

**Individualism, the New Woman, and marriage in the novels of  
Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Lucas Malet**

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**Department of English  
Royal Holloway, University of London**

**Submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English**

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### Declaration of Authorship

I, Tapanat Khunpakdee, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:



Date:

17 June, 2013

### Abstract

This thesis focuses upon the relationship between individualism, the New Woman, and marriage in the works of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Lucas Malet. In examining how these three popular novelists of the late nineteenth century responded to the challenge of female individualism, this thesis traces the complex afterlife of John Stuart Mill's contribution to Victorian feminism. The thesis evaluates competing models of liberty and the individual – freedom and self-development – in the later nineteenth century at the outset and traces how these differing models work their way through the response of popular writers on the Woman Question.

Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888) and *Marcella* (1894) posit an antagonism between the New Woman's individualism and marriage. She associates individualism with selfishness, which explicates her New Woman characters' personal and ideological transformation leading to marriage. The relinquishing of individualism suggests Ward's ambivalent response to the nineteenth-century Woman Question.

While Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897) prioritise individualism over marriage when the husband proves immoral or violent, Malet's unconventional representations of marriage in *The Wages of Sin* (1890) and *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901) articulate her advocacy of female individualism. Malet's New Woman heroines are free to carry on with the purity politics and sexual inversion which respectively characterise their individualism.

Thus, the fact that Ward, Grand, and Malet focussed on the notion of female individualism in response to contemporaneous debates about marriage and the New Woman demonstrates its significance. Yet, based on their varied perspectives – Ward's conservative rejection, Grand's conditional endorsement, and Malet's definite promotion – female individualism emerges as a still evolving concept. Reflecting the time in which they were written, these novels anticipated positive change in women's situation while acknowledging that the New Woman, once married, must sacrifice her individualism unless her marriage proves to be companionate.

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Tapanat Khunpakdee

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## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>Declaration of Authorship</b> .....	2
<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	4
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Part One: Mary Ward</b> .....	55
Chapter 1 <i>Robert Elsmere</i> (1888): Individualism, the New Woman, and the Feminine Ideal.....	56
Chapter 2 <i>Marcella</i> (1894): Individualism, the New Woman, and the Representation of Marriage as Conservative Modernity.....	88
<b>Part Two: Sarah Grand</b> .....	129
Chapter 3 <i>The Heavenly Twins</i> (1893): Individualism, the New Woman, and Desire.....	130
Chapter 4 <i>The Beth Book</i> (1897): Individualism, Duty, and Violence.....	171
<b>Part Three: Lucas Malet</b> .....	211
Chapter 5 <i>The Wages of Sin</i> (1890): Individualism, the New Woman, and the Absence of Marriage.....	212
Chapter 6 <i>The History of Sir Richard Calmady</i> (1901): Individualism, the New Woman, and Unconsummated Marriage.....	251
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	292
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	307

## Introduction

The last three decades have witnessed a distinct growth of scholarly interest in the late Victorian period and in particular, the literature and social debates surrounding the ‘New Woman’. The early ground-breaking work of 1970s critics was developed further in the 1990s and beyond by Ann Ardis, Ann Heilmann and Sally Ledger, and has been followed by more specific studies by Iveta Jusová, Teresa Mangum, and Angelique Richardson.<sup>1</sup> While early studies did much to recover near-forgotten women writers and establish key themes within their fiction, later works have focussed on individual authors and extra-textual contexts (such as eugenics in Richardson’s case). This study extends and develops this rich field in two ways. First, it brings together an unexpected grouping of popular women writers, who, I argue, were responding to the widespread discourses and debates surrounding the late-nineteenth-century Woman Question. Although Sarah Grand is at the centre of most studies of the New Woman phenomenon, the works of Mary Ward and Lucas Malet are rarely studied in this light. I shall suggest that these latter two writers provide important insights into the wider ramifications of the Woman Question in late nineteenth-century fiction. Both Ward and Malet, in very different ways, deploy iterations of the New Woman heroine to test established plot formats, such as the *Bildungsroman*, and explore the question of marriage and sexual relations in their works.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Iveta Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), hereafter abbreviated as *NW*; Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), hereafter abbreviated as *LELNC*.

The second key contribution this thesis aims to make is to consider these reworkings of the New Woman and the marriage plot in relation to individualism. As will become clear through the thesis, the liberal understanding of individualism – the duty to act for the self over and above the needs of community – had been central to the formation of the ‘Woman Question’ earlier in the nineteenth century: with particular reference to married women’s property, the campaign to repeal the contagious diseases acts, and the wider question of women’s legal status in marriage. This political concept of individualism, which I have considered during the preliminary research and will use throughout this thesis, interacts and informs the textual representation of individuality of each central female character; it also serves as another clear and crucial factor to help reconstruct the cultural history of that time for our modern-day comprehension. The aim of this thesis is thus to arrive at a broader and deeper understanding of progressive change in women’s position as it was imagined across a spectrum of popular literary texts of the 1880s and 1890s. This is, in other words, a development in the field of the New Woman study. But before establishing a conceptual framework of individualism within which to read the selection of novels, the Victorian era must first be contextualised.

## **I. The Late-Victorian Period**

As a result of the Industrial Revolution of the mid eighteenth century, the early Victorian period underwent immense transformation, mostly in terms of urbanisation and the difficulties it entailed. A connection between the economic and social effects the revolution had on people may be seen in inequities and injustices, which were the fruit of the great divide between the rich and the poor. Such problems associated with the industrialising and urbanising process of the 1830s and especially 1840s provided both a



focus and backdrop for novelists belonging to the ‘condition of England’ school, for example, Charles Kingsley, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charles Dickens.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, industrialisation had a significant impact on women, for there is convincing historical argument that it led to an idealisation and privatisation of middle-class women due to changes in the social structure and urban environment. In other words, perception of what were appropriate male and female roles underwent considerable revision. This resulted in the notion of separate spheres, which assigned to women the private sphere of the home, whereas men moved in the public sphere of politics, commerce and business, and social activities.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, women’s experiences, as well as public expectation, were deeply influenced by this notion.<sup>4</sup> Having their place firmly established by the hearth, women silently conformed to this socially constructed norm. Those who broke the rule not only became a threat and provoked strong reactions, but also ‘compromised’ their femininity and respectability by becoming ‘public’ figures.<sup>5</sup> In the capital alone, for example, there were, ‘[a]ccording to the reports of Society for the Prevention of Prostitution, under the patronage of the Lord mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, in 1836-1839 ... [n]ot less than 80,000 prostitutes exist[ing] in London, a great proportion of whom are of tender age.’<sup>6</sup> These women were disdained and condemned for the breach of the gender boundary by operating in the public sphere. By the late 1840s, prostitution created increasing alarm among people of many professions, including journalists, clergymen, and unmarried women themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Wheeler, ‘Mid-century Fiction’ in *English Fiction of the Victorian Period, 1830-1890* (London and New York: Longman, 1985), pp. 32-89.

<sup>3</sup> Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’ in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1993), pp. 383-414.

<sup>4</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, ‘Domestic ideologies of the 1830s and 1840s’ in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 180-192.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Mae Alexander, *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Ryan, *The Philosophy of Marriage, in its Social, Moral, and Physical Relations with the Physiology of Generation in the Vegetable and Animal Kingdoms* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1870), p. 21.

Their fear proved well-founded for by the 1850s, as Judith Walkowitz notes, ‘prostitution had become “the Great Social Evil,” not simply an affront to morality, but a vital aspect of the social economy as well.’<sup>7</sup>

However, despite these problems of the early period, mid-Victorian England continued to prosper. Indeed, the age was ‘one of notable progress in science’ and ‘industrial development’.<sup>8</sup> With regard to the intellectual aspect of the Victorian period, leading thinkers and critics were Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater. Responding to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle class, these authors focused on the idea of middle-class liberalism in social structure, economic system, and human nature. In terms of scientific discoveries, following *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin’s pioneering and controversial work published in 1859, Sir Francis Galton, himself a cousin of Darwin, started developing his theory of eugenics from 1865. His endeavours proved fruitful when it became a popular, and later influential, branch of science in Victorian England.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the achievements of the early Victorian period, there were concerns associated with sexuality in the middle of the century still. For example, early-Victorian anxieties about ‘the Great Social Evil’ continued as the problem of prostitution proved to persist. In the 1860s, the double standard was challenged by a social and moral conscience awakened to the plight of prostitutes; this was a result of the religious revival which was ‘burgeoning at the end of the 1850s’.<sup>10</sup> In addition to the help offered to prostitutes by the religious, the early feminists also made the fallen women the goal of their organised women’s movement. It was the ‘Ladies’ National Association for the

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 32; hereafter abbreviated as *PVS*.

<sup>8</sup> Norman McCord and Bill Purdue, *British History, 1815-1914*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 259.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Walkowitz, *PVS*, p. 70; Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), p. 44.

Abolition of Government Regulation of Vice’, ‘formed in the year 1869, with the object of securing the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts’ and led by Josephine Butler, that ‘frequently presented the Acts as a “slave code” imposed on women,’ and which ‘dr[ew] attention to the limited rights of all women, not just prostitutes.’<sup>11</sup> First passed in 1864, then extended in 1866 and 1869, the Contagious Diseases Acts were ‘an attempt to reduce venereal disease in the armed services’.<sup>12</sup> They enabled police ‘to arrest those [women] suspected of being “common prostitutes”, order them to undergo an internal examination at a certified hospital and if found diseased, detain them for a period of treatment or until they were pronounced cured.’<sup>13</sup> Feminists focussing on women’s rights perceived this connection between prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts; their awareness resulted in an attempt to redress the unfairness and therefore, during the 1870s and 1880s, ‘the Social Purity movement’ was in the rise. It aimed to raise ‘high moral standards for men and women.’<sup>14</sup> The ‘abolition of prostitution, working-class immorality, and the sexual double standard’ became the priorities among social purist campaigners and which will be discussed in the section on the marriage framework below.<sup>15</sup> In the same way that prostitution was seen as abuse of sexuality, homosexuality was regarded as another serious offence, the most notorious case of which was made public in 1895 during the trials of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).

Indeed, associated with sexuality, the notion of gender is central to many aspects of the Victorian era including economic and social. As I remarked earlier, the separation

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<sup>11</sup> The Ladies’ National Association, ‘What It Is, and Why It Is Still Needed’ in Sheila Jeffreys, ed., *The Sexuality Debates*, vol. 6 (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 191-195; p. 191; Sarah Richardson, ‘Politics and Gender’ in Chris Williams, ed., *A Companion to 19th-Century Britain* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp. 174-188; p. 184; hereafter abbreviated as *C19thCB*.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Hamilton, ‘Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886’ in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring, 1978), pp. 14-27; p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 34; hereafter abbreviated as *DR*.

<sup>15</sup> Owen, *DR*, p. 34.

of spheres – a dominant ideology for the majority of this epoch – demanded that middle-class women stay at home while their husbands work to support them financially as women had no control over money or properties prior to 1882. Historian Philip Harling demonstrates the significance of the separate spheres to the division of labour within the family: ‘The notion that men were solely responsible for the economic well-being of their families was deeply embedded in Victorian social policy.’<sup>16</sup> Economically, as Harling argues, such ideology worked to ‘deny wages to women’, a claim which concurs with scholar James Foreman-Peck who perceives that it was so ‘because of labour market discrimination against women; [moreover,] it was a means of maintaining male earnings.’<sup>17</sup> Such biases added to the double standard which left marriage as women’s only respectable means of subsistence. As a result, many called for reform and improvement in women’s economic and social situation, with education being among the priorities proposed by feminists who underlined ‘the importance of educating women for future employment.’<sup>18</sup>

While debates on the position of women were initiated in the economic and social arenas, in the literary and artistic landscapes, various terms and movements came to define the final decades. For example, decadence, aestheticism, and sexology reflected both the mood and the interest of the time. With regard to the first, scholar Dennis Denisoff explicates the root of the term to be from *de* + the Latin verb *cadere*, meaning to ‘fall away’; thus, as decadence was ‘commonly used to describe a society as it decayed, falling from a state of health and prosperity to one of physical and ethical ruin’, the idea of ‘decline, decay, and the loss of traditional values’ came to form its general concept.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Philip Harling, ‘The State’ in Williams, ed., *C19thCB*, pp. 110-124; p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> Harling, ‘The State’, p. 118; James Foreman-Peck, ed., ‘Quantitative analysis of the Victorian economy’ in *New Perspectives on the Late Victorian Economy: Essays in Quantitative Economic History, 1860-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-34; p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Richardson, ‘Politics and Gender’ in Williams, ed., *C19thCB*, pp. 174-188; p. 184.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis Denisoff, ‘Decadence and Aestheticism’ in Gail Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 31-52; p.

In contrast, aestheticism was ‘characterised by an interest in perfection’, yet ‘its focus is more specifically on artistic ideals’; its inception was as early as 1835 when French poet, novelist, and critic Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, chastised critics and their preconceived prejudices through his idea of *l’art pour l’art*, widely translated as ‘art for art’s sake’, arguing that art ‘has no [moral] responsibility except to beauty and should be evaluated with this in mind.’<sup>20</sup> Influenced by Gautier’s advocacy of ‘amorality’, the English literary world at the *fin de siècle* was, in a sense, represented by writers whose taste was distinctly associated with the arts and sexuality, namely the Pre-Raphaelites, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and Algernon Swinburne.<sup>21</sup> It was Wilde’s conviction of gross indecency in 1895 mentioned above that ended the aesthetic movement. Regarding sexology, figures of authority on sexological discourse and the knowledge about sexual inversion were Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, whose works will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

In terms of political developments, while Britain became Europe’s power house through her rapidly growing trade, industries, technology, and transportation, her female citizens did not have the right to vote. The Victorian era was the first to witness petitions to Parliament for women’s suffrage. It was an elaborate endeavour, with the support from some of the great names of the day. Indeed, ‘the beginnings of an organised, national movement for women’s suffrage [took place] in the latter half of the 1860s. The first suffrage committees were formed when Mill agreed to present a petition on this issue to the House of Commons in 1865’.<sup>22</sup> It was through the Representation of the People Act of 1918, that all women aged over 30, who were householders or the wives of householders,

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33; hereafter abbreviated as ‘DA’ and CCFS; Liz Constable, Matthew Potolsky and Dennis Denisoff, eds, ‘Introduction’ in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 1-24; p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Denisoff, ‘DA’ in Marshall, ed., CCFS, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Denisoff, ‘DA’ in Marshall, ed., CCFS, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘Now you see it, now you don’t: the Women’s Franchise League and its place in contending narratives of the women’s suffrage movement’ in Maroula Joannou and June Purvis, eds, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 15-36; p. 17.

were given the right to vote, as were all men aged 21 and above. However, equal voting rights for men and women only came a decade later in 1928.<sup>23</sup> In addition to these constraints, women's legal disability in other aspects of their lives was among the major concerns for the late-Victorian women's movement.

One of the most significant advances in legal history was related to married women's rights. Upon marriage, a woman became a *feme covert*, meaning that all her 'actions' were literally 'covered' by her husband who 'became responsible for them': indeed, 'a wife was presumed to be under her husband's protection and represented by him.'<sup>24</sup> Loss of identity, and being treated merely as the property of their husband, resulted in attempts to redress the condition. Introduced to the House of Commons in 1856, the Married Women's Property Act was only passed in 1870.<sup>25</sup> The extension used 'the *feme sole* language' – the legal term for an unmarried woman – in its recognition of a married woman's 'separate estate' or 'property', to allow her the 'same rights as men' in dealing with her property 'as if she were unmarried': wages, incomes, investments, and inheritance were now considered legally hers.<sup>26</sup> This departed from the common-law doctrine of coverture, which 'stipulated that a married woman was incapable of signing any contract without being joined by her husband as co-signer.'<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the beginning of legal recognition of women in their own right served to mark the initial progress in terms of women's legal position for which liberal thinkers were fighting.<sup>28</sup> In 1882, their achievement may be seen in the extension which 'gave a woman control over any money she brought to a marriage', and that husbands and wives were recognised 'as

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<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Chandler, *The Home Front, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Deborah Wynne, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), p. 21; Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 103; hereafter abbreviated as *FMLVE*.

<sup>25</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>26</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 25-26, 127, 125, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), hereafter abbreviated as *OL*.

separate legal entities'.<sup>29</sup> There was also improvement with regard to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which allowed women to sue for divorce, though not on the grounds of adultery alone.<sup>30</sup> An extension in 1891 consolidated the previous act; it effectively prevented marital rape, stipulating that husbands must gain their wives' sexual consent, which had until then been 'immaterial' in the eyes of the law.<sup>31</sup> In retrospect, the amendments of these laws predicate that women had gained increasingly more freedom as a result of feminist endeavours made by both liberal men and women. In the eyes of the law, a married woman could now lay claim to being an autonomous, self-possessed individual.

Thus far, I have demonstrated that the Victorian era was characterised by the contradictions that were at the heart of its history: progress and failure, advancement and decadence, affluence and poverty, rebellion and tradition, oppression and liberty. Following the Industrial Revolution, the modernisation of the Victorian age continued to create significant impacts on women. From the late 1860s to the 1890s, attempts to improve women's condition had been unremitting but were apparently slow in yielding results. At the end of the century, although a number of reforms were in motion and changes were visible in the horizon, women were still 'relative creatures', depending much upon their male relations, as Sarah Stickney Ellis sagely commented in *The Women of England* (1839).<sup>32</sup> For example, daughters relied upon their fathers, unmarried sisters upon their brothers, widowed mothers upon their eldest sons who inherited their father's title and property, and wives solely upon their husbands. While men may have regarded it as protection, such dependence, in fact, became women's inherent disability of social, financial, and legal nature. Such forms of legal disability became a great source of public

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<sup>29</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 190.

<sup>30</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>31</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 177, 185.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Ellis, *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London and Paris: Fisher, Son & Co., 1845), p. 210; Françoise Basch, *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-67*, trans., Anthony Rudolf (London: Allen, 1974).

concern. Discussed and debated in the popular press, they were also represented in fiction. A selection of these textual representations will be discussed in the thesis. This introductory chapter has shown the interconnected ideas and debates on the Woman Question and the marriage question at the end of the century. This interconnection is of particular significance to the New Woman phenomenon, which not only found an interesting representation in late-Victorian fiction but also anticipated various discourses of modern womanhood in the twentieth century. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, however, I demonstrate the particular influence of these earlier debates on women's legal standing in fiction by Ward and Grand: a legacy visible in how the authors figure the strain of representing a woman as an individual and individualist.

In fact, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, there were 'innovations' which 'open[ed] the floodgates to an increased reading public.'<sup>33</sup> The period enjoyed the substantial output of the periodical. In addition, the novel became another great aspect of the Victorian era. Through the harsh realities and conditions of the world in which their characters live, novels not only served as an affordable form of entertainment to readers, but also offered a valuable medium to novelists for proposing answers to social and political questions. Take, for instance, Elizabeth Rachel Chapman (1850-?), feminist, poet, and literary commentator who acknowledges the power of the novel.<sup>34</sup> In her *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction* (1897), Chapman, who 'approved of the women's movement' but 'had reservations about freethinkers' attacks on marriage', defines fiction

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<sup>33</sup> James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London and Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Alice Meynell, 'Introductory Note' in Elizabeth Rachel Chapman, *A Little Child's Wreath* (London and New York: John Lane, 1894), pp. 9-15; p. 9. It is difficult to determine Chapman's death date as there is no scholarly evidence for it. Since *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction* was her last published work, critics and historians generally assume that it was 'post-1897'. See Joseph Bristow, ed., *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. xxi; Caroline Blyth, ed. and introd., *Decadent Verse: An Anthology of Late Victorian Poetry, 1872-1900* (London and New York: Anthem, 2009), p. 606. However, the editors of *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* estimate that Chapman died around 1902. See Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow, with Cath Sharrock, eds, *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 717.



as ‘that branch of literature which in recent times has become the recognized vehicle of every kind of social polemic’.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, the novels and essays of the New Woman are often recognisable for their heightened social consciousness and clear political stance. According to scholar Norma Clarke, ‘[n]ovels are not political texts, but political novels can and do inspire political thinking. The popular novels of the 1890s which articulated women’s grievances and suggested feminist alternatives had considerable impact and are a vital part of our heritage.’<sup>36</sup> The Victorian novel thus held a central role in voicing the period’s concerns as well as providing the reader with an opening into the authors’ inner thoughts on those subjects. A serious and powerful medium, the novel also had a wide impact due to its popularity: ‘[t]he feminist novelists of the 1890s used the novel as a means of disseminating current feminist thinking. Novelists like Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Emma Frances Brooke, “Iota”, Menie Muriel Dowie, Mona Caird wrote popular novels which were commercial successes.’<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, there was a market pressure on novelists to follow ‘the conventions of popular fiction which demanded a romantic lover as the heroine’s ultimate and truly significant destiny’.<sup>38</sup> It is the very durability of such conventional plot characteristics of the novel, despite the political developments of the 1880s and 1890s, that are at the centre of my study the late-nineteenth-century social developments concerning women and marriage. There are a plethora of well-known, popular, novels at the end of the century with women and marriage as both their central themes and argument. Among these popular writers, my chosen authors, Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Lucas Malet were

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<sup>35</sup> Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 189; hereafter abbreviated *EF*; Elizabeth Rachel Chapman, ‘Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction’ in *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction and Other Essays on Kindred Subjects* (London and New York: John Lane, 1897), pp. 3-41; p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Norma Clarke, ‘Feminism and the Popular Novel of the 1890s: A Brief Consideration of a Forgotten Feminist Novelist’ in *Feminist Review*, no. 20 (Summer, 1985), pp. 91-104; p. 104; hereafter abbreviated as ‘FPN’.

<sup>37</sup> Clarke, ‘FPN’, p. 94.

<sup>38</sup> Clarke, ‘FPN’, p. 104.

eminently placed by their contemporaries at the forefront. Critically acclaimed works from the last quarter of the century to focus on marriage as a potential problem in a modernising society include, for example, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) by Olive Schreiner, *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897) by Sarah Grand, *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) by Mona Caird, and *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901) by Lucas Malet. Male authors also explored these themes, as seen in George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895), and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896). The works of these authors represented the distinctly dissimilar views towards women, more precisely the New Woman, and marriage. All six novels by Ward, Grand, and Malet will serve as a lens through which I explore significantly diverse attitudes to yet an overriding concern with the contemporary concepts of the New Woman, marriage, and individualism.

In the late nineteenth century, New Woman writers expressed their support for, acknowledgement and accommodation of professional ambitions in women. Based on this apparent agenda, twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship has gestured towards a strong connection between New Woman writing of the 1890s and feminism. Historian and scholar Karen Offen has encapsulated this relationship:

The importance of these 'New Woman' literary works lies precisely in the fact that their authors addressed issues that feminists had been raising, about the constraints of marriage, about work, about the possibilities and difficulties of self-realization, thereby exposing an even broader range of readers to their claims.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, the wide-reaching influence of New Woman writing may be taken to 'have inspired a "modernist backlash" in literature.'<sup>40</sup> True to Chapman's opinion with regard to the impact of fiction, the New Woman novel of the 1890s proved powerful, especially

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<sup>39</sup> Offen, *EF*, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> Offen, *EF*, p. 189.

since, as Ann Heilmann remarks, '[t]he specific questions New Woman fiction raised' were about 'the construction of gender and male violence in society, about the institutions of marriage and motherhood, and about women's right to radically redefine every aspect of their position in the world'.<sup>41</sup> Scholars have recognised the revolutionary attempt to renegotiate the oppressive condition of marriage and to educate and liberate women. Indeed, '[t]hese New Woman writers of the *fin de siècle* created a distinctly different body of literature that reflected their concerns about women's limited role in society' and ... began writing about their desire for increased women's rights' although, as Melissa Purdue and Stacey Floyd note, 'New Woman writers did not always agree on solutions to the problems that faced them'.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore apparent that the New Woman was instrumental in articulating women's need for independence and fulfilment as existing apart from sexual relations and outside of marriage. As Talia Schaffer notes, the figure was in fact a central rather than 'marginal' literary and cultural symbol, whose multi-vocalism helped advance social and political change, especially through exposing the double standard of sexual morality and male degeneration.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the significance of the closing decades of the nineteenth century, which was an epoch extraordinarily rich and awe-inspiring in the change, reforms, discoveries, and development, yet which remained self-contradictory through the strong attachment to tradition and customs, it is of particular interest to choose the late-Victorian period and its literature as a lens through which to trace and study the progress and the widening of spheres for late-Victorian women. By selecting Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Lucas Malet, I group together writers who were not only eminent for their works of

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<sup>41</sup> Ann Heilmann, 'Introduction' in *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, vol. 2 (London: Thoemmes Press, 1998), pp. xi-xviii; p. xv; hereafter abbreviated as *LVMQ*.

<sup>42</sup> Melissa Purdue and Stacey Floyd, eds, 'Introduction' in *New Woman Writers, Authority and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. ix-xi; p. ix.

<sup>43</sup> Talia Schaffer, "'Nothing but Foolscap and Ink': Inventing the New Woman' in Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, eds, *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 39-52; p. 44; hereafter abbreviated as *NWFF*.

fiction but also influential in shaping public opinion through their distinctive standpoints and extensive contribution to periodicals and magazines. Furthermore, I have found their different perspectives to be of great value through their informative dissonances, each providing a representative view of the time on the fraught question of a future society in which women might act with rational self-interest as individuals, over and above a sense of social duty. In relation to my key framework of individualism, I base my reading of the six novels primarily on Mill's principles of liberty and Caird's advocacy of independence. In my analysis of the New Woman figure, I consider it in relation to the Woman Question and the ideal of womanhood. With regard to marriage as represented in these novels, I focus on the marriage question, the double standard, and the idea of degeneration. The details of my conceptual framework are given below after I discuss the background and purpose of this thesis followed by the plot summaries.

## **II. Background and Purpose**

My decision to examine the New Woman, marriage, and individualism as represented in the selected works of fiction originated from a deep interest in the Victorian novel, women writers, and socio-political changes taking place at the end of the nineteenth century. Having considered the numerous developments as well as transformations which the Victorian era underwent as discussed in the previous section, I eventually refined the scope of this thesis to a focus on the New Woman figure and the marriage question which, as the novels I have chosen to consider will demonstrate, represent the difficulties in finding opportunities for self-development and gaining independence. Here, the combination of what I perceive to be an emergent theme of woman and individualism at the turn of the century suggests a new trend in approaching the history of ideas since individualism, essentially a theory related to politics and

economics, was developed by male thinkers whose main arguments were formed with men in mind.

Politico-economic and initially male-centred in nature, English thought on individualism gradually evolved and spread into literary representations of women as the characterisation of the New Woman heroines under scrutiny will attest. In fact, their individualism posits both socio-cultural influence and relevance to contemporary concerns, especially when viewed in relation to marriage as an institution that inflicted injustice, and the history of its concomitant loss of individual legal identity for women. These issues were publicly debated as well as articulated in the literature of the period. During the 1880s and 1890s, ‘defenders of the traditional individualism’ were accused of ‘selfishness’ on account of their ardour for ‘classical political economy and the Victorian ideal of self-help’, as opposed to the ideal of altruism defined by the self-renunciation apparent in ‘self-sacrificing acts’ and the idea of ‘selflessness’.<sup>44</sup> As we shall see, these latter traits are regarded as part of the ideal of womanhood, which became one of late-Victorian anxieties surrounding the position of women. They appeared as recurring themes not only in works of fiction but also in journalism. Central to the debates was an argument for the recognition of women’s individual existence, interest, and need in marriage, over and above that of the collective welfare of the state, which is germane to my contention that individualism plays a significant part in the literary representation of the New Woman and marriage. In a subsequent section, I will return to the development of the ideas of individualism and how it helps consolidate my thesis with regard to the works of the three authors.

Sarah Grand’s work is an obvious starting point for a study focussing on the figure of the New Woman and the Woman Question debates during the 1890s. Grand was well-known in her own time, and is now remembered once again as leading New Woman

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 238, 363, 364.

novelist. She was, moreover, one of the best-selling writers of popular fiction at the *fin de siècle*. Other names that retain pole position with regard to New Woman writing at the end of the nineteenth century include Caird and Schreiner, the creator of Lyndall who has often been identified as the first New Woman heroine in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883).<sup>45</sup> Although less commonly identified with the literary success of New Woman writing, in conjunction with Sarah Grand, both Mary Augusta Ward and Lucas Malet obtained the same prominent status as best-selling women authors of this period. Their well-established literary reputation, together with their distinct perspectives, offer a much more interesting study than that afforded by the generically typical and instantly transparent connection between Grand and other New Woman writers. Such diverse proclivities inform my decision to make them the subject of my study.

Grouping together these three writers of popular fiction who are not all usually regarded as New Woman writers may raise some critical questions from the outset. Yet the inclusion of Ward and Malet enables me to use individualism to a much better effect as a lens through which to read the literary figuring of the New Woman in texts that often resist its implications. This study focuses on six novels which were published mainly in the 1890s (the two exceptions are Ward's 1888 novel, *Robert Elsmere* and Malet's 1901 *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*) for three reasons. First, the final decade of the nineteenth century germinated many important developments, most importantly for this thesis, the formation of the New Woman in a debate between Sarah Grand and Ouida in the *North American Review* in 1894.<sup>46</sup> Having occasioned numerous debates across

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<sup>45</sup> For the canonisation of these novelists as New Woman writers, see Ann Heilmann, 'Introduction: the m/others of (feminist) art' in *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 1-9; hereafter abbreviated as *NWS*; see especially p. 4 where the suggestion that *The Story of an African Farm* may be perceived as the first New Woman novel justifies the identification of Lyndall as the earliest New Woman figure in late-Victorian novels.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' in *North American Review*, vol. 158 (March, 1894), pp. 270-276; hereafter abbreviated as 'NAWQ'; Ouida, 'The New Woman' in *North American Review*, vol. 58 (May, 1894), pp. 610-619. Ouida was the pseudonym of Marie Louise de la Ramée.

contemporary critical as well as political platforms, the New Woman has been an important figure in late-Victorian scholarship. In recent decades, students undertaking New Woman studies are particularly indebted to the works of scholars, critics, and literary historians who have amassed, analysed, and reintroduced a plethora of rare texts to academia, which serves as an excellent conduit for the flow of thoughts and insights into the subject. According to Heilmann, English scholars have been enthusiastic over ‘the New Woman renaissance’ in the 1970s.<sup>47</sup> New Woman criticism has provided the backbone for the study on new feminism, which also became a concentrated field of scholarly interests in the 1990s. I am aware of the interplay between gender and culture evident in the writings of the period, especially in New Woman writing, whose significance in twentieth-century scholarship has been the subject of fruitful undertaking among leading academics. Thanks to the works of Ann Ardis and Sally Ledger, I am able to trace the gestation that led to the ‘naming’ of the ‘textual’ New Woman and make a connection between the Woman Question and the feminist ideology within the larger English discipline.<sup>48</sup> A literary phenomenon, the New Woman was not only a ‘cultural icon’ but also, as Ledger notes, a historically significant figure.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, among the controversies of the 1890s was the marriage debate, which produced immediate impacts beyond the literature of the period. As Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst have suggested in their collection, the wide-ranging debates and developments of ideas during the *fin de siècle* were in the sciences, arts, culture, politics, and sociology, as witnessed through late-Victorian writings on topics including degeneration, the New Woman, the New Imperialism, socialism, anarchism, sexology, and racial science known as eugenics.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, this thesis is concerned with the

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<sup>47</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 234.

<sup>48</sup> Ann Ardis, ‘Preliminaries: Naming the New Woman’ in *New Women, New Novels*, pp. 10-28; p. 12; Ledger, ‘Who was the New Woman?’ in *The New Woman*, pp. 9-34; p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ledger, *NW*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> See Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds, *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), hereafter abbreviated as FS.

marriage question in the main because marriage as an institution held direct relevance to the contemporary New Woman, an entity existing both in the social world as well as the world of writing.<sup>51</sup> Central to plot, theme, and ending, marriage generically formed an element of fictional narrative devices. Marriage in the novel was of course a well-established literary convention providing the satisfying, happy ending that the mainstream Victorian readership required.<sup>52</sup> This pattern conformed to the literary tradition that had been passed on from the Romantic period to Jane Austen's time, through to the early Victorian era.<sup>53</sup>

However, *The Wages of Sin* is the only novel in this study in which no marriage takes place. This is not because the heroine decides not to marry, but because she dies. This unusual absence of marriage in the novel is followed by another strange and complex marriage in Malet's other novel, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*. These unique aspects in the works of a woman writer serve as another reason to justify my inclusion of Malet who defied nineteenth-century literary conventions, consciously running the risk of being attacked by critics and causing permanent damage to her reputation, at a time when marriage and the New Woman were visibly sensitive subjects to discuss. Moreover, with the focus still on the marriage question, I want to further argue that unlike Ward, neither Grand nor Malet conform to literary tradition insofar as their use of marriage in the selected works is concerned. Instead of being part of the ending,

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<sup>51</sup> See Richardson and Willis, eds, *NWFF*.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion on the demand for a happy ending in the nineteenth-century literary marketplace, see Kate Flint, 'The Victorian novel and its readers' in Deirdre David, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 17-36. Flint analyses the significance of the fairy-tale and romance elements in the novel's happy ending as opposed to the 'realist' one. A realist novel was undesirable because it was considered not 'marketable' by Victorian publishers for fear of 'displeas[ing] the British public' (pp. 24-25).

<sup>53</sup> Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974); Elizabeth Abel, Elizabeth Langland and Marianne Hirsch, eds, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983); Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (Verso: London, 1987); Patrick Parrinder, *Nation & Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Stephen Regan, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Critical Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001).



marriage in Grand's novels takes place early in the novel in order to allow sufficient space necessary for establishing and analysing what causes problems between married partners. Grand's investigation into marriage places special emphasis on the New Woman protagonists and their attitudes towards the institution. In comparison, Malet's novels approach marriage in a different manner by excluding it from one novel and problematising it in the other. Based on my second reason in selecting these six novels for their discussions of marriage, it is evident that Grand and Malet offer a particularly interesting contrast to Ward, whose portrayals of the New Woman represent a more conservative perspective which, by the end of her novels, places much significance on the traditional values associated with marriage.

Furthermore, that all three authors held a central position in the late-nineteenth-century popular fiction is of significance, especially in terms of the cultural, social, and political impacts their works created. It must be noted that in Victorian England, the novel was one of the essential prose mediums through which to engage with the reading public, disseminate ideas, and initiate change. I contend that since contemporary debates concerning women and their position were in the forefront of public interest, they led to the three writers' engagement in and response to these social, political, and cultural anxieties. In spite of Ward's conservative positioning, her early novel finds space to include a character that anticipates the New Woman. Thus, the similarities in these fundamentally different writers emphasise the centrality of the New Woman to their popular fiction, especially when viewed through the representation of their heroines' individualism and marriage.

The final reason is that, besides their focus on the New Woman and marriage, the six novels are selected for their portrayal of tension surrounding the question of female individualism and the New Woman who moves and struggles in the society where women generally conform to the gender roles associated with marriage. With regard to the

authors' view of marriage as demonstrated in the novels, we are able to infer that the association of the New Woman with some of the tenets of liberal individualism comes to symbolise both literary and social renovation. This is because the novels are forward-thinking in their argument that people may indeed benefit from the reconstruction of this social institution rather than its total demolition. In other words, in a typical liberal mode, the novels gesture towards a revision of middle-class marriage by urging for a means to maintain the institution by getting rid of its defects, as well as an acknowledgement that women would appreciate a certain amount of freedom and rights, the lack of which is at present deferring the much desired marital happiness. Yet as the authors' concerns were also rooted in literary, public, as well as publishing decorum, the revisionist tone is somehow overshadowed by the need to keep up with what readership would have expected from the period's most eminent writers.

Further to the main reasons, the six novels prove a useful basis for my central arguments. The representation of individualistic New Woman characters in the chosen novels not only points to a change radically diversifying away from the nineteenth-century literary conventions, but also reflects the authors' positions with regard to the two debates and individualism. This thesis aims to demonstrate that the scrutiny of each of the novels reveals the dynamic richness of the 1890s itself, and that they are a springboard into a new terrain of possibilities previously unexplored, deserving scholarly attention. The corresponding articulation of individualism by these distinctly dissimilar authors serves as a wholly and fundamentally fresh window on New Woman studies for future investigation: the novels play out the consequences of a social world in which women might – or might even be morally obliged to – act primarily for themselves, even if this ran counter to the needs of the broader community. Ward, Grand and Malet's works suggest that there was indeed a distinct trend in responses to the marriage debate of the final decades of the nineteenth century. Notwithstanding stylistic and ideological

differences among Ward, Grand, and Malet, all three novelists focus on the consequences of such resistance to conventionality through the internal comparison between the New Woman and the Old Woman in the novels under scrutiny. Indeed, the selection of New Woman fiction in this thesis helps illustrate on-going arguments among novelists who held strong yet diverse views towards, in Mill's terms, the defence of 'individual independence' and the emancipation of women as a means by which to prevent 'infringements of the freedom of the individual'.<sup>54</sup> Based on my reading of the six novels, such infringements are portrayed as a result of the traditional notion which deems marriage and the pertaining ideal of femininity to be the ultimate goals which every woman must aspire to attain. This conventional view creates tensions with the New Woman heroines whose interests do not necessarily reside in the domestic realm. It is important to note here that these fictional heroines point to the relationship between literary form and authorial agenda, as they bear evidence of their creators' conscious attempt to rework the Victorian marriage plot through the representation of female autonomy in opposition to female subjectivity. In the following section, I provide synopses of the six novels in preparation for the ensuing discussion on individualism, the New Woman, and marriage.

### **III. Marriage Plots and the Heroine as Individualist in the novels**

The chronologically first text, Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888) principally explores the Victorian crisis of faith which leads to clergyman Robert Elsmere's secularisation of his benevolence and philanthropic engagement in aiding the poor and the uneducated. Alongside this main theme, her central female characters, the Leyburn sisters, play an equally important part in representing Ward's ideal of womanhood through her characterisation of Catherine and Rose. Initially, the way Catherine places much value on

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<sup>54</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 14, 195.

self-sacrifice and Rose on independence forms a contrast in both their attitude and trajectory towards marriage. Against her serious, staunch and selfless sister living solely for others, Rose is portrayed as a self-confident girl of great potential whose dream of becoming a successful musician materialises in the course of the text. Representing the modern young woman of the time, Rose primarily rejects marriage in pursuit of personal achievement. The change of character in Rose, discernible when she agrees to marry Sir Hugh Flaxman and give up her musical career, suggests her eventual embrace of domesticity and femininity.

Similarly, in Ward's *Marcella* (1894) the eponymous heroine remains a strong symbol of the socialist spirit by sacrificing herself to the poor and declining Aldous Raeburn's love and marriage proposal because he epitomises the values opposite to her own. Aldous is not only a Tory MP but also heir to the title and estate of his grandfather Lord Maxwell. In symbolising wealth, power and prosperity, Aldous embodies both political and romantic rivalry against Edward Wharton, a socialist politician. Marcella's early identification with Wharton's values is replaced by an eventual break with him and an engagement with Aldous, but one which depicts her more as a scheming, selfish socialist than a loving and loyal fiancée. The final turn in her character happens after Marcella breaks off her engagement when she cannot convince the strictly law-abiding, though sympathetic, Aldous to reprieve a penurious poacher who murdered his gamekeeper. Marcella resumes her socialist scheme and leaves to work among the London poor. But she comes to a realisation of her error and returns to Aldous who forgives her as confirmed by their renewed engagement. Marcella leaves off her self-aggrandisement and instead embraces a self-abnegating attitude towards Aldous in whose leadership and love she now lives. Both novels strike the same chord at their close: through marriage, Rose and Marcella are given a place back into the private sphere of the home and domesticity: they acknowledge that in pursuing what is at first framed as a

great calling or cause – namely music or a new society – they are actually acting as anti-social individualists.

Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) features three heroines and their marriages. Evadne Frayling is a gentle yet self-confident young woman. Without formal education, she has erudite medical knowledge garnered from her own study. Her friend, Edith Beale, who epitomises the nineteenth-century traditional ideal of womanhood, marries Sir Mosley Menteith out of love. Little over a year into her marriage, after giving birth to a syphilitic son, she dies of the same disease contracted from her promiscuous husband. Evadne marries General George Colquhoun, with whom she is in love. However, since she learns on her wedding day that her husband may have been dissolute in his youthful days, she practises sexual abstinence to avoid possible venereal disease. In exchange for her decision, Colquhoun forbids any social activism and thus narrows her life considerably. After he dies of a heart attack, Evadne remarries and has two healthy children with her new husband, medical doctor Sir George Galbraith. However, her hysteria caused by her marriage to Colquhoun remains tenacious despite the improvement in her personal and marital circumstances. The third heroine, Angelica Hamilton-Wells, one of the eponymous twins, is a talented violinist whose ambitions are thwarted because of her gender. Edith's death terrifies Angelica, who vows never to marry for fear of the same tragic fate. However, feeling confined by the monotony of a woman's life, Angelica tries to escape by proposing marriage to Mr. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, a kind-hearted man twenty years her senior.

Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897) focuses on the central marriage between Beth Caldwell and Dan Maclure, one contracted through Mrs. Caldwell's authoritative order and Maclure's avaricious motive. Beth's initial hesitation is overcome by her sense of duty. Outwardly a respectable doctor, Maclure not only epitomises violence through his association with the Lock Hospital and his secret role as a vivisectionist, but also proves

an immoral husband who dampens the eponymous heroine's genius. Beth follows the social codes of feminine conducts by trying to please her husband in every way, but he turns out to be duplicitous and adulterous on top of being selfish and emotionally abusive. Although Beth practises self-sacrifice, she is gradually filled with bitterness from Maclure's corrupting nature. To counteract the effects of her developing sense of depression, she is finally resolved to leave her marriage, a decision which restores freedom to Beth and brings back her genius which boosts her success as a writer and orator.

Like Grand and Ward, in *The Wages of Sin* (1890) Malet portrays an artistic heroine, Mary Crookenden, who is remarkable both in her talent and perseverance in excelling at her chosen craft. To pursue her dream, Mary enrolls at an art school where she meets and falls in love with James Colthurst, the hero-painter. Through Colthurst, Mary unwittingly enters into a love triangle involving Jenny Parris, who is his model-mistress and later a prostitute. Despite Colthurst's admittance to his past sin, Mary holds onto her love for him and does not break off the engagement. Torn between his love for Mary and his sense of responsibility for Jenny who is dying, Colthurst forces himself to part from Mary amicably in order to nurse Jenny, but it is too late since she dies an untimely death at the age of twenty-nine. Falling off a cliff, Colthurst dies on the same day. His death reflects punishment for the sins he and Jenny have committed. Due to the absence of marriage, the novel suggests that Mary will be able to devote all her time, ability, and energy to creating the works of art that she loves.

In *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901) Malet's heroine, Honoria St. Quentin, identifies herself as a man. She is athletic in appearance, complete with masculine manners and movements. A sexual invert, Honoria develops a one-sided love for Katherine Calmady, her second cousin and widowed mother of the eponymous Sir Richard. Katherine is overprotective of Richard who is disabled since birth. Disappointed

by his fiancée's rejection of marriage, Richard leaves home and becomes an international rake. During his absence, Honoria comes and takes care of Katherine. When Richard eventually returns home after a terrible blow, Honoria redeems him morally by proposing to marry him. This generous act also means she can live with Katherine permanently. Through the central marriage in the novel, the three characters compensate what each is missing. In becoming a wife, Honoria has fulfilled her traditional duty and social obligation while achieving the real purpose of being close and able to serve her beloved Katherine. On the other hand, Katherine cherishes having Richard all to herself again so that she can continue as his loving and caring mother. Through his connection with Honoria, Richard atones for his past misdeeds by transforming himself into a philanthropist and building a hospital for the crippled on Honoria's advice and encouragement.

As these synopses have made evident, although the six novels are different, each one is similarly concerned with individualism, the New Woman, and marriage. While Ward's books put an emphasis on women's fulfilment derived from conventional marriage, the selected works of Grand and Malet call the institution and the associated ideal into question. Such concurrent interests found in ideologically opposed authors reflect the centrality of these three aspects in late-Victorian literature. In the following section, I establish the conceptual frameworks developed specifically for reading the six selected novels.

#### **IV. Conceptual Frameworks: Individualism, the New Woman, and Marriage**

In nineteenth-century Britain, individualism was not only conceived as a political concept directly applied to man and his relationship to the state or government, but also

concerned with ‘juridical equality’.<sup>55</sup> In an age when women were seeking to have their place within the wider community outside of the home, it is no surprise that theories associated with individualism should appeal to and help mobilise their arguments. The appropriation of individualism to characterise New Woman characters in the selected fiction reflects the late-century approaches to utilising this theory socially as well as culturally to the advantage of women. In fact, in the latter half of the century, anxieties arose caused by the Victorian gender ideology which subjected women to social, legal and financial handicaps. Such concerns may be read in the representation of the sexual double standard that turned a blind eye to male promiscuity and caused further problems. The Victorian double standard, with its implication of inequality between the sexes, is in fact a major theme central to the discussion about the New Woman, marriage, and the development of concerns for women’s emancipation. In other words, the mid-Victorian agitation for greater female freedom, which continued well into the closing decades, enables us to realise how enduring its influence remained to affect later writers including New Woman novelists. One of the weapons these writers adopted to fight against the sexual double standard and to protect their female protagonists’ freedom is the longstanding liberal discourse of individualism.

### *Individualism*

In the history of ideas, although individualism was a term that became common currency in the mid-nineteenth century across Europe and America, it had taken many different meanings. For instance, while individualism encompassed the ‘high Romanticist ideas on creative, expressive personality’ in Germany, it designated the ‘stress on free markets’ in the United States.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it may be perceived in religion, especially in Protestant Christianity, or in economics through the rise of the bourgeoisie and

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<sup>55</sup> Zubin Meer, ed., ‘Introduction: Individualism Revisited’ in *Individualism: The Cultural Logic of Modernity* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 1-29; p. 3; hereafter abbreviated as *ICLM*.

<sup>56</sup> Meer, ‘Introduction’ in *ICLM*, p. 3.



capitalism, and also in political philosophy conceived in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment eras.<sup>57</sup> In addition, individualism was related to political liberalism through its egalitarian implications of the rights of man, associated with economic liberalism through its *laissez-fair* doctrine, and connected to Romantic individualism when viewed alongside the aristocratic cult of individuality.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in response to the well-known Victorian gender prescriptions, the portrayals of heroines who are liberal individuals offer Ward, Grand, and Malet an opportunity to explore the many ways in which individualism may interfere with traditional female roles, in other words, the femininity, of their New Woman characters. In short, I want to point out that they represent individualism as an essential characteristic that defines the New Woman. Based on the six novels I consider, I will argue that individualism both formulates the New Woman's concept of personal identity and triggers her conscious guard of individuality. To further chart the progress of the idea of individualism and to establish its place within this thesis, I commence the following section with one of the most influential figures in the history of British philosophy.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was a prominent exponent of nineteenth-century liberalism. His influence began to flourish in the 1860s through his social, political, and philosophical works. *On Liberty* (1859), *Utilitarianism* (1863), and *Three Essays on Religion* (1874) were among the most significant of his writing.<sup>59</sup> His name was soon associated with the development of politics, especially political economy. Mill has become an immensely influential figure in the British history of ideas, whose 'complex social and political views' have continuously created points of investigation among

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<sup>57</sup> Koenraad W. Swart, 'Individualism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1826-1860)' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 23 (1962), pp. 77-90; p. 77; hereafter abbreviated as 'IMNC'.

<sup>58</sup> Swart, 'IMNC', p. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thoughts and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Place, 1993), pp. 123-124.

scholars.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, as historian Georgios Varouxakis and political theorist Paul Kelly assert, ‘more than thirteen decades after his death, he is still strikingly relevant’ especially in intellectual discussion of ‘liberty, its concrete meaning and limits, individuality, diversity, freedom of thought and speech, the unequal treatment and social conditioning of women, the best form of democracy, political representation, and a great number of other political and philosophical questions’.<sup>61</sup> In relation to this thesis and its central concerns, the significance of individualism in the chosen works of fiction may be supported by Mill’s argument in Chapter 3 of *On Liberty*, entitled ‘Of Individuality, as one of the elements of Well-Being’. Here, Mill proposes that ‘while mankind are imperfect ... so is it that there should be different experiments of living; that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others’.<sup>62</sup> Significantly, Mill stresses that this is not a selfish claim but one that benefits both the individuals as well as the society at large:

It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. Where ... the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, Mill argues for individualistic freedom which provides a great source of happiness insofar as it does not interfere with or destroy others’ well-being. As a result, Mill raises among his other concerns the one ‘practical question’ of ‘how to make the fitting adjustment between individual independence and social control’ which he claims ‘is a subject on which nearly everything remains to be done.’<sup>64</sup> This crucial question

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<sup>60</sup> Alan Ryan, *J.S. Mill* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Georgios Varouxakis and Paul Kelly, ‘John Stuart Mill’s thought and legacy: A timely reappraisal’ in Georgios Varouxakis and Paul Kelly, eds, *John Stuart Mill – Thought and Influence: The Saint of Rationalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1-18; p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>63</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>64</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 14.

indeed becomes the source of tension between the New Woman and marriage, which is represented in the novel as another form of social control.

In addition, the New Woman's implementation of individualism as a means to desist despotism imposed by society and in marriage concurs with Mill's argument for individuality as a right way forward. In *On Liberty*, Mill reminds us that to create a social environment in which all individuals are equal and free:

there needs [to be] protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own.<sup>65</sup>

Essentially, and in direct relation to my conceptualisation of individualism as used throughout this thesis, *On Liberty* is significant as it broadens our understanding of Mill's liberal individualist advocacy, one that demands 'a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence ... as protection against political despotism.'<sup>66</sup> In the same vein, the selected works of fiction help illustrate a growing trend among the New Woman characters, one of 'find[ing] that limit, and maintain[ing] it against encroachment'.<sup>67</sup> Through the various degrees of the individualist ideology applied by each New Woman protagonist, we will be able to determine the novelists' positioning with regard to the two major concerns at the end of the century: marriage and the improvement in married women's situation.

According to Mill's arguments that form the basis of *On Liberty*, I argue that it is possible to establish female autonomy within marriage provided that recognition of 'human liberty', which in the context of the selected fiction may be taken as individualistic liberty, is extended to include that of women. To achieve that ideal state,

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<sup>65</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>66</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 14.

his ‘principles’ of individual liberalism require ‘liberty of conscience’, ‘liberty of thought and feeling’, and ‘liberty of expressing and publishing opinions’, all of which constitute ‘the inward domain of consciousness’.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Mill advocates for ‘liberty of tastes and pursuits ... of each individual’, and ‘liberty ... of combination among individuals’ or the ‘freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others’.<sup>69</sup> These various kinds of liberty should be made available to all individuals which, according to Mill, will subsequently prompt progress of both the individual and the state.

In 1859, the year in which Mill’s *On Liberty* was issued, Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) published a successful work entitled *Self-Help* which discussed the idea of individualism as a means to self-development, success, and happiness on both personal and national levels: ‘[i]t is this individual freedom and energy of action, so cordially recognized by these observant foreigners [including German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)], that really constitutes the prolific source of our national growth.’<sup>70</sup> Smiles proposes a direct connection between individuals, stability, and progress. In essence, he theorises that individualistic freedom of action not only creates an impact on a small, personal level but also contributes to a large scale to benefit the nation: ‘[t]he spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength.’<sup>71</sup> Thus, Smiles’s work may be seen as another source that promotes among his readers the idea of individualism as a desirable personal characteristic to cultivate.

Further to the British strand, individualism also thrived elsewhere. Almost two decades earlier, radical American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson issued *Self-Reliance* (1841) in which he condemns conformism. In line with his well-known imperative advice

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<sup>68</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), pp. 21-23.

<sup>71</sup> Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 15.

to '[t]rust thyself', Emerson criticises the way in which society has led men to believe that the 'virtue in most request is conformity.'<sup>72</sup> According to his view, therefore, '[w]hoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.'<sup>73</sup> Significantly, Emerson ends his essay in a defence of individualism: 'Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.'<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the concept of individualism as proposed by Emerson here reminds us of its original root within the liberal tradition which 'is often said to originate as an ideology that celebrates *laissez-faire* government, stressing the right of the individual and his property to be free of outside interference.'<sup>75</sup> This explains the reason why 'Emerson is most often read as a *laissez-faire* individualist, and radical individualism is usually thought to be his distinctive contribution to American culture.'<sup>76</sup> In fact, Emerson's transcendentalism placed a great deal more emphasis on the interior development of the self, unlike Mill's emphasis on external, legal impediments to liberty. But both writers formed part of the broader association of individualism with freedom and positive social change in the later nineteenth century. With his radical focus on interiority, Emerson had an immense influence on later writers including sexologist Edward Carpenter and feminist Olive Schreiner whose *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) turned her 'into a key figure of the emerging New Woman movement'.<sup>77</sup> Schreiner's protagonist, Lyndall, anticipates the individualism of the New Woman heroines I study through 'her struggle for autonomous selfhood' represented in terms of the character's rejection of conventional marriage and motherhood.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance* (New York: The Roycrofters, 1908), pp. 11, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance*, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> Christopher Newfield, *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Newfield, *The Emerson Effect*, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Mrs. Havelock Ellis, *Stories and Essays* (Berkeley Heights: The Free Spirit Press, 1924), p. vi; Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 139.

<sup>78</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 143.

Almost half a century after the publication of Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, and in accordance with Mill's arguments three decades earlier, English individualist enthusiast and barrister Wordsworth Donisthorpe (1847-1913) wrote 'The Basis of Individualism' as part of a larger work entitled *Individualism: A System of Politics* (1889) encompassing the principles of personal liberty, absolute socialism versus absolute anarchy, and the history of moral and legal rights.<sup>79</sup> Two years later, member of the Fabian Society and socialist reformer Sidney Webb (1859-1947) disseminated his thought on individualism as a ramification of socialism, and which serves here as an extension of Mill's idea.<sup>80</sup> Webb commented earlier on 'the zenith of industrial individualism' at 'the beginning of this present century' where 'fullest liberty was left to the owner of land and capital ... to use them for his utmost advantage'.<sup>81</sup> He followed this with 'The Difficulties of Individualism' published in *The Economic Journal* in 1891. In this article, Webb noted that the loss of freedom is the most serious 'difficulty' of individualism.<sup>82</sup> Although Webb's central concern is found in social problems as the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, he also ponders individualism as opposed to collectivism. Thus, in the same way I want to argue with regard to the New Woman, Webb contends that 'the best possible social state will result from each individual pursuing his own interest in the way he thinks best'.<sup>83</sup> His notions provide a useful basis for my discussion on the serious outcomes of the New Woman's loss of independence, or in Webb's terms, her 'fullest liberty' and 'complete personal freedom', through marriage.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Wordsworth Donisthorpe, 'The Basis of Individualism' in *Individualism: A System of Politics* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1889), pp. 259-305.

<sup>80</sup> Sidney Webb, 'The Difficulties of Individualism' in *The Economic Journal* (June, 1891), pp. 360-381.

<sup>81</sup> Sidney Webb, 'Parliamentary and Municipal Socialism' in *Socialism in England* (London: Sonnenschein & Co., 1890), pp. 98-117; p. 98.

<sup>82</sup> Webb, 'The Difficulties of Individualism', p. 362.

<sup>83</sup> Webb, 'The Difficulties of Individualism', p. 364.

<sup>84</sup> Webb, 'Parliamentary and Municipal Socialism', p. 98; 'The Difficulties of Individualism', p. 364.

Thus, the male thinkers in British and American history of ideas agree on the significance of individualism and its practice among citizens. Its appeal proves to be far-reaching – across class, race, and gender boundaries. As we will see, it serves as a mobilising tool in New Woman writing engaged in revolutionising the role of women and influencing their social politics. As I remarked above, Mill’s lucid identification of what ‘liberties’ form the basic foundation of individualism provides a framework in which many of the New Woman protagonists under study are characterised. Their yearning for individualistic freedom of action which is conducive to an individual’s ‘genuine growth’ echoes Smiles’s argument. Moreover, the American school of individualism as promoted by Emerson, which commends ‘the triumph of principles’, inform one of the key characteristics of a few New Woman protagonists I consider. However, while principles strengthen these heroines, the novels criticise social customs that provide the basis of Donisthorpe’s idea of sexual inequality that thrives on women’s conventionally prescribed weaknesses.

I have so far concentrated on only male theorists whose conception of individualism spanned five decades (1841-1891). At the turn of the nineteenth century, a woman writer, Mona Caird (1854-1932), drew on this intellectual framework to argue for female individualism in marriage. As Heilmann notes, ‘children and motherhood’ were at the time regarded by women not as ‘a simple matter of biology’ but rather as ‘social and political conditions’ and, although both served to foil ‘their desire for personal development’, it was women themselves who ‘exact[ed] self-sacrifice from the next generation of women, who would in turn instil this principle in their own female children’.<sup>85</sup> Thus, in order for women to attain that desired liberty and to share equal status with men, as a means of breaking away from this ‘cycle of internalised oppression’, Caird advanced her argument for autonomy achievable through ‘female economic

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<sup>85</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 161.

independence'.<sup>86</sup> Subsequently, Caird became the first New Woman writer to address this link between economic independence, sexual autonomy, and individuality. To illustrate the extent of Caird's advocacy of individuality, it is worth looking at one of her letters in which she expresses a fierce disapproval of Lady Wilde's commendation of 'sacrificial' women. On 27 June, 1889, Caird professed that, as 'human beings', women had 'a right to claim the fullest opportunity for development and life' instead of being held down by marriage associated with the notion of 'submission', 'sacrifice', 'duty', and 'general self-destruction' that religious teaching and conventional upbringing imposed on women since their girlhood.<sup>87</sup>

Although Caird's view was perceptive, brave, and revolutionary, it took a long time for any effect to be noticed or be related to that earlier strand of thoughts derived from and associated with men. As a result, the subject of woman and individualism at the *fin de siècle* appears to have evaded contemporary public attention. Moreover, female individualism has been noticeably under-studied even in the current scholarship of the present time. Indeed, in New Woman fiction including the works selected for consideration in this thesis, there emerges a pattern that the New Woman heroines are 'testing the limits of autonomy and emotion, constraint and freedom, at the level of the individual person and body.'<sup>88</sup> As Regenia Gagnier further argues, women were in fact 'active shapers of individualist ideology'.<sup>89</sup> My thesis therefore focuses on the major but neglected connection between the New Woman, the marriage debate, and individualism as represented in the works of women writers of substantially diverse perspectives and agendas.

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<sup>86</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, pp. 161, 5; Mona Caird, 'Marriage' in *The Westminster Review*, Independent Section, vol. 130, no. 2 (August, 1888), pp. 186-201; p. 198.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 556; Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 157, n. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Regenia Gagnier, 'Individualism from the New Woman to the Genome: Autonomy and Independence' in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 2003), pp. 103-128; p. 106; hereafter abbreviated as 'INWG'.

<sup>89</sup> Gagnier, 'INWG', p. 104.



In conclusion, individualism as a political concept circulated widely in western societies from the mid- to the late-nineteenth century and was ramified into social, cultural, and literary arenas as it created a notable impact on late-Victorian literature by women writers. In this thesis, I draw out the significance of this concept in an analysis of the New Woman and marriage as represented in the novels of the 1890s. Based on Victorian thinkers, as well as on my application of the term drawn from my reading and analysis of the chosen works of fiction, individualism as used in this thesis comes to mean the right to self-government, the demonstration of self-confidence and self-assertion instead of self-abnegation and feminine self-effacement, the means to and opportunity for self-development which leads to stability and progress both personally and nationally, the pursuit of one's own interests in the way one thinks best, the sense of independence and, finally, full liberty and complete personal freedom. Most importantly, thanks to these all-encompassing appeals of individualism, I am interested in its ideology because it plays an important part in re-figuring the New Woman protagonists in the chosen fiction by forming and feeding their radical attitude towards marriage.

### *The New Woman*

Among the number of significant changes and reforms taking place in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the New Woman became a particular *cause célèbre* in the 1890s. Originated in 1894 in an exchange between Sarah Grand and Ouida, the figure of the New Woman was a quintessential icon of the *fin de siècle*. Indeed 'she was part of that concatenation of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s'.<sup>90</sup> In popular imagination as well as later critical analysis, the controversial figure of the New Woman was often placed alongside her counterpart, the ideal Victorian woman or the Old Woman. Essentially a middle-class phenomenon, the term has come to loosely identify both late-Victorian writers engaged in women's cause, and a mode of literary

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<sup>90</sup> Ledger, *NW*, p. 1.

representation which created a character type that attracted sympathy as well as opposition from critics and readers. The figure of the New Woman appeared across literary genres, ranging from the novel to the periodical press to poetry.<sup>91</sup> It created considerable literary impact on the later period, anticipating feminist discourses in the twentieth century.

Indeed, beginning in the late 1990s, the New Woman has been continually regarded by scholars, critics, and literary historians as a media construct and literary icon that constitutes a crucial part of late-Victorian feminism. Notable early book-length studies enriching this analysis include Sally Ledger in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), Ann Heilmann in *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000), as well as Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis in *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (2000). Writers whose works portray the New Woman in a positive light embodied late-century attempts to challenge the social roles imposed on women. Their arguments resided mainly in the areas of improved education and employment opportunities for women, as well as a chance to gain economic stability which had been partially achieved regarding the extensions to the Married Women's Property Act in 1870 and 1882.<sup>92</sup>

As I remarked earlier, the 'New Woman' arose from Ouida's response to Sarah Grand's 1894 article 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' in which Grand alludes to women's 'awaking from their long apathy', those decades of subjection as well as social injustice.<sup>93</sup> While Grand maintains her modern stance by encouraging women to seek liberation, Ouida's 'vocal' 'denunciation of the New Woman' expresses her strong 'antifeminism'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, 'Ouida's diatribe', as opposed to Grand's radical notion with

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<sup>91</sup> Schaffer, "Nothing but Foolscap and Ink" in Richardson and Willis, eds, *NWFF*, pp. 39-52; Linda K. Hughes, 'Daughters of Danaus and Daphne: Women Poets and the Marriage Question' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 34 (2006), pp. 481-493.

<sup>92</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 125.

<sup>93</sup> Grand, 'NAWQ', p. 271.

<sup>94</sup> Pamela Gilbert, 'Ouida and the other New Woman' in Nicola Diane Thompson, ed., *Victorian*

regard to women, is typical of the conservatives especially as she is ‘wholly opposed to Female Suffrage and the New Woman’.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, Ouida denounces the New Woman for the same reasons that sympathisers applaud her: the New Woman is intelligent, emancipated, and self-supporting.

Although Grand and Ouida have been regarded as the originators of the New Woman debate, with the year 1894 almost universally being held as her birth anniversary, wars had been waged for women’s liberation from restrictive social roles well before the nascence of this construct. Academic and literary critic Matthew Beaumont confirms that the New Woman is indeed ‘a product of the final two decades of the nineteenth century rather than of the 1890s alone.’<sup>96</sup> Moreover, feminist and literary historian Lucy Bland asserts that the New Woman, such as conceived by early New Woman writers including Grand, no longer regarded marriage as ‘the only respectable career for middle-class young women’.<sup>97</sup> This shift in attitude culminated in an entirely new (and radical) view when, ‘by the end of the nineteenth century a number of women were consciously rejecting marriage, not merely making the best of a bad deal.’<sup>98</sup> The desire for autonomy becomes an archetypal trait of the New Woman – one which relates her to individualism – what Beaumont calls a ‘recourse to an individualist politics’ drawn from Bland’s postulation that the New Woman’s ‘hallmark was *personal* freedom’.<sup>99</sup> Bland and Beaumont thus put forward views that validate my framework for the individualism of the New Woman in connection with arguments for women’s liberty and independence as made by Mill and Caird.

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*Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 170-188; p. 170; hereafter abbreviated as ‘ONW’.

<sup>95</sup> Ledger, *NW*, p. 36; Gilbert, ‘ONW’, p. 170.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew Beaumont, “‘A Little Political World of My Own’: The New Woman, The New Life, and *New Amazonia*’ in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 35 (2007), pp. 215-232; p. 221.

<sup>97</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p. 163; hereafter abbreviated as *BBEFSM*.

<sup>98</sup> Bland, *BBEFSM*, p. 163.

<sup>99</sup> Bland, *BBEFSM*, p. 144; quoted in Beaumont, “‘A Little Political World of My Own’”, p. 221 (emphasis in the original).

Based on this radical departure from the traditionally idealised representations of womanhood, critics often satirised the New Woman as man-hating, bicycle-riding, cigarette-smoking, and unattractively masculine. It is crucial to capture the contested ideas associated with this highly elusive figure. To illustrate these contradictory traits, Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis define the New Woman in the following terms:

she was oversexed, undersexed, or same sex identified; ... male-identified, or manhating ... radical, socialist or revolutionary, or ... reactionary and conservative; ... the agent of social and/or racial regeneration, or symptom and agent of decline.<sup>100</sup>

These highly contrasted characteristics reflect the challenging task of framing the New Woman. Moreover, they highlight the tensions between the sense of modernity some attach to this literary figure and the attempt to portray her as an upholder of traditional values typically associated with the Victorian notion of femininity. The modern side of the New Woman shows her ambitious desires to join in the public sphere of action, employment, education, politics, and art made evident in the above passage.

