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**‘A Large and Passionate Humanity Plays About Her’: Women and
Moral Agency in the Late Victorian Social Problem Novel**

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Abstract

This thesis examines responses to the idea of a specific female moral agency in depictions of women's philanthropic work by late nineteenth-century female novelists. Focusing on depictions of romantic and sexual female experience in the late nineteenth-century campaign against poverty, I explore the role of gender and sexuality in the making of the female moral self in novels by Mrs. Humphry Ward, Iota, Margaret Harkness, Jane Hume Clapperton, Gertrude Dix. I demonstrate the manner in which altruism was linked to romantic love and sexual desire, and show how this idea surfaced in the love-plot in novels by late nineteenth-century women. I argue that the novel was regarded as a valuable instrument to further the process of social reform, owing to its perceived unique ability to arouse the reader's sympathies; therefore, these novelists used the novel as a tool for constructing the altruistic self. Reading the novels alongside contemporary non-fiction discourse, I undertake an analysis of different romance plots and show how they relate to the debates of the social reform movement of the late nineteenth century. Finally, I suggest that by using the novel, and especially the romance plot, which was regarded as a feminine form of expression, these novelists are defending the idea of a feminine ethic, and a feminine conception of morality that was defined by emotion, feeling, and sympathy, as opposed to the more masculine scientific and sociological ideas behind the late nineteenth century social reform movement.

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Introduction

In 1886 Grant Allen, author of the infamous novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), praised the ‘romance writer’ who urged his readers to ‘[m]arry for love, and for love only’ for having ‘unconsciously proved himself to be the best friend of human improvement’.¹ In arguing that the love plot played an essential role in the quest to improve humanity, Allen articulated one of the key ideas of this thesis, namely, that romance plots in various shapes and forms have a deep social and political significance. While Allen based his statement on the idea that sexual selection worked best when instinct was allowed the privilege of selection, thus placing ‘human improvement’ within the context of eugenics, I wish to expand the concept of the importance of the romance plot beyond, but not apart from, the eugenic ideas circulating in late nineteenth-century social discourses and novels.

What Allen did not consider, and what this thesis will, is that novelists were acutely aware of the manner in which sexuality was understood to form an important part of the moral self in the late nineteenth century, a factor which novelists incorporated into their love plots. Despite Allen’s assertion that the novelist was ‘unconsciously’ taking part in the mission for ‘human improvement’, there is nothing unconscious about the manner in which novelists utilised the love plot. This thesis positions the female novelist as a social reformer who took part in the late Victorian mission for social and human improvement through narrative, and more specifically, through plots that provided variations on traditional love plots. I examine the interaction between love and charity, sexuality and altruism in the late nineteenth-century philanthropic novel. Looking at the novels of Mrs Humphry Ward, *Iota*, Margaret Harkness, Jane Hume Clapperton, Gertrude Dix, as well as the works of children’s fiction authors, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Alice F. Jackson, and Alice F. Mitchell, I explore the manner in which these novelists responded to the notion of a specifically feminine moral influence.

The late Victorians approached poverty as a problem with a solution rather than a fact of life. Not satisfied with mere ameliorations, optimistic social

¹ Grant Allen, ‘Falling in Love’, *Fortnightly Review*, 40 (1886), 452-462 (p. 460).

reformers were searching for the correct method that would eradicate poverty forever: '[t]he proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible', wrote Oscar Wilde in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism'.² Exactly how the reconstruction of society was best achieved was a subject fiercely debated. The diverse methods under consideration included, but were not limited to, character reform, eugenics, factory legislation, land nationalisation, trade unionism, and an eight hour day.

What everyone seemed to agree upon, however, was that rather than providing relief, charity exacerbated poverty. In 1884, an article criticising the contemporary philanthropic movements appeared in the *Scottish Review*. The anonymous author of 'Flaws in Philanthropy' pointed out the vast amount of money spent on philanthropic enterprises in London alone, and remarked that 'results are not what they should be, considering the enormous amount of both money and personal exertion expended in their attainment'. Philanthropy, the author argued, was necessary only due to poverty caused by 'greedy grasping at wealth, careless of who was overthrown in the struggle [...] selfish squandering, regardless of the welfare of future generations' and 'evil self-indulgence'.³ Instead of addressing the cause of poverty by combating selfishness and self-gratification, the author argued, charity instead fed those feelings of the middle class and poor at the same time, allowing the middle classes to indulge in self gratifying benevolence, and teaching the poor that only by squandering their money would they be repaid by the middle classes.

By attributing the cause of poverty to human behaviour rather than economic systems, the author of 'Flaws in Philanthropy' became part of a growing body of social critics who argued that the only lasting remedy to society's problems was to raise the character of the people. For the poor, this meant learning how to be thrifty, sober, and industrious; for those who were not poor, it meant cultivating a self-less personality, becoming someone who would pay fair wages, charge reasonable rents, and so forth. Henrietta Barnett, wife of Whitechapel clergyman and founder of university settlement, Toynbee Hall, Samuel Barnett, argued in 1882 that the poverty of the 'degraded' poor was 'the

² Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', *Fortnightly Review*, 49 (1891), 292-319 (p. 292).

³ 'Flaws in Philanthropy', *Scottish Review*, 3 (1884), 285-298 (pp. 286, 288).

natural result of their sinful, indulgent lives’ while ‘some of the noblest characters are developed under the enforced self-control of an income of a pound or thirty shillings a week’. Barnett pointed out that the class of the degraded poor often comprised those who earned up to ‘ten to twenty shillings a day’ in trades such as ‘hawking, flower-selling, shoe-blackening’. The poverty of such workers was regarded as a character failing: earning more than enough to keep a comfortable home, they instead spent their wages on drink and cheap amusements rather than saving money.⁴

The late nineteenth century, as Thomas Dixon has explained in *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain*, was an age of altruism.⁵ Altruism, as I will suggest in chapter 1 of this thesis, was constructed in biological and sociological discourses as being a quality that was particularly prevalent in women, owing to the self-sacrificing nature of motherhood. When Elizabeth Blackwell, one of Britain’s first female doctors, traced women’s ‘subordination of the self to the welfare of others’ back to ‘the material facts of gestation and the care of infancy and childhood’, she was merely confirming what had been commonly held throughout the century, but the new biological discourses on morality enabled her to do so with scientific authority.⁶ The maternal construct of female moral agency allowed women to create an ideology that Eileen Yeo has called ‘social motherhood’, in which the caregiving, nurturing, and authoritative aspects of motherhood were extended to the poor.⁷ Motherhood became the panacea for society’s ills, either through a form of spiritual motherhood in which middle-class women sought to ‘transform class separation and antagonism into the loving relations of the family’, or through a more literal interpretation of motherhood which focused on selective breeding to eradicate disease and degeneracy.⁸

By locating women’s moral agency in their mothering qualities, sexuality inevitably entered the equation. Mary Poovey has pointed out that

⁴ Henrietta Barnett, ‘Passionless Reformers’, *Fortnightly Review*, 32 (1882), 226-233 (pp. 227, 226).

⁵ Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meaning in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶ Elizabeth Blackwell, ‘The Influence of Women in the Profession of Medicine’ in *Essays in Medical Sociology* (London: Ernest Bell, 1902), p. 9.

⁷ Eileen Janes Yeo, ‘Social Motherhood and the Communion of Labour in British Social Sciences, 1850-1950’, *Women’s History Review*, 1 (1992), 63-87 (pp. 75-76).

⁸ Yeo, 1992, p. 70.

‘conceptualizing reproductive capacity as *the* basis of femininity inevitably (if inadvertently) foregrounded women’s sexuality alongside their moralized maternal nature’.⁹ Poovey implies that the inclusion of sexuality in women’s moral ground was problematic. Blackwell, however, found in the discourse of maternal love the possibility for a new recognition of a distinctly female sexuality that was a positive influence upon social life. In *The Human Element in Sex: Being a Medical Inquiry into the Relation of Sexual Physiology to Christian Morality* (1894), Blackwell wrote:

The profound depth of the passions of maternity in women extends not only to the relations of marriage, but to all the weak or suffering wherever found. It gives a sacredness to the woman’s appreciation of sex, which has not yet been utilised for the improvement of the social life of the nation’.¹⁰

The same year, mathematician and eugenicist, Karl Pearson, argued that motherly women possessed more sexual feeling than women who did not wish to have children. In ‘Women and Labour’ (1894), Pearson predicted that women’s sexual feelings would in the future develop as they increasingly came to realise that their social and political duties towards the state lay in motherhood. Inscribing motherhood as the greatest act of citizenship that women could perform, he also deemed the presence of sexual desire as a mark of good female citizenship.¹¹

In this thesis I argue that the philanthropic romance in its various forms was a product of the growing recognition of a connection between sexuality and altruism. Writing in 1888, historian and self-confessed ‘amateur philanthropist’, Edith Sichel drew a comparison between the novels of George Gissing and those of Walter Besant and declared:

We have had the Historical Romance, the Mystic Romance, the Social Romance, the psychological romance; it has remained for the present day

⁹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 11.

¹⁰ Blackwell, *The Human Element in Sex: Being a Medical Enquiry into the Relation of Sexual Physiology to Christian Morality* (London: J. A. Churchill, 1894), p. 6.

¹¹ Karl Pearson, ‘Woman and Labour’, *Fortnightly Review*, 55 (1894), 561-577 (p. 568).

to give us the Philanthropic Romance. It must yet be seen whether such romance will answer its purpose. To us at least, it seems more probable that the public will take its ugly lesson of home truths in the form of a pleasing tale, which has no pretensions to be personal, than in the direct and dull shape of long statistics.¹²

To Sichel, the romance element of the philanthropic novel was little more than the sweet coating for a bitter pill. What is more, Sichel's article demonstrated her belief in the idea that the philanthropic novel was specific to her age.

Victorian critics of the novel considered the philanthropic plot to be a product of the reforming spirit of the time in which they lived. Frederick Dolman argued in 'The Social Reformer in Fiction' that, some time during the nineteenth century, 'a change in the point of view' regarding the nature of poverty took place. Poverty, was no longer considered to be part of the 'natural order of things', and was instead recognised to be 'a condition of society as at present constituted'. It was this shift in the perception of poverty, Dolman explained, from the inevitable to the remediable, that gave rise to 'the appearance of the social reformer in fiction'. Examples of fiction began to appear that provided 'pictures of society as the social reformer sees it'; such novels portrayed 'men and women who have their being, not in accordance with the Church catechism or the conventional code of the drawing-room, but under the influence of social injustice, of class wrong, of political error'. Testifying to the influence that fiction had, Dolman argued that Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) 'did as much as numberless articles and reports to bring about the improvements which, in its later editions, Kingsley himself admitted to have taken place'. The reason that the novel had this power, Dolman concluded, was because 'the average man loves the dramatic, abhors the impersonal', and it was through the novel that 'the statistics are turned into narrative'.¹³

Allen's improving romance novelist is a 'he', while Sichel confines her discussion to two male writers, and Dolman reads the social reformer as

¹² Edith Sichel, 'Two Philanthropic Novelists: Mr. Walter Besant and Mr. George Gissing', *Murray's Magazine*, 3 (1888), 506-518 (p. 506). Sichel wrote of her experience as an 'amateur philanthropist' in *New and Old* (London: Constable, 1917), pp. 185-190.

¹³ Frederick Dolman, 'The Social Reformer in Fiction', *Westminster Review*, 137 (1892), 528-53 (pp. 528-530).

belonging to the male tradition. In contrast, I focus on the portrayal of female social reformers in the work of women novelists. My attentions are confined to the female novelist because it is part of my agenda to explore how romance, or rather, the underlying sexual desire that drives such plots, is related to the idea of a specifically feminine moral agency, based on women's reproductive capacities. Novel reading, as Kate Flint has pointed out, was constructed as an especially female activity.¹⁴ In this sense, novel writing may have proved itself to be the best way of reaching a wide female readership, for although these novels do not exclude a male readership, they took a form widely considered to be read mostly by women, namely, romance.

Why then was the novel an important political medium in itself? The answer to this question lies in the sympathetic engagement with which readers were supposed to interact with fictional characters. Implicitly stated in the ideas of Allen, Sichel, Dolman, was a belief that reading was in itself an act that could generate sympathy; Dolman suggested that the novel could succeed where political literature failed. An emotional interaction, and a sympathetic identification, took place during the process of reading. Whether reading novels will make us better people—in the sense of being more altruistic—has been recently debated by both literary critics and evolutionary psychologists.¹⁵ Perhaps the prominent proponent of this idea has been Martha Nussbaum who argues that '[o]ur experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel what might otherwise be too distant for feeling'.¹⁶ Reading novels, Nussbaum maintains, creates 'habits of empathy and conjecture conduc[ive] to a certain type of citizenship and a certain form of community: one that cultivates a sympathetic response to another's needs'.¹⁷ In this manner, the novel becomes a tool for the construction of the ideal citizen, and the ideal community could be shaped not only *in* fiction but *by* fiction. What is

¹⁴ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ See John A. Johnson, Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, and Daniel Kruger, 'Hierarchy in the Library: Egalitarian Dynamics in the Victorian Novel', *Evolutionary Psychology*, 6 (2008), 715-738, Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: an Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 47.

¹⁷ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 90.

significant to my discussion is the Victorians' own belief in the reader's sympathetic interaction with the text. As article in *Chamber's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* argued, the novel 'arouses those feelings of sympathy which always have a humanising tendency. A good novel may exercise a beneficial influence, of which the reader is quite unconscious, but which will nevertheless bear fruit in its effects upon the character'.¹⁸ It is for this reason that writers themselves viewed the novel as an important ideological tool.

Many of the authors discussed in this thesis had distinct ideas about the ways in which the novel interacted with contemporary ideologies. Jane Hume Clapperton, whose novel *Margaret Dunmore* (1888), I discuss in Chapter 3, viewed fiction as a diverse reflection of the ethical ideas circulating in the late nineteenth century. In her 1885 work, *Scientific Meliorism*, she advised her readers: '[w]e must not look to fiction for our *ethics*; but we may see there the standpoint average humanity has reached and the confusion of ideas upon the subject of right conduct, natural to a transitional epoch'.¹⁹ Clapperton warned her readers against using fiction as an ethical model, but pointed out that the study of fiction would provide a survey of contemporary ethics. In *Toilers in London* (1889), Margaret Harkness pointed out that novelists have a role in drawing attention to problems and making them visible to the public, 'the artist suggests: the economist merely puts his suggestions into practice', which suggests that the novelist has the inventive role of imagining solutions in social reform.²⁰

An ethical evaluation of fiction based on sympathetic identification inevitably carries with it a question of narrative and form. John Ruskin connected 'well-directed reading' with 'well-directed moral training' and informed the ladies who listened to, and later read, 'Of Queens' Gardens', that well-chosen literature led to 'a stronger moral state, and a truer thoughtful state, than that of others; enabling you, therefore, to guide, or to raise them'.²¹ This then raises the question: if readers identify with what they read, what type of narrative constitutes one that will produce the ethically minded citizen?

¹⁸ 'Fiction in two Aspects', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, 816 (1879), 513-515 (p. 513).

¹⁹ Jane Hume Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (London: Kegan Paul, 1885), p. 134.

²⁰ Margaret Harkness, *Toilers in London* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1889), p. 260.

²¹ John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *John Ruskin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 154.

Ruth Livesey has shown that female social reformers in training for the Charity Organisation Society were aware of the ideological implications of different narrative styles and carefully considered the style in which they structured their casenotes: '[t]he ethical content of reportage and social investigation—the attribution of responsibility to the individual, biological determinism or society—was therefore in the form'.²² An example of the extent to which generic conventions were understood to be linked to ideological positions can be found in Samuel Barnett's 'Sensationalism in Social Reform'. Barnett, an East End clergyman and a leading figure of the settlement movement of the late nineteenth century, was dismayed by the sensationalistic accounts of poverty that abounded in the late nineteenth century. 'They, by striving and crying', Barnett wrote, 'by forcible statements and strong language, have caused public opinion to stop its course of easy satisfaction, and to express itself in new legislation'. He argued that 'the statute book is cumbered with laws passed in a moment of moral excitement which remain without influence because they have never represented the true level of public opinion'.²³ His criticism was aimed at 'New Journalism', 'a style of narrative and sensationalist reporting' by W. T. Stead, which drew 'on the genres of melodrama, Gothic tale and pornography' to expose social evils.²⁴ Such narrative styles, Barnett suggested, may have been vital to creating legislation, but because they failed to raise the character of man, they could not bring about lasting change.

Although they had distinctly different ideas about the kind of style that was ethically preferable, Barnett and Stead both understood that narrative form and generic conventions, were in themselves ideological devices. An example of Barnett's moral aesthetic can be found in a letter which he wrote to his brother Frank in 1885: '[w]e have greatly enjoyed Edna Lyall's *We Two*, a novel without a villain and in which love is strong by being silent. The authoress has the art of making silence speak and she says more than she tells'.²⁵ The idea of a 'silence'

²² Ruth Livesey, 'Reading for Character: Women Social Reformers and Narratives of the Urban Poor in Late Victorian and Edwardian London', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), 43-67 (p. 45).

²³ Samuel Barnett, 'Sensationalism in Social Reform', in *Practicable Socialism*, by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett (London: Longman's and Green, 1888), 173-190 (pp. 174-179).

²⁴ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris, 2001), pp. xiv-xv.

²⁵ Henrietta Barnett, *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work, and Friends, By His Wife*, vol.1 (London: John Murray, 1918), p. 176.

that speaks powerfully, is in line with the Barnetts' conception of the 'passionless reformer', described by Henrietta Barnett, whose power lay not in overwrought rhetoric, but in the implicit influence that worked through telling stories and sharing aesthetic experience. Quoting American poet James Russell Lowell, Henrietta Barnett called for 'God's passionless reformers, influences/ That purify and heal and are not seen'.²⁶ It was through this silent and passionless influence that the character of the people was to be raised.

Barnett's theory of silent influence was not a new critical position: in 1864, an article upon 'Novels with a Purpose' in the *Westminster Review*, pointed to a growing consciousness of the influence of the novel:

The influence of the novel is beginning, too, to be publicly acknowledged of late more frequently than was once that fashion. For a long time his power over society, except as a mere teller of stories and provider of pastime, was ignored or disputed. It was, indeed something like the power of women in politics; an influence almost all-pervading, almost irresistible, but silent, secret, and not to be openly acknowledged.²⁷

By comparing 'the influence of the novel', to the 'power of women in politics', the author of this article suggested that the novel in itself exerted a feminine form of influence over its readers. In *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (2007), Rachel Ablow has suggested that 'novel reading constitutes a way to achieve the psychic, ethical, and affective benefits commonly associated with sympathy in married life: like a good wife in relation to her husband, novelists and critics claimed, novels could "influence" readers and so help them resist the depraved values of the market place'.²⁸ I draw upon Ablow's idea of the novel as a form of influence, and suggest that the influence of the novel is analogous to the idea of women's influence upon Victorian society: 'all-pervading' and 'irresistible' as well as being 'silent'.

I argue further that the use of recognisable plots tied to certain moments in time reflect the implicit ideology of the text. In affirming the link between plot

²⁶ Barnett, 'Passionless Reformers', in *Practicable Socialism*, 48-61 (p. 55-57).

²⁷ 'Novels With a Purpose', *Westminster Review* (1864), 24-49 (p. 48).

²⁸ Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 1.

and ideology I am following in the footsteps of Rosemarie Bodenheimer who argues that ‘it is in the shape and movement of narrative rather than in its proclaimed social ideology that we may find the “politics” of a novel in its deepest, most interesting, most problematical expression’.²⁹ The most potent example of the interaction between narrative and politics that Bodenheimer describes can be found in a plot structure that she has termed ‘the romance of the female paternalist’, in which female political intervention is facilitated by the heroine’s romantic involvement with a man occupying a position of power in the industrial or political world. In a similar vein, Frederic Jameson maintains that ‘the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions’.³⁰ This is not to say, however, that the novelists I discuss were unconsciously creating political expression through narrative technique; although ideology may be implicit, this does not necessarily mean that it was unconscious. I argue instead that narrative is consciously political, and there is no better example of this than in the diverse ways in which sex and politics are intertwined in the novels discussed in this thesis.

In her hugely influential study of the domestic novel, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong has argued that ‘female writing was not only responsible for the gendering of discourse; it was also responsible for representing sexual relations as something entirely removed from politics’.³¹ Armstrong has proposed that female novelists used the romance plot as a kind of disguise which allowed them to discuss larger societal issues without having to break the cover of the domestic sphere. In this manner, the political was cloaked in the personal. Writing in the same vein, Ruth Yeazell has suggested that the courtship plot in early-Victorian political novels provides a ‘cover’ for the politics of the story.³² Building upon the research of Armstrong,

²⁹ Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Fiction* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 3.

³⁰ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 79.

³¹ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 28

³² Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ‘Why Political Novels Have Heroines: *Sybil*, *Mary Barton*, and *Felix Holt*’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 18 (1985), 126-144 (p. 126).

Catherine Gallagher has maintained in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* that ‘novelists often “solve” social conflicts by first translating them into private conflicts’.³³ Such readings, however, rely too heavily on tenets of domestic ideology in the manner in which they suggest that private conflicts were perceived as having little to do with the politics of the public sphere; instead, I argue that both readers and writers had an intense understanding of the manner in which the personal, private, and sexual, was intrinsically political.

The plots in the novels examined in this thesis all take the form of some sort of romance. Romance was a particularly controversial genre for female readers. In *Empathy and the Novel*, Suzanne Keen, explains that ‘[t]he influence of the romantic experiences of fictional females on unmarried woman readers was an especially sensitive point’ because of novel’s assumed capability of ‘stirring up passions that could find satisfaction only in illicit sexual activity’.³⁴ Although it may have been frowned upon because of this, the romance genre may also have been the most effective genre in terms of provoking an empathetic response from its readers. In this thesis I link the romantic plots to moral action and specific forms of work in the arena of social reform. In doing so, I aim to show that romance plots are politically charged, which demonstrates the extent to which novelist recognised that sex and sexuality were both politically and socially significant in the nineteenth century, and not merely in terms of eugenic breeding. Each of these novels can be placed within one of the ideological discussions taking place in the late nineteenth century, therefore, I undertake close readings of the novels alongside the biological and political discourses of the movements which they may be said to address.

My study of the connection between sexuality and altruism in the late Victorian novel written by women adds to an existing canon of historical and literary criticism that examines the role of sexuality in the making of the moral self. My thesis has benefited hugely from Seth Koven’s rich and innovative *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (2004). Drawing upon the letters, journals, and published accounts of those who went slumming in

³³ Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (London: the University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 114.

³⁴ Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

the late nineteenth century, Koven forms a link between ‘eros and altruism’, and argues that the slums offered a space in which the middle classes were able to explore their sexuality beyond middle-class conventions.³⁵ Koven turns to nineteenth-century philanthropist, James Hinton’s suggestive phrase that he ‘longed to live among the poor as a man longs for his wedding day’, to propose the existence of an intimate connection between the altruistic urge and sexual desire. Those who devoted themselves to the poor, Koven argues, were motivated by erotic desire as well as altruistic urges.

What can be added to Koven’s account is an analysis of how the late Victorians themselves understood altruism and sexual desire as emanating from the same wish to benefit society, and an investigation into how the romance plot was affected by this idea. While Koven attributed eroticised accounts of slum excursions to a middle-class fascination with what he calls the erotics of dirt, I argue that such ideas also spring from notions that love of the poor had evolved from a basic love for another that resulted in procreation, in other words, that love of the poor and romantic love had the same root in primitive man. The connection that was made between sexual desire and the growth of altruism, which was considered to be taking place in the discourses on evolution of Herbert Spencer and Patrick Geddes and was appropriated by character reformers who aimed to cultivate ‘social affection’ amongst all classes of society, puts another perspective on Koven’s idea that slummers were exploring their desires in the slums and voyeuristically eroticising the poor.

Angelique Richardson’s scholarship on the connection between social reform, eugenics, the development of rational love, and how this has affected the love plot in the late nineteenth century novel, has also been vital to this thesis. In ‘The Eugenization of Love: Sarah Grand and the Morality of Genealogy’ (1999), Richardson points out the emergence of the idea of ‘rational love’ in the novels of Sarah Grand, as the result of the eugenic discourses of love in the late nineteenth century.³⁶ Richardson’s *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (2003), explores the impact of eugenic theories upon social reform schemes and sexual ideology in the late

³⁵ Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³⁶ Angelique Richardson, ‘The Eugenization of Love: Sarah Grand and the Morality of Genealogy’, *Victorian Studies*, 42 (1999), 227-255.

nineteenth century. Classifying eugenics as a ‘biological theory of class’, Richardson forces scholars to confront the often unpalatable eugenic strain running through many New Woman novels. Richardson tells us that ‘[a]round the middle of the century [...] the love-plot began to appeal as much to the biologist as to the novelist’.³⁷ While I take from Richardson’s work a distinct idea of the love plot itself as a discourse upon social morality, my thesis expands this idea beyond eugenics and also examines how those with few eugenic inclinations interpret the interaction between sexuality and social work.

In *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (2002), Dorice Williams Elliott explores how women’s philanthropic activities in Victorian England were represented in the Victorian novel.³⁸ Philanthropy, Elliott argues, ‘allowed women to perform useful activities defined as domestic without channelling all their desires into marriage’ proving that ‘women could be defined by something other than their sexuality, or their ability to reproduce’. As philanthropic women rose to prominence in the 1860s, the philanthropic heroine became as popular as the romantic heroine; these novels ‘seek to educate their readers in how to reconcile and discipline both their ambitions and erotic desires’.³⁹

Elliott bases her analysis on the Freudian separation of desire according to gender into the ambitious and erotic: ‘Freud ascribed both “ambitious” and “erotic” desires to men, but he maintained that women have only “erotic” desires’. In his conception of ‘erotic desires’, Elliott points out, Freud included ‘not only overtly sexual but romantic and motherly desires, which by extension or displacement, could even include spiritual or altruistic longings’.⁴⁰ While Elliott separates women’s erotic desires from their philanthropic (ambitious) desires, thereby showing that women had ambitious as well as erotic desires, I hope to show that erotic desires and philanthropic ambitions were closely linked. The scope of Elliott’s study ends in the 1860s, but there is ample opportunity to study the same phenomenon in the late nineteenth century. The

³⁷ Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 78.

³⁸ Dorice Williams Elliott, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002).

³⁹ Elliott, pp. 4, 7, 9, 29, 30.

⁴⁰ Elliott, p. 30.

philanthropic woman did not disappear after the 1860s; instead, she began examining and revising her methods.⁴¹

Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (1995), still provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of the connection between sex and morality in the discourses of late nineteenth-century feminism. Beginning with an analysis of the Men and Women's Club founded by Karl Pearson in 1885, Bland shows that men and women often had different ideas about the origins of morality and what constituted ethical behaviour.⁴² The discussions upon morality that took place between members of the Men and Women's Club, the club founded in 1885 by Karl Pearson with the aim to discuss 'all matters...connected with the mutual position and relation of men and women', help us to understand the how men and women approached the subject of morality from different perspectives. The women of the club resisted Pearson's definition of morality as being 'not a matter of feeling but of knowledge and study', and argued persistently for the inclusion of feeling as a moral determiner. Male members of the club were alarmed by what they considered to be an unscientific and irrational definition of morality: Robert Parker, the president of the club, observed in the ideas of another club member, Isabella Clemes, 'a danger of her viewing morality as mysterious intuition, or revelation, a divine (she believes in Providence and God...the capitals included) not purely human law'.⁴³ Annie Eastty, another member of the Men and Women's Club, used Darwin's discourses upon morality as 'due to the survival in the struggle for life of the social instinct', to argue that '[t]his justifies inclusion of *feeling* as well as *reason* in our use of the word'.⁴⁴

The gendered division of morality that Bland has described in the Men and Women's Club, was played out in the social sciences in the late nineteenth century. As old-fashioned sympathetic charity was discarded in favour of

⁴¹ This thesis is also indebted to the insightful work on the New Woman by Ann L. Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), and Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). These works are discussed in chapters two and three of this thesis.

⁴² Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 2001).

⁴³ Bland, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Bland, pp. 23, 3, p. 23.

scientific charity and the sociological study of poverty, the feminine conception of morality as emanating from feeling rather than knowledge became endangered. My own research follows this line of thought and demonstrates how the link between sexuality and altruism emerged in the work of contemporary female novelists. While the novel makes sporadic appearances in the historical works as a valuable form of discourse upon the topic treated, there is a need for further study of the novel in relation to social reform. Without focusing on the novel, these works take for granted that novels reflect the world in which they are created, I suggest that the novel was hoping to produce the desired altruistic citizen.

My thesis focuses specifically on the fictional portrayal of female social reformers whose primary interest was the relief or eradication of poverty. Women's activities as social reformers, of course, were not limited to their philanthropic interest in the working classes. The advancement of women as a class in themselves, also forms a prominent part of the late nineteenth-century social reform movement. Reformers such as Josephine Butler, who led the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act, showed that they understood the manner in which poverty was also a matter of gender, when, for example, Butler argued that women were driven into prostitution because of the few employment opportunities open to them. The work of social reform was also focused on providing employment opportunities for both working and middle-class women.

As such, the female suffragist, and the independent and career-driven New Woman, also became vital components of the reform movement. My discussion of the Suffrage Movement, however, is restricted due to my focus on the specifics of the texts discussed. Excellent work on the women's suffrage movement has been done by Susan Kingsley Kent.⁴⁵ Although the New Woman is a prominent figure during this period, and some of the authors discussed in this chapter were referred to as New Women, my own engagement with this concept is limited because I have chosen to group my authors according to different criteria.⁴⁶ Furthermore, my discussions of the writer's own political views are limited, my reason for this is partly that the political views of the author are not always known

⁴⁵ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the New Woman writers see Ardis, Ledger, Richardson.

and partly that I wish to emphasise the politics in the text. Where writers had strong political opinions, such as in the case of Ward, Harkness, and Clapperton, focusing too much on the writer's own political opinions makes us liable to misreading the politics of the text.

This thesis is organised thematically rather than chronologically. The novels I examine in this thesis have been chosen because they grouped themselves so neatly into coherent themes. Therefore, the chapters are organised around certain plots: the delayed love plot in the city slums, the factory plot, the communal plot, and the doll narrative. As I will demonstrate, these plots are all linked to certain ideologies, that readers themselves would have recognised. In Chapter 1, 'Passion and Compassion in the City Slums', I explore the emergence of the delayed love plot in slum fiction. As the concept of 'slumming' gained in popularity, the 'philanthropic romance' as Edith Sichel called it, emerged as a genre.⁴⁷ Examining Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Marcella* (1894) and Iota's *Children of Circumstance* (1894), this chapter argues that the delayed love plot that we find in these novels emerged owing to a combination of religious ideas about the connection between love and charity, and biological notions of the development of altruism from the sexual instinct. While *Marcella* has attracted a certain amount of literary criticism, Iota's *Children of Circumstance* has been relatively neglected in studies of late nineteenth-century fiction.⁴⁸ By looking at these two novels side by side, I also hope to stimulate further critical interest in Iota's novel.

In Chapter 2, 'The Woman Question and the Labour Question: The Sexual Politics of Industrial Reform in Margaret Harkness's *A City Girl* and *In Darkest London* and Mrs Humphry Ward's *Sir George Tressady*', I turn towards the subject of industrial reform. In *A City Girl* (1887), Harkness examines the position of working-class women under industrial capitalism. In both *In Darkest London* (1889) and *Sir George Tressady* (1896), a power struggle is played out between female reformers and male captains of industry that pivots around the female reformers' attempts to ward off unwanted sexual advances. The women

⁴⁷ Edith Sichel, 'Two Philanthropic Novelists: Mr. Walter Besant and Mr. George Gissing', *Murray's Magazine*, 3 (1888), 506-518 (p. 506).

⁴⁸ Two monographs devoted to Ward's novels are Judith Wilt's *Behind Her Times: Transition England in the Novels of Mary Arnold Ward* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2005), and Anne Bindsvlev's *Mrs Humphry Ward: A Study in Late-Victorian Feminine Consciousness and Creative Expression* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1985).

who attempt to intervene on behalf of the workers, by appealing to the men within whose power it lies to transform the industrial system, find themselves the objects of unwanted sexual or romantic interest from these men.

There is a significant body of work by social historians on women's roles in the campaign for stricter factory legislation and the increasing professionalization of women's philanthropic activities, but there has been little research into fictional portrayals of female industrial reformers of the late nineteenth century.⁴⁹ In this chapter I seek to bring to attention the existence of a small, but significant, enclave of social reform fiction that grew out of contemporary debates about women's roles in the regulation of the industrial sphere.