It is crucial to note that although the New Woman figure entered into the literary currency in 1894, ideas related to liberating and liberated women in fact evolved since the mid-century and continued throughout the ensuing decades. An advocate of betterment in women's position, Mill's most significant contribution to nineteenth-century feminism was *The Subjection of Women* (1869), an expression of his serious beliefs in the indispensable need for total individual freedom. Mill attempts to redress women's position seeing that marriage has turned them into slaves to their husbands.<sup>101</sup> As a result, Mill's work was, and still is widely regarded as an early feminist attempt to rectify the social and judicial injustices that subordinated women through marriage. The roots of Mill's modern thoughts may be traced back to his earlier work, *On Liberty*, which

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<sup>100</sup> Richardson and Willis, eds, *NWFF*, p. xii.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Marital Slavery and Friendship: John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*' in G. W. Smith, ed., *John Stuart Mill's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 247-263; p. 247.

defends women's right to self-government, an idea that echoes through the writings of the authors examined in this thesis.<sup>102</sup>

As we have seen through Mill's work, one thing becomes evident: writing indeed served as a powerful tool in the nineteenth century, one which many men and women employed as a medium through which to promote their beliefs, initiate change, and create trends. Women in later decades made use of writing to defend and improve their position by promoting social change. It was not a surprise that the 1890s saw 'the political explosiveness of feminist writing'.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, some eminent literary women including Ouida, Eliza Lynn Linton, and Mary Ward vociferously opposed the New Woman in their journalism. Taking a hostile position against women gaining greater freedom, prolific and influential journalist Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-1898) is an illuminating example especially when juxtaposed with Caird, Grand and Schreiner.<sup>104</sup> Provoked by Caird's conception of marriage as a form of slavery reminiscent of Mill's argument in *The Subjection of Women*, Linton strongly disapproved of Caird's proposed ideal of womanhood. She responded irately in 'The Wild Women as Politicians', 'The Wild Women as Social Insurgents', and 'The Partisans of the Wild Women', aimed at chastising such militant notions to which Caird replied in 'A Defence of the So-Called "Wild Women"'.<sup>105</sup>

In addition to these conceptual tensions, there were also oppositional views with regard to the ideology of separate spheres. While many upheld the domestic ideal, what she called "Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere", Grand condemned for imposing an unfair

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<sup>102</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 21, 22.

<sup>103</sup> Heilmann, 'Introduction' in *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. xv.

<sup>104</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Wild Women as Politicians' in *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 30 (1891), pp. 79-88; Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Wild Women as Social Insurgents' in *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 30 (1891), pp. 596-605; and Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Partisans of the Wild Women' in *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 31 (1892), pp. 455-464; Mona Caird, 'A Defence of the So-Called "Wild Women"' in *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 31 (1892), pp. 817-829.

demand on domestic servitude of women.<sup>106</sup> The emphasis on the separation of spheres illustrates ruptures in late-nineteenth-century ideology, which was divided into feminist and anti-feminist reactions. Contrary to the political statement often articulated in New Woman writing, many eminent figures were in opposition to female enfranchisement. A strong case was made when in June 1889, Mary Ward published ‘An Appeal against Female Suffrage’ in the *Nineteenth Century*. She recruited 104 signatories to join in, followed by over one thousand female anti-suffragists two months later.<sup>107</sup> Significantly, these writers represent the two sides of the New Woman debate on the same question of equality and domestic ideology.

Concerning the feminist view on the debate, the New Woman writers endeavoured to improve the position of women, in terms of increased equality between men and women, and better recognised social, political, and legal rights of women. As argued in Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, ‘the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement’.<sup>108</sup> Many of his principles were forward-looking and influenced a great number of arguments developed by later activists debating the Woman Question. The legal and social position of wedded women was equated with ‘sexual slavery’ widely resented among feminists.<sup>109</sup> In this light, women’s disability may be seen as the result of the ideal of womanhood which deprived women of their basic rights. Feminist thinkers attacked the cult of domesticity, which gave rise to the ideal of femininity popularly upheld by members of the middle and upper classes: they refuted what was perceived to be the natural, ‘inherent qualities of femininity’, namely ‘emotion, passivity, submission, dependence, and

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<sup>106</sup> Grand, ‘NAWQ’, p. 271.

<sup>107</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward *et al*, ‘An Appeal Against Female Suffrage’ in *The Nineteenth Century* (25 June, 1889), pp. 781-787; reprinted in Ledger and Luckhurst, eds, FS, pp. 92-94; p. 94.

<sup>108</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 184.

selflessness'.<sup>110</sup> But the domestic ideology proved to have staying power. It continued to be widely held even in the final decades of the century. As a result, women were greatly affected by a very narrow and limited life.

Moreover, the dispute concerning women's education was an important aspect central to the Woman Question. Due to Victorian social restrictions, education and employment opportunities for women were extremely limited. William Lovett (1800-1877), though working-class in origin, was well-esteemed as an early education reformist and supported by many middle-class sympathisers including Mill. In 1876, Lovett argued fervently for 'education as the key to self-fulfilment and enriched opportunity'.<sup>111</sup> This notion reappeared in New Woman writing in the last decade of the nineteenth century, such as seen in my analysis of the uneven development in girls' education represented in the selected works.

In conclusion, the three novelists' attitudes towards the New Woman are significant because they are indicative of the contemporary diverse, often contradictory, views of this construct. While the period's typical representation of the New Woman depicts a notorious figure – a rebellious man-hater or self-destructive proponent of free love – the New Woman characters are portrayed very differently in the novels of Ward, Grand, and Malet which seek to discuss the ideal(ised) womanhood, one that valorises wifedom and motherhood. Their struggle reflects the relation between public debates on marriage and women's position in the 1880s and 1890s. Each novelist explores the potential ethical and social conflict that results from a woman trying to live for herself as an individual, rather than abnegating her self before others. The optimistic and sympathetic portrayals in the chosen novels both determine and reinforce my framework

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<sup>110</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>111</sup> Brian Harrison, "'Kindness and Reason': William Lovett and 'Education' in Gordon Marsden, ed., *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), pp. 13-28; p. 16.

concerning the significant relationship between individualism and the New Woman figure, and also marriage, which is the final point of my study.

### *Marriage*

It is crucial to note the link between two quintessential debates in Victorian feminist discourse made by a New Woman writer. According to her closing words in the 1894 article, ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’, Sarah Grand deems that ‘[t]he Woman Question is the marriage question’.<sup>112</sup> This confident and definitive conclusion brings to the fore the centrality of the marriage question for the Victorian women’s movement. In fact, predating the New Woman debate which only began to gain momentum and culminated in 1894, the so-called ‘Marriage Question’ had been engaging both public and private attention since the mid-Victorian era. The marriage debate reached its zenith in 1888, in an explosive reaction from the public. This resulted in the extended debate published in newspapers in the form of correspondence expressing opinions both for and against this social institution.<sup>113</sup> It was in this context that Caird’s interventions on female individualism, financial autonomy and companionate autonomy sparked fierce debates in contemporary journalism.

According to Heilmann, Caird’s controversial article ‘Marriage’ (1888) ‘launched the emerging theory discourse of the New Woman movement in the shape of an erudite, historically grounded and fiercely radical analysis of the patriarchal system.’<sup>114</sup> A significant milestone in the New Woman debates, the article provoked a prolonged correspondence among readers, writers, and critics who deemed the article

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<sup>112</sup> Grand, ‘NAWQ’, p. 276.

<sup>113</sup> For analyses of Caird’s influential essay and the origin of the 1888 marriage debate, see Lorelee MacPike, ‘The New Woman, Childbearing, and the Reconstruction of Gender, 1880-1900’ in *NWSA Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring, 1989), pp. 368-397, especially pp. 383-385; Ann Heilmann, ‘Mona Caird (1854-1932): wild woman, new woman, and early radical feminist critic of marriage and motherhood’ in *Women’s History Review*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1996), pp. 67-95; and Ann Heilmann, ‘Re-visioning myths: *The Morality of Marriage* (1897), *The Pathway of the Gods* (1898) and *The Stones of Sacrifice* (1915)’ in *NWS*, pp. 157-199, see especially “‘A degrading bondage’: *The Morality of Marriage* (1897)”, pp. 165-169.

<sup>114</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 4.



‘outrageous’.<sup>115</sup> Caird’s central argument was that: ‘the present form of marriage—exactly in proportion to its conformity with orthodox ideas—is a vexatious failure’, a notion derived from the rigidly divided ‘spheres’ and the abuse of the concept of ‘womanly virtues’.<sup>116</sup> Notably, ‘Marriage’ achieved a remarkably wide readership and national impact. When, in response to Caird’s article, Harry Quilter posed the question ‘Is Marriage a Failure?’ in the *Daily Telegraph*, he received ‘twenty-seven thousand letters’ from readers within ‘only six weeks’.<sup>117</sup> Despite its overwhelming public reception, however, the article incited the most aggressive reaction from critics. Two years later, in the aftermath of Caird’s essay, novelist, trade unionist and female suffragist Clementina Black published a response entitled ‘On Marriage: A Criticism’ in which she agreed with Caird’s argument for women’s financial independence, but pointed out that Caird overlooked the crucial questions of class and marriage.<sup>118</sup> Despite criticisms, the debate on marriage continued and culminated in Caird’s subsequent work, a collection of essays entitled *The Morality of Marriage* (1897), in response to *Shafts*, a journal dedicated to women’s cause, proclaimed in 1898 that Caird was a ‘forerunner of a great reform’.<sup>119</sup> Caird’s demand for women’s economic independence, liberty, and equality within marriage takes forward Mill’s arguments about individualism, as I demonstrated in the above section.

The anxiety surrounding marriage continued through to the close of the century. Ella Hepworth Dixon (1855-1932), author of *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), wrote a perceptive article entitled ‘Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry’ (1899). Published exactly three decades after Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, Dixon’s article was representative of a reaction to the widespread debate on marriage during the last two

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<sup>115</sup> Heilmann, ‘Introduction’ in *LVMQ*, vol. 1, pp. x-xxx; p. xxix; Harry Quilter, ed., ‘Preface’ in *Is Marriage A Failure?* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1888), pp. 1-14; p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> Caird, ‘Marriage’, pp. 197, 195.

<sup>117</sup> Quilter, ‘Preface’, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Clementina Black, ‘On Marriage: A Criticism’ in *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 53 (1890), pp. 586-594; Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 1, p. xxix.

<sup>119</sup> Heilmann, ‘Introduction’ in *LVMQ*, vol. 1, p. xxx.

decades of the nineteenth century. Being in ‘sympathy with the modern feminist movement’, Dixon defended those activists who were accused of wishing to ‘compete with men’ and of evading the ‘high privileges and duties of maternity and domestic life’.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, she critiqued the ‘feminine education during the last twenty years’ as having an impact on the ‘critical attitude among womenfolk’ by instilling in them the importance of ‘an ideal partner in marriage’.<sup>121</sup> Like Caird, she attacked the traditional idealisation of marriage, noting that without ‘affection’ on the woman’s side, the married couple are simply ‘sacrificed to society’s rigorous demand for the outward observance of the proprieties’.<sup>122</sup> Significantly, Dixon’s view offers a connection to Mill’s notion on the damaging effects social customs had on destroying women’s individuality.

Another equally important factor that added to the ineffectual attempt to foster women’s autonomy in marriage lay in their legal standing. The impact of the laws was deep and serious as they became the major source of violence to which women were subject. The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 ‘were treated as a declaration of war by feminists’.<sup>123</sup> These acts were responsible for the rapid rise of the lock hospitals which provided treatment of venereal disease; the majority of patients were female prostitutes who had no means to defend themselves against suspicion of infection and humiliating gynaecological examinations. The chief opponent was women’s rights activist Josephine Butler (1828-1906) who discerned the violent and unjust aspects of these laws which punished women while disregarding their clients.<sup>124</sup> They represented distinctly the ‘stricter social demand for purity addressed to women than to men’, one that

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<sup>120</sup> Ella Hepworth Dixon, ‘Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry’ in *The Humanitarian*, vol. 14 (1899), pp. 391-396; p. 391; hereafter abbreviated as ‘WWACM’.

<sup>121</sup> Dixon, ‘WWACM’, p. 391.

<sup>122</sup> Dixon, ‘WWACM’, pp. 395, 394.

<sup>123</sup> Jamie L. Bronstein and Andrew T. Harris, *Empire, State, and Society: Britain since 1830* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2012), p. 121; Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality* (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), p. 70.

<sup>124</sup> Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 183; Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 80.

‘judge[d] men and women with varying harshness for analogous, essentially similar, acts’.<sup>125</sup> Failing to discourage extramarital sexual practice, the double standard instead fed the spread of venereal disease and, in relation to the notion of degeneration discussed in this thesis, became another instrumental factor in organising efforts among women’s cause supporters.

The threat these laws imposed on women moved many New Woman writers to write about the legalised difficulties facing married women. Campaigning for improvement in women’s position, Sarah Grand integrates her viewpoint regarding women’s legal subordination in the novels examined in Part Two. She sets her marriage plot retrospectively against the backdrop of legislative reforms, namely the Matrimonial Causes Act (the Divorce Act) of 1857, the Married Women’s Property and the Contagious Diseases Acts. While bearing evidence to the struggles women experienced before the change, Grand’s retrospective plots purposely reflect ‘the feminist attack on contemporary sexual politics and the exploitation of women’.<sup>126</sup> New Woman writers continued to focus on the interrelationships between sexual and legal inequities ingrained in fixed gender roles and the ideology of separate spheres. These aspects thus became an important part of the larger marriage question which informed both feminist and New Woman discourse at the end of the century. In addition, the late-Victorian feminists perceived that morality was in decline which propelled them to combat male vice and restore purity. In consequence, the social purity movement originated in the late 1870s and steadily expanded until reaching its peak in the mid-1880s, when campaigners collectively ‘condemned many forms of illicit sexual behavior, such as youthful sexual expression, prostitution and white slavery.’<sup>127</sup> They reflected concerns arising from the double standard of sexual morality and the alleged relationship between physical and

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<sup>125</sup> Aurel Thomas Kolnai, *Sexual Ethics: The Meaning and Foundations of Sexual Morality*, trans., Francis Dunlop (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 252.

<sup>126</sup> Heilmann, ‘Introduction’ in *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. xv.

<sup>127</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 92.

moral health, which became the basis of another *fin-de-siecle* discourse known as degeneration.

Socially, degeneration, or the sense of decline, was pervasive not only in Victorian Britain but also on the Continent. In his seminal work of 1892, philosopher, physician, sociologist and literary critic Max Nordau (1849-1923) ‘recognises at a glance, the *fin-de-siècle* disposition ... in the confluence of two well-defined conditions of disease’ namely ‘degeneration (degeneracy) and hysteria’.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, one of the dominant sentiments in Britain, apart from fears of an imminent apocalypse, was a precaution against degeneration in relation to the ideology of gender and morality. A Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Sir James Cantlie (1851-1926) quoted from the history of ‘many a previous race now in decadence’ to illustrate his warning against ‘effeminacy and sloth.’<sup>129</sup> In fact, degeneration was not limited to the world of science but created ripples that spread into cultural and literary arenas. It became associated with decadence, and by extension aestheticism, through the former’s connection with ‘pessimism, sexual aberrancy, mysticism and poor taste in clothing.’<sup>130</sup> In twentieth-century literary criticism, degeneration ‘represented the boundless capacity of a society to ‘generate’ regression: on the one hand, generation and reproduction, on the other, decline, degradation, waste.’<sup>131</sup> Symptomatic of the *fin de siecle*, the literature of the period reflects these anxieties caused by such backslidings, particularly in terms of sexual immorality, as will be seen in Malet’s marriage plots discussed in Part Three.

In conclusion, various writers and materials serve to clarify the frameworks and significance of my thesis. In conceptualising individualism, Mill’s works on liberty and

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<sup>128</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. from the second edition of *Entartung* [1892] (1893), fifth edition (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 15.

<sup>129</sup> James Cantlie, *Degeneration amongst Londoners* (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. 7-61; pp. 36-38.

<sup>130</sup> Denisoff, ‘DA’ in Marshall, ed., *CCFS*, p. 31.

<sup>131</sup> William M. Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 15-31; p. 16.

the subjection of women prove to be of especial value as they illuminate the exceptional nature among the New Woman characters who do not conform to the social customs that threaten to take away their individuality. My focus on this literary construct is an attempt to comprehend the ideal(s) of womanhood which will, in turn, formulate an answer to the late-nineteenth-century Woman Question. Characterised with independence and freedom, the New Woman serves to accentuate the ethical ramification of what it meant to be a female individual, which is apparent through the strain on and indeed impossibility of the marriage plot. My thesis thus benefits from these representations of social constraints which women were facing in marriage: they reflect the marriage question through their critiques on gender roles, the ideology of separate spheres, and degeneration. Since the three authors represent distinctively dissimilar perspectives on these questions, they offer different but enlightening insights. My analysis will demonstrate that while Grand figures an abstract collective of motherhood and race as a means to license self-regarding action, Ward absorbs the New Woman back into the landed tradition of conservative paternalism, and Malet rehearses more the Emersonian idea of complex and fractured interiority and sexuality prefiguring the self of literary modernism.

## **V. Conclusion**

My examination of iterations of the New Woman protagonist in the context of differing ideas of individualism provides a new way to look at the late-Victorian marriage question and its role in straining the plots of nineteenth-century fiction. Although to reconsider the selected texts with a focus on individualism may place my research at an oblique distance from the works of New Woman scholars, my reading extends the reach of our understanding of the New Woman paradigm beyond a more predictable canon of

feminist writers.<sup>132</sup> I focus on the ways in which Ward, Grand, and Malet employ and interrogate individualism to create New Woman protagonists who seek freedom from social convention. Their representation of the New Woman's autonomy, although to a certain extent it appears to be a positive attribute, often creates tensions in the text. The eventual decision of each New Woman character with regard to marriage informs our understanding of the pressure such individualism places on the conventional closure of literary texts and, indeed, the social actuality of a woman's passage to maturity. The three writers considered here were avowedly idiosyncratic in their responses to the late-nineteenth-century Woman Question and nowhere is this clearer than in their attempts to manage and rewrite the life plot of woman as an individual faced with the chance of marriage.

Based on my study of these six novels, further research may be conducted so as to explore in depth literary representations of woman and individualism which represent radical changes in late-nineteenth-century gender relations. Such progressive developments were achieved chiefly through the organised efforts by women themselves to overcome difficulties associated with marriage. The timing of this important intellectual and social transition, during the 1890s, serves as a culmination of a century-long struggle among women to come into their own. In this sense, the closing years both marked the beginning of a new century and anticipated a promising future. Thus, the focus on individualism in literary texts by women authors offers interdisciplinary approaches to literature since, when we think about individualism, its connection is not limited to politics, political economy, or the relationship between the state and its citizens

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<sup>132</sup> Clarke, 'FPN', pp. 93-103. Clarke discusses New Woman writers, with a special focus on Grand, her trilogy, and the 'popular novel' as a vehicle of opinion to serve political and social purpose. For an overview of late-Victorian popular 'New Woman' fiction, including Grand's first, privately printed *Ideala* (1888), her most commercially successful *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), and Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, see Stanley Weintraub, 'Reclaiming Late-Victorian Popular Fiction' in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 53, no. 2 (2010), pp. 170-181; pp. 177-179.

only. In fact, individualism relates to economics and social history, namely women's history and gender studies. The notion of woman and individualism will therefore be the next stepping stone, providing for us the channel through which we are enabled to trace the evolution of women of the Victorian era into the modernist age.

In the following chapters, I examine the dilemma of marriage and its questionable status as the right and worthy career for each New Woman protagonist. These aspects are varied and wide-ranging – from idealism and conformity to duty, from morality to purity, and from art to reproductive duty – and will give direction to my subsequent discussions. Corresponding to the number of novelists and their works, the thesis is divided into three parts, with each part consisting of two chapters. The first part will concentrate on Ward's representation of the two types of protagonists – the New Woman and the Old Woman – and the role of individualism in determining, or complicating, the attitude of each character in relation to marriage. It also interrogates the way in which marriage re-educates her into the idealised version of womanhood which Ward advocates. The second part examines Grand's portrayal of New Woman heroines and marriage to consider its effect on their individualism. The third and final part focuses on Malet's departure from the nineteenth-century literary tradition to which the other two novelists conform to a great extent.<sup>133</sup> Malet's depiction of both a non-existent and an unconsummated marriage foregrounds the significant connection between individualism and female sexuality. I shall begin with my discussion of Ward and her ambivalent views towards the New Woman figure and the marriage debate in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>133</sup> As Ledger notes, for example, '[*The Heavenly Twins*] is, though, ultimately a novel that tends to conform: both the central female characters – Evadne Frayling and Angelica Hamilton[-Wells] – end up in conventional marriages with 'respectable' men, Angelica married to a man twenty years her senior and Evadne to the morally correct Dr. Galbraith. Evadne is, though, more a patient than a wife to her second husband.' (p. 159). See Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and Feminist Fiction' in Gail Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-168; p. 159.

**Part One: Mary Ward**



## Chapter 1: *Robert Elsmere*: Individualism, the New Woman, and the Feminine Ideal

As previously noted, the 1890s witnessed extended public disputes on how accommodating society should be towards the changing position, character, and circumstances of women. In consequence, many powerful figures who had influence over the reading public appeared to hold self-contradictory views. Mary Augusta Ward, better-known in her time as Mrs. Humphry Ward, is a notable instance of such inner contradictions. In Part One of this thesis, I therefore concentrate on Mary Ward's best-selling work, *Robert Elsmere* (1888), and compare it with her later novel *Marcella* (1894). Both texts are important to my thesis as they portray central characters that are iterations of the 1890s New Woman figure. A close reading of Ward's two novels reveals that they pose a simple question of woman's place in society. In other words, beyond the immediacy of religious earnestness in *Robert Elsmere* and socialism in *Marcella*, I will argue that both novels are in fact Ward's medium for exploring the woman question through the representation of marriage and the individualism of her New Woman characters. But first of all, I will briefly discuss Mary Ward's life, roles, and interests in order to establish the context in which her thoughts, particularly those on women-related issues, took shape and evolved. Her works and accomplishments, both literary and otherwise, not only indicate her reputation but also reflect the basis of the intellectual underpinnings of the novels central to this thesis.

## I. Mary Augusta Ward: A Literary Life

Mary Augusta Arnold Ward (11 June, 1851 – 26 March, 1920), was the daughter of Thomas Arnold (1823-1900), a professor of literature, and Julia Sorrell (1826-1888).<sup>1</sup> A member of one of England's highly regarded families, famous relations included her grandfather, pioneering educationist and celebrated public-school headmaster Dr. Thomas Arnold of Rugby (1795-1842), and her uncle, notable critic and poet Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). As the Arnolds were staunch followers of the Liberal Party, their influence had contributed to the shaping of her liberalism, an instance of which was expressed via her religious liberal stance in terms of the theology of Robert Elsmere depicted in the novel.<sup>2</sup>

Ward's active involvement in social and public affairs was remarkable and diverse. From 1878 to 1879, as 'one of its moving spirits and secretary', she played a key part in founding Somerville Hall, which was renamed Somerville College in 1894 and became one of the two first Oxford colleges for women.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Ward served on the Somerville Council from 1881 to 1898 and, as she informed her mother, was also in 1882 appointed the 'first woman examiner of men' at Oxford.<sup>4</sup>

Although the promotion of higher education for women was one of Ward's great concerns, late in life, as president of the Anti-Suffrage League in 1908, she campaigned against votes for women.<sup>5</sup> Her opposition, in fact, surprised many as Ward was regarded one of the most intellectually polished and socially active women of her time. However, her reasoning was that as women were not subject to military service, they should not be

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<sup>1</sup> John Sutherland, *Mrs. Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-eminent Edwardian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 8; hereafter abbreviated as *MHW*.

<sup>2</sup> For Ward's theological position in connection to her 'liberal principles', see P. C. Erb, 'Politics and Theological Liberalism: William Gladstone and Mrs. Humphry Ward' in *The Journal of Religious History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (June, 2001), pp. 158-172.

<sup>3</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 28. See 'Marriage and Oxford: 1872-1878' for Ward's involvement in 'founding the institution' as well as her appointment to the Somerville Council (pp. 64-65).

<sup>4</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, pp. 65, 73, and p. 384, n. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Maroula Joannou, 'Mary Augusta Ward (Mrs. Humphry) and the Opposition to Women's Suffrage' in *Women's History Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 & 4 (2005), pp. 561-580; p. 567; hereafter abbreviated as 'MAWOWS'.

in a position to launch wars and, lacking experience in business, ought not to make large-scale economic decisions. Some historians argue that Ward supported the ‘Antis’ largely due to her willingness to help ‘patriarchal, powerful men’ who needed her influential pen to fuel their campaign against women’s suffrage.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Ward strongly encouraged and campaigned for women to be active in local government, both as voters and councillors. Shortly before her death she became one of the first seven English women magistrates.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to her literary career, Ward was a highly successful novelist, whose work was largely concerned with religious, social, and political issues. Moreover, many of Ward’s books emphasised the need to help the less fortunate in society, which signify her sympathy for the poor. This noticeable tendency highlighted Ward’s important role as a social reformer and an influential political activist begun in the late nineteenth through to the early twentieth centuries. Considering her association with the Anti-Suffrage League, for example, her nationally central role and influence becomes evident and helps explain why Ward has been made a subject of studies chiefly in terms of her social and political activities at the end of the nineteenth century. It should be observed, too, however, that the fact that she was opposed to women’s suffrage often leads many twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars to regard her as an anti-feminist writer.<sup>8</sup> This notion is reflected in her novel *Daphne* (1909), the American title of which was *Marriage à la Mode*. Moreover, Ward becomes central to the scholarship on suffrage literature on the strength of her anti-suffragist novel *Delia Blanchflower* (1914).<sup>9</sup> In terms of Ward’s anti-feminism, I want to point out that her chosen novels engage with the cultural formation of the New Woman through their critique of the threat this figure potentially

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<sup>6</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 373.

<sup>8</sup> Valerie Sanders, *Eve’s Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Joannou, ‘MAWOWS’, pp. 561-580.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Heilmann and Valerie Sanders, ‘The rebel, the lady, and the “anti”’: Femininity, anti-feminism, and the Victorian woman writer’ in *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 29 (2006), pp. 289-300; hereafter abbreviated as ‘RLA’; Joannou, ‘MAWOWS’, pp. 561-580.

poses to the social order. The selection of her fiction thus provides an important insight into the complex effects which the New Woman discourse had on more conservative commentators whom Ward came to represent.

As previously mentioned, Mary Ward has become the focus of expanding scholarship in recent years. Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, Peter Collister, and Judith Wilt have, among others, discussed Ward in terms of her politics, literary achievements and social influences, characterising her contributions across the spectrum, from literature to education, to social reforms and the affairs of the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Mary Augusta Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-eminent Edwardian* (1991), John Sutherland's biography, portrays in detail the life of an influential woman who succeeded not only as a devoted wife and mother, but also as an adroit persona in the political arena as well as the literary world. This biographical account delineating Ward's successes portrays a singular woman who achieved the best of both worlds, one of duty and domesticity and the other of power and productivity. The book provides a sometimes rather condescending, but nevertheless insightful and psychoanalytically informed narrative of the influence of her family relations on her politics and work.

Furthermore, Mary Ward's reputation was well-established far and wide since she was recognised beyond the country's boundaries. Ward was, in fact, 'one of the most widely read novelists in England and America during her lifetime' and 'probably England's best-known living woman writer'.<sup>10</sup> Her 'conscientiousness and seriousness' are evident in all her works and, over three decades after her death, in 1952 Somerset Maugham praised the 'well-stored mind' and 'command of language' which he attributed to her literary 'solid gifts'.<sup>11</sup> To posterity, as noted by twentieth-century critics, Ward was

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<sup>10</sup> William Samuel Peterson, *Victorian Heretic: Mrs. Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976), pp. 1, 7; hereafter abbreviated as *VH*.

<sup>11</sup> William Somerset Maugham, *The Vagrant Mood: Six Essays* (London: William Heinemann, 1952), pp. 194-195; quoted in Peterson, *VH*, p. 2.

‘an observer of the social and intellectual life of late nineteenth-century England’; to her own contemporaries, she was perceived as ‘the living embodiment of Victorianism’.<sup>12</sup>

With regard to her works of fiction, the most significant novel, intellectually, politically, and commercially, has remained *Robert Elsmere* (1888). Triggering much religious debate, *Robert Elsmere* became first the best-selling novel of the decade, then that of the nineteenth century itself.<sup>13</sup> It was an immediate and overwhelming success, with sales figures going over half a million copies within a year.<sup>14</sup> Over the next few years, it was translated into several languages.<sup>15</sup> The Christian values of repentance and self-sacrifice, which emerge as recurring themes of Ward’s novels, were controversial and received with ambivalence considering the growing scepticism of those times. These theological ‘passions’ and concerns, observed in England during its transitioning process, were captured by ‘a series of key publications recording a deeply emotional intellectual history’ namely ‘the Oxford movement’s “Tracts for the Times”’ in the 1840s, ‘the [1860] Anglican scholarship of *Essays and Reviews*’ and the 1899 ‘essays in *Lux Mundi*’.<sup>16</sup> After a period of obscurity following her death, however, there has been a revival of interest in Ward’s fiction. Both novels which are the focus of my thesis, for instance, have been recently reprinted, with a forthcoming edition of *Robert Elsmere* due to appear in 2012.<sup>17</sup>

In literary history and print culture, Ward had a major role in bringing about the fall of the circulating library. With the tremendous success of *Marcella* in 1894 which

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<sup>12</sup> Peterson, *VH*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Wilt, *Behind Her Times: Transition England in the Novels of Mary Arnold Ward* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 1, 47; hereafter abbreviated as *BHT*; John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 144; hereafter abbreviated as *VF*.

<sup>14</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, pp. 129-131.

<sup>15</sup> Helen Rappaport, *Encyclopaedia of Women Social Reformers* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2001), p. 731.

<sup>16</sup> Wilt, *BHT*, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Secrets has announced its plan to make *Robert Elsmere* available in the autumn of 2012 after it has been out of print for twenty-five years since last republication by World’s Classics in 1987; ninety-nine years since first edition. Twentieth-century publications of *Marcella* were undertaken by Virago and Broadview Press in 1984 and 2002.

increased the author's already well-established reputation, Ward was able to persuade her publisher into issuing a single volume, the cheap edition of the novel, sold 'at the cost of just 6s'.<sup>18</sup> The advantage garnered through her triumph over such monopolising influences also meant the demise of the 'three-decker' or three-volume novel '[p]riced at 31s 6d'.<sup>19</sup> This format had dominated the publishing business for much of the century, with the power resting in the hands of institutional purchasers such as W. H. Smith, and Charles Edward Mudie whom Sutherland calls the "“leviathan” of the London circulating libraries'.<sup>20</sup> These lending giants favoured the three-decker novel 'because it enabled them to make a separate charge for each volume borrowed.'<sup>21</sup> The fall of the three-volume novel, the maximum length of which was 250,000 words, brought greater freedom and independence to authors who could then experiment with more modern, less conservative, forms of composition and publication.<sup>22</sup>

To return to my focus on Mary Ward, her anti-feminism and the sense of ambivalence towards the iterations and complexities of the New Woman represented in her fiction, I will start with *Robert Elsmere* (1888). The fact that it is Rose Leyburn who takes the role of the New Woman in *Robert Elsmere*, not the eldest sister Catherine who marries the hero, should not prevent us from realising that this, the best-known of Ward's novels, contains early iterations of New Woman heroines. Arguably, readers might not regard Rose as Ward's strictly intended heroine until they reach Book V, which is nominally dedicated to her story and is thus exclusively titled 'Rose'. Ward employs this section to emphasise the modernity of its central character. Rose's status as a New Woman and her individualism are confirmed by the attributes with which Ward

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<sup>18</sup> Sutherland, *VF*, p. 138; *MHW*, p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, pp. 148, 126; Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *The Routledge Concise History of Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 205, 204; hereafter abbreviated as *RCHNCL*.

<sup>20</sup> Sutherland, *VF*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> Guy and Small, *RCHNCL*, p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 117.

characterises her, namely her strong sense of independence, principled determination, and musical talent. Moreover, Book V also traces Rose's gradual inner growth typical of the *Bildungsroman* tradition, which marks both the nineteenth-century convention and Ward's literary inclination. This, combined with the fact that Rose represents the opposite of Catherine, allows her to be perceived as *Robert Elsmere's* other heroine and forms the main argument in my discussion of this text.

The focus of my study and analysis in Part One thus centres on a contention that despite Ward's traditionalism, both *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella* explore and to some extent prefigure the complex tensions that characterise New Woman protagonists. The traits which connect Ward's Rose Leyburn and Marcella Boyce to the New Woman type are their strong sense of independence, strict principles, and artistic talents. Significantly, both novels posit an antagonism between individualism and marriage. By expressing their desire not to submit to the self-sacrificing duty associated with marriage, these New Woman characters are set up in marked contrast to the more traditional heroines in the texts, represented by Catherine Leyburn, later Mrs. Elsmere in *Robert Elsmere*, and Miss Agneta Raeburn in *Marcella*.

Ward's novels are concerned with the ideal of womanliness and the constricting cult of domesticity, all of which pertain to the broader ideology of separate spheres. As suggested by the title of this chapter, I will examine the crucial connection between the individualism of the New Woman and the ultimate change which, once she enters into the marriage contract, transforms the New Woman into a domesticated feminine ideal. My aim here is thus to consider the opposing ideals of womanhood in order to understand Ward's ambivalence towards the modern females epitomised by Rose and Marcella. Furthermore, I want to observe the shift in contemporary attitudes: as the literary world became more accepting of the New Woman towards the end of the century, it is worth pondering the reasons that kept Ward's ambivalence in place. The concepts of

individualism, the New Woman, and the feminine ideal as framed in the Introduction will be presented below as I demonstrate my reading of *Robert Elsmere*. First, I examine the individualism with which Ward characterises the New Woman character in terms of her freedom, independence, confidence, self-realisation, and self-development.

## II. Individualism

Ward's representation of individualism reflects her sense of an irreconcilable tension between the perceived selfishness of independent women and the requirements of family duty. This disapproval is seen in the novel's depiction of Rose's passion for her violin and for the freedom to live for it and through it. Nevertheless, Ward is aware of its counter-argument as she also demonstrates that the individualism of the New Woman is what provides protection against the sense of Rose's personal confinement. For example, Rose enjoys her freedom as she moves comfortably among *élite* musical groups in England and on the Continent. But according to Ward, it is women's self-abnegation and ties to domesticity which form and fulfil their social and cultural values, which nothing, not even the self-realisation attained through their individualism, can surpass.

Moreover, Ward explores the notion of female distinctiveness and individualism in order to explore the broader issue of women's quest for independence. This much-sought goal of self-realisation through the pursuit of talent leaves a significant impression on Oxford don Edward Langham, who expresses his surprised disbelief to Rose: "[I]t seemed to me so pathetic, so strange that anybody should wish for anything so much as you wished for the musician's life."<sup>23</sup> The possibility of becoming a full-time violinist saves Rose from the necessity of self-sacrifice and other womanly duties towards others. In contrast, it is these very duties which Catherine has readily performed, in addition to

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1888), p. 216; hereafter cited in the text as *RE*.



her ‘wifely chivalry’ which never fails Robert in his time of need (*RE*, p. 260). Ward juxtaposes Rose’s unwavering, self-centred decision to leave her family to devote herself entirely to music, with Catherine’s devotion to her husband, Robert Elsmere. The narrative puts an emphasis on Catherine’s quick sympathy, an ability to fathom Robert’s thoughts and emotions, in order to denote the character’s magnanimity and selflessness. For example, Catherine catches ‘the discomposure in [Robert’s] tone and look at once, and her wifely heart r[ises] against the squire [Mr. Wendover].’ (*RE*, p. 243) In short, Catherine is a conventional creature, structuring her social judgements in relation to her male relatives in all areas but one. With the exception of the emotionally tenacious hold on her Orthodox Christianity as opposed to Robert’s departure from his faith, Catherine represents an otherwise archetypal embodiment of convention.

In contrast, the novel stresses the New Woman’s exceptional nature which, as a means to her self-realisation, foreshadows a tendency to break away from convention in a pursuit of personal interests, yet which embodies a troubling self-centredness. In a scene at a large party, Rose’s talent, confidence, and ability to shine have a notable impact not only on Lady Charlotte Wynnstay, the conservative-minded aunt of Hugh Flaxman who will finally marry Rose, but also on other guests including the voluble Mrs. Darcy who at once ‘stare[s] at Rose with open mouth’ (*RE*, p. 239). Catherine eventually awakens to the unplumbed depth of Rose’s musical gift and agrees with Robert on its righteous use (*RE*, p. 239). Finally, Rose has fully emerged as a ‘child of grace and genius!’, whose ‘remarkable musical powers’ are acknowledged and applauded by the surrounding characters who simply discern how ‘music [i]s the mere natural voice of her inmost self.’ (*RE*, p. 239)

In addition, individualism is used to characterise Rose by emphasising her difference from people surrounding her in terms of her freedom and independence. The character echoes the Millian sense of individuality and liberty which allows her to do as

she pleases providing that she does not harm others.<sup>24</sup> A brief exchange between Rose and Lady Charlotte serves to elicit the dormant tension existing between the individualised being, defined by her non-conformist unconventionality, and the authority, whose ‘distinctly formidable’ presence is representative of the force of society (*RE*, p. 236). In the following passage, Lady Charlotte is surprised by Rose’s answer:

‘It is the *fashion* nowadays to have enthusiasms. I suppose you muddle about among the poor *like other people?*’  
 ‘I know nothing about the poor,’ said Rose.  
 ‘Oh, then, I suppose you feel yourself effective enough in some other line?’ said the other coolly. ‘What is it—lawn tennis, or private theatricals, or—hem—prettiness?’ (*RE*, p. 236; my emphases)

Ward, here, is exposing the expectations which society directs towards young women as Lady Charlotte’s initial guess suggests. In addition, as previously discussed in the Introduction, Lady Charlotte personifies John Stuart Mill’s notion about ‘the tendency of society to impose ... its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct ... [and to] compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own’.<sup>25</sup> Rose’s direct answer, suggestive of her freedom of choice to not be dictated to a fashionable trend of the day, defeminises her and mystifies Lady Charlotte. Her suddenly cooling tone carries openly admonitory disapproval of Rose’s ‘individual independence’, the exercise of which protects her from the ‘interference of collective opinion’.<sup>26</sup> Lady Charlotte’s next speculation represents a stereotypical view of a modern woman, in other words, the New Woman, as nothing but athletic (tennis-playing), vain (theatre-going or perhaps acting), or narcissistic. However, Rose’s talent is made manifest via Lady Charlotte’s request for a live performance, where Rose plays the violin, accompanied by Langham on the piano. After the two characters finish performing several duets, followed by rounds of applause and encores, two things become evident to Lady Charlotte who is mesmerised by both

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<sup>24</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), pp. 101-102; hereafter abbreviated as *OL*.

<sup>25</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 14.

Rose's ability as a violinist and by her appearance: "'Ah, but *excellent!*'" sa[ys] Lady Charlotte once, under her breath, at a pause; "and what *entrain*—what beauty!" (RE, p. 238)

Significantly, however, Ward's rejection of Rose's individualism is made evident through the character's conscious self-defence:

'And *I* am just a bundle of wants,' she sa[ys], half-mockingly.  
'Generally speaking, I am in the condition of being ready to barter all I have for some folly or other—one in the morning, another in the afternoon. What have you to say to such people, Mr. Langham?' (RE, p. 216; emphasis in original)

The belittling way of acknowledging herself and her 'wants', which potentially include everything associated with her talent and her dreams, as simply 'some folly or other' indicates that Ward regards the individualism of this New Woman character as nothing but a sign of girlish immaturity waiting to develop. Significantly, the passage acknowledges that women may have talents, but not what is needed to secure and develop them.

Nevertheless, Rose's immature trait is countered by her self-confidence and single-minded focus on her goal. Even though it is evident that Hugh Flaxman has taken a keen interest in her, she remains indifferent to his attention: 'clearly touched by Rose', Flaxman starts 'devoting his advantages in the freest way to Rose's service', with his 'famous musical library, and its treasures [being] lavished on the girl violinist' (RE, p. 429). With regard to Flaxman, Rose 'evidently like[s] him, but she banter[s] him a good deal; she would not be the least subdued or dazzled by his birth and wealth, or by those of his friends.' (RE, p. 430) With 'her whole attitude full of a young, easy, self-confident grace', although Rose may allow Flaxman 'to provide her with pleasures, she would hardly ever take his advice, or knowingly consult his tastes.' (RE, pp. 400, 430) In fact, these bursts of girlish confidence, or haughtiness, and self-formulated principles, suggest an antipathy to marriage driven by individualism. Ward notes that this New Woman

behaviour in Rose is put on ‘for the sake of that opposition her soul love[s], ... opposition to Catherine, opposition to Mr. Flaxman, but, above all, opposition to Langham.’ (*RE*, p. 430) Female individualism can, in this reading, be a source of social anomie, leading to the rejection of collective identity.

In addition to the dismissal of Rose’s individuality, the author seems to be highly critical of the sense of self-centredness emitted from Rose’s judgement of both herself and others. This is evident when Ward specifically juxtaposes Rose’s naïveté with Langham’s intellectual maturity. For example, Ward portrays Rose and her thinking to be simplistic in her attempt to educate Langham, whom she barely knows, into appreciating nature and other aesthetic values as a means to overcome his melancholy: ‘Happiness is to be got from living, seeing, experiencing, making friends, enjoying nature!’ (*RE*, p. 219) The character’s assertion appears to be founded upon her individual preference and experience, irrespective and oblivious of the superior knowledge or worldliness implicated by Langham’s Oxford-educated background and ‘the difference of years’ (*RE*, p. 218). Thus, Ward creates her New Woman as confident, self-important, but lacking in understanding, rather than as the refined, perceptive, and idealistic woman represented by Catherine.

Finally, Ward associates the New Woman’s individualism with the trajectory of her self-development. Clearly, the author does not promote such strong aspects of individualism especially when she portrays Rose confronting Catherine with ‘frank mutiny’ in her face as she demands to go to Berlin (*RE*, p. 210). As Wilt observes, ‘Rose particularly is wild to get away to the “world,” where her unusual talent at musical performance and composition can be trained and flexed to play its role in the self-composing, the performance of identity, that she unabashedly believes in.’<sup>27</sup> Consistent with the New Woman’s rebellion, Ward represents the individualism of Rose’s character in terms of her ‘intolerance of the family tradition.’ (*RE*, p. 210) Frustrated by Catherine’s

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<sup>27</sup> Wilt, *BHT*, p. 55.

last endeavour to entreat her to recall ‘what papa wished when he was dying’ which ‘seem[s] to her too strong, too sacred, to be often handled’, Rose finally unleashes her repressed intolerance (*RE*, p. 210). The following passage depicts Rose’s tempestuous reaction:

Rose sprang up, and ... met that argument with all the concentrated passion which her youth had for years been storing up against it. Catherine sat ... bewildered. This language of a proud and tameless individuality, this modern gospel of the divine right of self-development—her soul loathed it! (*RE*, p. 210)

Catherine here reflects Ward’s positioning on the ideal of femininity, which frames her belief in the ‘beneficent effects of altruistic sisterhood’, the ‘importance of women’s service and the power of women’s moral influence’.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the mention of pride, rebellion, and especially individualism in the above excerpt only accentuates Ward’s view of the New Woman’s path towards the self-serving purposes of modernity.

Ward’s characterisation of Rose provides a useful outline of the tensions surrounding woman and individualism. Representing the opposite of the traditional heroine, Rose exudes self-confidence and is prone to self-assertion, which are doubly highlighted against Catherine’s self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. Uncharacteristic of womanly women, Rose insists on pursuing her own interests as she thinks best and does not hesitate when an opportunity for self-development opens up for her. Her self-regarding determination reflects Sidney Webb’s sense of fullest liberty and Samuel Smiles’s recommendation of ‘perseverance [a]s the great agent of success’.<sup>29</sup> As Judith Wilt argues, Rose helps ‘engineer Catherine’s romance with Robert largely so she could follow her desire for study and performance to Europe’.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the character’s

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<sup>28</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), p. 228.

<sup>29</sup> Sidney Webb, ‘The Difficulties of Individualism’ in *The Economic Journal* (June, 1891), pp. 360-381; p. 364; Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), pp. 24-25.

<sup>30</sup> Wilt, *BHT*, p. 70.

freedom, subtle manipulation, and non-conformism associated with her youthful phase inform her individualist modernity. But the fact that Rose abandons all these modern traits calls attention to Ward's rejection with regard to her individualism, especially as Ward explicitly emphasises the self-importance of Rose's character. Aligned with immature disregard for others, suggested by her lack of worldly experience fed through single-minded interests and aspirations, the New Woman character claims that the most important things in her life can easily be summed up in four words: 'nature, art, poetry', and 'Wagner' (*RE*, p. 220).

In the novel's cultural context, the significance of German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883) lay in the public perception of him as a radical composer. The phenomenon known as Wagnerism lasted well into the Edwardian era where it became 'an integral part of the intellectual milieu'.<sup>31</sup> His universally acknowledged genius and radical techniques strengthened the composer's image of modernity which, alongside his anti-Semitism and anti-democracy, created far-reaching influences that transcended the world of music and operas. The literary, artistic and intellectual Wagnerites on the Continent had a strong effect on the English scene during the *fin de siècle*.<sup>32</sup> Works specifically focused on Wagner's musical influence, dramatic techniques, and aesthetic theories include George Bernard Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898) which, as an indication of the composer's expansive reach, offered a 'Fabian socialist interpretation' of his monumental epic opera, *The Ring (Der Ring des Nibelungen)*.<sup>33</sup> Eminent French writers such as Baudelaire, Zola, and Proust 'were very fond of Wagner's operas and their work employed Wagnerian themes and methods.'<sup>34</sup> Having 'long been recognised as the father of French Symbolist poetry' Wagner has a connection with British aestheticism and decadence through figures like Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, who made

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<sup>31</sup> John Louis DiGaetani, *Richard Wagner and the Modern British Novel* (New Jersey and London: Associated University Presses, 1978), p. 24; hereafter abbreviated as *RWMBN*.

<sup>32</sup> DiGaetani, *RWMBN*, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> DiGaetani, *RWMBN*, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> DiGaetani, *RWMBN*, p. 16.

Wagnerism fashionable in London in the 90s.<sup>35</sup> Representing the importance of art instead of political correctness, in other words, projecting rebellion rather than conformism, Wagner becomes an overarching symbol that encapsulates the radically unconventional character of the New Woman protagonist. Indeed, *Robert Elsmere* portrays Rose as oblivious to other social and feminine obligations, with her interests channelled one-dimensionally towards her individualist aspirations.

As Ward here equates female individualism with selfishness – an immersion in the self – Rose’s character appears to lack not only depth but also feminine virtues, especially when compared to Catherine, who eventually puts her mind and strength into helping her husband fight for the poor. Catherine thus reflects the feminine ideal, which establishes her as an Old Woman heroine. Rose, on the other hand, remains the central focus not only for her individualism discussed thus far, but also for her role as the novel’s New Woman protagonist. However, it is crucial to note that while Ward is anti-individualist, which in turn reflects her altruism, the author appears ambivalent towards both the Old and the New Woman figures as demonstrated in the section below. Her strongest advocacy, nevertheless, rests on marriage as attested through her conservative ideal of domesticity.

### **III. The New Woman**

Ward’s representation of her central women characters, with its implicit contrast of New Woman and Old Woman, invites the use of a comparative approach. Whether taken as two opposing personae (Rose versus Catherine), or one undergoing a gradual but irreversible transformation (Rose after marriage), the figures indeed offer valuable observations, socially, ideologically, and contextually. Moreover, in portraying the tensions between the traditional woman and what Robert calls ‘the modern young woman’, the author aptly anticipates the coming of the New Woman into the literary

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<sup>35</sup> DiGaetani, *RWMBN*, p. 16.

marketplace (*RE*, p. 570). In addition, Ward's representation of her two heroines in *Robert Elsmere* enables us to learn more about the New Woman's unique character, the idea of education and personal growth, women and individualism, and attitudes towards social changes at the end of the nineteenth century.

Although *Robert Elsmere* is generally regarded as Ward's depiction of 'the ethical dilemmas of a young Anglican clergyman who is converted to Christian Socialism', my concern lies primarily not in the hero's predicaments, but on the antagonisms between the central female characters.<sup>36</sup> The tensions are especially evident when Rose's fierce sense of independence establishes her as Ward's embodiment of New Womanhood. By not letting 'society' force its ways and values upon her and her goals, coupled with her musical ambition and accomplishment, Rose embraces modernity. It is evident, as I have indicated, that the character is created as a complete opposite to Catherine. In her notebook, Ward records that while Rose and Agnes 'are bored in the valley—Catherine alone is perfectly happy'.<sup>37</sup> Rose is further described, according to the notebook, as 'enthusiastic artistic pretty [*sic*] in an irregular red-haired way' as opposed to Catherine who has '[r]eligion intertwined with her every fibre'.<sup>38</sup> Ward's outline thus bears an indication of Rose's break from the existing social, moral and religious norms. Although Ward does not draw a specific connection between religion and duty, the difference between the two sisters allows an assumption that Rose represents a tenacious attachment to identity, whereas Catherine stands for self-abnegating, feminine duties towards others. Catherine puts others before her own interests as part of her religious belief and thus expects others to do the same. There is in fact a connection between Ward's ideal of self-sacrifice and altruism, and the sense of her rejectionist opposition to individualism

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<sup>36</sup> Joannou, 'MAWOWS', p. 563.

<sup>37</sup> Peterson, *VH*, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> Peterson, *VH*, p. 216.



manifested in the portrayals of Catherine and Rose.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, after Rose expresses her strong desire to spend the winter in Berlin ‘in a kind of acrid self-assertion’, Catherine ‘fe[els] a shock sweep through her. It [i]s as though all the pieties of life, all the sacred assumptions and self-surrenders at the root of it, [a]re shaken, outraged by the girl’s tone.’ (RE, p. 210)

The self-assertiveness and self-effacement of the respective heroines may be viewed in the literary and cultural context of the 1890s, which associated the New Woman with decadence and anomaly. Therefore, it is not so hard to imagine Ward’s reluctance to perceive the New Woman as an ideal heroine. This conceptual clash reinforces, if not worsens, the existing tensions between the figures of the Old Woman and the New Woman. *Robert Elsmere* signals these conflicts in a remarkably straightforward manner. Lady Charlotte Wynnstay, an authoritative figure in the novel, observes in reference to Rose’s power of argument in comparison to Catherine’s: ‘I never saw two sisters more unlike.’ (RE, p. 236) The differences indeed go deeper than their verbal skills, or the fact that Catherine is described as ‘[u]nmusical’ while Rose is depicted as a musical genius (RE, p. 211). Thematically, the novel revolves around the ideological tensions which these central characters represent, and which suggests a link with another issue concerning women’s education and female learning experience.

Even though the novel does not discuss the formal education of its female characters, Ward delineates in ample detail the development of the New Woman from girlhood to maturity. Significantly, by focussing on the growing up process of Rose, the novel recalls the nineteenth-century literary convention of the *Bildungsroman* with which Ward has often been associated. Thus, in addition to the novel’s obvious focus on the

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Dixon, ‘The World of *Robert Elsmere*’ and ‘Altruists and individualists in late Victorian fiction’ in *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 254-271; hereafter abbreviated as *IA*.

development of its eponymous hero, *Robert Elsmere* may also be read as a female *Bildungsroman*. Moreover, in the case of Rose who manifests a powerful artistic inclination from the onset, the story may be more appropriately regarded as a *Künstlerroman*, the German term meaning the artist's novel, and a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman*.

As a mode, the *Bildungsroman* generally concentrates on the hardships experienced during the internal development of the central characters until full maturity is reached. Both of Ward's novels chosen for this thesis similarly follow the difficult transformation of modern girls into mature young women, whose goals must change, from musical excellence and socialism, to marital love and the creation of a happy home. Hence, considering its narrative structure, *Robert Elsmere* is a *Bildungsroman* tracing the internal growth of its central characters – not only Robert but also Rose. Significantly, there is a striking parallel between the two as Wilt points out: 'Ward does want to be serious about her female artist in this book. Rose's talent, ambition, and growth are in the first two-thirds of the novel documented and celebrated, as pertinent to her universe as Robert's spiritual talent, ambition, and growth are to his.'<sup>40</sup> With regard to Rose, the process commences as soon as she realises that her feelings for Langham are doomed. Seeking solitude in her room, Rose 'fe[els] herself bereft, despoiled' (*RE*, p. 249). Central to the theme of personal growth in *Robert Elsmere* is the observation that 'a man loves, or should love, all that is associated with the maturity of his best self.' (*RE*, p. 260) Therefore, it is also requisite for Rose to grow up, mature, know how to love, and be transformed by marriage. The novel argues that this will be possible only when she reaches the zenith of her mature self. In other words, the New Woman is learning a lesson of how to attain the same status as a proper woman, the one that Catherine represents throughout the novel. Proving firm in her ambivalent attitude regarding women, Ward immediately underscores Rose's sudden – but which later proves to be lasting –

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<sup>40</sup> Wilt, *BHT*, pp. 70-71.

transformation: ‘And yet through it all, as she [l]ies] weeping, there c[omes] flooding a strange contradictory sense of growth, of enrichment. In such moments of pain does a woman first begin to live? Ah! why should it hurt so—this long awaited birth of the soul?’ (*RE*, p. 249) The onset of a personal shift in Rose signifies two ideas central to my thesis. On the one hand, the change will be the basis on which Ward makes her argument about women and individualism. On the other, it recalls the tensions between the New Woman and the Old Woman, not that between Rose and Catherine, but within Rose’s character itself, which can be made evident through a comparison with Ward’s early portrayal of Rose.

In the novel, Ward demarcates the differences between the New Woman and the Old Woman clearly by introducing a modern element when she pits art against religion. It appears unusual at first that Ward should invest in an artistically inclined character as a double protagonist alongside the spiritual Catherine. However, it does serve a purpose in reflecting Ward’s response to the New Woman through Rose’s early statement:

‘Papa thought it wicked to care about anything except religion. If he had lived ... I should never have been allowed to study music. It has been all mutiny ... whatever I have been able to do.’ (*RE*, p. 334)

Not only does this comment encapsulate Ward’s perception of the New Woman, but by deeming the pursuit of personal interests mutinous it also implies that tensions exist between Rose and her father prior to the opening of the novel. Such a confession thus signifies the author’s concurrence with the restricting opinion of the older generation embodied by the deceased father. In other words, Ward uses Rose’s opposition to Mr. Leyburn to embody not only the waning of religion but also that of conventional values. Anticipating the cultural upheaval of the 1890s, *Robert Elsmere* features foresight of the increasing tensions surrounding the New Woman’s practice of individualism, and her questions and doubts about ideals of marriage and feminine propriety in the coming decade. Ward’s juxtaposition of Rose’s mutinous spirit with Catherine’s compliant

disposition, in other words, mirrors the ‘discordant voices on the Woman Question’ and reflects ‘the multiple contradictions that characterised the late-Victorian conceptualisation of the feminine.’<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, the representation of her central female characters reflects Ward’s attitude towards contemporary social change. Her text works through, and is structured by, a major conflict between the New Woman’s identity and the Old Woman’s sense of rootedness. This is at its clearest in Ward’s depiction of the sisters’ opposing perspectives on their London experiences. While Rose intensely treasures and identifies with the attractions of the capital, Catherine can only see ‘its unfathomable poverty and its heartless wealth—how it oppresse[s] and bewilder[s] her! Its mere grime and squalor, its murky poisoned atmosphere, [a]re a perpetual trial to the countrywoman brought up amid the dash of mountain streams and the scents of mountain pastures.’ (*RE*, pp. 406-407)

In addition to juxtaposing the New Woman with the Old Woman to represent the contrast between city and country, Ward makes further use of binary opposition. She feminises certain male characters to form gender reversals, and relates them to the contrast between duty and purpose. In *Robert Elsmere*, the feminised characters are confronted with comparatively masculinised females such as when an easily distracted Robert is juxtaposed with a purposeful Rose. It also highlights the fundamental differences between and contradictions within the New Woman and the Old Woman. The fact that Rose finally makes a sacrifice, by surrendering that very part of her ‘inmost self’ and choosing marriage over her successful musical career, exerts a significant impact on the novel’s argument about the New Woman. (*RE*, p. 239) In this light, *Robert Elsmere* expresses Ward’s meditation on the security and values of the tried-and-tested traditional way of life as opposed to the excitement and possibilities associated with modernity.

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<sup>41</sup> Lyn Pykett, *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 21.

In conclusion, although Catherine's role as a dutiful wife resonates with Ward's advocacy of marriage, the major part of the novel focuses on the apparent tensions between Catherine and Robert. It portrays Catherine's conscience struggling against Robert's unorthodox creed and his ultimate resignation from the Church of England as well as against Rose's self-regarding aspiration. Although Ward's figuring of the New Woman appears to a great extent favourable – Rose appears in the public sphere with a successful musical career, a positive trait which earns her approval from other conservative characters as delineated in the individualism section above – it is noteworthy that the novel implicates Ward's disapproval of the New Woman as a traditional heroine. Significantly, however, the Old Woman is by no means portrayed as the ideal in all ways. As a result, Ward gives her New Woman heroine a chance to be reabsorbed into conservative paternalism through the prospect of a marriage between Rose and Flaxman, made possible by her 'new and womanly care' (*RE*, pp. 565, 597). As Ward employs the marriage plot and Rose's transformation to celebrate the feminine ideal typical of the nineteenth-century convention, it is evident that she uses her novel as a means to convey this traditional belief as I discuss in the next section.

#### **IV. The Feminine Ideal**

Throughout the text, Catherine is synonymous with maturity, a fact which establishes her as the literary Old Woman, and also as Ward's ideal. Catherine's task, moreover, is to maintain the traditional standard of femininity in readers' imagination. It is thus the feminine ideal, which pertains to the ideology of separate spheres, conservative gendered politics, and the Woman Question, that will form the focus of the present section.

Insofar as the ideology of separate public and domestic spheres was concerned, by the time that the industrial era was well advanced in Britain, it became widely adopted.

Allusions to this cult of domesticity, that the home was ‘the feminine sphere of duties’<sup>42</sup>, were plentifully made in the period’s prescriptive literature, works of fiction, magazines and newspapers. Home and work were clearly demarcated, meaning women had nothing to do with the process of production, nor professionalism, nor commercialism. Connected to women’s home-bound presence was their elevated moral status. They were expected to be a source of positive moral influence for their families, particularly to the husbands, as well as to society. Historically, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution of the early nineteenth century, the ideology of separate spheres emerged from the formation of the ‘middle class’:

a significant reordering and redefinition of ‘public’ in antithesis to ‘private’ ... entwined with a redefinition of ‘femininity’ in antithesis to ‘masculinity’, [became associated] with the emergence of a ‘middle class’.<sup>43</sup>

*Robert Elsmere* employs its middle-class female protagonists to convey Ward’s gender politics through their different femininities, one obliging, the other rebellious, yet both of which share a limited scope and underscore this ‘familial or private sphere and its demarcation from the public one.’<sup>44</sup> This flourishing social consciousness started to gain significant power, taking the form of a new language for which the novel became its great medium as noted above.

This traditional aspect of the middle-class culture led to a concept of absolute differences between man and woman pertinent to the conservative gendered politics that assigned to each sex a gender-specific, corresponding set of rights and duties. It serves as a focus of my present argument concerning the ideology of separate spheres in connection

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<sup>42</sup> Carol Dyhouse, ‘The role of women: from self-sacrifice to self-awareness’ in Laurence Lerner, ed., *The Victorians* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1978), p. 174.

<sup>43</sup> Dror Wahrman, ‘1832 and the “Middle Class” Conquest of the “Private Sphere”’ in *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 378; hereafter abbreviated as ‘1832’.

<sup>44</sup> Wahrman, ‘1832’, p. 378.

with the marriage question as portrayed in Ward's novel. In asking 'where is woman's place in society?' *Robert Elsmere* responds that woman's place is in the home: Ward argues that a woman belongs to the private sphere, and that family and home-making comprise the most sacred duties which she must perform in order to attain conjugal happiness.

To prove my point, we must look cautiously at the change taking place in the text. *Robert Elsmere* attests to Ward's argument as it turns out that the only means by which Rose, as a New Woman, may gain full maturity is by preparing to abandon her self in order to embrace the traditional role and marriage. Therefore, the New Woman must first overcome 'that stifling sense of catastrophe, so strange, so undefined' which Rose recalls of 'her own first love', and put an end to her girlish infatuation with Langham for whom, the text implies, she is not yet prepared to make any sacrifice (*RE*, p. 459). In the meantime, Ward introduces another suitor and a rival of Langham's love interest, Hugh Flaxman. She portrays Flaxman as a figure of the perfectly traditional gentleman: '[w]orthy, high-born, and popular' which suggests his prospect as a promising husband for Rose (*RE*, p. 429). Flaxman, 'to [the female] sex' has '[a]lways been singularly attractive. ... with women he [i]s the most delightful mixture of deference and high spirits' and is 'tall, good-looking, distinguished, one of the most agreeable and courted of men, and perhaps the richest *parti* in London.' (*RE*, pp. 429-430) Thus, in having the New Woman settle down with Flaxman eventually, Ward ensures that Rose parts with her individualism once for all and follows in the wake of the conventionally constructed Catherine.

However, in contrast with Catherine's steady character, Rose is represented as whimsical, a 'half-fledged creature' whose nerves can be 'all unsteady with music and feeling.' (*RE*, pp. 221, 240) The tendency to indulge in feelings aligns well with her artistic nature, and it also explains her character as driven by self-interested

individualism. Nevertheless, in Rose's capacity as a fiancée and future bride, natures such as hers described here promises neither security nor happiness insofar as the prospect of her future marriage is concerned. Ward textually emphasises Rose's want of sensibility, especially when juxtaposed with the calm and upright Catherine, through an impulsive, exaggerated, but confident declaration: 'I shall *feel* to my last hour' (*RE*, p. 220; my emphasis). The likelihood is further reduced as Ward accentuates the power of the capital city in drawing Rose in through its alluring art forms. Emerging afresh from the country, 'the whirl of [Rose's] London visit' stimulates nothing but 'the ambitions with which it ha[s] filled her ... the intoxicating sense of artistic power.' (*RE*, p. 249) Rose may quench her thirst for art by the civilisation in London, but as Ward argues, she cannot be completely satisfied because, as a woman, the only way in which this perfect and complete satisfaction is possible is through marriage.

In addition to the traditionalist portrayal of Catherine's character, Ward further affirms her conservative standpoint with regard to marriage through the conversion of the New Woman heroine. I want to argue that Ward's thinking remarkably resonates with earlier strands of thought. In fact, Ward's sentiment as expressed in *Robert Elsmere* bears a close resemblance to mid-century views such as generated by Eliza Lynn Linton. Linton was known among contemporaries as the 'champion of the Antis'.<sup>45</sup> Ironically one of the earliest and best paid examples of a professional female journalist, Linton celebrates traditional femininity in the articles that made up a series entitled 'The Girl of the Period' (1868). Originally published in the *Saturday Review*, Linton's articles rebuke 'the hardened and selfish New Woman of the 1860s' that anticipates the New Woman of the 1890s.<sup>46</sup> A prolific and highly salaried female journalist, Linton was the author of *The Girl of the Period*, originally published in the *Saturday Review* (1868). From 1851 through to 1868, Linton worked hard to establish herself as a 'most formidable critic of Victorian

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<sup>45</sup> Martine Faraut, 'Women Resisting the Vote: A Case of Anti-Feminism?' in *Women's History Review*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2003), p. 614.

<sup>46</sup> Heilmann and Sanders, 'RLA', p. 293.



womanhood'.<sup>47</sup> There is a striking parallel between Ward and Linton in that both were hardworking women who made a living from writing and, contrary to their expressed ideal, were hardly sheltering under a patriarch themselves. In 'The Girl of the Period', Linton renounced the 'advanced' woman whose 'purity of taste she has lost' as well as 'that far more precious purity and delicacy of perception'.<sup>48</sup> Evidently favouring anti-individualist selflessness associated with womanliness, Linton argues that the ideal woman is 'tender, loving, retiring, [and] domestic', those qualities which she claims are lacking in the 'modern English girl'.<sup>49</sup>

Rather assertively, Linton gives voice to a conservative view that anticipates Ward when asserting her anti-feminism through the conclusion of 'The Girl of the Period':

All men whose opinion is worth having prefer the simple and genuine girl of the past, with her tender little ways and pretty bashful modesties, to this loud and rampant modernisation ... talking slang as glibly as a man, and by preference leading the conversation to doubtful subjects.<sup>50</sup>

However, it must be borne in mind that Linton's advocacy of women's subjection was not in harmony with her actual liberated way of living. In fact, her anti-feminist views did not reflect her lifestyle but rather spoke to the contradictory attitudes prevalent in Victorian England regarding gender relations, which may have shaped her public opinions.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, in Ward's case, her ambivalence towards the avatar of the New Woman anticipated the diverse sentiments critics expressed concerning this problematic literary figure. Moreover, such ambivalence was evidently caused by much ideological attachment to the traditional ideal of femininity. This tendency to invest in the

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<sup>47</sup> Andrea Broomfield, 'Much More than an Antifeminist: Eliza Lynn Linton's Contribution to the Rise of Victorian Popular Journalism' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2001), p. 268; hereafter abbreviated as 'MMA'.

<sup>48</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1883), vol. 1, pp. 2-3, 4; hereafter abbreviated as *GPSE*.

<sup>49</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Broomfield, 'MMA', p. 267.

conventional values of women introduces my next focus on Ward's novel. Closely related to the feminine ideal is marriage. There is a connection between my focus on Ward's representation of this social institution and the contemporaneous debate following Mona Caird's 'Marriage' (discussed in the Introduction) in terms of the similarity in enthusiastic reactions both writers drew from the reading public. 'By the August publication of Caird's essay,' notes Wilt, '*Elsmere*, published in February ... was already a publishing "mania" in Europe and America [and, as John Sutherland notes, even Europe], its bulky hundreds of pages the subject of heated discussions in periodicals and pitched battles at the circulating library counters.'<sup>52</sup> The expressions of different views towards marriage, one modern, the other traditional, reflected the current interest in the subject. In *Robert Elsmere* itself, the antagonism between convention and radicalism, the polarised extremes upheld by Ward and Caird, is also at play in the second marriage plot, concerning Rose Leyburn's prospect with 'the two different kinds of "modern" lovers' Edward Langham and Hugh Flaxman.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note the tensions between Rose and Langham which, for a moment, suggest the romantic possibility of a marriage. While Rose is but 'a child of nineteen' and 'a romantic and wilful girl', Langham is 'a man of thirty-five', 'a dark, Byronic-looking creature', with a 'dark effeminate face' (*RE*, pp. 242, 428, 221, 237, 241). It is characteristic of Rose as the New Woman to regard herself 'with a terrified sense of importance' that she is 'a child no longer, though her mother and sisters would treat her as one' (*RE*, p. 216). Despite the display of Rose's sense of independence, confidence, even individualism, Ward creates a constant reminder that this is but a façade of false maturity. In fact, underneath this strong shell remains the fragile core of an undeveloped girl. An example of Ward's reminder is when Langham experiences a vision:

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<sup>52</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 130; Wilt, *BHT*, p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> Wilt, *BHT*, p. 70.

[A]s he gazed at her all the accidents of circumstance, of individual character, seemed to drop from her. He forgot the difference of years ... a girl hardly out of the schoolroom, vain, ambitious, dangerously responsive ... she was to him pure beauty, pure woman. (*RE*, p. 218)

This perhaps implies that the ‘romantic’ element in Rose and Langham’s courtship conforms to the conventional marriage plot where the heroine makes a suitable and satisfactory marriage. The heroine’s female ‘individual’ existence stops having any meaning in the male, and thus public, ‘gaze’ which, figuratively speaking, is so powerful that it enables Langham to manipulate the heroine into answering to his fancy. As a result, Rose’s individuality is completely replaced by the traditional ideal of femininity: the New Woman is perceived ‘no longer as she [i]s’ but viewed only as an embodiment of femininity. Through attributes such as ‘beauty’, ‘purity’, and ‘woman’, the novel prepares Rose for performing her duties associated with marriage.

In short, Ward concludes her argument by applauding the New Woman who eventually learns to embrace the feminine ideal. Deserting her early traits that fix her as one of Linton’s ‘modern women’ who are linked with ‘utter corruption’, Rose evolves into a noble specimen belonging to Catherine’s school.<sup>54</sup> Under the ‘Ideal Women’ section, Linton’s mind frame seems to perfectly fit Catherine and the reformed Rose:

Happily, we have noble women among us yet; ... women who can and do sacrifice themselves for love and duty, and who do not think they were sent into the world simply to run one mad life-long race for wealth, for dissipation, for distinction [musical in Rose’s case]. ... in general their noblest virtues come out only in the quiet sacredness of home.<sup>55</sup>

In the passage, three ideas emerge in accordance with Ward’s conservative gender politics as explicated in the novel, namely women’s obligatory selflessness, the sacrosanct influence of women in the home, which is the woman’s rightful realm.

It is noteworthy that Rose’s narrative of *Bildung* concludes with her ‘yearning’,

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<sup>54</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 58.

<sup>55</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 59.

‘not the yearning of passion’ but the wish to ‘change the self’ (*RE*, p. 459)

Through the ‘moral wave’ that configures her ‘transformed’ self in the direction of domestication, Rose responds ‘very sweet[ly]’ to Flaxman’s courtship and marriage proposal (*RE*, pp. 459, 597, 565). The transformation of the New Woman reflects on Catherine’s earlier trajectory towards marriage and, anticipating the ending of *Marcella*, confirms Ward’s conservative position with regard to the marriage question of the 1890s.

## V. Conclusion

My reading of *Robert Elsmere* has thus far been an attempt to analyse Ward’s literary representation of individualism. Focussing on Mary Ward’s representation of individualism, the New Woman, and the feminine ideal in *Robert Elsmere*, I have found the clear connection between individualism and the New Woman to be of great significance. This integral relationship emerges through Ward’s characterisation of the untraditional heroine with self-confidence and self-assertion, independence, determination, and talent. The traditional heroine, by contrast, exemplifies self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. My reading of the novel thus yields a proof of Ward’s mixed response apparent in her figuring of the New Woman and the Old, whose differences epitomise polarised contradictions: modernity and convention. Moreover, the novel draws attention to the centrality of the feminine ideal in that epoch. Essentially, that centrality finds its way to inform Ward’s response to the nineteenth-century Woman Question: *Robert Elsmere* is a strong testimony to the belief that a woman truly belongs to the private sphere, that sacred space called home, where the members’ happiness and well-being constitute the most privileged duties which she must perform in order to attain conjugal contentment.

In conclusion, the initial seemingly antagonistic relations between the New Woman, marriage, and individualism in Mary Ward's work serve us well in reflecting the very cultural and personal context in which they were conceived and germinated. As I have remarked throughout this chapter, *Robert Elsmere* reflects the author's ambivalence which is discernible in the following aspects. First, individualism creates tensions between the purposeful New Woman and a dutiful Catherine. Such tensions are resolved by the textual disintegration of the New Woman character, especially her independence which has an immense influence on Rose's modern notion against marriage. This untraditional quality of a central female character underscores the authorial need to maintain the ideal of marriage, which has been one of the novel's main strengths apart from its religious concerns. Moreover, Rose's marriage eventually signifies the shift in the character's attitude, which in turn clarifies and confirms the author's own conservatively-inclined view of the institution.

Secondly, Ward's conservatism as regards individualism may be further characterised by her rejection resulting in its total dismissal from the novel. The effect is achieved through Rose's embarking on womanhood. The novel enforces this transition by giving the character her realisation of the importance of marriage and the significance of self-sacrifice, which results in the abandonment of her New Woman's behaviour, dreams and beliefs. This significant shift only reinforces the novel's consistent portrayal of Catherine Elsmere as an epitome of true womanliness as opposed to Rose's misguided, false desire for a life in the public sphere. Reflecting the dichotomy between altruism and egoism, her reform clarifies Ward's argument in *Robert Elsmere* which, featuring the 'altruist' as a 'newly emerging social type', underlines the spiritual and ethical significance of feminine altruism through its advocacy of self-sacrifice and self-denial against egoistic desires.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dixon, *IA*, p. 259.

The novel implies towards the end that Rose is to follow in her sister's footsteps, that is, to be a 'real woman' not only by her status as a dutiful wife, but also by becoming a mature woman worthy of her place by the husband's side. In addition, with the novel culminating in Rose's change and new-found maturity, we are able to note Ward's conservative preference for marriage, not only in terms of her representation of the feminine ideal, but also of her structuring strategy of the fifth section of the novel as a conventional female *Bildungsroman*.

After all, Ward employs this sub-genre as her medium to represent her views of the feminine ideal and the pertinent ideology of separate spheres. According to the author, it takes an Old Woman to rescue the conventional and cultural values attached to the institution of marriage. In this light, I conclude that the author uses the novel to express and extend her support for the traditional figure of the Old Woman through a reformed Rose and her marriage. In other words, the projected prospect of Rose's marriage to Flaxman indicates the extinction of her individualism. Moreover, Ward's espousal of marriage as the highest duty highlights the great extent to which the separate-sphere ideology constructs the initial framework of her novel-writing. I propose that despite the twentieth-century interpretation of Ward as one-dimensionally conservative and anti-feminist, her figuring of the modern woman suggests a more nuanced position. Based on the novel, it is apparent that Ward rejects female individualism. But in exploring the complexities and moral ambiguities of her iteration of the New Woman, Ward appears more ambivalent than dismissive. It is only when marriage comes into focus that her conservative stance is most clearly confirmed.

In essence, while *Robert Elsmere* offers Ward's mixed response to the New Woman debate of the 1890s, it also represents her conservative support for marriage. Because she devoutly believed that 'the highest moral act, especially for women, is submission rather than self-assertion', it thus became 'one of the dominant themes of her

fiction'.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as John Sutherland asserts, 'No Orthodox Christian ever distrusted human passion more nor held a higher view of the sacredness of marriage than Mrs. Ward'.<sup>58</sup> This is testified through *Robert Elsmere* as well as the next novel, where the ambitious, independent, and assertive New Woman heroines eventually give way to self-sacrifice and submissiveness.

As I remarked earlier, there was a connection between the mid- and the late-nineteenth-century views on women. Out of the opinionated description of Linton's modern girl emerges the New Woman of the late nineteenth century. The marriage question also occupies centre stage as seen in the significant debates following Mona Caird's 1888 article 'Marriage'. In this light, the deliberate loss of individualism in Ward's fiction, which is the result of her New Woman's reformed character, makes it correspond with the ideal of womanhood framed by Linton, whose ideal of womanliness prevails over the New Woman's intelligence, high principles, individualism. In other words, conventional modesty and respect for marriage and husbands are restored, replacing the New Woman's resistance to conforming to the traditional feminine role. Thus, *Robert Elsmere* suggests that Ward is traditionalist by placing high values on women's submission and sacrifice of the self, despite having the New Woman heroine declare an unwillingness to marry early in the novel. However, it is worth noting that Ward's representation of her ideal of womanhood in *Robert Elsmere* is entirely different from that upheld by Sarah Grand and Lucas Malet, which informs my comparative perspective taken in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Finally, although Ward's novels often portray upper- and upper-middle-class characters, for example, Hugh Flaxman in *Robert Elsmere* and Aldous Raeburn in *Marcella*, the heroines are entirely of the middle class. These social discrepancies among the characters not only provide excellent studies for the middle-class ideology of separate

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<sup>57</sup> Peterson, *VH*, p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Peterson, *VH*, p. 5.

public and domestic spheres, but also add political values to it as a juxtaposition of conservatism and liberal views, which will form the focus of my discussion on *Marcella* in the next chapter.



## Chapter 2: *Marcella*: Individualism, the New Woman, and the Representation of Marriage as Conservative Modernity

*Marcella* by Mary Ward was published in 1894 and became one of Ward's most popular novels, with high sales figures in the United States and rapid reprints in the United Kingdom following its first publication in just three months.<sup>1</sup> The novel is central to my thesis as Ward's representation of the eponymous heroine brings into focus in even more direct terms the question of female individualism and the New Woman. In this later novel, written as the debates on the New Woman began to achieve more widespread currency and common recognition, Ward reaffirms in even more explicit terms her endorsement of marriage as a means to what I shall term here, borrowing from Alison Light, conservative modernity, revisited below. This chapter will investigate the particular contexts of the debates on the Woman Question in the late-Victorian era, on which the narrative of *Marcella* sheds considerable light.

It is important to note the different climate and the significant shift in the debate on gender which bears a direct connection with the works under scrutiny. The year 1888 witnessed the huge impact of Mary Ward's *Robert Elsmere* and Mona Caird's 'Marriage' and *Is Marriage a Failure?* while *Marcella* was published in 1894 when Sarah Grand and Ouida brought the New Woman into literary existence. During this six-year period, the public turned its focus from the institution of marriage to a new direction where women, identity, and morality formed the core of the debate centring on the New Woman. This

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<sup>1</sup> John Sutherland, *Mrs. Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-eminent Edwardian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 147, 148; hereafter abbreviated as *MHW*. Sutherland's analysis of Ward's one-volume reprint of *Marcella* is particularly informative in delineating its role in helping precipitate the fall of the three-volume novels that had given circulating libraries, led by Mudie and W. H. Smith, monopoly power in the British book trade for forty years (p. 147).

change manifests itself accordingly in Ward's work, with her advocacy of marriage strongly articulated in *Robert Elsmere* while *Marcella* features a full-fledged New Woman of the current time.

In my analysis of the individualism of *Marcella*, I will focus on Ward's conceptualisation of the individualist character, which is associated with the eponymous heroine's political ideology, namely her socialism. Moreover, the discussion will focus on another issue relevant to the late-nineteenth-century scientific context, that is the notion of heredity or, as it appears in the text, the matter of inheritance which is represented as the crux of the New Woman's difficulty. In the subsequent section, I look at the idea of biological inheritance, in other words, her family history, which serves as a significant part of *Marcella*'s individualism since it plays a key role in initiating the character into her zealous support for socialism. Regarding the figure of the New Woman, this chapter first examines the characteristics and the development of the New Woman as seen in Ward's textual representation, and then explores the problems concerning the late-Victorian system of girls' education. Finally, it investigates Ward's representation of marriage as conservative modernity in connection with the feminine ideal, which is part of the nineteenth-century gender roles and the ideology of woman's sphere. I look at the marriage between two characters who belong to different social classes and who represent the tensions caused by their respective political doctrines. In short, I want to argue that *Marcella* represents the marriage between selfishness and selflessness through the opposing political doctrines of socialist radicalism and Tory paternalism; the former as upheld by the New Woman heroine and the villain, and the latter by the hero.

As the title of this chapter signifies, marriage in *Marcella* is represented in terms of conservative modernity. The term is derived from Alison Light, who in her discussion of Agatha Christie and Ivy Compton-Burnett, argues that both authors 'share a modernist

irony, a strict formalism of technique, and employ a language of reticence which was able to articulate a conservative Englishness but in a modern form.’<sup>2</sup> Researching the literature of the interwar years, Light focuses on the relationship between the modernist form and the English conservative characteristics expressed through the discourse of reticence, which characterise Christie’s and Compton-Burnett’s writing. However, my definition of ‘conservative modernity’ is slightly different to what is given here, but which resembles the one she uses elsewhere: ‘Janus-faced, it could simultaneously look backwards and forwards; it could accommodate the past in the new forms of the present; it was a kind of deferral of modernity and yet it also invented a different species of conservatism from that which had gone before.’<sup>3</sup> It is this fusing of values of the conservative past with the progress of the modern future, or the wish to embrace the best of both worlds in order to achieve a satisfactory end, on which I base my definition of the marriage of the New Woman in *Marcella*. The radical change in the two quotes mirrors the social transformation taking place right at the end of the nineteenth century, reflecting the New Woman figure’s struggle between the duty and drudgery of domesticity and the allure of activity. However, it is crucial to make a distinction here that in formal terms, Ward’s novels were the last of the three-decker novels; therefore, they are essentially not modernist in that context although *Marcella* is modern in a cultural sense. After my examination of Ward’s representation of individualism, the New Woman, and marriage as conservative modernity, I will conclude this chapter by reviewing Ward’s ideas with regard to all three issues. In the following section, I begin by focusing on the conceptualisation of individualism in the character of Marcella.

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<sup>2</sup> Alison Light, ‘Agatha Christie and Conservative Modernity’ in *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 61-62.

<sup>3</sup> Alison Light, ‘Modernity and the Conservative Imagination: Fiction and Femininity between the Wars’ (doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1990), p. 8; hereafter abbreviated as ‘MCI’.

## I. Individualism

Even though Ward's novel places much emphasis on the clash between the central characters and their political beliefs, which is different from the religious overtone in *Robert Elsmere*, there remains one similarity in the individualism of the New Woman heroine. The individualism which characterises Marcella is not far different from that of Rose, whose musical talent feeds her self-confidence and her leap at the first opportunity for self-development. Rose's quest for independence, in other words, the pursuit of her own interest is echoed in Marcella's vocal self-assertion and her independent will to stand by her socialist creed in defiance of the feminine, self-effacing convention. These traits relate Marcella to Sidney Webb's notion that encourages a pursuit of interests in whatever way the individual thinks best.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Ward's disagreement with women's exercise of individualism, once confirmed in *Robert Elsmere*, re-emerges through her textual representation of Marcella's socialism. In other words, Ward employs the heroine's socialist creed to signify the cultivation of the character's individualism as she appears in opposition to the old-fashioned feminine role she is expected to perform in both society and family. The character is associated with tensions and abrupt forces such as uncontrollability, which Ward emphasises through the depictions of Marcella's 'stormy presence'.<sup>5</sup> The portrayal of Marcella as an 'agitated girl of twenty-one', with a 'stormy and unmanageable soul', thus poses a contrast to the symbolic Old Woman represented by Mary Harden. Mary is the rector's sister and Marcella's friend, whose 'modes of thinking, religious or social,' are characterised by 'old-fashioned or conventional phrases', and who has obediently 'submitted' to her brother's 'hard, ascetic

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<sup>4</sup> Sidney Webb, 'The Difficulties of Individualism' in *The Economic Journal* (June, 1891), pp. 360-381; p. 364.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward, *Marcella*, in 2 volumes (New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1894), vol. 1, p. 52; hereafter cited in the text. As I consult two editions, references are distinguished from the one-volume Virago edition by publication date, volume, and page numbers.

view' towards breaking up with her dying lover even though it makes her 'heart-broken' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, pp. 103, 471, 472).

Moreover, the novel focuses on Marcella's personal dilemma arising from aspirations to leadership that contradict her duties as a woman:

a passionate ambition—ambition to be the queen and arbitress of human lives—to be believed in by her friends, to make a mark for herself among women, without ... subordination to others who could not understand [her] ideas. (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 120)

The passage serves to highlight the incongruity of Marcella's philanthropy, that her longing to help the destitute is overshadowed by her individualism expressed through the wish for control and recognition, and the departure from the female gender role expected of her. The metonym signifying Marcella's desire to rule, lead, and take responsibilities towards the lower orders, plays out the significant tensions between her individualism and female paternalism framed in terms of duties towards others. In theory, paternalism aimed to maintain 'the natural order of harmony in social relation' upset by industrialisation or capitalisation.<sup>6</sup> When put to practice, it equated a 'rescue operation', often resorting to interventionism, that is the rescue of the oppressed, in order to alleviate poverty, damages or harm.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the self-definition of a paternalist may be perceived through his 'role of rescuer'.<sup>8</sup> Marcella, with her paternalist individualism accordingly wants to rescue the poor from their hard lives and protects them from what she perceives to be a threat posed by Aldous whose wealth symbolises capitalism. This assumed paternalist duty creates a significant tension with Marcella's socialism which, as I remark below, does not convey a collective sense of duty towards others but proves self-serving as she takes revenge against the aristocracy.

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<sup>6</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 22; hereafter abbreviated as *PSVSF*.

<sup>7</sup> Bodenheimer, *PSVSF*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Bodenheimer, *PSVSF*, p. 22.

Nevertheless, despite Marcella's seriousness accompanying her female paternalism in the passage above, it conveys a completely different sentiment to male paternalism. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues, 'female paternalism is a romance because it is a fantasy of intervention without power'.<sup>9</sup> There is a textual expression of Ward's reserved attitude towards the New Woman through the 'comic' sentiment with which, as Judith Wilt argues, the poor are shown to perceive philanthropic interventions from Marcella, the middle-class 'Queen'.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the passage conveys the author's implicit disapproval of the character's violation of gender roles and conventional appropriateness regarding middle-class women. Therefore, 'teeming with plans for her new kingdom, and [unable to] keep herself out of it', Marcella is deprived of all power except for her own determination to achieve her socialist goals that informs and strengthens her individualism (*Marcella*, vol. 1, p. 123).

In addition to the New Woman's self-imposed paternalist scheme, the individualism of the New Woman is further represented as related to the issue of inheritance. In the novel, Marcella insists on becoming an individualist through her refusal to be stigmatised by any familial ties to scandals. Her endeavour is successful due to 'her strong personality, her passionate sense of a moral independence not to be undone by the acts of another, even a father' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 118-119). In this light, emerging as her own mistress, Marcella's conscious self-detachment from her parents' past recalls Ralph Waldo Emerson's stress on the 'intrinsic right' that enables the individual to be free from external influences or associations to achieve that commended 'independence of solitude.'<sup>11</sup> The New Woman's self-knowledge – Marcella's recognition of being an individual and mistress of herself independent of any affiliations

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<sup>9</sup> Bodenheimer, *PSVSF*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Wilt, *Behind Her Times: Transition England in the Novels of Mary Arnold Ward* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2005), p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance* (New York: The Roycrofters, 1908), pp. 14, 15.

– thus provides the novel’s modern point of view through the conflict between radical Liberalism as opposed to the anti-individualist conceptions of Toryism represented by Marcella and Aldous respectively. Before discussing tensions between the two protagonists, however, I want to explore ideas of biological inheritance in the context of the late-Victorian society in order to help establish the individualism of Marcella more clearly.

In the text, biological inheritance serves as a plot device that not only moves the story forward but also creates conflicts between its central female character and all around her, including the hero. It is subtly juxtaposed with another kind of inheritance, large, immediate, and tangible, that is her family’s inheritance of the landed property. Resembling the episode featuring the ‘silent system’ at Miss Frederick’s school which isolates the ill Marcella from other healthy schoolgirls, no one calls the Boyce family to make any welcoming gesture or acknowledge their recent ownership of Mellor Park as if fearful of being morally polluted by them. This is described in the novel as a form of ‘social punishment’ (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 113). We learn about both the cause of such a cold reaction and the effect which this avoidance has on the heroine’s keen social senses when the novel yields access into her mind. Following the initial sense of puzzlement and resentment which leaves her ‘sore and unhappy;’ Marcella is portrayed with a ‘rush of pain and bitterness ... for her mother, her father, and herself. Ever since Aldous Raeburn’s hesitating revelations [of Mr. Boyce’s scandal “so long ago”], she ha[s] been liable to this sudden invasion of hot and shamed misery’ (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 116, 118, 119). Ward uses the character of Marcella’s father to correct the notion of biological inheritance, calling for an understanding that a daughter does not necessarily acquire the bad behaviours of her parent. What Aldous and Marcella refer to as a ‘scandal’, Richard Boyce defensively calls ‘his “irregularity” which he thinks “his father’s old family and country friends [including Aldous’s Grandfather] should ...

condone”” (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 113-114). His guilty conscience and attempt to have his wrongs excused and forgiven comes from his realisation that he has irrevocably stigmatised his wife and daughter.

In order to illustrate more clearly the connection between inheritance and individualism, Ward sustains discussion of the heredity question in the narrative.<sup>12</sup> As the novel shows, the society of West Brookshire promises the New Woman protagonist nothing different to Miss Frederick’s school. Metaphorically, the family scandal is represented as hereditary, as if Mr. Boyce’s mistake were a disease that could spread onto the wife and daughter. This fear is emphasised through the initial objection held by Lord Maxwell upon discerning Aldous’s feelings for Marcella: ‘As to money, you know, I care nothing. But it goes against me, my boy, it goes against me, that *your* wife should bring such a story as that with her into this house!’ (*Marcella*, vol. 1, p. 95; emphasis in the original) The hero’s reminder that Lord Maxwell ought to regard Dick Boyce and Marcella as two separate individuals rather than one collective Boyce ‘identity’ represents the wish to compromise. Ward uses Aldous’s following remark to both acknowledge and refute the old prejudice concerning heredity: “‘I see that you have grave cause to think badly of her father,’” he sa[ys] at last, rising as he sp[eaks]. “‘I must think how it concerns me. . . . *After all, she has done none of these things.*”” (*Marcella*, vol. 1, p. 95; my emphasis) Despite Aldous’s argument that Mr. Boyce’s guilt should not mar Marcella’s character in the consideration of others, the novel notes that society proves less open to persuasion. There is no ‘decent social recognition’, only a sense of alienation by people of her own rank as well as that underneath, both of whom cause ‘her social

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<sup>12</sup> Scholars have focussed on various aspects of the ‘theories of heredity’. See Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 29; hereafter abbreviated as *NW*; Angeliq[ue] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 206; hereafter abbreviated as *LELNC*; Sophie Gilmartin, ‘Geology and genealogy: Hardy’s ‘The Well-Beloved’ in *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 226-245; p. 244.



dilemma and discomfort' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 79, 80). The sense of isolation doubles the injury to Marcella's pride, which is represented as deep-rooted: 'Even at ten years old she perfectly understood that she was one of the Boyces of Brookshire, and that her great-uncle had been a famous Speaker of the House of Commons' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 9). Marcella's socialism – her desire to attack rank – is thus suggested to emerge from her personal sense of humiliation by the aristocratic order, rather than from principle. The text no longer represents the heroine's socialism as a collective sense of duty towards others but as vengeance for the self.

To return to the tensions between Aldous and Marcella, I now focus on the conflict between radical liberalism as opposed to the anti-individualist conceptions of Toryism. The two main characters, in other words, represent two opposing views. *Marcella* communicates Ward's concern about a need for pedagogic improvement, a sentiment implicated by the conservative character Aldous Raeburn purporting to initiate school reforms as part of his broader social scheme. As the new Lord Maxwell, Aldous appoints himself the responsibility towards 'extensive changes and reforms' for the benefit of his tenants (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 441). He is especially concerned by both the physical and intellectual aspects of education. The result is not only the rebuilding and enlarging of many schools which the character owns and supports, but also 'a somewhat original scheme for the extension of adult education throughout the property' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 441). In contrast, representative of socialism and Aldous's textual opposite, Marcella embraces an entirely different social reformism. Her enthusiasm goes into the revival of straw-plaiting, the rebuilding of cottages, the administration of local charities through 'a parish committee', pensions for old people, and land co-operation (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 120-121). Such focuses serve to widen the gap between the couple as they separate Aldous's ethos from Marcella's more material/economic schemes.

With regard to the individualism of the New Woman, the text creates another set of conflicts among the central characters. The New Woman, the hero, and the villain indeed become symbols chiefly realised and sustained through the heroine's shifting political beliefs. Ward employs the romantic possibility between Marcella and Henry Wharton to heighten both the sense of female independence and the heroine's status as the New Woman. Wharton is portrayed as an unscrupulous politician and lawyer who symbolises radicalism, especially as he is Aldous's political as well as romantic rival. The connection between Marcella and Wharton occurs at the height of her political development, which further strengthens Wharton's thematic role in the novel. Marcella's growing inclination towards radicalism becomes evident through Aldous's probing observation that, since Wharton's arrival, 'Marcella's whole views and thoughts have been largely—perhaps vitally—influenced by this man' who, according to Mrs. Boyce 'has made [Marcella] both read and think on all those subjects she has so long been fond of talking about.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, pp. 40, 41) Socialism, in its self-regarding version, appears to have taken a deep hold of Marcella who at this point bolsters Ward's rejection of individualism as her character demonstrates an obvious preference for Wharton to Aldous.

Despite Marcella's avowed socialism, Ward further emphasises the individualism of the New Woman as the novel reaches its climax when the heroine's confident involvement in saving a murderer proves a breach against all boundaries of class, convention, and propriety, which renders her a transgressive character. Marcella is shown to reject Aldous's Toryism by single-mindedly cancelling their engagement after the poacher Hurd's conviction in the murder case, during which Aldous and Lord Maxwell decline to sign the petition drafted by the defending barrister, Wharton. What follows is the prospect of Marcella marrying Wharton, the possibility of which is suggested by his stolen kiss in the library which signifies the beginning of romantic 'relations' that,

becoming ‘more than those of friendship’, underscores the interconnection of the novel’s romantic and political plotlines (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 378; vol. 2, p. 355). The idea of marriage of Marcella and Wharton serves as an allegory of the marriage between the New Woman and radicalism. Every decision comes to reveal not only her opposition to conservatism, but also the New Woman’s individualism: her course of action shows the character’s individual freedom, an underlying thought in John Stuart Mill’s argument for individual liberalism, rather than its conformity to the tradition.<sup>13</sup>

To accentuate the relationship between individualism and the New Woman, the text invests in the apparent antagonism and conflicts between Marcella and Aldous. In consequence, the promising aspect of a happy marriage is almost instantly obstructed by the heroine’s tendency towards individualistic self-centredness apparent in the passage below:

‘By the way,’ said the mother [Mrs. Boyce], suddenly, ‘I suppose you will be going over to help [Aldous] in his canvassing this next few weeks? Your father says the election will be certainly in February.’

Marcella moved uneasily.

‘He knows,’ she said at last, ‘that *I* don’t agree with him in so many things. He is so full of this Peasant Proprietors Bill. And *I* hate peasant properties. They are nothing but a step backwards.’ (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 228-229; my emphases)

The novel constantly deploys the dormant tensions between Marcella and her fiancé to underline the incompatibility between the egotistic New Woman and the altruistic Tory. It also portrays Marcella’s determination to help the poor as self-regarding, and her pride and wilfulness may be interpreted as selfishness towards Aldous, especially when directly juxtaposed with his pleasant attentiveness and selfless support given to her needs. Even though the heroine is represented as conscious of her own selfish behaviour, through her

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<sup>13</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 26.

uneasy movement during a conversation with Mrs. Boyce, Marcella still obdurately refuses to sacrifice her own socialist ideal for the benefit of Aldous.

Thus, despite the fact that, in general terms, socialism might be expected to offer a vision of collectivism and social liberalism, Ward's *Marcella* uses the heroine's socialist affiliations as a means to emphasise female individualism. The characterisation of Marcella typifies the idea of modern womanhood in the public imagination as 'the girl conscious of a high purpose and beginning to take up an independent position toward her world.'<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the individualist character of Marcella echoes a sentiment belonging to a female individual tradition already articulated during the 1830s and 1840s, for example, by Harriet Martineau's 'demand for individual fulfilment for women'.<sup>15</sup> In *Marcella*, socialism is the answer to that demand, with the heroine calling for an acknowledgement that woman too has an identity, rights, beliefs, and abilities to realise aspirations as do all individuals in society. By speaking proudly of her faith in socialism to which she religiously adheres, Marcella represents the New Woman who embodies not the conventional femininity but rather personal fulfilment, especially in the public sphere customarily assigned to men.

There is a textual connection between individualism, the New Woman, and marriage in the marriage plot which bears evidence of Ward's ambivalent responses to the New Woman debate, especially when viewed through the ideological framework of the separation of spheres, coupled with the question of individualism. For example, Marcella is represented as a New Woman preoccupied with her own purposes. The omniscient narrator depicts the heroine as motivated more by the success of her social

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<sup>14</sup> Mrs. W. L. Courtney, 'The English Girl in Fiction' in *The North American Review*, vol. 198, no. 696 (November, 1913), p. 671.

<sup>15</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 186; hereafter abbreviated as *FF*. Harriet Martineau underpins the importance of women's domestic duties and educational freedom, arguing that well-educated women would make for better housekeepers crucial to the happiness in every home.

schemes made possible by the impending connection to a powerful aristocratic family, than by love and readiness for duty and domesticity. In an episode leading up to the engagement, Marcella is shown as full of self-interest, complete with self-justification, which can easily be translated into selfishness:

Of course, if it happened, people would say that she had tried to capture Aldous Raeburn for his money and position's sake. Let them say it. ... Those whom she would make her friends would know very well for what purpose she wanted money, power, and the support of such a man, and such a marriage. (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 120)

Based on the text's argument, individualism, the New Woman, and marriage are all interrelated. In light of the above passage, the individualism of Ward's New Woman is rendered manifest through Marcella's determination to use marriage as a means to achieve personal aspirations. The depiction of the heroine's independent and politically engaged character, subversive to nineteenth-century social and cultural norms, challenges the traditional notion that matrimony is the basis of woman's true happiness. As the above passage attests, Marcella aligns happiness not with marriage, but with her socialist creeds, political activism, and determination to help the poor, as seen in her expression of an ultimate desire to 'live with them, work for them, [and] find out what I can do for them.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 69) Despite the novel's happy ending which involves the heroine's transformation, and as a means effectively to increase conflict, Ward's New Woman chooses to cancel her engagement and remain single to retain her individuality, instead of exchanging it for the economic stability that could realise her socialist dream, but at the price of the confinement of marriage.

Similarly, although Ward discusses at length some socialist ideas in *Marcella*, fundamentally she does not approve of Marcella's involvement in politics as affirmed in its sequel, *Sir George Tressady* (1896) where Marcella's continued attempts to 'lobby'

politicians get her into much trouble.<sup>16</sup> Ward argues that Marcella's concentration on her social schemes not only articulates the individualism of her character, but also hinders her womanly role and moral obligation towards her fiancé. As we have seen in *Robert Elsmere*, Ward's reasoning is based on her conservative outlook on marriage, requiring the husband to provide protection for his wife while she returns the favour through her 'pieties' and 'self-surrenders', with her place being firmly and happily in the home.<sup>17</sup> Although there is some truth in it, such arrangement may also be explicated more logically. Historically, women in the nineteenth century were dependent on their husbands for legal and financial reasons.<sup>18</sup> Such dependency on men may sufficiently explain the origin of women's 'weakness', or customary submission and silent acceptance of their destiny, fictionalised in *Marcella*.

As previously stated, Marcella represents a clear embodiment of female individualism through her sense of independence, and the freedom in pursuit of her own interests, also her demonstration of self-confidence and self-assertion which recalls the character's lack of feminine self-abnegation. These traits, which emphasise the unfeminine qualities of the New Woman character, thus reflect the author's disagreement with female individualism as it upsets the ethic of self-sacrificing duty deeply rooted in her conservative thinking. As a result, all of Ward's New Woman heroines eventually undergo an all-important personal transformation which ensures that their individualism has come to an end once for all. Her powerful rejection will become even clearer when viewed alongside her representation of both the New Woman and marriage which

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<sup>16</sup> Beth Sutton-Ramspeck and Nicole B. Meller, eds, 'Introduction' in Mary Augusta Ward, *Marcella* (New York: Broadview Press, 2002), pp. 11-26; p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1888), p. 210.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 8-9; Barbara Leah Harman, *The Feminine Political Novel in Victorian England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 2-3. Harman reinforces Shanley's statement about the legal situation of married women under the law of coverture.

conveys the idea of conservative modernity. First, my focus is on the New Woman figure, which will be examined in terms of character and education.

## II. The New Woman

Although Ward's novels are rarely considered in the context of New Woman fiction, the central character in *Marcella* is, as I have been suggesting, an iteration of that figure of emerging social anxiety in the 1890s. The textual resonance between Marcella and the nineteenth-century New Woman who 'refuse[s] to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenge[s] accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, cho[oses] to work for a living, or who in any way argue[s] the feminist cause'<sup>19</sup> is not only profound but also paradigmatic. Marcella is, in other words, an epitome of what Ward finds abhorrent with regard to advanced unwomanly women and feminism. The author further underlines the 'modern' aspects of Marcella's character by portraying the New Woman as courageous, intelligent, individualist and self-assured, as is seen in Marcella's confident delivery of a politically-charged speech at Maxwell Court in front of new acquaintances who, with the exception of Aldous, are all strangers to her. Metaphorically, the heroine emanates modernity despite all the conservative elements surrounding her.

It is the representation of the New Woman's confidence which creates new conflicts with conservatism. Ward portrays Marcella with intense confidence when she emerges into the world of the upper class, having 'made up her mind not to be afraid' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 174). The reactions she draws from the residents at Maxwell Court are 'alarm', 'dismay' and 'a sharp dry look' from the 'stiff indignant hostess' [Aldous's great-aunt, Miss Agneta Raeburn, and the 'present mistress of the Court' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 185)], as well as 'some amusement' followed by 'some

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<sup>19</sup> Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 3; hereafter abbreviated as *NWVN*.

disturbance of mind' from his grandfather Lord Maxwell as she exchanges intelligent words with the old gentleman on various political issues (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 174, 175, 176, 178, 183).

Indeed, Ward employs these characters to illustrate the tensions between conservatism and the New Woman. Described in the novel as 'the trained man of affairs' who is 'over seventy', Lord Maxwell serves to represent a conservative yet benign eye of the educated and experienced, whose years of wisdom and knowledge as a prominent politician, as well as his kind open-mindedness, help prepare him to welcome new things which the next generation brings (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 174, 189). This act of welcoming includes his good-natured approval of the New Woman's presence in society. The mixed element of conservatism and modernism comes through Lord Maxwell's vision and optimism, the evidence of which is presented during his mental evaluation of Marcella: 'He like[s] to see a young creature of such evident character and cleverness holding opinions and lines of her own. It [i]s infinitely better than mere nonentity. Of course, she was now extravagant and foolish, perhaps vain too. But that would mend in time — mend, above all, with her position as Aldous's wife.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 196) Ward's depiction of Marcella evokes her representation of Rose Leyburn's individualism as immaturity discussed in Chapter 1.

By contrast, Lord Maxwell's younger sister Miss Raeburn epitomises the conventional standard of the earlier generation, a quality which predestines her to become the guardian of values regarding the feminine ideal. Her apparent function is to be the critic of the New Woman as Miss Raeburn's initial reactions towards the heroine are entirely negative: 'Most forward, conceited, and ill-mannered' comprises Miss Raeburn's opinionated summary of her first impression, before concluding that Marcella 'has no proper principles, and as to what her religious views may be, I [Miss Raeburn] dread to think of them!' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 183) She mediates Ward's conventionalist



view through the tone of her retort which harks back to Eliza Lynn Linton's anti-feminist sentiments expressed in the 1860s.<sup>20</sup> Critical of the 'modern English girl', Linton deems this early archetype responsible for the 'national madness': her portrayal finds resonance in Ward's representation of the New Woman in the 1880s, especially when comparing Linton's notion that '[l]ove indeed is the last thing she thinks of'<sup>21</sup>, with Marcella's purposeful reason, driven by her socialist agenda, in accepting Aldous's marriage offer.

Contrasting with her idea of the 'modern' girl, Linton paints the ideal girl who, 'when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his rival ... a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress'.<sup>22</sup> In order to maintain the conservative tone of the novel, Ward accordingly positions Miss Raeburn as Marcella's counterpart, to teach her the role of the Old Woman who represents the 'old English ideal' which, according to Linton, comprises 'the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world'.<sup>23</sup>

Bearing close affinities to Linton's anti-feminist notion, and portrayed as Aldous's 'conventionally-minded' great-aunt, Miss Raeburn actively represents the 'old standard' as opposed to Lady Winterbourne who is much more liberal and open-minded:

'The poacher was Marcella's friend, and she cannot now distract her mind from him sufficiently to marry Aldous, though every plan he has in the world will be upset by her proceedings. ... She is meanwhile absorbed with the poacher's defence ... This is your modern young woman, my dear [Lady Winterbourne]—typical, I should think.'  
(*Marcella*, 1984, p. 263)

Ward employs the character of Miss Raeburn to convey Marcella's unwomanly indifference, and her use of emotional blackmail to manipulate her fiancé, as a means to

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<sup>20</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1883), hereafter abbreviated as *GPSE*.

<sup>21</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 9.

negate the positive aspects of the New Woman's philanthropic efforts. Furthermore, to imbue the old standard more effectively into Lady Winterbourne, Aldous's aunt adds:

‘I dare say you'll think it sounds bad ... but in my young days it would have been thought a piece of posing ... if a girl had put herself in such a position. Marcella *ought* to be absorbed in her marriage ... How Mrs. Boyce can allow her to mix herself with such things as this murder ... passes my comprehension.’<sup>24</sup>

In addition to this modern/traditional dichotomy, Marcella is shown socially to compromise Aldous by instigating a marriage between the two classes; that of the unstable nouveaux riches and the old landed aristocracy. She is perceived by the Raeburns as a New Woman especially when positioned against the conservative environment of Maxwell Court. When Marcella is first introduced to the Raeburns, although Ward allows Lord Maxwell's first impressions to be ‘favourable’, she notes the upper-class persistent hesitation and doubt: ‘every now and then his quick, judging look sweeping over her and instantly withdrawn — comparing, as the grandson very well kn[ows], every point, and tone, and gesture with some inner ideal of what a Raeburn's wife should be.’ (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 172)

On the other hand, to Miss Raeburn's traditional eye, Marcella ‘is capable of anything far-fetched and theatrical’ (*Marcella*, 1984, p. 264). The old lady does not have any tolerance or give any credit to her New Woman counterpart, especially given the heroine's confirmed interest and belief in socialism. Throughout the novel, Marcella remains steadfastly committed to that cause. For instance, at their first encounter, she confidently answers Lord Maxwell, ‘Yes, I am a Socialist. ... Both my judgment and my conscience make me a Socialist.’ (*Marcella*, 1984, p. 105) Quickly, Marcella impresses her audience despite the possible offence to their class when she:

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<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward, *Marcella* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 264; emphases in the original; hereafter cited in the text.

plunged into history, attacked the landowning class, spoke of ... other great matters, ... all with the same utter oblivion—so it seemed to her stiff indignant hostess [Miss Raeburn] ... —of the manners and modesty proper to a young girl in a strange house ... (*Marcella*, 1984, p. 105)

Marcella's speech and gesture here are deemed characteristic of the New Woman. In other words, she is intelligent, individualistic and vigorously principled. Undoubtedly, what Miss Raeburn is eager to find in Aldous's love object is the 'tender, loving, retiring or domestic' ideal of womanhood proposed by Linton, but which is at this point absent in Marcella's character.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, what Aldous admires in Marcella – her energy and passion – stands for 'modernity'. Represented alternately in a positive and negative paradigm, the New Woman in *Marcella* conveys the author's mixed response. I suggest that the ambiguous vacillation within the text regarding Marcella's reflection of the New Woman paradigm is the means to Ward's combination of conservative and modernity.

Neither Miss Raeburn nor Lord Maxwell may be said to exclusively represent Ward's attitude towards the New Woman due to the fact that both characters are so clearly and deliberately polarised in their perceptions of Marcella's challenge to gender norms. Nevertheless, it is crucial to realise that Lord Maxwell's sympathetic attitude towards the heroine, together with Miss Raeburn's conventional lack of understanding, demonstrate very well different contemporary positions on the New Woman. In other words, Ward reflects the multi-vocal discourse surrounding the New Woman. Compared to the compliant model of femininity typified by the Old Woman, it is to be expected that Miss Raeburn and her side of the world remain unfamiliar with the New Woman. The danger which Miss Raeburn clearly senses in the New Woman is described when Lord Maxwell summarises Marcella's character as 'a forcible young woman' and wonders if his grandson will be able to 'deal conveniently' with 'such a personality' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 178).

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<sup>25</sup> Cunningham, *NWVN*, p. 9.

Although Ward uses Lord Maxwell's character and his conservative position to imply that the New Woman is an undesirable marital choice for Aldous, both in the social and cultural senses, the eventual marriage between the two comes to symbolise a compromise conducive to progress. Without directly revealing what constitutes the Raeburns' 'ideal', the characteristically conservative representation of the family does suggest close affinities with popular traditional views, such as that delineated by John Ruskin. A Ruskinian ideal wife, as evoked in a lecture given on 14 December 1864, 'must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation'.<sup>26</sup> Ruskin's view is evident in the writing of Linton which I have previously discussed. Similarly, the passage quoted above describing Lord Maxwell's stealing glimpses assessing Marcella's qualifications as Aldous's bride and the future Lady Maxwell implies that the heroine is expected to be conventionally duty-bound even before she enters into marriage. The entire plot of *Marcella* revolves around the evident antagonism between the New Woman and the traditional marriage.

Contrary to Ruskin's idealistic view, the narrative orients the heroine's gentleness and service not towards her husband-to-be but entirely towards the poor. Nor does Marcella's self-renunciation represent a failure to help Aldous but rather the fruitless attempt at social reformism. Ironically, the novel shows a marked departure from Ruskin's lecture as Ward implies that Marcella's pride is what causes the most fundamental conflict between the engaged couple:

'Then it comes to this,' [Aldous] said steadily, 'that if I had been a poor man, you would have allowed me my conscience – my judgment of right and wrong – in such a matter. ... If I had possessed no more than Hurd ... but because of Maxwell Court – because of my *money*,' – [Marcella] shrank before the accent of the word – 'you refused me the commonest moral right. *My* scruple, *my* feeling, were nothing to you. Your pride was engaged as well as your pity, and I must give way.' (*Marcella*, 1984, p. 305; emphases in the original)

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<sup>26</sup> John Ruskin, 'Lilies: Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies: Three Lectures* (London: George Allen & Sons, 1910), pp. 109-110; hereafter abbreviated as 'LQG'.

Accordingly, the conflict is resolved at the end of the novel, with Marcella relinquishing her pride and the wish ‘always to take the lead and always to be in the right.’ (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 494) The heroine thus no longer appears as the New Woman thanks to her own willingness to reform, but this does not prevent her engaging in active philanthropy.

It is rather the case that the political realignments in this novel identify the New Woman’s advocacy of radical politics as self-seeking, whereas ‘true’ philanthropy involves the relinquishing of self in favour of altruism.<sup>27</sup> In short, I want to contend that the marriage of Marcella to the Tory hero cannot take place until she agrees to transform in order to represent Ward’s ideal. *Marcella* reinforces the author’s ambivalence which condemns the heroine’s ‘cold and selfish thoughts’ associated with her socialist era (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 497). For this reason alone, the heroine’s complete evolution at the end not only helps ‘reinststate the conventional marriage plot’ but also realises a happy ending which fulfils the novel’s campaign for the representation of marriage and self-sacrifice as Ward’s ultimate feminine ideals.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, Marcella’s eventual change of character emphasises Ward’s strong link to conservatism, both as literary convention which demands that the heroine be happily married, and a representation of the domestic ideology idealising woman’s submission and feminine duties. Despite the ideological conflicts caused by Ward’s simultaneous social conservatism and political Liberalism, the novel nevertheless mirrors the traditional, mid-century view of marriage and the family as woman’s profession, which was popularised by proponents for domestic ideologies such as Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis, who also advocated for improved education for girls to optimise their maternal capacity as well as household management.<sup>29</sup> Focusing on the centrality of education to life and marriage, *Marcella* contains Ward’s critical representations of girls’ education and its

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Dixon, ‘Altruists and individualists in late Victorian fiction’ in *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 263-271; p. 265; hereafter abbreviated as *IA*.

<sup>28</sup> Sally Ledger, *NW*, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *FF*, pp. 179, 182, 183.

uneven development as portrayed by the several episodes of Marcella's boarding schools. Significantly, the New Woman debate of the 1890s made the education of middle- and upper-class girls a potent topical issue. Josephine Butler, along with other feminists of the period, namely Emily Davies and Maria Grey, argued that 'middle-class women needed to be educated, like men, to make a positive contribution to society'.<sup>30</sup>

Even though girls' education might not be the prime focus in the novel itself, it certainly holds thematic significance concerning the figuring of the New Woman heroine. Underlining the need for reform, *Marcella* depicts three different institutions which have considerable influence on the formation of her character. First, 'Miss Frederick's Cliff House School for Young Ladies' delivers Ward's critique of 'the discipline, the teaching, the companionship' of the headmistress, which does nothing but 'transform little Marcella Boyce ... into a demon.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 5) The fault lies in its physical as well as emotional aspects embedded in 'the bare, ugly rooms', the 'getting up in the wintry dark' 'at half-past six', 'cold ablutions with some dozen others in the comfortless lavatory', and the meagre meal servings which take place 'in the long schoolroom' from which 'twice meat was forbidden and twice pudding allowed' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 6, 9). The headmistress, although depicted as 'perfectly well-intentioned', is 'at her wit's end' as to how to deal with extraordinary girls such as Marcella; extraordinary in terms of initiating a 'continual series of sulks, quarrels, and revolts' that foreshadow her development into a stereotypically rebellious New Woman (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 6). It is noteworthy that Marcella echoes Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) in which the heroine's 'childhood suffering' turns her into a 'rebellious' character.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rosamund Billington, 'Education, Women's' in Sally Mitchell, ed., *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 248-251; p. 249; hereafter abbreviated as *VB*.

<sup>31</sup> Nancy Henry, *The Life of George Eliot: A Critical Biography* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2012), p. 229.

Second, following Marcella's first school, Ward introduces another influenced by Evangelicalism in the 'small but much-sought-after school for young ladies at Solesby' which represents values central to the life of Victorian woman, namely 'family pride', 'religious influences', and marriage (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 20, 19). The last becomes significant when Mr. Boyce transfers Marcella to this school to be adequately 'produced as his daughter and heiress' as he anticipates inheriting Mellor Park (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 19). Ward connects education of this kind with the manufacture of social advantage as it produces commodities for the marriage market rather than dutiful, reflective individuals. It is evident that Ward is extremely interested in women as *individuals* – remarkable, talented, energetic – but the idea of them as *individualists* creates an insuperable problem for her. Third, Ward associates Marcella's inclination towards the New Woman with her education when, after her father's inheritance of Mellor Park, Marcella perceives herself to be 'something altogether different. She [i]s Marcella Boyce, a "finished" and grown-up young woman of twenty-one, the only daughter and child of Mr. Boyce of Mellor Park, inheritress of one of the most ancient names in Midland England' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 3-4). The school appears to produce a sense of pride – that awakening to her own exceptionalism – especially when reinforced by the family inheritance.

Although Ward was known as an advocate of women's higher education, in *Marcella* she appears to be more critical than supportive of the kind of education available to the heroine. Ward was instrumental in founding Somerville College at Oxford, which she named after the self-taught astronomer Mary Somerville.<sup>32</sup> The author also acted as one of the first secretaries on the Somerville Committee formed in 1878.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, as with her ambivalent representation of the New Woman, there appears a

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<sup>32</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 64.

certain inconsistency in Ward's view of education as she gave her own daughters no access to higher education.<sup>34</sup>

The negative association between the representation of the New Woman and boarding-school education poses a stark contrast to the conservative support given to an educational system made available to women, as expressed both by the literary portrayal of Aldous's social reform, and by Ward's own involvement at Oxford. Despite autobiographical associations (John Sutherland suggests that the boarding-school episodes in the novel illustrate Ward's own girlhood), *Marcella* still embodies Ward's argument that intellectual as well as physical exercises can prove more beneficial to girls than what the evangelical 'moral discipline' can offer.<sup>35</sup> To substantiate her point, Ward uses Miss Frederick's school to underline the lack of maternal warmth, care, and understanding which turns Marcella into 'a pitiable morsel, in truth, of rather forlorn humanity.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 7)

Rather than the nurturing, stimulating, character-forming institution that it should be, Ward equates this educational tradition to the anti-intellectual, punitive, oppressive environment, as seen in the handling of sick schoolgirls which mirrors the 'silent system' that was 'currently imposed on inmates of Victorian prisons' as a means to 'stimulate conscience and discourage recidivism'.<sup>36</sup> Ward articulates her educational standpoint through Marcella's abhorrence for this type of schooling, and the related combination between its disciplinary system and emotional hardships (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 6). *Marcella* calls for more room in which love, compassion, and care may be incorporated into girls' education in order not to attach to their learning experience the same sense of imprisonment portrayed in the sickbed episode. Ward's critique of '[b]rutal schools' and their failure to instil in children intellectual growth is shown by the close resemblance

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<sup>34</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, pp. 18, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, p. 18.



drawn between its 'sadistic' treatment of ill students, and the British penal system.<sup>37</sup>

Marcella's first boarding-school period thus foreshadows the restrictive, unsympathetic world which the New Woman heroine will constantly confront. It underlines Marcella's rebellion and negative individualism, which is represented as produced by an environment that discourages attachment to others. In other words, the heroine is forced into extreme individualism by these methods.

Furthermore, Ward criticises the education available to upper-middle-class girls for not encouraging any intellectual development in students, particularly the heroine, for 'she hate[s] her lessons' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 5). Through various representations of education, Ward portrays the heroine as deprived of not only bodily but also spiritual, mental, as well as emotional satisfaction. The first boarding school creates 'an aching, inmost sense of childish loneliness and helplessness' that oppresses Marcella and is implicitly responsible for the forming of 'a rebel' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 7). It is an ultimate critique of an institutional failure: instead of recognising Marcella's potential and accordingly cultivating a reflective, intellectual individual, Miss Frederick's old-fashioned establishment only succeeds in turning 'the odd, undisciplined child' into an irrevocable social misfit (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 12). The novel shows that it is the 'little spitfire outsider like Marcella Boyce' who is 'not a favourite with her companions, and ... a perpetual difficulty and trouble to her perfectly well-intentioned schoolmistress' that defeats the whole purpose of schooling (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 9). By not recognising her need for nurture as an individual, the school system turns her into an anti-social individualist, attacking that which she feels no attachment to.

In brief, *Marcella* sets out a theory which ascribes the apparent anti-social individualism of the New Woman to an education system that, paradoxically, fails to nurture and direct female individuals, their affections, appetites and interests. As the negative images associated with her boarding schools translate into the dark, troubled

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<sup>37</sup> Sutherland, *MHW*, pp. 19, 21.

side of Marcella, they confirm both the need for education reform crucial to the formation of a girl's future character, and a belief in the transforming power of education as key to self-fulfilment and full potential propagated in the late 1870s by educationist William Lovett.<sup>38</sup> Also as Ruskin notes, girls need understanding, love, and freedom or room in which to grow: 'you cannot hammer a girl into anything. She grows as a flower does,— she will wither without sun; ... but you cannot fetter her; she must take her own fair form and way, if she take [*sic*] any, and in mind as in body, must have always "Her household motions light and free / And steps of virgin liberty."'”<sup>39</sup> In this light, Ward concurs with earlier male thinkers sympathetic with the liberal promotion of women's self-development through the means of education. It is noteworthy that Ward's Christian values emerge through her advocacy for 'the sterner education of maturity' as a means by which to achieve 'true life' through 'self-surrender'.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, during the middle decades, the main purpose of much education on offer for middle-class girls resided not in their intellectual pursuits or realisation of potential, but rather in social skills and feminine accomplishment to prepare them for marriage. Girls' educational reform was gradual and in 1899, at the Women's Liberal Federation Annual Council Meeting, a prominent member confirmed that 'academic high schools for girls had been established in most parts of the country.'<sup>41</sup> Marking the time of change, in the next section I focus on the idea of conservative modernity as represented in *Marcella* in terms of cross-class marriage, the feminine ideal, gender ideology and women's sphere.

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<sup>38</sup> Brian Harrison, "'Kindness and Reason": William Lovett and Education' in Gordon Marsden, ed., *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), pp. 13-28; p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Ruskin, 'LQG', p. 121.

<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward, *New Forms of Christian Education: An Address to the University Hall Guild* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1898), p. 39.

<sup>41</sup> Joyce Goodman and Sylvia A. Harrop, eds, *Women, Educational Policy-Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1880* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 37.

### III. Marriage as Conservative Modernity

*Marcella* portrays the problems arising from the complex nature of the English class system and marriage. Following Ward's strong view on girls' education as a major contribution to the New Woman's rebellious and proud personality, the issue of bloodlines in *Marcella* forms a focus central to the marriage of the New Woman, as money, social rank, and inheritance are implicated as the cause of tensions between the unconventional Boyces and the conservative Raeburns. For all Marcella's self-declared status as a free agent, she is shown to be enmeshed in wider patterns of inheritance and family history that circumscribe her actions. Ward introduces Aldous Raeburn as a complete opposite to Marcella, who mentions him during a conversation with her father, 'her eye kindling combatively' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 39). The Raeburns' social and political distinctions, as well as their economic stability, are further accentuated in terms of Aldous's gentlemanly rank, inherited money and land, his Cambridge education and manners, especially his future career in politics which is predicted by the return of his grandfather Lord Maxwell into office (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 39).

The affluence of the Raeburn family thus poses a stark contrast to the status of the Boyces which the novel underlines through their wish to return to their 'natural rank in society' expressed early on (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 19). Marcella's father is the cause of 'one of the biggest scandals I [Lord Maxwell] remember in my time', which results in three months' imprisonment. The Boyce family not only become 'wretchedly poor', but also suffer from humiliation (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 92, 93). Based on this initial configuration, the Raeburns are the guarantors of tradition while the Boyces represent the degradation of old family rank in modern society.

The great difference in the hero and heroine's backgrounds emphasises the importance of class and its mobility in contemporary society. Marcella's marriage thus can be an allegory of a further step in social progress in the late nineteenth century as it

represents the alliance between the class of unstable financial speculators and the old landed money and responsibilities to the lower order. Indeed, both gambling and tradition symbolised by the two families are in fact perceived as traits of the British landed gentry. However, Ward reveals that the merging of the New Woman and the Tory leader, with its modern defiance of convention, is not an easy process. The novel treats the connection between Marcella's marriage and the family origins as a matter of considerable weight through Miss Raeburn, Aldous's aunt, and her constant objection and coldness towards the heroine. Such behaviour by the Old Woman character indicates that she is displeased with the match, which she regards as unsuitable.

In addition to Miss Raeburn's anxieties concerning the heroine's supposedly inferior social and financial status, heredity is also part of the discourse on inheritance which Ward employs to create conflicts in *Marcella*. I want to make a distinction here that Ward's use of heredity in *Marcella* is not related to the 'Darwinian biologization' outlined by Angelique Richardson, but by 'a larger, human way' reflecting the medieval notion of the shaping of destiny by bloodline and financial inheritance.<sup>42</sup> The text articulates this notion through Brookshire villagers and farmers that Aldous, their future landlord, 'is making an unsatisfactory marriage' because the heroine is 'the daughter of an extremely shady father' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 423). The origin of this rejection comes from Richard Boyce's financial disaster, the fall from his position in Parliament, and the moral failure insinuated through a love affair with an actress, all of which are represented as acute and unpardonable, especially since they result in the decease of Marcella's 'respected and loved' grandfather (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 58).

To return to the question of match-making above, *Marcella* demonstrates the extent to which the ideal of femininity influences decision-making regarding a marriage partner. More significantly still, the text reveals the connection between a wife's

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<sup>42</sup> Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 168.

character and the family's social respectability. Thus, Lord Maxwell's allusion to his family ideal (see p. 106 above) may be interpreted in three different ways. First, if marriage should indeed materialise between Marcella and Aldous, it would be an incompatible one, being against that 'inner ideal'. Symbolising conservatism, literally as a Tory MP as well as metaphorically, Aldous should thematically treasure the same values as his grandfather. Secondly, by vowing to be the one to lead, Marcella as the New Woman would certainly create further tensions in her relationship with her husband if marriage did indeed happen. Third and most importantly, the actual ending of the novel is the clearest indication of Ward's conservative views regarding the two ideals: marriage and femininity. As Ward's marriage plot unfolds, once the New Woman has made a smooth transition into an Old Woman by dutifully assuming the proper position of a womanly woman, Marcella is able to marry her beloved Aldous. The second proposal of marriage forms a key scene in the novel to which I will return in a later section in order to discuss Ward's visual manoeuvring of Marcella's personal transformation.

Despite the rather menacing picture drawn by Lord Maxwell, however, Ward uses the following description of the heroine's winning charm, a positive attribute of the New Woman, to negate that vision:

'And if in your good works [to help the poor] you want any help we can give, ask it, my dear young lady. My old comrade's granddaughter will always find friends in this house.' Lord Maxwell would have been very much astonished to hear himself making this speech six weeks before [prior to Marcella's first visit] (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 195).

The passage above encapsulates Ward's proposition that conservatism and the New Woman may be allies through mutual understanding, trust, and respect. In anticipation of marriage between Marcella and Aldous, it foreshadows Ward's conservative ideal by creating an attractive heroine here, only to make her abandon every aspect of her New Womanish charm and individualism at the end of the novel in order to stress the importance of marriage. Driving towards this end, Ward enables Marcella to build a

bridge between the two families during her first appearance at Maxwell Court, notwithstanding the prehistoric scandal, the Boyces' damaged name and precipitous status, and the implication of the Boyce-Maxwell estrangement. The New Woman has captivated even the prudent Lord Maxwell, who instantly becomes overpowered by his own sense of conviviality arising from his respect for the younger woman and her philanthropic dedication.

Overall, *Marcella* is Ward's didactic attempt to argue for the re-education of modern selfishness in the values of Tory paternalism. Having delineated the possibilities of a love affair between the New Woman and the radical leader, Ward concludes by an expression of disapproval, implying that such pairing between these unconventional characters not only forms a bad combination but also forecasts a perilous marriage. The novel emphasises this disapproving note nearer the end where it brings Marcella to a slow awakening. While disclosing her genuine feelings to Aldous, Marcella admits to being guilty of 'selfish indifference to, even contempt for, his life, his interests, his ideals; of her calm forecasts of a married state in which she [i]s always to take the lead and always to be in the right' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 494).

It is this kind of 'New Woman' mindset to which Ward appears ambivalent. This is due to her paradoxical notion of the feminine ideal: Ward's rejection of women's role in national politics coexists with her firm support of women's involvement in local government as illustrated in 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage' discussed below. Ward's notion has a Ruskinian resonance. In 'Of Queens' Garden', Ruskin argues, through a comparison of the roles of the sexes, that women should be 'Queens' and 'rule' their own domains, thus assigning to them a very particular area of domestic duty:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. ... But the woman's

power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.<sup>43</sup>

Based on the novel, the way Ward represents Marcella's desire to be the one to lead fits with the masculine traits given by Ruskin here. To emphasise the heroine's unfeminine attitude in the New Woman character, Ward repeatedly refers to Marcella's wilful endeavour to have control over Aldous, of which he is aware himself, during their dispute over Hurd's prosecution: 'To her, as to him, they seemed to be close on a trial of strength. If she could not influence him in this matter—so obvious, as it seemed to her, and so near to her heart—what was to become of that lead of hers in their married life, on which she had been reckoning from the beginning?' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, pp. 431-432)

Towards the end of the novel, Ward concludes her main argument by putting an increasing emphasis on the femininity of her New Woman character. Therefore, as Marcella eventually denounces her own selfishness – the basis of her individualism – she arrives at maturity within the conventions of this *Bildungsroman*. In other words, the heroine becomes a mature character as she performs an act of self-sacrifice, which is a feminine value idealised by Ward. Despite her strong sense of independence and self-confidence which is highlighted all through the narrative, finally Marcella has 'given away all rights—even the right to hate herself' as she discerns her feminine powerlessness and dependence and her duties towards Aldous as the future husband (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 497). Ward further emphasises Marcella's change of character in terms of reverence, submissive and total dependence through the character's heartfelt outpouring:

After to-night surely, she would be no more lonely! She was going for ever from her own keeping to that of another. For she never, from the moment she wrote her letter, had the smallest doubt as to what his answer to her would be; never the smallest dread that he would, even in the lightest passing impression, connect what she was going to do

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<sup>43</sup> Ruskin, 'LQG', pp. 107-109.

with any thought of blame or wonder. Her pride and fear were gone out of her. (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 487)

In light of this character shift, Marcella comes to embrace the ideal of selflessness. It has replaced not only ‘her movements of fierce revolt’ but also her old ambitions, self-importance and independence, all of which have framed her individualism. (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 1, p. 7) It is apparent that Marcella’s *Bildung* is an education in attachment to others which she has lacked at home and at school.

In addition to Marcella’s freshly acquired femininity, the switch has a major implication for Ward’s perception of gender roles and the ideology of woman’s sphere. Marcella’s retrogression into the Old Woman, together with the willingness to remain in the private sphere further reverberates with Ward’s anti-suffrage arguments, especially in her clearly articulated sense that women did have a role in the ‘housekeeping’ of local government, but not in national politics and diplomacy as I have suggested above. These sentiments are presented in ‘An Appeal Against Female Suffrage’ which conveys Ward’s attempt, championed by many ‘upper-class and middle-class British women’, to defining ‘women’s true role’ and to ‘enhancing its influence upon the public life of the nation’.<sup>44</sup>

Written in 1889, five years prior to the publication of *Marcella*, the Appeal petitions that:

In all these spheres [legislation, administration, foreign affairs, army, navy, industry, commerce, finance, and trades] women’s direct participation is made impossible either by the disabilities of sex, or by strong formations of custom and habit resting ultimately upon physical difference, against which it is useless to contend.<sup>45</sup>

The passage underlines the author’s conservative reservation with regard to woman’s social and political position, especially by the allusion to the nineteenth-century views of

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<sup>44</sup> Julia Bush, ‘British Women’s Anti-Suffragism and the Forward Policy, 1908-14’ in *Women’s History Review*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2002), pp. 431-454; p. 431; hereafter abbreviated as ‘BWASFP’.