In Chapter 3, 'Homogenic Love and the Socialist Novel: Same-sex Love in Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore* and Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers*', I explore the importance of same-sex relationships to the creation of egalitarian socialist communities, and show how homosexuality was legitimised in the socialistic discourses of the late nineteenth century. I look at the attempts to create female-led communities in Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore* (1888) and Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900). Although these novels have been discussed in tandem by Judy Greenway and Ann Ardis, there is ample scope for developing the homosocial dynamics of these novels, which have been mentioned in passing by Ardis and Ledger.⁵⁰ Livesey has noted that the 'the widespread desire to find a new life beyond the constraints of late nineteenth-century capitalism led to an eclectic collation of belief systems: spiritualism, Theosophy, Emersonian transcendentalism, Nietzschean notions of the will,

⁴⁹ Examples of socio-historical work on women's role in the factory debate of the late nineteenth century include Ruth Livesey, 'The Politics of Work: Femininism, Professionalisation and Women Inspectors of Factories and Workshops', *Women's History Review*, 13 (2004), 233-262, Carolyn Malone, *Women's Bodies and Dangerous Trades in England, 1880-1914* (Bury St. Edmunds: Royal Historical Society, 2003), Sheila C. Blackburn, '“Princesses and Sweated-Wage Slaves Go Well Together”: Images of British Sweated Workers, 1843-1914', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 61 (2002), 24-44, Malone, 'The Gendering of Dangerous Trades: Government Regulation of Women's Work in the White Lead Trade in England, 1892-1898', *Journal of Women's History*, 8 (1996) 15-35, Barbara Harrison, *Not Only the 'Dangerous Trades': Women's Work and Health in Britain, 1880-1914* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), Rosemarie Feurer, 'The Meaning of "Sisterhood": The British Women's Movement and Protective Labour Legislation', *Victorian Studies*, 31 (1988), 233-260.

⁵⁰ By the term 'homosocial', I mean: 'the continuum between "women loving women" and "women promoting the interests of women," extending over the erotic, social, familial, economic, and political realms', Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1985), p. 3.

Ruskinian medievalism, alongside the more material influences of Marx and Engels'.⁵¹ I add another creed to the roll call of improving ideologies of the late nineteenth century, namely, the social importance of the uranian, or homosexual.

In Chapter 4, “‘Quite a Different Class of Dolls’: Doll-desire and Love of the Poor in Late Nineteenth-century Children’s Fiction’, I examine how the ideas discussed in the previous chapters surfaced in children’s literature of the late nineteenth century. Drawing upon Sharon Marcus’s analysis of doll-fiction in *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007), I argue that doll-fiction replicates the connection between sexuality and altruism that we find in the adult philanthropic novel.⁵² This chapter analyses children’s literature that is still read, such as Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905) and *Racketty-Packetty House* (1907) alongside works that have been long forgotten, such as Alice. F. Jackson’s *The Doll’s Dressmaker* (1891), and Alice M. Mitchell’s *Two Dolls’ Houses* (1895).

⁵¹Livesey, ‘Morris, Carpenter, and Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labour’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32 (2004), 601-616 (p. 604).

⁵² Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Chapter 1.

Passion and Compassion in the City Slums: Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Marcella* and Iota's *Children of Circumstance*

This chapter examines the role that romantic love plays in the creation of female moral agency in *Marcella* (1894) by Mrs Humphry Ward, and *Children of Circumstance* (1895) by Iota.¹ My focus lies on the idea of a delayed or postponed love that is perfected by the heroine's moral growth through her philanthropic activities in the London slums. In both of these novels, the heroine travels to the slums and devotes herself to helping the poor in the aftermath of a failed love-affair. Marcella, the eponymous heroine of Ward's novel, goes to London to train as a nurse in the aftermath of her broken engagement to Aldous Raeburn, and Margaret, the protagonist of *Children of Circumstance*, goes to hide in the London slums when she learns that the object of her affections is married. Both women are eventually reunited with their lovers, but only after they have been morally transformed by their experiences in the slums. The plot of delayed love is by no means a phenomenon specific to this point in time; Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818) is a prime example of the validation of love through a delay that allows the moral growth of both characters. In fact, the delayed consummation of love may be considered almost universally essential to the romance plot: without it, there is no tension and no suspense. But what I am exploring in this chapter is how the delayed love plot that transports the heroine to the city slums where she devotes herself to the care of the poor came into existence at this point in time due to several competing sexual and ethical ideologies in the late nineteenth century. This chapter argues that the idea of a deep connection between the sexual love of two individuals and the development of an altruistic impulse towards humanity at large grew out of a combination of religious notions of love and charity, biological theories of altruism, and ethical idealism.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sexual relationships were

¹ Mrs. Humphry Ward, *Marcella* (London: Virago, 1984), Iota, *Children of Circumstance* (New York: D. Appleton and co., 1894).

increasingly perceived not as private relations between two individuals but as socially and politically significant events.² Perhaps the most prominent example of the emphasis on sex as a social and political activity can be found in the eugenic ideas which placed sexual relations between men and women at the centre of moral activity. Sex, rightly practiced, became a moral act when it was geared towards producing the next generation in its most noble and healthy form. It was through ‘rational love’, the practice of choosing a spouse with a view to producing healthy children, that, as Richardson puts it, ‘paradise on earth might be gained’.³ Eugenic theory, as Richardson has explained, had a strong impact on romance plots in the late nineteenth century novel.⁴ New Woman novelists such as Sarah Grand rewrote the romantic love-plot in polemical novels that presented rational love as the future of sexual relations between men and women; such plots removed sexual desire from the narrative of courtship and marriage.

Falling in love was allegedly going out of fashion to the extent that in 1886, Allen publicly voiced his concerns that ‘falling in love’ was in danger of being substituted with conscious selection. His worries were not directed towards the increasing tendency towards eugenic thinking, but were instead aimed at the prospect that the inclination towards rational love would ultimately work against nature. Allen argued that falling in love, ‘an instinct so conditioned, so curious, so vague, so unfathomable [...] must be nature’s guiding voice within us, speaking for the good of the human race in all future generations’. Replacing romantic love with rational love, an increasing tendency that Allen noted in the love plot, thwarted the ‘guiding voice’ of nature, and left procreation to the mercy of human error. The idea that nature possessed a ‘guiding voice’ suggests an agency at work similar to divine intervention; nature was not an abstraction or an accident, but was instead an active force with an intelligent plan. Allen’s language shows the manner in which the idea of ‘nature’ as an active creator and purposeful authority was often analogous to the authority of God as a creator. Indeed, Allen drew upon religious discourses to explain the importance of romantic love: ‘my doctrine is simply the old-fashioned and confiding belief that marriages are made in heaven’. There was therefore no need, in Allen’s opinion,

² Richardson, 2003, p. 79.

³ Richardson, 2003, p. 3.

⁴ Richardson, 1999, pp. 229-230.

to regulate the love instinct because sexual selection would serve its eugenic purpose.⁵

As I noted in the introduction, Allen argued that romance writers were performing an important public service when they urged their readers to marry for love, because they were affirming the idea of love as the ‘guiding voice’ that would lead to the most socially and biologically desirable match. Whether Ward and Iota read Allen’s plea to novelists to restore human faith in romantic love (and rescue the fate of the next generation), which was published almost ten years before their major love stories, is uncertain, but what is clear is that they were both on a mission to reinvigorate the love plot, and to justify the moral worth of romantic love in a world that was increasingly embracing the idea of rational love. *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance* both celebrate romantic love as an irrational but benevolent force, but they are both careful to point out that love should only be consummated within marriage.

Why, then, does the delayed love plot of these novels hinge upon an interlude of philanthropic activity in the city slums? There are several reasons for this. Firstly, these plots are a result of the enormous popularity of slumming in the late nineteenth century, which late nineteenth-century writers such as Benjamin Kidd supposed was due to an increase in the general goodwill of man towards his fellow. In his highly popular and influential *Social Evolution* (1894), Benjamin Kidd described a ‘deepening of and softening of character’, taking place in society, particularly among the power-holding classes. This deepening of character, Kidd argued, manifested itself in a heightened sensitivity of the privileged classes towards ‘misery and or wrong inflicted on any one’ and a rapid increase of charitable institutions during the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁶

Secondly, because of the dual perception of the city slums as either a space where people could explore their deepest, darkest desires, or where they could selflessly devote themselves to serving others, they provided the perfect environment in which to explore the connection between sexuality and

⁵ Allen, 1886, pp. 457, 453.

⁶ Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1894), pp. 179, 183. According to the *Review of Reviews* sales ‘in the first fifteen months of its existence, must have amounted to between forty thousand and fifty thousand, a degree of popularity which not more than half a dozen of the best novels attain within the course of a year’, Anonymous, ‘Some Notable Books of the Age-End: Some Account of the Success of Mr. Benjamin Kidd’s “Social Evolution”’, *Review of Reviews*, May (1895), 472-473 (p. 472).

philanthropic activity. Keith Gandal has pointed out that in late nineteenth-century fiction, the slum features as ‘a hothouse of vice, brimming with temptations, and the protagonist undergoes an internal transformation as she succumbs to her passions or transcends them with her will’.⁷ As Stefan Collini has explained, a strong will was regarded as one of the formative aspects of ‘character’—the force that was charged with regenerating society. Character, Collini tells us, ‘indicated a certain habit of restraining one’s impulses’, and impulses were associated with the “lower self” (conceived as purely appetitive and hence selfish).⁸ Gandal’s comment is made in reference to working-class protagonists already living in the slums, yet this pattern can also be found in novels that deal with middle-class heroines: a sojourn in the slums functions as a moral test of her will. Here, because both Ward and Iota argue the case for character as the driving force of social reform, the heroine’s will, symbolised in her ability to overcome sexual temptation, is crucial to her social endeavour.

The delayed love plot that we find in *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance* explores the tension between conceptions of sexuality as a destructive or a generative force, drawing upon discourses that locate the sexual instinct as the root of altruism, and upon the discourses of character that demanded the restraint of the lower self. As such, it also explores the tension between determinism and free will that permeates late nineteenth century theories about the origins of altruism. The delayed love plot pledges itself neither to the idea of rational love as the ‘moral’ form of love, nor to the idea that romantic love will save the world. Instead, it offers a reconciliation between biological determinism and free will in which desire represents the biological imperative, and the restraint of desire represents the self-made, strong-willed individual that makes her own decisions. Both Margaret and Marcella struggle with sexual temptation, a temptation that must be overcome before they can be rewarded.

In Koven’s *Slumming*, he explores the connection between ‘eros and altruism’ that is prevalent throughout discourses upon slumming in the late nineteenth century. Historically, he points out, the concept of ‘slumming’ was closely linked to sexual exploration, as the middle and upper-classes ventured

⁷ Keith Gandal, ‘Stephen Crane’s “Maggie” and the Modern Soul’, *ELH*, 60 (1993), 759-785 (p. 760).

⁸ Stefan Collini, ‘The Idea of Character in Victorian Political Thought’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985), 29-50 (p. 34).

into the city slums in search of sexual pleasure: '[a]s a form of urban social exploration, it bore the obloquy of sensationalism, sexual transgression, and self-seeking gratification, not sober inquiry and self-denying service to others'. Nineteenth-century philanthropists such as James Hinton challenged the idea that seeking sexual gratification in the slums was incompatible with a philanthropic agenda: '[r]efusing to play the part of self-sacrificing do-gooder, Hinton urged contemporaries to seek pleasure thorough altruism which would in turn result in social and sexual freedom'.⁹ What can be added to Koven's analysis is a wider examination of how a longstanding Christian notion of a connection between love and philanthropy developed into a direct link between the sexual instinct and the altruistic impulse towards humanity, which served to legitimise women's work in the public sphere through their reproductive activities while also creating the idea of a morally legitimate female sexuality that included sexual pleasure. This development shows the manner in which attitudes towards sexuality were changing towards the end of the nineteenth-century with the emergence of biological discourses upon the connection between sex, procreation, and community spirit.

The heroines of *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance* are eventually reunited with their lovers when they have achieved sufficient moral growth. Critics have been disappointed by plots in which female moral agency is subsumed back into the private sphere through love and marriage rather than providing the heroine with an increased presence in the public sphere.¹⁰ Florence Nightingale, for example, poured scorn over popular novelists who 'invented ladies disappointed in love or fresh out of the drawing-room turning into the war-hospitals to find their wounded lovers, and when found, forthwith abandoning their sick-ward for their lover'.¹¹ Using women's philanthropic work as a mere plot device to facilitate a larger and more important love plot, seemed to devalue women's public work and suggest that the best work of women was that which they performed as wives and mothers. Nightingale's concerns have been echoed by twentieth-century critics who have seen the love plot as relegating women to

⁹ Koven, 2004, pp. 4-5, 8, 10, 16.

¹⁰ Bodenheimer notes among literary critics of the 1970s and 80s 'a complaint that large public issues are abandoned in favour of personal or private plot resolutions' (1988), p. 6.

¹¹ Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What it is and What it is Not* (London: Harrison, 1859), p. 75.

the domestic setting from which their work has allowed them only a temporary escape. Writing in the wake of second wave feminism, Mary Poovey argued that romantic love too frequently compensates for failed opportunities in the public sphere; love plots in fiction ‘promise women in particular ongoing emotional intensity which ideally compensates for all the practical opportunities they are denied’.¹² The idea that love can serve as ‘an agent of moral reform’ because it defies ‘self-interest and calculation’, and ‘articulates (or can be educated to do so) an essentially unselfish, generous urge toward another person’, is also why love may prove the undoing of female agency.¹³

I would like to address these complaints with an analysis of the emergence of a plot in slum fiction where the postponement of romantic love acts as a catalyst for female agency in the public sphere. Crucial to this plot is the idea that a disappointment in love, a broken heart, is morally healthy, is, in short, character building. The love of Margaret and Marcella as it develops into a wholly unselfish and self-sacrificial urge, is what facilitates their entry into and professional success in the public sphere. I will argue that these plots are a result of women’s increased claims to both sexual and professional freedom during the late nineteenth century: if women were seeking to promote their entrance to the public sphere and were at the same time seeking freedom of sexual expression, what better way to do it than to become a philanthropist in the city slums?

This chapter will first examine how the idea of women going to the slums after a disappointment in love changed from being a denigrated to an accepted plot-line, and will explain how the slums were increasingly viewed as a space in which traditional sexual and gender norms could be challenged. I then go on to give an outline of the connections made between the development of altruism and romantic love in the nineteenth century, before turning to a detailed analysis of *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance*.

Lady-Slummers and Love-affairs

Late nineteenth-century attitudes towards the new phenomenon known as ‘slumming’ can be summed up by an article published at the beginning of the

¹² Mary Poovey, ‘*Persuasion* and the Promises of Love’, in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 152-179 (p. 174).

¹³ Poovey, 1983, p. 172.

vogue in *The County Gentleman*. In 1883, *The County Gentleman* estimated that the pastime of slumming, by which they meant a practice in which ‘smart people who have nothing better to do spend their days in visiting Outcast London, whence comes the bitter cry’— which was a popular amusement at the time the article was written—would ‘not rank permanently among the fashionable pastimes’.¹⁴ Even at the height of its popularity, when Whitechapel and Shoreditch featured in Baedeker’s popular guides to London, slumming was considered to be a mere passing fad, undertaken by a desire to be fashionable rather than by purely altruistic motives.¹⁵ When the popular press mocked the concept of slumming, women especially were targeted. The satirical magazines *Punch* and *Fun* conceived of aptly named characters such as Mrs. Snobson and Miss Fullalove, and illustrated puns on slumming with various well dressed and fashionable young ladies who remained nameless representatives of the movement.¹⁶ The message to the readers of such magazines was that slumming was undertaken by ladies of the middle or upper classes for amusement as an alternative to other social activities, and not because of any particular desire to help the poor.

The County Gentleman was perhaps right in its predictions about the transitory nature of the phenomenon of slumming if it is taken to mean merely a fashionable form of cross-class tourism. By 1893, Reverend James Adderley, who knew the poor intimately from the time he spent in the Oxford House Settlement, described how ‘the languid lady [...] who would be driven down Commercial Road to the Docks and back’ in order that she may boast of her exploits at social gatherings, had been superseded in the slums by the university settlement movement ‘which often leads men to come and reside in the poor parts of London’.¹⁷ Adderley associated ‘fashionable slumming’ with women, and the ‘University Settlement movement’, which he credited with ‘bring[ing] the “two nations” together’, with men. Ignoring the efforts of housing reformer Octavia

¹⁴ *The County Gentleman: Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal*, ‘The Man About Town’, 1127 (1883), 1542-1544 (p. 1543).

¹⁵ Koven, p. 1.

¹⁶ ‘Mrs. Snobson’, *Punch*, June 7 (1899), 267 (p. 267), ‘A Ready Reply,’ *Fun*, 976 (1884), p. 31, ‘A New Rung in the Social Ladder’, *Punch*, January 12 (1884), p. 18.

¹⁷ N. C. Masterman, ‘Adderley, James Granville (1861–1942)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/54554>, accessed 31 Aug 2010], James Adderley, ‘Is Slumming Played Out?’, *English Illustrated Magazine*, 119 (1893), 834-841 (pp. 834, 835, 836).

Hill who sought to bridge the gap between the middle and working-classes by employing female middle-class volunteers in her rent collecting schemes, Adderley cast the female slummer as a mere follower of fashion, whereas the practice of building settlement houses for the purpose of educating the poor in the East End was given the kudos of being a movement, and a movement of course involves devotion to ideals.¹⁸ While Adderley called for both men and women to ‘devote time and thought to East London’, his article displays a gender bias which was not uncommon in articles devoted to the practice of philanthropy, whereby men’s pursuits in the slums were held up as examples of selfless, discreet, and brotherly behaviour, while women’s efforts were considered to be undertaken out of boredom and for show rather than love for the poor.¹⁹

More than a decade before Adderley’s article, Maude Althea Stanley, a district visitor, showed in her writing a similar bias towards the motives of men: ‘[i]f a man undertakes to be a district visitor’, Stanley wrote, ‘you may be sure he does it because he feels a vocation for the work, and so he will do it well. But many a woman will take up visiting the poor because she finds an idle, listless life becoming a burden, amusement perhaps no longer amuses; or she may expect to find in the homes of the poor a cure for what is called “a disappointment”’. Stanley’s message was clear: men who visited the poor in the slums did so out of ‘kindness’ and ‘sympathy’, whereas women visited the poor for amusement, or to distract themselves from unhappy love affairs. Women who came to the slums from such motives, Stanley implied, rarely made good district visitors as visitors needed to know ‘something of the poor-law, of trade, and of the demand for labour; something of education, of hospitals’.²⁰ Unlike Nightingale, whose frustration was directed at the mythmaking surrounding lady philanthropists, rather than the philanthropic ladies themselves, Stanley’s critique does nothing to

¹⁸ Ruth Livesey, ‘Women Rent Collectors and the Rewriting of Space, Class, and Gender in East London’, 1870, 1900’ in *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950* ed. by Elizabeth Darling and Leslie Whitworth (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 87-106 (pp. 88-90). See also Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1875), ‘she gets to know the people; she spends the money received for the rents, after all expenses have been paid, in improving the house’ (p. 168).

¹⁹ Adderley, p. 841. The tradition of disdain towards women’s philanthropic activity has been analysed by Elliott: ‘Whether a domineering old maid, a pretty but silly young woman, or a patronizing Lady Bountiful, a philanthropic woman seems able to succeed only at “making herself and object of derision”’, p. 2.

²⁰ Maude Althea Stanley, *Work About the Five Dials* (London: Macmillan, 1878), pp. 6-7, also mentioned in Koven, p. 198.

dispel the myth of the disappointed lady philanthropist; instead, she uses this myth to provide a contrast from which she asserts her different status as a practical and competent philanthropist.

The note of scorn towards philanthropic women also crept into fiction, but during the 1890s, a shift seems to have taken place in which the love motive was seen as ennobling rather than interfering with the true purpose for being in the slums. For example, in 'Lady Vere's Charity', published in 1888, an aristocratic young woman visits the slums to pour scorn upon the impoverished woman who married the cousin she herself had her eye upon. Love drives Lady Vere not to charity but to petty vengeance; and although justice is meted out when she catches a fever in the slums and dies, she is ironically remembered fondly as a charitable lady: 'it was generally understood that she met her death from a fever contracted during some benevolent errand; and when they told the story of her death, they dwelt also with affectionate warmth on 'Lady Vere's Charity'.²¹ 'Lady Vere's Charity', is an answer to Tennyson's poem 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere' in which the speaker urges the Lady Clara to dissipate her boredom by devoting herself to the care of the poor instead of playing games with the hearts of young men: 'If time be heavy on your hands,/Are there no beggars at your gate,/Nor any poor about your lands?'.²² The speaker imagines that philanthropy will provide a purpose to women who would otherwise expend their energy in more mischievous ways. 'Lady Vere's Charity', turns the tables by suggesting that female philanthropy may disguise a selfish sexuality. Here, love is a purely selfish emotion that seeks only its own gratification at the expense of others.

In 1893, however, the same year that Adderley asked whether slumming was 'played out', *Myra's Journal* published 'The Lady Correspondent', a short story about a young lady journalist, Sydney Carew, who writes articles about life in the slums, falls in love with her editor, and produces her best work straight after being greeted by the news that he is engaged to be married. As she learns of her editor's engagement, she reels in shock, but quickly recovers herself:

²¹ I. H., 'Lady Vere's Charity', *Every Week*, 39 (1888), 294-296 (p. 296).

²² Alfred Tennyson, 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere', lines 58-60, *Poems of Tennyson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), pp. 114-115.

with a supreme effort she conquered herself, and clutching her desk with one hand [...] she bent her head over the work [...] Half-an-hour later the 'copy' was finished, and when the public read in their *Westminster Evening Herald* the pithy column written by the 'Westminster Woman' it was unanimously pronounced to be one of her best and most original articles.

Sydney must 'conquer [...] herself', and although it takes 'supreme effort' to do so, she emerges victorious from the struggle with her desire and publishes her best work to date. The story concludes with the assertion that it is '[w]ell for the world that it does not know how often the writer's pen is dipped in his or her heart's blood', which suggests that the writer's creativity is fuelled by the sufferings of unrequited love, and invites readers to draw parallels between the fictional Sydney and real life women in the slums. Sydney's status as a slum journalist writing articles about 'factory girls, flower sellers, and so forth', encourages readers to speculate that the women who engaged in such pursuits were also suffering from unrequited love.²³

Such a comparison may not have been entirely speculative: as Koven points out, Beatrice Webb, herself a prominent slum journalist in the late 1880s, took to working for the poor in order to distract herself from her unhappy love affair with Joseph Chamberlain and to control, as she herself wrote in her journal, her 'lower nature'.²⁴ A similar reason lay behind Olive Schreiner's re-location to East London, a move that Koven has interpreted as 'a form of sexual renunciation'.²⁵ The slums became the spatial location for the battle between the will and the passions, in which morality was determined by transcending the passions by force of will. Furthermore, the slums were also an ambiguous space where the border between the public and the private sphere could be renegotiated by philanthropic women. Because of this, the slum setting allowed novelists to explore the idea of female moral agency.

²³ Leily Elsner, 'The Lady Correspondent', *Myra's Journal*, 3 (1893), p. 15.

²⁴ Koven, p. 199, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Volume 1, 1873-1892: Glitter Around and Darkness Within*, ed. by Norman and Jean MacKenzie (London: Virago, 1982), p. 157.

²⁵ Koven, p. 199.

Altruism, love, and Biology

The condemnation of slum work merely as a distraction from unhappy love affairs was also part of a wider concern regarding the motives of charity and philanthropic work. Some social commentators feared that the surge of do-gooding in the late nineteenth century was little more than a display of moral exhibitionism, or an exercise in self-gratification.²⁶ The anonymous author of 'The Failure of Philanthropy', published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1896, reasoned that the recent wave of philanthropic activity had failed to alleviate the suffering of the poor because of 'the motive which lies behind much good-doing'. The author of this article pointed out that most philanthropic work was undertaken out of pity, for '[t]he thought of the sadness and the misery of the world is a heavy burden for a human being to bear', or because '[m]en do not like to have in the midst of their city an unhealthy area, a joyless population, a disinherited class.' The conclusion drawn from the article is that philanthropic schemes fail because they are drawn up out of the self-interest of the philanthropist.²⁷ When indiscriminate charity was implicated as merely perpetuating the poverty and degradation of the poor, women, as the main purveyors of philanthropy, were apportioned the greater blame.

The concerns about the self-gratifying effects of philanthropy rest upon the idea of a dualistic world view in which self-interest and self-sacrifice, egoism and altruism, eros and agape, were antithetical; however, this dualistic idea of the world began to unravel in the late nineteenth century when the perceived distinction between the body and the mind began to break down due to the rise of ethical idealism and the emerging biological discourses on morality. As Thomas Dixon has pointed out, the growth of T. H. Green's ethical idealism helped to blur the distinction between egoism and altruism: 'one of the central claims of idealist ethics was that the dichotomy between "altruism" and "egoism" was a false and unhelpful one'. The central creed of idealist ethics lay in the notion 'that a true system of ethics simultaneously encouraged both individual fulfilment and devotion to the common good'.²⁸ Love plots that revolved around philanthropic enterprise served to unite the desires of the individual with what

²⁶ Koven, pp. 14-16.

²⁷ 'The Failure of Philanthropy', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 73 (1896), 390-396 (pp. 390, 391). See also 'Flaws in Philanthropy', *Scottish Review*, 3 (1884), 285-298.

²⁸ Dixon, 2008, pp. 259, 260.

was good for the community, because, as Charles Fried has pointed out: ‘reciprocal love presents a kind of resolution of the paradoxes of self-interest and altruism’.²⁹

The rise of ethical idealism coincided with the emergence of a biological theory of the origins of altruism. The publication of Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* in 1871, in which Darwin sought to approach ‘moral sense’ ‘exclusively from the side of natural history’, and its explanation of the benefits of ‘love, sympathy, and self-command’ for the survival of the race showed that altruistic behaviour had evolved to ensure the survival of the species.³⁰ Darwin observed in animals the same social and sympathetic instincts that developed into a moral sense in man, and he gave examples of pelicans, dogs, and monkeys displaying selfless behaviour in rushing to aid their fellow creatures, and creatures of a different species.³¹ The explanation for such actions and the instincts that caused them—animals not having sufficient reason to conscientiously make decisions to act in aid—lay in the social benefits of co-operation for the survival of the species:

With those animals which were benefited by living in close association, the individuals which took the greatest pleasure in society would best escape various dangers; whilst those that cared least for their comrades, and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers.³²

Darwin’s evolutionary or biological explanation for the origins of altruism or the moral sense, sparked a further debate about the biological origins of altruism, which served to break down the barrier between egoism and altruism. In *Data of Ethics* (1879) Herbert Spencer devoted a whole chapter to the close relationship of altruism to egoism, explaining that one could not be entirely separated from the other. Altruism, Spencer argued, could be traced back to man’s biological desire for his offspring to thrive. Spencer, who defined altruism as ‘being all

²⁹ Charles Fried, *An Anatomy of Values: Problems of Personal and Social Choice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 79.

³⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 120, 133. Dixon points out that Darwin did not employ the terms ‘altruism’ and ‘egoism’ but instead spoke of ‘sympathy’ and ‘selfishness’, p. 130.

³¹ Darwin, 2004, pp. 126-27.

³² Darwin, 2004, p. 129.

action which, in the normal course of things, benefits others instead of benefitting self”, found the roots of altruism in the parental instinct that placed survival of the offspring before their own survival; such forms of altruism sometimes included ‘the parent entirely sacrificed in forming progeny’.³³ Furthermore, by placing the roots of altruism in the physical acts of reproduction, namely, giving birth, and breastfeeding, Spencer is tacitly arguing that altruism originates in femininity and motherhood.

When a part of the parental body is detached in the shape of gemmule, or egg, or foetus, the material sacrifice is conspicuous; and when the mother yields milk by absorbing which the young one grows, it cannot be questioned that there is also a material sacrifice.

Spencer pointed out that social and political altruism could develop only in cultures where ‘altruistic relations in the domestic group have reached highly-developed forms’ and he argued that the advance of social altruism was linked to ‘monogamic marriage’, as polygamous tribes were unable ‘to take on those high forms of social co-operation which demand due subordination of self to others’.³⁴ Spencer placed the ‘social co-operation’ of the family at the centre of altruistic development rather than romantic love. Clearly, Spencer was intrigued by the possible connection between sexuality and altruism for in ‘The Comparative Psychology of Man’ he called for an extensive inquiry into the psychology of man which would investigate, among other connections, how far the development of the sexual sentiment is ‘related to emotional advance; and especially to evolution of those emotions which originate from sympathy’.³⁵

The link between the sexual instinct, romantic love, and altruism was cemented in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889). Patrick Geddes, the biologist and civic planner, and the naturalist J. Arthur Thomson, traced the development of the sexual instinct from the ‘protoplasmic hunger’ of simple organisms to the ‘true sexual union’ of humans in which ‘the physical sympathies of sexuality have been enhanced by the emotional, if not also intellectual, sympathies of love’. The

³³ Herbert Spencer, *The Data of Ethics* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), pp. 204, 202.

³⁴ Spencer, 1879, pp. 203, 204, 205.

³⁵ Herbert Spencer, ‘The Comparative Psychology of Man’, *Mind*, 1 (1876), 7-20 (p. 16).

instinct to reproduce evolved into sexual desire, which in turn evolved into monogamous love:

A simple organism, which merely feeds and grows, and liberates superfluous portions of its substance to start new existences, is plainly living an egoistic and individualistic life. But whenever we find the occurrence of close association with another form, we find the first rude hints of love. It may still be almost an organic hunger which prompts the union, but it is the beginning of life not wholly individualistic. Hardly distinguishable at the outset, the primitive hunger and love become the starting-points of divergent lines of egoistic and altruistic emotion and activity.³⁶

From the ‘hunger’ to reproduce, from the biological imperative, came the beginnings of feelings towards one outside of oneself. Most importantly, it was altruistic activity as well as altruistic emotion—a mere love of others—that Geddes traced back to the love of a mate. Geddes and Thomson were not the first to link romantic and sexual love to the development of altruism, and the exercise of charity, but they were perhaps the first to trace a straight line from reproduction to romantic love to altruism.³⁷ Like Spencer, Geddes and Thomson argued that women, because of their role in reproduction, were more altruistic: ‘females, especially as mothers, have indubitably a larger and more habitual share of the altruistic emotions [...] the females excel in constancy of affection and in sympathy’.³⁸

The notion of an intimate connection between love and charity circulated in popular discourses upon love and abounded in clichés and aphorisms to an extent that they appeared as self-evident truths. According to Christian tradition, love and charity were intimately connected. F. K. Prochaska has observed that ‘if it was a small step from the love of family to the love of the family of man, it was

³⁶ Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (London: Walter Scott, 1889), pp. 264-266, 279.

³⁷ In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume argues that romantic love ‘is deriv’d from three different impressions or passions... The pleasing sensation arising from beauty; the bodily appetite for generation; and a generous kindness and goodwill’. *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 353.

³⁸ Geddes and Thomson, 1889, pp. 270-71.

a step made easier by Christian teaching'.³⁹ 'As every student of the New Testament knew, the word charity itself was Greek for love, synonymous with Christ-like conduct'.⁴⁰ It was through the exercise of philanthropy that people showed, through their love of the poor, their love of God.⁴¹ As Koven has explained, Charles Loch, the leader of the Charity Organisation Society 'turned to Corinthians, rather than to *Social Statistics*, in seeking guidance about the true nature of charity'.⁴² The chapter that Loch most likely referred to was 1 Corinthians 13: 1-2:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.⁴³

While the love spoken of in Corinthians is an all-encompassing love, many viewed sexual love as possessing as great religious and moral legitimacy as non-sexual love. In *An Essay on the Philosophy of Self-consciousness, Containing an Analysis of reason and the Rationale of Love* (1882), the deeply religious Penelope Frederica Fitzgerald argued that love formed the basis of morality as it was 'the originator of the sense of responsibility or obligation, from the strong desire of aiding others the idea of social duty is evolved'. To support her thesis, Fitzgerald used a collection of quotations, from poets, novelists and philosophers—often unacknowledged—at the end of each chapter, such as '[t]rue love wakes sympathy with all humanity'. While Fitzgerald did not specify whether the form of love that she was speaking of was 'eros' or 'agape', she argued that 'conjugal love' was the 'highest type of personal affection' as it

³⁹ F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 8.

⁴⁰ Prochaska, p. 11.

⁴¹ Keir Waddington, *Charity and the London Hospitals* (Woodbridge: Boydell press, 2004), p. 26.

⁴² Koven, p. 101.

⁴³ In Greek, the distinction was made between Eros and Agape, between sexual and non-sexual love; lacking the same precise terminology to distinguish between these two forms of love, English translators choose either 'love' or 'charity' to signify 'agape'. In the King James Bible, the version that most Victorians would have been familiar with, 'charity' was chosen as the most accurate English translation of 'agape'.

combined ‘congeniality of character, mutual benevolence, and identity of interests’.⁴⁴

Elizabeth Blackwell, one of Britain’s first female doctors, wrote extensively upon the subject of sex in *The Human Element in Sex* in which she argued that sex, far from being a degraded appetite, was the physical expression of a mental and spiritual passion. Combining her belief in God as the divine creator of the human body, with her medical knowledge, and drawing upon biological discourses that linked reproduction and motherhood to larger altruistic activity in society, she arrived at a conception of sex as an act that was both divine and spiritual:

A fundamental error as to the nature of human sex too generally exists in us, from failure to recognise that in the human race the mind tends to rule the body, and that sex in the human is even more a mental passion than a physical instinct.

Blackwell stated that ‘[t]he physical pleasure which attends the caresses of love is a rich endowment of humanity, granted by a beneficent Creative Power’; because the sexual act was created by God, it could not be an evil thing in itself.⁴⁵ Those who, like Blackwell, saw no opposition between biological discourses and their religious beliefs, used the human body as evidence of a divine will at work in nature.⁴⁶ As I have already noted in the introduction, Blackwell also used her medical knowledge of the body to affirm women’s role as the moral arbiters of society through their potential motherhood. She reconciled women’s sexual passion with their status as the mothers and moral arbiters of society through emphasising the spiritual origins of the sexual act. In doing so, her argument formed part of a growing tendency to recast female sexual desire as the desire for motherhood.

Although they may not have argued for the religious origins of morality,

⁴⁴ Penelope Frederica Fitzgerald, *An Essay on the Philosophy of Self-consciousness, Containing an Analysis of Reason and the Rationale of Love* (London: Trübner, 1882), pp. 149, 162, 119, 162.

⁴⁵ Blackwell, 1894, pp. 7. 14.

⁴⁶ Josephine Butler and her husband George saw in the evolutionary sciences proof of God’s greatness, arguing that the evolutionary sciences ‘helped us to a revelation of a wider universe, a larger purpose, and a greater God than we before realised’, Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler* (London: John Murray, 2001), p. 40.

texts on the biological origins of altruism such as *The Evolution of Sex* and the *Descent of Man* legitimised the feminine idea of morality as intuitive, and placed it above the masculine notion of morality as a matter of study.⁴⁷ Biological discourses upon morality strengthened the idea that women were indeed ordained as the moral arbiters of society, either by God or by Nature. The idea of women as the moral mothers of society manifested itself in two directions, one wholly biological which focused on women's power to provide the empire with fit citizens, and another which focused on the potential to broaden motherhood to a symbolic act of looking after those who needed to be looked after, in which sexual love was the force from which a broader altruism would flow.⁴⁸

‘You Roused Me’: Love and the Social Conscience in *Marcella*

Mrs Humphry Ward was one of the many popular novelists who took an interest in the slum movement in real life as well as in her fiction. Surrounding herself with some of the most influential social thinkers of her day, Ward's novels were deeply coloured by the ideological currents of the late nineteenth century. In *Robert Elsmere* (1888), the best-seller that propelled her into the literary elite, she tackled the future of Christianity in a world that was quickly losing faith; in *Marcella* (1894), she turned her attention towards the ideologies that coloured the slum movement of the 1890s. Ward's own practical involvement in the slum movement consisted of the University Hall settlement house that she founded in 1890, a less effective venture than her fictional exploration of the subject. The settlement proved unsuccessful when residents rebelled against the strong bias towards ideological scholarly work rather than practical social engagement.⁴⁹ When residents defected to form Marchmont Hall, which proved a much more successful venture among the working-classes, Ward had no choice but to accept its revised agenda.⁵⁰ When she wrote *Marcella* some years later, she was perhaps writing as one whose own ambitions to be a social reformer had been humbled in

⁴⁷ In ‘The Enthusiasm of the Market-Place and of the Study’ Karl Pearson argued that ‘[m]orality is a matter not of feeling but of knowledge and study’, in *The Ethic of Freethought and Other Addresses and Essays* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), 108-122 (p. 116). See also Bland pp. 22-23 for a discussion of gendered morality in the Men and Women's Club.

⁴⁸ Richardson, 2003, p. 68, see also Yeo, 1992.

⁴⁹ John Sutherland, *Mrs Humphry Ward: Eminent Victorian Pre-eminent Edwardian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 220.

⁵⁰ Sutherland, pp. 220-221.

the face of reality.

When *Marcella* was published in 1894, Frederick Greenwood announced in his review of novel in the *Pall Mall Gazette* that the novel was ‘not a love-tale’ but ‘a novel with a purpose’.⁵¹ Greenwood argued that the political purpose of the novel overshadowed the romance plot as Marcella’s romantic feelings lie dormant: ‘it is not till late in the history that she has any interest in herself as a lover or loved’; yet, as John Sutherland points out in his extensive biography of Ward, ‘Marcella’s love dilemma enacts a general political dilemma of the 1890s’—choosing to follow the path of socialism or individual moral responsibility.⁵² Contrary to Greenwood’s opinion, therefore, the love plot and the political purpose of the novel are inextricably linked.

The novel’s ostensible ‘purpose’ lies in turning social reformers away from the socialism that focuses on the redistribution of wealth through land reform; instead, the novel arrives at a solution that combines a revival of paternalism with a character-based social reform that focuses on self-improvement. Favouring the responsibility of the individual over the coercive power of the collective, or ‘mob-reason’ (p. 45), we follow the progression towards these ideas in Marcella, a young heiress who first endorses Fabian socialism (thinly disguised as ‘Venturism’ in the novel) and later abandons it in favour of individual effort in the slums and wage increases for her estate workers.

Marcella’s ‘love dilemma’ means choosing between the Conservative Aldous Raeburn, and the Socialist Harry Wharton. The rivals for Marcella’s affection function as personifications of certain political creeds: Aldous, the conservative, is ‘affectionate beneath his reserve’ (p. 114) with a ‘quiet cautious strength’ (p. 41), yet he is initially incapable of arousing Marcella’s passion. Wharton, on the other hand, is passionate and charismatic; he easily seduces Marcella with his charm, but he is later revealed to be a traitor and a hypocrite when he marries for money. Ward compares the search for the right political creed to the search for true love, and by doing so, she hopes to expose how the socialist creeds of the late nineteenth century seduce their supporters with promises of radical change that never materialise. Conservative paternalism, Ward, tries to show us, may not be exciting, but its slow changes will ultimately

⁵¹ Frederick Greenwood, ‘Mrs. Humphry Ward’s New Book’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9056 (1894), 1-2.

⁵² Greenwood, p. 2. Sutherland, p. 141.

prove more enduring. Initially, Marcella cannot choose between the two: she accepts a marriage proposal from Aldous without loving him because of the power such a marriage would give her, but when Wharton appears upon the scene, she is drawn to him because of their political affinity; she breaks off her engagement to Aldous and flees to the urban slums where she plans a life of self-sacrifice and self-mortification as a district nurse. She finally does fall in love with Aldous, but only once she has undergone a complete political conversion through her work in the slums. Living amongst the poor, she moves away from the idea of social reform being dependent on material and economic change, and instead embraces the idea of social change through character reform, love, and sympathy. Marcella must learn to distinguish between the true love and sympathy offered by Aldous Raeburn's paternalism, and the 'tawdry' and violent passion that is stirred in her by Harry Wharton's revolutionary ideas. The novel understands how seductive a political creed may be that offers radical changes, yet ultimately Ward portrays such radicalism as insincere measures designed only to alleviate the mental pangs of a middle or upper-class at war with its own conscience and its place in society.

Hence the love plot of *Marcella* does not provide 'cover' for a political plot, as Yeazell suggested that love plots did in the industrial novel; instead, Ward understood that sexuality and political ideology were closely linked, so closely linked, in fact, that they are at moments of the novel completely inseparable.⁵³ In choosing her political creed Marcella is also choosing her lover; choosing a romantic and reproductive partner thus becomes a political and social act. Politics precedes, and to some extent dictates, sexual preference, because political affiliation is what controls her desire. Fissures in Marcella's desire for Wharton appear at the point where she begins to disagree with him, and Aldous starts to figure in her imagination as a loveable object when she learns to sympathise with his politics. In this sense, sexual preference—the choice of mate—becomes a political performance. Sexual preference may even be produced by political preference. *Marcella* shows Ward's deep engagement in late nineteenth-century politics, and suggests that she understood that to align

⁵³ Yeazell, p. 126.

oneself with a mode of sexual being was to choose sexuality based on political associations.

Marcella does not love Aldous, but she accepts his proposal thinking about the social and political advantages she will gain as the wife of the heir of a great estate with strong Tory credentials and government contacts. Marcella puts forth her version of rational love, in which she imagines that she marries for the sake of the community rather than through her own desires, a version that has less to do with procreation than with the metaphorical birth of a revised ethic that she hopes such a match would bring forth. Marcella cannot agree with Aldous's politics because she does not love him; and she cannot love him because she cannot agree with his politics. She keeps her lack of love for her fiancée to herself, but her friend Mary Harden is astute enough to read her lack of support for Aldous's political activities as a sign that she does not love him. Mary believes that a woman should lay down everything for the man she loves: '[i]f I were in love, why, I would go anywhere—do anything—believe anything—if *he* told me! [...] I would give it all up!—governing one's self, thinking for one's self. He should do it all, and I would *bless* him!' (p. 117). Mary's passionate outburst and her idea of love shows Marcella an intensity of feeling that she herself has never felt; it gives her a glimpse of another woman's conception of what love should really feel like, a conception that she herself cannot accept. Yet Mary also associates love and marriage with a deeper state of self-knowledge: 'I think it is a very good thing you are to be married soon', she tells Marcella, 'then you will know your own mind'. Marcella too, is wary of Mary's idea of romantic love, 'to give one's self *all*' (p. 178) seems merely a 'squaw theory of matrimony' (p. 179) in which women are expected to give up all for the men they love. Marcella rejects love because she fears it will interfere with her own political freedom. Later she discovers that she must be willing to surrender herself in love in order to reach her professional potential.

The political differences between Aldous and Marcella become problematic when Harry Wharton, a young socialist to whom Mr. Boyce, Marcella's father, has taken a liking is invited to stay at Mellor, the family estate. Marcella finds the political ally in Wharton—'You a Venturist? So am I. Joy! Won't you shake hands with me, as comrades should?' (p. 145)—that she does not have in Aldous, and she proclaims her public support for Wharton by

promising to attend one of his meetings in the area after refusing 'again and again' (p. 157) to attend any of Aldous's meetings of the Conservative Party. Her political loyalty to Wharton is cemented when she attends this meeting; it is here, too, that she develops a sexual interest in him. This episode perfectly illustrates how Marcella's political views are directly connected to her physical desires; as she watches Wharton with 'passionate satisfaction' (p. 197) her romantic sensibilities are excited by his political zeal, which signals the constant exchange between politics and passion, between rousing and arousing, that recurs throughout the novel. Politics is mingled with flirtation as Wharton looks again and again for Marcella's response. His speech produces an intense physical reaction:

Marcella could hardly breathe. It seemed to her that, among these cottagers, she had never lived till now—under the blaze of these eyes—within the vibration of this voice. Never had she so realised the power of this singular being. He was scourging, dissecting, the weather-beaten men before him, as, with a difference, he had scourged, dissected her. She found herself exulting in his powers of tyranny, in the naked thrust of his words, so nervous, so pitiless. And then by a sudden flash she thought of him by Mrs. Hurd's fire, the dying child on his knee, against his breast. 'Here,' she thought, while her pulses leapt, 'is the leader for me—for these. Let him call, I will follow' (pp. 198-99).

The manner in which the 'words' of Wharton's speech penetrate Marcella's mind is likened to the physical penetration of sexual intercourse. Marcella is not merely politically roused by his speech, but also is physically aroused, which is made clear by the blatant sexual imagery in this passage, in which the dynamic between him as speaker and her as a listener is re-imagined as a sexual act in which Marcella 'exult[s] in his powers of tyranny, in the naked thrust of his words, so nervous, so pitiless'. Where Marcella rails against the thought of losing her independence in marriage to Aldous Raeburn, her passion for Wharton makes her not only willingly subject herself to his power; she even wishes to be tyrannised by him. She no longer fears losing her independence; instead, she exults in Wharton's 'powers of tyranny'. Here, then, is the passion that Mary

speaks of, a passion that delights not only in being led, but also in being tyrannised over. In these examples, passion serves to subjugate the woman to the man's needs, and causes her to surrender herself to him. Her subjugation depends upon whether she agrees with his politics, and at this point in the narrative, she does. Marcella can no longer claim to be capable of separating her political opinions from her love-life, as she has told Mary.

Marcella is violating Ward's own principles, which dictate that a wife's political existence is identical to that of her husband, hence Ward compares her political dissidence from her fiancé to sexual infidelity. In 'The Appeal Against Female Suffrage', Ward feared that providing married women with the vote would bring 'changes in family life, and in the English conception of the household, of enormous importance'. Exactly how these changes would manifest themselves, she does not yet know, but she is confident that extending the suffrage to women would lead to 'personal struggle and rivalry' in 'the human family'.⁵⁴

Marcella's infidelity is first imaginary, as she implicitly imagines engaging in sexual congress with a man other than her fiancé. After the meeting, she tells Wharton, 'I don't know whether you roused them, but you roused me' (p. 199), hinting at sexual arousal and signalling her imminent betrayal of Aldous. In comparison to Wharton, the 'palliatives' (p. 183) that Aldous proposes seem feeble, and although he 'spoke well', saying 'many cordial and wise-sounding things in praise of a progress that should go safely and wisely from step to step, and run no risks of dangerous reaction', his speech merely makes her feel 'aloof and cold' (p. 191).

Wharton understands her approval of his speech as a sexual invitation, and later, as Marcella returns from a ball at Maxwell Park, she encounters Wharton in the library at Mellor and they kiss. As he invites her to view the 'romance' (p. 220) of the library and she follows him, '[i]nvoluntary, but with a thrill' (p. 221), they witness Marcella's protégé, Jim Hurd, with a gun and they both suppose that he is on his way to poach at the Maxwell estate. Wharton too, is poaching on the Maxwell estate by attempting to woo Marcella. When he bids farewell to her with the intention of leaving Mellor in the morning, he urges

⁵⁴ 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage', *Nineteenth Century*, 25 (1889), 781-788. pp. 784, 785.

Marcella to confess that she does not love Aldous and to seek in her marriage a vehicle for the socialist cause: ‘promise me that you will make this marriage of yours serve *our* hopes and ends, the ends that you and I have foreseen together—that it shall be your instrument, not your chain’ (p. 224). Here, Wharton is proposing that although Marcella will marry Aldous, she will belong to him because of their shared political ideals.

By situating Marcella’s infidelity on the same night that Hurd shoots dead the Maxwell Park gamekeeper, her separate political existence is depicted as a destructive force that threatens the violent overthrow of the current hierarchy of gender and class. According to Victorian notions of monogamy as the safe-guard of the hereditary transmission of property, Marcella’s infidelity constitutes in itself an attack on property. The emergence of the monogamous family was linked, by Friedrich Engels, to the necessity of ensuring the legitimacy of sons in order that property should be kept in the family.⁵⁵ It is therefore no coincidence that Marcella has been consistently attacking game-laws and the notion of private property throughout the novel. In the popular anti-socialist discourses, the socialism which Marcella proudly declares is linked to adultery.⁵⁶ Furthermore, a clear connection between a wife’s political independence and fears of infidelity has been found by Barbara Leah Harman in the anti-suffrage discourse of the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ As a fervent anti-suffragist, it seems likely that Ward shared these fears. Marcella’s refusal to support the politics of her fiancé becomes associated with the violent upheaval of the hierarchy of society, and it is represented as murderous assault upon the defenders of private property.

Furthermore, the murder provides Marcella with an excuse for not telling Aldous about the kiss; as she lies awake that night, she resolves to ‘tell Aldous everything’ (p. 225), but the events of the following morning reverse her decision. When Marcella finds out that Hurd has shot dead the Maxwell Park gamekeeper, and she defends Hurd’s actions as a desperate attack on ‘the system’ by a member of the disinherited classes, she finds herself in opposition to Aldous, who seeks to uphold the law and will not allow for any mitigating

⁵⁵ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New Town: Resistance Books, 2004), p. 81.

⁵⁶ Lisa Higgins Cochran, ‘Adulterous Individualism, Socialism, and Free Love in Nineteenth Century Anti-Suffrage Writing’, *Legacy*, 21 (2004), 193-209 (p. 195).

⁵⁷ Barbara Leah Harman, *The Feminine Political Novel in England* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 6-7.

circumstances.⁵⁸ She decides not to tell Aldous of her own ‘weakness and treachery’ (p. 252), and secretly finds that his ‘attitude with regard to the murder’ levels out her own sins: ‘[h]e seemed somehow to be providing her with excuses—to be coming down to her level—to be equalling wrong with wrong’ (p. 252). Marcella pretends that her reason for not telling him is because her own infidelity lacks significance in comparison to the death-sentence that Hurd would receive if he was found guilty; but she is well-aware that confessing her infidelity would destroy her leverage over Aldous whom she now wants to assist her in a campaign to get Hurd acquitted. Aldous’s good opinion of Marcella rests upon his conception of her as a creature of a pure and simple morality. Yet even when she sustains the conception of herself as the moral woman, removed from the competitive and sexualised public sphere, she lacks the power to influence Aldous.

The plot of the female paternalist dictates that the female interventionist cannot touch ‘the system’—the male capitalist patriarchy—but that she should help a few individuals and go on to satisfy her desire to care for others in romantic love.⁵⁹ Marcella’s failure to touch the system is encompassed in her inability to rescue the poacher Jim Hurd from execution by appealing to her fiancé to save him. She cannot touch the system because the men behind it have separated their personal feelings from their official selves. As she brings a petition that pleads for the life of Hurd for Lord Maxwell and Aldous to sign, a refusal from both shows her that private feelings, and the private sphere, have no bearings on the public duties of men, no matter how much the men love and respect their women. Lord Maxwell shows himself perfectly capable of separating his private feelings and his public duties and he points out that Aldous and he should be acting in their professional, rather than personal capacity: ‘this is a matter of conscience, of public duty, both for Aldous and myself. You will not surely *wish* even, that we should be governed in our relations to it by any private feeling or motive?’ (p. 283). When Lord Maxwell suggests that to be touched by private feelings upon this matter would be morally wrong, Ward is exposing the illusion that private feeling can be a moral force in society. If the

⁵⁸ For an analysis of poaching as working-class resistance see Harry Hopkins, *The Long Affray: The Poaching Wars, 1760-1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1985).

⁵⁹ Bodenheimer, p. 22.

plot of the female paternalist rests upon the idea that personal feeling can be a powerful force in society, Ward shows the flaws in a plot structure that expects men to be easily turned from their political principles.

As for Aldous, his desire for Marcella does not guarantee that she has an influence over him upon the matter of which he has formed his own opinion. He is perfectly capable of desiring Marcella and simultaneously rejecting her plea for Hurd. In fact, Aldous's desire may even form an obstacle to Marcella's influence over him, for even in her distress, she comes across as an object to be kissed and fondled rather than a woman whose opinion matters independently. 'Aldous heard all she said, but what absorbed him mainly was the wild desire to kiss the dark hair, so close below him, alternating with the miserable certainty that for him at that moment to touch, to soothe her, was to be repulsed' (p. 284). Not even Aldous's 'wild desire' and the knowledge that any physical advances would be rebuffed is enough for Marcella to get her wish. Here, desire for a woman is unable to bridge the gap between the workers and their masters. This is where Marcella loses faith in the idea of female influence in marriage: '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?' (pp. 255-56).

Both Aldous and Lord Maxwell appeal to a higher morality than personal feeling; Lord Maxwell admires Marcella's position and sees in her 'a good woman, with a true compassionate heart' but tells her 'you mistake the whole situation' (p. 284, 285). The realisation that she will not be able to influence Aldous in the ways she had hoped leads her to break off the engagement. Aldous's reluctance to let Marcella go forces her to confess her infidelity, and this confession exposes her masquerade as the angel in the house. During the trial of Hurd, Marcella had assumed a morally superior attitude for which Aldous has had tender sympathies. When he learns of her infidelity she loses the moral authority that comes with female chastity: '[a]ll those great words of pity and mercy—all that implication of a moral atmosphere to which he could never attain—to end in this story!' (p. 307). Marcella's moral failing is not so much the kiss as her conscious decision not to tell Aldous in order that she may pose as his moral superior. Aldous seems more betrayed by the act of superiority that she has put on rather than her actual betrayal, 'you let me plead; you let me regard

you as wrapped up in the unselfish end; you sent me those letters of his—those misleading letters!—and all the time— [...] and my agony of mind during those weeks—my feeling towards you—my—’ (p. 307). What is most painful to Aldous is that Marcella has painted him as the moral villain when it is she who has done wrong, his parting words, ‘[y]ou have done me wrong’, put Marcella to shame. Marcella’s confession ends the engagement and also her stay at Mellor.

In the second half of the novel, we witness Marcella simultaneously developing a new moral life and an ability to fall in love. In the wake of her failed engagement, she goes to London to train as a nurse. After suffering the humiliation of revealing herself to be a moral charlatan in her actions towards Aldous Raeburn, Marcella’s work in the slums functions both as an atonement for her sins and an attempt to restore the sense of moral agency that she lost when Aldous brought home to her the extent of her moral failings. We rejoin Marcella a year later, when, after a year’s training in hospital, she works as a district nurse in the London slums in ‘insanitary tenements, miserably provided with air, water, and all the necessities of life’ (p. 336). Here in the city, she joins the rank of ‘invented ladies disappointed in love’ that Nightingale accused of ‘abandoning their sick-ward for their lover’.⁶⁰ Her brief spell as a nurse lasts for no longer than a year before she returns to Mellor to tend to her dying father, yet it allows ample time for the moral growth that is needed to furnish her reconciliation with Aldous.

Kristine Swenson argues in *Medical Women and Victorian Fiction* that the nursing plot of the novel conforms to contemporary clichés about the nursing profession, and employs nursing for ‘domesticating and disciplining a young woman’.⁶¹ The nursing profession certainly had such connotations among contemporaries as the author of ‘Nurses and Nursing’ suggests: the author of the article relates the story of a doctor friend who said that the only woman worth marrying is a nurse and then goes on to argue that 3-6 months of work in a hospital should be considered more important than ‘dancing’ and ‘drawing’ in ‘finishing a young lady’.⁶² Marcella’s nursing stint has also been described as ‘a

⁶⁰ Nightingale, p. 192.

⁶¹ Kristine Swenson, *Medical Women in Victorian Fiction* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005), p. 50.

⁶² Rev. E. J. Hardy, ‘Nurses and Nursing’, *The Ladies Treasury: A Household Magazine*, November 1, (1887), 645-649 (pp. 647-48).

form of sack cloth and ashes that will help her “grow a soul” and prepare her for future good works as a rich benefactor to the poor’; while this is partially true, such a reading sees Marcella as a mere Lady Bountiful rather than the sole owner of a large estate.⁶³ These critics have been too eager to shoehorn Marcella back into the traditional feminine philanthropic position, when in fact she achieves a much more direct form of power as a landlord when she inherits the Mellor estate after her father’s death. While it is true that Marcella does give up nursing, she does so with no thoughts of marriage; as the sole heir of Mellor, her father’s death will allow her to resume her plans without having to appeal to the authority of male relatives. Her departure from the nursing profession has been billed as a progressive failure by social and literary historians, yet in order to address the problems of the first part of the novel, she must return to the Mellor estate.

Furthermore, these critics fail to note that professional nursing, as opposed to unpaid nursing, was presented as a job for advanced and daring young women alongside other professions, such as journalism. Marcella’s chosen profession allows her to see the seedier side of life as she is confronted by poverty and drunkenness in the East End; as the journal *Atalanta* told its readers, ‘the idea of being an independent young woman, who can walk about safely even in Whitechapel and other districts where police-men and common human beings “fear to tread,” has its charms’.⁶⁴ Rather than being domesticated, as Swenson argues, Marcella’s nursing experience helps her to view her work in a professional and scientific manner; her training has imposed the systematic education that she previously lacked, and which made Aldous’s judgment superior. Nursing enables her to make the transformation from amateur philanthropist to a highly skilled professional. Marcella resists the impulse to romanticise nursing and views herself as a professional like any other: ‘[i]t’s the fashion just now to admire nurses; but it’s ridiculous. We do our work like other people—sometimes badly, sometimes well’ (p. 349). It falls to her friends instead to romanticise her profession. When Marcella visits Edward Hallin, a friend of Aldous to whom she remains close, he observes the changes that have taken place within her during the year:

⁶³ Philip & Beatrice Kalisch, ‘The Image of Nurses in Novels’, *American Journal of Nursing*, August (1982), 1220-1224 (p. 1222).

⁶⁴ ‘Occupations for Gentlewomen’, *Atalanta: The Victorian Magazine*, January (1895), 556-558 (p. 558).

How richly human the face had grown! It was as forcible as ever in expression and colour, but that look which had often repelled him in his first acquaintance with her, as of a hard speculative eagerness more like the ardent boy than the woman, had very much disappeared. It seemed to him absorbed in something new—something sad and yet benignant, informed with all the pathos and the pain of growth. (p. 351)

Hallin credits nursing with changing Marcella into a woman from a boy, yet this change may only be skin deep, for she seems instead to move towards a more manly conception of the ethics of her work. Tasks that require ‘both muscular strength and moral force’ are taken ‘simply in the day’s work’ (p. 337). By the 1890s, the figure of the nurse had already taken on a powerful mythology that Ward simultaneously exploits and subverts.

Marcella’s work offers her practical experience that inevitably colours her politics: her experience of the terrible state of the homes of the London poor makes her more sympathetic to rural landlords such as Aldous Raeburn, who are attempting to improve the lives of the workers on their own estates. An astonished Hallin looks on as she launches into a clear explication of recent improvements for the benefit of the people carried out by the same landlords that only one year before she saw as the enemy and as part of ‘the system’.

It’s a little strange to think, isn’t it, that while we in London go on groaning and moaning about insanitary houses, and making our small attempts here and there, half of the country poor of England have been rehoused in our generation by these same landlords—no fuss about it—and rents for five-roomed cottages, somewhere about one and fourpence a week! (p. 365)

Although he does not agree with Marcella, Bennett, the labour leader, is impressed by her argumentative style, ‘You ought to come and lead a debate down at our Limehouse club [...] you’d take a lot of beating’ (p. 365). Marcella’s impressive debating skills invite her into the masculine sphere of politics. Now, she uses the information she gleaned from ‘those Agricultural

Reports she had worked through the year before under Wharton's teaching, with so much angry zest, and to such different purpose' (p. 366), to defend the landlords whom she attacked last year. Even though Marcella herself is unaware of this, this is the first step towards a reconciliation with Aldous. Marcella moves away from the idea of an equal distribution of property and land division and towards the idea of character as the basis for lasting social reform. She rejects the preoccupation with the material that formed an important part of her previous social creed, and becomes instead more attuned to the psychology of the poor.

'[A]s I go about amongst these wage-earners, the emphasis—do what I will—comes to lie less and less with possession and more and more on character. I go to two tenements in the same building. One is Hell—the other Heaven. Why? Both belong to well-paid artisans with equal opportunities. Both, so far as I can see, might have a decent and pleasant life of it. But one is a man—the other, with all his belongings, will soon be a vagabond. (p. 376)

In order to fully realise the potential of equal opportunities, the poor must first develop a character that allows them to do so. The realisation that the character of the poor must be transformed, makes Marcella wonder whether she is the right person for the work, and her own moral failings thereby come into focus. Until her love for Aldous is revealed to her, her own moral power is somehow hidden from her.

Marcella's burgeoning love for Aldous grows in her owing to a religious conversion that takes place during her work in the city slums. From the slum inhabitants, she learns that there is more than material comfort, that the spirit is greater than the flesh: 'all this preoccupation with, this passion over, the things not of the flesh, the thwarted cabined flesh, but of the spirit—wonderful!' (p. 382). This realization inevitably moves Marcella away from her socialist materialism and towards a more spiritual conception of the work of social reform, and it is this shift that forces her towards a crisis. While she easily performs the tasks that require physical strength and courage—heavy lifting comes easily to her, and she shows no fear in dismissing an incompetent doctor—she fails at the parts of her job that require sympathy and comfort:

a cloud of impotence fell upon Marcella. She suddenly felt that she could do nothing—that there was nothing in her adequate to such an appeal—nothing strong enough to lift the weight of a human life thus flung upon her. She was struck with a dryness, a numbness, that appalled her. She tried still to soothe and comfort, but nothing that she said went home—took hold. Between the feeling in her heart which might have reached and touched this despair, and the woman before her, there seemed to be a barrier she could not break. Or was it that she was really barren and poor in soul, and had never realised it before? A strange misery rose in her too, as she knelt, tending and consoling, but with no efficacy—no power. (p. 385)

Her moral power to soothe and comfort amounts to a great big ‘nothing’, an absence of something vital that she needs in order to perform her work adequately. Where there should be sympathy and love there is merely a ‘dryness’ and ‘numbness’ that seems to prove to her that she is ‘barren’ and ‘poor’ and badly equipped to meet the needs of the poor. Marcella must either face the possibility that she is ‘barren and poor in soul’, or accept that there is a barrier that prevents her from accessing her true moral power. Exactly what it is that she lacks, she cannot yet put her finger on. The reader, however, is invited through the repeated emphasis that Marcella has ‘nothing’—‘she could do nothing’, ‘there was nothing in her’, ‘nothing strong enough’—to compare her ‘nothing’, to the repeated ‘nothing’ which comes from the lack of charity or love in 1 Corinthians: ‘And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing’ (1 Corinthians 13:3). Despite engaging in the material care of the poor, without love or charity, Marcella is nothing, and the words that are meant to soothe and comfort the poor are merely ‘a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal’. Because she does not have love, she cannot love the poor. If true moral power is linked to the capacity to love, and to love romantically, then Marcella’s lack of moral power springs from her present inability to fall in love. Even the use of the words ‘barren’ and ‘impotence’ seem to suggest that moral power is closely linked to sexual feeling and reproductive impulses, and that the absence of the sexual feeling linked to

romantic love is the source of Marcella's inability to act.

Gradually, however, she undergoes a conversion, or a reversion, to the 'evangelical training of her school years' (p. 386). In the slums, among those whose spirit sustains them when the body is infirm, Marcella realizes that there is a greater power at work than the forces of material change:

Nobody could live in hospital—nobody could go among the poor—nobody could share the thoughts and hopes of people like Edward Hallin and his sister, without understanding that it is still here in the world—this "grace" that "sustaineth"—however variously interpreted, still living and working, as it worked of old, among the little Galilean towns, in Jerusalem, in Corinth. (p. 386)

The 'grace' that 'sustaineth' is a religious conception of love which conflates charity and love: what Marcella yearns for is charity in its truest sense—

the motive power of life—something subduing, transforming, delivering—something that to-night she envied with a passion and a yearning that amazed herself [...] How many things she craved, as an eager child craves them! First some moral change, she knew not what—then Aldous Raeburn's pardon and friendship—then and above all, the power to lose herself—the power to *love*'. (p. 387)

Marcella's conversion to the evangelical Christianity of her girlhood is also the discovery of her own true sexuality, the desire to love and be loved. Spirituality and sexuality become one as Marcella 'yearn[s]' and 'craves' with a 'passion' for love, a love that is both charitable and sexual.

While her passion for Wharton was distinctly, and perhaps exclusively, sexual, her conversion towards a more spiritual conception of the world through her work in the slums, is what ignites a 'passion' for Aldous that is both spiritual and sexual. In her work on the sexual instinct, Blackwell reminded her readers that '[t]he term passion, it should always be remembered, implies a mental element'. Blackwell made no distinction between 'eros' and 'agape', instead, she

insisted that ‘sexual passion is love, even more than lust’.⁶⁵ Prompted by the ‘stirring of a new moral life within her’, Marcella approaches Aldous ‘full of a passionate yearning to make friends’, but is rebuffed by his ‘cold, strange tone’, as she enquires about the health of Lord Maxwell. What she reads as a moral impulse, as a wish to apologise to someone she has ‘vitally hurt, perhaps maimed’ (p. 409), bears the hallmark of the first stirrings of love towards Aldous. The beginnings of ‘a new moral life’, is couched in language that makes it impossible to separate from desire, as it is ‘beating and swelling stormlike within her’ (pp. 409-10). Here, Marcella’s ‘moral life’ is inseparable from her desire to be loved, ‘[s]he had taken being loved so easily, so much as a matter of course! How was it that it hurt her now so much to have lost love, and power, and consideration?’ (p. 410). The answer to this question is of course that Marcella now desires what she before attached little value to: romantic love. Now that she understands the connection between love of the poor and love for a mate, she knows that that she will neither achieve professional aptitude nor happiness without conjugal love.

Yet in order for *Marcella* to achieve what the plot of delayed love dictates, Marcella must learn to live without love as well as learning to love. She must be capable of sexual love in order to fulfill the Christian idea of charity, but she must also face the possibility that this love will never find its expression. She considers a proposal from Harry Wharton, wondering if he can fill the absence in her life, yet she decides that to accept his proposal would be to repeat her error of the last year, that of accepting love she did not herself feel. And when Wharton is revealed to be a traitor to the cause that he has been championing, her instinct is proven right: ‘I see my way! *I do not love you*—that is the simple, the whole truth—I could not follow you!’ (p. 485). Wharton’s proposal, and Marcella’s rejection, ensures us that she is not merely craving love for love’s sake: ‘I would have given all I have and am to feel like any happy girl, who says “Yes” to her lover. I tried to feel so. But even then, though, I was miserable and reckless, I knew in my heart—it was impossible!’ (p. 456). It is neither the spirit nor the flesh that leads Marcella back to Aldous, it is the combination of the two, embodied in her heart, an organ of both flesh and feeling: ‘it was as though she

⁶⁵ Blackwell, 1894, pp. 49, 52.

crept close to some dim beloved form in whom her heart knew henceforward the secret and sole companion of its inmost life' (p. 486).