<sup>45</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward *et al*, ‘An Appeal Against Female Suffrage’ in *The Nineteenth Century* (25 June, 1889), pp. 781-787; hereafter abbreviated as ‘AAFS’; reprinted in Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds, *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 92-94; hereafter abbreviated as FS.



sexuality and the related gender roles dictated by the separation of spheres that Ward herself seems to condone without a challenge. On behalf of all the 104 signatories whom she lobbied to support this organised opposition to women's suffrage, Ward concludes with the sentiment that resurfaces in *Marcella*: 'We are convinced that the pursuit of a mere outward equality with men is for women not only vain but demoralising. It leads to a total misconception of woman's true dignity and special mission'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, as Julia Bush argues, Ward's anti-suffragism serves to highlight her preoccupation with the 'true' character that forms the feminine ideal, as well as her indoctrination of the conventional gender ideology, which results in the women anti-suffragists' attempt to 'enhancing its influence upon the public life of the nation'.<sup>47</sup> In this light, *Marcella* may be seen to represent Ward's anti-suffrage activism, conception and espousal of the conservative ideal of womanhood, through the heroine's resignation from her socialist mission, which enables her to fulfil what Ward advocates for as woman's dignified mission: a marriage to the conservative hero.

Significantly, *Marcella* underlines the power of marriage which strips Marcella of her individualism. The very last lines of the novel bring this inversion into sharp focus: when the roles are reversed, and the power changes hands, the text suggests that the New Woman in *Marcella* has finally ceased to exist, with Aldous now taking control and Marcella obeying his orders. Therefore, it is highly ironic when Aldous phrases his question as he tries seemingly to restore to Marcella her old womanly 'power' over him: 'Does a man *forgive* the hand that sets him free, the voice that recreates him? Choose some better word — my wife!' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 498; marriage in the original) But the fact that the novel ends in an imperative, although a reassuringly comforting one, still indicates that Aldous is the one in authority and that Marcella is likely to comply. As the ending implies, Aldous is already superior to Marcella not only as her husband-to-be,

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<sup>46</sup> Ward, 'AAFS', p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> Bush, 'BWASFP', p. 431.

but also as the tamer of the New Woman. Symbolically, *Marcella* ends in the triumph of conservatism over the New Woman. In the following section, I look at the way Ward reconfigures the gender politics of the first part of the narrative to bring out the conventional gender ideology.

Ward's play of power dynamics between the hero and heroine which takes place after the role reversal emphasises the novel's focus on the re-education of modern selfishness in conservative values. During the tense moments which determine the future of Marcella and Aldous, it is the heroine who appears momentarily in power. For example, it is Marcella who writes to summon Aldous to her place. Confronting her, he seems unnecessarily anxious, self-defensive, and out of character: 'I trust I am not late. Your clocks, I think, are ahead of ours. You said eleven?' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 491) She uses business and shares, and her need for his advice regarding the sale of these, as a pretext for sending for him. The uncharacteristic nature of this whole event instantly makes Aldous 'conscious of some astonishment.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 492) However, it becomes increasingly clear in the narrative that Marcella is in fact the one about to lose her authority, as both the mistress of the place and of herself.

Ward follows the symbolic defeat of the New Woman with self-abnegating submission, newly acquired by the heroine, which clearly anticipates an emergent Old Woman. The loss of her self-assertion is evident when Marcella leaves yet another note on the writing desk towards which Aldous is directed. The choice of the epistolary form to avoid speaking represents the New Woman as silenced and subdued. The first letter may be deemed necessary due to the distance between the two residences. But when Aldous must read the second note even though Marcella is in the same room, the whole scene seems gratuitous. Nevertheless, its content explains the 'necessity' for Marcella to write instead of delivering it verbally: 'It was in this room you told me I had done you a great wrong. But wrongdoers may be pardoned sometimes, if they ask it. Let me know by

a sign, a look, if I may ask it. If not it would be kind to go away without a word.’

(*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 492) Through the altered tone and attitude, Marcella symbolically assumes the position of the inferior, both by asking for mercy and by displaying her penitence. This fragment thus finalises Marcella’s tangible transition from the New Woman to the Old Woman, from an independent and confident individual to a subservient creature, whose fate and future are in Aldous’s hand. It is evident that Ward’s portrayal of the New Woman is principally influenced by her ideological contradictions. This interpretation may be substantiated by Anne Bindslev, according to whose early research Marcella is ‘a rebellious heroine duly tamed by marriage at the end of the story’.<sup>48</sup> More recently, scholar Kristine Swenson’s assertion confirms my claim: ‘The ending of *Marcella* reinscribes its adventurous heroine, who had worked successfully in a progressive public career, back within the domestic sphere, performing traditional upper-class female duties.’<sup>49</sup> In this light, Ward’s endorsement of the feminine sphere of duties is linked with the marriage of the rehabilitated New Woman protagonist, which is the result of Ward’s conservative gender politics.

Moreover, Ward uses visual contrast to make Marcella’s transformation immediately recognisable. The scene takes place directly before the end of the novel, in which the hero and heroine are arriving at a mutual understanding. The second Marcella tells Aldous to sit down, she has instantly ‘sunk on her knees beside him.’ (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 493) Although he protests, she calmly insists: “‘You must”, she said steadily; “well, if it will make you happier, I will take a stool and sit by you. But you are there above me — I am at your feet”” (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 493). Visually, the two characters are positioned to represent the starkly conventional status attached to each sex. Besides, they fulfil the ‘romantic expectations of readers’ by providing a scene ‘of

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<sup>48</sup> Anne M. Bindslev, ‘Mrs. Humphry Ward: A Study in Late-Victorian Feminine Consciousness and Creative Expression’ (doctoral thesis, University of Stockholm, 1985), p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> Kristine Swenson, *Medical Women and Victorian Fiction* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), p. 61.

womanly capitulation in the face of masculine strength'.<sup>50</sup> Symbolically, having found her satisfactory place at Aldous's feet, Marcella begins 'her long confession', the most essential of which are acknowledgements of her 'selfish indifference to, even contempt for, his life, his interests, his ideals.' (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 494) Marcella's eventual repentance, acknowledged love for Aldous, and selfless devotion to helping the poor work as a contrast to the earlier tensions arising from her importunate domination and failure to accept his unselfish love:

Marcella vowed ... never to give up the struggle for a nobler human fellowship ... [b]ut not alone; only, not alone! She had learnt something of the dark aspects, the crushing complexity of the world. She turned from them to-night ... to make of love her guide and shelter. Her whole rich being was wrought to an intoxication of self-giving. (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 491)

The novel continues to unveil Ward's concern about marriage and the New Woman by equating female individualism with the heroine's selfishness. The novel's ending brings the answer to the above question when Marcella comes to identify her former political position with individual self-aggrandisement rather than altruism, and asks Aldous for forgiveness.<sup>51</sup> The prompt granting of her humble request by the kindly hero leads to a happy ending through the resumed engagement and the renewed certainty of their marriage. The final scene where Marcella whisperingly asks the hero to 'forgive' her is the most significant moment in the novel (*Marcella*, 1894, vol. 2, p. 498). It indicates very clearly Ward's position with regard to the New Woman and marriage. The message is delivered by the reformed Marcella via a submissive act of repentance. Moreover, by choosing the Tory Aldous over the socialist Wharton, Marcella is seen

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<sup>50</sup> Ann Heilmann and Valerie Sanders, 'The rebel, the lady, and the "anti": Femininity, anti-feminism, and the Victorian woman writer' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 29 (2006), p. 292.

<sup>51</sup> Dixon, *IA*, p. 266. Dixon analyses W. H. Mallock's novel, *The Individualist* (1899), which satirises the 'fashionable ideal of altruism' through a 'pompous, self-serving, vain, social-climbing' Mrs. Norham whom Dixon perceives to be inspired by Ward.

symbolically to abandon her persona as a politically radical New Woman, and return to the conventional world where woman, according to Ward, belongs.

As the constant tensions in the novel signify, I want to argue that *Marcella* is in fact the battlefield where Ward's conservatism and the anti-marriage sentiment are at war. But since Marcella's decision to marry Aldous becomes definite, these tensions between the two characters are instantly eradicated. Furthermore, Ward's position is at its most manifest when the novel designates the New Woman as the one who needs changing to embrace marriage whereas Aldous stands firm in all that he represents, including his career as a Tory MP and his social schemes as a landowner. Once the tangible presence of the New Woman is eliminated from Marcella's character by her own prostrating plea to Aldous for forgiveness, her new identity as the Old Woman emerges through the voluntary act of self-sacrifice. The willing loss of freedom and individualism, which gives way to the adoption of submissive silence, all translates into Marcella's avowal to duty as a woman. To put it briefly, Ward's representation of marriage as conservative modernity reflects this ideological compromise: the fact that Aldous is attracted, rather than repelled, by Marcella's individuality and strength of character at the outset, makes for the modernity while the elimination of her anti-social individualism at the end signifies conservatism.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Ward's complex relationship to the Woman Question is thus summarised by the two aspects that form the conflict between matrimony and personal fulfilment. First, marriage replaces the individualism of the New Woman with self-sacrificing duties. Secondly, it transforms Marcella from an embodiment of attractive modern womanhood seeking to be outside the frame of conformism and heredity to an ideal of womanliness who values her place in the private sphere. Ward's repositioning of the New Woman is

significant since Marcella, who is characterised by her strong socialist conviction and a sense of combative independence, initially rejects marriage. The shift, therefore, echoes Linton's appeal to 'our women' to 'come back again to the old English ideal, once the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world'.<sup>52</sup> This sentimentalism finds a resonance in both *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella* and, I suggest, represents Ward's conservative 'gendered politics of power' in which 'women were subservient to men.'<sup>53</sup> Thus, although different in their religious and socio-political concerns, Ward's novels similarly demonstrate her ambivalent views towards the New Woman: marriage trumps the desire for personal and professional achievement, with Rose and Marcella 'embracing' the conventional role.

However, although the author has recently been associated with late-Victorian anti-feminism based on her anti-suffrage writing spanning twenty-five years – from 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage' (1889) to *Delia Blanchflower* (1914) – as suggested by Andrea Broomfield, Thomas Dixon, Ann Heilmann and Valerie Sanders, I realise that her attitude towards the New Woman figure is not as wholly negative as we might think. In the selected texts, she even allows conventionally-minded characters to acknowledge and applaud the talent and modernity of Rose and Marcella. Significantly, I contend that the novelist is not always positively disposed towards the figure of the Old Woman as might be expected: both Catherine and Miss Raeburn can become limited or old-fashioned even for their closest male relatives like husband and brother. Instead, Ward employs the New Woman protagonist to mediate the idea of conservative modernity. On account of this strand of modernity in Ward's fiction, scholars such as Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst acknowledge her affinity to New Woman fiction.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, I find conservative modernity an apt description of Ward's ambivalence since it 'paradoxically gave

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<sup>52</sup> Linton, *GPSE*, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Langland, 'Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel' in *PMLA*, vol. 107, no. 2 (March, 1992), p. 294.

<sup>54</sup> Ledger and Luckhurst, eds, *FS*, p. 96.

respectable women a new kind of articulacy and new positions of power', a claim which she substantiates in *Sir George Tressady* when Marcella's 'new position of power' results in the resumption of her old self.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Ward never severely punishes the New Woman by representing her as a sexual rebel or subjecting her to death, which happens in the 1895 and 1896 novels of Grant Allen and Thomas Hardy.<sup>56</sup> Thus, she may also be seen to embrace feminism. As Beth Sutton-Ramspeck reminds us, to 'ignore Ward and to deny her feminism are not only to distort and oversimplify the culture and gender politics of her time but to silence one of its most prominent and interesting voices.'<sup>57</sup> This argument offers an interesting premise for further scholarship to ascertain whether or not, or to what extent, she endorses feminism.

With regard to the novelist's thought on the separation of spheres, I agree, but only to a certain extent, with Sutton-Ramspeck's view on Ward's 'social feminist concept' drawn from her anti-suffrage petition.<sup>58</sup> To define social feminism, Sutton-Ramspeck places Ward's emphasis on 'duties and responsibilities' in opposition to the focus 'on rights (as liberal feminists argued)', the latter adopted by Grand and Caird in the tradition of John Stuart Mill as I have often emphasised.<sup>59</sup> However, I depart from her claim on Ward's feminism in that, though this is a matter worth debating when we explore her figuring of the New Woman, it is evidently out of the question when we concentrate on her perception of marriage. In *Marcella*, the character's evolution is not only requisite but also serves as a useful tool. Marcella's transformed personality is a

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<sup>55</sup> Light, 'MCI', p. 8; Gisela Argyle, 'Mrs. Humphry Ward's Fictional Experiments in the Woman Question' in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2003), pp. 939-957; pp. 948-949.

<sup>56</sup> Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, introd., Sarah Wintle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. and introd., Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, 'Shot out of the Canon: Mary Ward and the Claims of Conflicting Feminisms' in Nicola Diane Thompson, ed., *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 204-222; p. 218; hereafter abbreviated as 'SC'.

<sup>58</sup> Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, 'SC', p. 210.

<sup>59</sup> Sutton-Ramspeck, 'SC', p. 210; emphases in the original.

means to clarify and emphasise Ward's ambivalent view of women. The character shift is necessary since the novel structurally and thematically relies on the heroine's change to make her marriage to the conservative hero possible. The end of the relationship between Marcella and radicalism thus gives way to the beginning of her marriage to conservatism, which highlights the utmost significance of femininity and marriage as woman's highest ideal and duty. Through marriage, Marcella metaphorically solves the internal conflicts between classes: her marriage symbolically replaces the antagonism between the rich and the poor. Consequently, *Marcella* emerges as a late-Victorian 'condition of England' novel, a sub-genre prevalent in the mid-century. Writers including Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Martineau and Frances Trollope illustrated poverty and hardships in the industrial north, poor housing, overcrowding, and contagion during periods of economic recession.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the unquestionably positive and sympathetic portrayals of her two New Woman characters in *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella*, Ward petitioned for women to retain their traditional role through modesty according to the arguments drawn from her anti-suffragist writing. In the novels, in fact, while subtly conveying her disapproval of those being temperamentally given to the pursuit of independence and professional achievement, or being actively engaged in politics and self-aggrandising projects – traits which respectively characterise Rose and Marcella – Ward ostensibly encourages women to marry and flourish in the private realm of domesticity. To illustrate my point, based on the ending of both novels, these characters ultimately marry despite their initial protest against the idea of marriage, and uniformly give up their New Woman status and freedom in the public world, confirmed by a personal transformation which conforms to and perpetuates the ideology of separate spheres. It is noteworthy that the 1880s and 1890s were particularly productive in the context of debates on marriage, women, and the

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<sup>60</sup> Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *The Routledge Concise History of Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 40, 39.



individual. In opposition to Ward's advocacy of marriage articulated through her novels, other influential novelists viewed the institution differently. Mona Caird emerges as the most representative of the anti-marriage school, her stance is affirmed in her work which 'depicted the dangerous effects of women's dependent position'.<sup>61</sup> Taking a different approach, Sarah Grand attempts to rescue the institution of marriage by 'demanding a single standard of sexual chastity'.<sup>62</sup>

In the next Part, I discuss Grand's important novels: *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) focuses on the fate of three fundamentally different female protagonists while *The Beth Book* (1897) represents marriage as a site of violence and the deep impact it has on the heroine who nevertheless performs her wifely duties flawlessly. In the earlier novel, while Edith Beale represents the traditional feminine ideal, Evadne Frayling embodies knowledge and self-government associated with the New Woman. The third heroine, eponymous twin Angelica Hamilton-Wells, epitomises freedom, independence, and liberal individualism. I will concentrate on the different desire Grand attaches to these characters, and the way in which marriage later influences their attitude. In connection to Ward's ideal of womanliness which perceives submission to be the highest moral act in woman and deems marriage her supreme duty, I now turn to Grand and her views as represented in *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book* respectively.

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<sup>61</sup> Laura Stempel Mumford, 'Feminist Writing' in Mitchell, ed., *VB*, pp. 296-297; p. 296.

<sup>62</sup> Mumford, 'Feminism' in Mitchell, ed., *VB*, p. 295.

**Part Two: Sarah Grand**

### Chapter 3: *The Heavenly Twins*: Individualism, the New Woman, and Desire

Part Two concentrates on two novels by the writer most commonly associated with the figure of the New Woman: Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) is the focus of this present chapter, and *The Beth Book* (1897) of Chapter 4. Grand's novels represent New Womanhood in an indelible connection to her interest in social purity campaigning: a stark contrast with the literary and political conservatism of Ward's fiction discussed in Part One. In this chapter, my purpose is to scrutinise three elements in *The Heavenly Twins*, namely Grand's interest in individualism; the extent to which this is inalienable from her representation of the New Woman, and how far these two former categories are troubled by desire in her narratives. In the next chapter dealing with *The Beth Book*, my discussion is concerned with individualism, duty, and violence. Significantly, this thesis employs the nineteenth-century politico-economic theory of individualism to read Grand's selected fiction in its socio-cultural context. While there has been a rich development in relation to her writing thanks to the significant contribution of Ann Heilmann, Teresa Mangum, and Angelique Richardson, the focus on individualism as a discipline has been informed mostly by Regenia Gagnier's important work, although her reading of the New Woman through the economic/scientific lens is not particularly concerned with the chosen novels under scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> At the end of Part Two, I will conclude by drawing on Grand's attitudes towards both novels in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), hereafter abbreviated as *NWS*; Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), hereafter abbreviated as *MMM*; Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), hereafter abbreviated as *LELNC*; Regenia Gagnier, 'Individualism from the New Woman to the Genome: Autonomy and Independence' in *Partial Answers: A Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 2003), pp. 103-128; pp. 108-109 discuss Grand's short story 'Eugenia' (1894).

develop a comparative perspective. Before beginning my main discussion, I shall introduce Grand and her life, her social role, and her works.

### **I. Sarah Grand: A Literary Life**

Sarah Grand was the pseudonym of Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke McFall (10 June, 1854 – 12 May, 1943). She was the daughter of an English naval surgeon, Edward John Bellenden (1813-1862), and Margaret Bell Sherwood (1813-1874). At her first school, the Royal Naval School at Twickenham, Grand became interested in Josephine Butler (1828-1906).<sup>2</sup> A renowned feminist and social reformer, in 1869, Butler formed the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts which enacted injustice and cruelty onto prostitutes in places where military men and naval officers were garrisoned.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts proved to have a profound influence on Grand's adolescent mind, its impact significantly 'effective and far-reaching'.<sup>4</sup> The result of Grand's efforts, at age fifteen, in founding a club to support Butler's cause was her expulsion from school.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, her impression and convictions became confirmed and grew deep-rooted; they resurfaced in her writings including *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*.

In fact, both novels convey her wish to educate readers on the dangers of venereal disease and legislation described in the Introduction which did not protect women against contagion. In addition to the arguments she made in these novels, Grand demonstrated a deep level of awareness and knowledge about such issues in her journalism: '[t]here are

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<sup>2</sup> George W. and Lucy A. Johnson, eds, James Stuart, introd., *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1909), pp. 1, 312.

<sup>3</sup> Drew D. Gray, 'City of Dreadful Delights: Vice, Prostitution and Victorian Society' in *London's Shadows: The Dark Side of the Victorian City* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Forward, 'Attitudes to Marriage and Prostitution in the Writings of Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, Sarah Grand and George Egerton' in *Women's History Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1999), p. 66; hereafter abbreviated as 'AMP'.

<sup>5</sup> Forward, 'AMP', p. 67.

upwards of a hundred thousand women in London doomed to damnation by the written law of man if they dare to die, and to infamy for a livelihood if they must live'.<sup>6</sup> Voicing her feminist concerns, Grand makes a connection between men's hypocrisy, their exploitation of women/prostitutes, and these laws which evoked the sexual and moral double standard. As Margaret Hunt notes, '[c]ritics of the CD Acts were outraged by the fact that they seemed to sanction prostitutes and hence male vice'.<sup>7</sup> Blatantly in breach of 'female civil liberties', these Acts 'enshrined the "double standard" of Victorian gender politics and concentrated all its attack on disease upon the body of the working-class prostitute rather than on the actions of her clients.'<sup>8</sup> Grand examined such issues in earnest in *The Beth Book*, a book which many of her readers, scholars, and critics familiar with both her work and her life have deemed semi-autobiographical.<sup>9</sup> While the eponymous heroine marries a medical doctor, in real life Grand married an army surgeon, David Chambers McFall, in 1871 when she was sixteen and he thirty-nine and a widower.<sup>10</sup> In addition to McFall's two sons from his previous marriage, they had a son together: born in 1871, David Archibald Edward McFall was known among his family as Archie.<sup>11</sup> Being a surgeon's wife afforded Grand access to a wealth of medical knowledge which would appear in much of her future writing, including the two under scrutiny.

Socially, Grand was active in her campaign against the threats of venereal disease, more specifically that of syphilis. The disease was perceived as a threatening epidemic in

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' in *North American Review*, vol. 158, no. 448 (March, 1894), pp. 270-276; reprinted in Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward, eds, *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), vol. 1, p. 34; hereafter abbreviated as 'NAWQ' and *SSPSG* respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Hunt, 'The De-Eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys' in *Feminist Review*, no. 34, Perverse Politics: Lesbian Issues (Spring, 1990), p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Gray, 'City of Dreadful Delights', p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Sally Mitchell, ed., *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 343.

<sup>10</sup> Forward, 'AMP', p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Forward, 'AMP', p.67.

the later nineteenth century: a perception which fuelled both the legislation itself and the organised attempts to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. Grand lectured in Britain as well as America on a wide range of political issues relating to women, she became vice-president of the Women Writers' Suffrage League formed in 1908.<sup>12</sup> It was the first professional organisation of women writers in Britain.<sup>13</sup> Grand argues her point in support of the vote eloquently during an 1896 interview entitled 'The Woman's Question' published in the *Humanitarian*, concluding that: 'it is most important that women should have the right to vote in Parliamentary elections. ... for ... [men] cannot understand our wants as well as we do ourselves.'<sup>14</sup> As Carol Senf notes, Grand was politically active all her life as can be seen from the local offices she held including president of the local branch of the National Council of Women; president, chairman, and principal speaker of the Tunbridge Wells branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; and mayoress in Bath between 1922 and 1929 although she declined a proposal to her to act as mayor in full capacity afterwards.<sup>15</sup> Grand's involvement in politics poses a stark contrast to that of Ward, who became president of the Anti-Suffrage League in 1908.<sup>16</sup> However, their differing stance extends beyond the question of suffrage as my reading of their fiction shall attest.

With regard to Grand's, they are divided into two distinct genres: fiction and journalism. Significantly, her novels are discussed by, among others, Ann Heilmann, Teresa Mangum, and Angelique Richardson, while her non-fiction has been made

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Introduction' in *The Heavenly Twins*, ed. and introd., Carol A. Senf (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. vii-xxxvii; p. xxxiv.

<sup>13</sup> Sowon S. Park, 'Doing Justice to the Real Girl: The Women Writers' Suffrage League' in Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini, eds, *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah A. Tooley, 'The Woman's Question: An Interview with Madame Sarah Grand' in *The Humanitarian*, vol. 8 (1896), pp. 161-169; reprinted in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, pp. 222-223; hereafter abbreviated as 'WQ'.

<sup>15</sup> Senf, 'Introduction' in *The Heavenly Twins*, pp. xxxiv- xxxv.

<sup>16</sup> Maroula Joannou, 'Mary Augusta Ward (Mrs. Humphry) and the Opposition to Women's Suffrage' in *Women's History Review*, vol. 14, no. 3 & 4 (2005), p. 567.

available by Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward in the 5-volume anthology entitled *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts* (1998) and the 4-volume *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand* (2000).<sup>17</sup> Grand's important novels are *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897). Due to their controversial materials, it was difficult for Grand to find publishers; she published *Ideala* anonymously at her own expense. Later she assumed the name 'Madame Sarah Grand' to which she adhered for the rest of her life. Gillian Kersley, author of Grand's biography *Darling Madame: Sarah Grand and Devoted Friend* (1983), notes that the decision was largely influenced by her husband, for McFall disapproved of her ideas and did not wish his name to be linked with them.<sup>18</sup> Grand's independence in fact started as early as in 1890 when she left her family to concentrate on her chosen career as a feminist writer, an act which offers a logical explanation when viewed in the context of British legal reforms in the late nineteenth century. Grand left McFall after the Married Woman's Property Act was passed in 1882; as I remarked in the introductory chapter, the act is crucial to the question of marriage, individualism, and feminism in the 1880s and 1890s as it enabled women to control their own property instead of losing their inheritance, earnings, and incomes received before as well as during marriage, and the right to execute wills to the husband. Under this law, therefore, Grand was enabled to manage her money and support herself without having to depend on McFall. I discuss the injustice of such laws in detail in the next chapter, '*The Beth Book*: Individualism, duty, and violence', which focuses on Grand's representation of violence in connection with the eponymous heroine's marriage.

Indeed, Grand's second major novel, *The Heavenly Twins* attracted much attention and instantly elevated her status to the same level as well-established authors. As a reviewer noted in 1893, '[t]he "Heavenly Twins" has excited more conversation and

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<sup>17</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*; Mangum, *MMM*; Richardson, *LELNC*; Ann Heilmann, ed. and introd., *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998); Heilmann and Forward, *SSPSG*.

<sup>18</sup> Senf, 'Introduction' in *The Heavenly Twins*, p. xxxi.

controversy than perhaps any other book that has appeared since “Robert Elsmere”<sup>19</sup>. As should be clear from the first chapter of this thesis, this comparison of Grand’s work with Ward’s 1888 novel is not as unexpected as it might seem. Although the explicit sexual radicalism of *The Heavenly Twins* might appear a world away from the theological controversies that form the central plot of *Robert Elsmere*, both novels work through issues of individualism, new moralities and new social relations in various iterations of the New Woman in their representations of marriage. The *Review of Reviews* critic, W. T. Stead, was perceptive in his criticism that ‘Sarah Grand in “The Heavenly Twins” has achieved the greatest success among women writers of fiction since Mrs. Humphrey [*sic*] Ward wrote “Robert Elsmere.”’ But the phenomenal sale of her novel is a small thing compared with the result she achieved in breaking up the conspiracy of silence in society on the frivolous side of marriage.’<sup>20</sup>

In terms of Grand’s journalistic writing, she was a prolific contributor who concentrated on the topical debates of the day, especially in terms of the late-Victorian Woman Question. Her journalism conveyed the author’s attempts to improve the current conditions of marriage, to reform public attitudes towards the relationship between men and women, to educate women of dangers of the moral double standard as well as marriage if instigated in ignorance, and to benefit the health of humankind and ensure a stable and powerful future.<sup>21</sup> Further to Grand’s concerns with the question of gender, this thesis contends that individualism forms a significant basis of her arguments. As I remarked in the Introduction, Grand and Ouida gave birth to the New Woman through their journalism in 1894. Four years afterwards, Grand advocated her support for the New Woman, a positively attractive creature complete with feminine and moralistic attributes,

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<sup>19</sup> Anon., ‘The Gentlewoman: “Sarah Grand”’ in *Gentlewomen* (23 December, 1893); reprinted in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 441.

<sup>20</sup> W. T. Stead, ‘The Novel of Modern Women: Sarah Grand’ in *Review of Reviews*, vol. 10 (1894), p. 67; reprinted in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 454.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘The Man of the Moment’ in *North American Review*, vol. 158 (May, 1894), pp. 620-628; reprinted in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. 621.



by enumerating the differences between the two antagonistic entities and calling into question the traditional gender roles: ‘the New Woman is well endowed ... when the Old Woman is more than usually censorious’.<sup>22</sup>

To clarify her stance regarding the Woman Question once for all, Grand reminded her readers and critics alike that they needed a change both in character and attitude: ‘[t]wenty years ago women were held in such low esteem, in consequence of the tactics of the Old Woman ... but the New Woman came, exacted respect, and won it.’<sup>23</sup> Grand represented the endeavours of New Woman writers to redefine the female roles into independent women. Whereas in patriarchal society, marriage and motherhood were deemed the only appropriate occupations for them, these writers argued for encouragement and accommodation for women’s professional ambitions. Concerning gender issues, Grand informed her interviewer in 1896 of her re-engineering scheme starting at the smallest unit of the home and educational system: ‘[t]he nursery is the proper place to teach the equality of the sexes, and a system of co-education would greatly help in this direction.’<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Grand became known for her maternalist and social purist position that ‘demanded a levelling-up of male morals’.<sup>25</sup> The interview thus serves to underscore the strand of difference feminism reflected in her journalistic writing and her persistent emphasis on the importance of sexual purity, marriage, and maternity.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the ways in which *The Heavenly Twins* reflects not only women’s social, legal, and financial disadvantages, but also the sexual double standard that turned a blind eye to male promiscuity. While Ann Heilmann has done much valuable work to draw attention to Grand’s interest in social and sexual purity, and

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘The New Woman and the Old’ in *Lady’s Realm* (1898); reprinted in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, pp. 466-470; p. 467; hereafter abbreviated as ‘NWO’.

<sup>23</sup> Grand, ‘NWO’ in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. 469.

<sup>24</sup> Tooley, ‘WQ’ in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 226

<sup>25</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, pp. 160.

Angelique Richardson has helped us to understand how this intersects with late-nineteenth-century social-Darwinism, the focus of my analysis falls on the discourse of self and rights that grew out of the liberalism of John Stuart Mill and the Married Women's Property campaigns.<sup>26</sup> Based on Grand's central female protagonists, their rationality and independence, I suggest that Grand uses individualism and the New Woman figure to question the rights of women and (un)womanliness. Furthermore, I look at Grand's representation of gender roles, male and female sexualities, and premarital chastity in relation to desire and contagious diseases. In addition, the fact that there are three heroines is important as they serve different purposes. While Evadne's sexual abstinence and Angelica's strong sense of independence establish Grand's perception of individualism, Edith's conventional womanliness represents the Old Woman. Through Evadne and Edith, it becomes apparent that the body itself and its rights are the site of battle: the Old Woman underlines the argument that sexual desire is a threat to self-possessed individualism in Grand's narrative. I contend that individualism serves as the weapon against oppression. In the first section of this chapter, I will concentrate on the representation of individualism in Evadne's character, followed by that of Angelica, in preparation for a comparison with Grand's portrayal of Edith. This pattern will be repeated in the second section where I focus on the literary depiction of the New Woman, and section which focuses on desire in the third.

## **II. Individualism**

*The Heavenly Twins* is remarkable for its representation of female individualism in tension with social norms. First, central to Grand's feminism, she employs rationality to characterise Evadne, who epitomises self-control, abstinence, and sexual selection, as a

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<sup>26</sup> Heilmann and Forward, *SSPSG*, vol. 1; Richardson, *LELNC*.

means to argue that control over one's own body is very important. The novelist portrays her as an individual determined to follow her own principles rather than letting anyone exercise control over her: 'Mother, I will do anything you suggest except the one thing. I will not live with Major Colquhoun as his wife.'<sup>27</sup> The depiction of Evadne as a thoughtful, outspoken, and independent-minded character shielding herself against contagious disease encapsulates the idea of individualism articulated in Mill's liberal discourse. Scholars have not yet discussed this representation of Evadne as an individualist. While Ardis analyses sexual abstinence in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), Heilmann identifies 'defence of the rights of the individual' in Mona Caird's *The Morality of Marriage* (1897), and Richardson notes 'Evadne's abstinence after marriage on health and political grounds' as the sign of Grand's eugenics.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the heroine's individualist assertion of the right to self-protection clashes with the traditional notion of femininity to which her mother, Mrs. Frayling, expects her to conform. Symbolising society, Mrs. Frayling condemns Evadne for being 'selfish and unnatural', which opposes to Mill's argument that individuality is not selfishness but a promise of progress (*HT*, p. 107).<sup>29</sup> Daring to be different, fighting for the good cause, and living for the desired independence, Evadne functions as a contrast to the docile and naïve Edith who epitomises the feminine ideal.

Since the New Woman's individualism is informed by her rationality, it becomes apparent that Grand here urges her readers to realise the importance of the power to reflect. The author represents Evadne as habitually taking 'everything *au grand sérieux*, and to consider it' (*HT*, p. 7). Thus, Evadne's question on how it is 'as if her people were

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<sup>27</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1893), p. 107; hereafter cited in the text as *HT*.

<sup>28</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, pp. 166-167; Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 110; cited in Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 161; Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), pp. 101-102; hereafter abbreviated as *OL*.

satisfied that by enforcing silence they could prevent thought' stresses that female freedom of speech must accompany free-thinking before any change and improvement in women's situation can be realised (*HT*, p. 20). Furthermore, this thought functions on two levels: while it depicts Evadne as an obedient child who respects the parental authority by keeping quiet, it charts the depth of her penetrating vision. The New Woman emblematises perceptiveness, discerning a fault in what Grand calls 'old and accustomed', traditional ideas concerning the rights of women (*HT*, p. 20). Acting as Grand's mouthpiece, Evadne proposes the right for women to decide for themselves and not be forced to marry someone 'steeped in vice' (*HT*, p. 20). Grand's conclusion appears modern in that without individualism, defined in the novel as woman's freedom of thought and decision-making, marriage represents oppression instead of liberation.

Moreover, the novel emphasises the urgency of such change through Evadne's outspokenness: this individualistic trait enables the heroine to overcome her fear for impropriety. What she exclaims causes 'alarm and horror' to both herself and Edith: 'Edith! You are not going to marry that dreadful man?' (*HT*, p. 232) The confrontation of the two heroines, each with her strong will, metaphorically represents of opposite sets of beliefs. Edith reveals her naïve conviction, 'with bright eyes full of confidence and passion', insisting repeatedly that 'I can make him all that he ought to be! I know I can!' (*HT*, p. 235) However, Edith is not the only one who deeply believes in love. Even her mother backs her up. Mrs. Beale assures Evadne that 'Edith has accepted him [Sir Mosley Menteith] because she loves him, and that is *enough*' (*HT*, p. 233; my emphasis). In essence, Grand condemns such men in her journalistic writing as guilty of 'cowardliness', with Menteith being an archetype who preys on 'a young, ill-educated girl's' 'mistaken notions of life; who knows her nature while she herself is kept in ignorance of it, and uses his knowledge to degrade her. That is not fair play.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Grand, 'NWO' in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. 470.

Grand employs the tragic death of her Old Woman character, Edith, who has done her wifely as well as reproductive duties, to stress the disastrous result of an innocent marrying a syphilitic man. In contrast, Evadne insistently refuses to consummate her marriage due to her husband's dubious past. Grand suggests that by regarding marriage and self-abnegation as their prime duty, women may unwittingly put themselves at risk of contracting diseases: 'Edith ha[s] been robbed of all means of self-defence by the teaching which insist[s] that her only duty as a wife consist[s] in silent submission to her husband's will.' (*HT*, p. 280) The eventual death of the Old Woman conveys both Grand's reaction against the Victorian 'stress on pre-marital chastity and ignorance' and her reaffirmation of the desirability of female individualism.<sup>31</sup> Richardson points out that Grand relies on New Woman heroines to promote sexual knowledge in women, as these characters benefit from 'exercising their superior capacity for sexual selection on rational grounds'.<sup>32</sup> Grand employs Menteith's syphilitic body didactically to make a case for her eugenic belief, cautioning her readers to heed their 'reproductive partner' since their 'breeding' could benefit the country and its empire in significant ways.<sup>33</sup> What underlies this authority in relation to collective 'racial' fitness, however, is the delineation of a strongly individualised self. In Grand's work, I suggest, a sense of rational control and rights over one's body as a female individual is the basis of any further advance for women (and the nation): but female sexual desire remains a troubling factor in this process.

Textually, Grand characterises Evadne's rationalism in terms of self-principled sexual abstinence. Lacking Evadne's wisdom and willpower – or individualist practice – Edith devotes herself unreservedly to her marriage, the consummation of which ironically causes her premature demise. Her death underscores the importance of knowledge to

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<sup>31</sup> Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 124.

<sup>33</sup> Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 9.

avoid sexually transmitted diseases. However, the novelist was harshly criticised by the conservative public which appeared to be in denial of the existence of such evils, despite the factual reports and manuals that were published and became promptly banned.<sup>34</sup> In using the novel to discuss the taboo subject of venereal disease, Grand proposes a logical and practical solution in terms of the New Woman's abstinence. This notion was first introduced in her earlier novel, *Ideala*, the first of this important feminist trilogy.

When it comes to the literary representation of male sexuality, Grand's narrative stresses its raw animal nature: a sense of crude sexual attraction, such as that which draws Menteith's attention to the 'manoeuvres' performed by 'one of those good-looking girls of the middle class who throng to fashionable watering-places in the season—young women with senses rampant, and minds undisciplined, impelled by natural instinct to find a mate...' (*HT*, p. 279). The novelist acknowledges that woman is just as much a sexual being as man. However, she further proposes that those women who are exceptional – but are the true 'New' future of womanhood, have reserve or control over their natural instinct, which is why Evadne is extolled in the novel by her refusal to fall for Colquhoun's sex appeal.

The practice of self-control and abstinence is inalienable in the novel from Evadne's individualism, without which the heroine is likely to succumb to the strong masculine appeal: 'It flatter[s] [Colquhoun's] vanity to perceive that this curiously well-informed and exceedingly strong-minded young lady bec[omes] as weakly emotional as any school girl the moment she [finds] herself face to face with him.' (*HT*, p. 110) Grand acknowledges that sexuality is part of womanhood. Yet the novelist stands firm in her argument that prudence is the best policy.<sup>35</sup> The novel portrays the young Evadne with

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<sup>34</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, ed., *The Sexuality Debates* (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1987).

<sup>35</sup> John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 269; Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 100; Simon Szreter, *Fertility, Class and Gender in Britain, 1860-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 570.

‘the natural instincts of a being rich in vitality, and wholesome physical force’ (*HT*, p. 344). Behind her ‘dignified self-possession’, she admits a tender feeling for Colquhoun ‘whose every glance and word ha[ve] thrilled her with pleasurable emotion’ (*HT*, pp. 44, 344). In one instance, Colquhoun, aware of his power to manipulate his wife through his good looks and that ‘caressing of the voice’, tries his best to entreat and reconcile her to a more conventional husband-and-wife relationship:

He sat down beside her, *close* to her: ‘Will you forget all this? ... Will you forget my *past*? ... Will you consent, Evadne, will you — my wife — will you?’

He lent forward *so close* that her senses were troubled — *too close*, for she pushed her chair back to relieve herself of the oppression, and the act irritated him. (*HT*, p. 344; my emphases)

The stress on the close proximity of their bodies, and the fact that Evadne has to struggle against Colquhoun’s presence, serves to highlight two things: Evadne’s sexualised nature, and her strong will which keeps the other in check. So successfully has she suppressed her desire that Colquhoun becomes frustrated and accuses her of being ‘cold-blooded’, to which Evadne ‘sa[ys] nothing, but ... smile[s]. She [i]s not cold-blooded, and he kn[ows] it as well as she d[oes].’ (*HT*, p. 345)

In the above quotations, Colquhoun’s frustration is doubled as he realises that although his wife is attracted to him, she resolutely withholds her sexuality because he may well be a carrier of venereal disease, as suggested by a mysterious letter on her wedding day and her cool reaction thereafter. It is the instance of female rational self-possession and self-control such as this which deepens the conflict between the New Woman and her husband and undermines the future of their marriage. Thus, sexualisation represents the New Woman’s weakness because it demonstrates an anti-rational act when faced with temptation. For example, Evadne has ‘her own momentary yearning to be held close, close; to be kissed till she could not think; to live the intoxicating life of the senses only, and not care’ (*HT*, p. 344). The importance of the word ‘momentary’ here, however,

is in its power to restore Evadne's individualism through her retrieval of self-control and the determination not to let her emotions rule over her reason. To be an individual agent with rational self-determination, in Grand's fiction, requires strict control over the senses.

Grand's eugenic ideas support my argument that the New Woman's sexual abstinence as represented in her novels is the result of the protagonist's individualism: Evadne's knowledge in medicine and phrenology dictates a need for self-preservation which calls for discipline and self-control against both sex appeal and the natural call of maternity. Following *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin's pioneering and controversial work published in 1859, Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a cousin of Darwin, started developing his theory of eugenics from the mid-1860s.<sup>36</sup> Grand's interest in eugenics resulted in her argument that a woman should be able to choose her marriage partner in order to produce healthy children and create a happy family. Richardson has already done much to draw attention to how Grand drew on Galtonian eugenics in considering the question of marriage and sexuality, perceiving the author to be 'a committed exponent of biological determinism and eugenic feminism.'<sup>37</sup> This thesis contends that such ideas grounded in the fitness of the collective 'race' sit in tension with Grand's investment in an ideal of female individualism as seen in Evadne's eventual recession. It is worth noting here, however, that Grand's interest in eugenics aligns the desire for personal gratification with the nation's moral and physical regeneration. In other words, the eugenic approach to selecting one's marriage partner carefully and critically to ensure a safe and beneficial marriage suggest a combination of individual and collective endeavour, reflected in the hygienic pursuit of a healthy marriage.

While Evadne raises a question of the double standard of morality, Angelica conveys Grand's concerns about equality and gender oppression. The evidence is clearest

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<sup>36</sup> Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 29-31.

<sup>37</sup> Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 95.



in the New Woman's reaction to the dangers in the marriage of the Old Woman: the horror of marriage and motherhood killing Edith leaves an indelible impression on Angelica who vows to shun marriage altogether. Angelica's defiance against customs as a means of self-defence echoes Mill's advocacy of individualism and women's rights. The character rationalises her – and by extension Grand's thinly veiled – advice to avoid sexually unsafe marriage to a cynical yet sympathetic character, her uncle Lord Dawne:

‘You will marry eventually——’ he began.  
 ‘Like poor Edith? ... That was her ideal,’ Angelica proceeded—‘her own home and husband and family, someone to love and trust and look up to. ... And she was *an exquisite womanly creature!* No, thank you! It isn't safe to be *an exquisite womanly creature* in this rotten world.’ (*HT*, p. 317; emphases in the original)

Angelica's sense of rational choice, based on evidence, personal autonomy and self-possession, functions to emphasise the character's individualism. The novel characterises the twin ‘with true British independence’ (*HT*, p. 31). Instead of relishing the luxurious life of a lady by birth, Angelica is shown to prefer living for a purpose: ‘so irksome d[oes] she find the purposeless existence which the misfortune of having been born a woman compel[s] her to lead.’ (*HT*, p. 469) Essentially, she follows in Evadne's wake, feeling oppressed by the meaninglessness of life as she has ‘but to get up and go to bed, after spending the interval in the elegant and useless way ladies do—a ride, a drive, a dinner, a dance, a little music—trifling all the time to no purpose’ (*HT*, p. 454). Grand thus uses the eventual marriage of Angelica to counteract the sense of confinement demonstrated by the marriage of Edith and Evadne:

‘Oh, yes, I married. That was what was expected of me. Now, my brother when he grew up was asked with the most earnest solicitude what he would like to be or to do; everything was made easy for him to enter upon any career he might choose, but nobody thought of giving *me* a chance.’ (*HT*, p. 460; emphasis in the original)

As a New Woman who defies convention, Angelica will assume a superior, active, masculine role in asking Kilroy to marry her. Grand represents Angelica's radical antagonism to being consigned to the 'women's sphere' through a comparison with her twin brother, and the gender role reversal in the dream episode featuring a brave Angelica challenging ecclesiastical male authority, both of which put an emphasis on the character's strong sense of individualism. She is to be presented at Court, 'brought out in proper splendour; while, with a view to going into the Guards eventually, Diavolo [i]s to be sent to Sandhurst...' (*HT*, p. 295) This passage collocates man's freedom with woman's subjection as a means to highlight both the sense of social restriction and the lack of intellectual opportunity for women.

The novel's representation of female sexuality links it with the notion of female weaknesses, particularly through the character of Edith, and periodically that of Evadne. When the two characters are overcome by their sexuality, they become anti-rational and are reduced to unreasoning animals. Angelica by contrast, exhibits the anti-animalism which characterises her as an asexual New Woman. The twin demonstrates her individualism through her refusal to have a husband-and-wife relationship with Kilroy:

That part of her nature had never been roused into active life, partly because it was not naturally strong, but also because the more refined and delicately sensuous appreciation of beauty in life, which is so much a characteristic of capable women nowadays, dominated such animalism as she was equal to, and made all coarser pleasures repugnant. (*HT*, p. 467)

The novel forms Grand's main argument that individualism, defined here as Angelica's self-regarding action of not submitting to the 'duty' of sexual consummation of marriage, serves as a weapon against desire. The character recommends putting a bounded sense of bodily self-preservation before other-regarding acts when succumbing to her desire may mean venereal risks, which threatens the life of both the New and the Old Woman. Individualism is achieved through the characters' choice of self-willed rationality instead

of desire and conformism. According to Grand's opinion of Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895), '[t]he only difference between us and the beasts of the field is that we can regulate our passions by the exercise of will and principle.'<sup>38</sup> Whilst Richardson and Heilmann have read Grand's ideas of 'progress' in relation to the collective concerns of eugenics, I would suggest that Grand's representations are just as strongly informed by the liberal model of Mill's individualism as discussed in my Introduction. Self-possession, bodily self-control and the duty to the self before others exist in tension with broader collective aims for the progress of the collectivity of women and the race.

To close this section, I must note that although the novel advocates individualism, or women's ability and right to self-protection outside as well as within marriage, this novel is by no means anti-marriage. Indeed Grand herself favoured legal marriage and its protection of women and their children's legitimacy,<sup>39</sup> promoted the idea of 'sexual complementariness' as well as women's 'reproductive function'.<sup>40</sup> The novel does, however, contend that women should be careful and well-informed when selecting their marriage partners: the duty towards the self outweighs any demands of others in marriage and Grand's emphasis on this tenet of liberal individualism reflects the long battles over women's legal status within marriage over the course of the nineteenth century.

### III. The New Woman

Clearly concerned with the cause of the New Woman, the central arguments of *The Heavenly Twins* rest in its call for women's wider range of activities, for which the heroines are portrayed to have great potential. Evadne is quick in learning and naturally intelligent. Angelica is musically gifted, a perfect violinist. Grand's representation of

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<sup>38</sup> Tooley, 'WQ' in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 228.

<sup>39</sup> Tooley, 'WQ' in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> Angelique Richardson, 'The Eugenization of Love: Sarah Grand and the Morality of Genealogy' in *Victorian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (1 January, 1999), p. 229.

women of exceptional talent and genius here, also in *The Beth Book*, draws a connection with Ward through Rose. These strongly marked cases of individual genius require narratives that raise the question of what to do when an individual exceeds the general terms of the collective. The New Woman characters in the two authors' novels are subject to living in a society where traditional views prevail with regard to the 'Women's Sphere' and its limitations. Women are confined within the shadow of the home as represented by these heroines who are deprived of the chance to develop their talents. Grand argues that the lack of women's rights results in acts of rebellion. Angelica opts for the unconventional cross-dressing adventures: her midnight roaming and meetings with the Tenor. Evadne, by contrast, retreats into the shelter of sexual abstinence.

As a New Woman, Evadne represents the early feminist efforts through her mentally agitated, but socially and emotionally inhibited, struggle for the rights of women accentuated by 'a hope that some means may be devised to put right what is so very wrong' (*HT*, p. 342). Grand asserts that this is achievable through a collective endeavour of men as well as women. By '[i]nverting Victorian moral codes with constructed women as icons of purity, Grand called on women to reject "impure" men, while demanding that men contain their sexuality.'<sup>41</sup> Contemporary readers, both British and American, 'hailed' Grand's novel as 'the chief women's rights novel of the period'.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the novelist's critique of the lack of social awareness, support, and sympathy for such reform is expressed through a central male character, Colonel Colquhoun, who by his official title and gender symbolically represents power and superiority. In entreating Evadne not to join any feminist movements after marriage because it will taint

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<sup>41</sup> Heilmann, 'General Introduction' in *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Norma Clarke, 'Feminism and the Popular Novel of the 1890s: A Brief Consideration of a Forgotten Feminist Novelist' in *Feminist Review*, no. 20 (Summer, 1985), p. 95; hereafter abbreviated as 'FPN'.

his name, Colquhoun personifies the oppression which marriage casts on the New Woman as it limits Evadne's independence and freedom of will.

Thus, Grand's use of individualism to characterise her New Woman characters highlights the emergent awareness of, and reaction against, male control. The narrative illustrates the evident clash of will between husband and wife: 'It c[omes] to be pretty generally known that all ha[s] not gone well with the Colquhouns immediately after their marriage.' (*HT*, p. 122) Significantly, while Ward's Marcella and Rose resign individualism in favour of subsuming the self in marital identity, Evadne's self emerges with fresh force from the realisation of legal impediments to individual selfhood. Juxtaposed with the figure of the New Woman is that of the Old Woman. Ironically, Grand represents the character of Mrs. Frayling as an Old Woman herself to criticise the conventional definition of an ideal wife:

'I do know, however, that [Evadne] is perfectly innocent, and I am indeed thankful to think that at eighteen she knows nothing of the world and its wickedness, and is therefore eminently qualified to make somebody an excellent wife.' (*HT*, p. 39)

This statement creates a double irony. First, it is not Evadne's innocence but her knowledge garnered through medical texts which enables her to stay at a safe distance from her husband: both Evadne and Colquhoun agree to cohabit as a means 'to keep up appearances' (*HT*, p. 109). Second, Mrs. Frayling's idea of innocence of 'wickedness' matches that of Edith who 'might have done great good in the world had she known of the evil' (*HT*, p. 158). As an Old Woman, Edith is 'a lovely specimen of a well-bred English girl'; to her parents, she is 'their white child, their pearl' (*HT*, p. 155). Metaphorically, Edith stands for all that is pure and worthy; her character serves as a

perfect model of ideal womanliness, that ‘archetypal chaste virgin-heroine, very young, completely inexperienced, unaroused, [and] guileless’.<sup>43</sup>

In her analysis of the novel, Norma Clarke argues that the ‘principal evil in society’s “protection” of women’ resides in ‘the insistence of the bourgeois ideal on innocence and unworldliness’, the result of which is ‘ignorance which le[ads] women into contamination and [prevents] them fulfilling their highest function as the nation’s moral vanguard.’<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as Margaret Markwick suggests, there is indeed a ‘considerable irony in bringing up daughters to be obedient wives, and then despairing of rescuing them from the pit that obedience and duty trap them in.’<sup>45</sup> Edith’s parents cannot rescue her from the disease and death that are the result of her marriage to the corrupt Menteith, whose degeneration is shielded from her perception because of her ignorance.

While Evadne as a New Woman embodies late-Victorian women’s attempts to gain their rights, Angelica is associated with carefree unwomanliness represented by her adopted ‘transvestism’. The twin assumes her androgynous persona, in Book IV, ‘The Tenor and the Boy – An Interlude’: she becomes a cross-dresser, appearing as her brother, Diavolo, or ‘The Boy’ to the Tenor. The episode emphasises her attempt at circumventing social and cultural violation of the sense of self and freedom experienced by Angelica the debutante. Instead of a celebration, the formal coming-of-age becomes a form of personal oppression: ‘It [i]s not that she ha[s] any actual objection to going to Court and coming out, but only to the way in which the arrangement ha[s] been made—to the coercion in fact’ (*HT*, p. 321). Although the event aims to find her the right marriage partner, Angelica as a New Woman projects a different outlook: to her it means the end of her dreams, her artistic aspirations being ‘to take her violin, and make it ... a

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<sup>43</sup> Margaret Markwick, *Trollope and Women* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1997), p. 146; hereafter abbreviated as *TW*.

<sup>44</sup> Clarke, ‘FPN’, p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> Markwick, *TW*, p. 138.

delight to thousands.’ (*HT*, p. 541) Barred from her ambition, the New Woman finally rebels against that very ‘coercion’ that forces her to conform to the feminine convention.

In the nineteenth century, Ann Heilmann suggests, ‘female cross-dressing became a potent marker of personal and political resistance’ as well as an expression of ‘individual and collective rebellion’.<sup>46</sup> In Angelica’s case, it endows ‘a woman with a potential for anarchic violence.’<sup>47</sup> Angelica’s escapades as ‘The Boy’ thus represent her as a socially transgressive New Woman. The ease with which Angelica the Boy interacts with the Tenor contrasts significantly with her female self on display in public. The utter difference reflects the late-Victorian concerns about female dress and its limitations, especially as the corset had ‘ignited a furore of debate that burned steadily throughout the nineteenth century, reaching its zenith in the 1880s and 1890s.’<sup>48</sup> The corset, that controversial ‘piece of underwear’, had its place in cultural, literary, and medical history as ‘dress reformers and doctors had blamed tight-lacing—lacing a corset to extremely small dimensions—for a variety of female maladies, including neurasthenia and consumption.’<sup>49</sup> As Heilmann notes, the damage could be fatal by ‘impair[ing] the blood circulation and deform[ing] the skeleton, affecting the lungs and liver, and causing respiratory problems’.<sup>50</sup> As a result, ‘rigorous physical exertion such as dancing could result in death.’<sup>51</sup> In addition to physical pains and threats caused by being tightly-laced, I agree with Christine Kortsch’s argument that for New Woman novelists making the case against this unhealthy fashion, the corset ‘could signify just about anything’.<sup>52</sup> Hence, having avoided the suffocation created by tight garments, though temporarily, I perceive

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<sup>46</sup> Ann Heilmann, ‘(Un)Masking Desire: Cross-dressing and the Crisis of Gender in New Woman Fiction’ in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2000), pp. 83-111; p. 84; hereafter abbreviated as ‘UMD’.

<sup>47</sup> Linda Dowling, ‘The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s’ in Lyn Pykett, ed. and introd., *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 50.

<sup>48</sup> Christine Bayles Kortsch, *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women’s Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 56; hereafter abbreviated as *DCLVWF*.

<sup>49</sup> Kortsch, *DCLVWF*, p. 56.

<sup>50</sup> Heilmann, ‘UMD’, p. 92.

<sup>51</sup> Heilmann, ‘UMD’, p. 92.

<sup>52</sup> Kortsch, *DCLVWF*, p. 56.

that Angelica stands for the New Woman's demand for room to 'breathe' freely, to enjoy the same 'convenience' and freedom as men.<sup>53</sup> In other words, female cross-dressing becomes a means by which the New Woman goes into the male sphere of activity.

The twin's assumed male self thus serves 'to test the boundaries of gender identity'.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the New Woman as a female cross-dresser disrupts the fixed sexual norm when she adorns herself so well as the opposite sex, both in clothes and in mannerism. The aspect of this sexual fluidity threatens to disintegrate society and its future which depends so much on the reproductive functions of heterosexual coupling. Such threats caused by sexually deviant performances, such as seen through the homosexual reading of the relationship between a cross-dressed Angelica (as Diavolo) and the Tenor,<sup>55</sup> contrast the presence of erotic desire between these two outwardly male but anatomically different characters, with its absence in the heterosexual marriage of Angelica and Kilroy. However, such homoerotic tensions within the text are dispersed once Angelica returns to her femininity.

Angelica's femininity is in fact rather fluid and fluctuating. It becomes a site of conflict especially if we look back to the scene leading up to her marriage proposal. Finally, having in part given in to the system that confiscates freedom from her, Angelica nevertheless 'h[olds] her peace, and [goes] to walk off her irritation in the grounds alone; and there she encounter[s] her fast friend of many years' standing, Mr. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe' (*HT*, p. 321). Symbolically, the sight of a frustrated Angelica as a lone walking figure highlights the importance of woman's personal space. But again, as the narrative already signifies, her moment of privacy does not last when it is disrupted by Kilroy entering into the scene on horseback. The friendship between the two is a significant aspect in the novel especially with regard to the vast age gap, with Kilroy

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<sup>53</sup> Heilmann, 'UMD', p. 95.

<sup>54</sup> Demetris Bogiatzis, 'Sexuality and Gender: "The Interlude" of Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*' in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2001), p. 53.

<sup>55</sup> Heilmann, 'UMD', pp. 97-101.



being twenty years her senior (*HT*, p. 544). But this friendship is about to change its form. Noticing her acute frustration, Kilroy asks, ‘in his peculiarly kindly way’, how he can help her, which results in one of the most memorable moments in the novel: “‘Marry me!’ sa[ys] Angelica, stamping her foot at him—“Marry me, *and let me do as I like.*”” (*HT*, p. 321; emphasis in the original)

The apparent lack of romance and the evidence of her stubborn, furious sense of independence adds to the already unconventional nature of this proposal. Moreover, Grand uses the reversal of gender roles to enhance Angelica’s affinity with the New Woman. The twin is the one being active as opposed to Kilroy’s passive, feminine (‘kindly’), subdued quietness and resigned character. The constructions of gender become confused momentarily, especially when we take into account the actual proposal scene which includes the figure of the horse, which was a literary trope of ‘versatile, evocative, and significant uses’ in nineteenth-century fiction.<sup>56</sup> As a means of transportation, horses were associated with an aristocratic masculinity which claimed the freedom of the road. Thus, the horse becomes the site on which Angelica’s anxiety is displaced, for ‘[w]hen he saw her he dismounted, and Angelica snatched the whip from his hand, and clenching her teeth gave the horse a vicious slash with it, which set him off at a gallop into the woods.’ (*HT*, p. 321) Although the New Woman does not mount the horse, the fact that she whips him and subjects him to her whim suggests an image of female horsemanship which disrupts the other images of femininity and domesticity typically associated with a heroine. Essentially, instead of appearing subservient as deemed appropriate of her sex, Angelica threatens to be subversive despite the fact that both she and the horse are metaphorically the two domesticated animals to serve man’s use. To illustrate this, both have limited physical liberties: horses are reined and harnessed, whereas women are

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<sup>56</sup> Gina M. Dorré, *Victorian Fiction and the Cult of the Horse* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 16.

corseted and crinolined. Both are disciplined by men to submit to them and will be punished if they rebel or cross the line.

The novel represents the tensions between an untamed Angelica and a group of powerful men, whose confrontation substantiates this reading. Primarily, Angelica serves as Grand's forefront spokesperson as seen in her consistent defence and fight for the women's cause. It is this assumption of equality, in other words Angelica's conscious lack of womanliness, that has 'electrified' man as demonstrated by an episode about her dream (*HT*, p. 295). Twice in her dream, she is shown to be indifferent to the thought that she is defying the long-standing image of the ideal woman. By claiming that 'This is love. Love is life. I am his. He is mine. Most of all, he is *mine!*' and kissing the 'man', Angelica provokes 'a chorus of men from the earth' who are looking up at her as she hovers in the 'sphere' (*HT*, p. 294; emphasis in the original). The distance between these men and Angelica symbolically emphasises the superior position of the latter. I perceive the dream to function as Grand's allegory of sexual relations and institutionalisation of women's civic and sexual oppression. Nevertheless, the novel carefully notes that this is only a dream, which means that it would never materialise in reality.

Furthermore, despite its transience, the dream episode makes a salient point by echoing the conservative response to the New Woman, since it represents men as a collective throughout while woman is depicted as an exceptional individual. In other words, Grand uses Angelica's subversive dream subtly to represent the conflict arising from the character's challenge to male authority over women. The men try to prevent Angelica from usurping their power: 'No, we can't allow that!' (*HT*, p. 294) Together, the men reject Angelica's unconventional character as well as the quest for equality: 'You're beginning to know too much. You'll want to be paid for your labour next just as well as we are, and that is *unwomanly!*' (*HT*, p. 294; emphasis in the original) However, as a New Woman heroine, Angelica is untroubled by her unwomanliness: she is an

individual who exceeds the collective gender category and hence her usefulness – as with so many iterations of the New Woman – in substituting individualism for collectivism in matters of gender politics. On the contrary, indeed, the men’s criticism, claiming that she does not conform to the culturally constructed sexual codes, only serves to underline Angelica’s individualism. What is implied by the term ‘unwomanly’ above is the New Woman’s brain, which causes her to ‘know too much’, and thus becomes a threatening figure to male authority.

The feminism of this novel rests on its central argument for the rights of women through the marriage plots of Evadne and Edith, and negotiation of unwomanliness through the character of Angelica. *The Heavenly Twins*, in other words, reflects Grand’s view of the injustice suffered by women in marriage. Both Evadne and Angelica are unable to carry out their aspirations once they enter into marriage because their husbands, and convention, do not allow them to. While the sexual subversions of ‘The Tenor and Boy’ have received much recent critical attention, I have suggested how a deeper element of the narrative works to emphasise Angelica’s individualism and how it questions the very categorisation of gender as a collective – ‘womanhood’. Angelica’s iteration of the New Woman sets up resonances with those of Evadne and Ward’s Rose. The novel demonstrates that when a woman acts in an individualist manner against the collective, self-sacrificing duties of marriage and reproduction, she represents female individualism which calls for equality by unsettling deep structures of the social order. To strengthen her argument, Grand illustrates the threats occasioned by lack of individualism through her portrayal of desire and its fatal consequences which I now turn to investigate.

#### IV. Desire

In this section, my main focus lies in Grand's representation of desire in *The Heavenly Twins* as a means to inform her readers of the dangers caused by venereal disease in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In an unpublished 1894 letter, Grand recorded her fear of the threat of a culture of syphilis on the nation: 'the numbers said to be diseased by dissolute living in Europe are one in three ... and ... the disease is incurable'.<sup>57</sup> This continual dread and anxieties is apparent when the author conveys her concerns through the syphilis plot, in which the Old Woman heroine contracts the disease from her husband, and the New Woman's prophylaxis against possibilities of venereal infection is through self-imposed sexual abstinence. In 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', Grand maintains her support for marriage, but reveals that venereal diseases in married couples are the result of male promiscuity and must be objected to: 'When a man talks about knowing the world and having lived ... he means something objectionable; in seeing life he generally includes doing wrong ... with him liberty mean[s] license [*sic*]'.<sup>58</sup> It was this kind of licence, and the pertinent double standard, which increased the spread of syphilis across all classes of people.

Such concerns caused by the sexual double standard and male vices initiated the so-called social purity campaign as a means to solve these problems. In Grand's social-purist stance, 'she cut[s] across seemingly antipathetic ideological frameworks in combining her virulent critique of contemporary (male) sexual morality with a startlingly modern, sensual exploration of female desire.'<sup>59</sup> The key difference between male and female sexualities, however, is that women are better able to control their desire than men. What social purity campaigners sought was to abolish prostitution – exploitation of

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<sup>57</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Mangum, *MMM*, p. 91. Grand's unpublished letter to Frederick Henry Fisher was dated 22 March, 1894, and is preserved in the special Collections at the UCLA.

<sup>58</sup> Grand, 'NAWQ' in Heilmann, *SSPSG* vol. 1, p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, pp. 14-15.

women and girls – and other sexual activities considered immoral including pornography as a means to end the double standard of morality.<sup>60</sup> In short, social purity aimed at promoting sexual chastity achieved through self-control when desire arises for morally blemished and thus undeserving partners. Therefore, the shortcomings perceived in girls' preparation for marriage are reflected in Grand's 1894 article, 'The Modern Girl': 'For the chief duty of her life she is unprepared. The inconsistencies in the whole education of a girl are both ludicrous and pathetic, and place her in a false if not a dangerous position.'<sup>61</sup> Hence, social purity feminists argued for sex education as a medico-moral prophylactic against men's sexual vice, which became a degenerative force affecting not only feminine purity but also the race, the nation, and the Empire. Through their efforts to cleanse the society of all sexual impurities, their activism was also regarded as part of a social hygiene movement, which believed in women's regenerative abilities.<sup>62</sup>

In the following discussion on desire in its relationship with marriage, I focus on male and female sexualities with which Grand links public social and moral anxieties surrounding the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, I will discuss gender roles and the double standard which encourages male license while women must endure and suffer this social and moral lenience that requires their chastity in return. Finally, I look at the solution given in the novel in Grand's social-purist terms that require women as well as men to practise and preserve pre-marital chastity as a means to ward off such evils she deemed easily avoidable. As both New Woman heroines testify, it becomes apparent that Grand's social-purity feminism echoes Mill's individualism as they both advocate women's right to self-government.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), pp. 98-99; hereafter abbreviated as *BBEFSM*.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Grand, 'The Modern Girl' in *North American Review*, vol. 158 (1894), pp. 706-714; reprinted in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, pp. 40-41.

<sup>62</sup> Bland, *BBEFSM*, p. 52.

<sup>63</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 21, 22.

As contemporary literary portrayals and journalistic writings testify, women's status in the late-Victorian era was still not much improved from the middle decades when the campaign around questions of women's legal identity and property within marriage had first gained force. Despite the real gains of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, women were still subject to oppression as a result of living in male-dominated society. The sense of suppression evident in the literature and journalism of the New Woman era stemmed from the narrow outlook on life, lack of gainful employment, and limited chance to experiment with their sexuality due to the social customs that demanded that they protect their purity until their wedding night. Moreover, society seemed pre-occupied with preserving female innocence by withholding from girls all knowledge relating to sex, even concerning their own puberty.<sup>64</sup> As a result, such innocent minds turned instead into ignorance, and could result in fatal dangers arising from sexual relationships with their husband.