After confessing her love for Aldous to Hallin as he lies upon his deathbed, Marcella briefly hopes for a reunion with Aldous; but when Hallin dies before he can pass on the message to Aldous, it looks as though Marcella must face the future alone. Shortly after this, her father dies. The entire Mellor estate is now at Marcella's disposal to use as she wishes. Yet the absence of any response to her confession from Aldous leaves her feeling temporarily impotent:

She had pined once for power and freedom, that she might make a Kingdom of Heaven of her own, quickly. Now power and freedom, up to a certain point, were about to be put into her hands; and instead of plans for acting largely and bountifully on a plastic outer world, she was saying to herself, hungrily, that unless she had something close to her to love and live for, she could do nothing. (pp. 515-16)

But when Marcella returns to Mellor, she immediately begins to set in motion changes to the estate, plans to build new improved cottages for the tenants, opening up Mellor to the people of the village. Perhaps this forms part of a subtle plan to rekindle her romance as Aldous has been appointed executor of Mr. Boyce's will. She explains her scheme to Aldous: '[i]t's only this: you see, as there is no one depending on me—as I am practically alone—it seemed to me I might make an experiment' (p. 537). Since she has neither father nor husband to answer to, she has the opportunity for experimenting with her property: 'I want it to be a place of amusement and delight and talk to us all—especially to the very poor' (p. 537). She devises a scheme to lower rents and raise wages on the estate. During this conversation, a different Marcella emerges from the one that we have seen in the slums. This is perhaps evidence that she works and thinks best in connection to Aldous. Her enthusiasm for social enterprise has returned, and instead of being convinced that she can do nothing on her own, her unbridled existence allows room for social experiments. She returns to the passion of her former self, and Aldous is 'enchanted to see the old self come out again—positive, obstinate, generous' (p. 539).

It is now that the connection between romantic love and true sympathy or

altruism becomes clear; as she thinks over the changes that have taken place within her moral self over the past year, she recognizes her prior sympathy for the poor as a selfish impulse, she sees herself in retrospect as ‘a creature without eyes, worked, blindfold, by a crude inner mechanism that took no account really of impressions from without’ (p. 554). She realises that a true altruism cannot spring from the single self, and that morality comes not from within but from interacting with one’s surroundings:

By daily life in natural relations with the poor, by a fruitful contact with fact, by the clash of opinion in London, by the influence of a noble friendship, by the education of awakening passion—what had once been mere tawdry and violent hearsay had passed into a true devotion, a true thirst for social good. (p. 554)

Here is a list of all the factors that contribute to Marcella’s moral education, an education that finally allows her to distinguish between ‘tawdry and violent hearsay’ and ‘true devotion’; it is this moral education that allows her to see the moral worth of Aldous, and which uncovers her desire for him. She is now able to distinguish the ‘*true*’ love that she feels for Aldous from the feelings that she held for Wharton the year before. There is a confirmed link between Marcella learning the distinction between true love and false passion, and her developing a ‘true devotion’ to the poor.

To return to the romance of the female paternalist, Ward reverses the woman’s role in the romance; it is instead the woman who learns from love to adopt some of her lover’s moral vision. While the romance of the female paternalist may question the heroine’s knowledge of the system, it also suggests that her lack of knowledge of the system is what allows her to imagine alternatives; her power springs from her own ignorance. Here, Marcella’s prior ignorance has been nothing more than a stubborn reluctance to abandon her own moral vision; ignorance has no moral value. To cement this reversal of the current of influence from woman to man, it is Marcella who effectively proposes to Aldous, and it is she who kneels down before him to confess her previous faults. The religious connotations of her confession are obvious, and Aldous, her lover, becomes analogous to a priest—who in turn stands in for God—as she

must ‘confess’ before she is ready to accept Aldous: ‘[y]ou are to hear me confess; you are to give me penance; you are to say the hardest things possible to me’ (p. 557). Lover and God are combined, as only Aldous can grant her absolution. Significantly, Aldous responds by refusing to play the deity and tells her that she ‘can’t imagine that I should let *you* kneel to *me*’; he is not asking Marcella to submit, she instead initially demands that he let her submit herself—‘you must’—but she quickly concedes: ‘[w]ell, if it will make you happier, I will take a stool and sit by you’ (p. 557). Love does indeed make Marcella eager to give up herself and submit her will to her lover, but in choosing Aldous as her beloved she is protecting herself against the abuse of that power.

When Marcella is reunited with Aldous, she has not only learnt to love, but she has also reconciled herself to giving up that love. While she previously viewed love of the poor as the only true form of love, she now realises how intimately love of a mate is linked to love of others. When she could not love Aldous, her love for the poor was deficient as well, despite her ministrations for their comforts. Ward’s conception of marriage, as laid forth in *Marcella*, is an attempt to solve the problem of female political representation and citizenship without suffrage: if women can only truly fall in love with men who are their political allies, then their husband’s vote will implicitly cover them as well. In this sense, choosing a husband really is a political choice.

Children of Circumstance: Desire and Duty in the City Slums

Irish-born Kathleen Mannington Caffyn’s main claim to fame is her 1894 novel *A Yellow Aster*, a work which placed her among the New Woman writers. In *A Yellow Aster*, she describes an intellectually advanced young woman who learns to love her husband only when she becomes a mother, an incident which reveals the ‘true’ essence of womanhood, which has hitherto lain buried deep inside her.⁶⁶ At first, the unfortunate heroine lacks the ability to fall in love having been brought up by parents severely lacking in affection; although she likes her husband, she feels no passion for him and marries him as an experiment. Initially disgusted by the thought of sexual intercourse, the birth of her child and the maternal feelings roused in her releases a sexuality that finally allows her to fall

⁶⁶ Iota, *A Yellow Aster*, 3 vols (London: Hutchison, 1894).

in love with her husband. When Caffyn, whose novels were published under the pseudonym 'Iota', makes intermittent appearances in the works of critics who have taken on the New Women, it is this novel to which they refer.⁶⁷ Even so, Iota has remained on the periphery of critical interest, often mentioned, but swiftly dealt with. *Children of Circumstance* deserves critical attention, however, as it is arguably a far more multifaceted novel than *A Yellow Aster*. When *Children of Circumstance* was published, it did not receive as much attention as Iota's previous novel, though the *Bookman* noted dismissively that:

The thesis of the book is, evidently, that by a cultivation of natural affections and graces, women will do much more for the regeneration of the world than by taking up missions, or improving their intellects. With that sentiment we have no quarrel, but the natural result of reading so unrestrained a book, is to make one fear the emotions, and long to give one's self up wholly to the severest mental discipline, happen what may to the moral regeneration of the world.⁶⁸

The *Bookman*'s disapproval of the 'unrestrained' discussion of 'emotions' was perhaps more an objection to the frankness with which Iota discussed sexual matters and prostitution in the novel, and was a display of exactly the sort of prudishness that she set out to attack.

Children of Circumstance examines the many contradictions surrounding Victorian sexuality and gender constructs, and deconstructs the notion of a class-based sexuality in which the middle-class woman is seen as pure and passionless, and the working class woman as loose and lascivious. As such, the novel explores the issues of sexual morality that had played a crucial role in the plans of social reformers ever since the female-led campaign for the repeal of the 1864 Contagious Diseases Act, the law designed to stop the spread of venereal disease in the army and navy. Led by Josephine Butler, female reformers protested against the sexual double standard inherent in the Act, which allowed the police to apprehend suspected prostitutes and subject them to a physical examination by

⁶⁷ Ardis, 1990, p. 94.

⁶⁸ *The Bookman*, 7 (1894), 55-56 (p. 56).

a doctor, while the prostitutes' male clients faced no consequences.⁶⁹ Those who campaigned against the Act showed how this sexual double standard lay at the heart of Victorian sexual morality, and they called for the same rigid standard of chastity that women were held to, to be applied to men as well.

By the 1890s, when Iota was active as a novelist, the Contagious Diseases Act had been repealed, and the social purity movement, as Richardson words it, 'began to feed off discourses of degeneration, biologizing male sexuality as brutish if left unchecked'.⁷⁰ An example of such thinking can be found in an article in the *Woman's Herald* on the 'True Basis of Marriage' in 1891, which praises W. T. Stead and Mrs. Besant for advocating similar sexual restraint on men as on women but also applauds them for recognising 'the fundamental basis of morality "sexual intercourse for procreation only"'. The author of this article hoped that that the idea of marriage would in the future 'convey an ideal of self restraint, of devotion to an ideal, of friendship, and universal fellowship', and they maintained that restraint of sexual passion would eradicate the major social concerns of the day: 'prostitution, grinding poverty, and hereditary disease'.⁷¹ When Iota wrote *Children of Circumstance*, she was therefore addressing a climate in which sexual desire as a social evil was not merely related to prostitution: concerns about desire merged with eugenic ideals of rational reproduction to give rise to the notion of sexual restraint as the panacea for all social evils.

In *Children of Circumstance*, the sexuality of a young middle-class woman that has flourished despite her upbringing among the puritan Plymouth Brethren is used to symbolise the natural desire that has been suppressed by the constraints of middle-class culture. This same constraint of middle-class women's sexuality is shown to be responsible for creating a climate in which men, culturally permitted discreet sexual expression, purchase sex from deprived working-class women under the illusion that they are only purchasing what these women would give freely. The special moral authority of middle-class women relied upon extended notions of differences between middle and lower-class women where the middle-class woman featured as the chaste ideal, and working-

⁶⁹ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Late-Victorian Sexual Danger* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 23.

⁷⁰ Richardson, 2003, p. 48.

⁷¹ 'True Basis of Marriage', *Woman's Herald*, 149 (1891), p. 730.

class women as sexually loose, marrying early (if marrying at all) and breeding uncontrollably.⁷²

When Butler launched her campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act, she recognised that conventional attitudes towards female sexuality were strongly based on social class, with middle-class women occupying a position as the chaste angel of the house.

Worldly and impure men have thought, and still think, they can separate women, as I have said, into two classes;—the protected and refined ladies who are not only to *be good*, but who are, if possible, to *know* nothing except what is good; and those poor outcast daughters of the people whom they purchase with money, and with whom they think they may consort in evil whenever it pleases them to do so, before returning to their own separated and protected homes.⁷³

According to Butler, men divided women into two classes: those they married, and those they had sex with. The women that they married were held up to rigid standards of sexual purity, by which they were expected to ‘*know* nothing except what is good’, in other words: they were expected to be entirely ignorant of sexual matters. The effect of this insistence upon keeping middle-class women sexually pure, was to transfer female sexuality onto working-class women, whose duty in society it became to service a ‘natural’ male sexuality.

Almost twenty years after Butler pinpointed the division of women into pure and impure according to class, Edward Carpenter argued that this class-based notion of sexuality was due to the perceived separation between sex and love. The denial of female sexuality bore with it the ‘necessary accompaniment’ of prostitution as the product of a ‘hypocritical Puritanism’ which forbade women ‘to speak of their natural desires’.⁷⁴ Carpenter theorised that the middle-class

⁷² See Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 7. Poovey, too, has observed that middle-class women, specifically, were meant to lack sexual desires, while working-class women, as Mayhew observed, ‘*did* experience sexual desire’, which formed the ‘driving force behind all crime, poverty, and social disorder’. Poovey, 1989, p. 15, Michael Mason has challenged the notion of the asexual middle-class woman in *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 195-196.

⁷³ Josephine Butler, *Social Purity* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1879), pp. 10-11.

⁷⁴ Edward Carpenter, *Sex-love and its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1894), p. 5, Carpenter, *Woman and her Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1894), p. 31.

version of female sexuality was restrictive and harmful to both middle and working-class women; the sexual double standard which accepted sexual desire in men, but condemned it in women, forced men to seek their pleasure in women of the lower classes. To remedy this problem, Carpenter suggested that it was necessary to acknowledge the existence of female sexual desire that was not marked by 'that divorce between the sentiment Love and the physical passion which is so common with men', and he argued that woman 'is or should be the interpreter of Love to man, and in some degree his guide in spiritual matters'.⁷⁵

In *Children of Circumstance*, Margaret's character and her campaign to befriend and help prostitutes often bear a strong resemblance to the actions and beliefs of Butler, however, the conclusion that Margaret eventually comes to more closely resembles Carpenter's idea of greater recognition of the sexual instinct in women. As such, the repression or failure to acknowledge the existence of a female sexuality among middle and upper-class women has repercussions throughout the whole strata of society. Not only does Iota's novel argue for the recognition of female sexual desire, but she also suggests that this desire is God-given.

In order to explore the contrast between the sexual, and by extension, moral, lives of middle and working-class women, *Children of Circumstance* employs the familiar format of the heroine who becomes a philanthropist in the aftermath of a broken love affair. A young woman's struggle to overcome her desires for a married man leads her to the city slums of London where she devotes herself to helping and befriending the prostitutes in the area. The plot revolves around Margaret Dering, a young orphan raised by her elderly spinster aunts, who unwittingly falls in love with a married man, Geoffrey Hyde. When she discovers that her lover is married, Margaret leaves for London with Geoffrey, but once there she decides that Geoffrey must go back to his wife, and she herself goes to live with her former nursemaid in a poor area of London. To distract herself from her own unhappiness, she devotes herself to befriending the many prostitutes who live in the area. Margaret soon finds herself allied with a local young clergyman, Frank Weston, and in fierce opposition to the local

⁷⁵ Carpenter, *Woman and her Place in a Free Society*, 1894, p. 9.

district visitor, Miss Dow, who suspects that Margaret herself must be a prostitute, since she keeps their company and is not a traditional rescue worker.

What is unique about *Children of Circumstance* and its discussion of prostitution is its refusal to blame male sexuality. Instead, Iota's novel suggests that the middle-class insistence upon the chastity of middle-class women has created a sexual class system in which working-class women provide sexual favours for middle-class men in exchange for money. The novel even goes so far as to suggest that middle-class women were in some ways partly responsible for the problem of prostitution, as their own desire to keep themselves pure and ignorant ensured that their men would seek gratification elsewhere. In this manner, the novel went against the tendency of the New Woman novelists 'to recast the social question in terms of the 'pollution' of society by masculine sexuality', by approaching the problem of prostitution from another angle; rather than prostitution being the effect of men's voracious sexual demands, it was seen as the result of the whole sexual culture of the nineteenth century: the separation of sex from love, the ideal of female chastity, and the eugenic idea of rational love are all implicated.⁷⁶

Children of Circumstance addresses the notion of the prostitute as the unfortunate double of the respectable middle-class woman, and seeks to break down the barrier that divides the two.⁷⁷ Parallels are frequently drawn between Margaret and the prostitutes she is helping; indeed, as the lover of a married man, she is 'the other woman', even though the relationship has not yet become physical. Geoffrey Hyde is drawn towards her because she is the opposite of his wife Beatrice—'a cold, prim, abstraction'. We are invited to draw parallels between Geoffrey, who falls in love with Margaret because he is trapped in a passionless marriage, and the man who seeks out the company of prostitutes in lieu of his wife. Iota does not blame Geoffrey for seeking affection elsewhere, nor does she blame Beatrice for a physical coldness that stems from 'habitual self-repression' and 'hereditary reticence' (p. 19). In fact, the repression of female sexuality is viewed as a tragedy that separates women from themselves

⁷⁶ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism*, in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷⁷ Walkowitz identifies the prostitute as the 'embodiment of the corporeal smell and animal passions that the rational bourgeois male had repudiated and that the virtuous woman, the spiritualized "angel in the house," had suppressed'. Walkowitz, 1992, p. 21.

and from God. Margaret's deeply religious maiden aunts have cut themselves off from the garden of Eden by renouncing their sexuality, as Iota's portrayal of Aunt Julia shows: '[s]he had not lost her kingdom—she had never so much as entered into it [...] It was herself who had been to blame, she had been her own flaming sword, shutting herself out of Paradise' (p. 2). Iota is here comparing Aunt Julia to the sword that bars Adam and Eve from re-entering Eden: '[s]o he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life' (Genesis 3:24). Rather than Aunt Julia being shut out of paradise by God's authority, she herself has ensured that she never enters it at all. Her insistence upon chastity has therefore disconnected her from God by removing her from God's authority. She has come to the personal realisation that it would have been better to have lost her kingdom through sexual sin than to never enter it at all.

Iota is here drawing upon a connection between sexual and religious ecstasy that is prevalent throughout religious and sexual discourse of the nineteenth century. Maureen Moran has suggested that 'for many Victorians religious faith and sexual desire occupied the same field of emotional energy', Virginia Lieson Brereton reminds us that 'those who turned to communion with the divine had often turned to sexual imagery', and Sue Morgan points out that 'using the language of religious ecstasy to depict the sexual act was a common rhetorical device throughout the period'.⁷⁸ What this suggests is a conflation between sexual desire and religious belief in which sexual desire means being closer to God.

Children of Circumstance pays tribute both to the common notion of the female slum-worker being motivated by a failed love affair, and to the idea of the slums as the arena in which illicit sexual pleasure is sought by the middle and upper classes. As someone who is guilty of sexual transgression in mind if not in deed, Margaret comes to the slums both to hide and to pay penance for and distract herself from her illicit desires. Initially, her residence in the slums has no

⁷⁸ Maureen Moran, *Catholic Sensationalism and Victorian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 188, Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women's Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 21, Sue Morgan: "'The Word made Flesh': Women, Religion, and Sexual Cultures" in *Women, Gender, and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940*, ed. by Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 162.

altruistic or philanthropic motive whatsoever; the slums seem to her the perfect place to hide from her maiden aunts and her married lover: '[s]he would hide herself and rest, and try to grasp hold of life again. She thought she would here, in this wilderness of houses have free field to do it in' (p. 59). To Margaret, the slums are a 'wilderness', a deep dark forest where she can disappear from the world while she recovers her bearings. But if she thinks that she can simply disappear into anonymity in the slums, she is very much mistaken. As Deborah Epstein Nord informs us: '[t]he metropolis offered anonymity, community, and distance from provincial and familial expectations, but it also proved a difficult and threatening place to be a woman alone'.⁷⁹ A young girl arriving in the city slums with no history or philanthropic mission behind her is bound to excite suspicion among the slum dwellers, as Margaret herself discovers.

To the locals Margaret is 'a mystery' (p. 59), a person who appears out of nowhere with no explicable motive; the locals' suspicious attitudes towards her suggest their wish to assert themselves and protect their community from members of the middle-class who come to their area to hide from their sins: 'they do not relish imported persons from the higher ranks, with unfathomable doubts attached to them' p. 59). Their misgivings about Margaret show their resistance to perceptions of the slums as an area with no morals, where middle-class sinners can escape the judgement of the community. This also illustrates the polarised view of the slum travelling that appeared in literary depictions: if the middle-classes were not in the slums to take part in philanthropic pursuits, they were there in the pursuit of or aftermath of sexual transgression. Ironically, the district visitor's hounding of Margaret, and the fact that she herself helped to spread rumours about Margaret amongst the inhabitants, suggests that the idea that the middle-classes go to the slums to hide originates with middle-class slum workers: '[I]ndeed, it had been Miss Dow, in her zeal, who had first cast the doubt, and tickled the ears of the Rowites' (p. 60). Miss Dow has seen nothing that would suggest that Margaret is a fallen woman, and merely bases her opinion on preconceived assumptions: '[i]t is not to be supposed that such a person would take refuge here without her reasons' (p. 58). If Margaret's reasons are not philanthropic, then they must be sinful.

⁷⁹ Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 182.

The realisation that young women do not have the freedom to come and go as they please in the city is what leads Margaret to the path of philanthropy: she hopes that working for the poor will help to legitimise her presence in the city as a single woman.⁸⁰ The novel here recognises that philanthropic activities become necessary to provide cover for people who might have come to the slums for various reasons. Drawing upon the mythology of slum work as a distraction from or substitute for sexual or romantic gratification, Margaret hopes that slum work will help her control her feeling for her lost love: 'I must keep my thoughts in order and in their proper place that is, not revolving around myself and Geoffrey' (p. 97). Furthermore, after a few weeks in the slums with nothing to occupy her other than music, singing, and languages, the largest part of the middle-class girls' education, Margaret feels in need of 'something to fill up the crowds of idle hours', and she has learned from the very books that perpetuate the idea, that philanthropy is the thing that she can rightfully devote herself to:

I should have considered myself rather impertinent for interfering: but it seems the right thing to work for the poor; the testimony of hosts of books goes to prove it, and also to prove the delights of the resulting sensations to yourself and to them. (p. 97)

Margaret is seduced into slum-work by popular notions that working for the poor will provide her with an alternative source of pleasure. The readiness with which she puts aside her own qualms against slum work, suggests the manner in which women help to perpetuate the myths surrounding them. Scornful of the notion that philanthropic work is 'the right thing', and aware that her attempts at charity may simply be seen as interference by the objects of her attentions, Margaret still plays along with the idea because she knows that to do nothing would be to confirm the rumours of herself as a fallen woman. Women's philanthropic missions become part of their constant effort to widen the distance from the biblical notion of woman as naturally sexual and sinful. The irony here is that Margaret believes that Miss Dow is half right in her accusations, and that she is

⁸⁰ Lucy Bland points out that the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 that 'outlawed brothel keeping', placed 'women living with other women, and even women living on their own', under suspicion of prostitution. Bland, 2001, p. 101.

mistaken only in assuming that Margaret is an active sinner, rather than a sinner in thought: '[a]ll the people here believe that I'm an active sinner of some sort or another. Passive sin never enters into their calculations. It's not tangible enough' (p. 63). After having her philanthropic attentions spurned by the respectable poor in the area, Margaret decides that she must devote herself to helping the lowest members of the 'unrespectable' poor, namely, prostitutes.

Written almost ten years after the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in 1886, the novel addresses the continued efforts to curb prostitution by rescue workers such as Ellice Hopkins and Laura Ormiston Chant. Hopkins gained notoriety as a social purity crusader in the 1880s because of her endorsement of legislation that sanctioned the forceful removal of children from the parental home if their parents were suspected of being involved in prostitution. She was also actively disseminating 'didactic tracts' which advocated strict supervision of the working-classes to prevent them from falling into immorality that were 'frequently melodramatic, misinformed, and plagued by class limitations'.⁸¹ Under the leadership of Ormiston Chant, the National Vigilance Association focused its attentions on closing down brothels and enforcing the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which 'outlawed brothel keeping and the procurement of women for prostitution'.⁸² The methods employed by Hopkins and Ormiston Chant came under censure from the older generation of women who campaigned against the repeal of Contagious Diseases Act. Elizabeth Wolstonholme Elmy feared that women would be driven onto the streets by the closure of the brothels, and called the 'Ellice Hopkins Act', 'wholesale kidnapping'.⁸³ As well as gaining the opprobrium of older reformers, Hopkins and Chant, and their followers, were frequently mocked in the popular press who described them as 'prudes on the prowl' or 'prurient prudes'.⁸⁴

Hopkins and Chant are conflated in the character of Miss Dow, a woman who represents a breed of spinsters, who, in renouncing sexual satisfaction, have formed an obsession with the sexual habits of others. Her pleasure lies not in helping, but in actively seeking out sinners:

⁸¹ Sue Morgan, 'Faith, Sex, and Purity: The Religio-Feminist Theory of Ellice Hopkins', *Women's History Review*, 9 (2000), 13-33 (p. 23).

⁸² Bland, p. 101,102.

⁸³ Bland, p. 101,102, Morgan, 2002, p. 20.

⁸⁴ Morgan, 2010, p. 168, 'London.—January 9th, 1891', *Judy: The Conservative Comic*, January 14 (1891), p. 21.

She was on sinners before they had a notion of her approach, and was thus frequently privileged to deal faithfully with them caught red-handed in the act. She was sharper in spotting female vice than male, from a feeling of modesty befitting the intricacies of her virgin state, but she overcame her natural feelings when duty demanded it of her. (p. 202)

The sarcastic tone is apparent in this passage, in which Miss Dow actively seeks out what she professes to be repugnant to her; erotic titillation is disguised as philanthropic interest. Her own 'modesty', which she believes helps her to identify vice, is instead a vivid erotic imagination that conjures up scenes of sexual misconduct where there are none. It is this kind of rescue worker that Frank Weston, the clergyman that Margaret befriends, denounces when he asks his sister Rica to join him in his work with the prostitutes: '[a] nice well-dressed girl with her faults and her foolishness would be a much more likely straw for one of those poor things to cling on to than either an angel or a mission' (p. 131). Frank describes the vigilance ladies as 'listening with bated breath to anecdotes and records that, to say the least, were amazing, and mostly outside the point', before imploring his master to save him from their clasp: 'From vigilance ladies, good Lord, deliver us!' (p. 130).

Miss Dow visits Frank to tell him that Margaret wanders the streets at midnight, giggling with prostitutes, and holds late night 'orgies' (p. 223), and accuses Frank of taking part in these orgies. To Miss Dow, the slums are a place for acting out depraved sexual desires, and she imagines licentiousness at every street corner. Furthermore, when visiting Frank she fears for her own sexual safety as she turns up without a chaperone:

She would stand this no longer. Watch her—her, indeed—out of that chair with a sort of smile on his face, if someone had lately made a joke. There was a carnal look about it, very unpleasant indeed. And she quite alone in the room too! She would report the matter—possibly to the Bishop. A sudden little thrill of pleasure made her for a minute quite weak and human. (p. 223)

Miss Dow suspects everyone involved with the prostitutes of harbouring illicit sexual desires, yet this passage shows that she clearly gains a physical pleasure from imagining herself as a woman carnally desired by Frank, and also from the idea of pointing this out to the bishop. The suggestion that Miss Dow fears, yet at the same time craves, sexual approaches from Weston implies that she herself is in the slums to satisfy some unarticulated carnal lusts. Thus Iota acknowledges the existence of slum work that stems from a combination of sexual repression and prurient curiosity.

While the novel attempts to break down the barriers between the two classes of women, it consistently insists upon making the other middle-class characters (apart from Miss Dow) acknowledge Margaret's refined nature. Frank instantly notices Margaret as being out of place in the area and different from the other girls. Though Frank has some difficulty defining exactly what makes Margaret different, apart from specifics such as 'some unusual quality in her voice', and 'she walks well' (p. 135), he knows that the local girls are 'not an atom like this one. You'd spot her in a jiffy' (p. 134). Margaret excites Frank's curiosity, but unlike Miss Dow, he does not jump to any conclusions about her reasons for being in the slums. When she explains her mission to Frank: 'I have loads of time on my hands, and I thought I would spend it by prowling round with open eyes, and getting to know some of the girls around me' (p. 147), Frank approves of her work: 'I myself have been thinking, for a long time past, that girls could do an enormous lot for one another—that is, if they would consent or be allowed to open their eyes' (p. 148). Yet at this point in her experience, Margaret argues that immersing girls in the type of work that she herself has taken on would be 'quite impossible, and extremely cruel' (p. 148), and she points out that she is capable of taking on such work because circumstances forced her to come and live in the slums:

I had got over the first sick shock of grey horrors before I came into personal contact with one of the girls about me [...] Why should ignorant girls' lives be spoilt with the practical knowledge—one only grasps it properly by actual contact—of this dulness and misery? A girl could never be the same again once she knew— really. (p. 148)

When Frank points out that ‘you are a contradiction to all you say’, Margaret insists that she is no ordinary girl: ‘I told you I am different altogether’ (p. 149); her eyes were gradually opened to the horrors that she lived among, and her work was merely a natural progression of her knowledge.

What Frank does not understand from her statement, is how Margaret’s progression from ‘ignorance’ to ‘knowledge’ began with her affair with Geoffrey Hyde. Her status as a ‘passive sinner’, wanting to sin but choosing not to, ‘I long for sin—which means, I suppose, Geoffrey Hyde [...] I hate and detest being good—which means keeping out of his way’ (p. 63) sets her apart from the innocent, ignorant girls who Frank hopes to introduce as slum workers. During her affair with Geoffrey, Margaret had already partially entered the world of sin and vice even though she had no knowledge that she was doing so. Her intention to live a life of chastity confirms her own opinion of herself as partially ruined.

This distinction between ignorance and knowledge of sexual matters and the implications of such knowledge lies at the heart of Victorian perceptions of class-based sexuality. According to Mary Jeune, a prominent slum and rescue worker, the contrast between middle and working-class sexualities lay not in any kind of inherent difference, but merely in degrees of knowledge and education about sexual matters.

A woman may be perfectly virtuous yet not pure-minded, and there the difference begins between the way in which women of the upper classes and lower classes view the matter. A poor woman is perfectly well conducted, faithful to her husband, and excellent in all the essential duties of a wife and mother, but she is not a modest-minded woman in the same sense as women of a better class. Her education and hard struggling life have prevented her being so, and she brings up her daughters like herself.⁸⁵

Knowledge of sexual matters disqualified women from being ‘pure-minded’ or ‘modest-minded’, yet Jeune points out that the working-class girl’s knowledge protects her from falling, and argues that middle-class girls in their ignorance are

⁸⁵ Lady Mary Jeune, ‘Helping the Fallen’, *Fortnightly Review*, 38 (1885), 669-682 (p. 673).

more likely to fall: '[p]erhaps in some ways her completer knowledge acts as a shield [...] while she may be deprived of the freshness and delicacy of an ignorant woman, she does not run the same danger of falling', according to Jeune's argument, ignorant middle-class women were in greater danger of falling than their lower-class sisters who were equipped with the facts of life.⁸⁶ Here, the working-class girls' knowledge of sexual matters allows them to choose their fate and to dispose of their own sexuality and body as they wish, whereas middle-class women who are completely in the dark regarding sex and its relation to their own bodies deprives them of the ability to chose purity. When a middle-class girl then falls, her ignorance means that she has no agency, has made no deliberate choice. Margaret's assertion that 'a girl could never be the same again once she knew—knew really' (p. 148), is also suggestive of the loss of purity that comes with that knowledge.

The emphasis upon upholding the sexual ignorance of girls and young women, suggests latent fears of a female sexuality that is ready to rise up and wreak havoc given half the chance. Margaret says as much to Frank Weston:

If I gave way to natural woman, I should this minute be clothed in scarlet and purple, and all the girls feel the same: but they do, as you may perceive, give way to the natural woman, and throw on colour whenever they can. I sometimes envy them their capacity to wear brilliant and inconsequent bows. (p 163)

Margaret is here suggesting that woman is naturally licentious, which makes the novel in danger of regressing to eighteenth-century notions of women as, in Poovey's words, 'the site of wilful sexuality and bodily appetite', the very qualities that made woman responsible for the fall of man and the expulsion from paradise.⁸⁷ Scarlet and purple, the colours worn by the whore of Babylon, are the colours that signal to the outside world the girls' status as prostitutes, and their sexual availability.⁸⁸ The use of clothing to signify sexual status highlights just how flexible the construction of sexuality can be. When Margaret befriends Poll,

⁸⁶ Jeune, 1885, pp. 672-73.

⁸⁷ Poovey, 1989, p. 9.

⁸⁸ The whore of Babylon was 'arrayed in purple and scarlet colour' (Revelations, 17:4).

she makes her dye her gaudy scarlet cape a sober and innocuous brown that signals the end of prostitution and her transition into a new life. Poll throws off her old life just as easily as she throws off a coat, yet the changing of clothes could simply be an exercise in disguising the natural woman. If, as Judith Butler suggests, we are all in 'drag' in the ways in which we perform gender, Margaret is more in 'drag' than the prostitutes because she masquerades as a passionless woman through her restrained middle-class clothing. The 'drag' that the prostitute wears to signal her sexual availability is in Margaret's eyes what she really is.⁸⁹ Margaret is engaged in a struggle to control her 'natural' womanhood, and knows that if she were to 'give way' and relinquish control over herself, she too would be clothed in the colours of prostitution. The irony is that Margaret envies the free sexual expression of the girl whom she is attempting to transform into middle-class respectability.

Like Marcella, Margaret considers her work in the slums as a renunciation of her romantic and erotic desires, and it is doubtful whether she would have taken up working with the prostitutes had she not firmly resigned herself to a life of chastity. This becomes manifest when Frank proposes to her, and she tells him: 'I thought people must know without my telling that that sort of thing has nothing to do with me now. Couldn't you see I had lived that part of me' (p. 231). '[T]hat sort of thing', namely love and marriage, is, in Margaret's opinion, a finished chapter in her life. Much like Broughton's philanthropic heroine in *Not Wisely But too Well* (1867), who takes up district visiting after her affair with a married man, Margaret has pledged her love to one man only, and considers this love to be final.⁹⁰ To Margaret, love is an irrational force over which men and women have no control: 'we loved each other, and that's the end of it. I had to love him the very first minute I saw him, and he had to love me. It was all wrong; but I don't think we settle these things for ourselves' (p. 232). Here, she suggests that the universe does not work according to any moral order, that love has been forced upon her and Geoffrey, even though it is 'wrong'. While her own free will played no part in her love, Margaret has conquered her desires by force of will by renouncing her claim upon Geoffrey.

⁸⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 174.

⁹⁰ Rhoda Broughton, *Not Wisely, But too Well* (London: Richard Bentley, 1879).

There is a constant tension in the novel between a healthy restraint of desire and the morbid repression of natural and life-giving urges. When Margaret decides not to elope with Geoffrey, she does so for the benefit of Beatrice, who, Margaret understands, does love her husband, despite her inability to express her love physically. While Margaret disappears into the slums, Beatrice gradually expires from an unspecified illness that is implicitly linked to the lengthy repression of her sexual desires; the main characteristic of her illness is a slow wasting away of her physical frame. Thus, the novel attacks the ideal of female chastity by suggesting that it imperils the health and happiness of middle-class women, as well as driving their husbands into the arms of prostitutes.

It is left to Caroline, a clergyman's daughter turned prostitute, to articulate the novel's proposed solution to the problem of prostitution. Suspecting that Margaret has come to the slums to escape from her own desires, Caroline urges Margaret to abandon her work in the slums and go back to the man she has escaped from: 'you and the like of you have driven the art of true love out into the desert, and you are driving your men day by day into the highways and hedges to us' (p. 319). Caroline's solution to the problem of prostitution, the middle-class woman's embrace and enjoyment of sex, proves too radical and must be extinguished from the plot, hence, true to the conventional narrative of fallen women which dictates that the fallen woman must die, Caroline meets her death after rescuing a friend from a fire. Yet through her mode of fiery death, Caroline redeems her sinful life, effectively passing through purgatory before her death.

When Margaret returns to her aunts, Frank's sister, Rica, who searches for her own mission in life, interrogates Margaret about her motives in going to live in the slums: '[a]s you don't want to write a book or get canonised, or capture a curate, what single personal effect do you find in this life you have been leading?' (p. 334), Margaret responds by telling her 'the first effect has been a humiliating one', 'I have had the tables turned upon me' (p. 334). Her experience with the prostitutes has taught her that 'nothing so keeps these girls out of the fold of respectability as the belief that they are out of it' (p. 334), and that young middle-class girls are complicit in keeping these women out of respectability in order to retain their own ignorance and purity. While Margaret initially shied away from Frank's idea that ordinary respectable middle-class girls should come

to the slums and get involved with rescue work—‘it would be cruel’—and only considers herself suitable for such work because she herself has come close to falling, she has now come round to the idea and thinks that a little shock and humiliation such as she herself has endured in discovering her kinship to the prostitutes, would do the world some good:

The ordinary girl’s division of people into two groups, good and bad, sheep and goats, is a big part in their happiness; it makes them feel so aloof from the goats, so nice and superior, giving quite an angelic twist to them as a body. It’s humiliating, and a shock, and a good deal of a horror, to find how commonplace and alike we all are, and that we have no business at all on pedestals, looking over the heads of people, but should just step down and look into their hearts, and find ourselves there, ourselves and our little ways—primitive, and in the rough, of course, but us all the same.

Through Margaret, Iota deconstructs the idea of the angel in the house by pointing out that middle-class women’s ‘angelic’ status depends upon the division of women into two classes—‘good and bad’, ‘sheep and goats’. Margaret points out that middle-class women have been complicit in creating the enduring division of women into pure and impure as it has made them feel superior in the knowledge that they belong to the former group. Her own illicit love for Geoffrey has been essential in shaping this conception; she realises ‘the significance of pain towards perfection’, and recognizes that ‘even a lost love has its uses—its sad, tender uses’ (p. 340). Iota shows how Margaret’s perception of love has altered from the time she spent with prostitutes; she no longer sees love as something ‘shameful’ that she has to ‘keep constantly crushing out’, and has learnt that the working-classes suffer for the women’s eagerness to uphold the middle-class sexual ideology. She presents the view instead that there is potential for moral agency in the expression as well as the suppression of desire. Once Margaret has reconciled herself to a loveless life, Geoffrey is given back to her. Recognising Margaret’s activities in the slums as a sign of her moral worth, Beatrice, who has not long to live, tells Margaret that she wants her to marry

Geoffrey.

Conclusion

Although these novels may not interact directly with the scientific discourses that linked the development of altruism to romantic love, they participate in an attempt by biologists and sociologists to validate and provide evidence that romantic love is the foundation of all self-less behaviour. When Darwin saw that in the natural world ‘those that cared least for their comrades, and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers’, he provided an explanation of self-less behaviour in which it proved beneficial to the struggle for survival.⁹¹ The erosion of the distinction between egoism and altruism that followed in Herbert Spencer’s *Data of Ethics*, and the concrete link between romantic love and altruism made by Geddes and Thomson in *The Evolution of Sex*, facilitated the emergence of the delayed love plot that we find in these novels. These novels show how the idea of a connection between the sexual instinct and the altruistic urge in the biological discourses of the late nineteenth century were in fact closely linked to traditional Christian ideas about the connection between love and charity. Although biological discourses on altruism often sought to distance themselves from theology, the faith that biologists and sociologists placed in the knowing power of nature means that their conception of ‘nature’ is often analogous to the idea of a deity.

By creating heroines capable of strong romantic passions, yet also capable of learning to restrain their desires for the greater good, Ward and Iota demonstrate the victory of the will over the biological self without in any way undermining the moral influence of romantic love. Taking the trope of the slum-worker as being disappointed in love, Ward and Iota portray their lovelorn heroines with affection rather than the scorn that Nightingale reserved for such heroines. By showing that their heroines are practical and resourceful, they validate the previously mocked philanthropic heroine in love. In Marcella’s case, the discovery of her love of Aldous is directly linked to the unveiling of her true moral self; when she learns to distinguish between true passion that she now holds for Aldous and the false feelings she held for Wharton (false because

⁹¹ Darwin, 2004, p. 129.

Wharton's social conscience, which attracted her in the first place, is revealed to be a sham), she develops 'a true thirst for social good' (p. 554). Margaret's love, too, evolves from a selfish desire from which she tries to hide, to a wider love that she is no longer afraid of acknowledging.

The slums act as a kind of purgatory through which the heroines must pass before they are ready to enter into the heaven of romantic love. Both Marcella and Margaret are sexual transgressors: Marcella has betrayed her fiancé by kissing another man, and Margaret's transgression lies in her love for a married man, and they must expiate their sins before they are allowed a happy ending. In the slums they encounter the greatest suffering and worst sinners, which they must try to alleviate. Marcella and Margaret emerge from their experiences wiser, and more sympathetic than when they started out. They learn, through their immersion in misery, both their own and others', that happiness cannot be found in isolation. As a reward, they are reunited with the lovers they lost, and their love is deeper, truer because of their experiences.

Neither of the heroines abandon their philanthropic work when they return to their lovers: Marcella continues her work for the poor as Lady Maxwell, alongside her cabinet minister husband in the sequel *Sir George Tressady* (1896); and Margaret, we are made to understand, will become a powerful force in society once she is married to Geoffrey who is now an up and coming member of parliament. Such conclusions hope to avoid the philanthropic heroine's absorption back into the domestic sphere after her marriage. An oft-quoted example of this is *Middlemarch*'s philanthropically minded Dorothea Brooke, whose own ambitions are put aside to assist the political career of her husband.⁹² *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance* avoid this pitfall for their heroines by casting their reunion with their lovers as the fertile ground for new social endeavours. However, only Ward's heroine lives up to this promise as we follow her social and political work after her marriage in *Sir George Tressady* (1896). The story of Iota's heroine and her social enterprise ends with both the assurance of future greater social work and marriage to Geoffrey Hyde, but whether these things actually will happen is left to the reader's imagination.

⁹² Elliott, 2002, pp. 189-215.

Chapter 2.

The Woman Question and the Labour Question: The Sexual Politics of Industrial Reform in Margaret Harkness's *A City Girl* and *In Darkest London* and Mrs Humphry Ward's *Sir George Tressady*.

In chapter one I explored the connection between sexual love and the development of the altruistic urges that lay behind women's philanthropic activities in the slums. I explained how Ward and Iota used romance plots to validate women's sexual desires by connecting them to altruistic activities. In Chapter 2, I turn towards middle-class women's involvement in the industrial aspects of the social reform movement, and I examine the manner in which two female novelists with vastly different political allegiances interpreted the role of women's influence in the campaign for stricter factory legislation that took place during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Margaret Harkness's *In Darkest London* (1889) and Mrs Humphry Ward's *Sir George Tressady* (1896) both consider the limited power of the female social reformer to transform the male dominated anarchic and competitive capitalist system into a strictly regulated system that prohibited the exploitation of workers.¹ These novels demonstrate the ways in which Ward and Harkness, despite their considerable political differences, both reacted against the idea of free market capitalism, as it took advantage of the weakest members of the sexes.

Ward and Harkness both took an interest in the rights of workers to fair wages and decent working conditions. Harkness, a cousin of Beatrice Webb, joined the Social Democratic Federation and played an active role in the London Dock strike in 1889, where she appealed to Cardinal Manning to intervene on behalf of the workers.² Ward's involvement in the labour movement was less direct and consisted of raising awareness of the issue through her novels and writing an emotional plea in the preface to Beatrice Webb's *The Case for The Factory Acts* (1901).³ Ward and Harkness differ markedly in their outlook upon the future of the working-classes: Harkness sees little hope for a working-class

¹ Margaret Harkness, *In Darkest London* (Black Apollo Press, 2009), Mrs Humphry Ward, *Sir George Tressady* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1896).

² John Lucas, 'Harkness, Margaret Elise (1854–1923)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2005

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56894>, accessed 16 Dec 2011]

³ Beatrice Webb, *The Case for the Factory Acts* (London: Grant Richards, 1902).

that is fighting what she presents as an insurmountable enemy, while Ward displays her optimism for positive changes through protective legislation. They do, however, present similar anxieties about women's power, their rightful position in society, and women's work, which arose in the context of the labour movement of the late nineteenth century.

Here, as in the novels discussed in Chapter 1, much of the plot revolves around the sexual and romantic life of the heroines. But if *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance* viewed sexual relations between men and women as an aid to women's moral agency, and viewed female altruism as being dependent upon sexual feeling, *In Darkest London* and *Sir George Tressady* explore the difficulties that a sexual construction of moral influence presents. In *Sir George Tressady*, Marcella returns in her married state as Lady Maxwell. Still determined to help the poor, she has assisted her husband, now a powerful cabinet minister, in researching and drafting a factory bill that restricts the legal hours of labour. The opposition towards the bill is strong in the Liberal Party, and as Marcella tries to influence Sir George, a rising figure in the liberal party, she solicits his admiration, and inadvertently becomes embroiled in a sexual and political scandal. Harkness's *In Darkest London* shows the problems that a young female factory owner faces in taking on the factory foreman. When Ruth Weldon announces her intent to improve conditions for the workers, Mr. Pember, the factory foreman, begins a campaign of sexual intimidation that eventually induces her to give up the factory and flee to the safety of marriage to a Salvation Army captain. What unites these plots is that they are both narratives in which female reformers who attempt to intervene in the industrial system are placed in a sexually compromising position which forces their retreat from the arena of industrial reform.

As several critics have pointed out, the political novels of the mid-nineteenth century frequently expressed class or industrial conflicts as sexual or romantic encounters. Yeazell has suggested that the courtship elements of 'condition of England' novels such as *Sybil* (1845) and *Mary Barton* (1848) allow for the substitution of a 'politically dangerous man' for a 'sexually unaggressive young woman', and points out that 'social and political anxieties

are contained—and eased—in the narrative of such courtship’.⁴ Instead of offering a resolution, the courtship elements in *In Darkest London* and *Sir George Tressady* offer only further complications by raising questions about the female social reformer’s vulnerability to sexual advances from the men whose moral compass she seeks to transform. By using heroines who do not wish to marry the men they seek to reform (Marcella is happily married already, and Ruth wants to marry a Salvation Army Captain rather than the factory foreman) Ward and Harkness expose the limits and dangers of the idea that women can gain political power through their sexual relationships with men. In doing so, they expose the fact that female influence was constructed in a manner that makes women particularly vulnerable to sexual advances.

The question is then why such concerns should specifically air themselves in novels concerning labour conditions of the late nineteenth century, when earlier industrial novels and novels devoted to the phenomenon of ‘slumming’ saw possibilities rather than threats in the sexual construction of morality? The reason for this is that *In Darkest London* and *Sir George Tressady* were addressing a different set of issues from those discussed in *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance*. *Marcella* and *Children of Circumstance* focused on middle and upper-class women’s ability to challenge the social system through invention on the level of the individual; both novels subscribe to the idea that personal contact with the poor is the key to lasting social reform. As such, these novels showed an unwavering optimism in the power of the female social reformer.

In Darkest London and *Sir George Tressady*, however, are addressing an arguably more complex issue when they wrestle with the structures of industrial capitalism and explore how far these structures will bend under pressure from female reformers. When the female reformers take on the subject of industrial capitalism and factory legislation, concerns arise over women’s ability to intervene in the economic structures in which they officially have no say as disenfranchised members of society. In a world where women have no vote, intervention, novels such as *North and South* tell us, can most effectively occur

⁴ Yeazell, p. 127.

through women's use of their sexual power over men.⁵ But to assume that this type of intervention is effective and unproblematic is to leave the status quo unchallenged; it means assuming that women do not need greater official power because they already possess the means to gain power through their relationships with men. By challenging the idea that women's most direct route to authority is through their relationships with men, as *In Darkest London* does, and by exploring the complications and hazards that such an assumption brings, as Ward does in *Sir George Tressady*, these novels explore the sexual construction of moral influence.

In this chapter I will argue that plots which placed female reformers in sexually compromising positions were the result of anxieties about middle-class women's increasing claims upon the public sphere as they moved away from amateur philanthropy and sought instead to assert themselves as professionals. These novels are both a call for women's greater access to the public sphere and an expression of fear about such a prospect. As discussed in Chapter 1, the polarized view of female sexuality, in which working-class women were viewed as sexually lascivious, and middle-class women as being largely chaste, depended upon middle-class women's seclusion from and working-class women's access to, the public sphere. Throughout the nineteenth-century, discourses that argued for the necessity of factory legislation relied upon narratives that portrayed working-women as being in either sexual or moral peril—the two were to some extent interchangeable.

As Patricia Johnson has explained, such rhetoric was freely employed to prohibit women's labour in the mines in the 1840s, thus reducing female competition in the labour market.⁶ In the 'First Report of the Commissioners on Mines', one of the commissioners described '[t]he chain, passing high up between the legs of these girls' which 'had worn large holes in their trousers', and emphatically pronounced that 'any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work—No brothel can beat it'.⁷ The workmen interviewed claimed 'that sex in the coal seams was a frequent

⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Patricia E. Johnson, *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), pp. 19-26.

⁷ *Children's Employment Commission: First Report of the Commissioners, Mines* (London: William Clowes and sons, 1842), p. 24.

occurrence and that the women lacked domestic training'.⁸ The scandalous details and the accompanying illustrations were widely reprinted in the popular press, gaining public support for the prohibition of female labour in the mines. The result of the furore was the 1842 Mines and Collieries Bill, which prohibited women from working in the mines. Not only were these descriptions vital to secure public support for the prohibitive Acts, they also established a link between women's work and their (alleged) sexual immorality which was to dog attempts at female professionalisation for years to come. The factory girl was labelled as sexually corrupt when she ventured out from her prescribed sphere and aspired (practically if not theoretically) towards equality with men.

When the campaign for stricter factory legislation was revived in the late nineteenth century, it took protective legislation for women as its starting point, and by doing so supported the notion of biological differences of sex, citing women as vulnerable, physically delicate, and the potential mothers and incubators for a new generation. In her study of the dangerous trades in the late nineteenth century, Carolyn Malone has classified the '[s]ensational stories about women's work' that emerged to highlight the dangers that women encountered in certain trades as 'narratives of sexual danger'. Such narratives perpetuated 'the idea that women who crossed prescribed social boundaries placed themselves at risk; in this case, they faced bodily danger'.⁹ When female reformers took up the campaign for stricter factory legislation in the late nineteenth century, they were moving away from amateur philanthropy and were taking their place in the public sphere, and anxieties about women's entrance into the public, industrial, and political sphere emerge in these novels. Middle-class women's increased presence in the public sphere, therefore, was fraught with concerns about their sexual integrity.

When Ward and Harkness introduced the sexual threat in their novels, they were participating in a culture that sought to discourage women from venturing into the public sphere by persuading them that their chastity would be called into question. By transferring the sexual threat from factory girls to the middle and upper-class women who were attempting to improve conditions in the

⁸ Johnson, p. 20.

⁹ Carolyn Malone, *Women's Bodies and Dangerous Trades in England, 1880-1914* (Bury St. Edmonds: Royal Historical Society, 2003), p. 9.

factory, they were drawing parallels between working-class women's entrance into the public sphere through the labour market and middle-class women's entrance to the public sphere through philanthropic and social work. The question is whether these two novelists were attempting to discourage women from entering the public sphere or whether they were exposing the manner in which men in power used the threat of exposure to force women to retreat from the public sphere.

In order to place these novels in their historical context, I begin by outlining the political background against which these novels were written and address the debate in which they took part. I explain how the call for stricter factory legislation arose owing to concerns about female workers, and then show female reformers sought increasing professional recognition because of a shift towards legislative rather sympathetic measure in social reform. After this I turn to a detailed analysis of the archetypal narratives in the novels.

Women and Work

As labour historians have noted, women's work was a contentious issue throughout the nineteenth century. Because of the close relationship between female economic independence and women's sexual freedom, women's work was linked to the breakdown of the familial unit and the end of male hegemony. Susan Zlotnick has explained that 'industrial labor became associated with a radical reversal of "natural" gender roles, a brave new world characterized by female employment and male unemployment'.¹⁰ In *The First Industrial Woman* Deborah Valenze outlines the complex mixture of gender ideology and free-market capitalism that led to women's work becoming synonymous with unskilled and badly paid labour that was injurious to women's health and that reduced wages for working men.¹¹ To reformers such as Josephine Butler, paid employment was the route to female independence, though, on the other hand,

¹⁰ Susan Zlotnick, *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 7.

¹¹ 'Once a widespread employment thoroughly identified with women, spinning became mechanized; housed in factories; and managed, supervised, and carried out largely by men in the early industrial period. Though women workers found jobs operating large mules in factories during the 1820s and 1830s, for the most part, they obtained work on the lowest rungs of the employment ladder', Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 183.

female labour was often badly paid.¹² Late nineteenth-century female reformers therefore had a complex relationship to female labour and to the capitalist system. Rosemarie Feurer has pointed out that the debate regarding protective legislation ‘signaled a division in the women’s movement between equal rights and socio-feminist camps’.¹³ Furthermore, this debate separates female reformers into those who saw the prospect of financial independence in the employment opportunities capitalism offered, and those who viewed capitalism as the patriarchal means for exploiting an inherent womanly weakness.

The inquiry into the sweated trades in 1888 revived a national concern about the conditions under which workers, and particularly women workers, were forced to earn a living. The first report on sweated labour published by the Royal Commission in 1888, a 1050 page long document, confirmed ‘the existence of great evils’ in the sweated trades of London.¹⁴ Although sweated labour was generally associated with ‘outwork’, work undertaken in the worker’s own home rather than a factory or workshop, according to the Royal Commission’s definition of sweated labour, factories and workshops also housed sweated workers.¹⁵ ‘Sweating’ was defined by the Select Committee in 1890 as work characterised by ‘unduly low rate of wages’, ‘[e]xcessive hours of labour’, and ‘[t]he insanitary state of the houses in which the work is carried out’.¹⁶ According to these criteria a large part of the working-class population fell under this description, but it was the female working population that captured the sympathetic imagination of the public.

Two years after the publication of the report on sweated labour, Mary Jeune, a district visitor and a frequent voice on social questions, commented upon

¹² Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminism* (London: Virago, 1994), pp. 21, 84. Butler suggested that women were drawn to prostitution because they had so few opportunities in the labour market, see *Women’s Work and Woman’s Culture: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1869), p. xviii.

¹³ Feurer, p. 234.

¹⁴ *First Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System; Together With the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: Hansard, 1888), p. 2.

¹⁵ Blackburn points out that Webb’s interpretation of sweating in her evidence before the Select Committee on the Sweating System ‘overlooked the terrible conditions at Bryant and May’s match factory, which had occasioned the famous 1888 strike, and the sweating in London’s jam, pickle, and confectionary establishments’. Sheila C. Blackburn, “‘Princesses and Sweated-Wage Slaves Go Well Together’: Images of British Sweated Workers, 1843-1914”, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 61 (2002), 24-44 (p. 36).

¹⁶ *Fifth Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords; Together with an Appendix and the Proceedings of the Committee* (London: Hansard, 1890), p. cxxxv.

the significance of the report, and recalled that '[w]hat intensified the evil was the fact which came out in the clearest way, that the class which perhaps suffers most from its effects is the unskilled working woman of London and our big towns'.¹⁷ It is more likely that Jeune is remembering the furore surrounding the report and the impression it formed on the public imagination rather than the details of the actual report itself; for, as Sheila C. Blackburn points out, Lord Dunraven, the chairman of the inquiry, was 'dismayed [...] when many of the working-class witnesses seemed neither abject nor forlorn', and 'insisted that the self-esteem of the sweated had led them to borrow clothes so as "to present a favourable appearance"'.¹⁸ Jeune's article was populated by examples of forlorn and destitute women who shouldered the economic burden of supporting their families in the absence—or failure—of male bread-winners: she described with pathos '[t]he mother struggling hour by hour for her children's food, the wife to gain the commonest necessities of life for her dying husband, the sister endeavouring to keep the home together for the little orphans'. The women that Jeune portrayed were not simply 'women': they were mothers, wives, and sisters. As such, they were defined by their roles in relation to their position in the family. The unspoken implication of Jeune's article was that women's primary role as carers placed them at a distinctive disadvantage in the labour market. Working not for themselves, but to support family members, they would accept work at any wages. Women, Jeune argued, were at a distinct disadvantage in the labour market 'only because they were women', with all which that entailed. Jeune was either buying into or propagating herself a discourse of female vulnerability that dominated the debate surrounding female factory legislation and the role of women in the industrial world.¹⁹

The campaign for stricter factory legislation, which took protective legislation for women as its starting point, supported the biological differences of sex. Evelyn March-Phillipps, a journalist and art historian, claimed that the delicate health of women required specific factory Acts aimed at protecting women:

¹⁷ Mary Jeune, 'Competition and Co-Operation Among Women', *English Illustrated Magazine*, 76 (1890), 293-304 (p. 293).

¹⁸ Blackburn, 2002, p. 33.

¹⁹ Jeune, 1890, p. 293.

[T]he factory Acts have always recognised a distinction between men and women, and the reports to the labour commission on whitelead industry, which is the point now under consideration sufficiently establish the fact that women and girls are more sensitive than men to lead poisoning, some indeed suffering so acutely that they die within two of three days of being attacked.

Furthermore, March-Philipps argued that women who worked in the unregulated small laundries had been forced into their position by good-for-nothing husbands: 'to find a respectable married woman taking in the trade is almost always proof that a husband, from drink or other causes, does not do his duty by the home'.²⁰ The larger significance of these women's endorsement of protective legislation was that it centred upon a belief in the idea that free-market capitalism was a system that endangered women as it allowed employers to take advantage of weaker members of society. By favouring protective legislation, these women were partaking in a feminist tradition that views free-market capitalism as being inherently harmful to women.

Far from all female reformers were in favour of factory legislation that applied only to women. Vocal opposition to the factory acts came from Jessie Boucherett, the founder of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, and her followers. Boucherett's opposition was based on the idea that working women had little say in the creation of the factory Acts, and on the notion that regulating women's work would hinder women's opportunities in the labour market: 'If working women had been more consulted at present in force before the passing of the Factory and Workshops Act at present in force, it would have been different from what it is now'.²¹ These women were in favour of free market capitalism, for they viewed capitalism as a system that gave women the chance to earn their own living and which therefore assisted female independence.

²⁰ Evelyn March-Phillipps, 'The Factory Bill: as it Affects Women', *Fortnightly Review*, 55 (1894), 738-748 (pp. 742, 740). See also March-Phillipps, 'Factory Legislation for Women', *Fortnightly Review*, 57 (1895), 733-744.

²¹ Jessie Boucherett and Helen Blackburn, *The Condition of Working Women and the Factory Acts* (London: Elliott Stock, 1896), p. 51.

Opponents of factory legislation recognised that the proposal of stricter legislation for women was a symptom of the idealisation of women that much of the social reform system rested upon. To Ada Heather-Bigg, who deplored factory legislation that applied to women especially, the issue of factory legislation sprang from anxieties about female workers and about the true sphere of woman and what kind of work was suitable for women.

To numbers of people there is something eminently distasteful in the idea of a woman working for wages at all. They cannot but deem that she divests herself of her noblest attributes by descending into the arena of toil with men, and they incessantly hanker in their heart of hearts after a blissful Utopia, where a woman's share in the world's industry is limited to that small fraction of it which can be carried on in the safe shelter of the home.

As a member of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, Heather-Bigg conducted her own investigation into the nail and chain-making trade for women, inspecting several workshops: '[t]he fires roar, the hammers clink, the sparks fly, and men and women toil together at the anvil. No wonder that at first the spectacle is a rude shock to the idealiser of woman'. Yet while criticising the idealisation of women, Heather-Bigg is careful to point out that the female workers she inspected were 'robust and strong, without being in the least bit masculine'.²²

Middle-class Women and Industrial Reform

Writing in 1897, Margaret Irwin, one of the four female assistant commissioners appointed to investigate the conditions of women's work, recognised a recent ideological shift among the women's labour movement towards favouring a labour market regulated by act of parliament rather than trade unions. Irwin attributed this shift to the rise of scientific methods of inquiry into the causes of poverty that replaced charitable efforts to relieve poverty. 'One is glad to note', Irwin wrote, 'that the new methods of dealing with these and similar evils in our social and industrial worlds are based more on economics than "sentiment"'.

²² Ada Heather-Bigg, 'Female Labour in the Nail Trade', *Fortnightly Review*, 39 (1886), 829-838 (pp. 829, 832, 833).

Consequently, Irwin noted, ‘the marked characteristic of the women’s labour movement to-day is the increasing interest shown in Factory Acts, Truck Acts, Shop Hours Acts, and similar enactments’.²³

Irwin was observing a change in the way that women approached the labour question, in which they moved away from idealistic solutions and instead focused on the power of government to regulate industrial conditions. One of those who changed their position according to this pattern was trade unionist Clementina Black. In 1887, Black expressed her reservations about factory legislation in ‘Caveat Emptor’ and hoped instead that the growing tide of ‘human feeling’ and ‘conscience’ would protect the workers. ‘[S]urely’, Black asked, ‘it is not very Utopian to hope that sympathy may go on developing side by side with the growing desire for justice to all men until it forms an effective check on the savage instinct to take as much as we can?’.²⁴ The solution that Black proposed was for middle-class consumers to deal only with firms who could guarantee their workers decent wages and good conditions. In proposing this solution, Black was placing an inordinate amount of power in the hands of the female consumer who could, by buying right, help to solve the problem of labour; it lay within the scope of ordinary middle-class ladies to topple the savage laws of supply and demand by becoming conscientious and sympathetic consumers. She was thus applying the tenets of character reform to the great industrial problems of the day. By 1891 she had modified her view considerably. In ‘The Coming Factory Acts’ Black confessed to her earlier scepticism towards the factory legislation and her previous youthful naivety: ‘I set out with a prejudice about “State Interference”, and should have been quite ready, at sixteen or seventeen to read a paper at a debating society upon the pernicious character of the Factory Act’. Her new perspective, however, was that ‘the material as well as the moral welfare of this country demands better conditions of life’ and that ‘legislative regulations have in fact helped’.²⁵

Legislative regulations, it was widely acknowledged, were effective only to the extent that they were reinforced, and it was for this purpose that Factory Inspectors were employed to inspect factories and prosecute those who did not

²³ Margaret Irwin, ‘The Problem of Home Work’, *Westminster Review*, 148 (1897), 541-557 (pp. 541, 542).

²⁴ Clementina Black, ‘Caveat Emptor’, *Longman’s Magazine*, 10 (1887), 409-420 (pp. 411-412).

²⁵ Black, ‘The Coming Factory Acts’, *Contemporary Review*, 59 (1891), 710-717 (p. 710).

abide by the current regulations. Since the 1870s, women had been campaigning to get female inspectors appointed on the grounds that women workers would more easily share their complaints with a fellow woman. In 1879, Alexander Redgrave, the chief factory inspector, voiced his opposition against the proposed appointment of female inspectors on the grounds of feminine delicacy, '[l]ooking at what is required at the hands of an inspector, I fail to see advantages likely to arise from her ministrations in a factory [...] so opposite to the sphere of her good work in the hospital, the school, or the home'.²⁶ Redgrave argued that 'the general and multifarious duties of an inspector of factories would really be incompatible with the gentle and home-loving character of a woman'.²⁷ To Redgrave, women's activities in the factory, whether they were there as inspectors or operatives, meant that they strayed too far from the nurturing duties associated with the domestic sphere.

In 1894, Karl Pearson announced in his article upon 'Woman and Labour' that '[t]here has never been a Labour Question without a Woman's Question also. The rape of Lucretia and the death of Virginia are attached in legend not without significance to far-reaching democratic changes'.²⁸ In the story of Lucretia's rape, suicide, and its consequences: '[t]he King is exiled, the monarchy ended; the Republic begins with the election of two consuls', and in the story of Virginia's death at the hands of her father to save her honour, women are defiled by the aristocracy, and the actions which avenge such deeds transform society.²⁹ It is particularly interesting that in an article on the connections between the women's movement and the labour movement, Pearson recognised that narratives of sexual abuse and sexual threat serve to articulate wider political struggles between the lower and upper-classes. Pearson does not fully explain his allusion to these tales of attacks upon women's chastity; he never elaborates the connection between rape and 'far-reaching democratic changes'. This becomes clear only later in the article where Pearson expresses his concerns that the

²⁶ Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 92.

²⁷ Helen Jones, 'Women Health Workers: The Case of the First Factory Inspectors in Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, 1 (1988), 165-188 (p. 170).

²⁸ Pearson, 1894, p. 563.

²⁹ Sandra L. Joshel, 'The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia', in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* ed. Amy Richlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 112-130 (p. 116).

women's movement's bid for equality will remove them from the chivalric protection of men.

They have contented themselves with a claim for equality of opportunity, without seeing its futility even if granted. They have not recognised that the very formulation of this claim has hastened the decay of what protection existed in the few remnants of medieval chivalry.

While Pearson was in favour of women gaining the vote, he was less enthusiastic about the prospect of female employment. The article elaborates Pearson's concerns that the women's movement would lead women to abandon their duties as wives and mothers, roles that their reproductive biology had assigned them, and instead lead them into waged labour. His resistance towards women entering the labour market was based on his view of every woman as a potential mother; concerned about the damage that women would do to their reproductive system, he feared that a nation of women workers would bring forth a 'degenerate' race, and he hoped that women would instead aim to preserve their strength for their proper duty: motherhood.³⁰

By linking the maternal instinct to the sexual instinct and describing members of the women's movement as 'sexless', Pearson equated the individualistic women's movement with women who had no desire to be mothers and he therefore saw them as lacking the sexual instinct. It is here that the relevance of the classical rape narratives becomes apparent. It can be argued that rape/seduction is a way of forcing sexuality and motherhood upon independent, 'sexless' women who were reluctant to take up positions as wives and mothers, and who would rather enjoy independent positions as workers and voters. The withdrawal of chivalry, the rape of Lucretia and the bargaining of Virginia's sexuality, becomes a punishment for women's bid for equality and a method of relegating women to her true sphere, instead of being the catalyst for a democratic revolution. There is ample evidence to support this theory in Barbara Leah Harman's study of female political activism in the Victorian novel, where she notes that the idea of women entering the public realm was 'associated with

³⁰ Pearson, 1894, pp. 565, 569.

indecorous self-display, illicit sexuality and infidelity, and the destruction of the family'.³¹

'Woman and Labour' gained a favourable response from the women's labour movement, it was partly reproduced in the *Woman's Signal*, the women's trade union journal, which shows the extent to which the movement ostensibly subscribed to ideas about gender differences. When Beatrice Webb was interviewed in the *Woman's Signal* that same year and was asked, in an article entitled 'The Labour Commission', 'do you not think that there will be some trades in which a woman's physical weakness will always put her at a disadvantage', Webb answered: 'it is best for women to devote themselves to the work they are fitted to do. I agree with Karl Pearson's article on "Women and Labour" in the June number of the *Fortnightly*. Tell readers of THE WOMAN'S SIGNAL to study it'.³²

'The Labour Commission' is particularly significant because it offers a good example of the gender roles with which female reformers were expected to make themselves compliant, yet it also shows their knowledge of such ideologies at work and the skill by which they were able to manipulate them. In order to enter the debate, women were compelled to assert their femininity and to insist that their authority came from their 'womanliness' as distinct from an aspiration to equality with men. The article begins by pointing out Webb's deference to male authority:

It is not very long ago since I read a remark of Mrs. Sidney Webb's to the effect that she usually felt in the presence of a man that he was in some way her superior. This attitude of diffidence to masculine wisdom was exceedingly magnanimous and graceful in a lady of Mrs Webb's ability. At length, however, her accurate knowledge has forced her into the position of chief critic of the Royal Commission on Labour, presided over by his Grace the Duke of Devonshire and composed exclusively of men.³³

³¹ Harman, 1998, p. 6.