In the novel, Grand's representation of sexualities – through Menteith, Colquhoun, Edith, Evadne, together with the anxieties created by the unstoppable outbreak of syphilis – confirms her view that women must look after themselves and preserve a sharp individuality and sense of primarily self-directed action because the way social customs worked was to their disadvantage. The context of syphilis makes the refusal of the claims of others before the self a matter of life or death. Despite their sexual promiscuity, both Colquhoun and Menteith who epitomise moral contamination thrive on social acceptance: 'at all events they repent and marry, and become respectable men eventually' (*HT*, p. 186). In her campaign for marriage, Grand proposes female individualism as a counterblast to male immorality since marriage to an intellectually and morally inferior husband depresses Evadne and dims her exceptional ability for good while marrying an unsuitable man kills Edith.

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<sup>64</sup> Bland, *BBEFSM*, p. 139.

Metaphorically, Grand uses Edith's neurotic character prior to her death to represent the anger, regret, and revenge of a wronged innocence. Repression has ruined Edith's mental well-being and the repetitiveness of her utterance, suggestive of dementia, expunges her angelic image: 'I am quite, quite mad! I never hurt a creature in my life—never thought an evil thought of anyone; why must I suffer so?' (*HT*, p. 304) Grand's stress on the importance of sexual purity not only in women but also in men, provides an answer to Edith's rhetorical question. It reinforces Grand's view of traditional gender roles: she invests much import in Victorian sexual codes, which explains why her New Woman heroines are not sexual radicals, unlike Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), who epitomise sexual transgression.<sup>65</sup> In the interview, Grand confirmed her life-long support of Butler's cause and the need to continue the fight for women's rights. She proposes compulsory health checks prior to marriage: 'Men endeavour to protect themselves from disease by restrictive laws bearing on women, but nothing has yet been done to protect the married women from contagion.'<sup>66</sup> The allusion to the Contagious Diseases Acts, which are discussed in the next chapter, confirms that women as individuals were weighed as nothing against the collective rights of the military to preserve a fit male fighting force. Grand's focus on the lack of individual rights in married women harks back to Mill's argument against subjection. This lack of rights accentuates the New Woman's need for individualism.

With regard to Grand's representation of marriage and female sexuality, it equates a woman's sexual desire with weakness because it is anti-rational and thus weakens her self-control. This idea is in harmony with the social purity discourse of the novel. Sexual desire is normalised as seen in Evadne's natural response to Colquhoun's sex appeal and

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<sup>65</sup> Lloyd Fernando, *'New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), pp. 129-146; hereafter abbreviated as *NWLVN*; Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and the crisis of Victorianism' in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds, *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 22-44; p. 33, p. 43 n. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Tooley, 'WQ' in Heilmann, *SSPSG*; vol. 1, p. 222.

Angelica's erotic dream which I discussed previously (see pp. 145, 153). Significantly, the novel proves Grand's willingness to portray female desire even though it becomes unconsummated or kept in abeyance. Writing within purity discourse, Grand acknowledges female sexual desire but advocates curbing it through rational acts of self-control and individual choice.

Thus, Grand presents the effects of syphilis as a warning against venereal risks. It causes further damage to Edith's child – another instance of an innocent victim of the double standard. The novel demonstrates that this problem is deep-rooted and difficult to solve: as Lesley Hall concludes, '[n]either feminism and social purity nor sexual science was entirely successful in actually eradicating the double standard.'<sup>67</sup> In rendering the campaign in the form of fiction, Grand inevitably recasts it as a matter of individual character's choices; but perhaps purposely the solution is also one of individualist, rather than collectivist, solutions to the problem of sexual danger within marriage.

To illustrate the oppression of marriage further, Grand uses the character of Reverend Basil St. John, a clergyman, who epitomises the religious establishment and its association with the traditional view which consecrates marriage (*HT*, p. 180). In a counter-argument, Grand employs Mrs. Malcomson, a discerning character, to remind him that a man might bring his wife more harm than good due to prejudice and selfishness (*HT*, p. 180). In addition, Mrs. Malcomson advocates a wider sphere for activity and opportunity, without which women simply become 'the suffering sex' as suggested by Mr. Price introduced below (*HT*, p. 187). She articulates classic liberalism which casts men as selfish individualists in their egoism. Grand's solution here is to even the balance by promoting the individualism of some women to draw attention to the taken-for-granted individualism of men.

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<sup>67</sup> Lesley Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Gender & History*, vol. 16, no. 1 (April, 2004), p. 50.



As I noted earlier, the novel argues that in order to avoid suffering, desire must be controlled. Thus, Grand highlights the limited but stark power of individualist acts by exceptional women as a means to fight back the dangers of men's collective conspiracy against equality. An amiable elderly character and a liberal 'humanitarian', Mr. Austin B. Price expresses his genuine pity towards women for being kept 'in ignorance of the source of most of their sufferings, mental and physical' (*HT*, pp. 177, 183, 187). Grand uses Price's argument to imply that both religious and social arrangements are behind the endorsement of male selfishness: 'the once vicious man becomes the father of vicious children and the grandfather of criminals. You persuade women to marry these men. The arrangement is perfect. Man's safety, and man's pleasure' (*HT*, p. 186). Price's sympathetic, feminist-oriented character voices the contemporary view on marriage which allows men's best interests to override women's needs. The novel highlights the lack of understanding and willingness to tackle this problem through Edith's mother, Mrs. Beale, who takes Menteith's immoral past for granted: 'We *do* know that there have been errors; but all that is over now, and it would be wicked of us not to ... hope for the best' (*HT*, p. 235; emphasis in the original). Her childish belief is strongly contrasted with Evadne's learned apprehension as the latter 'aw[akes] to the significance of all this' (*HT*, p. 231). The exchange presents a visual as well as metaphorical juxtaposition of mature innocence with young wisdom, suggesting that it is not only young girls who are to blame for sexual ignorance but also their parents. The sense of qualm communicated through the New Woman character indicates Grand's call for change.

In conclusion, Grand argues that it is unhealthy for women to tolerate social expectations that unfairly dictate their lives and limit their minds. She interpolates this idea through Sir Shadwell Rock, a highly acclaimed medical man. Establishing his character's authority through his expert knowledge and career, the author cautions her readers against blind conformism summed up in Sir Shadwell's perceptive prediction:

‘The [social] restrictions imposed upon women of ability warp their minds, and the rising generation suffers’ (*HT*, p. 639). His remark serves as Grand’s warning against treating ‘woman’ as a sex as a single collective category and instead argues for a constellation of female individuals who in turn are encouraged to view the world from an individualist perspective in search of what is best *for* them. In addition to connecting marriage with the sense of oppression, Angelica’s masquerading – an act of self-serving pleasure – questions the ideal of womanliness and domesticity constituted in women’s feminine duties towards husband, children, and home-making. The novel critiques both the ideal of marriage and the double standard, and identifies the latter as the cause of the New Woman’s rejection of this traditional institution.

Thus, I perceive that Grand effectively uses another instance of gender role reversal to represent the New Woman’s intellect and confidence. The novelist weakens the male sex through Angelica’s polite but authoritative usurpation of power: ‘now step down gracefully, take your pensions and perquisites, and hold your tongues. Men are the muscle, the hard working material of the nation; women are the soul and spirit, the directing intelligence’ (*HT*, p. 295). Angelica’s analysis implies the need of cooperation between men and women, which makes the body complete and functional. However, it also invokes Grand’s argument against intellectual oppression by equating men to muscles that are strong but unable to think, while women are shown to be superior intellectually yet are deprived of the opportunity to exercise their power. Ironically, the New Woman’s moment of supremacy becomes short-lived. In Grand’s portrayal of Angelica’s dream, the character confronts the ‘Pope of Rome’ who powerfully thunders, ‘HOME IS THE WOMAN’S SPHERE!’ (*HT*, p. 295; emphasis in the original)

The above scene evokes the controversial ideology of separate spheres which disables many capable married women from achieving their full potential professionally. Thus, *The Heavenly Twins* poses a difficult problem related to two aspects of the late

nineteenth-century debates: gender roles and the social purity movement. Two of the four main marriages feature good husbands: readers never question Kilroy's and Galbraith's moral probity. Nevertheless, Kilroy forbids Angelica from assuming a professional role, even though she subconsciously refutes in her dream that 'it would be a creditable thing for her to take her violin, and make it what it was intended to be, a delight to thousands.' (*HT*, p. 541) Likewise, though pure-minded and loving, Galbraith infantilises his wife as soon as they '[a]re settled' and, in his capacity as her private doctor, he 'trie[s] to order her life so as to take her mind completely out of the old groove.' (*HT*, p. 659)

Significantly, Book VI, entitled 'The Impressions of Dr. Galbraith', accentuates the novel's shift from third- to first-person narrative, which signifies that, upon marriage, Galbraith manages to appropriate his wife's voice completely.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, even morally sound men undermine women: although Kilroy and Galbraith fulfil the expectations of social purity campaigners by being chaste and not threatening their wives' purity with diseases, they can still appear to be oppressive intellectually and emotionally. As a social purity and eugenicist discourse, *The Heavenly Twins* achieves its goal by encouraging careful selection of sexual partners. At the same time, it concedes that hopes for freedom and equality within marriage may be long in being realised.

Despite their clear marking as New Woman characters, Evadne and Angelica follow the same pattern in struggling between their individualism and wifely duties after marriage. As the independence implicitly integral to the former obviously does not agree with the latter, Grand represents the New Woman with no alternative but to choose between sacrifices: herself or her marriage. Significantly, for Ward, the answer is that marriage resolves the anomaly of female individualism in the form of the marital unit –

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<sup>68</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 118; Ann Heilmann, 'Narrating the Hysteric: *Fin-de-Siècle* Medical Discourse and Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893)' in Angelique Richardson and Christ Willis, eds, *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 123-135; p. 128.

self-sacrifice is depicted as the necessary good for the collective well-being of society. In contrast, for Grand, marriage can be an insoluble equation with the loss of self through marriage to a dissolute man.

The portrayal of immoral husbands and virtuous wives thus represents the sexual advantage taken through the innocence/ignorance dichotomy. *The Heavenly Twins* censures men who take advantage of the Victorian notion of duty and self-sacrifice that form key ingredients of the ideal womanhood. For example, Evadne remains an ‘ideal’ woman only by submitting to the role of an obedient wife. In other words, she must sacrifice her individualism, intellect, and the desire to lead an active public life, in order to satisfy her (first) husband’s wish. Angelica likewise sacrifices the urge for a life of ‘uncommon freedom’ and autonomy by discarding her persona as ‘The Boy’ to resume the appropriate role as a woman and Kilroy’s wife. Both New Woman characters relinquish their individualism in a bid to gain their husbands’ approval.

Significantly, both Evadne and Angelica are lucky when compared to Edith in that their husbands (in Evadne’s case the second one) are good men. However, the two heroines do not escape the fate that married women are subject to. They are expected to be dutiful wives and mothers, and nothing else. To illustrate this argument, the narrative stresses that Evadne’s depression, followed by her attempted suicide towards the end of the novel, is a result of the permanent damage caused by her first marriage (*HT*, p. 661). Had the suicide been successful, her unborn baby would have been killed along with her. The narrative reveals that the underlying motive for Evadne’s suicide is to save them both ‘from Edith’s fate’ possibly caused by acquired/ congenital infection respectively (*HT*, pp. 665-666). Similarly, Angelica’s character loses its vibrancy; the twin only

regains her active role when she finally leaves her Doll's House existence to realise her socially reformative schemes in *The Beth Book*.<sup>69</sup>

Consequently, the similar fate of the heroines underpins the lasting impact that a bad, limiting marriage has on the New Woman. The initial portrayal of Evadne as a sexual, desiring being of 'refined senses' serves to highlight her conversion as she develops into a mature, restrained character, a contrast which emphasises Grand's dynamic play between the New Woman and the Old Woman. Echoing Mary Ward's Marcella, Evadne's nervous breakdown signals the defeat of the New Woman as she eventually shrinks back into a silent and vulnerable Old Woman who must rely on male support to live. These symptoms are manifested towards the end of the novel as hysterical depression, with which Dr. Galbraith diagnoses her. Grand's representation of the permanent loss of individualism as a means to self-protection continues as Evadne reappears as a traditional, subdued, and silent character in *The Beth Book*. Therefore, Grand posits that Evadne's marriage to Dr. Galbraith, an honourable, kind, and loving husband, cannot cure her of a mental disease which results from her demoralising marriage to Colquhoun. Despite Grand's well-known advocacy of motherhood, she argues that even by giving birth to two children, Evadne is no more complete as a woman than when she was the childless wife of Colquhoun prior to his death.

In contrast, I argue that the Tenor's death practically benefits Angelica's marriage: indeed it has 'brought her home' (*HT*, p. 551). The last page of Book V thus marks the end of Angelica's individualism and the beginning of her new image as a

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<sup>69</sup> The phrase derives from the title of a three-act play by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906); *Et Dukkehjem* (1879) was traditionally rendered in English as *A Doll's House*. According to Egil Törnqvist, the female protagonist '[r]eflect[s] the views of a male society, [where] everyone [including her future husband] sees Nora as a child to be cared for like a doll.' By leaving her husband and children in order to find out who she is and be independent, the heroine drives feminist critics to view Ibsen as 'a fervent proponent of improved *women's* rights'. See Egil Törnqvist, 'Prologue: background', 'The drama text', and 'Epilogue: impact' in Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, ed., Egil Törnqvist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 28, 5, 154; emphasis in the original.

traditional wife. The alteration of character, which depicts Angelica now as an Old Woman, occurs as the character's delayed awakening to Kilroy's plea: 'If you could care for me a little, Angelica.' (*HT*, p. 551)

Symbolically, moreover, the name 'Daddy' suggests the paternalistic power exercised by the husband and head of the family. The novel turns towards the feminisation of the New Woman as Angelica obediently shows her emotions by throwing herself into his arms, crying, and declaring her gratitude 'for the blessing of a good man's love.' (*HT*, p. 551) Equally important, these are the words in which Book V ends. The episode creates a contrast with Angelica's earlier wish for independence, freedom, and leadership in marriage, which identifies her as an individualist. All that is about to change now, in that the implicitly asexual aspect in Angelica and Kilroy's marriage is progressing into a sexual one. Acknowledging her previous sexual deficiency, Angelica pledges to change: 'I used to accept all your kind attentions as merely my due, but I know now how little I deserve them, and I wish I could be different. I wish I could repay you. I wish I could undo the past and begin all over again—begin by loving you as a wife should.' (*HT*, p. 546) Her transformation into an Old-Woman type of wife is implied by submissiveness and a sense of delicate dependence as Angelica asks Kilroy not to 'let me go again, Daddy, keep me close' (*HT*, p. 551). Moreover, she kisses him 'passionately' for the first time which recalls the previous inadequacy of her role as a wife. In displaying a womanly love for Kilroy, Angelica's character appears as a dutiful wife, answering to Kilroy's wish for her to care for him.

In addition, Grand's strong values concerning traditional sexual codes and her social-purity feminism explain why she does not portray her heroines as sexual radicals. Nevertheless, some New Woman characters who represent sexual transgression, such as Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, do in fact share some commonalities with Grand's figure. For example, like the 'neurasthenic' Evadne, Sue

does also compromise her sexual politics at the end of the novel, defined first by her ‘sexual free union [with Jude] and [then] an asexual Christian marriage’ when she goes back to remarry Richard Phillotson who has been sexually repulsive in her opinion and whom she does not love.<sup>70</sup> Although Grand was harshly criticised for writing about syphilis in *The Heavenly Twins* and the lock hospitals in *The Beth Book*, she retrospectively noted in the foreword to the 1923 edition of *The Heavenly Twins* that:

It was time someone spoke up, and I felt that I could and determined that I would. I would expose the injustice with which women were treated, in all its cruelty, and those who were responsible for its continuance.<sup>71</sup>

Reminding her readers of her purpose and bravery in using the novel to deliver a direct attack on the problems concerning pre-marital chastity and social purity, Grand appears consistent in her convictions in both marriage and motherhood as seen in her maternalist campaign. In the 1896 interview, Grand stresses the fact that a woman does have a very important part in helping eradicate injustice and shape a better future not only in terms of her own family but also of society and, by extension, the country at large.

In other words, Grand’s maternalist project puts strong emphasis on the connection between women’s rational choice of healthy, morally and sexually untarnished men and the state of the nation. Acknowledging that this is a taxing task, Grand projects a sense of certainty that it will pay off to an immeasurable degree, so the sooner the undertaking, the surer and better the result. Elsewhere, Grand pinpoints the significance she attaches to women’s responsible motherhood on an individual as well as a national basis when she expresses her social purist creed, that ever-present belief in ‘the

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<sup>70</sup> Tolly Moseley, *‘An Emancipated, Intellectualized Bundle of Nerves’: New Woman Identity and Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century England* (Georgetown: Southwestern University Press, 2005), p. 16; Fernando, ‘Hardy: “The Fiction of Sex and the New Woman”’ in *NWLVN*, pp. 129-146.

<sup>71</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘Foreword’ in *The Heavenly Twins* (London: Heinemann, 1923); reprinted in Heilmann, *SSPSG*, vol. 1, p. 404.

highest ideal of marriage, parenthood and citizenship'.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the disorder and confusion ensuing Angelica's transgression of her proper gender role, and the improved relationship with her husband following her altered attitude and behaviour convey the triumph of marital love which Grand advocates. The 1923 foreword thus serves to accentuate the enduring seriousness of the concerns and campaigns around the Matrimonial Causes, the Married Women's Property, and the Contagious Diseases Acts dating back to the 1860s at which time the novel is set.

Hence, *The Heavenly Twins* fulfils its task as both a social purist and a eugenicist text. It portrays two good marriages in which husbands are high-minded and sympathetic men who love and respect their wives. Moreover, towards the end of the novel, Angelica and Evadne are enabled by their circumstances to perform their traditional duties: both become obedient wives and the latter a mother of two healthy children. Such scenarios project a very positive picture of an ideal husband and wife, and also of ideal parents and children. But they fail to depict each heroine as a person in her own right. In other words, the novel tries faithfully to represent the good, happy, and healthy marriages which Grand advocates. Nevertheless, it notes that women cease to be recognised as individuals once they enter into marriage. This recognition resonates with Mill's argument that women should have complete freedom instead of being enslaved by their marriage ties. In short, I want to point out that although Grand realises the importance of female individualism, at the same time she reflects the reality of the time by mapping out its incompatibility with marriage through the various marriage plots in the novel.

Thus, the novel addresses a call for social hygiene to save both 'the individual and [the] community' from the 'imminent risk of contamination and ruin'.<sup>73</sup> It claims that this effort in bringing degeneration to an end will reach its optimal result provided that it

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<sup>72</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Marriage Questions in Fiction: The Standpoint of a Typical Modern Woman' in *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 69 (1898); reprinted in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. 493.

<sup>73</sup> Heilmann, 'Introduction' in *SSPSG*, vol. 4, p. 3.



commences with society's considerations of women as individuals with personal aspirations. In this sense, marriage serves as a means of aligning the desire for personal gratification with the nation's moral and physical regeneration. Building on Ann Heilmann's focus on Grand's social-purity feminism, my analysis of *The Heavenly Twins* highlights the particular tensions between liberal individualism and female desire which leave the problem of woman's separate existence in marriage unresolved.

## V. Conclusion

Reminiscent of Mill's argument in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Grand's novel highlights woman's 'subjection' by contrasting it with men's unbounded liberty and independence. The arguments played out in *The Heavenly Twins* enable us to develop new perspectives on the central questions of individualism, the New Woman, and desire. Individualistic characters are defined as thoughtful, confident, and autonomous. More importantly, Grand employs rationalism in Evadne to protect her from corruption. In this light, individualism – the call to act for the self before others – provides a shield against syphilis which, as Meegan Kennedy argues, symbolises 'women's lifelong sexual and intellectual repression' resulting from 'men's libertinage'.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the New Woman characters represent a feminist call for women's rights and glorify the idea of 'unwomanliness' to promote equality. Indeed, the extremes of female individualism are necessary to counterbalance long eras of male egotism and privilege as the novel uses its depiction of sexual desire to reflect the dangers of the double standard.

Grand pathologises this issue in the figure of the Old Woman who, with her pre-marital chastity lacking in male characters, is ironically killed by syphilis. This tragedy leads to Grand's purported solution: individualism. Textually, it becomes obvious that

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<sup>74</sup> Meegan Kennedy, 'Syphilis and the Hysterical Female: the Limits of Realism in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*' in *Women's Writing*, vol. 11, no. 2 (July, 2004), p. 261.

Grand associates marriage metaphorically with venereal disease. Focussing on male sexual misdemeanour literally plaguing the nation, Grand's argument rests on the question of what women will do with their sexuality: to tolerate marital oppression through the double standard and remain victims of male degeneracy like Edith, or to take courage and fight for the rights to refuse sexual abuse and stop becoming 'the suffering sex'. Essentially, Grand promotes the New Woman while opposing to '[t]he Old Woman [who] draws her hood over her head, and sits in darkness that she may not know us for what we are.'<sup>75</sup> The representation of the double standard, for which Grand was most severely criticised, reflects her response to the strict gender roles Ward upholds in her fiction. Despite Grand's attempt to educate the public, novelist Arnold Bennett judged her most popular work 'a bad novel' although he admitted that 'it was a brilliant ... argument against the "criminal repression of women" for the selfish ends of men.'<sup>76</sup> Bennett's comment not only applauds Grand's courageous endeavour but also supports her fight for women's freedom within marriage, which is realised through the heroines' individualism.

However, it is worth noting that the novel remains problematic in terms of the closure it gives to each heroine. While Grand endorses self-serving freedom in Angelica who liberally ignores her reproductive duties, the narrative makes evident that real power, though latent, is ever-present in the character of Kilroy. Consequently, Book V closes with Angelica helplessly asking for his love and support (see p. 165). Moreover, through Galbraith's point of view, Book VI portrays Evadne as a helpless wife. Since their changes symbolise the social conditions which keep women under men's control, female autonomy cannot fully flourish. However, despite this progress towards a mollified Angelica who tempts us to assume her character undergoes a permanent conversion, the text resists such interpretation since Grand spotlights her active involvement in Kilroy's

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<sup>75</sup> Grand, 'NWO' in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, p. 470.

<sup>76</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Fame and Fiction: An Inquiry into Certain Popularities* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 347.

parliamentary speech-making. Based on this reversion, I agree with Teresa Mangum that Angelica's 'life' and 'purpose' have been restored to her, but, unlike Mangum, I connect Angelica's resumed activism with her liberal-minded marriage partner, not Diavolo whose identity she occasionally borrows. It is the 'good husband' who realises Angelica's regenerated energy which flourishes and re-emerges in the sequel.<sup>77</sup> I thus conclude that Grand recognises the significance of individualism and promotes it in relation to marriage in her most important New Woman novel. In the next chapter, I look at marriage in *The Beth Book* from a different angle. My focus will be on Grand's representation of the legal disabilities imposed on married women, and marriage as a form of violence, both of which have harmful effects on Beth's individualism and personal progress.

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<sup>77</sup> Teresa Mangum, 'Sex, Siblings, and the *Fin de Siècle*' in JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward, eds, *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), pp. 70-82; pp. 81-82.

#### Chapter 4: *The Beth Book*: Individualism, Duty, and Violence

*The Beth Book*, subtitled *Being a Study from the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman of Genius*, was published in 1897 and was the last of Grand's controversial feminist trilogy. Preceded by *Ideala* (1888) and *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), the novel concentrates on the development of its New Woman heroine from birth through to her triumph over difficulties. The novel represents these obstacles as ones caused by her uneven education, bad marriage, and lack of opportunity to progress in a society where girls' and women's abilities are either underestimated or ignored. Significantly, Sarah Grand sets her marriage plot against the backdrop of legal debates and reforms surrounding the Divorce Act of 1857 and the 1869 campaigns for the Married Women's Property Act, passed in 1870 and again in 1882.<sup>1</sup> *The Beth Book* extends her arguments in *The Heavenly Twins* based on these important acts which are key to Grand's figuring of the New Woman and individualism. In contrast to the nineteenth-century idealisation of marriage – a staple of happiness represented in Mary Ward's novels I have analysed), Grand's marriage plot culminates in the eponymous heroine's aggravated position, which the author portrays as severe but without sufficient evidence for the laws to protect her.

With regard to the novel, *The Beth Book* recharacterises marriage by associating it with the violence that oppresses the eponymous New Woman heroine morally, mentally, and intellectually. Instead of fulfilling the New Woman's potential, her marriage and the violence it entails serves to hinder her progress personally as well as professionally. The portrayal of such violence enables Grand trenchantly to argue that individualism is a vital means of self-defence against that oppression. The clarity of the author's argument corresponds with my purpose in studying female individualism as represented in the

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 76; hereafter abbreviated as *FMLVE*.

selected works. My reading focuses on the representation of duty and violence in tension with the individualism of Beth's character. The term 'duty' in the novel carries more meaning than other-regarding services: it refers to Beth's sense of obligation to others above that to herself. Moreover, Beth's duty is also represented in connection with marital violence which is perpetrated by her husband. I will therefore study individualism, duty, and violence in turn, before delineating my own findings in relation to the way in which Grand used received fictional forms to test the strain between womanhood and individualism. I commence by looking at individualism as it features in *The Beth Book*.

## **I. Individualism**

With regard to *The Beth Book*, my focus on individualism will be divided into three related aspects, namely independence and freedom, self-development, and self-reliance, all regarded as continuing phases of individualism reflected in the female protagonist. In terms of the author's literary representation of individualism, Sarah Grand demonstrates first the repression and then the development of Beth's individualism manifested in these different stages. They bear an important link to John Stuart Mill's argument, which I discuss in detail below, concerning individualism conceivable only within 'the appropriate human region of liberty.'<sup>2</sup>

In this light, while marriage is so idealised in Mary Ward's *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella* that the New Woman heroines willingly exchange their individualistic ambitions for matrimony, the marriage plot in *The Beth Book* allows Grand to valorise individualism over a marriage of abuse and violence. While the husband figures in Ward's novels are characterised via their loving hearts, gentleness, and unconditional devotion to the New Woman heroines, Dan Maclure is, in comparison, Grand's

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<sup>2</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 26; hereafter abbreviated as *OL*.

embodiment of duplicity and violence. The narrative reveals that Maclure fakes affections for Beth because he mistakenly overestimates her inheritance. Thus, the book explores the marital tensions which aggravate the conflicts between the two central characters. Behind the clash of characters lies the reflection of the woman's limited sphere of activities while, in contrast, allowance is amply made for female sexual duty. To illustrate her argument, Grand juxtaposes the figure of the over-sexualised Maclure with Beth, who is 'a nicely balanced creature, with many interests in life, and love could be but one among the number in any case; but Dan almost seem[s] to expect it to be the only one.'<sup>3</sup> Her characterisation finds an echo in Grand's journalistic writing: while the Old Woman loves being made love to, which the author deems unhealthy, the New Woman is, in marked contrast, a 'well-balanced creature', hence firmly resonating with Beth's description.<sup>4</sup>

To foreground the heroine's subsequent success as an individual, the novel portrays marriage, especially its sexual aspects, as a hindrance to Beth's progress instead of providing her with support. As Beth's interest in literary art and her dedication to its creation appear better to fulfil her desire than the incompatible, unloving husband, they begin to obscure the importance of her marriage:

There is a mental analogy to all physical processes. Fertility in life comes of love; and in art the fervour of production is also accompanied by a rapture and preceded by a passion of its own. When Beth was in a good mood for [literary] work, it was like love—love without the lover; she felt all the joy of love, with none of the disturbance. (*BB*, p. 394)

This statement illuminates Grand's alignment of 'disturbance' with Maclure, particularly the taxing duty of Beth's sexual relationship with him through the pretext of 'love', which may be replaced with 'sex' in Dan's personal context. The narrative represents Beth more

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book*, introd., Sally Mitchell (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), p. 343; hereafter cited in the text as *BB*.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Grand, 'The New Woman and the Old' in *Lady's Realm* (1898); reprinted in Ann Heilmann, ed. and introd., *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, vol. 2 (Routledge: Routledge/ Thoemmes Press, 1998), pp. 469-470; hereafter abbreviated as *LVMQ*, followed by volume and page numbers.

as an individualist intent on making personal progress than a sexualised wife by emphasising that mental stimulation and fulfilment are more important to her than bodily gratification. Thus, giving expression to male selfishness with his ‘masculine egotism’, Maclure sneers at Beth’s individualism, considering it unfeminine to refuse male sexual objectification, in other words, to prefer ‘love without the lover’:

Dan looked disconcerted. In his cheerful masculine egotism it had not occurred to him that Beth might find incessant demonstrations of affection monotonous ... that the wife should be the first to be bored was incredible; and worse: it was unwomanly. (*BB*, p. 343)

As a ‘tolerant’ wife, Beth yields to what convention deems her duty. However, Dan has ‘satiated her once for all, and she never recovered any zest for his caresses. She found no charm or freshness in them, especially after she perceived that they were for his own gratification, irrespective of hers.’ (*BB*, p. 343) In this light, Grand employs the character of Dan Maclure to elicit the interrelated question of sexuality, women’s self-possession, and sexual (un)willingness which contributes to Beth’s embrace of individualism as a shield against further invasion of the self.

The basis of Grand’s advocacy of individualism within marriage rests on the gendered limitations and the disproportionate notion of duty required solely from the woman. The author argues that individualism is a creditable substitute for the dated system through her characterisation of Beth’s mother, Mrs. Caldwell, who

appears to have been a good woman marred ... [first,] by the narrow outlook, the *ignorance* and *prejudices* which were the result of the mental restrictions imposed upon her sex; secondly, by having no conception of *her duty to herself*; and finally, by those mistaken notions of her duty to others which were so long inflicted upon women, to be their own curse (*BB*, p. 280; my emphases).

In addition to the three-step analysis of the Old Woman crucial to comprehending the significance of Beth’s adoption of individualism, the passage contains a criticism of the

convention Grand perceives to be structured so as to weaken, if not destroy, woman's intellect and equilibrium. In her role as the Old Woman, Mrs. Caldwell's maturity is ironically questionable for 'her judgment [i]s no more developed in most respects than it had been in her girlhood' (*BB*, p. 280). Mrs. Caldwell echoes Edith Beale in *The Heavenly Twins*, who is consumed to death by marriage instigated in 'ignorance' and 'prejudices' to a sexual rogue, Sir Menteith Mosley, also an equivalent to the promiscuous Dan Maclure in *The Beth Book*.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Mrs. Caldwell also functions as Grand's textual implication that, unless Beth acquires and maintains individualism, a state of which may be achieved if she breaks away to live life on her own, she would suffer her mother's and Edith's fate. The novel confirms this foreshadowing in terms of Dan's unethical activities, namely his involvement in running a Lock Hospital and practising vivisection which will be revisited in the section on violence below. The burgeoning triumph of the New Woman in guarding her individual interests is represented by her fortitude in withstanding the corrupting influence of her husband, a brave force of resistance which also proves that individualism indeed provides her with a defence against what Grand terms in her 1898 article 'the blight of the ghastly constant fact of uncongenial companionship.'<sup>6</sup> It is this perceived relevance that accounts for my occasional use of her journalistic writings as a lens through which to interpret her fiction.

As I remarked in the introductory section, the development of Beth's character taking place between the restraining period of her marriage and her separate existence from her husband charts the four-step progress towards the heroine's individualistic liberty. Mill's theory about individual liberalism begins with his call for a 'liberty of conscience'.<sup>7</sup> What follows is a 'liberty of thought and feeling', meaning an 'absolute

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1893), p. 228.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Does Marriage Hinder a Woman's Self-Development? A Discussion' in *Lady's Realm*, vol. 5 (1898); reprinted in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, pp. 576-586; hereafter abbreviated as 'DMHWS'. The Grand section occupies pp. 576-577; p. 576.

<sup>7</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 26.



freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological'.<sup>8</sup> Next, he argues for a 'liberty of expressing and publishing opinions', and finally, the 'freedom to unite', one that allows for 'combination among individuals'.<sup>9</sup> To support Mill's reasoning which claims that the granting of these liberties is conducive to establishing for women the female right necessary for their self-government, the marriage plot in *The Beth Book* demonstrates early a reversed, undesirable effect perceivable through the New Woman heroine's loss of autonomy, though temporarily until its recovery in the last chapters, through her ties with Dan Maclure. In other words, Mill's theory is at work especially when we apply it to the trajectory of Beth after her marriage I examine in the following section.

In addition to exposing the various forms of violence confronting Beth, the narrative periodically highlights the resulting lack of marital happiness so as to emphasise Grand's advocacy of 'liberty of conscience' or the first phase of Beth's development of her individualism: 'She s[ees] little of Dan in those days, and th[inks] less; but when they me[e]t, she [i]s, as usual, gentle and tolerant, patiently enduring his "cheeriness," and entering into no quarrel unless he force[s] one upon her.' (*BB*, p. 394) Beth chooses silence and avoidance not only to secure peace in her marriage, but also to have a chance to be alone and able to make personal, individual progress.

It is worth noting here that the conceptual focus on the connection between marriage and the individualism of the New Woman comes from Grand's formal revision of the text's construction. Marriage no longer occurs as a happy ending but rather forms the beginning of a vital learning process for Beth who works her way through those 'youthful experiments' until she achieves the reward, that desired 'mature identity'.<sup>10</sup> Grand's 'fictional representations of female development' thus define *The Beth Book* as

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<sup>8</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Mill, *OL*, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (Verso: London, 1987), p. 118.

one of the ‘female versions’ of the *Bildungsroman*, or the ‘novel of formation’, especially as the text explicitly focuses on the ‘interrelationships shaping [the] individual growth’ of the New Woman heroine.<sup>11</sup> For the majority of the novel, the eponymous protagonist is repeatedly on the receiving end of violence – verbal, physical, and emotional – perpetrated by two characters: Mrs. Caldwell, a dictatorial mother through whose treatment Beth becomes a sorry ‘victim of brute force’, and Maclure, a covert vivisector whose ‘inhuman callousness’ makes him ‘all the more repulsive’ and lowers him in her esteem (*BB*, pp. 162, 438). This aspect of moral and ethical violence, in addition to Maclure’s emotionally aggressive behaviour towards Beth, demarcates Grand’s representation of marriage – a loveless, abusive, and anti-idealistic bond between man and woman – from that affectionate and companionate union envisioned in Mary Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella* previously discussed.

More importantly, the novel is testament to Grand’s claim that life as a separated individual is preferable to life in a mismatched marriage. Portraying Beth as a triumphant individualistic New Woman, Grand concludes in a tone both congratulatory to the protagonist as well as didactic for the reader, alluding to ‘the fate [Beth] had only narrowly escaped by help of the strength that came of the brave self-contained habits she had cultivated in her life of seclusion and thought.’ (*BB*, p. 447) This passage resonates with the second phase of Mill’s liberal individualism as it is connected with the ‘liberty of thought and feeling’ afforded Beth by her ‘secret chamber’, discovered by accident (*BB*, p. 347). Conducive to the heroine’s liberty of thought and feeling, the ‘secret chamber’ promises to foster Beth’s individualism as she exclaims: ‘I am at home, thank God! I shall be able to study, to read and write, think and pray at last, undisturbed.’ (*BB*, p. 348) Beth’s character emphasises the significance of married women’s privacy and need for

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland, ‘Introduction’ in Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland, eds, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 3-19; pp. 4-5.

room to meditate by claiming that ‘the little room’ up in ‘the tower ‘at the side of the house’ is ‘exactly what she ha[s] been pining for most in the whole wide world of late, a secret spot, sacred to herself, where should would be safe from intrusion’ and where she can freely ‘set to work at once’ (*BB*, pp. 346, 347, 355, 348). Towards the end, Beth’s access to privacy will prove fruitful to her career, which culminates in ‘an extraordinary achievement, a great success’ of her oratory (*BB*, p. 525).

*The Beth Book* thus argues for individualism as a woman’s tool to fight against the old-fashioned view, one which denies that women possess intellectual abilities, reducing them to just a face. Dan Maclure conveys such view in degrading terms: ‘You [Beth] look like a silly little idiot. But never mind. That’s all a girl need be if she’s pretty’ (*BB*, p. 342). Throughout the novel, Grand characterises Maclure not only as an ‘unfeeling’ husband but also unsupportive, which results in Beth’s resolution no longer to ‘expect him to sympathise with her in her [literary] work.’ (*BB*, p. 342) Comparable to the New Woman’s unfavourable circumstances in *The Beth Book*, Grand continues to articulate a similar notion of the lack of moral support in a man, and the crippling effect it creates on his wife, in ‘Does Marriage Hinder a Woman’s Self-Development?’:

It is a most difficult task for her to take her neck out of the halter. Tied to a man who, from obtuseness of selfishness or principle, not only does not assist her development, but refuses to recognise either the necessity or the possibility of further development, the married woman finds her intellect shut in a dungeon from which there is no escape.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to Grand’s journalistic writing in which she argues that marriage may be a regrettable handicap, causing a sense of confinement and suffocation to women’s self-development, *The Beth Book* demonstrates that women are still expected to keep their needs and ambitions to themselves, and that silence remains prescribed as a requisite

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<sup>12</sup> Grand, ‘DMHWSO’, p. 576.

feminine attribute. In working her way towards the desired ‘authorship’ (*BB*, p. 365), Beth’s literary aspiration meets with disdain from her husband:

‘Dan, won’t it be delightful if I really can write? I might make a career for myself.’  
‘Rot!’ said Dan. (*BB*, p. 367)

Maclure thus embodies the conventional resistance against the New Woman writing as part of the larger women’s movement of the 1890s, which automatically handicaps the third phase of Beth’s individualism, that is her ‘liberty of expressing and publishing opinion’. In the preceding scene in which Sir George Galbraith, Beth, and Maclure discuss the heroine’s literary attempts, in terms of the future prospects and the possibility of Beth producing work that is ‘fit to publish’, Galbraith’s assurance and Maclure’s derision reflect Grand’s further resonance with Mill on the importance of the woman’s individual freedom (*BB*, p. 366). The heroine’s choice of separation from her immoral and emotionally abusive husband (though not legally obtained at the time as will be discussed below) is significant to the development of her individualism.

Indeed, the decision to leave marks Beth’s achievement of the third stage of individualism. This is because in the end, the conflict between the New Woman character and her husband ironically proves to yield a positive result evidenced in her remarkable successes as a writer and orator. In other words, what Beth has gained in exchange for her failed marriage unequivocally reflects Mill’s advocacy of independence, freedom, and female individualism. Thus, I here contend that *The Beth Book* campaigns for, in Mill’s terms, the ‘liberty of tastes and pursuits’, the freedom of ‘framing the plan of our life to suit our own character’, and ‘of doing as we like ... without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong’.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the indifference that characterises

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<sup>13</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 28.

Maclure not only casts him as a self-centred husband but also affirms Mill's theory which prompts and justifies Beth's department. The text clearly puts in marked contrast that, for example, while Maclure 'never trouble[s] himself to consult her taste in books ... [he keeps] bringing home three-volume novels for himself from the library ... [and] ma[kes] Beth read them aloud to him in the evening, one after the other—an endless succession' (*BB*, pp. 369-370). To sharpen the contrast between Maclure's blatant self-centredness and Beth's ever-ready willingness to please, the narrative highlights the husband's refusal to accommodate Beth's needs in return. For example, despite her ability to read and write, he verbally attacks her ambition to become a successful writer: "I tell you you're a silly fool, and your head wouldn't contain a book. I ought to know." (*BB*, p. 366)

Moreover, the root of Dan's misogynistic contempt, expressed through his conviction that '[l]iterature is men's work', further symbolises the violence of attitude towards women: 'It's all very well to scribble a little for pastime, and all that, but she mustn't seriously imagine she can do that sort of work. She'll only do herself harm.' (*BB*, p. 366) Although he acknowledges the abilities of what he calls 'exceptional women', those women of letters who 'have written, and written well, too', he instantly censures Beth's desire to become 'an exceptional woman' as '[c]oarse and masculine' (*BB*, p. 366). Instead of encouraging Beth to expand intellectually, Maclure, who becomes Grand's textual representative of abusive marriage, serves to perpetuate if not worsen female disabilities. His old-fashioned narrow-mindedness, in addition to selfishness, is the basis of the rocky marriage at the heart of *The Beth Book*.

The vast disparity in Grand's central characters means that marital tensions, instead of happiness, are inexorable:

Disillusion is a great enlightener; our insight is never so clear as when it is turned on the character of a person in whom we used to believe; and as Dan gradually reveal[s] himself to Beth, trait by trait, a kind of distaste seize[s] upon her. (*BB*, p. 364)

Accordingly, Beth turns her attention away from her marriage, which is falling apart as Maclure has ‘dropped out of her life completely, and left her as friendless and as much alone as she would have been with the veriest stranger.’ (*BB*, p. 364) She instead embarks on a journey towards self-development, evidently fuelled by her sense of individualism, as she discusses with Sir George Galbraith ‘her attempts to cultivate her mind [through] reading and writing’ (*BB*, p. 364). Here Mill’s ideas are at work to promote Beth’s personal success through her attainment of freedom of expression.

Finally, the three stages of individualistic liberty all combine to reach an apogee indicated by the beginning of her oratorical career, which signifies her fourth and last, that is, the ‘freedom to unite’ as a member of a larger political community. To illustrate the Millian notion of such freedom found in the heroine’s newly-discovered community, the narrative reveals that although ‘sp[ea]king to a hostile audience’, eventually Beth ‘ha[s] so moved them that they r[i]se at last and cheer[ ] her for her eloquence, whether they h[o]ld her opinions or not.’ (*BB*, p. 525) It is these four stages of individualism that finally help prepare Beth to reach her highest potential which would have been forever dormant had she chosen to remain downtrodden by her own marriage.

The novel makes its final and most forceful argument which confirms the enabling power of individualism through which Beth acquires her independence and freedom. She ascends to her own greatness as one of her bedazzled listeners notes: ‘Beth is launched at last upon her true career.’ (*BB*, p. 525) The prospect of personal success, without any support from her husband, accentuates Beth’s transition from a dependent wife to a fully mature, individual woman with her old powerful character which has been inactive during marriage. Beth is ‘all energy now that the possibility of making a career for herself ha[s] been presented to her, but it [i]s the quietly restrained energy of a strong nature.’ (*BB*, p. 369) The strength of Beth’s character lies deep in her autonomy – ‘her system of self-

control' once lost, now regained – that helps her to cope with the social pressures ingrained in marriage that hinders her self-development (*BB*, p. 422).

In addition, Grand accentuates the heroine's strong individuality through Beth's sense of independence and non-conformism represented by her disregard of conventionality. For example, Beth gives her advice 'with spirit' to her first male admirer, Alfred Pounce, not to let his 'people' force him into conventional career pursuits, those of 'the bar or the church or something', especially as he himself wants 'to be a sculptor' (*BB*, p. 246). Beth's following statement, even though textually directed at Pounce, seems to carry a strong implication and encouragement for all of Grand's women readers: 'Don't be forced. ... Follow your own bent. I mean to follow mine.' (*BB*, p. 246)

Beyond the specific connection between the history of protest against women's legal and political disabilities and the philosophy of Mill, the preceding analysis indicates how ideas of self-government and self-help were worked into a wider cultural network in the nineteenth century. As the 'the root of all genuine growth in the individual', Samuel Smiles argued for the 'strong individuality' essential to maintaining 'perfect freedom of thought, and speech, and action.'<sup>14</sup> In keeping with Smiles's argument, Beth eventually dissociates herself from marriage, having perceived it to be detrimental to her growth and freedom. But, I would argue here, the context of *The Beth Book* and its setting in the midst of the campaigns around the Married Women's Property Act marks the strong and particular affiliations of female individualism it explores with Mill's own contribution to liberal thinking about self and duty.

Thus, the novel proposes individualism as a means to counter the oppression imposed on the New Woman. A parallel with Ward's Rose Leyburn, the idea of Beth's genius is suggested primarily by the subtitle: 'Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), pp. 15, 20.

Caldwell Maclure, *A Woman of Genius* refers to the notions of the female genius which, according to Teresa Mangum, contrast Beth's success with her lack of formal education.<sup>15</sup> As Abigail Dennis notes, '[f]rom the outset, it is clear that Beth is an intelligent and cerebral child (her creativity and enquiring mind constituting her innate "genius")'.<sup>16</sup> Beth is represented through her intellectual leanings rather than emotional or physical. This is evident especially as we look at her early childhood during which she demonstrates 'transgressions and seemingly threatening sense of independence'.<sup>17</sup> The cultivation of self-development assisted by her genius not only proves a satisfactory substitute for marriage but also plays a crucial part in the change in Beth's character.

Among the various forms of her self-induced personal progress is that of financial nature. This is because the marriage between Beth and Maclure is in fact borne of unwillingness in the young but dutiful daughter, who 'want[s] to explain that she ha[s] not actually pledged herself, that she must take time to consider; but her heart fail[s] her in view of her mother's delight.' (*BB*, p. 330) The match may be considered an advantageous, mercenary marriage, only that instead of the wife it ironically benefits the husband who, depicted as a self-serving hypocrite, epitomises avariciousness. Consequently, the latter part of the novel portrays Beth providing not only for her own needs but also for her husband, who is periodically tearful when in need of money.

The reversed gender hierarchy is most manifest in Maclure's moral inferiority and degenerative nature in need of discipline. Through the characterisation of Maclure as a parasitic figure feeding on Beth's 'tender human nature' (*BB*, p. 481), Grand creates a contrast by placing much emphasis on Beth's acute sensitivity. It is juxtaposed with the absence of Dan's conscience to enhance Beth's moral superiority: '[Beth] had grown to

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<sup>15</sup> Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 150-152; hereafter abbreviated as *MMM*.

<sup>16</sup> Abigail Dennis, "'A Study in Starvation': The New Girl and the Gendered Socialisation of Appetite in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*" in *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2007), p. 20; hereafter abbreviated as 'SS'.

<sup>17</sup> Dennis, 'SS', p. 30.



have a very real affection for Dan ... but her estimate of his character ... would have made her despise another man.’ (*BB*, p. 353) Moreover, the plot makes a political statement in an allusion to the law of coverture where, prior to the Married Women’s Property Act of 1870, a man was responsible for any debts incurred by his wife but not vice versa.<sup>18</sup> Grand reverses the situation when Beth discovers Maclure’s slyness in securing a loan from Mrs. Caldwell without intending to pay her back. The New Woman’s ‘determination ... to pay back every farthing’ informs her sense of individual responsibility to make amends for her husband’s deceit (*BB*, p. 353).

At the same time, the narrative emphasises the widening fissure within the marriage arising from money matters after ‘Beth fully realise[s] her husband’s turpitude with regard to the money ... and she [i]s deeply pained. ... True, she never ha[s] any money; but that [i]s no excuse, for there [a]re honest ways of making money, and make it she would.’ (*BB*, p. 353) A double irony of situation is then created when among his expenses provided for by Beth’s own labour is a sum prepared for the arrangement for Maclure’s mistress, Bertha Petterick, to come and reside in their home. Moreover, whether from a moral, personal, financial, or social perspective, the novel apparently denounces Maclure’s self-serving notion that ‘[h]usband and wife are one’, which enables him to casually ‘appropriate’ Beth’s ‘pin-money’ as soon as it arrives (*BB*, pp. 352, 353). The lack of separate legal identity for women reflected above echoes Mill’s argument that ‘the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement’.<sup>19</sup>

These financial burdens and the inevitable strains only work to the character’s advantage as they shine a spotlight on her determined perseverance, as well as in her later pursuit of a literary career. While this reading does not represent marriage as a failure in

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<sup>18</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869), p. 1; hereafter abbreviated as *SW*.

Caird's sense, but a means to development, a stark contrast with *The Heavenly Twins* discussed in the previous chapter, Grand emphasises the necessity of female individualism within marriage as the only means to achieve this: 'Out of the fullest experience of life [by which she means marriage] is most likely to be born the fullest development of the individual—presuming that by self-development is meant the largest intellectual and physical growth combined in the fullest proportion'.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, her argument proves a surprising parallel with Ward as both authors here advocate marriage as a means to fulfilment, one professionally, the other conjugally.

Grand thus portrays Beth as an unconventional female character, earning 'fifty pounds in eighteen months by her beautiful embroideries' which, although it represents her accomplishment in a feminine art, paradoxically enables her to assume a masculine role of providing for her husband to pay off his debts, some of which money ironically goes to her own mother (*BB*, p. 394). Beth's ability to support herself as well as her husband accentuates Maclure's financial dependence, which conveys Grand's counter-argument that individualism is a desirable trait especially as it is conducive to the New Woman's self-development. Indeed, Samuel Smiles proposes a direct connection between individuals, stability, and progress on not only a personal but also a national level: 'The spirit of self-help ... constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength.'<sup>21</sup> This forms part of the programme Grand plans to promote individualism as it promises to benefit both her readers and the human race. Thus, *The Beth Book* proposes a solution for problems women experience within marriage which draws upon the mid-century theories of individualism. The novel's setting amid the debates on the legal standing of women and the Married Women's Property Act situates this in the Millian discourse of liberty and self-determination. Grand is astute in applying both the external, financial, and legal

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<sup>20</sup> Grand, 'DMHWSD', p. 576.

<sup>21</sup> Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 15.

aspects in Mill's advocacy of liberty and the internal, expressive, and developmental components of self-determination to realise the heroine's individualism.

While Maclure embodies 'moral defects' revealed only after marriage, Beth represents 'a sad majority of wives whose attitude towards their husbands must be one of contemptuous toleration ... of their past depravity and of their present deceits.' (*BB*, p. 353) The way in which Grand demonstrates Beth's self-reliance clearly aligns it with Emerson's notion of individualism: 'Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, Beth's awareness of the need for, and a means to, liberation from immorality accentuates her burgeoning individualism in an Emersonian sense. The New Woman's self-reliance is implicated through the protagonist's determination to survive on her own, as 'Beth [goes] out into the world alone, knowingly and willingly. The prospect ha[s] no terrors for her' (*BB*, p. 486). Her calm, voluntary, even welcoming, embrace of the change marks the beginning of Beth's sense of 'peace', freedom and independence.

In conclusion, the representation of individualism in *The Beth Book* argues for the importance of women's independence and freedom, self-development and self-reliance. It reflects Sarah Grand's awareness and acknowledgement of the negative 'degrading' effect marriage may have on women who let themselves be deprived of such basic needs. Based on Mill's argument above, Grand is extending that debate with the retrospective setting of this novel discussed in the following section. By writing a female individual within marriage, she is making a political statement about the alternative possibilities and potential of a society where woman put self before others. Indeed, Grand argues, a woman can flourish, as Beth does, both within and outside of marriage if she is able to implement her individualism, which is depicted as a guarantee for her growth.

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<sup>22</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance* (New York: The Roycrofters, 1908), p. 59.

## II. Duty

In this section, I focus on Sarah Grand's fictional representation of women and duty in *The Beth Book*. In fact, there are two different types of duty performed by the eponymous heroine. The first is her duty towards others, which I call her social duty and which represents Beth as the conventional Old Woman. The second, however, is Beth's duty towards herself which places her in the opposite camp as the New Woman figure.

In the novel, Beth's social duty is represented in terms of the New Woman's personal struggle brought by the social pressure of conformity. Grand draws attention to Beth's individualistic inclination in an urge to call for recognition of female needs through the character of Miss Victoria Bench, Beth's unmarried great-aunt who resides with the Caldwells. Her benign, religious character, though it has a positive influence on Beth's spiritual growth, serves the more significant role of mother-surrogate providing Beth with tender affection characteristically wanting in her biological mother. More importantly still, Aunt Victoria makes a perceptive plan for the continuous realisation of her great-niece's potential after her death by willing 'Beth to have her room ... in order that Beth might ... have proper privacy in her life, with undisturbed leisure for study, reflection, and prayer.' (*BB*, p. 222) Despite her express wish, privacy, study, and reflection remain unavailable to Beth even until after her marriage. Thus, Grand's mission here is to write a secular version of the spiritual self-possession that women had traditionally been allowed within Christianity.

Consequently, to emphasise the point raised by Aunt Victoria's foresighted character, the narrative depicts the heroine's constantly thwarted 'longing' for a personal space to be free from all social constraints (*BB*, p. 290). However, Grand acknowledges that the idealistic vision of female self-government is still far-fetched simply because of the prevalent sense of duty ingrained in women's culture and education. First of all, Beth starts a kind of 'education' at home, a responsibility undertaken by her own mother. *The*

*Beth Book* unmask the hypocrisy of womanly values and duties as these, so deeply instilled by her mother and later by the boarding schools she attends, suggesting that this only deepens the violence associated with Beth's marriage further. Secondly, I perceive Beth's schooling to be Grand's argument against the restrictive nature of its system, resulting in its failure in giving the heroine adequate preparation for marriage, or in opening up the real possibility of an alternative should marriage not work out for her. Grand's representation of education as demoralising thus serves as a reminder of Mill's argument that 'the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilisation, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things.'<sup>23</sup> The passage reflects Grand's approval of Mill's proposition for individualism, while it stresses her disagreement with the restrictive, conventional teaching imposed on girls.

To reinforce her theory, Grand uses the boarding-school episode to portray the inevitable sufferings befalling the heroine at frequent intervals. I want to argue that while duty and individualism are clearly antagonistically placed, the novel reveals that Grand favours the latter as a reasonable and beneficial choice for her heroine. In addition to establishing Beth's characteristic will to overthrow her school-imposed duty, the narrative implies the significance of the much-needed motherly tenderness and affection. However, the school saps vitality out of its schoolgirls in terms of its lack of mental stimulation, narrowness of activities, and especially its inability to recognise the needs or talents of individual students in order further to cultivate their potential. Therefore, a pattern emerges in which the New Woman, when pushed to the limits, will sacrifice her dutiful submissiveness and go to extreme lengths to protect her well-guarded sense of liberty. Thus, 'a stiff neck [i]s a very small drawback to the delights of such a change.' (*BB*, p.

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<sup>23</sup> Mill, *OL*, p. 102.

303) Indeed, Beth's eventual escape from the restraint of her school anticipates her emergent need to flee from the metaphorical confinement created by her marriage.

Similarly, anticipating Beth's suffering from marital depression, the narrative further portrays Beth's repressed jealousy of the liberty represented by the sight of people cruising the river by her school, dancing to the music, walking on the banks, sitting about under the trees, and children playing: 'Suddenly Beth burst[s] into tears' because, while she is confined within the school walls, other people are 'all free!' (*BB*, p. 302) In addition to the young Beth's intense emotional breakdown, the loss of liberty and of those rights to protect her own interests continues to affect the New Woman protagonist well into her marriage, in which the new social status as a dutiful wife clashes with her individual desire, and which results in the various signs of Beth's mental as well as bodily suffering (*BB*, p. 354).

In other words, the oppression of Beth's schooling foreshadows the trials of her marriage to Maclure. The constraint which the school puts on her personal freedom affects the heroine who responds powerfully. Grand's representation of Beth's experience and reaction thus echoes Ward's similar attitude towards the uneven development in girls' education as attested by Marcella's rebellious school-girl years during which the constraining condition not only checks her intellectual and individual progress but also cuts her out as a social misfit. Significantly, there is a parallel between Marcella and Beth in that both are shown to be liberated by going through marriage, in Beth's case ironically through her separation from Maclure.

The failure of Beth's marriage thus sheds light on the reverberation of Mill's earlier argument for compatibility in marriage partners. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill claims that the 'ideal of married life' lies in the 'union of thoughts and inclinations' between husband and wife, and that '[u]nlkeness may attract, but it is likeness which retains; and in proportion to the likeness is the suitability of the individuals to give each

other a happy life'.<sup>24</sup> However, although the New Woman heroine abides by her womanly duty, often with an effort to please her husband and keep their marriage intact, she is slowly overtaken by a sense of wronged virtue: 'a good man would have felt the force of goodness in her, and would have revered her. Maclure recognise[s] no force in her and fe[els] no reverence ... It is pleasant to give pleasure; but there must be more in marriage for it to be satisfactory than free scope to exercise the power to please.' (*BB*, p. 481)

To justify Beth's move to a life on her own outside marriage, Grand launches an attack on the flaw arising from the 'patriarchal structures' of the system that privileges men.<sup>25</sup> She argues that as a consequence, such license creates a sense of male egotism symbolised in the novel by both Maclure and Pounce, the two main sources of trouble for the New Woman. Therefore, Grand proposes replacing social and moral obligations towards others with the New Woman's realisation of duty, not to others but rather to *herself*, that is, as an individual with practical and social ambition. Beth's newly awakened sense of self-government in fact underlines Grand's argument articulated in the earlier novel. Moreover, the narrative reminds us of a connection between Beth and the other New Woman heroine in *The Heavenly Twins* who previously and famously stands for female autonomy within marriage: 'Until she went to Ilverthorpe [the home of Angelica and Mr. Kilroy], [Beth] had never heard that there was a duty she owed to *herself* as well as to her husband' (*BB*, p. 425; my emphasis).

Thus, the heroine's choice of separation from her husband reflects the realisation of her 'duty to herself': Beth's growing awareness of the fact that to survive and succeed as an individual, together with the opportunities and freedom to move from the private sphere to the public, is preferable to remaining dutiful within an oppressive marriage as seen in Beth's warning dispassionately directed at Maclure:

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<sup>24</sup> Mill, *SW*, p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> Heilmann, 'Introduction' in *LVMQ*, vol. 1, p. xviii.

‘I am not going to be domineered over by you as if I were a common degraded wife with every part of spirit and self-respect crushed out of me by one brutal exaction or another. *I shall do my duty*—do my best to meet your reasonable wishes; *but I will submit to no ordering and no sort of exaction.*’ (*BB*, p. 408; my emphases)

Such views clearly resonate with Mill’s respect for and advocacy of equality and companionship within contractual marriage, and by extension Caird’s notion of ideal marriage as a union firmly founded in companionate friendship. Indeed, there were throughout the nineteenth century advocates of the notion of ‘companionate marriage’ who ‘argued less for legal equality than for a higher form of conjugal companionship, founded on mutual restraint, forbearance, and respect.’<sup>26</sup> When marriage proves to lack in all these qualities, Grand’s *New Woman* proposes that there are alternatives both satisfying and rewarding outside of marriage in the details of the London episode, one featuring Beth’s sense of independence as she commences living on her own as will be discussed shortly. In this episode, Grand discernibly delineates Beth’s newly assumed status as a *New Woman* through the character’s freedom of action and decision.

Metaphorically on the first step towards coming into her own, Beth is able to acquire knowledge and ponder, map out the direction of her life and be in a refined and respectable area that contrasts favourably with her old abode with Maclure (*BB*, p. 486). Judged by the portrayal of Beth’s aptitude in self-navigation in a strange new place, and as the days of her wifely duties to Dan Maclure are ‘over’ after the separation, Beth replaces them effectively with the long overdue duties to herself. In other words, Grand shifts the cultural significance given to woman’s subordination of her own desires for the needs of others to the *New Woman*’s identification of duty to herself.

In conclusion, Grand contends in a distinctly modern tone characteristic of the mid-1890s that marriage is associated with oppression, not liberation: its cultural and

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<sup>26</sup> A. James Hammerton, ‘Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty’ in *Victorian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Winter, 1990), pp. 269-292; p. 270.



social significance does nothing but deprive women of the ability to think and make their own decision. Thus, she shapes her New Woman characters so as to argue for the rights of women to organise and put in motion efforts to cure the diseased nation. As I explore in the following section, unlike the transformative power of marriage which changes the New Woman heroines in Ward's novels, the violence in Beth's marriage makes it necessary for her to remain a strong, principled New Woman, whose previous 'dutiful submission' 'to her husband' is eventually, and justifiably, substituted with 'a duty she owe[s] to herself' (*BB*, pp. 424, 425).

### III. Violence

In this section, I draw attention to the social pressure represented in *The Beth Book* as the sole cause which drives the New Woman into an unhappy marital contract. Contrary to the popular fictional representation of marriage as what brings a happy ending to all of the protagonists' romantic trials and tribulations, Grand connects Beth's marriage with distress and sorrow, the cause of which arise from marital violence and women's legal disability, which form the main issues in this section's analysis.

That Grand begins her representation of marriage by emphasising Beth's hesitation to create an ominous atmosphere is therefore contrary to the way in which marriage is represented in Ward's novels. The dialogue between Beth and Count Gustav Bartahlinsky reflects Grand's criticism of the social pressure weighing on woman's decision to marry. A minor character in the novel, Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, 'a nobleman of great attainments and wealth are certainly not numerous', nevertheless plays a quite significant role concerning Beth's development (*BB*, p. 118). Moreover, he embodies the love of literature as well as respect for female power of creativity (*BB*, p. 150). His thematic function is to introduce to Beth the idea of 'pure poetry' and

‘copyright’ (*BB*, p. 117), and to recognise and encourage her inherently linguistic talent: all of his attributes help foreshadow the promise of Beth’s literary and oratorical stardom at the end of the novel. Therefore, despite his superior status and birth, soon ‘Beth and Count Gustav [a]re sworn allies’ (*BB*, p. 150).

The narrative implies that already before marriage social pressures are at work among women, whose legal and financial dependence on men reduces them to conformity with regard to their marriage-partner choice. As the portrayal of marriage in *The Beth Book* attests, Grand does not reject marriage but rather proposes a reform to ensure that conjugal happiness and a high moral tone are maintained by both sexes. Setting the novel retrospectively in the 1860s, Grand calls attention to the debates around the Married Women’s Property Act. The character of Count Gustav Bartahlinsky thus reflects aspects of Grand’s responses towards the New Woman debate about marriage which are also evident in her journalism. Count Gustav, who serves as a benign paternalistic figure towards Beth, encourages Beth to take marriage seriously while not letting society influence her decision (*BB*, p. 334). On the surface, the Count’s advice may appear to communicate his acknowledgement of Beth’s worth as an individual, as well as his exemplary respect for her opinion. However, crucial to this chapter’s central concern is the fact that Count Gustav’s words reflect his awareness of the social pressure surrounding the heroine, eclipsing her individuality. It should be noted here that with an exception of the Count’s character, very few characters in the novel perceive Beth’s individuality, which goes entirely unacknowledged even by her immediate family. Society, epitomised by Beth’s authoritative mother, interferes with her rational decision-making, subjecting her to conformism which foreshadows the heroine’s future loss of personhood through marriage.

*The Beth Book* attests to Grand's 'politicis[ation of] the topic [of marriage]' as she reworks the marriage plot in order to focus 'on the abuse of married women'.<sup>27</sup> The result is that the courtship appears shortened while marriage itself happens early and proves to be far from romance:

That autumn Beth was married to Daniel Maclure, M.D., &c., &c. At the time of her marriage she hardly knew what his full name was. She had always heard him called 'the doctor' or 'Dr. Dan', and had never thought of him as anything else, nor did she know anything else about him—his past, his family, or his prospects. (*BB*, p. 337)

While Grand's rushed time scheme serves to prefigure the Maclures' doomed marriage, it simultaneously creates an opportunity for the narrative to explore its contingent collapse as insinuated by the dubious vagueness of the husband's character, his past and future. Thus, 'begin[ning] after marriage, follow[ing] the gradual disintegration of a relationship to demonstrate the injustices of the institution of marriage to women,' the New Woman novel 'rewrit[es] the middle' so as not to 'take on the same cultural and gendered meanings.'<sup>28</sup> These may be found, for example, in Ward's traditionally happy endings which romanticise her characters' embrace of social law and the social sanction given by marriage. Significantly, Grand's woman-centred perspective invokes Mill's rights-based interventions in the 1860s.

Metaphorically, moreover, the description of Beth's new matrimonial home serves a double function which defies the role of marriage as a loving haven. It proves 'inconveniently arranged inside, and ha[s] less accommodation than its outside pretensions promised' (*BB*, p. 340). It foreshadows the nature of the Maclures' marriage, while reflecting Grand's response to the idealisation of domesticity that does not answer to woman's own expectation. The exterior of the house mirrors the immaculate façade of Maclure's character, which is the shell that conceals his degenerative nature. The

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<sup>27</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 16.

narrative stresses Maclure's calculating scheme by revealing his ulterior motive in marrying Beth: "It *was* a swindle," he bawl[s]. "Where are the seven or eight hundred a year I married you for?" (BB, p. 393; emphasis in the original) Far from being the 'right-minded man' whom Grand recommends as a woman's ideal husband, Maclure symbolises selfishness and abusive behaviour: he not only hinders Beth's self-development but also wrecks their marriage eventually.

Based on the theme of violence, *The Beth Book* reflects a serious question of what really constitutes marital violence. The breakup of the Maclures' marriage, it must be noted, is not so much a result of the husband being physically violent towards the wife than of the intellectual, psychological, and emotional abuse to which he subjects her. In connection with the problem of violence, Grand simultaneously raises another case as she notes that Beth is, however, unable to divorce Maclure even when his secret affair is uncovered. Part of Beth's inability to divorce her husband is due to the common law of coverture.<sup>29</sup> In legal terms, the definition of coverture is '[t]he status of a woman during, and arising out of, marriage. At common law a wife "lost" her own personality, which became incorporated into that of her husband, and could only act under his protection and "cover"'.<sup>30</sup> Hence, by agreeing to marry Maclure, Beth automatically loses her individuality. However, the problem of women's legal disability within marriage lies much deeper than that raised by the law of coverture, and which I will analyse in detail towards the end of this section.