³² 'The Labour Commission', *The Woman's Signal*, 28 (1894), 17-18 (p. 18).

³³ 'The Labour Commission', p. 17.

The phrasing of Webb's conception of male superiority, the notion that men are 'in some way[s] her superior' allows for a wealth of omissions. Men are not superior in every way, they are superior 'in some ways' and regarding the labour question, Webb's knowledge is superior. The interviewer, the 'I' of the quotation above, regards this deference as 'magnanimous' meaning that she recognises that Webb is not an inferior to men, in fact, Webb's concession appears almost as an act of female chivalry towards the male ego. Webb is portrayed as someone who has been 'forced [...] into' her position, as someone who unwillingly, but dutifully takes upon herself the job of criticising an all-male committee, knowing that, in this case, her knowledge is superior. Perhaps sensing a tone of sarcasm in the author's voice is reading too much into such a statement, yet the hyperbolic assertion that Webb has been 'forced' by her own 'accurate knowledge' to criticise a commission 'composed exclusively of men' suggests that the author is perfectly capable of reading Webb's deference to men as a clever guise.

The anonymous author of 'The Labour Commission' then goes on to suggest that portrayals of influential women must follow a certain formula which asserts the womanliness of the person portrayed: '[o]ne gets almost tired of saying that the women who are making their impress upon the thought of the day are "womanly"; of course they are, and that is the great secret of their success. I repeat the formula—Mrs. Sidney Webb is very womanly'. There is here a certain feigned fatigue, or boredom, on the part of the author, which suggests that she is weary of always having to assert the femininity of the successful women interviewed for the journal. Not only does the author make this point once, she makes it twice as though she is placating a readership intent on this formula while at the same time drawing attention to this formula as repetitive. Although the quotation shows an awareness of the importance of appearing 'womanly', the interviewer suggests that this may merely be a pose that women use to gain power over men, 'it would be wrong, though, to convey the idea that Mrs. Webb lacks force of character. But there is a winsomeness about her which might put her opponent off his guard'. The 'womanly' qualities required of powerful women serve not only to disarm, but also to fool the opponent into complacency:

the interviewer sees Webb's opponent as a man whom she can seduce with her 'deep, dark eyes', 'very winning smile', and her 'soft, clear voice'.³⁴

After having established Webb's belief in the superiority of men, and Webb's own womanly charms, Webb is given free reign to criticise the Royal Commission of Labour. Webb goes on to criticise the men of the Royal Commission: 'they had not a chairman who knew anything about labour questions; a most charming and excellent man, but not fitted for the office'. The Lady Commissioners involved were sent on an 'absurd and impossible commission' by the men, which they 'wisely' ignored and instead 'applied themselves to collecting information upon the subjects which each thought most important'.³⁵ The female commissioners have thus shaken off their incompetent male superiors and performed their duties under their own leadership. The formula of women's power laid out in the article consists of first asserting the subject's concession to male superiority, then establishing the womanliness and beauty of the subject, and finally presenting the subject's worthier handling of the situation. Thus, Webb's deference to male superiority, and perhaps even her deference to the wisdom of Pearson, may be merely an outward pose that allows her to criticise the male establishment.

Webb's readiness to use her womanly charms presents a contrast to her earlier anxieties about placing herself in such a position, yet perhaps such anxieties sprang from the approbation of women for exercising such behaviour. A young Webb documented the older female reformers' objections to the use of sexual power in her journal:

Octavia Hill objected to my being asked to preside at a meeting because I tried to float myself and my work through my personal influence with men: and the same impression had reached Florence Nightingale [...] And this is the crown I have won. *There is always some foundation for a deeply graven impression.*³⁶

³⁴ 'The Labour Commission', p. 18.

³⁵ 'The Labour Commission', p. 18.

³⁶ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Volume 1, 1873-1892: Glitter Around and Darkness Within*, ed. by Norman and Jean Mackenzie (London: Virago, 1982), p. 352.

Webb's use of italics here suggests her own concern that she was indeed guilty of using 'personal influence', a tactic that the older female reformers clearly disapproved of. If women's influence with men depended upon stirring the sexual instincts of men, then women who were politically powerful could be branded flirts. The language of sexual difference provides women with strategies to covertly assert their own power—a smokescreen under which they can work without male intrusion or scrutiny. Yet, by employing this seductive technique, women were playing a dangerous game, as we shall see further on in this chapter, since they had to put themselves forward for the (sexual) admiration of men in order to gain power. The male progression from mere admiration to sexual advances meant that men could beat women at their own game; by subjecting women to sexual advances, women were forced to retreat in order to maintain their dignity.

Women under Capitalism in Margaret Harkness's *A City Girl* and *In Darkest London*

In this section I examine the position of women under capitalism as depicted in Harkness's novels *A City Girl* and *In Darkest London*. I argue that Harkness uses the seduction plot and draws on Gothic conventions to articulate the position of women in a capitalist society. Before Harkness began writing novels, she trained briefly as a nurse, but found herself cut off from her family and her allowance when she ended her training prematurely.³⁷ Driven by financial necessity as well as a strong social conscience, she turned instead towards writing. Exactly what motivated her to end her training is not known, but it was during this period that Harkness became more interested in social questions. As the cousin of Beatrice Webb, she moved in similar circles and befriended Eleanor Marx. She joined the Social Democratic Federation founded by H. M. Hyndman, but towards the end of the 1880s she became increasingly disenchanted with the movement. Beatrice Webb's diary entry for 25th May, 1888 records Harkness as a traitor to the socialist cause and a 'false friend' to Webb herself.³⁸

³⁷ Lynne Hapgood, 'Is this Friendship?: Eleanor Marx, Margaret Harkness and the Idea of a Socialist Community' in *Eleanor Marx (1855-1898): Life, Work, Contacts*, ed. by John Stokes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 130.

³⁸ Mackenzie, p. 251.

In 1899 Harkness 'bid good-bye to the Labour Movement' in her pamphlet on reforming the banking system.³⁹ The most overlooked piece of her oeuvre, *Imperial Credit* presents Harkness as a disillusioned social reformer, disheartened by the frequent quarrels of the socialist movement: '[m]y birth, sex, and temperament have prevented me from coming forward openly amongst those who are fighting in the labor ranks, and to these things I attribute my being misunderstood by the people who call themselves socialists'.⁴⁰ It is particularly significant that this statement should appear in the pamphlet where Harkness bows out of the labour movement. Unfortunately, she does not elucidate this comment any further, yet it is clear that she feels unable to participate in the socialist movement because of her status as a middle-class woman. According to Harkness, women in the labour movement are either prevented from 'coming forward', or are 'misunderstood' when they do so. Lynne Hapgood has suggested that Harkness's writing gives a 'cumulative sense of a woman constrained by her need to work and by her small means, yet unable to find a foothold in the desired socialist community which would transform class and economic relations'.⁴¹ What we find in the above statement from *Imperial Credit* and in the rest of Harkness's oeuvre, in addition to this, is a keen perception of women as a separate social class.

Harkness, as Gerd Bjørhovde has pointed out, was particularly interested in the plight of working women and understood that women were often excluded from ideas about what constitutes the labouring classes. Bjørhovde places Harkness's novels in the new tradition of naturalism that was emerging in the late nineteenth century, an observation that she bases on her analysis of *A City Girl*.⁴² Sally Ledger also affirms Harkness's debt to naturalism and points out that in critical readings 'Harkness has been found to fall short both as a feminist and as a socialist'. Ledger finds the cause for these inadequacies in Harkness's stylistic allegiance to 'a literary naturalism which did not offer much in the way of

³⁹ Harkness published under the name John Law. John Law, *Imperial Credit* (Adelaide: Vardon and Pritchard, 1899), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Law, 1899, p. 3

⁴¹ Hapgood, pp. 134-35.

⁴² Gerd Bjørhovde, *Rebellious Structures: Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel, 1880-1900* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987), pp. 61-62.

affirmation for either of these political movements'.⁴³ I argue that Harkness distanced herself from naturalism and realism after Engels's complaint that *A City Girl* was not realistic enough, and instead turned towards archetypal narratives drawn from gothic and melodramatic conventions in order to articulate the position of women in the labour market. Rather than viewing *A City Girl* as a naturalist novel, we gain additional insight into the political and sexual dynamic of this novel by viewing it in terms of working-class melodrama in which innocent working-class maidens are seduced by villainous aristocrats.⁴⁴

In an 1888 letter to Harkness that is famous among critics of the realist novel, Engels argues that by portraying the working-class characters of her novel *A City Girl* as passive, and powerless to improve their own situation, she misrepresents the working classes. Engels wrote:

In *City Girl*, the working class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even showing [making] any attempt at striving to help itself ... Now if this was a correct description about 1800 or 1810, in the days of Saint-Simon and Robert Owen, it cannot appear so in 1887 to a man who for nearly fifty years has had the honour of sharing in most of the fights of the militant proletariat.⁴⁵

Bjørhovde detects 'an element of sexism' in this letter, and notes that 'Marxist criteria tended to be formulated in such a way that they exclude women', pointing out that Nelly, like many other women, 'does not work in a factory, the kind of industrial environment generally considered the typical setting for the growth of working-class militancy and solidarity'.⁴⁶ Ledger has also noted Engels's failure to understand the gender perspective of the novel; by his own unintentional admission Engels is criticising the novel from a male perspective: the examples

⁴³ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 50.

⁴⁴ See Anna Clark, 'The Politics of Seduction in English Popular Culture, 1748-1848' in *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. by Jean Radford (London: Routledge, 1986), 47-70, Martha Vicinus, ' "Helpless and Unfriended": Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama', *New Literary History*, 13 (1981), 127-143.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Engels, Letter to Margaret Harkness, 1888, in *An Introduction to European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism*, ed. by Martin Travers, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), pp. 122-124.

⁴⁶ Bjørhovde, pp. 77-78.

of people who, in the past, have tried to improve the situation for the working-classes are all male, hence he fails to observe that the novel, according to its title, depicts the situation of city girls and not the militant proletariat.⁴⁷

When Engels failed to view the novel as realistic because it did not live up to his expectations, he was showing his lack of knowledge about how the situation of female unskilled labourers differed from that of the masculine militant proletariat. Unlike Engels, a reviewer for the *Women's Penny Paper* felt that the work was wholly realistic '[t]here can be no question of exaggeration or of the novelist's license to adorn a tale, for every scene, every character, almost every conversation, bears the impress of coming straight from life'.⁴⁸ The abject condition of the unskilled workers portrayed in the novel, was, in this reviewer's eyes, an accurate depiction of the lives of these workers in reality. The difference of opinion between these two reviewers of what makes a novel realistic, depends upon the gender of the reviewer.

Despite recognising that the whole plot revolved around Nelly's seduction by Arthur Grant, Engels failed to recognise the ideological significance of the seduction plot. In fiction aimed at the working classes, seduction plots, as Anna Clark has pointed out, function as a 'political metaphor' for 'class exploitation', where the seduced maiden represents the ravishment of the working class at the hands of the capitalist masters. The problem with such plots, Clark argues, is that they mask the real plight of working women since they 'displaced potential anger at sexual exploitation to the level of class-conflict, preventing working women from publicly articulating antagonism towards men of their own class'. In reality, Clark points out, women were more likely to be seduced, raped, or sexually harassed by men of their own class.⁴⁹ This may be, but we would do well to remember that middle-class men often sought sex from working-class girls, as I noted in Chapter 1. Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act shows that middle-class men were not above seeking the sexual services of working-class women.

In reading seduction plots purely as metaphor for the abuses towards the working-classes as a whole, Clark misses the vital expression of female

⁴⁷ Ledger, 1997, p. 46.

⁴⁸ 'The Writings of "John Law"', *Women's Penny Paper*, 34 (1889), p. 8.

⁴⁹ Clark, 1986, p. 49. See also Jan Lambertz, 'Sexual Harassment in the Nineteenth Century Cotton Industry', *History Workshop Journal*, 19 (1985), 29-61.

subjection that such plots entail. The seduction plot exposes the vulnerability of women not only towards the abuses of men, but also shows that women are equally victimised by constructions of femininity. Going back to the origins of the seduction plot in the eighteenth century, Susan Staves suggests that the seduced maiden is such a popular subject because she personifies ‘precisely those virtues the culture especially prized in young women: beauty, simplicity [...] trustfulness, and affectionateness’.⁵⁰ In such a reading of the seduction plot, traditional female virtues are held equally accountable for the victimisation of women.

In *A City Girl*, Harkness employs the familiar format of a young working-class girl who is seduced by a man of higher social standing and gives birth to an illegitimate child. She posits the sexual pursuit of women, and the potential motherhood that follows, as a method of destroying female independence and agency. When *A City Girl* was published, female labour was increasingly under fire from those who saw in it the destruction of femininity. By the seduction of Nelly, Harkness demonstrates how sex can be used to cow the independence of the working woman and domesticate her by forcing her into the traditional role of mother and wife. The novel follows Nelly Ambrose, a working-class girl who earns her living by making trousers for a sweater; she loses her job and is thrown out of the family home after she is seduced by and falls pregnant by a middle-class gentleman.

While the novel contains the classic platitudes about the lives of working-class girls in which their economic independence leads them to into sexual promiscuity and fallenness, it also favourably portrays East End working girls as independent women who can ‘come and go at all hours of the day and night without comment, especially “hands” like Nelly, who help pay the rent’.⁵¹ The earning power of the factory girl gives her an independence that allows her to set her own rules of conduct. Harkness follows the tradition of depicting working-class girls as being sexually loose, yet Nelly’s status as a sweated worker rather than a factory girl diverts the element of sexual danger away from the factory itself.

⁵⁰ Susan Staves, ‘British Seduced Maidens’, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 14 (1980-1), 109-134 (p. 118).

⁵¹ Johnson points out that ‘there is often a blurring of the lines between prostitutes and working-class women involved in nondomestic kinds of labor’. Johnson, p. 5.

An example of such narratives is M. A. Pennell's *Nellie Gordon, the Factory Girl; or, Lost and Saved* (1879), in which a young catholic girl is ruined by her work in the factory. Having entered the factory only to support her little brother Johnny after they have both been left as orphans, Nellie is inevitably tarred by the lewd atmosphere of the factory:

For some time Nellie kept steadily to her duties, going to church every Sunday with her little brother, and sending him daily to the Catholic school; but after a while the evil companions with whom she associated at the factory, only too surely had a sad influence on the young, motherless girl [...] Nellie yielded to temptation, to which vanity and love of pleasure made her an easy prey. The girl fell—how hopelessly, you who have walked the streets and seen the iniquity which abounds in our crowded manufacturing cities alone can tell.⁵²

In Pennell's short novel, Nellie's fall is presented as being the prescribed fate to women who enter factory work. The narrative of Nellie's progression from church-going girl to fallen woman occupies only a few sentences, which suggests that the author believes that no explanation is necessary: the connection would have been obvious to readers. Nellie's story ends when she dies of consumption shortly after her fall.

Harkness resists this ending, instead allowing her heroine to marry her original suitor. In a short analysis of *A City Girl*, Ledger reads Nelly's final rehabilitation as a feminist affirmation, as she escapes the traditional fate of the fallen girl of fiction, which is death either by illness or suicide.⁵³ This may, however, be a more accurate representation of the manner in which an illegitimate child was considered among the urban working classes. For example, in her article upon fallen women, discussed in chapter 1, Jeune pointed out that the working classes were far less condemning of women who got pregnant out of wedlock. A pregnancy outside marriage was regarded more as an economic

⁵² M. A. Pennell, *Nellie Gordon, the Factory Girl; or, Lost and Saved* (London: R. Washbourne, 1879), pp. 35-36.

⁵³ Ledger, 1997, p. 48.

inconveniency than a moral failure.⁵⁴ The life of the poet Ellen Johnston serves as an example of a working-class girl whose illegitimate child did not hinder her employment. In the 1867 version of her *Autobiography*, Johnston revealed how she ‘did not, however, feel inclined to die when I could no longer conceal what the world falsely calls a woman’s shame’:

No, on the other hand, I never loved life more dearly and longed for the hour when I would have something to love me—and my wish was realised by becoming a mother of a lovely daughter on the 14th of September, 1852.⁵⁵

While Johnston recognised an illegitimate child to be a shameful thing, she bluntly brushed aside the world’s opprobrium and emphasised her joy in the prospect of motherhood. As H. Gustav Klaus has observed, the candour with which Johnston revealed her illegitimate child was deemed unacceptable since it was removed from the 1869 version of her autobiography.⁵⁶

At the beginning of *A City Girl* Nelly stands out as a hard working—if vain—girl in a building of drunken women.

the wives of these men added to the family income by charing, tailoring and sack-making, besides doing all the house work. They were little better than beasts of burden, poor things, for East End husbands have but a low opinion of the weaker sex. (p. 7)

Through the eyes of Nelly, Harkness presents marriage in the East End as a tyrannous institution that turns women into the slaves of husbands and children: ‘they must clean their “place”, get the children’s clothes ready for Sunday, scrub, cook, and bake, whilst boys and girls hung about and husbands did nothing’ (p. 8). Even though Nelly has a sweetheart, George, she has no intention of marrying yet, as she knows that the future that awaits her is the life of the married

⁵⁴ Jeune, 1885, p. 672-673.

⁵⁵ Ellen Johnston, *Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston, the ‘Factory Girl’* (Glasgow: William Love, 1867), p.11.

⁵⁶ H. Gustav Klaus, ‘New Light on Ellen Johnston “The Factory Girl”’, *Notes and Queries*, 55 (2008), 430-433 (p. 433).

women in the buildings. Instead, she dreams of a life of leisure, which means to her 'to sit on a sofa, to read a novelette, to sip coffee with a teaspoon'(pp. 10-11), and imagines that the path to such a life is through an 'ideal lover' who should have 'long white fingers' (p. 43). Nelly imagines that marrying up the social scale is her path to salvation, and the means by which she will be able to escape the destiny that awaits her as an East End wife.

When Nelly meets Arthur Grant, a middle-class hospital guardian and radical, she believes herself to have found the ideal lover, and begins a relationship with him, even though she knows that he is married. While the discourses surrounding protective legislation portray factory girls as sexually adventurous, it is Nelly's naivety and her complete ignorance of relations between the sexes and the classes that allows her to be seduced. When Arthur offers to take her rowing on the river, she sees no other motive but his own kindness: 'Mr. Grant himself was so good, so kind, the little hand thought' (p. 64). Using the terminology of the body politic, in which the workers represent the hands of the nation, Harkness reduces Nelly to a body part required to perform the physical work of the nation, implying that this is how Arthur sees her.

Nelly's innocence of sexual matters before the seduction becomes clearer in comparison to a later episode in the novel where she fears for her sexual safety. Harkness's suggestion of Nelly's sexual ignorance prior to her seduction is compounded by the depiction of her after she has been seduced. When the baby that she gives birth to as a consequence of her seduction falls ill, she takes the baby to hospital, and, finding herself told to return the next morning, falls asleep in a nearby shed. The hospital's proximity to water reminds her of her seduction: '[t]he memory of those days brought with it no bitterness, it was not in Nelly's nature to feel bitter against anybody', yet Nelly decides that 'it wasn't all his fault' (p. 156). Upon waking during the night, she finds that the shed is on a tiny island and the drawbridge that connects it to the hospital has been pulled up. The possibility of sexual assault is the first thing that presents itself to her.

Was she alone? If she was she did not mind; but supposing she was not?
She shook all over as women shake when they realize their feebleness and

masculine strength. She was not afraid of ghosts, only of her own weak muscles opposed to brute force and loneliness. (pp. 158-59)⁵⁷

Harkness replaces the naivety with which Nelly pursued her relationship with a fear of the masculine sex and the power it holds over women. Grant's seduction of Nelly hardly seems to have been violent, and Nelly seems to have been a more than willing participant; her fear is more likely to spring from the beating that she receives from her brother when her pregnancy is revealed. The seducer and the violent brother merge in Nelly's mind into a representation of 'brute force', and her new awareness of masculine strength and power makes her realise that men can take what women do not freely grant them.

After her baby dies, Nelly loses her ambition for a better life, '[c]ut off from the past, seeing no hope for the future, she did not seem to care what happened to her now she had lost the baby. Girlish pleasures seemed such silly things. She had no wish now for theatres and outings' (p. 179). After the baby's funeral, when the evidence of Nelly's seduction has been removed, George tells Nelly that he has been given the position of caretaker to a writer's colony in the country, and asks her to come with him as his wife. The proposal is not so much an offer of marriage as an offer of employment since the colony needs another servant. After all that has happened, she is grateful for the offer of marriage. The girl who sobs 'Oh, George [...] I ain't worth it', (p. 184) is a far cry from the independent factory girl encountered at the beginning of the novel, who shuddered at the thought of becoming a slave in marriage. Nelly is removed to a house in the country where she becomes a house-keeper, and is absorbed into the domestic work suitable for women.

Arthur Grant has tamed Nelly for George: after having a child, she is no longer interested in finery, no longer dreams of her ideal lover, and is ready to settle down into married life with George. The novel thus demonstrates how middle and working-class men work in collusion to remove women from the factory environment. Nelly's seduction ends her financial independence, and motherhood transforms her from a vain and pleasure-seeking girl into a 'real'

⁵⁷ p. 58-59, Harkness seems to have made an error the second sentence, which suggests that women have a masculine strength. The real meaning can be deduced from the next sentence, which places female weakness in opposition to masculine strength.

woman, who cares more for her child than herself. Harkness thus shows how seduction is used to domesticate the independent factory girl. For Nelly, moving up the social scale also means moving into domestic service, a profession recognised by the middle-classes to be far more respectable than factory work, but feared by working-class women as a profession in which they lost their independence.

Harkness, perhaps annoyed with Engels's inability to comprehend female experience, made her ideas of female peril all the more outlandish in her coming novels, yet she insisted on calling them realistic as she wished to drive the point home that this was what life was like for working-class women. Harkness's novels portray the victimisation of working-class women as doubly oppressed, first by virtue of their class, and secondly by their gender. By switching from attempted realism to a plot that employs the conventions of gothic fiction in order to articulate her ideology, she is also turning towards a different readership.

The same year that Harkness's *In Darkest London* was published, Webb portrayed Harkness as a troubled figure who was angry at the world's injustices, who alienated her friends with her erratic behaviour, but who had true sympathy for the poor and downtrodden. In March 1889, Webb commented on Harkness's character:

Poor Maggie gets bitterer and bitterer with the whole world—does foolish and inconsiderate things and then is vexed that she loses friends. Poor Maggie! With her lonely tortuous life and envious temper. And yet for those in trouble she has plenty of warm sympathy—true *mitgefühl*—for the failures of society.

Webb suggested that religion might soothe Harkness's troubled conscience and alleviate her loneliness: '[i]f only she had religion, that haven of rest and peace for the lonesome worker, the one anchor in this life of strange dreams and feverish feelings'.⁵⁸ Her assessment of Harkness's spiritual needs seems all the more astute when one considers that Harkness would have been following the Salvation Army as part of research for the novel she was writing when Webb

⁵⁸ MacKenzie, p. 279.

made this comment, and that this experience would lead her away from socialism and towards a more spiritual solution to poverty.

On October 22nd 1890, Webb began her journal entry by noting that ‘Margaret Harkness writes a sensational article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* denouncing socialists and her old friends Tom Mann and John Burns: poor girl, another treachery added to the long roll’.⁵⁹ “‘Salvation” versus Socialism: In Praise of General Booth’, was published the day before Webb noted its appearance in her diary. Writing under her pen-name ‘John Law’, Harkness recounts how she began to lose faith in the socialist movement: ‘[m]y socialistic dream was vanishing’, she recalled, ‘for I had discovered to my bitter disappointment that the Socialist leaders of my acquaintance were the strongest Individualists of my acquaintance’. She added censoriously: ‘[t]hey talked Socialism, but practised Individualism; and all the time the slummers were starving’. The saviour of the slums, she insisted, was not to be found within the socialist movement, but instead within the Salvation Army, the religious philanthropic organisation founded by William Booth in 1865. While she praises General Booth’s scheme, it is the Salvation Army slum lassie ‘distributing food tickets’ amongst the poor who ‘carries with her the talisman of a brave, loving, unselfish spirit’ who takes the centre stage as the saviour of the slums.⁶⁰

The article shows Harkness stepping away from economic and political solutions to the problems of poverty and instead professing ‘love’ as the final panacea and embracing a more traditionally feminine vision. Although Harkness confessed herself to be an agnostic, her vision of the future presents earth as a secular heaven where love has become a religion: ‘I believe’, she wrote, ‘that love will one day grow strong, even in the slums of our great cities, and that then THIS world will be heaven’. As the bastion of ‘quarrelsome men’, socialism can offer women no power to change society; instead, such power can be found within the ranks of the Salvation Army.⁶¹

⁵⁹ MacKenzie, p. 343.

⁶⁰ John Law, ‘Salvation V. Socialism: in Praise of General Booth’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 21 (1890), 1-2. As Pamela J. Walker has demonstrated, the Salvation Army provided a space for women where they were less constricted by gender: ‘[t]he Hallelujah Lasses Seized what was categorically denied to women: authority both sacred and secular. They claimed a right to preach equal to that of men. *Pulling the Devil’s Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 130.

⁶¹ Law, 1890, p. 1

In Darkest London contains several plot strands that all converge around Captain Lobe, a young Salvation Army Captain living in Whitechapel; it is the sub-plot that focuses the young factory owner Ruth Weldon, and the labour mistress Jane Hardy, that I wish to concentrate on in my analysis of the novel. In this strand of the narrative, Harkness employs the conventions of the female gothic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century to highlight the plight of women under the capitalist system. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century gothic novel, problems of contemporary society are displaced to a land far away and long ago; in the late nineteenth century, the gothic plot was transported into a metropolitan environment. Urban gothic has made its name as a genre that drew upon anxieties about degeneration and monstrosity that the evolutionary sciences of the late nineteenth century revealed to be much closer to home.⁶² The gothic, however, is not merely a discourse of monstrosity but is also a powerful critique of the patriarchal and capitalistic structure of society. Novels such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which explored the evil other, follow the tradition of 'male gothic', based upon 'the recognition of the evil other as oneself'. In the tradition of female gothic, however, 'horror' is situated in the 'external world of economic exploitation and patriarchal corruption'.⁶³ The monster is not within, but is without, in the structure of society.

According to Diane Hoeveler, the female gothic tradition is centred within 'the belief that women are victimized and oppressed not simply by gender politics but by the social, economic, political, religious, and hierarchical spaces that bourgeois capitalism—and by extension the patriarchal family—has constructed to contain them'.⁶⁴ The narrative strand that follows Ruth contains all the classic plot elements of the gothic novel: an orphan girl's struggle against an evil guardian for control over the property that is rightfully hers; the persistent shadow of the sins of her dead mother; and her resistance to the sexual advances that would allow the evil guardian to take over her property and her body.⁶⁵

⁶² see Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 69-70.

⁶³ Diane Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁶⁴ Hoeveler further suggests that the female gothic aims for 'the fictional feminization of the masculine world, the domestication of all those masculine institutions that exist to define the sexuality, not to mention the sanity, of women', Hoeveler, 1998, p. xiii.

⁶⁵ 'although she has all of the considerable obstacles against her—you guessed it—the young, innocent, naive heroine, manages to gain her rightful inheritance, usually by besting an evil uncle

In Darkest London contains both these elements of the gothic. The novel feeds upon the idea of the lower classes of London as a degenerate and monstrous race: life in the slums is portrayed with stylistically overwrought prose that bears witness to the slums as dangerous areas filled with ‘ghoulish cries and hideous noises’ (p. 23) and populated by ‘men lower than beasts’ (p. 23) where Jack the Ripper roams the streets.⁶⁶ But what is ultimately presented as being more frightening, and far more perilous, is the spectre of capitalism embodied in the ruthless factory foreman Mr. Pember. Judith Halberstam has drawn attention to the manner in which ‘Marx himself emphasized the Gothic nature of capitalism, its investment in Gothic economies of signification, by deploying the metaphor of the vampire to characterise the capitalist’. Halberstam quotes from Marx’s *The First International* (1864) where he writes: “British industry...vampire-like could live but by sucking blood, and children’s blood too”.⁶⁷ I suggest that Harkness, too, understood the gothic nature of capitalism; writing before the emergence of urban gothic in the nineteenth century, Harkness instead employs the symbolism of the gothic villain and casts capitalism as the demon lover of the gothic novel.

Ruth Weldon has inherited from her father a small cocoa-nut chip factory that employs around 35 women, but until Ruth turns eighteen, in a few months time, the factory is in the hands of Mr. Pember, who is also Ruth’s legal guardian according to a confused will made by Ruth’s father. Mr. Pember is a self-confessed woman hater, described as ‘very good-looking’ and ‘one of the devil’s own children’ (p. 79); he cares only for profit and maltreats his workers. Because Ruth is afraid of Mr. Pember she wants to give up the factory and become a slum saviour, but she is persuaded to enter the factory by a Salvation Army Superintendent who tells her that her ‘duty is clear enough’ and that she ‘ought to

(read: displaced father figure). And to make matters perfect, the heroine further triumphs over a patriarchy by creating an alternative companionate family, marrying a “feminized” man who promises, if not in word then through his sheer incompetence, to be completely malleable’, Hoeveler, 1998, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁶ Such language, Eileen Sypher suggests ‘attempts to “package” the slums for the middle class, to at once appear to open up the slums to the viewer, yet simultaneously to objectify them, containing what is frightful in them’, Eileen Sypher, *Wisps of Violence: Producing Public and Private Politics in the Turn-of-the-Century British Novel* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 109.

⁶⁷ Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 102. Halberstam coins the term ‘Gothic economy’ to signify ‘a logic of capitalism, which rationalizes even the most supernatural of images into material images of capitalism itself’, and suggests that ‘Marx, in fact, is describing an economic system which is positively Gothic in its ability to transform matter into commodity, commodity into value, and value into capitalism’ (pp. 102-103).

fight this man, and look after those young women' (p. 88). Ruth joins forces with Jane Hardy, the labour mistress of the factory and a self-professed socialist. Jane hates Mr. Pember, yet remains in his employment to support her old ailing mother. Her constant referral to Mr. Pember as 'the Capitalist' shows the extent to which he represents all the abuses of the capitalist system towards women.

Ruth conforms to the standard of pure and passive femininity set by the gothic heroine. Seen through the eyes of Captain Lobe, Ruth is described as possessing a 'clear white forehead [...] like an ivory tablet, upon which Time had written no false word, no evil thought, nothing but love and truthfulness' (p. 29). Yet underneath this semblance of innocence lurks the frightening possibility of a disruptive female sexuality that threatens to destroy the moralised space of the middle-class home. We learn from Ruth's nursemaid Hester, that Ruth's mother, now long dead, once planned to leave her husband and child to run away with the then factory foreman. Her mother's sexual misconduct inadvertently opened the door for Mr. Pember to take over the factory, as he stepped in to fill the position left vacant when the previous foreman left in a hurry after his intentions towards Ruth's mother became known. In this manner, Harkness links female sexual misconduct and the abandonment of the home to the development of ruthless capitalism. Harkness is suggesting that the factory and everything associated with it destroys the feminised space of the home.

The story of Ruth's mother is told to Captain Lobe by Hester, Ruth's nurse, but Ruth herself is unaware of it. Hester fears that the sins of the mother will inevitably colour Ruth's fate; even though Ruth appears to her as 'that good and innocent it is difficult to see how she ever could go wrong exactly', it is exactly this innocence that recalls her mother: 'You'd have thought the same thing of her mother. But her mother forgot herself' (p. 26). Hester's judgment upon Ruth's mother explains the full implications of her misconduct: she has not merely betrayed her husband, but has 'forgot herself'; this phrase can carry double meaning for it implies that women must always be in control of their lower nature lest it leads them astray: but it also suggests that sexual transgression means a loss of self.

Paradoxically, Ruth's innocence seems also to foreshadow a potential for both sexual and moral misconduct. Her desire to join the Salvation Army seems due a partial realisation of this potential; her greatest wish is to become one of the

many slum saviours who 'lived on ten shillings a week, and worked day and night among the scum of London' (p. 31). Capitalism, personified in Mr. Pember, seems too powerful an enemy for a young girl to take on; instead, Ruth wishes to renounce her role in capitalism and turn her back completely on the profits and losses of the industrial world by joining the Salvation Army. Harkness finds the most accurate analogy to describe Ruth's feelings towards Mr. Pember in the 'Zoological Gardens': 'I have watched the little yellow ducks given to the serpents, and I have seen the poor things shaking with fear, but they couldn't go away. I don't know how it is, but I feel like that; he—he fascinates me' (p. 84). Harkness invokes a combination of biblical and zoological imagery that simultaneously positions Mr. Pember as the serpent who tempted Eve and a representative of the amoral animal world in which the weaker creature is consumed by the stronger.

When the Superintendent tells Ruth that her duties lie with the factory workers, he too formulates the struggle in gendered terms: it is not simply a fight between a master and his workers, it is a struggle between men and women, in which the men must be overpowered and the women protected. While it may seem that the women, outnumbering Mr. Pember, could easily overpower this man, it is not the man they are fighting but the whole system of male aggression embodied in capitalism. Ruth knows that Mr. Pember is her biggest challenge, 'she seemed to see a formidable array of difficulties, not the least of which was the shadow of the man who reigned supreme at the factory' (pp. 85-86). When Ruth takes the advice of the Superintendent and goes to work in the factory, Mr. Pember realises that she may start causing trouble, and he sets in motion a longstanding plan to marry her and gain control over the factory. Having neither love nor desire for Ruth, and finding it 'an awful nuisance to begin this love-making' (p. 79), yet desiring her property, Mr. Pember assumes the role of devoted lover and declares his intentions to Ruth in his office. He humbles himself to Ruth and speaks of himself as her servant, yet he also appeals to her sense of duty by pointing out her debt to him: 'I have looked after your interests in this place, I have served you faithfully, and I have asked for no reward except the gratitude which I felt sure you would give later on, when you were old enough to understand what I have been doing' (p. 92). When Mr. Pember

proposes the marriage as a kind of payment for his services over the years, he is really demanding that Ruth hands over the authority of the factory to him.

While Mr. Pember attempts to present himself as a devoted lover, Ruth sees only the snake or the demon lover and fears him. Ruth is trapped in the enclosed space of the factory office: 'casting a frightened glance towards the door, feeling that she would like to escape from this man', but she is simultaneously 'fascinated by him' (p. 92). The spell is broken the instant that Mr. Pember makes physical contact with Ruth: '[h]e sat down beside her, but when his arm touched her waist, she gave a shriek that made the labour-mistress hastily leave the keyhole, and the factotum drop his newspaper' (p. 104).

A minute later she was in the passage, having slammed the door of Mr. Pember's sanctum in the face of that astonished gentleman. She put her hands out in the dark as if to protect herself from some unseen presence, and she walked straight into the arms of the labour mistress. (p. 93)

Jane Hardy, the labour mistress of the factory and a dedicated socialist, witnesses the incident and swears to protect Ruth. Jane assumes an aggressive, masculine pose, yet she is really a fragile woman. She has her own troubled past since Mr. Pember is the only man that she has ever loved, exactly what this past is, the narrator is loath to reveal:

In order to interpret the expression on her face it would be necessary to take the skeleton from her cupboard and rattle before her the bones of a ghost laid some years before—the ghost of a man who was dear to her then, although he happened to be a capitalist. (p. 94)

Women's hunger for affection, Harkness seems to suggest, and their tendency towards masochistic behaviour, leave them open to abuses from men.

Harkness portrays Jane as a committed socialist, yet she also shows how Jane, as a working-class woman, stands outside both the militant proletariat and the socialist movement. Caring for her aged and infirm mother, combined with her work at the factory, leaves her little time and energy to engage with the socialist cause and keep up with the latest reading. What arises out of this is a

troubling gender essentialism in which Harkness seems to assume that women are ‘naturally’ tender and loving, and it is this that makes them unable to stand up to the patriarchy. While Jane is portrayed as being hardened on the surface, Harkness portrays her as caring and loving on the inside. Harkness assumes a caring and mothering side to women’s nature, and it is this that forces Jane to stay on at the factory even though she abhors Mr. Pember. While Jane speaks of the coming socialist revolution in terms that she herself does not understand, Harkness suggests that what Jane wants more than anything is love and motherhood, and she admits that she would readily betray the socialist cause to gain it. She is trapped between bodily desires and what she intellectually desires for women:

‘Force,’ ‘the survival of the fittest,’ ‘surplus value,’ all the names that puzzled her so much, that stood for things she could not grasp, she would have bartered at that minute for half an ounce of love, for a few grains of affection. (p. 124)

Jane’s vulnerability is here exposed for the first time; her desire for love means that she would easily swap all her principles in return for love.

Mr. Pember has an acute understanding of women’s vulnerabilities and has attempted to seduce Jane in the past, yet he seems to realise that an emotional seduction may be just as potent as a sexual seduction.

‘I might have married,’ she said to herself, ‘only I could not love the men who wanted to marry me. I could never care for anyone but Mr. Pember. I do not care for him now, I hate him—he is a capitalist. He has robbed me of children. I shall never feel a child’s arms around my neck; I shall never, never hear the word “Mother.” It is all his fault. He gave me no peace until he could see how dear I was to him, then, because I would not give in to him, he went away. He never meant to marry me. I kept my virtue, as they call it, and here I am, a withered-up woman with a hunger for children. It will not, die till I am dead; books and work will not kill it. I hate him—the capitalist!’ (p. 125)

Through her depiction of the relationship between Mr. Pember and Jane, Harkness links capitalism and industrial labour to the destruction of motherhood in a similar manner to those who later campaigned for the Dangerous Trades Act.⁶⁸ Malone's study of the rhetoric employed by those who campaigned to restrict women's work in what became known as the dangerous trades, signals the extent to which industrial capitalism was implicated in the destruction of motherhood. Even though modern historians have found evidence to the contrary, miscarriages and infertility were cited as common complaints among working women.⁶⁹

At this point the narrative shifts to focus on Captain Lobe as he follows a group of hop-pickers to Kent. When he returns to London he finds Ruth recently recovered from small-pox and living with women who belong to the Salvation Army. Ruth catches the disease under suspicious circumstance, as there has been no recent cases in the area, and the local doctor suspects Mr. Pember of giving it to Ruth: 'I had a visit from the girl who used to help Hester with the house-work; and from what she told me, I have no doubt that Pember gave Ruth the smallpox' (p. 222). Ruth's recollections of the aftermath of her illness seem to confirm the doctor's suspicions that Mr. Pember has somehow infected her with smallpox in order to prevent her from marrying someone else and her taking her property elsewhere:

She remembered how Mr. Pember had come into her room after Hester's death, how he had closed the door and seated himself close beside her. Trembling, afraid to run away, she had listened to him while he talked of marriage [...] 'You will not see that little Salvation chap again now that you have had the smallpox. You will have to marry me, or join the Salvation Army'. (p. 177)

Readers of gothic fiction would recognise this as an example of 'rape in the guise of forced marriage' that dominated gothic plots in the early nineteenth century.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Malone, 2003, p. 139,

⁶⁹ Malone, 1996, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁰ Ruth Bienstock Anolik, 'The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode', *Modern Language Studies*, 33 (2003), 24-43 (p. 25).

Harkness posits Mr. Pember as the melodramatic villain: in the solitude of his office, Mr. Pember delivers a long monologue that reveals his intentions towards Ruth, which is interspersed with his laughter: 'he laughed for quite two minutes' (p. 192). Whether Mr. Pember intends to kill Ruth or simply disfigure her is unclear, yet it is evident that the disease is inflicted upon Ruth as punishment for refusing to marry him. Mr. Pember is too 'lazy' to engage in sexual coercion, yet the threat of it looms over Ruth and makes her give up the factory: 'Perhaps the taint of paralysis in his blood made him lazy, he had not troubled himself about Ruth since that day she had screamed in his office' (p. 127). His laziness means that he has lost his sexual powers: 'I'm too Lazy now to trouble about women; but in my day—in my day' (p. 192), 'I didn't go the right way to work. I couldn't exert myself' (p. 193). His lack of virility does not hamper his ability to put fear into women. For Ruth, the mere idea of marriage to Mr. Pember is enough for her to renounce all claims of her property. To corroborate this, Harman has shown how suggestions of 'corrective' sexual violence have been used to intimidate ambitious women. In this novel, Ruth gives up all efforts to reform the factory and even hands it over to her aggressor. Sexual menacing, which includes the suggestions of sexual violence, forces women to give up what is rightfully theirs, and hampers their efforts at reforming the capitalist system.

Through these two novels, Harkness is making a clear statement about the vulnerability of women under the male dominated capitalist system, and she shows how even the threat of sexual violence is enough to force women into retreat. Although she has the opportunity to take charge of the factory, Ruth is forced out of the industrial system and renounces capitalism completely as she goes on to live on a pound week in the Salvation Army and looks forward to marriage to Captain Lobe, who has no economic or sexual designs upon her. The novel might have ended in the classic gothic resolution of the heroine marrying a better man, yet instead of regaining her property and imposing a feminine ethic upon the male industrial world, Ruth relinquishes control of the factory, and the factory girls are left in the hands of Mr. Pember. Capitalism is presented as being so hostile to women's needs that the only solution is for women to renounce it altogether and instead live under alternative economic systems. Harkness does not propose a capitalist system that is revised by feminine influence; the solution

she offers is a complete escape from capitalism into alternative economic systems. For Nelly it is the rural community to which she and George relocate at the ending of *A City Girl*, and for Ruth it means joining the Salvation Army.

‘Promise me not to be a political woman there’s a dear’: *Sir George Tressady*

In 1896, Ward published *Sir George Tressady* as a follow-up to *Marcella*. If *Marcella* was Ward’s response to the growing popularity of slumming, *Sir George Tressady* was Ward’s response to the growing call for stricter factory legislation that followed the sweating controversy, but the novel is also an exploration of how the campaign for factory legislation was changing the position of middle and upper-class female reformers. In the latter novel, we revisit *Marcella* five years after her marriage to Aldous, when she is struggling to put forward ‘a special Factory Act for East London’ (p. 83). The Maxwell Bill, so called after its creators, Lord and Lady Maxwell (*Marcella* and Aldous), proposes to make sweating a penal offence, and to drive the sweating industry ‘into factories of a certain size, where alone these degraded industries can be humanised and controlled’ (pp. 123-24). Although Maxwell is the official proposer of the Factory Bill, *Marcella* becomes more famous in her role as an unofficial champion of the Bill, and it is finally due to her sexual power, and not her husband’s influence, that Britain gets its first factory Act that covers both sexes.

Because Ward was famously opposed to female suffrage, Ward’s novels are usually read as expressions of anxiety about the possible extension of female power in the political arena. Anne Bindslev suggests in her reading of *Sir George Tressady* that the novel dramatises the objections to female suffrage, based on the idea that women’s admission to the public realm would deplete the ‘national reserves of moral force’, that Ward published in the 1889 ‘Appeal Against Female Suffrage’.⁷¹ I would like to suggest that another reading is possible. For, whether she intends this or not, *Sir George Tressady* undermines some of the very ideas behind Ward’s opposition to women’s suffrage presented in the Appeal. Although Ward aired her concerns about the effects upon the family of granting women the vote in the Appeal, it is instead the implicit

⁷¹ Anne Bindslev, *Mrs. Humphrey Ward: A Study in Late-Victorian Feminine Consciousness and Creative Expression* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1985), p. 101.

methods of gaining power that women resort to due to their lack of official representation that threaten the family.

Through Marcella, Ward presents women's influence as a force for good, yet she also demonstrates that the underhand method by which women gain power is potentially destructive. These concerns, however, are trivialised by the manner in which the potential scandal of an affair between George and Marcella is quickly averted, when Marcella also 'seduces' George's wife, who threatens to expose her suspicions. Ward is suggesting that women will be more powerful if they keep up the performance of femininity, and work instead through the seduction of their opponents. Ward's novel also reverses the gender dynamic of seduction and posits the upper-class Lady Maxwell as the seducer, by which means she gains power of George.

When Beatrice Webb read the novel she wrote to Ward, praising her ability to put political arguments into narrative form: 'you have managed to give the arguments for and against factory legislation and a fixed standard of life with admirable lucidity and picturesqueness—in a way that will make them comprehensible to the ordinary person without any technical knowledge'.⁷² There is, however, very little in the form of argument in favour of the factory Acts, what there is, on the other hand, is a very charismatic female character, who is unequivocally in favour of them. It is due to Marcella's sexual power that Sir George Tressady, the most powerful member of the opposition, changes his mind about factory legislation and betrays the Liberal Party.

The story of the MP publicly turning against his own party on the question of factory legislation is not without its precedent in reality. When Sidney Webb argued for stricter factory legislation in 'The Limitation of the Hours of Labour' in 1889, he chose to introduce his article by quoting from the diary of Mr Greville, who recalled the chaos that Lord Ashley's Ten Hours Bill caused in 1844:

I never remember so much excitement as has been caused by Lord Ashley's Ten Hours Bill, nor a more curious political state of things—such intermingling of parties, such a confusion of opposition [...] John

⁷² Janet Penrose Trevelyan, *The Life of Mrs. Humphry Ward* (London: Constable & co, 1923), p. 117.

Russell voting for ‘ten hours’ against all he professed last year, has filled the world with amazement.⁷³

Webb goes on to write that history is likely to repeat itself the moment an eight hour bill is proposed in parliament: ‘[t]he world will be surprised to find some very sturdy politicians voting in favour of the Bill, even “against all they professed” some time ago’ (p. 860). His prediction was based on what he considered to be the decline of laissez-faire individualism and a move towards greater regulatory power invested in the state. The fact that Webb was one of Ward’s mentors on industrial questions when she wrote *Sir George Tressady* explains how such an event made its way into Ward’s novel, in Ward’s novel, however, the conversion is not due to a changing conscience but to a beautiful woman’s influence upon a young MP.

When Sir George Tressady turns against his party and all his previous beliefs to vote through the Maxwell Bill, he has not undergone a genuine political conversion, he is merely hoping to please Marcella because he has fallen in love with her. The genuine political conversion takes place outside the parameters of the narratives as Marcella herself has altered her views regarding factory legislation considerably since she told Wharton in *Marcella*:

A compulsory Eight Hours’ Day for all men in all trades!...You *know* you won’t get it! And all the other big exasperating things you talk about—public organisation of labour, and the rest—you won’t get them till all the world is a New Jerusalem—and when the world is a New Jerusalem nobody will want them!⁷⁴

Marcella arrives at the conclusion that character is the key to lasting social reform, and that when the character of man has transformed enough such legislation will be superfluous, arguments used fiercely by opponents to factory legislation in the late nineteenth century. Yet in *Sir George Tressady*, Marcella goes on to campaign for stricter factory legislation. She appears to have made the

⁷³ Sidney Webb, ‘The Limitation of the Hours of Labour’, *Contemporary Review*, 56 (1889), 859-883 (p.859).

⁷⁴ Ward, 1984, p. 400.

same conversion towards the idea of government intervention that real life female reformers were undergoing, and that John Russell underwent fifty years previously.

The novel begins when Sir George Tressady retreats to the country house of his friends following his election as MP for coal-mining town Market Malford; the dinner-table talk turns to Marcella's political influence over her husband. What is particularly noteworthy about this exchange is the manner in which Fontenoy, who is the driving force behind George's political victory, emphatically denies the idea that Marcella, and by extension any woman, is the guiding force behind the government, while Mrs. Watton, the hostess, considers Marcella to be responsible for 'the source of half the mischievous work done by this precious Government in the last two years' (p. 22). Fontenoy agrees with her about the state of the government, but he is less certain that Marcella lies behind it and tells Mrs. Watton with a 'half-contemptuous smile' that he is 'not inclined to make Lady Maxwell the scapegoat' and urges her to '[l]et them bear their own misdeeds' (p. 22). The idea that a woman lies behind the recent transformation of the conservative party into 'State Socialists' is inconceivable to Fontenoy, but to Mrs Watton, female power has always been an active influence in government.

Plenty of English Cabinet Ministers have been led by women before now [...] Only in the old days you knew where you were. Women were corrupt—as they were meant to be—for their husbands and brothers and sons. They wanted something for somebody—and got it. Now they are corrupt—like Lady Maxwell—for what they are pleased to call “causes,” and it is that which will take the nation to ruin. (p. 23)

The complaint here is not that Marcella exploits sexuality to get her own way, but that she does so for causes beyond those of her own family. Mrs. Watton sees a new threat in the woman who participates in public life because of an interest in the welfare of nation rather than merely assisting male family members to fulfil their political ambitions. Marcella's influence upon her husband naturally extends to the government, for, as Mrs. Watton asserts, '[s]he leads him by the nose, and whatever tune he calls, the Government must dance to, because of his

power in the House of Lords' (p. 25). By this chain of command, Marcella effectively rules the country through her power over her husband.

The narrative eventually proves Mrs. Watton right, and Fontenoy is proved wrong, which suggests that Ward believes that women, both the Marcellas and Mrs. Wattons of this world, are far more influential and knowledgeable about politics than men suppose them to be. Furthermore, it is Fontenoy's failure to note the political influence of women that eventually costs him his political victory. Marcella is an active presence in the House of Commons, and although she is only permitted to watch from the ladies gallery, she is the central opponent in the extended debates over dinner. As George hears 'Lady Maxwell's penetrating but not loud voice' dominating the discussion, he 'ma[kes] a face' and turns towards Letty, his fiancée, to exact from her a '[p]romise [...] not to be a political woman, there's a dear!' (p. 91). To George, there is something distinctly unwomanly about a woman who takes an active part in the political life of the nation, and when Letty as well pretends to the position of political wife, he playfully entreats her 'when I've got a big Bill on' to 'let me do a little of it for myself—give me some of the credit' (p. 92). To George, the idea that women should become the legislators of the country, and that he should need to ask his wife for permission to perform his political duties, is a joke that threatens to become reality through women such as Marcella. Unlike Fontenoy, George recognises that women who know how to play the game are genuine contenders in the political arena, and that they may usurp the men in power.

Ward grants that Marcella has been permitted to enter the political arena due to the qualities that she brings from the domestic sphere, but she does so in the voice of Marcella's opponents, which suggests that those who grant women access to the public sphere based on their traditional feminine qualities are 'simple':

her obvious wifely devotion attracted simple souls to whom the meddling of women in politics would have been nothing but repellent had it not been recommended to them by the facts that Marcella Maxwell was held to be good as well as beautiful; that she loved her husband; and was an excellent mother to a fine son. (p. 86)

To George, Marcella's 'wifely devotion' is a little too obvious, and as she is not averse to public displays of affection for her husband, he suspects that Marcella's 'wifely affection and all the rest of it' is merely 'part of the play' (p. 92). Ward is suggesting the possibility, through the character of George, that Marcella's public show of love for her husband is a calculated act; Ward herself, however, does not believe this is the case since she goes to great lengths to convince the reader that Marcella's love for Aldous is the motive power of her life and that it is this that lies behind her political motivation.

When George calls upon Marcella, she is capable of skilfully manipulating the conversation 'with great deftness', and George finds 'both his temper and manner softened' by her interest in his travelling experiences. The conversation leaves a great impression upon Marcella, who senses a sadness and a vulnerability beneath George's hard exterior, '[h]e talks as if he had no humanity, and did not care a rap for anybody. But it is a pose—I *think* it is a pose' (p. 115). Marcella has been searching for an inroad to the Liberal Party; she has tried 'her eloquence and her charm' (p. 115) upon Fontenoy to no avail, and upon the 'young aristocrats, either of the ultra-exclusive or of the sporting type' (p. 115), '[a]nd once or twice, when she had pushed her attack to close quarters, she had been suddenly conscious of an underlying insolence in her opponent—a quick glance of bold or sensual eyes which seemed to relegate the mere woman to her place' (p. 115). When she attacks these men (with verbal argument), the men respond by becoming male pests who view her as a sexual object. These men use the threat of attacking someone's chastity as a method of making women withdraw from the political arena. This technique corresponds to what Harman calls the 'chivalry withdrawal threat', meaning that women who engage in political discussions or activities forfeit their right to the chivalric respect of men by associating themselves with the public sphere and thereby leaving themselves open to sexual advances and harassment by men. Amongst opponents of women's work, Harman argues, seduction and rape are figured as punishments for the woman who ventures too far from the domestic sphere.⁷⁵ Marcella is never threatened with sexual violence, but the 'bold sensual eyes', which so many women feared, is enough to make her withdraw out of her

⁷⁵ Harman, p. 5.

womanly delicacy. Unless she wants her virtue questioned, Marcella is forced to withdraw.

When Marcella realises that George may be the key to overturning the Liberal Party's fierce resistance towards the Factory Bill, she alters her manner towards him considerably. Since she is aware of the chivalric qualities of men such as George, she presents to him a side more personal, sensitive, and traditionally womanly. As the thought of influencing George arises in her mind, she paces up and down her living room and stops before the mirror, 'her eyes half-consciously studying what she saw' (p. 116). She is weighing herself up and examining her own looks, and wondering how far they will take her with this young man. She is conscious of her own beauty and its influence on other people 'even among the workmen, unionist leaders, and officials of the East End it had helped her again and again to score the points that she wanted to make' (p. 116). She abandons the professional mode that she was operating under during their first meeting and approaches him in a far more personal manner.

Marcella now begins a campaign to influence George that bears all the hallmarks of courtship; she indulges George with long private walks by the river and through the gardens that read like courtship scenes. Their talk of the forthcoming factory Acts is interspersed with descriptions of the stillness and the beauty of the night, '[f]or a minute or two the night made itself heard, the gentle slipping of the river, the fitful breathing of the trees. A swan passed and repassed below them, and an owl called from the distant woods' (p. 232). By choosing such a scene for a discussion of the Factory Bill, Marcella, whether she knows it or not, is attempting to seduce George politically by simultaneously using the beauty that she is conscious of and the romance of the summer night as the backdrop. As he walks beside Marcella, George feels 'a quick gust of romance and pleasure sweep across him' (p. 230) and he is further seduced into revealing 'unconsciously' his personal troubles to her, 'his bringing up, his mother [...] even his relations to his wife' (p. 235). Though he is aware that he is confessing himself 'with an extraordinary frankness to a woman he had made up his mind to dislike' (p. 235), he cannot defend himself against Marcella's sensuous onslaught.

Their conversation is interrupted by Maxwell, who has come in search of his wife in the darkness. Marcella's 'white dress', symbolic of the bride's

chastity, is the only thing visible to Maxwell in the darkness, yet he is conscious of the threat that lies implicit in the scene, and takes hold of his wife to lead her away from the dangers of the night: '[i]s this path quite safe in this darkness? Suppose we get out of it [...] Maxwell, in some anxiety, caught his wife's arm, and made her pause till his eye should be once more certain of the path' (p. 237). Maxwell is perhaps aware of the degree to which his wife is leading another man down the garden path, and he is certainly aware of the effect that Marcella has upon men. Her next conversation with George takes place in the garden, and Marcella lures him in by not talking politics, and instead letting him into her confidence concerning trouble with the son of a family friend. She has understood that George has made a hasty and imprudent marriage, and that his wife has little to offer him in way of companionship, and she takes advantage of this situation and offers him the womanly friendship he cannot get from his own wife. Marcella is skilfully presenting a version of herself that is very different from the forceful air of the woman who argues with the men over dinner at the House of Commons and from 'that first hostile image' of the professional skill of the former nurse to whom George could be of little use.

He was particularly glad that in this fresh day of growing intimacy she had as yet talked politics or 'questions' of any sort so little!...Had she started any subject of mere controversy he would have held his own as stoutly as ever. But so long as she let them lie, *herself*, the woman, insensibly argued for her, and wore down his earlier mood. So long, indeed as he forgot Maxwell's part in it all. (p. 261)

She is now not only *a* woman but 'the woman', and she knows that venturing into conversations about politics would destroy the illusion of 'the woman' that she presents to George. She realises that women's quickest route to power is through seduction, and George struggles to remember that 'Maxwell's ways of looking at things were none the less pestilent because *she* put them into words' (p. 261). Marcella acts as a mediator between Maxwell and the rest of the world, couching the politics of the factory Acts in terms of female sympathy.

When George attends a meeting in the East End about the factory Acts, Marcella is one of the main speakers in favour of factory legislation. This

meeting is a turning point in the novel, and this is when the people around Marcella, even those closest to her, start to wonder about the propriety of her behaviour as she speaks at this public meeting. As her speech entirely fails to impress the crowd, George realises that she is merely repeating, word for word, one of her husband's speeches. It is only when she shifts from using her husband's voice to using her own voice, which entails a shift from the masculine to the feminine, that she is able to solicit any reaction from the crowd, and from George in particular.

Ah!—those last few sentences, that voice, that quiver of passion—they were her own—herself—not Maxwell. The words were very simple, and a little tremulous—words of personal reminiscence and experience. But for one listener there they changed everything.

Here, also, Marcella switches to a personal voice, and abandons the 'set explanation, and defence of the bill point by point' (p. 313); in this manner, public speaking forces women to lay open their lives and their emotions to strangers. Yet Marcella has made it clear earlier that she does need the support of the crowd as much she needs a change of heart from George. The idea is that it is here, in the personal narratives and passionate appeals, that women can truly make a difference in the lives of the poor. Women should not deal with facts or argument; instead they should manipulate the listeners and pull at their heart strings.

The room, the crowd, the speaker—he saw them for a moment under another aspect: that poetic, eternal aspect, which is always there, behind the veil of common things, ready to flash out on mortal eyes. He *felt* the woman's heart, oppressed with a pity too great for it. (p. 314)

As the emphasis on 'felt' indicates, Marcella almost becomes open to George's touch; thus, when she speaks in public and speaks about herself, she is unwittingly putting herself forward for the admiration of men, thereby establishing the link between speaking in public and sexual impropriety. Yet

George is perhaps indeed different from the other men whom she has attempted to transform, since his passion for Marcella is tinged with chivalry.

The sexual dynamic that has been established between Marcella and George, is reinforced when Marcella is hit by a stone thrown from the crowd as she leaves the meeting under George's protection. The link between the famous scene of *North and South* where Margaret is struck is boldly implicit. Yet the scene is different since Marcella is not stepping forward to shield a man from the violence of workers, and the incident is not explicitly linked to her public speech, since she is hit while she is being sheltered by George: 'he could but feel grateful to the crowd. It gave him this joy of protecting and supporting her' (p. 315). It is surely significant that when Marcella, a married woman herself, is sheltered by another woman's husband, she is hit by a stone thrown from the crowd. The stone becomes at once the consequence of putting herself forward in the public arena, and a punishment for her friendship with George. She is troubled by the incident, and begins to think about whether she was wrong to stand up and speak at the meeting (and perhaps whether she is getting too entangled with George). Yet the incident does Marcella more good politically since George's sympathy is even further roused, since he is allowed the role of Marcella's friend and protector and he will not hear her self-criticism:

You wouldn't talk of mistake—of failing—if you knew how to be near you, to listen to you, to see you, touches and illuminates some of us! His cheek burnt, but he turned a manly, eager look upon her. Her cheek, too, flushed, and he thought he saw her bosom heave. (p. 319)

Women's political power depends upon them stirring the emotions of men; it is therefore linked to their sexual power, and this is also why the propriety of women entering the political arena is questioned. While the romance of the female paternalist dictates that the heroine is rescued from any charges of impropriety by her marriage to the man whom she is attempting to influence, Marcella is playing a risky game by using her feminine charms to change George's mind about the Factory Bill. His feelings for her waver between sensuality and chaste spiritual admiration. This is only because of Marcella's love for her own husband: '[h]ad Marcella Maxwell been another woman, less

innocent, less secure!’ (p. 360). This is part wishful-thinking, part gratitude that such a situation could never come to pass; but of course, by voicing this idea through George, Ward suggests this possibility to the reader. Rapidly, however, she steers that reader away from this possibility by moulding George’s love for Marcella in the shape of courtly love: ‘[a]s it was, Tressady no sooner dared give a sensuous thought to her beauty than his own passion smote him back—bade him beware lest he should no longer be fit to speak and talk with her, actually and spiritually’ (p. 360). From his sceptical beginnings, George has become her greatest champion, and has also embraced the idea of women involving themselves in the political life of the nation.

While George applauds Marcella’s actions, her husband is less convinced, not because he thinks that she may harm the cause, which is what she herself is worrying about, but because he sees it both as a slight upon his masculinity and his political skill, and a threat to her own reputation:

His wife—the wife of a Cabinet Minister—pleading for her husband’s Bill, or as the enemy might say, for his political existence, with an East-End meeting, and incidentally with the whole public—exposing herself, in a time of agitation, to the rowdyism and stone-throwing that wait upon such things! The notion set the fastidious old-world temper of the man all on edge. But he would never have dreamed of arguing the matter so with her. A sort of high chivalry forbade it. (p. 324-325)

Whether Maxwell himself disapproves of her actions or not, he immediately sees how the situation will appear to the opposition. She has not only exposed herself to the audience that she spoke to before, she has also, by extension, exposed herself to ‘the whole public’ sphere. It seems to come as a matter of fact that women who put themselves forward, who expose themselves in public, will be attacked. By exposing herself, she has also revealed the political weaknesses of her husband, and by first delivering a dry and un-engaging speech and subsequently a more personal appeal to the emotions of her listeners, she is unconsciously demonstrating the failure of her husband’s political approach. Maxwell also begins to worry about whether his wife’s influence over the young man whom she has befriended is more than political:

Had she any real consciousness of the power she wielded? Once or twice, in the years since they had been married, Maxwell had watched this spell of his wife's at work, and had known a moment of trouble. 'If I were the fellow she had talked and walked with so,' he had once said to himself, 'I must have fallen in love with her had she been twenty times another man's wife!' Yet no harm had happened; he had only reproached himself without daring to breathe a word to her. (p. 307)

The scenario that is being played out between George and Marcella has been building up for a long time and Maxwell has been living under the shadow of a sexual scandal waiting to happen, and yet to acknowledge that his wife is conscious of her own power would be to admit her own culpability.

While Maxwell never doubts his wife's devotion to himself, he is concerned about how her actions, and George's devotion to her, may appear to the outside world. George's wife Letty also begins to have her suspicions about the friendship, and worries that Marcella is attempting to seduce her husband. To Letty, Marcella's political engagements and her interest in the working classes is merely a method of attracting attention and admiration: '[s]he is just a superior kind of flirt. She is always making women anxious about their husbands under this pretence of politics' (p. 337). The new breed of political women are merely out there for the admiration of men. Her suspicions come to a head when George speaks out in favour of the Factory Bill. Letty, and those close to her, recognise George's conversion as being more than a political betrayal; coupled with George's attentions towards Marcella and a photograph of her that Letty finds, voting through the Factory Bill becomes tantamount to an act of adultery. The national issue quickly becomes a domestic crisis, and threatens to break into a scandal as Letty's friends and relations rally round her in condemnation of Marcella.

After the vote George visits Marcella to declare his actions as a token of love for her; he sees his speech as an 'act of homage' to Marcella, rather than a decision made to improve the lives of the workers: 'I never thought of them' (p. 423). He explains that knowing Marcella has changed his mind about the role of women in political life, 'after all, it seemed a woman could talk of public things

and still be real—the humanity did not rub off, the colour stood!’ (p. 425). Here, George is granting Marcella entrance into the public sphere only because of his admiration for her.

[t]hese things—these heavenly, exquisite things that some men talk of—this sympathy, and purity, and sweetness—were true! They were true because you existed—because I had come to know something of your nature—had come to realise what it might be—for a man to have the right—— (p. 426)

George is at once projecting upon Marcella the image of the angel in the house which is lacking in his own marriage, and imagining what it must be like for a man married to such a woman to exercise his conjugal right. This curious mixture of idealisation and sexualisation forms an integral part of Sir George’s chivalric attentions towards Marcella; the fact that she is a married, unobtainable woman is exactly what makes her so desirable, as it enables George to uphold her as a specimen of pure womanhood. This is where the connection between the angel in the house and courtly love becomes problematic: courtly love, as Helene Cixous has pointed out, depends on the same dualistic idea of womanhood as either virgin or prostitute.⁷⁶ Even though Ward puts forth the idea that Marcella is leaving herself open to sexual advances from men through her political work, she stresses Marcella’s devotion to her husband and the absurdity of any notion of sexual impropriety on her part.

Yet Marcella is not wholly innocent in the affair, for the scene played out between her and George is merely the culmination of a pattern of behaviour in which she befriends young men hoping to convert them to her cause. By letting herself be on such friendly terms with men, and allowing them to ‘know’ her so intimately, she is inviting them to speculate about whether the intimacy will lead to carnal knowledge. After George declares his love for Marcella, Maxwell is annoyed that the situation he has foreseen has finally occurred. He finds Marcella’s influence over George, which also serves as a metonym for her power over the male government, deeply unsettling, not merely because of public

⁷⁶ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I. B Tauris, 1996), p. 171.

speculation about her relationship with George, but also because it undermines his own political position: '[t]his young man, ill-balanced, ill-mated, yet full of a sensitive ability and perception, had fallen in love with her; and Maxwell owed his political salvation to his wife's charm' (p. 430). The eventual triumph of the factory Act is publicly recognised to be the outcome of Marcella's clever manipulation of Sir George, rather than a political victory for Maxwell. George's initial concerns that any political involvement from his own wife would steal his glory are now repeated in Maxwell.