Thus, Grand's depiction of Beth's marriage as a form of violence betrays her contestation of the traditional viewpoints of conservative writers as those represented in Ward's *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella*. Significantly, the author puts considerable emphasis on the individualism of the heroine in conjunction with the grievous

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<sup>29</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> 'Coverture' in Jonathan Law and Elizabeth A. Martin, eds, *A Dictionary of Law*, seventh edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 143.

representation of marriage: Beth's disappointment in marriage becomes the starting point of her long path to freedom, which starts early with the character's determination to realise her desire of becoming a writer, despite social resistance and cultural disapproval.

Ideologically, *The Beth Book* communicates Grand's progressive view on the marriage question. It is a politicised work, with its appropriation of the then topical debates about the practice of vivisection, the running of Lock Hospitals, and the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. The latter two are closely related: 'the lock hospitals [were] provided by Government as the result of this legislation.'<sup>31</sup> The 'lock hospitals, which were founded in 1746, have been the principal centres for the treatment of venereal diseases in England since that date'.<sup>32</sup> Notoriously, however, the Acts created social debates among women's rights activists led by Josephine Butler because they 'mandated the examination and detention of prostitutes in an effort to curb the spread of venereal disease, but left their male customers untouched.'<sup>33</sup>

*The Beth Book* attempts to clarify the close proximity between the practice of vivisection and the forced examination of prostitutes in Lock Hospitals. The novel may be viewed as part of nineteenth-century feminist campaign literature, especially as it draws on the iconographical relation between vivisection and sexual violence against women. In 1898, Stephen F. Smith, surgeon at Liverpool Lock Hospital, not only gave vivid accounts of contemporary well-known vivisectioners in action, but also discussed the effect of 'curare', the drug of which Beth professes accurate knowledge, which artificially intensifies the nervous sensibility and thus the vivisected animal's pain (*BB*, p. 440).<sup>34</sup> It is through the shared characteristics of innocence and passivity of both victims of the

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<sup>31</sup> Frederick W. Lowndes, *Lock Hospitals and Lock Wards in General Hospitals* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1882), p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> J. Ernest Lane, 'London Lock Hospitals' in *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2963 (13 October, 1917), p. 500.

<sup>33</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen F. Smith, 'Vivisection: An Independent Medical View' in *LSE Selected Pamphlets* (London: The London Anti-Vivisection Society, 1899), pp. 3, 5.

medical profession that informs the novel's grave disapproval. Grand in fact creates a particularly haunting atmosphere in the scene where Beth is on the verge of discovering Maclure's vivisection activity.

The overall effect is enhanced through the use of Gothic elements which encompass darkness, isolation, the sense of danger and anxiety, incarceration, confusion over what is real or unreal, complete with innocence being killed off. The scene reaches its climax as Beth comes upon 'a sight too sickening for description':

The little black-and-tan terrier, the bonny wee thing which had been so blithe and greeted her so confidently only the evening before, lay there, fastened into a sort of frame in a position which alone must have been agonising. But that was not all. (*BB*, p. 437)

The fact that the narrative refrains from giving a more vivid description of the vivisected dog may be linked to the insensitive nature of the women being examined by Lock Hospital doctors. More importantly still, the sight demonstrates that women, equally helpless, are the least aware of the fact: 'Beth had heard of these horrors before, but little suspected that they were carried on under that very roof.' (*BB*, p. 437) This incident shakes her sense of security, especially when traditionally, '[t]he home is a place of family, domesticity, and therefore safety.'<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the hurting and killing of an innocent victim further demonises the medical profession through the character of the doctor-husband, who represents degeneracy. The connection is clear as '[i]n Britain, the *fin de siècle* Gothic is influenced by theories of degeneration.'<sup>36</sup>

Such a startling discovery only leads to a brave confrontation between the New Woman who upholds humanity and the vivisector who is the perpetrator of violence: "look here, sir, I am not going to have any of your *damnable* cruelties going on under the same roof with me." (*BB*, p. 439; emphasis in the original) Feminist activist Frances

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 88; hereafter abbreviated as *GL*.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *GL*, p. 117.

Power Cobbe (1822-1904) attempted to campaign against vivisection.<sup>37</sup> A notable figure actively mobilising movements designed to fight for women's cause, Cobbe was 'celebrated in her time as a suffragist, essayist, journalist, theologian, and social reformer.'<sup>38</sup> She founded the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection in 1898 and campaigned for 'humane' progress.<sup>39</sup> While *The Beth Book* does not portray the vivisected dog in detail, Cobbe generously reproduces the sad effect, with the animals being forced to undergo sufferings in the same way that patients at a Lock Hospitals might be.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the section containing details and discussion about vivisection and the Lock Hospitals may be regarded as an allegory to the bleak prospect of Beth's future, as her upbringing and education teach her to accept and yield to Maclure's abusive behaviour and to Mrs. Caldwell's violent authority over her.<sup>41</sup>

Further to the novel's theme on violence, the tensions which Beth experiences during her marriage drastically increase with Grand's inclusion of the afore-mentioned love affair between Maclure and Bertha Petterick, introduced to Beth as a paying patient who is to stay with them (*BB*, p. 396). The narrative illustrates Dan Maclure's coarse amorous nature as a contrast to Beth's refined character. This juxtaposition is to illustrate the effect of damage, mental and physical, that a misguided marriage brings.

Significantly, Grand employs the novel to sound the alarm over the fact that violence does not necessarily always happen corporeally. It is not only Maclure's adultery and

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<sup>37</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, *The Moral Aspects of Vivisection*, fourth edition (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), pp. 19, 20; hereafter abbreviated as *MAV*. Cobbe later published a book entitled *Illustrations of Vivisection, or Experiments on Living Animals, From the Works of Physiologists* (Philadelphia: American Anti-Vivisection Society, 1888). Preceding the drawings and accompanying descriptions designed to ensure the success of her anti-vivisectionist attack, the frontispiece reads: 'Do not refuse to look at these pictures. If you cannot bear to look at them, what must the suffering be to the animals who undergo the cruelties they represent?'

<sup>38</sup> Sally Mitchell, 'Introduction' in Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), pp. 1-9; p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Hilda Kean, 'The "Smooth Cool Men of Science": The Feminist and Socialist Response to Vivisection' in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 40 (Autumn, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Cobbe, *MAV*, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> María Isabel Romero Ruiz, 'Fallen Women and the London Lock Hospital Laws and By-Laws of 1840 (revised 1848)' in *Journal of English Studies*, vol. 8 (2010), p. 145.

embezzlement of Beth's own money as I remarked earlier, but also especially his gambling, alcoholism and addiction to narcotics which jeopardise both of Beth's equilibrium and security:

'This is my bedroom,' she said significantly.  
 'I know,' he answered.  
 'You know—yet you keep your hat on, and you are smoking,' she proceeded.  
 'Why,' he rejoined, 'and if I do, what then?' (*BB*, p. 344)

All of these demoralising traits are portrayed as an infringement on Beth's individual welfare. Moreover, although there is not a rape scene in the novel, Maclure does in fact force entry into Beth's room:

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'this is intolerable!'  
 'What is intolerable?' he demanded.  
 'This *intrusion*,' she replied. 'I want to be alone for a little; can't you understand that?'  
 'No, I cannot understand a wife locking her husband out of her room, and what's more, you've no business to do it. *I've a legal right to come here whenever I choose.*'  
 Then Beth began to realise what *the law of man* was with regard to her person. (*BB*, p. 345; my emphases)

The narrative thus establishes Maclure as a sexually abusive man not only in his capacity as Beth's careless, womanising, offensive and insulting husband but also metaphorically through his work at the Lock Hospital. His alcohol abuse, moreover, does play a thematically and culturally important role in the novel.

This is due to the fact that, viewed in a larger socio-cultural context, *The Beth Book* may be regarded as Grand's discursive reach to the temperance movement, often presented by women writers and activists as an allied cause to women's suffrage, through the novel's emphases on responsibilities and rights. The temperance movement originated as an early public realisation that alcohol abuse 'had become a great social



problem'.<sup>42</sup> Such issues inherent in the Maclures' marriage inevitably reflect Grand's call for marriage reform. The scenario reflects the plight of women in the nineteenth century who were still dependent on their husbands for legal, social and financial reasons.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Cobbe also pointed out the legal 'injustice', arguing that women were capable of and deserved to have 'full civil and political rights'.<sup>44</sup> These causes of dependence on men may sufficiently explain the origin of women's 'weakness', or customary submission and silent acceptance of their destiny, which underlies Grand's main concerns in *The Beth Book*.

In conclusion, at the heart of Grand's discussion of marital violence lies an entanglement involving Maclure and a web of ethical, emotional, and sexual delinquency symbolised by his involvement in the Lock Hospital, a love affair, and the pain caused by dissecting a living body. Consequently, as one of the novel's commentators points out, 'even the sternest critic of wifely duty may perhaps admit that, laws or no laws, Beth had good reason for running away from him.'<sup>45</sup> The novel's argument that Beth becomes the sufferer of these forms of violence perpetuated by her marriage to him answers to Grand's wider question on the 'womanly women' and the traditional notion of femininity, which serve to degrade rather than elevate the heroine.

However, there is still another intangible, yet ever-present, aspect of violence imposed on women in general, namely their state of legal disability once they have signed themselves up for a marriage contract. We have seen throughout the novel, for example, that Maclure never hits Beth. The novel does not contain any portrayals of wife-beating

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<sup>42</sup> Samuel Couling, *History of the Temperance Movement in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: William Tweedie, 1862), p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 8-9; Barbara Leah Harman, *The Feminine Political Novel in Victorian England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, *Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors: Is the Classification Sound? A Discussion on the Laws Concerning the Property of Married Women* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1869), pp. 6, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Anon., 'The Beth Book: A weekly record and review for ladies' in *Woman's Signal*, vol. 8 (2 December, 1897); reprinted in Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward, eds, *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, vol. 1 (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 486.

which had been a prevalent social problem associated with domestic violence and the working-class since the seventeenth century.<sup>46</sup> The fact that Maclure's mental cruelty leaves no visible sign on Beth means that there are not sufficient grounds for her to divorce him. Indeed, the 'provisions of the Divorce Act [the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857] and its amendments [the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878] helped only women whose husbands were guilty of adultery *in combination with* incest, bigamy, or *extreme physical cruelty*.'<sup>47</sup> As a result, *The Beth Book* conveys Grand's view of the injustice between the sexes and her agreement with Mill's protest that those laws are an affront to what marriage should be.

Significantly, Grand uses the New Woman heroine's circumstances as groundwork for her response to the marriage debate and the controversy in the previous decade occasioned by Mona Caird's 1888 article. Rejecting Pounce's illicit proposal, Beth reasons with him that marriage 'does not fail when husband and wife have good principles, and live up to them.' (*BB*, p. 468) Moreover, Grand reiterates this claim in Beth's emphasis on the earnestness and honesty of both husband and wife, in both public and private realms, as fundamental elements to the success of marriage (*BB*, p. 468).

Discerning Beth's dire disability, characters who are happily married men themselves, in their earnest attempts to obtain a divorce for Beth, do their utmost lawfully to relieve her of such oppressions. These are the novel's sympathetic characters, namely Sir George Galbraith, Mr. Kilroy joined by his wife Angelica, along with 'the whole of that advanced woman's party at Morne', who collectively represent contemporary feminist endeavours to improve the situation (*BB*, p. 368). Eventually, Grand tackles her

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<sup>46</sup> Joanne McEwan, 'Attitudes towards Male Authority and Domestic Violence in Eighteenth-Century London Courts' in Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, eds, *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 261.

<sup>47</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 131, 167-169, 138; my emphases.

target head-on when she identifies the weakness of this legislation which fails to recognise mental damage on women (*BB*, p. 518).

However, even though Grand argues that the only logical outcome is for Beth to separate herself from the vicious husband through divorce, it is unattainable at this time. Following the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 which enabled Maclure and Beth to have the same rights to their property – the former act allowed a married woman the *feme sole* status to own separate estate while the latter, in regarding married couples as two separate entities, enabled women to have control over their money before and after marriage – it was only in the late 1890s when an abused or mistreated wife was able to try to obtain a legal separation from her husband at a local magistrates' court, which 'reflected a growing respect for individual autonomy within marriage'.<sup>48</sup> This was after the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, and the Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act of 1895, which expanded the provisions, stipulating that 'a separation decree, custody of their children, maintenance, and court costs' may be granted to a wife 'who *left her husband* because of his "persistent cruelty" or "wilful neglect to provide reasonable maintenance"', provided that she was not guilty of adultery.<sup>49</sup> Had the novel been set in a later period, Beth might have been eligible to appeal to obtain a separation order. However, since her birth date falls in 1861 as Beth is twenty-five years old when all 'the [Contagious Diseases] Acts hav[e] been rescinded' in 1886, the retrospective setting implies that Beth must endure her marital condition without any legal aid or representation (*BB*, pp. 513, 518).

Furthermore, the novel conveys Grand's response to the one-sidedness of this legal system of which Mill and his wife-to-be, the widowed Harriet Taylor, 'entirely and

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<sup>48</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 49-50, 190, 14, 175.

<sup>49</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, pp. 174-176; emphasis in the original.

conscientiously disapprove[d]'.<sup>50</sup> What they found wanting, according to 'the statement signed by Mill on his marriage with Mrs. Taylor', dated 6 March, 1851, was the fact that 'the whole character of the marriage relation as constituted by law ... confers upon one of the parties to the contract, legal power and control over the person, property, and freedom of action of the other party, independent of her own wishes and will.'<sup>51</sup> In line with the Mills' unfavourable opinion, Grand's novel makes use of Beth's continued legal disability to reflect the ineffectiveness of such attempts to redress this piece of legislation. *The Heavenly Twins* also attacks this legalised loss of identity through its portrayal of Evadne's experience as she has no rights over her self in marriage.

Such disappointingly unfair aspects of legislation explain the novel's propensity towards an uncertain closure. It raises a question of where the eponymous New Woman might proceed beyond the ending since it remains to the last that Maclure denies granting her a divorce. Yet the novel concludes with Arthur Brock riding towards her. His description conjures up an image of the worthy 'Knight', whom the author depicts as Beth's 'saviour' 'com[ing] to rescue her' (*BB*, p. 527). Placed at the very end, Grand's use of Arthurian romance in the novel is strategically remarkable. Like Sir Gawain, Brock is characterised as 'manly, honest and truthful'.<sup>52</sup> However, the fact that Beth is still married, hence legally bound, to her husband, suggests that her future relation with Brock will be anything but lawful. The novel's ending is therefore highly problematic in its ambiguity which, for a moment, takes away Beth's clear conscience and rational integrity: 'in dumb emotion, not knowing what she d[oes], Beth reache[s] out her hands towards him as if to welcome him.' (*BB*, p. 527)

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<sup>50</sup> John Stuart Mill, *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, ed. and introd., Hugh S. R. Elliot, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), p. 158.

<sup>51</sup> Mill, *Letters*, p. 158.

<sup>52</sup> Derek Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 62; hereafter abbreviated as *AR*.

In Beth's personal context, therefore, her precarious position may be paralleled with 'the adulterous liaison of Lancelot and Guenevere', especially as both are comparatively borne of 'the conflict of passion and duty, of private and public responsibilities.'<sup>53</sup> Despite some negativity arising from these references to the Arthurian legend, the positive aspect of such 'an illicit romance' found in 'many New Woman novels' is that it not only 'demonstrate[s] the alternatives to marriage' but also 'offer[s] the female protagonist a liberating experience that clarifies the constructive role an equitable relationship could play in a woman's life'.<sup>54</sup> Even though the narrative never directly alludes to Beth's contemplation of the future with regard to the state of her marriage, it is arguably open to interpretation whether or not Beth will resort to her 'New Woman's uncompromising "freedom"'.<sup>55</sup>

Through its representation of marriage, the novel attempts to achieve a simple solution to overcome gender oppression by demolishing that invisible but real barrier which excludes women from the public world. Despite Grand's difference from Ward on the premise of marriage as attested in its oppressive portrayal in her novels, in her non-fiction work she advocates marriage as a feasible means to fulfilment. In this surprising parallel with Ward, Grand differs from Caird in contending that, where respect, freedom, and independence for women is achieved through an idealistic, marital relationship with a good, 'right-minded' man, marriage can be benevolent, even conducive to their 'self-development', intellectually and physically.<sup>56</sup> Despite their disparity, in that Caird adopts a more radical attitude compared to Grand's feminine outlook to marriage, I take their proposals as a joint force in trying to achieve the same goal, that of recuperating the

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<sup>53</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 189; Pearsall, *AR*, p. 63; Molly Youngkin, *Feminist Realism at the Fin de Siècle: The Influence of the Late-Victorian Woman's Press on the Development of the Novel* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 50. Mangum and Youngkin have drawn a connection between Grand's use of the horseman figure as Tennysonian knight.

<sup>54</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Grand, 'DMHWS', pp. 577, 576.

institution of marriage. In addition, my conclusion on the campaign against marital inequality corresponds with Ann Heilmann's incisive analysis: the representation of marriage by Caird and – informed by my findings shall I add – Grand not only invokes natural equality between the sexes to refute women's untenable dependency and subordination to men, but also confirms that both women drew extensively on Mill's philosophy of the 1860s.<sup>57</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Through the triumph of the New Woman which takes place after she leaves her marriage, the novel – as part of Grand's 'social project' – mediates her 'feminist ideas' formed to extend 'claims for personal liberty and equality of opportunity' among young middle-class women readers.<sup>58</sup> Based on the marriage between an honest, principled, discerning New Woman and a deceitful, unethical, violent doctor, we witness a stark contrast between Grand and Ward. Moreover, the issue of compulsory sexual consent, read in the context of the Divorce and Married Women's Property Acts, demonstrates that Grand was aware of women's helpless exposure to abuse. Such awareness is evident in her fiction which recognised and 'underscored the relationship between economic, sexual, and legal autonomy. Based on these laws, neither a married woman's money nor her body were her own—both were the "property" of her husband.'<sup>59</sup> In addition to Grand's perceptiveness, the reworking of the marriage plot aligns her with an earlier writer. Seizing on the 'foundation of the liberal feminist response to marital violence' in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), *The Beth Book* demonstrates Grand's

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<sup>57</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 167; hereafter abbreviated as *NWS*.

<sup>58</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 157.

‘resistance to coverture’ and promotion of women’s ‘financial independence’.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the setting also situates it in the wake of the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, which was ‘arguably the single most important change in the legal status of women in the nineteenth century’ as it for the first time established women’s exclusive rights to their own property.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, the novel illustrates Grand’s advocacy of individualism among married women as a boost to their personal progress. In 1898, Grand envisions an idealistic marriage, arguing for the woman’s individual freedom so that ‘she not only makes the best wife for a man, but ... he discovers that he has a real and charming companion in the house’; indeed, Grand stresses the importance of marriage, stating that ‘no woman is fully developed until she marries.’<sup>62</sup> Through its representation of the adverse impact which a violent or limiting marriage has on a woman, the novel proposes that the choice of marriage partners plays an important role in determining her personal progress and fulfilment: ‘If a woman be married to a right-minded man, then marriage will not hinder self-development.’<sup>63</sup>

Based on Grand’s argument, I perceive a connection with Mona Caird’s ‘Marriage’ especially as it anticipates Grand through the demand that women be given access to education, as well as opportunity to support themselves so as to gain independence. Both Grand and Caird project modern perspectives designed didactically to check women’s futile attempts to flee from unfavourable family circumstances and prevent predictable marital distress.

Finally, it is crucial to note Grand’s sometimes self-contradictory notions. On the one hand, her fiction may promote marital separation as the only means for the New

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<sup>60</sup> Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 86.

<sup>61</sup> Shanley, *FMLVE*, p. 103; Heilmann, ‘Introduction’ in *LVMQ*, vol. 1, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>62</sup> Grand, ‘DMHWSO’, pp. 577, 576.

<sup>63</sup> Grand, ‘DMHWSO’, p. 577.

Woman heroines to come into their own, as is the case in *The Beth Book* and also *Ideala*. This connection needs acknowledging even though the first of Grand's New Woman trilogy is omitted from my study, due in part to the periodisation of the selected texts. Published in 1888, Grand in fact began *Ideala* in 1879 and completed it in 1881.<sup>64</sup> Unapologetic in its condemnation of conventional marriage, the novel argues that it can often become worse if accompanied by a wrong choice of partners. The difference is that while marriage takes place in these novels – which leaves separation to be the only sensible solution at the time when divorce was not easily obtainable – in her non-fiction, Grand argues for the 'indissolubility' of marriage, the term she quotes directly from Elizabeth Rachel Chapman's essay of the same title.<sup>65</sup> Contrary to the argument she makes in *The Beth Book*, Grand claims that: 'The tendency of divorce is to degrade marriage to the physical plane entirely ... Greater facility for divorce means more self-indulgence [among men] ... and more misery for the rest'.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, although Grand promotes marriage as well as motherhood, she recommends careful contemplation before making any decision. This view to equality between the sexes is the result of her 'powerful commitment to the struggle for women's rights'.<sup>67</sup> As I have indicated, Grand endorses marriage; the novel only puts forward separation as an alternative conducive to women's autonomy. Grand's fiction thus plays out feminist visions of a rehabilitated marriage in which women can thrive as individuals outlined by John Stuart and Harriet Taylor Mill in the 1860s. The novel's retrospective setting allows this legal struggle over married women's property and divorce to unfold

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<sup>64</sup> Heilmann, *NWS*, p. 29; Mangum, *MMM*, pp. 59, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Marriage Questions in Fiction: The Standpoint of a Typical Modern Woman' in *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 69 (1898); reprinted in Heilmann, *LVMQ*, vol. 2, pp. 481-493; p. 490; hereafter abbreviated as 'MQF'.

<sup>66</sup> Grand, 'MQF', p. 389. Expressing great commendation to its author's acumen and the 'moral education' her work presents (pp. 483 and 493), Grand's article draws its inspiration from Elizabeth Rachel Chapman's book entitled *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction: and other Essays on Kindred Subjects* (London and New York: John Lane, 1897). Chapman's 'The Indissolubility of Marriage' which Grand analyses is the last in this collection.

<sup>67</sup> Mangum, *MMM*, p. 151.



and embrace a narrative of female self-development in which Beth is the genius of the age concentrating its struggles. It takes the narrative of an individual to appreciate the crucial nature of preserving individualism. Essentially, Beth can develop despite marriage thanks to her individualism. Although the novel offers a more reassuring promise – that a female genius may succeed – than George Eliot's female *Bildung* narratives, the success materialises only after a great deal of the heroine's emotional torture.

Significantly, my reading of Grand's two novels has perceived and pointed up the emerging danger of women surrendering themselves and their individualism to the constraints which marriage and the ideology of separate spheres impose upon them. The portrayal of each marriage serves as Grand's argument for female individualism, against the unfair treatment and the wrongs of women, which include catastrophic effects ranging from psychosomatic symptoms – stereotypically diagnosed as 'vapours' and 'hysterics' caused by nervousness and repression – to death.<sup>68</sup> My contention agrees with Angelique Richardson who discerns in Grand's non-fiction the same argument for women's 'thorough pre-marital scrutiny of a potential life-partner'.<sup>69</sup> While Richardson's approach is clearly formed around Grand's eugenicist and maternalist approach to the marriage question – which enables her to connect the author's argument with Chapman – I on the other hand distinguish Grand's stress on men's character and its impact on women's social, moral, and psychological well-being as closer to Malet's approach as seen in her representation of male sexual vice and moral contamination which reinforces her defence and advocacy of the New Woman's wholesomeness discussed in the next chapter.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Feminism and Hysteria: The Daughter's Disease' in *Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 145-164; p. 145.

<sup>69</sup> Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 114; hereafter abbreviated as *LELNC*.

<sup>70</sup> Richardson, *LELNC*, p. 115.

Thus, I conclude that Grand's solution to the marriage question materialises in a dawning realisation that Beth *is* an individual within marriage, who not only demands respect for her self and sexual identity, but also has liberty to determine and order her life. Grand's representation of marriage advances two ideas. First, the book is her political statement proposing separate legal identity for women. Second, it conjures up a vision of a utopian society wherein women may put self before others and succeed. I suggest that it is the depiction of legal disadvantages, the separation of spheres, and the double sexual standard, which collectively contribute to failing marriages in *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*, which serves to bring out Grand's solution to the marriage question by trying to re-educate the public explicitly through graphic examples.

Moreover, unlike Ward who projects a favourable view of marriage, there is a connection between Grand and Malet in that both destabilise its typical image, deeming it the cause of personal and intellectual decline in their female protagonists. Echoing contemporary anxieties on degeneration, Grand offers an unadulterated portrayal of a collapsing institution. While Ward's *Marcella* neither admits nor questions the downside of marriage, *The Heavenly Twins*, published in the previous year, elaborates on the venereal epidemic shockingly penetrating into the middle-class home, damaging innocent wives' health. Grand's social-purist stance is at its clearest in her censure of the double standard condoning male sexual over-indulgence and the on-going problem of prostitution. This is reinforced by Grand's ethical condemnation insinuated through references to the lock hospitals and the Contagious Diseases Acts in *The Beth Book*. This engagement with degeneration, sexuality, and prostitution in her books resonates strongly with Malet as seen in the latter's exploration of female sexual identity and desire in the *New Woman* and the prostitute in her 1890 novel.

I have been focussing on four novels by two very well-known women authors in late-Victorian England: authors famous in their own time and recently in receipt of

attention on the part of feminist scholars. In the following part, I discuss Malet's *The Wages of Sin* (1890) and *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901). In contrast to Ward's conservative ideal of marriage that textually eliminates the individualism of the New Woman, and to Grand's radical critique of marital abuse that threatens the New Woman's individualism, Malet's unusual representations of marriage enable her heroines to maintain the institution instead of doing away with it. Thus, I begin with a focus on *The Wages of Sin* and the New Woman's purity, love triangulation, and the absence of marriage, before moving onto discussing Malet's portrayal of the New Woman's sexual inversion, a modified, gender-confusing version of marriage, and also a love triangle of a different kind in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*.

In the next chapter, I want to argue that women's acts of self-sacrifice such as those performed by the prostitute, Jenny Parris, as opposed to the virginal Mary Crookenden, complicate the questionable nature of late-nineteenth-century gender codes, as well as problematise male sexual freedom and irresponsible conduct. In the final analysis, I demonstrate the way in which the author's resistance to such injustice justifies the immaterialised marriage which forms my argument concerning *The Wages of Sin*.

**Part Three: Lucas Malet**

**Chapter 5: *The Wages of Sin*: Individualism, the New Woman,  
and the Absence of Marriage**

I have explored the complex ways in which Sarah Grand's novels interrogate how idealised femininity – with its sexual ignorance and self-sacrificing duty associated with marriage – entails the loss of female individualism. Significantly, there is a stark contrast between the first two novelists I have examined. While Mary Ward promulgates that home is the woman's sphere, Grand argues that men's attempt to domesticate women is one that women should collectively try to rectify. As Ward and Grand are both working from the mid-nineteenth-century concerns about legal rights of women in marriage and the suffrage question, Malet seems much more invested in ideas of sexuality, selfhood, and self-expression that foreshadow early twentieth-century concerns. Thus, occupying centre stage in her novels, these very anxieties will inform my discussion.

It is noteworthy that alongside Ward and Grand's political activism, Malet's non-engagement with 'the suffragist movement or other public causes concerning the rights of women' results in her exclusion from 'critical accounts of New Woman fiction.'<sup>1</sup> However, in the selected fiction, Malet's female protagonists not only appear as iterations of the New Woman but also respond to significant contemporary debates. Her representation of female sexual selves through desire, whether of heterosexual or same-sex nature, indicates that Malet explores the New Woman figure in terms of psycho-sexuality. But the ultimate triumph of each heroine's purity suggests the author's defence of the New Woman against decadence as well as her enthusiasm for sexology. It is precisely through these *fin-de-siècle* developments that Malet approaches and appropriates individualism: she represents the proto-modernist concepts of complex

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Delyfer, *Art and Womanhood in Fin-de-Siècle Writing: The Fiction of Lucas Malet, 1880-1931* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p. 7; hereafter abbreviated as *AWFSW*.

interiority and psychological depth that provocatively reveal female hidden sexual desires. In the subsequent discussions, I shall demonstrate the ways in which Malet's exploration of female individualism in terms of the protagonists' desire, sexuality, and selfhood offers a new focus to reading her novels.

Part Three of this thesis examines the work of Lucas Malet, one of the best-selling popular women writers of the 1890s, which juxtaposes aestheticism with decadence. While there are elements of aestheticism conveyed through the figure of the female artist in *The Wages of Sin* (1890), it also portrays characters who embody promiscuity, moral irresponsibility, and prostitution. This theme of degeneration continues into *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901), which pits male disability against lesbian desire. Based on Malet's disagreement with the conventional subordination of women which echoes John Stuart Mill, my thesis is concerned with her complicate representation of women, sexualities, and marriage which draws a significant connection with the individualism of her central female protagonists. But first, although less has been written about Malet in comparison with Ward and Grand, she has been receiving increasing academic and critical attention, and in recent decades her writing has benefited from scholars' assiduous attempts at re(dis)covery. It is therefore important to get a preliminary glimpse into her life and writing career as a means to contextualise and acclimatise us to the literary and cultural world in which her works were produced.

## **I. Lucas Malet: a Literary Biography**

Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison (4 June, 1852 – 27 October, 1931) was the second daughter of the celebrated Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Frances, *née* Grenfell (1814-1891).<sup>2</sup> Mary Kingsley Harrison never wrote under her family name.

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Lundberg, 'An Inward Necessity': *The Writer's Life of Lucas Malet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 30; hereafter abbreviated as *IN*.

Adopting ‘Lucas Malet’ as her *nom de plume*, Malet explained in a 1903 interview: ‘Lucas was the maiden name of my father’s mother, and Miss Malet was her aunt ... a very clever woman, it seems, and it was from her that we inherited whatever brains we happen to have.’<sup>3</sup> Her pseudonymous authorship was to do with the men in her family, whose religious sternness was entirely at odds with the subject-matter of her best-selling novels as will be discussed shortly. Her marriage, moreover, proved to be an unhappy and childless one. Despite her training at the Slade School of Fine Art which, established in 1871 in Gower Street, London, set ‘a new and refreshing standard of figure drawing for the British art schools’, she dropped painting when she married.<sup>4</sup> Her aesthetic style of writing can be linked to her love for pictorial art.

In her career, Malet was considered one of the most successful writers at the end of the nineteenth century. Although rivalry existed between Malet and Ward, ‘their alliance in battle together against Mudie’s Circulating Library’ is noteworthy.<sup>5</sup> Considering herself a ‘serious’ writer, Malet took matters concerning women’s status and well-being seriously in her non-fictional writing. In 1905, Malet published ‘The Threatened Re-Subjection of Woman’, an essay which openly criticised Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), President of the United States of America from 1904 to 1909, and his ‘message to Congress’.<sup>6</sup> The essence of his ‘sermon’, as Malet put it, was in Roosevelt’s conventional rhetoric: the ‘prime duty of the man is to work, to be the

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Whiting Halsey, ‘Lucas Malet in London, England’ in Francis Whiting Halsey, ed., *Women Authors of Our Day in Their Homes: Personal Descriptions and Interviews* (New York: J. Pott & Co., 1903), pp. 63-72; p. 69; Lundberg, *IN*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 199; hereafter abbreviated as *FFA*; Stuart Macdonald, *History and Philosophy of Art Education* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2004), p. 269.

<sup>5</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Lucas Malet, ‘The Threatened Re-Subjection of Woman’ in *The Fortnightly Review*, n.s., no. 77 (1 January - 1 June, 1905), pp. 806-819; p. 816; hereafter abbreviated as ‘TRW’; Betsy Harvey Kraft, *Theodore Roosevelt: Champion of the American Spirit* (New York: Clarion Books, 2003), p. 172.

breadwinner; the prime duty of the woman is to be the mother, the housewife.<sup>7</sup> Her grave disapproval of Roosevelt's view comes through most strongly when she employs religious language in her accusation: 'But marriage, housewifery, the permanent subordination of the woman to the claims of the husband, the family and the household, this is rank heresy—heresy, moreover, seasoned with insult.'<sup>8</sup> Malet voices her concerns through a comparison of the present with the past, and how their generation should look to the future for improvements rather than backward to the primitive state:

For, putting aside sentimentalism and faddist absurdities alike, it will be seen, I think, on closer analysis that the demand for self-abnegation on the part of a large section of our feminine population would be a very heavy one in thus setting back the hands of the clock.<sup>9</sup>

In common with Sarah Grand, Malet perceived demands for the 'self-abnegation' of married women as a loss of recent and hard-won individual autonomy for women. Malet took it upon herself to be instrumental in affecting some necessary change to women's imagined identities and powers, especially since she declared that Roosevelt's advocacy should 'be pronounced unpractical and impracticable'.<sup>10</sup> Her forthright view is noteworthy as it informs the retrospective settings of her novels which expose some of this emergent struggle in process.

A remarkably productive author, Malet's writing career began in 1879 and continued until her death in 1931. Among her essays, poems, short stories, and seventeen novels, Malet's work 'from 1891 to 1910, received even more favourable critical notice in London literary circles than that of her contemporaries Henry James, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and Joseph Conrad.'<sup>11</sup> Although her books went out of print following her death,

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<sup>7</sup> Malet, 'TRW', p. 807.

<sup>8</sup> Malet, 'TRW', p. 807.

<sup>9</sup> Malet, 'TRW', p. 808.

<sup>10</sup> Malet, 'TRW', p. 808.

<sup>11</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 4.



in recent years an academic revival of interest has done much to restore Malet's position as one of the finest women pioneers of aestheticism.<sup>12</sup>

In literary history, the aesthetic movement 'occurr[ed] from the second half of the nineteenth century into the early part of the twentieth' and 'manifested itself not only in poetry, painting, and literary essays but also in dress, furniture design, and popular genres like the advice book'.<sup>13</sup> Talia Schaffer notes that in the 1890s, after 'realism began to look outmoded, aestheticism and naturalism became two of the most popular modes of fiction writing.'<sup>14</sup> Reacting to the brutality of realist writing intent on representing things as they were, aesthetes turned towards textual effects, intricate styles, and elaborate literary craftsmanship. This focus on aesthetic, not didactic, values reflected the French notion of *l'art pour l'art*, or art for art's sake. Naturalism, in contrast, was considered 'an exclusively masculine form' that employed eagle-eyed precision 'with uncompromising fidelity to the truth' to depict life in the most accurate detail, without filtering out sordidness or offensive materials.<sup>15</sup> Led by Emile Zola (1840-1902) English-language naturalist writers including George Gissing (1857-1903) and George Moore (1852-1933) created works with controversial consequences for focussing on shocking and grotesque subjects such as disease, disability, prostitution, sex, and ugliness.<sup>16</sup> Despite obvious differences, aestheticism and naturalism 'shared many of the same ideas about art', the most important of which was that they represented '[a] great rebellion against realist imperative.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, pp. 5, 32-33; Delyfer, *AWFSW*, pp. 2, 3, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds, *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 2; hereafter abbreviated as *WBA*.

<sup>14</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, pp. 43, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, pp. 43, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 44.

As one of the central movements in late nineteenth century, female aestheticism 'is an integral part of both literary and feminist history.'<sup>18</sup> Based on Malet's novels, aestheticism may be characterised by her use of elaborate, beautified, 'pretty' language which, apparently charming and feminine, enables her to couch daring concerns while guard herself from the guilt of familiarity with such horrifying and dire truths.<sup>19</sup> The fictionalisation of such provocative issues as illegitimacy, polygamy, prostitution, physical disability, death, and sex, were sufficient to damage a woman's reputation as was the case with Sarah Grand. In Malet's case, her engagement in these subjects caused critical damage also because she was Charles Kingsley's daughter and the wife of a well-respected rector, William Harrison (1840-1897).<sup>20</sup> In addition to her religious household and upbringing, both men's reputation inevitably led society to expect Malet's work to be conventional. Often overlooking the depths and skilful craftsmanship of her works, contemporary critics considered Malet a less than competent writer simply because of her 'unfeminine' subject matter.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the harsh critical reception of her work, Malet continued to write and gained a reputation as she became 'a courageous yet successful novelist of increasingly sexualised studies of characters that problematise categories of gender and sexuality.'<sup>22</sup> Her most critically acclaimed novel was *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901). Prolific writer, scholar, and politician Stephen Gwynn (1864-1950) praised the book unreservedly in the *New Liberal Review*, insisting that Malet wrote the book with 'a high moral purpose', with psychologically accurate depiction of 'the moral effect of deformity on the deformed.'<sup>23</sup> In the past decade, the novel has generated much interest in terms of

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<sup>18</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 200; Schaffer and Psomiades, *WBA*, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, pp. 1, 174.

<sup>21</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 239.

<sup>22</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Gwynn, 'Sir Richard Calmady' in *New Liberal Review*, vol. 2, no. 10 (November, 1901), pp. 480-488; cited in Lundberg, *IN*, p. 242.

Malet's significance in the late-Victorian Gothic and disability studies.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, in relation to this thesis, Richard Calmady's physical deformity can be read in relation to contemporary women's metaphorical disability at the heart of late-nineteenth-century women's movements. Moreover, Malet's formation of New Woman heroines and her marriage plot yield a basis on which my analysis of individualism in relation to sexuality develops.

Of the two novels selected for this thesis, Malet's eighth novel, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, was the more significant. Malet's success as a novelist, at the time when women writers were closely scrutinised, became apparent when the book was compared to the best work of George Eliot, Honoré de Balzac, George Meredith, and William Makepeace Thackeray by well-known critics and scholars including William Leonard Courtney and Stephen Gwynn.<sup>25</sup> Demand was high, and it soon entered the top-ten best-selling chart in England, Scotland, and the United States.<sup>26</sup> However, the majority of the reviewers expressed unease about Malet's themes. While a reviewer stated in the *Spectator* that 'there can be no doubt as to the impressiveness, the seriousness, and the poignancy with which Lucas Malet has developed a gruesome theme', the *Contemporary Review* critic admitted that it was 'by far the most original, subtle and impressive novel that has been published this season', yet adding that the theme was 'gruesome to the point of repulsiveness'.<sup>27</sup> Such resounding negativity may be linked to the impact which the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 (the details of which are given in the next chapter) had on the publication of decadent literature. Consequently,

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<sup>24</sup> Catherine Delyfer, 'Lucas Malet's Subversive Late-Gothic: Humanizing the Monster in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*' in Ruth Bienstock Anolik, ed., *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), p. 89.

<sup>25</sup> William Leonard Courtney, *The Feminine Note in Fiction* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1904), p. 90; Gwynn, 'Sir Richard Calmady'; cited in Lundberg, *IN*, pp. 242, 243.

<sup>26</sup> Talia Schaffer, ed., 'Introduction' in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady by Lucas Malet* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), pp. ix-xxxii; p. ix; Lundberg, *IN*, p. 247.

<sup>27</sup> Anon., 'Novels of the Week' in *Spectator*, no. 87 (14 September, 1901), pp. 357-358; Anon., 'Some Recent Books' in *Contemporary Review*, vol. 80 (1901), pp. 599-608; pp. 602-603; cited in Lundberg, *IN*, pp. 236, 237.

although she began writing in the early 1890s, Malet astutely waited until after the homosexual uproar had subsided to publish her novel.<sup>28</sup> Typical decadent themes included sickness, perversion, artificiality, and aestheticism which, ‘affect[ing] the style and structure of the novel, [resulted] in a greater focus on purely linguistic effects and less interest in conventional narrative development.’<sup>29</sup>

From a professional point of view, to enter the literary market amid homosexual scandals would place Malet at a great disadvantage due to her ‘gender’ and ‘daring subjects’.<sup>30</sup> While critics appreciated Malet’s male contemporaries such as James, Wilde, Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson for their daring topics, experimentalism, and representations of sex and sexuality, Malet was censured for the same reason. Her fiction was deemed transgressive because it ‘depicted sexually explicit issues such as incest, sadism, masochism, homosexuality, or physical and emotional deformity.’<sup>31</sup> Of necessity, Malet sought to inoculate herself against suspicions of same-sex ‘immorality’ associated with Honoria’s sexuality by situating the story back in the safer territory of the 1860s when such ‘inversion’ had not been scientifically ‘theorised’ in the way it was in the last decade. Assured by the ‘innocence’ characteristic of that relatively remote past, Malet manages to discreetly insert a reference to sexological ideas which, although anachronistically inaccurate, blends into the narrative seamlessly. Thus, this conscious but subtle reminder serves to emphasise the connection between Malet’s lesbian heroine and contemporary discussions of same-sex desires.

Similarly, *The Wages of Sin* portrays love triangulation involving its central characters, Mary Crookenden, James Colthurst, and Jenny Parris introduced below. I

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<sup>28</sup> Patricia Srebrnik, ‘The Re-Subjection of “Lucas Malet”’: Charles Kingsley’s Daughter and the Response to Muscular Christianity’ in Donald E. Hall, ed., *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 200.

<sup>29</sup> David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), pp. xvii, 120.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 83; hereafter abbreviated as *PLAB*.

<sup>31</sup> Gillies, *PLAB*, p. 83.

argue that Malet's use of love triangles carries symbolic significance and serves two purposes. First, they introduce the theme of decadence through each male protagonist: both Colthurst and Sir Richard represent moral and sexual decline. This similarity in Malet's male protagonists is crucial as it informs the unusual nature of her marriage plots. Secondly, the manner in which Malet triangulates her romantic love plots is irregular as there are two women against one man. According to Eve Sedgwick, to triangulate means to portray 'rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle' in which 'the bond between rivals' is 'even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved.'<sup>32</sup> As erotic triangles may entail both 'sexual and nonsexual male bonds', Sedgwick argues that the former can 'radically disrupt' the continuum of male homosocial desire, resulting in what she calls 'homosexual panic' and often involving violence, which does not appear in Malet's selected texts.<sup>33</sup> Malet's triangles suggest their participants' competing erotic desire for the beloved. In *The Wages of Sin*, Malet creates two female rivals instead of adopting the conventional male-male-female formula. In *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, the rivals appear to be two characters of the opposite sex, both fighting for a female beloved.

Malet's twisting of the love triangle to represent competition between a man and a woman for a single love object is exemplary of how she treats many of the literary paradigms of such social problem fiction. Malet's aesthetic influences enable her to probe into the very normative categories of sex and play out plots in which the battle for female individualism at the heart of the nineteenth-century 'woman question' is set aside in favour of ideas of identity associated with psychological interiority. It is particularly the doubling across the gender line in this novel, and female sexualities in *The Wages of Sin*,

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<sup>32</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 21; hereafter abbreviated as *BM*.

<sup>33</sup> Sedgwick, *BM*, pp. 23, 89.

which emphasise the difference in her conceptualisation of both individualism and marriage from that of Ward and Grand. Moreover, Malet's exploration of the sexuality and psychological depth in the New Woman characters departs from the legal and political concerns addressed by the other two novelists, and thus introduces a fresh perspective on New Woman criticism.

Significantly, Malet's love triangle in the novel anticipates an important New Woman tale: *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) by Ella Hepworth Dixon (1857-1932). The only novel by this prolific writer, editor and columnist, it portrays the problematic relationship of the two female protagonists, Mary Erle and Alison Ives, who suffer from their suitors' infidelity.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the plot reflects Dixon's grave disapproval of moral and sexual double standards as both characters do not marry because the men are unworthy.<sup>35</sup> This bears a close resemblance to Malet's themes of seduction and abandonment. In the novel, Malet exhibits careful meditation on marriage and individualism through her female protagonist, Mary Crookenden. An iteration of the New Woman, Mary represents female independence and purity of mind. Malet positions her against Jenny Parris, who is a model, mistress, and mother of an illicit child. Out of love, self-sacrifice, and a strong sense of responsibility, Jenny is eventually driven (ironically enough) into prostitution and becomes, by definition, the Fallen Woman. As Schaffer notes, 'the titular sin is sexual excess' which, I argue, affects not only the two sinners but also the impeccably high-minded and physically pure New Woman.<sup>36</sup> Textually, Jenny connotes sexual decadence: 'a woman who indulged in sexual gratification for its own sake rather than for procreation degraded her womanhood.'<sup>37</sup> Malet draws an insidious

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<sup>34</sup> Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1894), hereafter abbreviated as *SMW*.

<sup>35</sup> Valerie Fehlbaum, 'The Story of a Modern Woman' in Valerie Fehlbaum, *Ella Hepworth Dixon: The Story of a Modern Woman* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 117-147; p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 232.

<sup>37</sup> John Fletcher Clews Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain, 1875-1901* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 158; hereafter abbreviated as *LVB*.

connection between Mary and Jenny through the novel's ambitious hero, James Colthurst and a love triangle: Colthurst is the father of Jenny's child, and the fiancé and mentor of Mary. I want to emphasise specifically that Mary is the only 'unmarried' New Woman character discussed in this thesis. This absence of marriage is precisely what enables the individualism of the New Woman to remain intact, and which declares the author's distinctly different view to both Ward and Grand.

Primarily, it is essential to establish a connection between Malet's non-marriage, her characterisation of the New Woman, and the philosophy of individualism. Characterised with consistency, perseverance, and personal achievement, Mary reflects Samuel Smiles's notion of self-help: 'perseverance is the great agent of success'.<sup>38</sup> Endowed with a great sense of purpose, self-sufficiency, and a promise of success, in addition to her individualism and the more complex sense of interiority and self-development, the New Woman forms the focus in the next section where I compare her with the Fallen Woman, whose character serves to highlight the double sexual standard inherent in prostitution. Malet responds to this issue through the relationship between the painter-hero and his model-mistress. This leads to the last section where I read Malet's representation of marriage as an important expression of her view of sexual degeneration. Among the six novels I consider, *The Wages of Sin* is the only exception in which marriage is non-existent. In excluding the legal standing of a female individual and in addition to serving as Malet's response to the double standard and sexual morality and degeneration, this absence, I argue, reflects Malet's ambivalence. While the marriage plot endorses women's sexual fulfilment, the immaterialised marriage itself argues that women's personal autonomy and self-development are the more supreme choice.

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<sup>38</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), pp. 24-25.

## II. Individualism

In earlier chapters, I have analysed the differences between the New Woman and more conventional heroines, such as Catherine in Ward's *Robert Elsmere* who characteristically puts a priority on duties over personal desires. In *The Wages of Sin*, Malet portrays Mary as a talented girl artist whose great ability is manifest since the age of twelve.<sup>39</sup> Her character displays a strong sense of morality, a well-developed love of art, independence of mind, and strength of character that neatly fit her into my conceptual framework of female individualism. This aligns Malet with Grand and Ward, who allow their New Woman heroines to pursue, within decency, their passions and love of the arts: Rose and Angelica are outstanding violinists, while Beth succeeds not only in her literary career but also in another form of art, the art of oratory. Although Marcella does not appear as an artistic character, she emerges as a speaker of great eloquence and confidence before a large and distinguished audience.

I have therefore situated Malet's works as a contrast with those of Ward and Grand not only because of their immensely popular and 'best-selling' status in contemporary reading public, but also because of their refraction of New Woman heroines in an aesthetic context. As we have seen, the case of the female genius was frequently invoked in debates on the nineteenth-century Woman Question to test out the limits of social expectations for female self-abnegation. It should not be surprising therefore, that this formula was also of interest to writers engaging with the New Woman question and drawing on the long tradition of the *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*.

Mary's determination to become a successful female artist represents her as an individualist who confidently challenges the traditional code of femininity by secretly enrolling herself at an art school. This decisive fortitude recalls Sidney Webb's advocacy

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<sup>39</sup> Lucas Malet, *The Wages of Sin* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895), p. 4; hereafter cited in the text as *WS*.



of the pursuit of one's own interests in the way one thinks best.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Mary's independence reflects Mill's promotion of women's right to self-government.<sup>41</sup> Malet further emphasises Mary's individualism in terms of her consistency and perseverance represented in the dedication to her art. Mary's first appearance in the text, at age twelve, shows her intent on drawing a tame doe, an action that makes evident her love for drawing (WS, p. 8). The early promising sign of greatness is delivered by her astute uncle, Kent Crookenden, Rector of Brattleworthy: 'Draw, draw, draw, from morning to night; why, this devotion to the fine arts is astounding, Miss Polly.' (WS, pp. 3, 8) This purposeful concentration, contrasted remarkably with her tender age, proves to persist into Mary's womanhood when the character clearly remains driven by individualism. The heroine's single-minded determination to succeed is at its clearest in a scene where, upon congratulating Colthurst on his successful exhibition, Mary discloses her own ambition: 'I can imagine nothing more inspiring, more satisfying than to have realised one's dreams, and made a great artistic success.' (WS, p. 111) This confession happens twelve years after the doe episode to affirm that art remains the one interest in her life. Importantly, this remark accentuates a connection with both Smiles and Webb, whose individualist notions are rooted in perseverance and achievement.

Significantly, through Mary's confident entrance into the artistic, and thus predominantly male, world, *The Wages of Sin* creates a symbolic link between individualism and sexuality. Colthurst embodies the allure of the art world, into which Mary craves to enter despite her gender, which threatens to ruin her autonomy. The tensions become strongest when Malet actively explores libidinous desires rather than conventional love in Mary's character. This switch suggests that Malet uses the heroine's fiancé who has a child with a prostitute to twist the social problem genre. The desire for

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<sup>40</sup> Sidney Webb, 'The Difficulties of Individualism' in *The Economic Journal* (June, 1891), pp. 360-381; p. 364.

<sup>41</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 22.

a decadent man calls for the individualism of Mary, similarly to Evadne's abstinence in *The Heavenly Twins*. While Grand advocates rational thinking, Malet acknowledges the overpowering force of desire that is an important part of her heroine's inner being she is keen to explore.

If we take the novel as Malet's battle against the mainstream, then similarly to Malet's 'marginal status' in terms of 'the critical reception of her work', Mary emerges also as a marginalised female artist, whose individualist endeavour to overcome social and critical strictures attempts to redress the age-old bias against women.<sup>42</sup> The novel argues that unless women's individual liberty is attainable, they cannot produce works that serve full aesthetic purpose: but this comes at the severe cost of repressing sexual desire and that aspect of interiority. Through this argument, the book foreshadows the woman artist's plight in *The Beth Book* where Beth suffers from lack of freedom, understanding and encouragement when she attempts to produce literary works.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, alongside Grand's defence for individual rights to self-government and Ward's advocacy of altruistic self-abnegation, Malet adopts a flexible view in which psycho-sexuality plays a significant part. When Mary is not burdened with romantic love, individualism prepares her for a successful professional career. However, after Colthurst crosses paths with her, which substantially upsets Mary's firm hold of self-control, her individualism begins to waver as romance interferes with her role as a New Woman, whose purity is presumed to uphold throughout the course of the novel. In the following section, I focus on the tension between the ideal of womanhood and the double standard reflecting the moral and sexual complexities at the close of the century.

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<sup>42</sup> Gillies, *PLAB*, p. 198.

<sup>43</sup> Grand, *BB*, p. 367.

### III. The New Woman

Malet's iteration of the New Woman demonstrates an attempt to create a 'new' ideal of womanhood: a modification of the Victorian ideal against the conventional notion that marriage is the ultimate career for women. Malet problematises the feminine ideal by textually juxtaposing the purity which Mary embodies with the sexual aspect of the selfless sacrifice Jenny makes to save the hero. This positioning serves to strengthen the connection between the New Woman and individualism since the condemnation and punishment implicit in the title prove that Mary's purity matters more than Jenny's self-sacrifice. However, the fact that Mary actively desires Colthurst and is aware of that desire unsettles conventional ideals of female 'purity'. Thus, the love triangle illustrates that Malet both uses and at the same time destabilises the conventional contrast between pure/impure woman in the novel. This extramarital relationship between Jenny and Colthurst leads to my final focus on the double sexual standard which exonerates the man but reprimands the woman.

Although predating the Grand/Ouida exchange by four years, Mary is introduced textually as an avatar of the New Woman who has 'moments of audacity' characterised by 'unconventional breadth of speech and action' (*WS*, p. 90). Scholars have drawn a connection between Mary Crookenden and Mary Harrison/Malet through their similarity in evading the duties of the 'dependent, self-sacrificing domestic madonna [*sic*]' to make progress as 'independent women artists'.<sup>44</sup> Importantly, self-sacrifice was viewed as an act of great merit: women were expected to put others and their needs before themselves, whether within the family, marriage, or society. It became part of the Victorian ideal of womanhood which, 'centr[ing] on marriage and the home', was also connected to the popularisation of the closely related feminine 'virtues' characterised as 'self-abnegation': a virtue, which as we have seen, Malet was herself to explicitly reject in her non-fictional

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<sup>44</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 165.

writings on the Woman Question.<sup>45</sup> Essentially, Malet's pursuit of a writing career points to her strong identification with self-identity and self-fulfilment outside of the domestic realm. But such pursuits, argues Lyn Pykett, are 'improper' according to the Victorian feminine ideal.<sup>46</sup> Malet explores this issue through Mary who scrutinises how self-sacrifice could hinder not only a woman's marital happiness, but also that of her husband.

To accentuate Mary's radicalism, Malet creates Madame Sara Jacobini to interpose herself between Mary's anti-marriage notion and the appeal of married life. Jacobini, 'a distant cousin of the Crookendens, more distinguished for the romantic aspects of her marriage than its social and material advantages—who for some years ha[s] acted as companion to her young kinswoman', embodies a classic notion of Victorian wifedom: her marriage signifies satisfaction while she achieves motherhood playing a maternal role to the motherless Mary 'upon the death of her father' when she is eighteen (*WS*, pp. 81-82, 91). When it comes to matrimony, however, Mary tries to persuade Jacobini to adopt her modern view:

'To settle down to it is *too great an act of self-abnegation*. I dare not risk it—no, I daren't. Supposing as I say, five or six years hence I found it intolerable? No, I can give no sufficient securities. It would be wicked to let Lancelot invest all his capital of future happiness in me. Don't you see that it would?' (*WS*, p. 281; my emphases)

In the novel, Lancelot Crookenden and Mary are first cousins. He has been in love with her ever since she was twelve and he fourteen (*WS*, pp. 10, 22). An affluent, gentlemanly, and well-educated young man, having graduated from Eton then Cambridge, Lancelot appears to be highly eligible as a choice of marriage partner for the heroine (*WS*, p. 70). Both Kent and Jacobini, who serve in the text as Mary's father and mother surrogates, encourage the match since they perceive Lancelot to be the best marital choice for Mary.

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<sup>45</sup> Harrison, *LVB*, p. 157; Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 55.

<sup>46</sup> Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 181-183.

In addition to this matter-of-fact projection of her future in an economic analogy, Malet further makes Mary balance up the idea of modern marriage against the more traditional one without exclusively saying which is the better:

‘I think there is nothing more beautiful than that sort of life; just husband and children, putting aside the development of one’s own nature ... merging all private ambition in ambition for the second generation. I am *not* sure that it is *not* the ideal for us women—what we were originally intended for. But though I admire it, I cannot rise to it.’ (WS, p. 281; my emphases)

Mary reconstructs the traditional roles women played through successive eras and the recurring representation of ideal wifehood and motherhood in late-nineteenth-century literature. Malet must have been aware of the diverse views with regard to the late-Victorian Woman Question. Her own ambivalence reflects on Mary being hesitant in making up her mind about what is the best option for a woman – whether to pursue one’s ambition or develop one’s talents to achieve public acknowledgement and personal satisfaction which denotes individualism, or to submit oneself to the wifely duties completely. This hesitation is noteworthy because it points at the growing split within Mary’s character, as well as a potential sign of Malet’s complex appreciation that gender was far from the sole determining factor in identity.

As I remarked in the introductory section, Malet’s figure of the woman artist bears a significant connection with that in Dixon’s novel. In Malet’s book, Mary is at the centre of both love and artist plots. In *The Story of a Modern Woman*, the combination of this motif is apparent, although the love and artist plots are split between the two protagonists mentioned above. Similarly to Mary Crookenden’s secret registration at the fictional Connop School of Art, Mary Erle strives to succeed as a female painter, enrolling at the Central London School of Art.<sup>47</sup> The parallel continues to expand when Mary’s fiancé, Colthurst, has an illegitimate daughter with his mistress, while Alison’s

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<sup>47</sup> Dixon, *SMW*, p. 83.

fiancé, Dr. Dunlop Strange, seduces one of his patients who bears him a child.<sup>48</sup> Malet's Jenny and Dixon's Number Twenty-seven become unwedded mothers for whom the future looks very bleak.<sup>49</sup>

Significantly, Malet and Dixon portray their New Woman heroines as innocent fiancées who face similar tortures of having the truth concealed from them. The discovery of the wronged and discarded mistresses not only necessitates the breaking of each heroine's engagement, but also brings death to these Fallen Women (WS, pp. 425, 440).<sup>50</sup> The parallels are a staple of New Woman fiction. Moreover, while New Woman scholars suggest that Dixon's novel 'can be read alongside *Out of Work* (1888) by John Law (Margaret Harkness) and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899)', I want to suggest that Malet's novel is a potential source for *The Story of a Modern Woman*.<sup>51</sup> Although both novels underscore the same New Woman theme and love triangulations, with each 'Mary' eventually 'align[ing] herself with th[e] fallen woman', Dixon appears more straightforward in attempting to 'incite sympathy for a fallen woman and condemnation for the man who ruins her' while Malet creates a much more complex vision of the madonna/whore dichotomy.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, *The Wages of Sin* explores the multi-faceted moral and sexual complexities depicted through the views and experiences of the heroine who, in contrast with Ward's ideal of womanhood, anticipates Grand's New Woman through her consciousness of the self and its desires. Malet conveys this modern aspect of Mary's character through an experienced married woman, Jacobini who, with authority stemming from her long and intimate relationship with the heroine, confidently speaks of the latter's view of marriage: '[s]he ask[s] excitement and adventure.' (WS, p. 281) But instead of

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<sup>48</sup> Dixon, *SMW*, pp. 234, 235.

<sup>49</sup> Dixon, *SMW*, pp. 233-235.

<sup>50</sup> Dixon, *SMW*, pp. 276-279.

<sup>51</sup> Stephanie Forward, ed., *Dreams, Visions and Realities: An Anthology of Short Stories by Turn-of-the-Century Women Writers* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), p. xviii.

<sup>52</sup> Christine Bayles Kortsch, *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 121.

desiring a marriage to Lancelot, which Jacobini predicts would be of a ‘safe and pleasant sort’, Mary recoils from the idea, claiming that there is ‘nothing, nothing to look forward to.’ (WS, p. 281) Malet’s metaphor of ‘a marriage-ship’ is illuminating in differentiating the view held by the young, unconventional heroine from her more traditionally romantic notion. In *Lancelot*, Jacobini envisions a marriage-ship, ‘furnished with sails of silk and masts of sandal’, making ‘a life’s voyage over such very tranquil and sunny waters.’ (WS, p. 281)

In opposition to this preference for a dependable marriage partner, Malet’s iteration of the New Woman argues that such predictably smooth sailing is precisely what destroys the pleasure and the thrill of married life: ‘[t]here would be nothing accidental in the business. One would always know precisely where one was. I can map it all out’; in other words, there would ‘[n]ever [be] the least ripple of adventure to stir the surface.’ (WS, pp. 280, 281) Instead of embracing the feminine act of self-effacement, by acknowledging as part of Mary’s being those self-regarding needs for waves of adventurous excitement, terms possibly laden with sexual meaning, the novel ‘produced a new model of female identity predicated on a structural critique of the Victorian categories of female experience.’<sup>53</sup> Mary indeed refines and extends the meaning of women’s fulfilment since in late-Victorian Britain, ‘[w]oman’s sexual fulfilment was to be found only in her role as wife and mother’.<sup>54</sup> Mary’s attitude serves to question the old ideal of womanhood and the validity of the conventional creeds – respectability and stability, as a means to introduce a new ideal of female sexual selfhood.

In the above exchange, Jacobini’s character serves to gauge the extent of the visible evolution which women underwent in respect of marriage during the late nineteenth century. Mary here consistently refuses to marry the most socially eligible suitor. This notion is in itself modern and reflects the radical attitude Malet associates

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<sup>53</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 217.

<sup>54</sup> Harrison, *LVB*, p. 158.

with her New Woman's ideological and personal consistency. True to her sense of adventure and excitement, Mary foregoes the orthodox concept found in other works of fiction which represent marriage as sacred and rewarding:

‘Supposing I did as he wants me to do, and then later found I was bored, how horrible for him! It is much kinder to make him rather unhappy now than run that risk.’ (WS, p. 281)

The above passage suggests that Malet recognises the rapid inter-generational change that causes anxieties to the older generations represented by Mary's mentor. The language of risk and excitement suggests that Malet is taking the marriage debate further than Grand or Ward in the direction of twentieth-century ideals and aspiration: the woman wants sexual excitement and adventure and not just material, legal rights within marriage. Indeed, the heroine here accepts her own sexual needs and sexual individuality, not for the future of the 'race' and maternity like Grand, but for autonomous female sexuality. Moreover, the expression of concern on account of Lancelot's feeling represents the New Woman's sense, rationality, and judgment. Following Jacobini's observation that Mary is 'too logical ... far too reasonable' (WS, p. 281), the novel establishes how irrational, over-feminine characteristics result in disasters. Thus, because of the sexual aspect of Jenny's self-sacrificial act which forms the focus of the next section, she is denied an opportunity not only to epitomise the feminine ideal but also to marry the man she loves. This is because Malet endorses a particular notion of female purity as represented by Mary, in whose 'proud maidenly purity' Colthurst will come to 'tak[e] strange fantastic delight' (WS, p. 175). Nevertheless, Jenny cannot be totally dismissed as both her sacrifice and sexualisation create tensions in the text.

A head-strong character, Jenny leaves home to be with Colthurst who takes her to Paris (WS, p. 408). Jenny's surname, Parris, suggests Malet's play on words: the city is not only rich with 'aesthetic experience' for aspiring young artists but also decadent, with



decadence ‘denot[ing] moral, cultural or sexual degeneration.’<sup>55</sup> Thus, a pair of binary oppositions since aestheticism is defined as the perception or appreciation of beauty, yet as scholars of Victorian literature argue, ‘these concepts are often best understood together’.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the plot affirms the notion that ‘[d]ecadent and aesthetic Victorian literature became inextricable from problems of sex and sexuality in the late Victorian period, especially when it contained a whiff of Frenchness.’<sup>57</sup> While in Paris, the aspiring painter is poverty-stricken, and Jenny resorts to prostitution out of necessity when illness threatens his life (*WS*, p. 188). There is a vital connection between Malet’s prostitute and an earlier verse by a painter-poet. Dante Gabriel Rossetti chooses ‘Jenny’ for a title of his poem, ‘portions of which were written c.1847, c.1858-60, and 1869-70.’<sup>58</sup> The poem candidly ‘embrace[s] the social issue of prostitution’ and ‘free love’.<sup>59</sup> It portrays a prostitute, whose fatigued sleep allows ample opportunity for the speaker, a male student, to observe her and her fallen path. The speaker’s sympathetic rather than condemning comments indicate the position taken by Rossetti, and later Malet, in viewing the fallen woman as a helpless victim of male lust which the Contagious Diseases Acts are designed to perpetuate.

It is important to note that when anything involves sexuality, though perhaps an act of self-sacrifice, it still presents problems both dangerous and degenerative in the world of Victorian fiction. This is the case especially when we compare the novel with

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Jones, ‘Attic Attitudes: Leighton and Aesthetic Philosophy’ in Gordon Marsden, ed., *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), pp. 187-197; p. 189; Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 37; hereafter abbreviated as *KCVL*.

<sup>56</sup> Purchase, *KCVL*, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Purchase, *KCVL*, p. 38. Purchase’s definition of ‘Frenchness’ includes ‘stereotypically relaxed sexual attitudes’ (p. 38). These attitudes characterise Jenny and Colthurst in his younger years, which he regrets especially since he compares her to the New Woman heroine whom he afterwards wants to marry.

<sup>58</sup> D.M.R. Bentley, ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Inner Standing-Point” and “Jenny” Reconstructed’ in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 3 (Summer, 2011), pp. 680-717; p. 690.

<sup>59</sup> Lisa Dallape Matson, *Re-Presentations of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Portrayals in Fiction, Drama, Music, and Film* (New York: Cambria Press, 2010), pp. 113, 114.

*The Beth Book*. The fact that its eponymous heroine forgoes food to the point of ‘starvation’ and sacrifices her ‘pretty hair’ for money to save Arthur Brock’s life becomes an admirable aspect which raises Beth’s personal worth: while the act intensifies her ‘suffering and gentleness’, Beth’s honour and purity cannot be doubted.<sup>60</sup> Although Jenny and Beth reflect an idealised quality in nineteenth-century literature, the sexual aspect of Jenny’s sacrifice lowers her value in Colthurst’s eyes. Jenny’s sexualised character – her affair and prostituted body – embodies corruption. This symbolic union between decadence and prostitution pronounces the growing concerns of the 1890s. These moral flaws, indicative of degeneration, disqualify her as a bride. Despite Jenny’s love for Colthurst and his gratitude towards her, he intends to marry the New Woman who textually stands for Colthurst’s ideal of purity.

Significantly, Jenny’s belief that love will save her anticipates Edith Beale and her fate in *The Heavenly Twins*. Malet places Jenny’s love for Colthurst ‘among the most beautiful, the most unmanageable, the most dangerous things the world has to show.’ (WS, p. 181) This is precisely where the telling contrast between Mary’s self-possession and Jenny’s irrationality comes into play since the latter’s love:

has little to do with the intellect, with appeals to the intelligence, or even to the sense of beauty... It has small brains, perhaps, it certainly, on the other hand, has a large heart. It does not *weigh*, does not consider, does not think; but feels only (WS, p. 181; my emphasis).

However, the novel highlights Malet’s disapproval of this romantic, psycho-sexual, unthinking, sacrificial loss of the self by contrasting the depiction of Jenny’s love and generosity starkly with Colthurst’s cold-hearted, calculating contemplation of how to make his mistress understand that he never intends to marry her: ‘in speaking he ha[s] undoubtedly supposed that every sentence would have shown Jenny, more and more

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<sup>60</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book*, introd., Sally Mitchell (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), pp. 513, 514; hereafter abbreviated as *BB*.

plainly, the distance that separate[s] him from her, his future from hers.’ (WS, p. 182)

Although Jenny proves to be slow, or even unwilling to comprehend, Colthurst remains stubbornly unswayed. He adheres to his initial motivation to tear himself from her, to annul her attempt to regain ‘her place again at his side’, even if ‘to point out that way [i]s brutal in face of that same loyalty’ that she ceaselessly holds towards him (WS, p. 182).

Malet here utilises the central love plot development to depict Colthurst’s two-fold guilt. Firstly, he dishonours Jenny through an extramarital liaison in which she becomes an unwed mother. Secondly, he shirks his responsibility by planning to abandon her for a woman better than Jenny in all regards. Again, Malet intensifies Jenny’s self-sacrifice by enlarging on Colthurst’s selfish worldliness against her unsuspecting readiness in thinking the best of him. In comparison to Mary’s intellectualism, Jenny is characterised as unsophisticated, believing that it is her illness and loss of good looks that deter Colthurst’s marriage proposal. To deepen the pathos, Malet emphasises that what Jenny asks of him are just the basic physical necessities of life, much less than what a woman should demand from her suitor. Still, Colthurst is not prepared to accept her; the only thing he cares about is his art: ‘I want to leave the living soul, not the corpse of my work behind me; a soul that will grow and develop, and be every bit as alive a century hence in my followers as it is to-day in me.’ (WS, p. 180) This underlines Colthurst’s ambitious nature whose desire to succeed overrules everything else: ‘I do propose to myself to effect nothing less than a revolution.’ (WS, p. 180) While the novel celebrates the sense of purpose his speech conveys, it criticises his selfish character. He fails to see that in his grand scheme of things, he has transformed Jenny into a ‘living corpse’: Colthurst is destroying the ‘living soul’ of the woman whose utmost sacrifice of her self suggests not only true love but also self-destruction.

Through Jenny’s magnanimous character, the novel represents Malet’s alliance with New Woman writers and social-problem novelists in their challenge against the

Victorian perception that the prostitute was a source of contamination as seen in the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s. Malet assumes her New Woman stance by depicting the prostitute in an unarguably sympathetic light, which corresponds to Elaine Showalter's account of '[t]he prolonged feminist campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts [which] educated women to understand that prostitutes were helpless victims of male lust'.<sup>61</sup> Despite its slightly earlier publication date, the novel apparently reflects the New Woman discourse of the 1890s. Its focus on seduction and abandonment, and the figure of the prostitute represented as a victim whose cause is embraced by the New Woman, resonate strongly with the first of Grand's New Woman trilogy, *Ideala* (1888). The eponymous heroine leaves her adulterous husband after learning of 'the old story' directly from Mary Morris, a dying 'desolate girl', who 'thought [*Ideala*]'d better know—and get—away from—that low brute.'<sup>62</sup> Out of pity, despite her own reluctance, *Ideala* patiently listens to her imparting her extramarital affair, 'the old story aggravated by every incident that could make it more repulsive and her husband was the hero of it.'<sup>63</sup> Both Malet and Grand appropriate the New Woman themes of male infidelity and female victimisation.

Significantly, Malet's central themes of male indulgence and female oppression not only indicate her attack on the double sexual standard at the heart of legal and political campaigns but also revisit works from the earlier period. In her most successful novel, *Hidden Depths* (1866), Scottish writer and social reformer Felicia Skene (1821-1899) polemically criticises the hypocrisy associated with the 'Social Evil', positing that prostitution exploits helpless women who should be rehabilitated back into society.<sup>64</sup> Her

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<sup>61</sup> Elaine Showalter, 'Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the *Fin de Siècle*' in Lyn Pykett, ed. and introd., *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp. 166-183; p. 169; hereafter abbreviated as *RFSF*.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Grand, *Ideala* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry and Co., 1890), p. 115.

<sup>63</sup> Grand, *Ideala*, p. 115.

<sup>64</sup> Edith C. Rickards, *Felicia Skene of Oxford: A Memoir* (London: John Murray, 1902), p. 168; hereafter abbreviated as *FSO*.

philanthropic work was extensive as seen in her correspondence with Florence Nightingale on nursing and her anti-vivisectionist support for France Power Cobbe.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Skene held personal acquaintance with Mary Ward and was instrumental in helping with the latter's first publication, *A Westmoreland Story* (1870).<sup>66</sup> Recalling reading *Hidden Depths*, Ward describes Skene's heroine as 'a saint of goodness, humility, tenderness.'<sup>67</sup> Proposing that it is 'men' who are 'a hundred-fold more guilty', Ernestine Courtenay, like Skene, critiques the double standard as she spends her life helping out 'lost' and 'wretched women.'<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that as a 'social reformer concerned with the rescue of fallen women', Skene anticipates New Woman activists in recognising that it is men who degrade women and thus make them 'fall' from grace.<sup>69</sup> The real source of moral and sexual contamination, the hushed widespread venereal epidemic, argues Skene, lies in male promiscuity rather than female excessive sexuality. However, although *Hidden Depths* was published in the midst of heated debates surrounding the Contagious Diseases Acts and their extensions which subjected prostitutes to prejudice, unfair punishment and humiliation, its forthright denunciation of the double sexual standard appears to have been closer in nature to Malet's *The Wages of Sin* than to Grand's *The Beth Book*. The aim of her novel is to explicate and evoke sympathy and understanding rather than to furnish a political campaign as part of a larger women's movement. An echo with Jenny's fall into the dark sexual and moral abyss of prostitution is heard in Skene's realisation that, inevitably, offenders 'must starve or sin again to win a morsel of

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<sup>65</sup> Rickards, *FSO*, p. 77.

<sup>66</sup> Rickards, *FSO*, p. 133; Beth Sutton-Ramspeck and Nicole B. Meller, 'Mary Augusta Arnold Ward: A Brief Chronology' in Beth Sutton-Ramspeck and Nicole B. Meller, eds, *Marcella* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Rickards, *FSO*, p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> Felicia Skene, *Hidden Depths*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1866), p. 211.

<sup>69</sup> Julie Melnyk, 'Women, writing and the creation of theological cultures' in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline de Vries, eds, *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 32-53; p. 42.

bread.<sup>70</sup> Thus, Colthurst's character only strengthens Malet's, and by extension, Skene's stern rejection of the double sexual standard with his stubborn refusal to acknowledge this natural susceptibility, to recognise Jenny's real reason and motive behind such 'sinning', notwithstanding the fact that it is he who subjects her to seduction, prostitution, semi-abandonment, and death. Symbolically, self-sacrifice is what kills Jenny.

Indeed, in her non-fictional work fifteen years after the publication of *The Wages of Sin*, Malet articulates a strong argument against this traditional practice for its prejudice against women. Women's fulfilment, Malet suggests in 'The Threatened Re-Subjection of Woman', is no longer found in wifehood and motherhood alone. The author posits that marriage has gradually lost 'its attraction for women of the middle-class.'<sup>71</sup> Thus, through the avatar of the New Woman, Malet expresses her new ideal of womanhood based on purity. Significantly, the novel is noteworthy in providing new inflections for such terms as 'purity' and 'chastity' through the purity of self-focus and singular purposes of the heroine. Based on these meanings, the novel argues that purity weighs more than self-sacrifice, and reinforces this argument when the plot bypasses Mary's opportunity to marry in order that her chastity remains unblemished. Importantly, the novel's ending in the absence of marriage between Mary and Colthurst signifies Malet's modern perception. It suggests that the sense of identity and achievement is not limited to domesticity. This idea reverberates in 'The Threatened Re-Subjection of Woman' where Malet points out that 'the modern woman has already discovered ... that all achievement is based upon the rejection of the not-absolutely-essential ... [and] that freedom is the first element in the attainment of success.'<sup>72</sup> The non-marriage plot which I discuss in the next section explores what Mary has to 'reject' in order to gain that 'absolutely essential' sense of independence.

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<sup>70</sup> Felicia Skene, *Scenes from a Silent World, Or, Prisons and their Inmates* [1889] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. xii.

<sup>71</sup> Malet, 'TRW', p. 813.

<sup>72</sup> Malet, 'TRW', p. 813.

#### IV. The absence of marriage

*The Wages of Sin* represents the concept of ‘non-marriage’ when the author circumvents the marriage plot entangled in a love triangle involving Mary, Jenny and Colthurst. His untimely death, occurring shortly before the novel ends, serves to deliver Mary from her moral dilemma (WS, p. 444). The virginal heroine is no longer burdened with marriage with a man who has wronged another woman. In this section, my focus is divided into three different aspects of Malet’s non-marriage plot. The fact that marriage does not take place represents the author’s appreciation for women’s autonomy. In other words, marriage in the novel creates an impasse, especially when the prospect of Mary’s sexual fulfilment, traditionally perceived in terms of wifehood and motherhood, threatens to overthrow her personal autonomy. Moreover, should the union be permitted, it would be read as a sign of sexual degeneration. This is because the bond between Mary and Colthurst implies a symbolic contagion since the heroine would be sharing the same man with a prostitute woman. Finally, the absence of marriage is a positive textual force as it not only creates an opportunity for Mary further to pursue her artistic career, but also preserves her Madonna-like purity.

In the novel, the idea of marriage appears to be associated with the heroine’s impending loss of personal autonomy. Following Colthurst’s proposal of marriage, Mary soon loses her usual self-confidence, consistency, and determination. Instead, she is overcome by self-contradiction common to other iterations of the New Woman character we have seen elsewhere in this thesis. Malet portrays Mary’s internal conflict as the character admits to Jacobini after Colthurst’s confession of love that ‘I don’t propose going back to the Connop School again. ... I must give up trying to be modern, and professional, and all that.’ (WS, p. 283) This changeability in the heroine highlights the character’s desire for the hero, one that is strong enough to make the New Woman willing to trade her independence and ambition with it. As a result, Mary must sacrifice

all her New Woman qualities, the ‘modern’ and ‘professional’ qualities associated with studying at the art school, in order to prepare herself for marriage. Her intention is confirmed when she admits to Jacobini that: ‘I must resign myself to re-entering the ranks of ordinary, common-place young womanhood.’ (WS, p. 283) This decisive declaration is sharply contrasted with the earlier episode in which the heroine declines to accept Lancelot’s proposal (WS, p. 275).

Even though the narrative suggests that what prevents Mary from entering into marriage is her love of art, the real reason why she is unwilling to accept Lancelot’s proposal is because she loves Colthurst (WS, p. 275). However, Malet contrasts the image of light associated with Mary with the dark vision of Colthurst. The narrator reveals that Mary and Colthurst are nothing but the opposite of each other as they represent ‘light and darkness, night and morning, beauty and the beast’, which signify tensions and incompatibility (WS, p. 289). The author also emphasises the perceptiveness of her New Woman character, whose individualism in guarding her own purity results in the hesitation to continue the engagement upon learning about Colthurst’s debauchery. Mary is again weighing up the question of marriage in economic analogies: she is not giving up on her valuable self in exchange for debasing her currency.

Representing the radicalism Malet associates with the New Woman, the heroine does not naïvely believe that marriage offers an ideal cure for all moral ills as implied by her reaction to the knowledge of Colthurst’s guilt: ‘his future relation to herself ... so appal[s] Mary Crookenden’ (WS, p. 409). This recoil from immorality anticipates the New Woman, such as Grand’s Evadne who challenges conventional codes of femininity when she exhibits knowledge of human sexuality that informs her desire not to consummate her marriage. As I argued in Chapter 3, Grand envisions the results of this naïveté through both the character of Edith, the Old Woman, and her mother Mrs. Beale,



who hope that marriage will prevent Menteith from committing further sexual vices.<sup>73</sup> In contrast, while Mary may be represented as sexually ‘pure’ in the text, her purity is not sexual ignorance, but an active choice of self-containment. Nevertheless, she is susceptible to bouts of hesitation, implicitly a result of her love and desire for Colthurst.

Thus, the New Woman becomes threatened by her imminent association with degenerative sexuality as she appears to lose all that former sense of integrity and independence. Despite the shock, it is nonetheless ‘beyond all question that her love [i]s intact still.’ (WS, p. 437) This love triangle reflects the formulaic nature of the romantic plot, which makes the connection between *The Wages of Sin* and contemporary works of popular fiction unmistakable. The text throws into relief a stark conflict between Colthurst’s sense of responsibility for Jenny – in whom he perceives ‘a demon of profligacy’ – and his love for Mary whom he worships as ‘a goddess of virginity’.<sup>74</sup> In an attempt to desexualise Mary, the hero notes that his is ‘[n]ot only worship for her physical beauty, but for her maidenhood, for the unstained fairness and purity of her.’ (WS, p. 360) Mary’s powerful virginal image becomes comprehensive in Colthurst’s acknowledged indebtedness: ‘Your purity has cleansed it ... [and] wiped out my sense of disgrace.’ (WS, p. 252) The connection between Mary and the Virgin is here strengthened. Thus, while the narrative stresses Colthurst’s guilt-ridden relationship with Jenny, it creates a contrast through his adoration of a ‘divine’ Mary.

However, as Malet is concerned with her protagonists’ psycho-sexual development, she explores the internal conflict by shifting the focus onto the sensual side of Colthurst’s love. He makes an allusion to Pygmalion and Galatea, a suitable allegory for an artist: Colthurst ‘had only wanted to stare at her as at some beautiful work of art; and, of its own free-will ... the statue stepped down from its pedestal.’ (WS, p. 121) In Greek mythology, having life breathed into her by Aphrodite, Galatea the statue becomes

<sup>73</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1893), pp. 233, 235.

<sup>74</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 232.

animated and makes herself available through the yielding act of ‘stepping down’ from her pedestal. She marries her creator Pygmalion and gives him a son.<sup>75</sup> While the word ‘pedestal’ reflects Colthurst’s *clichéd* notion of Mary’s sacredness, his action signifies a secret, natural, inevitable desire to own and enjoy that purity. Along this mythological line of the artist’s ‘infatuation with his own creation’, and despite his determination, Colthurst is still unable to resist the New Woman’s mythical attractiveness.<sup>76</sup> By raising the heroine above moral and sexual impurities, Malet emphasises Colthurst’s own failings through this transparent contrast.

To sustain these psycho-sexual tensions between the decadent man, the prostitute, and the pure woman, the novel ensures that the heroine remains *physically* unsullied to the end through the ‘non-marriage’ plot. Following Colthurst’s death, Kent constantly hints that Lancelot is a suitable marriage partner for Mary despite the fact that both are first cousins. Moreover, while Lancelot’s love is clearly of a romantic nature, hers is cousinly (WS, p. 10). Although his textual proximity to Mary may suggest a possibility of Lancelot replacing Colthurst, such interpretation proves ill-founded. The novel emphasises the one-sidedness of Lancelot’s love from the outset and ensures that it remains unrequited by having the heroine firmly refuse his proposal of marriage. Mary’s refusal is noteworthy in reinforcing her consistency where art is concerned: Lancelot is no less attractive than Colthurst, except for his only ‘fault’ being his lack of artistic sensibility. Besides, Lancelot’s mother, Mrs. Caroline Crookenden, conveys Malet’s strong disapproval of inter-blood marriage. Disagreeing with Kent, Mrs. Crookenden expresses an authoritative view: ‘I have always strongly disapproved of first cousins marrying’ (WS, p. 11). Her rejection voices the *fin-de-siècle* anxieties surrounding the

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Gagarin, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 73; hereafter abbreviated as *OEAGR*.

<sup>76</sup> Gagarin, *OEAGR*, p. 73.

taboo subject of incest, one which Malet revisits in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* examined in the next chapter.<sup>77</sup>

Based on the consistency of Mary's decision-making which allows her to yield only to Colthurst whom she loves, the novel ascertains its argument that Mary succeeds in retaining full control over herself from external interference. In other words, the main determining factor in Mary's decision whether to marry or not is her desire, which only Colthurst can fulfil. The episode in which Mary's love emerges as invincibly intact in spite of the repulsion caused by Colthurst's past association with Jenny verifies my point here: the heroine's love and desire conquer all other obstacles. Hence, *The Wages of Sin* suggests that its artistic heroine makes an exception to marry the person of her desire: because of Colthurst, Mary's personal autonomy gladly gives way to sexual fulfilment.

In essence, while *The Wages of Sin* asks whether marriage is possible for the New Woman, the plot refuses to give a straightforward answer. There are instead projected probabilities which are shrewdly designed so as to benefit the heroine. With or without the hero, Mary would nevertheless manage to retain her love and close tie to her art, either as a married woman through her husband's work or, as a single woman, through her own. Eventually, as the ending testifies through Colthurst's death, Malet prefers guarding the New Woman and her individualism against loss of autonomy and risk of contagion, as marriage to the man who embodies degeneration would likely infer.

In addition to its anticipation of the New Woman, the novel's discussion of *fin-de-siècle* fears of degeneration is subtly integrated into the main narrative through Jenny and Colthurst. As a prostitute, she epitomises contagion, whereas his relationship with her reflects degenerative sexuality. This pairing serves as Malet's overarching metaphor for degeneration. In the novel, sins and poverty are regarded as illnesses which are contagious. Suffering from guilt, shame, and disgust, Colthurst at first shuns both Jenny

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<sup>77</sup> Schaffer and Psomiades, *WBA*, pp. 50, 51, p. 60 n. 12.

and his unacknowledged daughter, Little Dot, thus deliberately concealing his relationship with them from society. He cannot bear looking at his own child because he sees in her ‘the poisonous fruit of his own sin—an evil deed taking on bodily form and confronting the doer of it as a material fact; [sees] in her the incarnation of his own lust and Jenny’s ruin.’ (WS, p. 375) Instead of turning Colthurst into an anti-hero, however, Malet balances his negativity with a sense of duty towards them. For example, there is a time when he looks after Dot (WS, p. 381). He also nurses Jenny at her deathbed, in front of Mary whom he wants to still be his ‘bride and wife’ but realising that he has lost her permanently (WS, p. 437). In this respect, the didactic messages from Malet’s novels show how she and Grand share concerns about sexual misconduct in both men and women, which were among the symptoms of the degenerative state of the *fin de siècle*.

Based on Malet’s positive and sympathetic portrayal of her heroine, the character succeeds in deflecting any association with degeneration which would become the aim of critical detractors of the New Woman in later years. Contrary to popular views, but concurring with the protagonists in the novels of Ward and Grand, *The Wages of Sin* portrays the New Woman as an epitome of purity. Mary stands in opposition to the corruption of marriage and sexuality represented by Colthurst and Jenny.

In fact, the subject of degeneration had a considerable impact on the literature of the period. Towards the end of the century, anxieties arose out of three causes of degeneration: the national, biological, and aesthetic decline.<sup>78</sup> As I note in the introductory chapter, Sir James Cantlie lectured on the subject of ‘Degeneration amongst Londoners’ in 1885 to caution against such dissolution.<sup>79</sup> Fears of biological degeneration resulted in a great body of new medical knowledge. Evidence of interests in symptoms pertaining to degeneration such as hysteria, neurosis, and heredity began to surface, not

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<sup>78</sup> Stephen Arata, ‘Introduction: Decline and Fall’ in *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> James Cantlie, *Degeneration amongst Londoners* (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. 7-61.

only in the medical arena but also in journalism and literature. Such preoccupations with the subject of decline found participants in both sexes. For instance, Grand's remarkable medical knowledge was clearly the result of her interest in the subject; she utilised hysteria effectively to build up the dramatic climax in *The Heavenly Twins*. The absent marriage in *The Wages of Sin* thus serves to highlight the incompatibility between the New Woman and the decadent man. Culturally as well as ideologically, as Linda Dowling argues, the New Woman and the decadent can never hope to unite.<sup>80</sup>

Furthermore, Malet's iteration of a New Woman corresponds to Grand's campaign for social purity and eugenics: marriage to the decadent artist metaphorically poses a threat to both self and as society through its potential contamination caused by his relationship with Jenny. To distance the heroine from the Fallen Woman's degenerative influence, the narrator declares: 'Mary Crookenden, proudly clean in mind and body' (WS, p. 424). The focus on the New Woman's mental, moral, and physical cleanliness resists textual alliance with female decadence. In other words, Malet separates Mary from the idea of sexual degeneration by resolving the conflict between the New Woman's artistic identity and her emotional desire for Colthurst through her deployment of a *deus-ex-machina* device, literally 'a god from the machine', to facilitate 'an extraneous solution of a difficulty.'<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Malet's decision against the heroine's marriage to the decadent may be read as her endeavour to prove that the New Woman is neither a social threat nor a moral failure. This strand in Malet's plot equates her with feminist campaigners who established the New Woman as a regenerative influence, chiefly through an attempt to differentiate between male and female aesthetics, and highlight the hazardous

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<sup>80</sup> Linda Dowling, 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s' in Pykett, *RFSF*, pp. 47-63; p. 56; hereafter abbreviated as 'DNW'.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Dwight Goodell, *Athenian Tragedy: A Study in Popular Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), p. 116.

consequences of male decadents' uncontrolled libidinous endeavour. For example, when Grand juxtaposes Beth as an aspiring New Woman with the decadent poet, Alfred Cayley Pounce, the novelist is painstakingly careful in highlighting the eponymous heroine's acute perceptiveness, preference for an open and honourable existence, and purity.<sup>82</sup> Similarly to Beth's sexual integrity and moral strength discussed in the previous chapter, Mary does not associate herself with decadence. As Beth finds fulfilment in writing, Mary likewise will thrive in painting.

It is worth noting here that both Malet's and Grand's positive attitude was by no means universal. As Dowling suggests, critics often perceived a strong connection between the New Woman and decadence:

To most late Victorians the decadent was new and the New Woman decadent. The origins, tendencies, even the appearance of the New Woman and the decadent – as portrayed in the popular press and periodicals – confirmed their near ... relationship. Both ... raised as well profound fears for the future of sex, class, and race.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, I observe that Malet's early novel both anticipates the ideological connection between the two figures and counteracts the critical derision aimed at the New Woman. Only the decadent Colthurst and Jenny are punished by death. In the following section, I concentrate on the absence of marriage and its significance in connection with the individualism of the New Woman.

The fact that the hero dies as a way to pay for his sins both verifies and confirms Malet's standpoint on the importance of female purity and independence. Colthurst's demise brings the end to his further immoral acts. According to the late-Victorian scientific discovery of heredity, his death necessarily means the prevention of undesirable characteristics being passed onto offspring. Significantly, Malet's elimination of the hero

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<sup>82</sup> Grand, *BB*, p. 472.

<sup>83</sup> Dowling, 'DNW', pp. 49-50.

from the novel indicates not only her argument in favour of morality and eugenics, but also the preservation of Mary's individualism. As I remarked earlier, Mary as an individual retains her righteous disposition by not sharing the same man with a prostitute.

Thus, the absence of marriage is central to the development of the New Woman and her individualism as it intensifies Mary's powerful character. Her purity safeguards her from disgrace while Colthurst's uncontrolled sexuality punishes him: his fall from the cliff symbolises his fall from grace, and his death the payment of the 'sin' he committed. In fact, Colthurst dies after Jenny is dead, which means both of them have paid their 'wages of sin', a clear reference to the Bible: '[f]or the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.' (*KJV*, Rom., 6:23) Metaphorically as well as literally, the two sinners' death serves to give Mary's her eternal life of purity and freedom to pursue what Malet terms the 'absolutely essential': her art.

In addition to the *deus-ex-machina* plot device associated with Colthurst's fall to death, I want to suggest that marriage is in fact cancelled before: 'Mary Crookenden had gone from him. Gone ... with a kiss sacred and sweet; and with her going Colthurst's gracious vision of wedded-love had fled back through the gate of dreams'. (*WS*, p. 441) Although Mary's love and desire for Colthurst appear to linger still since it is she who initiates that last kiss, it is her conscious decision, assisted by Colthurst who serves his textual function by ensuring that Mary's purity remains (*WS*, p. 440).

While the mutual decision leading to the lovers' separation reflects Malet's notion that decadence must never interfere with the New Woman, it is the New Woman who helps reform the decadent. Therefore, my reading perceives Colthurst's death to be less accidental since the authorial decision to forestall marriage appears to be predetermined. Notably, that Mary turns her back on Colthurst serves to reinforce Malet's argument for female individualism. Moreover, the absence of marriage suggests that this institution is significantly in decline: the ending reflects the changing attitude. Compared to Ward's

and Grand's (conditional) advocacy, Malet articulates the lack of faith in *conventional* marriage (this informs her unconventional representation in the 1901 novel which I discuss in the next chapter). With regard to her perspective on the New Woman, the non-marriage plot suggests Malet's belief that the New Woman's true triumph remains not in matrimony but in her intact purity and opportunity to succeed in her chosen art.

The fact that Malet characterises the heroine as a female artist is important: Mary represents the New Woman as a moral and artistic ideal at the time when aesthetics was taking to the centre stage in literature. As the novel implies, the heroine is likely to fulfil her dreams of becoming a professional because she will have the time, energy, and freedom which would otherwise be differently occupied were she to become Colthurst's wife. In this sense, Mary is married to the idea of art. Since marriage as a social institution appears to have been in the downfall, Malet substitutes it with art at its zenith instead. This is what I perceive to be Malet's response to the aesthetic New Woman who is in opposition to the *fin-de-siècle* decadent movement. Thus, Malet's artistic New Woman, when considered through her non-marriage which symbolically separates the female artist from decadence, is not subversive to social norms as she is portrayed as the upholder of morality, and the new ideal of self irrespective of marriage.

Malet reinforces the notion that self and purity matter more than marriage through the other important male character, Lancelot. Acting instinctively on his love, and also true to his namesake, Lancelot has served in the novel as Mary's loyal guard. It is noteworthy that Kent has entrusted Mary to Lancelot from the very beginning through to the end. In the episode where Mary wants to draw the deer up close, Kent gives an order: 'Take care of her, Lancelot.' (WS, p. 10) These words will serve as the novel's closing line when Kent, once more, orders him to '[t]ake good care of her, Lance.' (WS, p. 450) As a narrative device, Malet's use of Arthurian romance is significant, especially as it occurs at the very end. The novel closes with a heroic gesture of Lancelot entering into



the scene on horseback the moment Kent exclaims: ‘Ah! here come Lancelot and the horses.’ (WS, p. 450) This motif recalls the ending of *The Beth Book* where Arthur Brock appears in the horizon as a knight in shining armour riding towards Beth.<sup>84</sup> The romantic possibility of marriage between Mary and Lancelot, however, is out of the question when we take into account the New Woman’s autonomy and consistency in her decision-making which the novel has made evident.

## V. Conclusion

The fact that *The Wages of Sin* ends with no possibility of marriage, as opposed to Grand’s novels, serves as Malet’s subtle critique of this social institution. As the novel was an important medium through which writers discussed and disseminated their ideas, Malet’s decision to cancel the most central element in novel-writing tradition indicates that she problematised the question of marriage. My analysis may be placed alongside Patricia Lundberg’s *précis* of Malet’s themes and interest: ‘A specialty of Malet’s was triangulated love affairs — heterosexual and lesbian, licit and illicit, requited and unrequited — and her women characters reject marriage for creative artistry.’<sup>85</sup> However, I differ from Lundberg in arguing that it is less to do with the arts – the aesthetic notion *l’art pour l’art* – that impels her female characters to scorn marriage. Rather it is because marriage, in its traditional form which *rejects* female sexuality, is no longer adequate to fulfil women. More importantly, it can be a source of sexual and moral contamination.

Accordingly, Malet turns *The Wages of Sin* into a literary strategy, through her representation of individualism, the New Woman, and the absent marriage, to refute the contemporary association of the New Woman with decadence. Her concern is well-

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<sup>84</sup> Grand, *BB*, p. 527.

<sup>85</sup> Patricia Lundberg, ‘Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison [Lucas Malet] (1852-1931)’ in Jennifer Cognard-Black and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls, eds, *Kindred Hands: Letters on Writing by British and American Women Authors, 1865-1935* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2006), pp. 133-146; p. 134.

grounded since, as Lyn Pykett notes, the ‘language of degeneration and the issue of gender were at the centre of the turn-of-the-century discourse on fiction.’<sup>86</sup> Significantly, Malet’s defence of the New Woman heroine’s wholesomeness serves to guard her own reputation by associating Mary’s stance with aesthetic art and purity, not with Colthurst’s decaying art steeped in sexual vice. Moreover, it indicates her alignment with New Woman writers such as Sarah Grand and their ‘revolt against established literary conventions and modes of representation.’<sup>87</sup> The novel emphasises this connection between Malet and New Woman fiction through her construction of the heroine’s autonomy.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the 1890 publication date places the novel at the beginning of a decade preoccupied with significant change and controversial debates concerning women’s position. Essentially, *The Wages of Sin* is Malet’s response to social issues surrounding the Woman Question through its early iteration of a New Woman figure.

In addition, although disruptive, the absence-of-marriage plot is significant and must be properly acknowledged. It serves a positive function of sustaining the purity and individualism of the New Woman. I want to note here that its absence is different from other ‘non-marriage-centred novels’ associated with New Woman writing, namely ones ‘supporting an idea of female sexual freedom.’<sup>89</sup> In Malet’s novel, it allows the heroine’s individualism to thrive through the aesthetic sphere of art. In consequence, Mary’s independence remains to the same, if not greater, extent as her remaining male counterparts, including Lancelot.

This unconventional representation is followed by that of another strange and complex marriage in Malet’s later novel, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*. In the next chapter, I concentrate on the complicated gender role reversal played out by the

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<sup>86</sup> Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1995), p. 53; hereafter abbreviated as *EF*.

<sup>87</sup> Pykett, *EF*, p. 57.

<sup>88</sup> Pykett, *EF*, p. 57.

<sup>89</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 42.

protagonists. The novel portrays Honoria St. Quentin who completely reverses gender roles at the end of the novel by proposing marriage to the hero. Opposite Honoria is the beautiful but destructive Helen de Vallorbes who represents the immoral, deceptive, sexually overcharged *femme fatale*, whose vengeance leads to Richard's disgrace. The two women characters create an opportunity for Malet to explore and experiment with female sexuality in a new dimension.

**Chapter 6: *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*: Individualism,  
the New Woman, and Unconsummated Marriage**

Chapter 6 closes Part Three with an examination of Lucas Malet's *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901). The novel caused public controversy, mainly over its treatment of same-sex love, sexual misdemeanour, and the hero's physical deformity.<sup>1</sup> My reading of this novel focuses on Malet's textual representation of gender reversal. It is noteworthy that the date of publication bore a direct relation to the scandal surrounding popular poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, a *fin-de-siècle* icon who was associated with the Decadent Movement. Following the Wilde trials in 1895, which sentenced him to two years' imprisonment and hard labour, he was publicly punished with the maximum penalty for 'acts of gross indecency and immorality with men'.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of 'an increasingly prudish reading public', Malet's decision to delay publication of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* until after 'a dangerously repressive atmosphere' following the controversial case had subsided is crucial to reading its depiction of same-sex desire.<sup>3</sup> The novel, 'in progress in the 1890s', was 'written over a span of fourteen years'.<sup>4</sup> It draws a clear connection between Honoria St. Quentin, her attitude to marriage, her mannish build and behaviour, and most important of all, her feelings for Katherine, the eponymous Sir Richard's mother. As the latest published novel covered by this thesis, it evidently provides an illuminating contrast to the other works in terms of marking the changes in social and cultural values. At the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 83; hereafter abbreviated as *PLAB*.

<sup>2</sup> Michael S. Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Lundberg, 'An Inward Necessity': *The Writer's Life of Lucas Malet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 162; hereafter abbreviated as *IN*.

<sup>4</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, pp. 166, 228.

moreover, I want to point out that it underlines the hidden similarities between Lucas Malet, Mary Ward, and Sarah Grand where their New Woman heroines are concerned.

Considering its original ‘birth’, the novel is primarily *fin de siècle* but to classify it as belonging to one particular subgenre would be inadequate. In fact, it can be described as belonging to a variety of literary modes: the realist novel (or the English naturalist novel as influenced by the realism of contemporary French fiction written during the 1880s and 1890s), the religious novel, the psychological novel, the Gothic novel, the *Bildungsroman*, and aesthetic fiction. It is this last which has most recently been central to revived research interest in Malet.<sup>5</sup> The generic multivalency of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* is understandably a result of the numerous perspectives that critics from different schools employed to approach the novel, hence the various analyses that each practice yielded. But it also signifies the multi-layered depth of Malet’s novel. In this thesis, I take the novel predominantly as a New Woman narrative through its representation of Honoria, who is clearly an avatar of the New Woman despite the novel’s setting in the 1860s. Moreover, Malet’s work shares close characteristics and interests with other New Woman writers of the period including, as Talia Schaffer notes, Ouida, Vernon Lee, Ella Hepworth Dixon, and Mona Caird.<sup>6</sup> However, what marks her significant differences is that, in the early twentieth century, Malet is accessing new models of a sexual psychological self and individuality in community that simply are out of step with the debates in political reform that polarise Ward and Grand. The two former are battling out the legal question of marriage, self and

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<sup>5</sup> Talia Schaffer, ed., ‘Introduction’ in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady by Lucas Malet* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), pp. ix-xxxii; pp. xiv-xix; Talia Schaffer, ‘Connoisseurship and Concealment in *Sir Richard Calmady*: Lucas Malet’s Strategic Aestheticism’ in Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds, *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 44-61; hereafter abbreviated as *WBA*; Talia Schaffer, ‘Malet the Obscure’ in Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 197-243; hereafter abbreviated as *FFA*.

<sup>6</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 5.

womanhood in current legal state. Malet has a very different utopian urge to imagine total alternatives via the new models of sexual selfhood.

Similarly to Sarah Grand's critical reception following her frank portrayals of promiscuity coupled with acquired and congenital syphilis, female desire, and comments on the Lock Hospital, Malet was likewise attacked for depicting sexual passions in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*. With regard to Malet's representation of sexuality in this novel, my discussion extends to reach a late-Victorian theory about sexual inversion, prompted by signs of masculinity consistently present in the New Woman protagonist. Honoria, the dominant, sexually deviant character introduces same-sex friendships which are obliquely suggestive of her homoerotic desires towards other female characters. Unlike Grand's Angelica, Malet's heroine is not a cross-dresser, but she favours unfashionably unfeminine outfits which allow for practicality, swift movements, and male sports like riding and hunting. Furthermore, this absence of femininity in Honoria's character is starkly contrasted with the lack of masculinity in the eponymous character.

Based on such interesting combinations, my analysis finds its root in the novel's representation of individualism, which I define in this chapter as sexual inversion. Her character's wish-fulfilment reflects a related idea of individuality. According to psychologist and scholar Roy F. Baumeister, '[f]ulfillment was associated with private, even inner, life — with individuality.'<sup>7</sup> Again, Honoria serves to underscore Malet's notion of the self which, as scholar Dimitris Tziouvas observes, is closely connected with identity, especially as 'identity has been equated since the nineteenth century with the hidden, inner and, in turn, true self'.<sup>8</sup> With regard to the chapter's focus on the New Woman, I discuss the figure in terms of its (un)femininity in relation to the ideal of

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<sup>7</sup> Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> Dimitris Tziouvas, *The Other Self: Selfhood and Society in Modern Greek Fiction* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), p. 6.

womanhood. Finally, the idea of unconsummated marriage which resounds in the novel becomes one of the most significant aspects of Malet's work.

The fact that the novel is set in the 1860s brings forth new concerns emerging in the last decades of the century and Malet's circumvention regarding them. Engendered by new sciences such as eugenics and sexology, the nascent knowledge on sexuality and its pathological conditions soon contributed to the period's taboo subjects. These anxieties were translated into textual manifestations variously in legal, medical, religious, and literary discourses such as the periodical press and the novel. The last decades witnessed the emergence of a pioneering, medical discourse that focused on sexuality and ranged from issues on sexual behaviours, to gender categories, to the 'sexual inversion' of the brain, a term which eventually came to define homosexuality.<sup>9</sup> Through her representation of Honoria, Malet embraces the notion of the gendered self and self-development that relates to contemporary sexological discourse.

In this section, I want to look at the history of late-Victorian sexual science largely influenced by German theorists, namely the birth of sexology, the ramifications of which extended into the study of sexual inversion, in order to establish grounds on which my study of individualism as represented in the novel through lesbianism is based. The notion of gender identities which departed from conventional norms, and which posed themselves as a clinical, psycho-pathological symptom, emerged during the 1860s. Many twentieth-century critics and historians of sexuality hold German lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) as the first to form a scientific theory of homosexuality, although he

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<sup>9</sup> Patricia Murphy, 'Disdained and Disempowered: The "Inverted" New Woman in Rhoda Broughton's *Dear Faustina*' in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2000), pp. 57-79; p. 63; Esther Newton, 'The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman' in *Signs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1984), pp. 557-575; pp. 557-560; hereafter abbreviated as 'MML'.

himself was not a medical man.<sup>10</sup> Ulrichs argued that homosexuality was not acquired later in life but that homosexuals (although he never used the term but preferred referring to them as ‘the third sex’ or ‘uranians’ as opposed to the ‘true’ man) were rather biologically hardwired to be attracted to persons of their own sex.<sup>11</sup> His ideas influenced many working in the field of sexual science.

Interested in and responding to Ulrichs’s theory, Berlin-born Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal (1833-1890), eminent neurologist and professor of psychiatry since 1874, deserves recognition for having made ‘one of the earliest and most influential medical attempts to explain homosexuality’.<sup>12</sup> In an 1869 article which has been regarded as ‘the first medical paper in modern times on what came to be designated as homosexuality’, Westphal diagnosed his clients, a female and a male transvestite, with *konträre Sexualempfindung*.<sup>13</sup> The phrase, which may literally be translated as ‘contrary sexual feeling’,<sup>14</sup> or sexual instinct inverted towards members of the same sex, became standardised medical term by its equivalent Latinate terms as sexual ‘inversion’ since the late 1870s, having been appropriated by American and Italian psychiatrist in 1870 and 1878 respectively.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in light of medical literature and scientific writings of the late nineteenth century, homosexuality was defined and stereotypically represented as a

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<sup>10</sup> Hubert Kennedy, ‘Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: First Theorist of Homosexuality’ in Vernon Rosario, ed., *Science and Homosexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 26; hereafter abbreviated as ‘KHU’.

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy, ‘KHU’, pp. 26-27, 30, 32-33; Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger: Sex, Science, and Self in Imperial Vienna* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 92; hereafter abbreviated as *OW*.

<sup>12</sup> Sengoopta, *OW*, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Westphal, ‘Die konträre Sexualempfindung: Symptom eines neuropathologischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes’ in B. Gudden, E. Leyden, L. Meyer and C. Westphal, *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Verlag von August Hirschwald, 1870), pp. 73-108.

<sup>14</sup> Warren Johansson, ‘Contrary Sexual Feeling’ in Wayne R. Dynes, Warren Johansson, William A. Percy and Stephen Donaldson, eds, *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, vol. 1 (Chicago and London: Garland, 1990), pp. 266-267.

<sup>15</sup> Derek Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 37-38 n. 1; Vernon A. Rosario, *Homosexuality and Science: A Guide to the Debates* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2002), p. 275.



psychiatric illness, indeed a trait of degeneration, which ‘imagined mental illness to be rooted in a diseased nervous system.’<sup>16</sup>

Similarly to Westphal, psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) was influenced by Ulrichs’s writings. Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, an iconic sexologist work carefully revised twelve times between 1886 and 1902, ‘established some of the best known sexual taxonomies’.<sup>17</sup> His key terminology of ‘perversion and deviancy’ still remains in use nowadays including homosexuality, lesbianism, and fetishism.<sup>18</sup> Lesbian relationships, what Krafft-Ebing calls ‘forbidden friendships’, were prevalent among not only female prisoners, but also prostitutes whose unsatisfactory ‘intercourse with impotent or perverse men’ impelled these ‘unfortunate creatures’ to ‘indulge in it.’<sup>19</sup> He divided lesbianism into two categories: ‘congenital contrary sexual instinct’ which was ‘pathological’, and ‘acquired sexual instinct’ characterised by ‘repugnance for sexual intercourse with the opposite sex.’<sup>20</sup> Through its association with prisoners and prostitutes, Krafft-Ebing represented lesbianism as a ‘vice’ or ‘saphism’ [*sic*] in reference to the Greek lyric poet Sappho whose poems ‘express love and desire for women and girls.’<sup>21</sup> Her birthplace, the island of Lesbos, lent its name to the word ‘lesbian’. Significantly, Krafft-Ebing reported that ‘saphism’ was ‘met more frequently among ladies of the aristocracy and prostitutes’, and that ‘Lesbian love’ was ‘of late,

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<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Matte, ‘International Sexual Reform and Sexology in Europe, 1897-1933’ in *The CBMH/BCHM*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2005), p. 255.

<sup>17</sup> Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 32, 22; hereafter abbreviated as *ELS*.

<sup>18</sup> Bauer, *ELS*, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, ‘Lesbian Love’ in *Psychopathia Sexualis with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study*, trans., Charles Gilbert Chaddock, seventh edition (Philadelphia and London: F. A. Davis Company 1893), pp. 428-430; p. 429; hereafter abbreviated as ‘LL’. Krafft-Ebing draws extensively on the mid-century work of French hygienist Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet (1790-1836). First published in 1835, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* was translated into English in 1857 entitled *On Prostitution in the City of Paris*.

<sup>20</sup> Krafft-Ebing, ‘LL’, p. 429.

<sup>21</sup> Krafft-Ebing, ‘LL’, p. 430; David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 49.

quite the fashion,—partly owing to novels on the subject'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, sexology as a new field of scientific studies came to create such an influential impact on many professions during this period. With an authority's reference to the novels' considerable role in making lesbianism fashionable, the claim indicates that it entered into not only official but also popular vocabulary of the day. In addition to introducing a new sexual 'category' or 'type', the Honoria's lesbianism, which informs her individualism, further confirms that Malet's novel draws substantially on contemporary sexology as a means to respond to the woman and marriage questions of the *fin de siècle*.

Outside of Germany and Austria, the impact of Ulrichs's work rippled far and wide. In England, in an 1896 work *The Intermediate Sex*, first published in 1908, Edward Carpenter refers to Ulrichs and his pamphlets, acknowledging his indebtedness to Ulrichs's propositions on natural, congenital homosexuality that 'there were people born in such a position'.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, Carpenter begins the chapter entitled 'The Intermediate Sex' with a direct reference to 'the arrival of the New Woman amongst us', which marks the beginning of a time when 'many things in the relation of men and women to each other have altered'.<sup>24</sup> 'We all know women with a strong dash of masculine temperament,' remarks Carpenter, 'and we all know men whose almost feminine sensibility and intuition seem to belie their bodily form.'<sup>25</sup>

In addition to these distinguished pioneers, another prominent figure in this field who shares a place in the history of gender and sexuality is English sexologist and physician Havelock Ellis (1859-1939). Ellis's 1896 *Sexual Inversion* was part of his major work, the encyclopaedic seven-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928), with critic and essayist John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), also Ulrichs's notable follower, as his collaborator (the two never met in person but worked on the

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<sup>22</sup> Krafft-Ebing, 'LL', p. 430.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 19; hereafter abbreviated as *IS*.

<sup>24</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, p. 17.

project through correspondence until Symonds's death).<sup>26</sup> *Sexual Inversion* was translated and published first in Germany in 1897 as *Das konträre Geschlechtsgefühl* for the same reason Malet delayed the publication of her novel until 1901. Ellis's work dealt with homosexuality strictly in a scholarly manner since he did not want to risk censorship after the Wilde trials. When compared to earlier sexological texts which regarded homosexuality as a degenerative, pathological, and psychological form of mental diseases, *Sexual Inversion* proved radical in its argument that homosexuality was 'natural and normal', also 'hereditary', and that 'for several persons for whom [Ellis] felt respect and admiration were the *congenital* subjects of this abnormality'.<sup>27</sup> His approach is admirably scientific, neutral, and philosophical even in the case study of his wife Edith Ellis, *née* Lees (1861-1916), whom scholars have widely held to be the subject of Case XXXVI in 'Sexual Inversion in Women'.<sup>28</sup> Edith 'came out to him about her romantic feelings for an old school friend', and although he supported her 'congenital' sexual inversion, there were moments of 'wavering' and regrets for his 'previous hopeful expectations for married life'.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, sexology has an important place in the late-nineteenth-century history of ideas. These key works by European and English sexologists offer an insight into the sustained development in studies and budding theories about gender, sexuality, and the various practices that deviated from their contemporaries' understanding dictated by conventional heterosexual relationships. It is important to note that sexologists held

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<sup>26</sup> Vincent Brome, 'Prologue' in Vincent Brome, *Havelock Ellis: Philosopher of Sex* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 1-7; p. 1; Bauer, *ELS*, p. 29; Wan Wyck Brooks, *John Addington Symonds: A Biographical Study* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), pp. viii, 55; Frederic Harrison, *John Addington Symonds* (New York and London: Macmillan & Co., 1896), pp. 4, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion in Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, third edition, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1915), pp. v, 265; my emphasis; hereafter abbreviated as *SI*.

<sup>28</sup> Clare L. Taylor, *Women, Writing, and Fetishism, 1890-1950: Female Cross-Gendering* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 47; Ellis, 'Sexual Inversion in Women' in *SI*, vol. 2, pp. 224-226.

<sup>29</sup> Kristin Franseen, ed., 'Through Science to Justice: Examining Homosexual Activism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century' in *The National Conference on Undergraduate Research 2011* (New York: Ithaca College, 31 March – 2 April, 2011), p. 874; hereafter abbreviated as 'TSJ'.

‘often-conflicting views on lesbianism in general’; while Krafft-Ebing leans towards negative representations of lesbians, Ellis and Carpenter remain sympathetic in their assessment and analyses.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, Malet’s characterisation of her New Woman heroine in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* is perceptibly a response to this late-Victorian controversy on homosexuality, especially when the focus on ‘the special nature of [Honorias] love-sentiment’ aligns her with the contemporary sexological interest in the ‘intermediate’ woman.<sup>31</sup>

In essence, this thesis contends that the depiction of Honorias lesbianism reflects John Stuart Mill’s liberalist principle through the character’s unbounded freedom. However, Malet’s articulation of Millian discourse is significantly different from Grand’s exploration of Beth’s trajectory towards liberation. Despite the retrospective setting in the 1860s in the midst of Mill’s interventions around liberty, individualism and marriage of both novels, Malet’s text brings into focus a fresh set of debates on the individual and the collectivity. Rather than Mill’s rights-based discourse of individualism, Malet sets out a territory in which the self and its desires in all its ramifications demand a society flexible enough to embrace difference. Her strategy serves to accentuate the importance of individualism which forms my focus in the following section.

## **I. Individualism**

In *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, Malet effectively represents the New Woman as a self-confident character rather than a social-conformist: a strongly marked sexual self places her outside the collective categories of gender such that only self-directed individualism can make sense of her life-choices. Malet’s portrayal of Honorias sense of independence forms part of the character’s individualism, which is derived from

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<sup>30</sup> Franseen, ed., ‘TSJ’, p. 874.

<sup>31</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, p. 37.

her sexual inversion. For Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, ‘Urnings’, or the ‘third sex’, suggested more altruistic possibilities for the future of society – more collectively minded for others, rather than self-directed.<sup>32</sup> However, Honoria as a female invert emerges as an opposite to these unmanly men whose altruism connotes a womanly attribute. She has adopted male qualities, defined by a focus on self-interests, which explains her individualist character. In other words, sexual inversion liberates her from being ‘woman’ and hence the ingrained sense that duties to others must come before the self. Certainly, in noting that ‘[t]he Urning is capable, through the force of his love, of making the greatest sacrifices for his beloved’, Carpenter’s ideas about the social benefits of homosexuality were angled not so much at women but rather men who would lose ‘selfish desire for personal gratification’ as a result of this new sexual identity.<sup>33</sup> So Honoria is shown somehow – as an invert – to be a female who is not a ‘woman’ and who hence is licensed to be an individual. Hence, Honoria’s lesbianism not only urges her to forgo conventional romance and relationship with Richard, but also realises her wish-fulfilment as she finally succeeds in living with Katherine who is the sole object of her same-sex love and existence.

To confirm Honoria’s gender identity in the post-Wilde period, it is significant to note that Malet positions her as a man throughout the novel. Indeed, Honoria identifies herself as a man, speaks like a man, and behaves towards other women as a man does. Although it may seem that Malet conforms to the novelistic convention of marrying off her heroine, Honoria’s marriage is as problematic as the others I have heretofore discussed. It is, in fact, the questionable nature of Honoria’s decision to give up her freedom to marry and settle down to a domestic life that calls for investigation.

The sudden disparity in the character of Honoria and her abandonment of freedom, when read alongside the problematic hero Richard Calmady, confirms that

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<sup>32</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, pp. 13, 173.

<sup>33</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, pp. 139, 144.

Malet carefully invents Honoria to represent a perfectly autonomous individual. She is in every sense stronger than the hero: intelligent, well-educated, rich and philanthropic, strong and athletic, and manly in terms of her behaviour and attitude towards marriage. Furthermore, Honoria's deliberate disregard of her own feminine form, which enhances her boyish appearance, reinforces Malet's alignment of her with the late-Victorian theory of sexual inversion, especially as '[r]uggedness of features, a certain disdain for appearances, even brusqueness, [a]re signs of manliness.'<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, viewed through this contemporary sexological lens, it becomes clear that Malet's portrayal of Honoria as an epitome of athleticism deliberately signifies the character's masculine predisposition, as opposed to the eponymous Richard's feminised character, which functions to further place her outside accepted understanding of gender roles as an exceptional individual. The author's manipulation of her gender identity leads to the ambiguity of Honoria's affection for Cousin Katherine, who will become her mother-in-law. This intimacy is explored in detail in the section on marriage below. The display of love towards Katherine is constant throughout the novel. Moreover, this intense, if one-sided, relationship between two female characters in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* will inform my discussion of the unusual love triangle that serves to support my interpretation of Malet's approach to the late-nineteenth-century notion of lesbianism.

This paradox about why a lesbian woman should want to marry a man is the basis of my argument as I want to demonstrate that Honoria's individualism is related to and develops significantly from her lesbianism, which ironically motivates her to change her mind and marry Richard. The fact that the plot culminates in what appears to be an unlikely marriage between the masculine New Woman and the physically deformed, and

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<sup>34</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 414; hereafter abbreviated as *FF*.

thus effeminate, hero, means that the novel seeks to effect a kind of wish-fulfilment. Rather than following the traditional practice, Honoria in fact makes a conscious decision to marry. Her marriage to Richard brings Honoria closest to the realisation of her exceptional selfhood; that is to live out her lesbian fantasies with Katherine. First, there is the certainty of permanent physical proximity that comes from living at Brockhurst with her beloved Katherine. Second, the sharing of the name Lady Calmady between two individuals is also open to interpretation: it enables Honoria to feel as if she were married to Katherine, or that she essentially becomes one and the same as Katherine. In other words, Malet chooses marriage as the only legitimate resolution from which every central character benefits.

Interestingly, questions may arise through an observation that Malet never explicitly states Honoria's lesbian identity. Nevertheless, with reasons and textual evidence given above which validate my argument, Honoria must remain interpreted as a lesbian. It is noteworthy that the New Woman in the 1890s was occasionally identified as a lesbian: indeed, a New Woman heroine characterised with a certain 'masculine air', 'using men's phrases', or investing her interests in 'unfeminine topics' was becoming more frequent by the end of the century.<sup>35</sup> Honoria is an instance of such unfeminine appearance and mannerism. In addition to her attire 'producing a something delightfully independent [and] soldierly', with her 'lazy grace', she also speaks to a man, Ludovic Quayle who is in love with her, as an equal:

'you know I can meet men pretty well on their own ground. ... I could shoot and fish as well as most of you ... I can ride as straight as you can. I can break any horse to harness ... I can sail a boat and handle an axe. I can turn my hand to most practical things'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and emergent lesbian identity' in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 122-149; p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> Lucas Malet, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1912), pp. 550, 498; hereafter cited in the text as *RC*.

Honorio's character indeed bears close proximity to Carpenter's definition of 'the extreme type of the homogenic female': although by no means a 'markedly aggressive person,' she is 'of strong passions, masculine manners and movements, practical in the conduct of life ... often untidy, and *outré* in attire; her figure muscular, her voice rather low in pitch'.<sup>37</sup>

In Honorio's case, her choice of lesbianism conveys an outstanding message that signals her individualism. She does not allow conventional gender roles to interfere with her sexual inversion. The narrative emphasises Honorio's strong aversion to heterosexual relationships through the history of her courtship: 'Many men ha[ve] wooed her, and their wooing ha[s] left her cold. She ha[s] never wooed any man. Why should she? To her no man ha[s] ever mattered one little bit.' (*RC*, p. 602) Malet creates a confident character to represent all that is new and interesting. For example, to Ludovic who represents the traditional values, Honorio's 'views of men and things str[ike] him as distinctly original. Her attitude of mind appear[s] unconventional.' (*RC*, p. 287)

Malet thus argues that the New Woman does not necessarily upset the balance within society, provided that enough understanding is allowed her: '[s]he attract[s], while slightly confusing, that accomplished young gentleman—confusing his judgment, well understood, since Mr. Quayle himself [i]s incapable of confusion.' (*RC*, p. 287) In this instance, Ludovic embodies the Victorian society that was beginning to familiarise itself with the new notion of woman embarking upon the deeds of men, mobilising freely in the sphere of activities. Indeed, Honorio displays manly courage and charity in every situation that calls for her as '[a] certain vein of knight-errantry in her character incline[s] her to set lance in rest and ride forth ... to redress human wrongs.' (*RC*, p. 332) This trait differs from the sort of political individualism in Grand, and which Ward reacts against. Here Malet is testing out how a female character who will not fit in the category 'woman'

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<sup>37</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, pp. 30-31. Like 'Queen Christine of Sweden' whom Carpenter refers to in his footnote (p. 31), Honorio often appears in the novel in her riding gear and 'jack-boots'.



tests all kinds of collectivist assumptions in society in favour of each being judged as individuals.

In harmony with her knightly valour, Honoria displays a thorough preference for women on three notable occasions. The first instance is Helen, who is another relative of both Honoria and Richard. With regard to Honoria's feelings towards Helen, they are more than cousinly. For example, she retires characteristically when Helen starts talking to Richard, but comes back and, to Richard's dismay, interrupts their 'agreeable' 'conversation' (*RC*, p. 179). Honoria's displeasure bordering on jealousy is implied through the tension that suddenly spreads over her face: 'her expression [i]s grave, and the delicate thinness of her face appear[s] a trifle accentuated.' (*RC*, p. 183) Yet, she behaves towards Helen very tenderly: 'She c[omes] up to Madame de Vallorbes and passe[s] her hand through the latter's arm caressingly', insisting that they must go at once. (*RC*, p. 183) The intimate gesture, and Honoria's and Richard's initial remark that she does not like him and vice versa, are suggestive of her inclination towards same-sex desire.

Later on, Honoria appears to be very tender in the way she feels towards Richard's fiancée, little Lady Constance Quayle who is Ludovic's sister (*RC*, p. 303). Honoria is instrumental in setting her free from the enforced, one-sided engagement. Physically, the knightly Honoria offers comfort to the 'distressed damsel' when, 'swe[eping] past Mr. Decies and ben[ding] over Lady Constance Quayle, [Honoria] raise[s] her, [and] str[iving] to soothe her agitation.' (*RC*, p. 339) In return, however,

the close contact of that soft maidenly body that she had so lately held against her in closer, more intimate embrace than she had ever held anything human before, aroused a new class of sentiment ... She realised, for the first time, the magnetism, the penetrating and poetic splendour of human love. (*RC*, p. 344)

This passage creates an important contrast with the deployment of chivalry at the end of *The Beth Book*. Here, the woman is the knight. Moreover, this kind of human love will be fully awakened in Honoria when she enters into Katherine's world at Brockhurst.

Honoria is as much taken in by Katherine's beauty as she is by Richard's maimed body.

Finally, and the most important piece of evidence of Honoria's lesbian leanings is her devotion and love for Katherine. She has confessed her love for Katherine who acknowledges it but does not reciprocate, answering in an affirmative to Honoria's anxious questions: 'Does it displease you? Does it seem to you unnatural?' (*RC*, p. 416) Calling herself a 'beast', Honoria admits to Katherine that she never cares for anyone: '—really to care, I mean—till I cared for you', revealing her knowledge of and familiarity with sexology: 'Of course I had read plenty about the—affections, shall we call them? And had heard women and girls, and men too, for that matter, talk about them pretty freely.' (*RC*, pp. 415-416) In this extended dialogue between Honoria and Katherine, Malet investigates her New Woman protagonist's development in relation to contemporary sexological arguments (despite the fact that the novel is set in the 1860s when such arguments had not existed). Importantly, it is Honoria's lesbian predisposition, her 'frank, free nature' and 'her masculine independence' that will fulfil both Richard's lack and needs.<sup>38</sup> As the novel illustrates, Honoria has more than sufficient power to provide the support on which both Katherine and Richard will depend.

With its focus on the protagonist's ostensible lesbianism, the novel raises the question about the implausibility of the heroine proposing to Richard. Notwithstanding this problematic element, however, Honoria's same-sex love serves effectively to explain the New Woman's action despite her previous determination to remain single. By marrying Richard, she will remain close to the person with whom she is in love. Honoria is indeed depicted as totally and tenderly devoted to Katherine: 'She ben[ds] down and

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<sup>38</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, p. 37.

taking Lady Calmady's hand kisse[s] it. And as she d[oes] this, her eyes [a]re those of an ardent yet very reverent lover' (*RC*, p. 414). Honoria may be compared with the protagonist in Radclyffe Hall's quintessentially lesbian novel of the twentieth century. In *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Hall portrays Stephen Gordon as a female invert, who invokes the congenital inversion theories put forward by Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Carpenter.<sup>39</sup> As Nancy J. Knauer convincingly argues, we may perceive a couched expression of same-sex desire through Hall's lesbian characters whose longing for their right to 'protect' their loved ones is a euphemism for their desire to 'marry' them.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Honoria's consistent need to care for Katherine signify a hidden and partially fulfilled wish for 'marrying' Katherine, at least in name. Echoing the Ellises and their marriage, Honoria remarks on 'how thankful I was I had never married. Picture finding out all that after one had bound oneself, after one had given oneself!' (*RC*, p. 416) Moreover, Honoria recalls Edward Carpenter's indebtedness to Ulrichs's theory in Carpenter's explanation that 'the apparently feminine would, instead of marrying in the usual way, devote herself to the love of another feminine.'<sup>41</sup>

Thus, by characterising Honoria with lesbianism, Malet establishes the character's sexual selfhood through her same-sex desire that in turn betrays her secret wish-fulfilment. Honoria's determination to pursue 'another feminine', to the extent that she is willing to drop her previous anti-marriage principle so as to be near the love object, is consistent with the character's individualist outlook as she grounds her decision-making in her best interest. This new consciousness, represented through a new sexual type, suggests that Malet's exploration of desire, sexual inversion, and individualism in her heroine anticipates the feminism associated with the early twentieth-century literary modernism for increasingly 'dissociating' selfhood from 'stable structures' of the sexual

<sup>39</sup> Nancy J. Knauer, 'Homosexuality as Contagion: From *The Well of Loneliness* to the Boy Scouts' in *Hofstra Law Review*, vol. 29, no. 401 (2000), p. 404.

<sup>40</sup> Knauer, 'Homosexuality as Contagion', p. 404.

<sup>41</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, p. 20.

norm.<sup>42</sup> The text achieves this through the complex mapping of Honoria's atypical sexual selfhood, which underscores the element of her individualist wish-fulfilment in her heterosexual marriage to the son of the woman she loves: 'She long[s] inexpressibly to remain here, to assist in these experiments' (*RC*, p. 597). This determination not only enhances her already strong character but also prepares us for the novel's central problem of the heroine's masochism, which I examine in detail in the section on marriage below, and love triangulation in the following scene. To underscore the extent of Honoria's determination, the novel accentuates the unattractive prospect through Richard's infantilising and feminising account of himself as 'a man who's carried up and down stairs like a baby ... who is cut off from most forms of activity and of sport—a man who will never have any sort of career' (*RC*, p. 610). Mistaking his statement for a refusal, Honoria answers him in a very masculine manner:

'Richard,' she crie[s] fiercely, 'if you don't care for me, if you don't want me, be honourable, tell me so straight out and let us have done with it! I am strong enough, I am *man* enough for that. For heaven's sake don't take me out of pity.' (*RC*, p. 610; my emphasis)

Taking the novel as a fictional representation and social critique of the era in which it was written, I argue that this marriage results from a compromise. By instigating marriage with the sexually reformed Richard, Honoria allows herself to nurture her individualism which derives from her unconventional sexual identity. In other words, the void that separates the position taken by contemporary critics, including William Alden of *The New York Times*, from that taken by Honoria signifies a certain amount of unease attached to this new kind of female sexuality. As Malet points out in the narrative, this unfamiliarity inescapably emerges to Richard's sharp eyes: 'His acquaintance with women was fairly comprehensive [during the period of his Rake's Progress], but this

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<sup>42</sup> Timo Müller, 'Toward the Modernist Self' in *The Self as Object in Modernist Fiction: James, Joyce, Hemingway* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), pp. 21-90; p. 21.

woman represented a type new to his experience.’ (RC, p. 560) Such anxieties were felt by conservative critics, and led to their dismissal of Honoria, a representative of the late-nineteenth-century emergence of lesbianism, as the novel’s rightful heroine.

In conclusion, it is nevertheless through Malet’s detailed study and representation of the heroine’s sexual inversion that we learn substantially about the current developments in sexual science taking place during the *fin de siècle*. It was highly innovative and bold of Malet’s to create a sexual invert as the heroine for her important and complicated novel. As its central plot culminates in Honoria’s marriage to Sir Richard, instigated largely through the heroine’s same-sex desire for his mother, the novel seeks to portray her individualistic behaviour. It advocates a pursuit of one’s own interests in the way one thinks best. Moreover, Malet endows her lesbian protagonist with full liberty and complete personal freedom. As an invert, indeed a masculine female, Honoria not only enjoys her unique sense of independence, being free to ride, run, hunt, or even turn down her suitor, but also assumes the right to self-government. Her character echoes the Millian advocacy of ‘liberty of tastes and pursuits’.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the novel’s demonstration of Honoria’s self-confidence and masculine self-assertiveness, instead of self-abnegation and feminine self-effacement, serves to both reflect and accentuate her individualism. Most important of all, the novel itself signals a confirmation that Malet was not only up-to-date with her sexological knowledge through her eloquence in appropriating its discourse. In fact, she also viewed the New Woman in terms of female inversion and individualism, a new concept of sexual individualism and liberty which builds on Mill’s principle in the 1860s, which she portrays positively and progressively.

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<sup>43</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 28.

## II. The New Woman

In this section, I examine Malet's portrayal of the New Woman through the unfeminine character of Honoria, which is juxtaposed with the figure of the *femme fatale* represented by Helen. In addition to these extremely polarised femininities and sexualities, the novel also depicts the ideal of womanhood. Instances of such depiction occur when Honoria and Katherine are viewed together, as will be discussed below.

It is important to note that the figure of the New Woman shares a close connection with her antagonist: Honoria St. Quentin and Helen Ormiston, later Madame de Vallorbes, are both relatives of Richard, also of one another, and all are of the same age. Both characters prove in fact to have considerable influence on each stage of Richard's radical transformation. Foreshadowing their interwoven future – since each character is portrayed as fractured and partial, hence, their need for each other to reach completion – the narrative notes the two developments concerning his cousins, 'each proving eventually to have much personal significance' (*RC*, p. 168). First, a newspaper announces that Honoria, now in her early twenties, has inherited great wealth from her godmother. Her instantly heightened social status and financial security prompt Katherine to write a note, 'with very sincere and lively pleasure', to congratulate her cousin, now promoted to the rank of General St. Quentin, whom she holds 'in affection for old sake's sake.' (*RC*, p. 168) The St. Quentins' absence from Brockhurst is once again emphasised as Katherine recalls the visit paid when Honoria is six (*RC*, p. 90). 'Honoria she remember[s] as a singularly graceful high-bred little maiden, fleet of foot as a hind—too fleet of foot indeed for little Dickie's comfort of mind, and therefore banished from the Brockhurst nursery.' (*RC*, p. 168)

The motherly protectiveness, which is an important trait in Katherine's character, continues to exercise its power regardless of the wrong-doers' intention. Richard's other cousin, Helen, cruelly calling him '*avorton*' [the French term for dwarf] in front of family

and friends, which results in her first visit to Brockhurst being abruptly curtailed (*RC*, p. 134). An irate Katherine flies at her niece, causing Helen to cut her forehead against a table. The Calmadys' doom is sealed, with the self-consciously beautiful Helen 'hissing the words out with concentrated passion between her pretty even teeth', telling Katherine that "I hate you. ... You have spoiled me. ... I will never forget." (*RC*, p. 135) This intense hatred and the focus on Helen's teeth – a recurring image in the novel which contains the Gothic element of the *vagina dentata* associated with the dangerous female sexuality of the castrating woman – firmly establish the character as a *femme fatale*.<sup>44</sup>

After a lapse of nearly fifteen years, Katherine learns from her other brother, William Ormiston, that his daughter Helen is to marry the Comte de Vallorbes, 'a young gentleman very well known [*sic*] both to Parisian and Neapolitan society.' (*RC*, p. 168) Despite mutually ill feelings, Katherine writes a letter to congratulate them on this well-matched marriage and to the bride she gives 'a necklace of pearls, with a diamond clasp and bars to it, of no mean value.' (*RC*, p. 168) Considering the hostility that exists between the two characters, this reaffirms Katherine's 'generous' disposition. Significantly, the irony in Katherine's act is noteworthy: while the pearl-and-diamond necklace symbolises bridal purity and perfection, Helen will prove to be an undeserving recipient of such a gift since, four months into marriage, she speedily separates from her husband and embarks on infamous affairs with many men, including Richard.

To offset any doubts regarding Richard's fitness, Malet begins by establishing her hero's admirable activities and his otherwise normal movements and masculine pleasures. As a result, the reader perceives that despite his deformed lower body, Richard learns to shuffle along, horse-ride, hunt, and raise prize-racing horses. Academically, he also excels at Oxford (*RC*, p. 168). All these developments take place in the intervening years during which Katherine closes herself and her son off from both family and society.

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<sup>44</sup> Bill Overton, *Fictions of Female Adultery, 1684-1890: Theories and Circumtexts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 170-171.

When Helen returns as a grown woman, she is in the company of her cousin, Honoria. A tall, boyish girl in a matador's hat, Honoria's dress and attitude suggest an independent and courageous spirit. Ironically, Richard instead falls for the evil and voluptuous Helen.

Notwithstanding the speedy passage of time and the 'misery of that episode of his boyhood [which] set[s] its tooth very shrewdly in him even yet', Richard remains enchanted by Helen when he sees her by chance after she leaves her husband and comes to Brockhurst with her father for a visit (*RC*, p. 181). The description of Helen in the following passage again reminds us of the connection between her and the pearl imagery: 'as she sp[eaks], the soft colour c[omes] and [goes] in her cheeks, and her lips parting [show] little even teeth daintily precious as a row of pearls. The outline of her face [i]s remarkably pure.' (*RC*, p. 179) Helen's association with pearls through the simile used to describe her beauty, seeming purity and precious value, recalls the pearl necklace given her as a wedding present. Moreover, this costly gift evokes the Biblical sentiment that a good wife is a 'pearl of great price' (*KJV*, Matt., 13:46), who is 'more precious than rubies' (Prov., 3:15). However, this beautiful façade is questionable, especially as Helen's past offence is brought up in the narrative that follows: 'It seem[s] the most cruelly ironical turn of fate that this entrancing, this altogether worshipful stranger should prove to be one and the same as the little dancer of long ago with blush-roses in her hat.' (*RC*, p. 181) After their accidental encounter, Richard contemplates inviting Helen and her father to Brockhurst, which puzzles Katherine. Nevertheless, she agrees to 'gladly have them if you wish it—only you remember what happened long ago, when Helen was here last?' (*RC*, p. 189)

Katherine's intuition foreshadows Richard's fall as she correctly senses the dangerous waves radiated from the *femme fatale*. In sexological terms, the *femme fatale* may be pathologised as suffering from nymphomania, meaning sexual 'insatiability', and is consequently connected to degeneration: '[t]o become sexual to this degree was to fall,



to fall from middle-class womanhood and hence out of the circle, into that Other world.’<sup>45</sup> The ‘emergence of the *femme fatale*’ dates back to the mid-century novels, such as William Makepeace Thackeray’s Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1848), and the figure continued its literary and cultural impacts into the 1860s.<sup>46</sup> In the novel, Helen has sexual relationships with at least three men: Comte de Vallorbes, Paul Destournelle, and Richard. They reflect her ‘dangerously primitive instincts of a great courtesan, [which] filled her with an enormous pride, [and] a reckless self-confidence.’ (RC, p. 396)

Alongside Richard’s fatal attraction to Helen, the narrative builds on the tension between the hero and the New Woman when Richard refuses to invite her (RC, p. 190). Implicitly, his decision is sexually grounded suggested by Malet’s use of visual contrast: Helen’s ‘black velvet coat’ ‘reveal[s] the roundness of her busts’, her skirts ‘st[and] out stiffly from her waist, declaring its slenderness’ while her hat ‘thr[ows] the upper part of her charming face into soft shadow.’ (RC, p. 179) Whereas Helen’s silhouetted face and sensual body connote sex appeal, the same scene depicts Honoria leaning ‘against one of the white pillars of the colonnade’ in ‘a straight pale grey-green jacket ... [h]er skirt ... hung in straight folds to her feet, being innocent alike of trimming and of the then prevailing fashion of crinoline [in the 1860s].’ (RC, pp. 181, 177) She appears almost as a straight line, none of the feminine – sexualised – attributes such as curves, roundness or slenderness are emphasised. Significantly, clothing conveys telling details: Honoria’s selection of ‘the straight lines, practical materials and business-like images of men’s clothes’ instead of ‘the soft, flowing curved lines, the rich colours and textures, elaborate detail and constricting shape of women’s clothes’ not only foregrounds her masculinity

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<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008), p. 3.

but also reflects the nineteenth-century trend that clothing was indeed ‘becoming a powerful part of gender segregation.’<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, Malet emphasises the New Woman’s wholesomeness not only through the sense of freedom from socially-imposed fashions but also the colour green. Like her outfit, Honoria’s eyes are ‘a clear dim green, as the soft gloom in the under-spaces of a grove of ilexes [*sic*].’ (*RC*, pp. 183, 553) The light colour of her garment, and the white pillars against which she leans, symbolically connect Honoria with nature and the light of day as opposed to Helen’s night-like figure. Additionally, whereas Honoria’s presence is clearly seen in the open, Helen tends to remain partially in the shadow. Through characterisation and the use of visual contrast, the sexual identity and symbolic values of each character are established. While Helen represents the traditional *femme fatale* and Honoria emerges as a masculinised heroine, I will contend that Katherine epitomises the ideal womanhood through the combination of her motherhood and Honoria’s (un)femininity. Significantly, although at first sight, these two aspects seem to be contradictory, Malet is foregrounding a fusing of the self in the lives of others in order to attain one’s goal. This attempt is germane to the notion of female individualism as seen in the novel’s emphasis on sexual identity rather than property and politics: to achieve happiness is to be true to one’s heart and, as the sexual invert Honoria claims, ‘to stand by the woman.’ (*RC*, p. 574)

While Honoria concentrates all her energy on women, the novel stresses the other kind of love: the powerful motherly love of Katherine. After Sir Richard Calmady senior marries the beautiful and well-connected Katherine Ormiston, he brings her to Brockhurst where an ancient curse prophesies early deaths of all the men until a fatherless and crippled Calmady shall redeem the family. After her husband’s agonising death following a fall from his horse, Katherine’s distress causes the child in her womb to suffer: the

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<sup>47</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *FF*, p. 414.

beautiful baby, also named Richard, is born with his feet attached to his thighs (*RC*, p. 64). Historically, such cases were recorded. Indeed, Irish politician and country gentleman Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh (1831-1889), who was ‘born with stumps for arms and legs, but who rode and hunted with special saddles and married his cousin’, may have inspired Malet: resemblances between real life and fictional fabrication are striking even in minute details that recognise the love of yachting in Kavanagh and Richard (*RC*, p. 383).<sup>48</sup>

The narrative quickly shifts its focus to Katherine and her ‘love’: “your mother’s love will never grow old or wear thin. It is always there, always fresh, always ready ... you are the light of my eyes, my darling, the only thing which makes me still care to live.” (*RC*, p. 147) As I argue in relation to marriage below, Katherine is bound not only in duty and mother-love but also in a strong attachment to ‘her Richard’ which insidiously transforms itself into a new form of love; that of incest. The text offers this reading through its depiction of an overprotective love blown out of proportion: generally gracious, gentle and charming, ‘her pride [i]s always on the alert, fiercely sensitive concerning Richard.’ (*RC*, p. 102) Even her brother Colonel Ormiston makes no exception: ‘If Roger d[oes] not take to the boy, then—deeply though she love[s] him—Roger must go.’ (*RC*, p. 102) Katherine embodies unconditional motherly devotion wholly channelled to Richard, who lives a delightful sheltered existence, despite that one breach by Helen whose scar left by Katherine’s blow reminds us of the *femme fatale*’s revenge waiting to be executed against the Calmadys. Helen’s seduction initiates Richard’s fall into his darkest moral abyss before he is salvaged by Honoria. Through her unconsummated marriage discussed below, Honoria’s character emerges as distinctly atypical of conventional heroines, especially as her individualism rescues Richard from a fate of degenerating into a forlorn, impenitent sinner. Despite the setting of the 1860s

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<sup>48</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 234; Sarah L. Steele, *The Right Honourable Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh: A Biography* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1891), pp. 8, 127, 300, 305.

which predates both socialism and the New Woman, Malet's novel shares a common concern with Ward's *Marcella* in the heroine's socialist commitment to helping the repentant Richard forward with his philanthropic work.

However, the novel deters the implied match as Honoria is determined not to marry: 'I have no particular faith in or admiration for marriage' and will reject Ludovic's marriage proposal (*RC*, pp. 337, 593). The understatement is that she is in love with Katherine. During Richard's prolonged absence, Honoria has taken his place at Brockhurst and become his mother's close companion: indeed, she 'love[s] Lady Calmady.' (*RC*, p. 332) The sexual invert's 'innocent' declaration of love is key to appreciating Malet's complex novel. Having declared her intention not to marry, then declining a good man's marriage proposal yet proposing to a disabled one, Honoria leaves a clear mission statement: to make her relationship – though one-sided – with Katherine acceptable and permanent.

Since Malet portrays Honoria as a perceptive character, she discerns that the only way to gain access to Katherine's love is through Richard. Thus, the mannish Honoria approaches the guilt-ridden hero with her socialist scheme to convince him, with his vast wealth, to open a hospital for the crippled. Significantly, this development echoes the altruism Carpenter associated with the new sexual types in society and reinforces my focus on sexual exceptionalism and the new sorts of community, as opposed to the need for individualism and the rupture of inherited legal forms in Grand's work. As a married woman, there is no question that Honoria has fulfilled her socially-constructed feminine role. But the fact that she assumes leadership in her marriage, initiates ideas and projects, and determines the nature of her marriage, all accentuates her unfeminine proclivity. However, I want to argue that to regard the central female figures separately is to overlook the significance of Malet's remarkable technique of fusing them to make up one *wholesome* individual: the ideal 'Calmady woman'. The sexual triangle between Honoria,

Katherine, and Richard reflects the new sorts of marriage and communities explored and experienced by Carpenter and Ellis. Edith, Ellis's lesbian wife, called her union a 'semi-detached marriage' as, while they were periodically living apart, she 'had same-sex affairs throughout their relationship.'<sup>49</sup> Honoria's unconventional marriage thus opens the way to a new sort of self as it empowers her with female autonomy. At the time when society valorised maternal functions, the biologically non-mother Honoria can be at a great disadvantage as a heroine.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, this so-called Calmady woman represents the metaphorical marriage between the New Woman and traditional femininity Katherine embodies. Malet carefully manoeuvres the mutual identification between Honoria and Katherine by making both women a 'Lady Calmady' by marriage. Moreover, Malet creates a remarkable self-perpetuating pattern when Katherine Ormiston has become Richard's/Dick's wife and Dickie's mother, while Honoria St. Quentin has also become Richard's/Dickie's wife and little Dick's adopted mother which appears in my discussion on eugenics below. Thus, this image of 'Lady Calmady' is unarguably traditional: viewed simultaneously, they make up a figuratively whole female individual who encapsulates Malet's definition of ideal womanhood by sharing the other's identity as wife/mother thanks to sexual inversion that draws Honoria to Katherine.

Hence, the significance of sexological discourse seen in Malet's exploration of the 'third sex' and altruism, in relation to the individualism of the New Woman, rests on her redefinition of gender which engenders freedom of the self. This is achieved when Malet reverses Carpenter's theory by characterising Honoria as a male-identified character, and thus substitutes altruistic sacrifice for self-regarding acts.<sup>51</sup> Although the setting in the

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<sup>49</sup> Diana Maltz, 'Ardent Service: Female Eroticism and New Life Ethics in Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900)' in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 17, no. 2 (June, 2012) pp. 147-163; p. 148.

<sup>50</sup> Cindy LaCom, "'It Is More than Lame": Female Disability, Sexuality, and the Maternal in the Nineteenth-Century Novel' in David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, eds, *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 189-201; p. 190; hereafter abbreviated as 'IIML'.

<sup>51</sup> Carpenter, *IS*, p. 40.

1860s allows for its textual innocence about same-sex desires and degeneration between the characters, I perceive the novel to be an important work that not only acknowledges the relationship between two debates, sexology and the New Woman, but also recasts it in a positive light. This recognition is at its clearest when Honoria appears to bring potentially regenerative force to society, despite the degeneration implicit in the hero's flaws or her inversion, through marriage.

### **III. Unconsummated marriage**

This section examines the ways in which Malet manoeuvres the unlikely marriage between the sexually reformed, chaste Richard and the masculinised Honoria, and the reasons it remains unconsummated. My explication for this unusual nature is that, responding to the current concern over sexual decadence, Malet asserts grounds for protecting the self. More significantly, in contrast to the previous novels examined in this thesis, marriage does not cause Honoria to lose her individualism: her lesbian selfhood and individual liberty persist through her male identification. At the same time, Richard 'represents the feminine part of Honoria.'<sup>52</sup> This view supports my reading of Honoria who, although having duty towards others, takes her responsibility in the public sphere of business. Malet juxtaposes her freedom of movement with Richard, who remains passively in the private sphere to which disability confines him. Honoria's sexually inverted character reflects a reversed version of Carpenter's theory of the third sex and, despite her apparent masochism in the love triangle, contributes to her wish-fulfilment. I will explore these aspects in the following sections.

Honoria's gender reversal raises the question of gender identity in connection with marriage. Her manliness contrasts with both the feminine ideal and Richard's

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<sup>52</sup> Schaffer, *FFA*, p. 214.

disability. In addition to ‘infantiliz[ing] and feminiz[ing]’ Richard’s character, Malet ‘masculinizes Honoria’; this masculinisation manifests itself when Honoria’s character ‘accepts’ the hero’s ‘moral failings as a man would, seizes the man’s initiative in proposing marriage, and is, like a good man, willing to take no for an answer.’<sup>53</sup> The fact that since his birth, Richard is dependent upon his mother and loyal servants means physical confinement. While Brockhurst’s sheltered environment symbolises the private sphere, Richard’s dependence upon his carers is metaphorically a form of effeminacy though his unfitnes for public activities. Such effeminacy harks back to James Cantlie’s idea of decadence discussed earlier (see pp. 51, 244).<sup>54</sup> As effeminacy and ‘sloth’ were deemed the cause and effect of decline, Cantlie’s lecture steered towards his solution: the nineteenth-century notion of manliness as the desired opposite of decadent, effeminate men. Importantly, despite the novel’s setting in the 1860s as I have often remarked, the tensions here are apparently around the ideas of sexual identity and decadence from the 1890s. This strategic predating validates my choice for a sexological approach to Malet’s novel and serves to strengthen my reading of the lesbian identity of her heroine.

With regard to the decadent aspect of the novel, I propose that Richard’s disability serves as another gender role reversal based on a literary ideology in which disability in the nineteenth-century novel functions as metaphor.<sup>55</sup> Although portrayals of disabled bodies in the nineteenth-century British novel are typically represented in opposition to the ‘healthy’ body, the fact that the ‘characters with physical disabilities in the nineteenth-century novel’ were predominantly female must be taken into consideration because it emphasises the repetitive patterns based on gender divides: disabled female bodies ‘signalled very real cultural fears about women, female sexuality, and the

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<sup>53</sup> Lundberg, *IN*, p. 233; emphasis in the original.

<sup>54</sup> James Cantlie, *Degeneration amongst Londoners* (New York: Garland, 1985), pp. 7-61.

<sup>55</sup> LaCom, ‘IIML’, pp. 189-201.

maternal'.<sup>56</sup> However, with regard to the novel, this theory only works when applied the other way around: it is rather Honoria's athletic body and purity that are juxtaposed with Richard's deformity and his experiments as a sexual rake.

Moreover, regardless of the contemporary recurrent patterns, Malet's deliberate choice of having a crippled male rather than female underlines both the New Woman's superiority and the author's advanced point of view. Although this desire springs out of having an alter ego who will be perfect in terms of physical limbs, Richard nevertheless embraces a womanly duty in desiring to reproduce and extend the family line. Therefore, Richard is represented with a feminised attitude towards marriage: 'I want to marry because—because I want a child—I want a son' (*RC*, p. 299). He has high hopes and indeed projects a grand vision for the son he dreams of having. (*RC*, p. 301) In this light, he allocates very considerable importance to his prospect of marriage, almost to the same extent that women are eagerly awaiting theirs, an only means that grants them economic and financial stabilities.

Hypothetically, I want to argue that the character of Richard is chosen to exact the radical women writers' vengeance against men by assuming the role of the disabled female as described above. As Catherine Delyfer observes, '[I]ike Victorian women, he is trapped in a body deemed inferior by Victorian society'.<sup>57</sup> In other words, his deformity becomes the site for a mode of punishment of male sexuality. The framing of Richard as a disabled and feminised character recalls the scene in which the manly Honoria heroically instigates marriage between herself and Richard, which serves as evidence of reversed gender roles. Richard's disability functions as Malet's second mode of gender reversal in relation to the ideology of disabilities as a metaphor. Furthermore, Malet's manoeuvring of gender echoes Grand's concerns about male sexuality, especially as

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<sup>56</sup> LaCom, 'IIML', p. 190.

<sup>57</sup> Catherine Delyfer, 'Lucas Malet's Subversive Late-Gothic: Humanizing the Monster in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*' in Ruth Bienstock Anolik, ed., *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), pp. 80-96; p. 89; hereafter abbreviated as 'LMSLG'.



Richard echoes Evadne and her sexual abstinence. The resonance is particularly manifest when Richard's disability and guilty conscience eventually confine him to the feminine role of passivity and self-willed chastity.

In contrast, Honoria successfully realises her desire through gender role reversal which strengthens her 'passionate relationship' with Katherine. This bond appears as 'an eroticised mother/daughter[-in-law] relation' similar to what Radclyffe Hall describes in her early work, the 'closeted' novel *The Unlit Lamp* (1924), as it produces an outlet for Honoria's lesbian instinct.<sup>58</sup> Like Stephen Gordon, Hall's invert heroine in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Honoria's apparent masculinity enhances the contrast with Richard's feminised character and inferior morality. As Lady Constance whom he wants to marry rejects him, Richard, thwarted in 'normal' love, leaves Brockhurst and turns himself into an international rake. Malet strains the marriage plot in order to explore sexuality as Richard's adventure culminates in his 'sin'. In Naples, Helen takes her childhood revenge by seducing Richard in one of the most daring sex scenes (*RC*, pp. 459-460). Malet employs this 'secret license' to analyse his moral collapse: the recurring image of the castrating woman through Helen's lips and teeth suggests that Richard is now totally emasculated (*RC*, pp. 179, 463, 486). Following his physical collapse, the narrative necessitates Katherine's speedy reclaiming of her son (*RC*, pp. 488-489, 509-510).

Nevertheless, once Richard and Katherine get back to Brockhurst and resume their normal mother-son relationship, the narrative suggests that their existence is privileged and intrusion-proof, with one exception: Honoria. Through Katherine's motherly love for Richard, as well as Honoria's selfless love for Katherine, Malet joins her three main characters together. This becomes a love triangle which pins Katherine to one point, connected to her son at the second point through an incestuous desire, and to Honoria at the third as her love object.

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<sup>58</sup> Newton, 'MML', p. 571.

It must be noted that the Calmady love triangle is different from other Victorian novels employing the same device. While Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) features Lucie Manette as the love object of Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton, Malet's work diverges from the classic pattern of 'two males' as 'rivals for a female'.<sup>59</sup> The tension is instead between Honoria and Richard competing for the love of Katherine, who ironically clings to her son as if he was her deceased husband. The love triangle is suggestive of Malet's portrayal of incestuous desire and lesbian wish-fulfilment.

However, in legal and cultural history, incest was a taboo, forbidding sexual relationships between parents and children – particularly the mother-son incest – siblings of full or half blood, grandfathers and granddaughters.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, although not illegal, marriage between first cousins became frowned upon in the nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup> My reading agrees with Delyfer's analysis.<sup>62</sup> The characteristics of Katherine's incestuous desire are at once recognisable as a substitute of her son for her dead husband. Likewise, since Richard has undergone a long and painful journey of moral redemption – a direct consequence of his 'rake's progress' – he begins to resume the once very close and ambiguous tie with Katherine. The blurring of the two Richards is evident throughout the novel, especially when Katherine grants his wish through her ambiguous use of the phrase 'my beloved': 'We will be alone, you and I, just as long as you wish. With me, *my beloved*, you are very safe.' (RC, p. 518; my emphasis) Furthermore, the following 'love' scene is significant in terms of its depiction of Katherine as a sexual being while being next to her son:

Katherine caught and kneeling, held him, his poor hands clutching  
impotently at her shoulders, his head sinking upon her breast. While in

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<sup>59</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 4, 206.

<sup>61</sup> Adam Kuper, *Incest & Influence: The Private Life of Bourgeois England* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 109.

<sup>62</sup> Delyfer, 'LMSLG', p. 92.

that embrace ... all the womanhood in her leapt up to claim the manhood in him, thereby making the broken circle of her being once more wholly perfect and complete. (*RC*, p. 509)

Nevertheless, this sexual innuendo is instantly mitigated thanks to Honoria's presence. While Malet leaves it unclear concerning Honoria's conduct as Richard's wife, it is obvious she never leaves her place by Katherine's side. At last, the New Woman's victory becomes apparent when Honoria has succeeded in moving in with the woman she loves, sharing her name, and running her home for her. Textually, there is no evidence of a romantic relationship between Richard and Honoria. The marriage plot thus proves to feed rather than solve the complications arising from the interrelationships between the main characters. As I have recently remarked, after marriage, Richard is barred from his mother by Honoria who exercises an authority as the self-proclaimed head of the family. Significantly, by strengthening her 'ardent female friendship' with Katherine through a more lawful channel of being her daughter-in-law, Honoria as a lesbian character 'proposes to usurp the son's place in the oedipal triangle'.<sup>63</sup> Although female friendships were regarded as 'pure and ennobling' in the 1860s, it explains Richard's increasing insecurity after realising that he has irrevocably lost his place to the New Woman.<sup>64</sup> The clearest instance of the loss of Richard's dominance in the narrative is when the atmospheric harmony is interrupted as Richard, having just kissed Katherine's hand, notices his wife approaching. The novel could end here with Richard and Katherine in sight, but Honoria's arrival has brought not only a sense of disruptive force but also of uncertainty: '—And—ah! here comes Honoria!' (*RC*, p. 618) It is questionable whether Richard means these words as his greeting or regrets that the precious moment alone with his beloved mother is so suddenly curtailed, with the two pauses, uttered immediately

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<sup>63</sup> Newton, 'MML', p. 571; the quotes are from Newton's analysis of Radclyffe Hall's lesbian classic, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). For a detailed discussion on the 'inappropriate intense same-sex friendships' in New Woman writing, see Murphy, 'Disdained and Disempowered', pp. 62-63; hereafter abbreviated as 'DD'.

<sup>64</sup> Newton, 'MML', p. 561.

after the praises he has been eloquently paying Katherine, denoting his displeasure that his private time with her is ended.

The cumulative tensions between husband and wife in fact serve as an important indicator of the novel's central problem: Honoria's lesbian desire for Katherine. The gratification from physical intimacy is evident during their walk which creates noteworthy textual implications. The contentment Honoria derives from Katherine is subtle but evident as she 'pat[s] the hand which [lies] on her arm very tenderly.' (*RC*, p. 612) An uncanny parallel between 'the elder and the younger Lady Calmady, as they slowly [pace] the straight walk' and 'Richard and Katherine Calmady, hand in hand' '[p]acing slowly down the centre of the terrace' (*RC*, pp. 611, 38) is remarkable. As both Richards are unable to accompany Katherine, the resemblance between these passages presents Honoria as their ideal substitute.

The heroine has retained her individualism throughout the novel as she ostensibly shows her lesbian love through a keen and consistent wish always to be with Katherine. Having fulfilled this desire through her marriage, Honoria orchestrates a love triangle with Katherine at the first point, Richard at the second, and herself at the last. This love triangle is unusual in the extreme as it involves not only an incestuous relationship between mother and son but also a same-sex desire between the two central female protagonists. Textually, the unusual love triangle reflects signs of decadence which, although anachronistic considering the retrospective setting, serves to strengthen Malet's theme of degeneration.

The fact that Honoria sacrifices her life as an independent heiress, and that she proposes a celibate marriage to Richard in order to be near Katherine, suggests a tendency to give herself pain. Of the two participants, Honoria is likely to lose in this romantic rivalry to gain Katherine's love, especially as the mother-son relation is stronger than ever. This trait stands in tension with earlier models of feminism. For Florence

Nightingale, among others, the ‘conception of duty and the notions of femininity adhered to by her family and by society’ created problem, not liberation.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, I contend that the connection between the loving of pain, in the context of marriage, presents itself as a sign of masochism in Honoria. Malet thus draws a connection with Olive Schreiner whose narratives, characterised by their ‘idealizations of self-denial, sexual purity, and maternal self-sacrifice’, come to represent ‘New Woman masochism’.<sup>66</sup> In marrying Richard in spite of her same-sex desire for Katherine, Honoria appears to choose failure in her own romantic pursuit so as to preserve that of her beloved. The decision thus accounts for the female masochistic act of self-sacrifice.

Although the notion of masochism has long been established as a pathological symptom in sexologist discourses of Krafft-Ebing, as well as Ellis whose focus is on inverted women, the representation of masochism in literature, particularly the Victorian novel, is a ‘recently invented concept’.<sup>67</sup> John Kucich has given his ‘highly specific definition of masochism’ as ‘the production of omnipotent fantasy by means of pain-seeking behaviour’.<sup>68</sup> Significantly, he alludes to psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan and their tendency to view masochistic relations as ‘triangular rather than dyadic, since the masochist appears to play out ambivalent sexual relationships with both mother and father.’<sup>69</sup>

In the context of late nineteenth-century sexual inversion, Honoria emerges as a younger, inverted woman attracted to an older, heterosexually married woman.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 129-130.

<sup>66</sup> John Kucich, *Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 88; hereafter abbreviated as *IM*; John Kucich, ‘Olive Schreiner, Masochism, and Omnipotence: Strategies of a Preoedipal Politics’ in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 79-109; p. 81.

<sup>67</sup> Krafft-Ebing, ‘Masochism’ in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, pp. 89-152; p. 89; Ellis, *SI*, vol. 2, pp. 259, 260; Kucich, ‘Introduction’ in *IM*, p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> Kucich, ‘Introduction’ in *IM*, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Kucich, ‘Introduction’ in *IM*, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 113; hereafter abbreviated as *IF*.

According to Martha Vicinus's research into love between women in the nineteenth century, only a handful of women 'fully acknowledged and acted upon the sexual basis of their deep love for another woman.'<sup>71</sup> Others, and into this group may Honoria be classed, 'controlled their erotic desire in order to win a higher love.'<sup>72</sup> To Honoria, '[p]hysical consummation [with Katherine] [i]s less important than the mutual recognition of passion.'<sup>73</sup> I contend that the triangular relationship in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* represents Honoria's masochism, in that she has to control and repress her same-sex desire. In other words, the novel seeks to imply that Honoria's attempt to 'serve' Katherine is futile, and thus consciously masochistic, since she is unable to replace the one in whose love Katherine eternally dwells, nor is she able even to light away the remnants of his shadow:

Then, with a long-drawn, fluttering sigh, Katherine looked up at the tall, straight figure.

'Dick—ah, you've come in! My beloved—have you had good sport?' she said.

Honoriam sat down on the end of the sofa, bowing her head.

'Alas, alas, it is only me, Cousin Katherine. Nothing better than me, Honoriam St. Quentin. Would that it were someone better,' and her voice broke. (*RC*, p. 414)

The similar build between the elder Richard and Honoria, rendered momentarily confusing by her athletic frame, makes Katherine's bewildered state easily plausible. But what lies beneath the surface is Honoria's self-inflicted pain. Katherine's tenaciously enduring love for the deceased husband, Honoria's hurtful acknowledgement that her presence is not worthy of Katherine's delight, and the belittling equation of herself to a 'thing', all indicate that Honoria is losing ground. Still, Honoria perseveres despite all the emotional sufferings, both experienced and in store, to achieve that higher love. They are

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<sup>71</sup> Vicinus, 'Introduction' in *IF*, p. xix.

<sup>72</sup> Vicinus, 'Introduction' in *IF* p. xix.

<sup>73</sup> Vicinus, 'Introduction' in *IF*, p. xix.

in fact ‘instances of [her] cherished pain’.<sup>74</sup> As I have shown, the novel closes on Richard and Katherine enjoying their private moments together *without* Honoria in the picture. The fact that she is deliberately left out of the frame confirms my argument that there is no way in which Honoria may wield herself through this impenetrable bond between the mother and son. Yet, we must bear in mind that both Katherine and Richard rely on Honoria in terms of strength of character and skills of management. Her sacrifice, together with Katherine and Richard’s dependence on her, serve to heighten Honoria’s masochistic leaning as well as her true self-worth.

However, the narrative retains its emphasis on the one-sidedness of Honoria’s situation. She is exultant during a walk with Katherine who directly seeks Richard in whose company she finds great delight. This love for each other’s ‘companionship’ is conspicuous and consistent. Therefore, when Richard expresses his love and gratitude, he includes the important people to him, his adopted son Dick, Chifney the trainer, most of all Katherine – the ‘most perfect of mothers’ – but not his wife (*RC*, p. 618). Although this omission underscores the tensions within the love triangle, the fact that the novel ends on Honoria’s name nevertheless signifies her importance at Brockhurst: ‘Honoria St. Quentin’s presence br[ings] a sense of security and reassurance at this period of her development.’ (*RC*, p. 406)

In this respect, therefore, Malet’s conception of marriage in the novel is a multi-functioning tool, with the potential to legitimise the unethical relationship between one man and two women, who create a literary equivalence of the New Woman, and to cathartically purify impurities in the novel. On the one hand, Richard’s disability is equated to femininity in that it imposes his metaphorical confinement to domesticity – within the gates of Brockhurst which symbolises the domestic sphere – and restriction on activities as well as aspirations towards self-fulfilment. On the other hand, to take

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<sup>74</sup> Kucich, ‘Introduction’ in *IM*, p. 4.

Honorina as an ambiguous symbol of the controversial ‘third sex’ of the 1890s gives the notion of marriage in the novel a new meaning especially as it becomes the means by which all three characters succeed in correcting their mistakes or flaws.<sup>75</sup>

First, Richard finally finds a ‘wife’ who understands and accepts his deformity. Second, the joint relationship to Richard allows the senior Lady Calmady to fulfil her role as a mother, and the younger Lady Calmady to administer the household as a good wife must. Richard’s disability thus stops being a burden thanks to Honorina’s efficient management. With their great wealth combined, both can put it to good use helping the poor and the disabled. However, the narrative does not simply imply that their betterment is realised through money or materialism. It is Honorina’s strong physical body, which symbolises her moral strength, that represents the force which keeps the integrity of Richard’s chastity and morality remains both sustainable and at a high standard. This textual function not only reinforces Honorina’s status as a New Woman but also evokes the late-century notion of purity central to Grand’s novels. The non-consummated marriage in Malet’s work is therefore a reminder that reproduction is not the only duty that married couples must carry out, but other duties – based on high-mindedness and morality – should take precedence in their shared living experiences. This is why the novel focuses on Richard’s determination to reform, aided by Honorina’s moral strength and support, until he finally triumphs over all obstacles including his disabled body.

To link Richard’s disability to the issues of sexuality also explains the adoption of his nephew, Dick Ormiston, which bears direct relevance to the idea of heredity and eugenics which evokes Grand’s interest in the subject. Adoption, like abstinence, is taken as a protection against the dangers of passing on hereditary disability: not venereal disease but physical deformity. Born disabled, Richard is discouraged from producing offspring to avoid passing on defective traits. His decision to practise celibacy, as

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<sup>75</sup> Murphy, ‘DD’, pp. 61-63.



opposed to an early urge to have a son with Lady Constance, mirrors a widespread motif: the image of the disabled woman who is unable to fulfil her maternal and domestic duties, and therefore condemned for possessing diseased female sexuality and suspect morality.<sup>76</sup> This is because in late-nineteenth-century literary representation, the ‘whole’ body means the ‘wholesome soul’ and, therefore, ‘the disabled body was increasingly read as a sign of either sexlessness or sexual deviance’.<sup>77</sup> It clarifies the reason why Richard needs to withhold his sexuality in order to be able legitimately to transfer his aristocratic title to another more perfectly limbed and blood-related heir through the safer means of adoption. Significantly, Malet employs the adoption plot both to advocate purity and to question the passionate investment of the self embedded in Katherine’s powerful motherly love for Richard. Honoria, by contrast, can love others more and help them because, unlike Katherine, she is not totally fixed on her own offspring.

Further evidence reinforcing the heroine’s will to preserve her sexual integrity is when the once ‘faithful lover’ Ludovic wishes her matrimonial happiness to which Honoria declares ‘rather hastily’: ‘I shall never be anything but Honoria St. Quentin.’ (*RC*, p. 588) It is characteristic of Honoria to not consummate her marriage, especially as ‘[t]here [i]s ... a triumph of high purity and of freedom of soul in her aspect.’ (*RC*, p. 614) Meanwhile, she has cultivated profound relationships with other members of the household. Moreover, in three years a normal couple usually have children, such as Lady Constance who has twins by Decies, while Honoria and Richard choose to adopt little Dick Ormiston instead (*RC*, p. 498). Malet’s implication that the Calmadys opt for adoption as a way to preserve purity as well as avoid association with disability further serves to highlight Honoria’s chastity. In this light, Malet’s New Woman and the adoption plot resonates with Grand’s ideas of eugenics and social purity. In effect, Malet

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<sup>76</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women’s Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> LaCom, ‘IIML’, pp. 192-193.

ends her tales of ‘thwarted artistic ambitions and illicit love’ by subtly detaching Mary and Honoria – whose names symbolise virginal purity/honourable chastity – from ‘sexually bold or erratic characters.’<sup>78</sup> It is noteworthy that the taint in Grand’s male characters appears to be impossible to shift, while Richard is rescued from degeneration by the New Woman. As a result, the family line can be reclaimed and rehabilitated, which affirms the redeeming power of the New Woman.

#### IV. Conclusion

Despite its retrospective setting, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* provides a modern take on the long-running liberal tensions around individualism and a woman’s legal status in marriage. It provides a constellation of sexual selves that makes no sense of simple categorisations by male and female – but at the same time suggests that the future of the race requires unusual sorts of loving communities in which individualism and the desires of the self are constantly balanced against the needs of others in a world in which the manly man and the womanly woman no longer really have force.

Framing proto-feminist concerns within the Woman Question and the marriage question, Malet creates the two parallel aspects in *The Wages of Sin* and *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*: the recurrence of love triangulations, and portrayals of atypical marriage (one cancelled, the other unconsummated) are what negate the possibility of procreation. First, Malet relies on the use of triangular relationships between the central characters in both novels as a means to explore the wider question of morality. Moreover, the portrayal of the Fallen Woman in *The Wages of Sin* and the *femme fatale* in *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* serves as a very rich source of commentaries on the contemporary concerns regarding female sexualities and degeneration. Secondly, although Malet’s representation of marriage signifies her scepticism about the institution,

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<sup>78</sup> Lundberg, ‘Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison’, p. 134.

it stresses the importance of feminine purity that characterises her protagonists. In *The Wages of Sin*, Malet achieves this by juxtaposing the New Woman with the Fallen Woman to argue that purity weighs more than self-sacrifice. Similarly, Honoria is an embodiment of purity, though of a different sort; she is pitted against licentiousness typified by the *femme fatale* and the degenerative hero. Notably, as a sexual invert Honoria would symbolise a challenging resistance to contemporary society for not conforming to social and sexual norms. Malet offsets such aversion by connecting Honoria with nature, open space, and bright light as opposed to sensuality, mystery, and shadow associated with her counterpart. Moreover, although setting the novel in the 1860s may problematise the legitimacy of Honoria's status as a New Woman, it helps modulate the possible sexual threat caused by a new unfamiliar sexual category.

To conclude Part Three, I want to stress the significant connection between Malet's atypical representation of marriage and the wider context of contemporary problems concerning the female sex, what Mary Ann Gillies characterises as 'the moral and social complexities of late nineteenth-century women's lives.'<sup>79</sup> The marriage of Malet's New Woman becomes a site where taboos, namely incest and same-sex desire, are played out. The author here explores the degree to which self-sacrifice, selfishness, and individualism are part of the general outlines of sexuality: in maternity, intergenerational desire, and incest. Neglected or under-appreciated until recently, the admirable quality of her rendering these into fiction is present in both novels, although Talia Schaffer states that it is *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* which 'cemented Malet's status as the leading psychological novelist of the period.'<sup>80</sup> Much scholarship has been concentrating on Malet's role in introducing new modes of literary representation through her aestheticism and, as her own contemporaries admitted,

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<sup>79</sup> Gillies, *PLAB*, p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> Talia Schaffer, 'Connoisseurship and Concealment in *Sir Richard Calmady*: Lucas Malet's Strategic Aestheticism' in Schaffer and Psomiades, *WBA*, pp. 44-61; p. 45.

modernism in a sense of characters' inner reflections and psychological depth. This combination of the two components habitually appeared in contemporary criticisms both at home and abroad. Prolific literary figure resident in New York, German-born Frederick Leypolds noted, reservedly but positively, in 1901 that Malet's latest novel was 'purely a psychological novel. ... No one can fail to see that it is the work of an artist.'<sup>81</sup>

However, my reading of Malet's novels looks beyond her modes of representation. The distorted portrayals of marriage focussing on the changing gender roles and degeneration confirm that her place is far removed from Ward who represents the ambivalence associated with conservative modernity. Concurring with Gillies's assessment of Malet as 'a writer of moral and social fiction for women', I propose that her novels and their modern perspective of marriage strengthen her affinity with New Woman writers, especially through the connection with Grand as my comparative analyses of their works demonstrate.<sup>82</sup> This placing of sexuality at the centre stage of the narratives, rather than a distraction as in Grand's fiction, suggests a new orientation for the grounds of feminist debates on the self in the twentieth century. The emphasis on individual sexual orientation as opposed to individualist resistance to the enforcement of collectivist socio-legal norms is at stake here. Perhaps it is not surprising then that Malet, even more than Grand, moves away from a focus on the individual *Bildungsroman* to the sort of composite developments involved in her love triangle plots. Even the narrative form here suggests that individualism is being tested and questioned as a suitable narrative form for the problem of self-determination and sexual desire.

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<sup>81</sup> Frederick Leypolds, 'Lucas Malet. *Sir Richard Calmady*' in *The Literary News*, vol. 22, no. 2 (November, 1901), pp. 321-322; p. 321.

<sup>82</sup> Gillies, *PLAB*, p. 81.

## Conclusion

This thesis has been focussing on the literary representation of individualism, marriage, and the New Woman in the novels by Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Lucas Malet. Instrumental to my reading and analysis are the female protagonists in the selected texts. Each character mediates the author's reflection on the ways in which changes and reforms in social, cultural, and political realms had significant impact on women at the end of the Victorian period. Evidently, the study of the individualism of these New Woman heroines and their marriage enables us better to form a more complete vision of the changing position of women and the responses it triggered, both from the three authors and contemporary critics at the end of the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*, which was itself a particularly important transitional period into the new century and the modernist era. As I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, the works of the three novelists are distinctly different and representative of each author's unique styles and perspectives on the nineteenth-century Woman Question. While Ward's anti-feminism is apparent as seen in *Robert Elsmere* and *Marcella*, Grand's novels, *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*, present her as a social-purist feminist, just as Malet's aestheticism and feminism become discernible in *The Wages of Sin* and *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*.

Although the three novelists' perception as reflected through their protagonists may appear occasionally in opposition, with regard to the main aspects of my thesis, they prove to concur in their figuring of a plot crux around marriage and the New Woman. They portray New Woman characters facing the contradictory choice between individualism and the self-sacrifice requisite for marriage. Due to the three authors' position as writers of popular fiction, and considering their extensive outputs especially

in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the impact their works created is of critical significance. As the novel became one of the essential instruments in initiating change, the similarities in their engagement with the New Woman and the late-Victorian marriage question point to the social, political, and cultural anxieties, all of which have informed the main themes in both recent and current studies in the field of late-Victorian women's literature. What this thesis has discovered is that the question of marriage made the common ground between the conventions of popular fiction and the abiding political anxieties about feminism and marriage in a changing world.

With its specific focus on individualism in the otherwise well-trodden field of Victorian feminism and the figure of the New Woman, this thesis hopes to make a case for the reconsideration of its figuring in relation to marriage as represented in these major works under consideration. As the novel became a serious and powerful medium – making political statements as well as having wide impact due to its popularity – it provided these writers with a means of voicing their concerns regarding the condition of a *feme covert* and the changing legal status. Their success indicates the significant contribution of popular fiction in helping to disseminate and normalise these changes by reshaping the traditions of the marriage plot. By taking individualism as a lens through which to read their novels, I propose that these three women writers' diverse ideologies serve to underscore their similar interest in representing, through the New Woman characters, the dilemma women encounter both prior to and in marriage caused by the risk of appearing 'selfish' when, in fact, they are simply guarding what should be recognised as their inherent right to personal happiness. The consequence of female individualism in each novel thus signifies its author's stance, either conventional or radical, through her approach to and handling of that conflict in the most intimate aspect of a woman's personal life: depending on political perspective, as we have seen,

individualism is either the means to social disorder and selfishness; the guarantor of the future health of the race; or a prefiguring of modernist discontinuity and interiority.

Such multi-dimensional departures from convention may be linked to the development of the theory of liberalism and its progress in the nineteenth century. I perceive that it is this connection between politics, culture, and literature which contributed to the emergent notion of individualism and its influence on New Woman fiction. In fact, the New Woman figure, the notion of female individualism, and the portrayal of marriage as a site of conflicts, represent Ward, Grand, and Malet as courageous and forward-thinking writers. They were, in a sense, modern for having produced novels that appeared to challenge the strand of literary conservatism of their time, although we may expect the modernity in Ward's New Woman characters to be of a lesser degree and more of an expression of her conservatism in comparison to Grand and Malet. Of the three authors, only Malet emerges as a most modern since her fiction anticipates the modernist movement of the twentieth century. In the following section, I discuss my research findings in terms of individualism, the New Woman, and marriage as perceived by Ward, Grand, and Malet who represent different contemporary approaches to the three notions.

Through the realist modes of Ward and Grand, their fiction focuses on the exteriority of the female protagonists. In other words, it depicts these characters' relationships with the outside world of the public sphere formed through individualism. However, Malet's works foreshadow the new trends in late-Victorian, early-Edwardian literary movements namely sexology and modernism. They not only portray the talent or uniqueness of the female protagonists but also explore the depth of their inner sexual selves. Outwardly, Mary is portrayed as an epitome of purity yet we come to witness the character's psychological complexity through her strong active desire for the hero.

Likewise, despite her philanthropy, Honoria also represents an urge to satisfy her own same-sex desire which may not be apparent to other characters.

Known as an anti-feminist author, Ward uses the notion of female freedom, self-serving independence, and active participation in the world of profession and politics highly uncharacteristic of the womanly woman, to characterise her female protagonists, Rose Leyburn and Marcella Boyce. In Rose's case, it is the character's musical talent which defies the socially constructed ideal of marriage. It makes her focus more on becoming a full-time violinist and, as a result, she ignores the conventional expectation that women sacrifice their own ambition in order to cater to others' need. Evidently, instead of selflessness, Rose's chosen trajectory reflects the character's fixation on self-development, a subtle resonance with Samuel Smiles's advocacy of self-help. Ward's creation is full of confidence, prone to self-assertion, who remains steadfast to her principles. In contrast, Catherine exemplifies self-abnegation and thus serves as Rose's complete opposite. The character's attempt to stop Rose from resisting social convention to which Catherine herself staunchly adheres signals Ward's conception of the eldest sister as the traditional heroine whereas the youngest represents an erratic womanhood devoid of proper womanly conduct. I want to take Judith Wilt's observation further by adding that Ward's 'seriousness' in creating Rose as a girl artist through her singular purpose on developing her own 'talent, ambition and growth' serves to consolidate her character's individualist modernity.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, Ward employs female independence and advocacy of socialism to portray the individualism of Marcella. The character's self-assertiveness and active engagement with socialism not only illustrate its defiance to convention, but also mirror Rose's deliberate choice to achieve her ambition, a nuanced echo on Sidney Webb's

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Wilt, *Behind Her Times: Transition England in the Novels of Mary Arnold Ward* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 70-71.



theory that encourages the pursuit of one's own interests in the way one thinks best. Furthermore, Marcella consciously and confidently regards herself as an individual, a mistress of herself, independent of her parents' past, which evokes Ralph Waldo Emerson's affirmation of and emphasis on the right of the individual to be free from external influences. In this light, notwithstanding her conservatism, Ward's textual representation of female individualism interestingly aligns her with contemporary exploration of ideas characteristic of the *fin de siècle*: female genius and female emancipation.

Through these two controlling ideas, Ward represents in her novels the dilemma associated with the marriage question confronting the two protagonists, namely the difficult choice between passion and propriety. As Rose and Marcella gradually begin to experience the desires for emancipation as well as for romantic love through the prospect of marriage, they realise that one hinders the other. Due to the necessity of conforming to literary tradition, but also to a large extent the author's own conservative worldview, I conclude that it is typical for Ward to have these characters place marriage before their individualist self-realisation. Despite the fact that Ward devotes the large part of both novels trying to establish her protagonists as modern-minded, radical women, their characters are in fact contradictory to her perspective on the proper place for women. Thus, female individualism has to give way to marriage, since Ward's conservatism and anti-feminism cannot endorse the equality between women and men. This is in line with scholar William Samuel Peterson's statement that for Ward, 'the highest moral act for women is submission rather than self-assertion'.<sup>2</sup> Ward uses her New Woman heroines to inculcate this principle that accounts for the transformation from the assertive, self-confident New Woman into what Ward considers to be the ideal wife.

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<sup>2</sup> William Samuel Peterson, *Victorian Heretic: Mrs. Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976), p. 7.

Significantly, I perceive in Ward's novels both differences and similarities to Grand's works. While Ward's rejection and Grand's promotion of female individualism mark their ultimate dissonance, both writers focus on the exceptional individualism or political engagement of their female protagonists. Ward's Rose and Marcella, and Grand's Evadne, Angelica, and Beth, are all portrayed with freedom, confidence, and self-government. Grand represents through *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book* the social problems prevalent in contemporary society with a specific focus on marriage and the pressure it puts on women. In the earlier novel, the individualistic character and female rational self-possession of Evadne are expressed through her sexual abstinence. It communicates Grand's thoughts on the importance of sexual selection, as well as her emphasis on the merit of women's self-control as a means to defend themselves against moral corruption and sexual contamination. Significantly, the individualist heroine epitomises the call to act for the self before others, which articulates Grand's feminist demand for the rights of women.

In this light, *The Heavenly Twins* reflects the liberal discourse of the (female) self which John Stuart Mill so eloquently defends. The Millian emphasis on liberty and freedom characterises Grand's other New Woman heroine in the novel, Angelica Hamilton-Wells who, liberated from social conventions and traditional values, serves as the writer's response to the question of equality between the sexes. The representation of Angelica's individualism, expressed through her fierce sense of independence, is necessary for Grand to draw out the sense of female subjection as opposed to male privileges. Essentially, the novel makes it obvious that it is through her individualism that Angelica achieves freedom and personal fulfilment. This notion coincides with Sidney Webb's argument that fullest liberty and complete personal freedom are the only means truly to achieve individualism, and that the loss of freedom causes the most serious difficulty of individualism.

As with Angelica, in *The Beth Book* Grand traces the eponymous heroine's personal journey from her adolescence through to her maturity. The novel follows the character's development by first focussing on her loss of independence, followed by an enlightenment which accompanies her through the various stages towards individualism as advocated by Mill. Moreover, Beth's success in terms of personal autonomy is a potent testimony to Grand's argument for female individualism. During her marriage, the heroine exhibits a strong sense of self-reliance as propagated by Emerson. After her separation from her immoral husband, her character embodies female independence and freedom for which Webb strongly argues. These attributes, Grand contends, are all crucial to Beth's post-marriage chance of self-development championed by Smiles. In other words, individualism is introduced in the novel as a solution to all the problems arising from Beth's marriage. Evidently, Grand finds women's liberal legal identity to be particularly fascinating. In consequence, her novel is set in retrospect to reflect the mid-century debates and reforms, with *The Beth Book* critiquing the Divorce Act, the Married Women's Property Act, and the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Malet, in stark contrast to Ward and Grand, conceptualises individualism from an opposite angle. While the New Woman protagonists in the first four novels examined in this thesis aspire to attain equal legal, social, and political footing with men, the heroines in Malet's novels are the products of her psycho-sexual approach to individualism. As I have contended, she defines Mary Crookenden's individualism in Emersonian terms, through the character's consistency and perseverance, as well as her determination to pursue personal achievement, all in spite of social convention and external pressures. Indeed, in contestation with the construction of gender roles, Malet creates Mary so as to explore the psychological depth of a woman's sexuality and ambition, which appear to be pushed to the innermost of the character's consciousness. Similarly to seventeenth-century prolific writer and philosopher Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle

(1623-1673), who was ‘one of the first English woman writers to conceive of and create a female subjecthood’, Malet turns her novel into a site of ‘a developing interiority’ which, between what is displayed on the cold surface and that concealed within the unseen interior space, ‘question[s] the very relation of self to world’.<sup>3</sup> It is these hidden desires, sexual and professional, that form Mary’s individualism; they convey to us Malet’s notion of the character’s autonomous selfhood which, resonating with Cavendish’s idea, reflects the ‘belie[f] in an inner self separate from the social self’.<sup>4</sup>

Malet’s other heroine, Honoria St. Quentin, is characterised with lesbianism, and the desire to realise her secret wish-fulfilment, which manifests her exceptional individuality through the character’s sexual selfhood. In fact, Honoria’s individualism is, as I have thus far argued, expressed through the character’s self-definition identified by her atypical sexuality. This explicates the necessity that causes Malet to keep reminding us throughout the novel that Honoria identifies herself not as a woman but as a man. Nevertheless, biologically she remains a female. This is possible when we view the character through Edward Carpenter’s argument. Carpenter defines sexual inversion as ‘the leaning of desire to one of the same sex’ which ‘is in a vast number of cases quite instinctive and congenital, mentally and physically, and therefore twined in the very roots of individual life and practically ineradicable.’<sup>5</sup> Since Honoria does not define her ‘self’ as a woman, she therefore divests herself of that ingrained sense of duties towards others. In other words, she re-creates herself in society as an individual. In consequence, she has the right, that Millian notion of liberty, to do everything she desires as long as her action does not harm others. In this paradigm, it becomes evident how her lesbianism effectively feeds her individualism.

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Low, ‘Surface and Interiority: Self-Creation in Margaret Cavendish’s *The Claspe*’ in *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 77, no. 2 (Spring, 1998), pp. 149-169; pp. 149, 150; hereafter abbreviated ‘SI’.

<sup>4</sup> Low, ‘SI’, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 55.

By portraying her protagonists as exceptional female individuals like Ward and Grand, yet departing from them as she places her focus firmly on female sexualities (apparently Ward does not discuss sexuality whereas Grand is more concerned with male sexualities), Malet offers an interesting choice of study of the New Woman sub-genre. Importantly, Malet's study of the desire, sexuality, and selfhood of her heroines anticipates feminist thoughts associated with the 'emergence of literary modernism in the first decades of the twentieth century' and its expressions of 'gradual dissociation of selfhood from stable structures'.<sup>6</sup> Such concerns may be explained by the fear that 'the individual may be subject to the dissolution of an identity'.<sup>7</sup> In this light, the three authors' similar interest in female individualism becomes all the more interesting when the diversity of their representation suggests that there may be more than one approach, that is, politically conceived, to this complex concept.

In *The Wages of Sin*, Malet characterises the New Woman heroine and her aspiration with individualism in the tradition of John Stuart Mill and Sidney Webb. Mary desires two things: artistic success and James Colthurst. The depiction of Mary's right to self-government, in other words, her independent decision to attend the Connop School of Art and her self-exposure under Colthurst's supervision, echoes Mill's principle while her will to pursue her own interests in the way she thinks best alludes to Webb's theory. This indicates her individualism as is seen on the exterior. However, as I have often remarked, Malet differs from Ward and Grand who participate in the debates in political, legal, and social reforms. As seen in her fiction, Malet explores the psychological depth, that modernist notion of interiority, and emotion of Mary's character. Thus, the fact that Mary sustains her engagement, despite her knowledge of Colthurst's decadent background and Jenny's love and illicit relationship with him, affirms her psychologically as well as

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<sup>6</sup> Timo Müller, 'Toward the Modernist Self' in *The Self as Object in Modernist Fiction: James, Joyce, Hemingway* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), pp. 21-90; p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe, 1900-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 92.

sexually individualist pursuit. However, since society does not expect women to excel in anything other than their maternal and domestic duties, the heroine's desire for self-glorification is by no means appropriate. Furthermore, because it is not acceptable for women to experience, let alone display, sexual desire, the novel is inevitably enabled to explore the tensions surrounding the New Woman's strong urge to achieve her personal goals. Such traits are at variance with the tenet of women's self-abnegation, that collective sense of duty to others, designed to benefit society at large. This collectivist notion is, by contrast, amply exemplified by the majority of the Old Woman characters in the works of Ward and Grand.

In *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, Malet's portrayal of Honoria's sexual inversion bears relevance to John Stuart Mill's principle. Honoria's lesbian leaning, which defies both the traditional gender roles and the separation of spheres, echoes the Millian 'liberty of tastes and pursuits', especially as the character purposefully 'fram[es] the plan of [her] life to suit [her] own character' so as to fulfil her wish of being with Katherine 'even though they [other characters] should think [her] conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly to both Ward and Grand, the author explains both of her New Woman protagonists' transgressive choices in terms of individualism.

Through Malet's novels, we witness a new kind of sexual identities, indeed the 'redefinition of gender', which aligns Malet with the feminist discourse and consciousness widespread in the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Her focus on sexuality and liberty, furthermore, signifies a further step in ideological development from Mill's advocacy in the 1860s, a period rich in terms of intellectual awakening and intervention, which Malet chooses as the backdrop for her novels. While Mill focuses on equal rights, Malet calls upon society to recognise new forms of sexual identity: all those different sexual, or

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<sup>8</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, third edition (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Gerda Lerner, 'The Right to Learn, the Right to Teach, the Right to Define' in Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 192-219; p. 195.

more appropriately, ‘sexological “types”’ ‘whose sexuality ... [though] perverse ... constituted their very identities.’<sup>10</sup> Instead of an emphasis on property or politics like Ward and Grand, Malet is more concerned with the self and its desires. Thus, Malet justifies the placing of both of her New Woman heroines outside of the collective categorisation of gender roles by reclaiming them as exceptional female individuals. In other words, Malet experiments with female characters who do not fit in the traditional category of woman. Rather, as seen in the novels, both Mary and Honoria insist that they be regarded and treated as individuals, not collectively as characterless women. These characteristics accentuate their strong individuality, which fuels their individualism.

Hence, my focus on the three authors’ literary representation of individualism serves to illustrate the characteristics of exceptional women at the end of the Victorian age. Together, the novels of Ward, Grand, and Malet help demonstrate that the expression of individualistic behaviours in women is profoundly problematic as well as unacceptable in the late-nineteenth-century society where these traits defy the traditionally feminine role. Hitherto, as seen in my analysis, Ward, Grand and Malet are all invested in the concept of female individualism although each author responds to it quite differently. For instance, Ward reacts against the kind of political individualism which Grand vigorously promotes among her female protagonists: this is attested through Ward’s traditionalist idea reinforced by the New Woman willingly abandoning her individualism and returning to the private sphere. Meanwhile, Malet views it neither in legal nor social but rather modernist terms, that is, through the psycho-sexual lens that markedly diverges from both Ward and Grand. Hence, her fiction introduces a totally different angle in which to conceptualise female individualism.

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<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Kaye, ‘Sexual identity at the *fin de siècle*’ in Gail Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 53-72; p. 62.

Despite their differing approaches, however, both Malet and Grand portray individualism in their female characters as a positive force whereas Ward, congruent with her anti-feminist attitude, does not sanction individualism at all. This is reaffirmed by her preference for the Old Woman since the New Woman's individualism is represented in the texts as immaturity. Significantly, Ward advocates traditional values associated with womanhood, altruism, self-abnegation, while Grand actively campaigns for the opposite, that is, rationality and self-government. In comparison, based on her proto-modernist approach, Malet appears to adopt a considerably flexible view. In Malet's fiction, female individualism is closely connected with sexuality and the self. She allows her heroines to indulge in their passionate pursuits of personal aspirations, be it occupation or lovers. Indeed, she explores the new consciousness of female sexual identities, which are represented in terms of Mary's awareness of sexual desire and Honoria's lesbian selfhood.

Analysing individualism in relation to the notion of autonomy and independence, critic and scholar Regenia Gagnier argues that '[w]omen-created New Women were not so rigidly independent. They wanted autonomy, individual development, but they wanted it through *relationship*.'<sup>11</sup> However, this does not seem to be the case with all women-created New Woman characters. While Ward's conservatism may influence the ways in which her New Woman protagonist transform *through* relationships, Grand and Malet contend that the question of individualism is to a large degree the question of choice and circumstances. When relationships do *not* work, for example, in Grand's novels, then individualism and independence serve as an alternative solution.

Similarly, individualism also serves as substitution for normal relationships in the fiction of Malet. Nevertheless, my reading of Malet's novels concurs with Gagnier's

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<sup>11</sup> Regenia Gagnier, 'Individualism from the New Woman to the Genome: Autonomy and Independence' in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 2003), pp. 103-128; p. 106; emphasis in the original; hereafter abbreviated as 'INWG'.



conclusion in regard to the multi-valence of individualism, particularly the British concept, that ‘in the period up to the Second World War, individualism often meant market competition in the US, psychological complexity and refinement for the Anglo-European, and biology for German science.’<sup>12</sup> Gagnier’s view remarkably resonates with Malet’s works in which we perceive ‘the modern psychological individual ... through the meticulous calculation of pain and pleasure aestheticized in the narrative.’<sup>13</sup> Still, the representation of individualism in the novels of Ward and Grand corresponds with Gagnier’s classification of New Woman fiction, especially as they reflect her judicious connection between ‘the female subject in mid-Victorian fiction’ and ‘the modern idea of the self-regulating individual.’<sup>14</sup>

Thus, my reading of the six novels has led me to the conclusion that individualism is a compound concept, especially since the textual representation by the three novelists contests the original notion that this is a strictly political theory. Indeed, its multi-faceted application and appeal may explicate the spread of individualism into social, cultural, and literary realms, such as seen in its relevance to both the Woman Question and the marriage debate of the 1890s which are the basis of this study. It is important to note that my focus on the representation of individualism in the selected fiction has been truly worthwhile as it traces two important forms of development from the mid-century through to the *fin de siècle*.

First, it becomes clear that individualism as a male-centred model prevalent in the middle of the nineteenth century has made its way to fascinate women in the final decades. Indeed, my focus on female individualism as perceived in these heroines helps establish the existence of late-Victorian women’s attempt to retain their sense of self, in other words, to be recognised as individuals in society. This self-focussed desire not only

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<sup>12</sup> Gagnier, ‘INWG’, p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Gagnier, ‘INWG’, p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Gagnier, ‘INWG’, p. 108.

creates a break with the conventional ideal of womanhood that prioritises self-effacement and self-sacrifice, but also marks an immense gain in progress in terms of women's identity and position. Secondly, my interest in individualism as depicted by three women authors unexpectedly exposes the link between the late-nineteenth-century formation of feminism and the influence of mid-century male thinkers, the most eminent being John Stuart Mill and his theories on liberty and subjection. Through the ways in which Ward, Grand, and Malet appropriate these principles into their novels, we witness the shift in the relationship between women and marriage.

Anticipating and joining in two quintessentially *fin-de-siècle* debates, Malet's reversed parallel with and influence on the works of Edward Carpenter and Ella Hepworth Dixon suggest a potent combination for further research. In this respect, the author deserves to have a place in New Woman criticism and, by implication, late-Victorian feminism. However, we must acknowledge that she was by no means an activist, being neither 'political' nor 'feminist' in the sense that both Ward and Grand were during their active involvement in shaping the socio-political agitations of their day.<sup>15</sup> This is why although Talia Schaffer pragmatically acknowledges Grand as a 'representative New Woman', she is inclined to label Malet more as an aesthete than a New Woman writer.<sup>16</sup> This is due to the non-realist nature of female aestheticism as opposed to the realism associated with New Woman writing.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, in the wake of Patricia Lundberg's informative and valuable account, Jennifer Cognard-Black and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls recently perceive in Malet traits that bring out the New Woman

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<sup>15</sup> Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds, 'Introduction' in Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 1-22; p. 15; hereafter abbreviated as *WBA*.

<sup>16</sup> Talia Schaffer, 'Connoisseurship and Concealment in *Sir Richard Calmady*: Lucas Malet's Strategic Aestheticism' in Schaffer and Psomiades, eds, *WBA*, pp. 44-61; p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Lisa K. Hamilton, 'New Women and "Old" Men' in Schaffer and Psomiades, eds, *WBA*, pp. 62-80; p. 78 n. 11.

in her as their careful perusal of the novelist's personal letters testifies.<sup>18</sup> This claim concurs with my findings based on the selection of Malet's non-fiction as well as novels presented in this thesis. Whether in public or privately, regarded as innovator of aestheticism or early modernism, it is evident that Malet harboured and expressed concerns associated with the Woman Question and New Woman debate.

In conclusion, in examining the representation of individualism, the New Woman, and marriage in the chosen texts, I have discovered that individualism as a socio-political theory is a crucial but missing piece of the jigsaw in recent scholarship on New Woman and late-Victorian feminist criticisms. The six novels have attested to claims that marriage was planted deep within Victorian culture. The New Woman characters, whose weapon – but also sometimes weakness – is individualism, embody contemporary resistance against this conventional creed. The fact that Ward, Grand, and Malet all begin their novels in ways that conform to this similar pattern suggests a valid historical reconstruction of the 1890s with a focus on the increase in women's knowledge, desire for autonomy, and refusal to conform to the dominant traditional culture. Furthermore, that their New Woman characters do not embrace marriage at first indicates a shifting trend which seems to have gathered force in the latter half of the decade. Since the mid-1890s was heavily caught up in concerns surrounding decadence, Ward's ambivalence, Grand's eugenics, and Malet's aesthetics emerge as appropriate responses representative of their perspectives on marriage. Nevertheless, individualism eventually fades from each novel, despite its initial strength and influence on the characterisation of every New Woman heroine. The contested views conveyed through the works under examination all progress towards an increasingly dynamic interplay between the marriage question, individualism, and the woman question, at the end of the century.

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<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Cognard-Black and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls, 'Introduction' in Jennifer Cognard-Black and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls, eds, *Kindred Hands: Letters on Writing by British and American Women Authors, 1865-1935* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2006), pp. 1-19; p. 15.

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