A woman's charm may give the workers of England their Factory Act, but it may also destroy the families of the powerful men who fall for it. A public victory is contrasted with a private disaster, and Ward asks us to weigh up which is more valuable. She herself seems ambivalent towards Marcella's actions. Even though concerns are expressed about Marcella being blameworthy, and the link is made between the political woman and the potential adulterer, it is George who is portrayed as the most blameworthy. It is after all, he who falls in love, Marcella's affections never stray from Maxwell, and she repeatedly assures herself that she only wishes to see the Factory Bill voted through to please her husband. When she realises her mistake, Marcella restores the domestic happiness in the Tressady home by befriending Letty, and soothes her husband by telling him that she shall no longer interfere in matters of public policy. The scene where Marcella visits Letty to apologise for her intimate behaviour towards George and her neglect of Letty, is, in a manner of speaking, also a seduction scene. Here, however, Marcella uses her motherly power to subdue and comfort Letty:

Marcella knelt beside her, the tears running down her cheeks. She put her arms—arms formed for tenderness, for motherliness—around the girl's slight frame. 'Don't—don't repulse me,' she said, with trembling lips, and suddenly Letty yielded. (p. 472)

George, on the other hand, suffers the fate that is usually assigned to the fallen woman when he dies while assisting one of his workers in after an explosion in one of his coal mines. While Marcella can be redeemed by making amends to

George's wife, and retreating from the public sphere, George can only be redeemed through the sacrifice of his life.

In this manner, Ward suggests that there were some questions, factory legislation being one of them, in which female interference in the political life of the nation were entirely justified. Marcella does retreat from the public sphere, but not before she has won a huge political victory; this allows Ward both to have her cake and eat it. She can remain theoretically against women's suffrage while granting women an enormous amount of practical influence in matters of government. Ward uses the sexual element of the plot to show the dangers of women's involvement in politics, she suggests the possibility of adultery and the destruction of the family, both commonly used reasons why women should not be granted the vote, but the ease with which the situation is resolved ultimately trivialises such concerns that abounded in contemporary society. Neither George nor Marcella ultimately commits adultery, neither marriage is destroyed as Marcella—perhaps far too easily—succeeds in reconciling Letty and George. Punishment is meted out to George; he is the fallen woman of the novel, and he is allowed the fallen woman's fate of redemption before death, by assisting in a mining accident that will kill him.

Conclusion

As I have shown, these novels contain two different plots concerning the effect of gender relations upon power structures in industrial relations: one in which the male opponent that the female reformer hopes to influence is cast as either a gothic villain, sexually threatening, incarcerating and possibly murderous, and another in which the political opponent is cast as someone who can be converted into a chivalric knight who worships from afar and will do anything, even betray his own allegiances to please her. The gothic plot points to the persecution of women by men and the chivalric plot to the adoration of women by men. In the gothic plot, female agency is threatened into submission by male sexual violence, in the chivalric plot, female agency is generated by the man's respect and admiration for the woman's chastity and his acceptance of woman's status as the moral guardian of society. Both of these plots say something very significant about the power of female influence in society: they both argue that for the ploy of feminine influence to have any effect on the male worldview, the male must

have a clear respect for women, must see her as spotless, and of a higher moral calibre, respect for female virtue and motherhood. This kind of female influence only works if the men are willing to surrender some of their power as a token of love or in exchange for gratitude. These novels recognise the vulnerability of female influence and recognise that this influence depends on upholding the belief of women's moral purity.

In both of the novels discussed in this chapter, the heroine retreats from her political work to save her virtue. Ruth hands over her factory to Mr. Pember after a campaign of sexual intimidation and pursues her original ambition of joining the Salvation Army. As the weaker sex, Harkness suggests that women are doomed to be dominated by the aggressive systems of the men in power, and the aggressive laws of industrial capitalism remain unchallenged. The one alternative presented to this problem is Jane Hardy's vision of a reversed society in which women are in power and the men are oppressed. Once women have 'seats in Parliament', Jane says, '[m]en *will* be subjected. I am sorry for them; they will suffer very much, but they *must* be subjected' (p. 187). Jane's conclusion seems to be that the power-holding class will always subject those who have less power: according to Jane, the idea that virtue can triumph is in itself a fallacy. Such a position dictates that women must remain powerless if they are to retain their moral superiority.

Sir George Tressady may not offer us the same stark conclusion, but it is telling that Marcella retreats into domesticity after her greatest political victory; she is, perhaps, too close to power. Ward, however, is decidedly more optimistic about the role that women can play in both the political and industrial system, although she suggests that women's involvement in industrial politics may endanger the stability of the family, these concerns are brushed aside by the ease with which Ward resolves the situation by sending her befriend Letty. What these novels reveal about both authors is a strong stance against laissez-faire capitalism: Harkness suggests that capitalism takes advantage of the female weaknesses that she considers to be partially inherent and partially a product of female oppression under the capitalist system; Ward, on the other hand, suggests that capitalism can be tamed through protective legislation, a viewpoint that fits her own belief in a paternal authority.

Chapter 3.

Homogenic Love and the Socialist Novel: Same-sex Love in Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore* and Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers*

In this chapter I examine the role that sexuality plays in the attempt to establish egalitarian socialist communities in Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore: Or, A Socialist Home* (1888), and Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900).¹ Both novels were written during the revival of communal socialism that took place during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Late nineteenth-century socialism was marked by, as Kevin Manton succinctly puts it, a 'doer-dreamer dichotomous model', with the economic socialism devoted to trade-unionism and campaigning for land nationalisation belonging to the former, and the ethical socialism that laid the theoretical ground-work for communal socialist belonging to the latter.² In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892) Engels took to task the socialism that did 'not claim to emancipate a particular class to begin with, but all humanity at once' thereby neglecting 'the interests of that proletariat', and instead praised Marx for revealing 'the materialistic conception of history' and 'the secret of capitalistic production through surplus value'.³ The socialist organisations that sprang up in the 1880s were divided by their allegiances to either the economic and material conditions of life or the spiritual and mental aspects of life. H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation—founded in 1881 as the Democratic Federation before becoming the Social Democratic Federation in 1883—called for land nationalisation, free compulsory education, and a universal eight-hour working day.⁴ Led by William Morris and Edward Aveling, defectors from the SDF formed the Socialist League in 1884. The

¹ Jane Hume Clapperton, *Margaret Dunmore* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1888), Gertrude Dix, *The Image Breakers* (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1900).

² Kevin Manton, 'The Fellowship of the New Life: English Ethical Socialism Reconsidered', *History of Political Thought*, 24 (2003), 282-304 (p. 282). Further works on late nineteenth century socialism include Chris White's, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), and Livesey's *Sex, Socialism, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a discussion of women's involvement in the socialist movements of the late nineteenth century see June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002).

³ Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1892), pp. 6, 44.

⁴ Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 73, Himmelfarb, pp. 326-27, *Socialism Made Plain: Being the Social and Political Manifesto of the Social-Democratic Federation* (London: W. Reeves, 1883), p. 6.

Fabian Society, also founded in 1884, which combined ‘ethical and spiritual concerns [...] with an interest in Land Nationalization’, was established by members of Thomas Davidson’s Fellowship of the New Life, who, as Bernard Shaw expressed it, ‘wanted to organize the docks’ instead of ‘sitt[ing] among the dandelions’.⁵

The communal socialism that we encounter in *Margaret Dunmore* and *The Image Breakers* hoped to combine the ethical and material aspects of socialism through co-operative homes. Communal living would solve the problem of private property and labour by sharing property and equally dividing labour and its rewards, as well as helping to cultivate the unselfish sides of human nature that would make socialism an instinct rather than an external political structure. Several experiments in communal living took place in the 1890s, such as the Clousden Hill Communist and Co-operative Colony, founded by Frank Capper and William Key, and Norton Hall Community, but none of them were successful. As Mark Bevir explains ‘[e]ventually most of the communes suffered from the difficulties that so often beset such experiments. They attracted idlers. The standard of living went down. Members started bickering. Key figures left. The communes disbanded’.⁶ The failures of these experiments in communal living may explain why Clapperton’s novel, written before they took place, is so consistently optimistic in its depiction of the commune, and why the attempts at such communities are short-lived and end in acrimony in Dix’s novel, which was published with hindsight in 1900.

Margaret Dunmore is the story of a young woman’s triumph when she founds a successful socialist commune despite initial misgivings from her friends. *The Image Breakers* depicts the successive failure of several attempts to set up self-sufficient socialist communities. At the heart of both attempts, and the reason for their success or failure, lies the sexuality of the men and women involved in the communes. In the search for an ideal society, sexual relations between men and women are revealed to be the greatest obstacle to social harmony. Clapperton’s commune meets with success because the members manage to police the heterosexual impulses that threaten the social harmony. In Dix’s commune, by contrast, the sexual dynamic between men and women

⁵ Bevir, p. 133, Manton, p. 282.

⁶ Bevir, p. 276.

cannot be contained, and so the commune fails. In both of these novels, heterosexual relationships are shown to underpin an unequal society in terms of both class and gender.

Clapperton's novel of communal living critiques the prevailing ideology of heterosexual romantic love, sexuality, and monogamous marriage, and makes the case for abandoning passionate love in favour of spiritual love. In doing so, she prioritises female relationships. *Margaret Dunmore* is the story of a young spinster who sets up a successful socialist commune with her close female friend, Miss José. This relationship is vital to the success of the commune as female bonding strengthens a feminine ethic that forms the ideological basis of the commune. Dix's novel *The Image Breakers* focuses on two female friends and their experience of seeking companionship and love at the same time as they search for an ideal society. We follow Leslie, a New Woman type whose goal in life is to find freedom, and her slightly older friend, Rosalind, a distinctly more old-fashioned type of woman who aspires to live for others.⁷ Both women are initially drawn to socialism, seeing in the socialist philosophies of the late nineteenth century the potential for freedom from gender conventions. Here, as in *Margaret Dunmore*, the idea of equality through same-sex relationships is crucial to establishing egalitarian communities. However, the difference between the two novels is that the female characters of *The Image Breakers* cannot sustain their relationship once the prospect of heterosexual love emerges.

These novels have been read in conjunction by Judy Greenway, Ann Ardis, Sally Ledger, and Eileen Sypher as manifestations of the utopian leaning in late nineteenth-century socialism.⁸ Most of these critics have also briefly mentioned the prevalence of homosocial relationships between women in these two novels. Ardis has suggested that the female relationships in *The Image Breakers* 'lie somewhere along the line of what Adrienne Rich terms "the lesbian

⁷ My purpose in this chapter is not to enter into an extended discussion of the New Woman; for such a discussion see Sally Ledger, 1997. Angelique Richardson has provided a new perspective on the New Woman by exploring her affiliations with the eugenics. For the purposes of my discussion, I take the New Woman to mean a woman who focuses on individual fulfilment through her career rather than marriage.

⁸ Judy Greenway, 'No Place for Women?: Anti-Utopianism and the Utopian Politics of the 1890s', *Geografiska Annaler*, 84 (2002), 201-209, Ann Ardis, "'The Journey From Fantasy to Politics': Representations of Socialism in Novels by Florence Dixie and Gertrude Dix', in *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889-1939*, ed. by Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai. (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 43-56, Ledger, 1997, pp. 50-58.

continuum”, but they do not encompass genital sexual contact between women’.⁹ Sypher notes that both *Margaret Dunmore* and *The Image Breakers* contain distinctly homosocial elements.¹⁰ Ledger observes that the ‘intimate companionable relationship’ that Rosalind and Leslie ‘enjoy’ is ‘diluted with the emergence of a male suitor for one of the women’.¹¹ Although these critics all note the existence of strong homosocial bonds in these novels, it is a subject that deserves to be dealt with at more length. What is missing from these readings is a more in depth analysis of the role that sexuality and potential homosocial relationships between women played in the late nineteenth-century socialist movement and the women’s movement. By contextualising the idea of the lesbian continuum solely within the women’s movement, these critics have overlooked the importance of homosexual relationships in late nineteenth-century socialist theory. In this chapter, therefore, I explore the importance of homosocial bonding in late nineteenth-century socialism, and argue that the conception of spiritual and fraternal love that formed the basis of ethical socialism, was manifested in the homosexual.

I will first examine the role that sexuality played in the discourses of utopian socialism and explain the socialist aversion to heterosexual marriage, and then look at the emerging discourse of the social value of homosexuality. After this I discuss Clapperton’s ideal of rational love in the socialist commune, and show how sexual love, in Clapperton’s eyes, is one of the selfish and competitive ideologies that training in the commune will stamp out. Clapperton’s sexual ideology corresponds to the social purity feminists’ concerns about the effects upon society of unregulated male sexuality, and the solution to this problem is for the women of the commune to help train the men to self-awareness. I then look at *The Image Breakers*, and explain how the socialist doctrine of an ideal society born out of the androgynous union of male and female underpins the notion of compulsory heterosexuality that permeates the novel.

⁹ Ardis, 1990, p. 138.

¹⁰ Eileen Sypher, *Wisps of Violence: Producing Public and Private Politics in the Turn-of-the-Century British Novel* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 137, 134.

¹¹ Ledger, 1997, p. 125.

Socialism and Sexuality

The late nineteenth century witnessed a resurgence of utopian ideas that had largely disappeared from the socialist agenda after various failed experiments in the early nineteenth century.¹² Although the utopian, and communal socialism, of Robert Owen, Henri Saint-Simon, and Charles Fourier, had been declared a failure, the evolutionary ideas circulating among socialists in the 1880s and 1890s generated a hope that mankind was at last ready for experiments in communal living.¹³ Jane Hume Clapperton, the Edinburgh-born self-professed socialist, reasoned that such experiments had failed because ‘the raw material chosen [...] was unfit’, and she hoped that a better quality of ‘raw material’, by which she meant people, would render such experiments successful in the future.¹⁴ Clapperton firmly believed that humanity had progressed considerably since the age of Robert Owen’s experiments in communal living. As her hopefulness suggests, the utopian socialists of the late nineteenth century drew upon evolutionary discourses and hoped to transform society into an extended family based on mutual co-operation; as Mark Bevir explains, they ‘defined socialism as the enactment of a spirit of democracy and fellowship in which relationships were based on equality and love’.¹⁵

Although the Owenite communities had been declared practical failures, late nineteenth-century socialists drew upon the theories on which these communities were founded. The legacy from the Owenites can be found in the communal socialist’s desire to transform private property into communal property, and their hostility towards monogamous marriage. Attacking the quintessential characteristics of the middle-class home, such as the idea of the family as a closed social unit and the defence of private property, communal socialists sought to expand the definition of family beyond blood bonds, and to replace private property with communal property. As Barbara Taylor has pointed

¹² Among these were Robert Owen’s New Harmony, see Carol A. Kolmerton, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in American Owenite Communities* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), and the transcendentalist Brook Farm, see Sterling Defano, *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹³ See Carol Kolmerton, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communities* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1991).

¹⁴ Jane Hume Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (London: Kegan Paul, 1885), p. 278.

¹⁵ Bevir, p. 302.

out, the Owenite socialists believed that ‘*Homo Economicus*, the atomized, competitive individual at the centre of bourgeois culture, was the product of a patriarchal system of psycho-sexual relations’.¹⁶ Robert Owen himself condemned marriage ‘as the key source of competitive ideology, as well as the main institution responsible for the transmission of private property’ and viewed the family as ‘the little commonwealth that looks only to its own interests and ignores those of its neighbours’. To free the home from its socially constricting middle-class ideology and economics, Owenite socialists proposed communal homes and free unions between men and women. As Barbara Taylor has pointed out, ‘[o]nly the harmonising of all human needs, through communal ownership and the transformation of the human character would ensure a new mode of loving, co-operative existence’.¹⁷

The attack upon monogamous marriage was not confined to the discourses of utopian socialism. Engels, who declared himself a scientific socialist to distinguish his branch of socialism from the utopians, wrote an extended critique of monogamous marriage in *The Origins of the Family*. Here, he pointed out that monogamous marriage had sprung up out of the necessity to ensure the correct transmission of property: ‘[m]onogamy was the first form of the family not founded on natural, but on economic conditions, viz.: the victory of private property over primitive and natural collectivism’. Rather than being an expression of love, monogamous marriage had evolved to safe-guard property, and as such it facilitated ‘the subjugation of one sex by the other’. To Engels, the oppression of women was closely linked to class oppression: he maintained that ‘[t]he first class antagonism appearing in history coincides with the development of the antagonism of man and wife in monogamy, and the first class oppression with that of the female by the male sex’.¹⁸ By abandoning the monogamous structure of middle-class marriage, class oppression and the oppression of women could both be eradicated.

The women of the Owenite movement were particularly vocal about their demands to change the prevailing marital laws and their desire for sexual as well

¹⁶ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1991), p. 38.

¹⁷ Taylor, p. 38, 39, 22.

¹⁸ Friedrich Engels, *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1909), p. 79.

as class equality, but alongside their attack upon marriage emerged another, perhaps more troubling, concern about the threat that sexual relations posed to equality. What if it was not only the legal structure of marriage that helped to oppress women; what if heterosexual love itself also played a major part? Anna Wheeler, a prominent socialist and public speaker in the 1820s and 30s, publicly declared that love ‘fixed and perpetuated the degradation of her sex’ and turned women into ‘sentimental slaves’. ‘Why should [a man] change his unjust, cruel, and insulting laws for woman’, Wheeler asked, ‘when he can...through woman’s power of loving, command worship and adoration...?’¹⁹ Perhaps Wheeler was speaking from her own experiences when she condemned love: she joined the Owenite movement after escaping from an unhappy marriage she entered into at the age of fifteen, without her parents approval; her husband quickly turned to drink, and she was perpetually pregnant.¹⁹ That such a marriage took place without her parents’ approval suggests that it was indeed a love-match; she was not coerced into such a marriage by the dictates of patriarchal society, but entered it freely for love. After leaving her husband and joining the Owenite movement, Wheeler became an outspoken critic of love and sexual passion. Inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft’s idea of ‘*reason* teach[ing] passion to submit to necessity’, she hoped to ‘*rationalize* human character, from whence all these sentiments emanate...by the invigorating influence of a co-operating reason’.²⁰ As Thomas Laqueur has pointed out, this ‘denial or devaluation of female passion is to some degree part of a more general devaluation of passion’.²¹

Wollstonecraft became one of the first women to challenge the heterosexual organisation of society when she included an extensive critique of (heterosexual) romantic love in her *Vindication*. Heterosexual relationships, she recognised, reinforced the binary organisation of gender into male and female as diametric opposites according to the two-sex model that emerged during the enlightenment.²² It was this organisation of gender that she attacked. The model

¹⁹ Taylor, pp. 48, 46, 59.

²⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (Oxford: World’s Classics, 1999), p. 97, Taylor, p. 47.

²¹ Thomas Laqueur, ‘Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology’, in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (London: University of California Press, 1987), 1-41 (p. 22).

²² For an account of the progression from a one-sex model of gender, in which women were merely inferior versions of men, to a two-sex model in which women were considered the

of womanhood to which Wollstonecraft aspired was one that was more ‘masculine’, but only in the sense of possessing ‘those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character’.²³ Janet Todd has pointed out that ‘her idea was androgynous: a mingling of male reason and female sensibility’.²⁴ Other critics have also noted the androgynous implications of her writing and her identification with lesbian and transgender women. Noticing Wollstonecraft’s affinity with those who crossed prescribed boundaries of gender, such as Sappho and Chevalier D’eon—a French diplomat who dressed as a woman—Ashley Tauchert has called Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Right of Woman* ‘a fundamentally *transgendered* text’.²⁵ If the key to equality between the sexes lay in breaking down the dualistic model of sex that emerged during the enlightenment, in which men and women began to be regarded as each others’ opposites, those who transgressed the boundaries of gender, through cross-dressing or homosexual tendencies became role-models for a new equality.

The idea that the oppression of women could be ended if men (and women) only learned to control passion by force of reason re-emerged in the late nineteenth century. This idea had, of course, never disappeared, but it came into a particular focus as social purists and eugenicists found the cause of social degradation, degeneration, and poverty in the mindless fulfilment of the passions and bodily appetites.²⁶ Here, as well, heterosexual passion came under fire as the creator of boundaries and eradicator of equalities. Men and Women’s Club member Henrietta Muller suggested that it was the sexual element of romantic love that made it an individualistic impulse, and proposed that transitioning from physical and sexual love to spiritual love would solve this problem: ‘it stands to reason because the physical in us is definite, limited, mechanical; the mental and spiritual alone is infinite in power and unlimited in its range’—what she meant was that sexual relations were exclusively between two people, but spiritual love

opposites of men, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender From The Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 149-192.

²³ Wollstonecraft, p. 72

²⁴ Janet Todd, ‘Reason and Sensibility in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman*’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 5 (1980), 17-20 (p. 17).

²⁵ Ashley Tauchert, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft: Feminist, Lesbian, or Transgendered’, in *Exclusions in Feminist Thought: Challenging the Boundaries of Womanhood*, ed. by Mary Brewer (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 236-249 (pp. 240, 241).

²⁶ Richardson, 2003, chapter 1.

has limitless potential.²⁷ Not everyone condemned sexual desire as being wholly individualistic. Edward Carpenter admitted that sexual desire could be problematic, as it could lead one into ‘the fiercest conflict’ between the ‘instinctive and sub-conscious nature’ and the later developed ‘human and moral self’, but he also saw it as a manifestation of desire for union with other souls: ‘perhaps the corporeal amatory instinct and the ethereal human yearning for personal union are really and in essence one thing’.²⁸ He believed that some form of sexual feeling was indispensable to the understanding of human society:

The sex-instinct lies so deep and is so universal, that for the understanding of life—of one’s own life, of that of others, and of human nature in general—as well as for the proper development of one’s own capacities, such experience is almost indispensable.²⁹

Carpenter’s *Sex-Love and Its Place in Society* encapsulates the two competing ideologies of sexual love that were prominent in the late nineteenth century, the one viewing sexual love as a selfish physical appetite and the other viewing it as a yearning for communion, and he attempted to mediate between the two by actively promoting spiritual love, while not condemning sexual love.

Even more dangerous was the fact that sexual love could present itself as a short-cut to heaven on earth, when it was merely the fulfilment of a bodily appetite. Writing to Maria Sharpe (the future Mrs Karl Pearson), Kate Mills, another member of the Men and Women’s club, suggested that sexual love was dangerously deceptive because it promised ‘heaven in the absorption in to another life’.

I am not an ascetic or a prude but...I say it is the cursed thing that pulls men and women down and holds them down...this mad craving to find a heaven in the absorption in to another life which takes the form of sexual intercourse...it is fatal because it does it while it throws over us a

²⁷ Bland, p. 42.

²⁸ Carpenter, *Sex-Love*, 1894, pp. 6-7, 8.

²⁹ Carpenter, *Sex-Love*, 1894, p. 4.

beautiful, incomprehensible, mysterious, feeling of devotion and self-surrender.³⁰

For Mills, the sexual instinct was a force that was capable of pulling men and women down from heaven, and holding them firmly ‘down’, and retaining them on earth, instead of soaring up to heaven through living on a spiritual plane. The solution to the problem that sexual relations between men and women presented both to the prospect of equality, and to the attainment of heaven, was, for her, the eradication of sex altogether. It is no coincidence that after condemning sexual love between men and women she suggested that evolution would lead to the development of ‘the perfect specimen of the perfect man (which would surely be hermaphroditic—only man and woman together forming the perfect creature...).’³¹ She was here imagining the disappearance of gender altogether, as male and female merged into ‘the perfect creature’.

Most likely, Mills’s idea of the two genders merging into one hermaphroditic being came from her involvement with the Theosophical Society, which she joined in 1891.³² Founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky, the Theosophical Society drew upon eastern mysticism to form the doctrine of the ‘Divine Hermaphrodite’ based upon the idea that the perfect androgyne would be formed by the combination of ‘the male principle’ and ‘the female principle’.³³ ‘The Uranian’—the term used by Carpenter and John Addington Symonds to signify the homosexual—came to play a central role in the Theosophical Movement as the homosexual was seen as an early embodiment the ‘Divine Hermaphrodite’. As Dixon has pointed out, ‘the Uranian simultaneously represented a spiritualized and celibate (homo)sexuality and a harbinger of the New Age’.³⁴ The Theosophical movement bore some distinct similarities to the ethical socialism of the late nineteenth century, with some members of the Theosophical Society moving between the ideologies. What both movements had in common was the idea that humanity would evolve into a better and more

³⁰ Bland, p. 42.

³¹ Bland, p. 42-43.

³² Bland, p. 168.

³³ Joy Dixon, ‘Sexology and the Occult: Sexuality and Subjectivity in Theosophy’s New Age’, in *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 288-309 (p. 294).

³⁴ Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 2001, p. 114.

socially minded type. Socialism, too, celebrated the Uranian as the embodiment of a being in which masculinity and femininity were perfectly combined.

Those who have linked romantic love to the rise of individualism and the oppression of women focused exclusively on the unequal dynamics of heterosexual love, but same-sex love was covertly beginning to be recognised as an antidote to the individualistic, fleshly, and oppressive heterosexual relationship. In 1883, John Addington Symonds defended male homosexuality and argued for the social and moral importance of homosexual relationships in *A Problem in Greek Ethics*. As only ten copies were printed, it is unlikely that the work was widely read, but its publication, and the follow up *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891) was a sign of an emerging discourse upon the link between homosexuality and a greater sense of social responsibility.³⁵ Symonds extolled the virtues of what he called ‘Greek love’ and explained how ‘[g]lorifying in their emotion, the Greeks pronounced it to be the crowning virtue of free men, the source of gentle and heroic actions, the heirloom of Hellenic civilisation’.³⁶ Symonds emphasised the spiritual and emotional aspects of homosexuality without dwelling too much on the physical side. The discourse of homosexuality as a promoter of communitarian virtues became an important idea among the utopian socialists through the influence of homosexual socialists such as Walt Whitman and Edward Carpenter. As Mark Bevir has explained, ‘Whitman defined his ideal in terms of “the dear love of comrades,” arguing that true democracy is of the spirit of “manly love”’, and ‘even suggested that because the love of homosexuals crosses barriers of class, homosexuals might be the harbingers of democracy’.³⁷

Inspired both by Symonds and the homoerotic poetry of Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter published his pamphlet *Homogenic Love: And its Place in a Free Society* in 1894, as part of a series of pamphlets upon gender and sexuality. Drawing upon Symonds’s use of the ideals of ancient Greece to defend homosexuality, Carpenter argued that the fact that ‘the whole literature and life of the greatest people of antiquity—the Greeks of the Periclean age—was saturated

³⁵ Rictor Norton, ‘Symonds, John Addington (1840–1893)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26888, accessed 3 Feb 2012].

³⁶ Quoted in Chris White, *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 162.

³⁷ Bevir, p. 249.

with the passion of homogenic or comrade-love, must convince us that this passion cannot be lightly dismissed as of no account—must convince us that it has an important part to play in human affairs’. Carpenter identified himself as a ‘Uranian’ or ‘invert’ and lived outside Sheffield with George Merrill, a working-class man, a relationship that seemed to confirm the idea of the ability of homosexual love to cross class boundaries. Like Symonds, Carpenter chose to downplay the sexual aspect of homosexual relationships, although he acknowledged that ‘this kind of love, too, like others, has its physical side’. Homosexual relationships, he argued, were by definition less sexual than heterosexual relationships, which contributed to the social importance of such relationships:

in the homosexual love—whether between a man and a man or between woman and woman—the physical side, from the very nature of the case, can never find expression quite so freely and perfectly as in the ordinary heterosexual love; and so therefore there is a ‘natural’ tendency for the former love to run rather more along emotional channels. And this no doubt throws light on the fact that love of the homogenic type has inspired such a vast amount of heroism and romance—and is indeed only paralleled in this respect (as J. Addington Symonds has pointed out in his paper on Dantesque and Platonic ideals of Love) by the loves of Chivalry, which of course owing to their special character, were subject to a similar transmutation³⁸

According to the ideal of sexual love transformed into spiritual love, homosexual love was more exalted and more spiritual than love between men and women.

Fin-de-siècle socialists who viewed same-sex relationships as a path to social equality, were following a tradition established by the French utopian socialist movements that drew upon the ideas of Charles Fourier, and Claude-Henri de Saint Simon. Despite similarities in their social theories, Fourier and Saint Simon were ‘unacquainted with each other’s work’, although the movements that were based on their ideas would have been familiar with the

³⁸ Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love: And its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1894), pp.13, 22, 13, 37.

ideas of each, as well as the philosophy of Robert Owen.³⁹ What all three of these utopian movements had in common was a deep sense that society was organised according to sexual relations, and that a sexual reformation was necessary to change society. If Fourier viewed 'sexual passion' as 'an unconscious psycho-dynamic underlying all historical change', it was Saint Simon's followers rather than he himself who debated the importance of sexual relations.⁴⁰

Coupled with this preoccupation with sexual matters, was a celebration of traditional 'feminine' qualities, and femininity in general. The reason for this was that utopian socialism in general viewed the 'traditional' feminine qualities as exactly those desired for individuals in the socialist state; as Taylor points out, 'the very qualities which were considered quintessentially female were also those which the Owenites wished to see generalized across the population: love, compassion, generosity, charity. A good woman, it was implied, was a born communist'.⁴¹ Saskia Poldervaart has explained how the French utopian socialists of the 1830s and 40s celebrated traditionally feminine qualities and sought to incorporate these qualities in the masculine in order to create the ideal being that would usher in the socialist state. Poldervaart points out that while '[t]he Saint-Simonean men wanted primarily to deepen their insight into "what it is to be a woman" by practicing celibacy, opening up their personal feelings by means of continuous introspection and discussions and handling all domestic chores by themselves', Fourier glorified lesbianism: 'Sapphism is an exalted virtue, because it creates ties that did not exist until now. It is a precious amalgam of love and friendship'.⁴²

The notion of socialism as a 'feminine' ideology survived into the late nineteenth century and was utilised by opponents of socialism as well as socialists themselves. When weighing up the pros and cons of extending the franchise to women, T. E. Kebbel compared feminine politics to socialism: 'there is, I believe, in feminine politics an element of Socialism'.⁴³ Kebbel condescendingly noted that 'when you talk to women of the sanctity of rights of

³⁹ Saskia Poldervaart, 'Theories About Sex and Sexuality in Utopian Socialism', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 29 (1995), 41-68 (p. 45), Taylor, pp. 45-46, 28-29.

⁴⁰ Taylor, p. 29, Poldervaart, p. 52.

⁴¹ Taylor, p. 31.

⁴² Poldervaart, pp. 44, 55-56, 49.

⁴³ T. E. Kebbel, 'Feminine Politics', *Time*, 5 (1889), 491-500 (p. 493).

property, and point out to them that it is one of the elementary conditions on which civilization rests, they reply with innocent irrelevance “Oh! But don’t you think the Duke of This or Sir Somebody of That has a great deal more than he ought to have?”.⁴⁴ Women and socialists, according to Kebbel, were united in that ‘[t]hey do not readily grasp abstract principles’, and hence, to extend the vote to women would be to move towards a socialist state. For some socialists, however, the femininity of socialism stood in its favour. As Ruth Livesey points out, Oscar Wilde viewed socialism as a woman.⁴⁵ In ‘Poetical Socialists’ he referred to socialism repeatedly as ‘she’ and ‘her’: ‘if she succeeds, her triumph will not be a triumph of mere brute force’.⁴⁶ Because the qualities that ethical socialists valued were traditionally seen as being feminine, and because of the perception of the male homosexual as being more feminine than the heterosexual, and female homosexual as being more masculine than the heterosexual, the homosexual assumed a position of importance in discourses of socialist androgyny.

When discourses upon homosexuality began to emerge in the 1890s, they emphasised the androgyny of the homosexual. In *Sexual Inversion* first published in 1897 Havelock Ellis suggested that homosexuality was a remnant of ‘embryonic hermaphroditism’:

We can properly grasp the nature of abnormality better if we reflect on the development of the sexes and on the latent organic bi-sexuality in each sex. At an early stage of development the sexes are indistinguishable, and throughout life the traces of this early community of sex remain.

Several of the subjects Havelock Ellis interviewed for his study saw themselves as having the sexual mind of the other sex. One of the subjects described his feelings towards his own sex as being the feelings of a woman: ‘[i]n the frame of a man I had the sexual mind of a female...In imagination I possessed the female organ and felt toward man exactly as an amorous female would’.⁴⁷ This subject

⁴⁴ Kebbel, p. 493.

⁴⁵ Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁴⁶ Oscar Wilde, ‘Poetical Socialists’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 13 (1889), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Havelock Ellis, *The Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1921), pp. 184, 97.

viewed his sexual self as being female; his actual male physical body was to him nothing more than a 'frame' for what was potentially the mind of a female. In this sense, homosexuality opened up the possibility of breaking down the boundaries of gender.

Edward Carpenter would later develop his theory of homosexuality towards a theory of androgyny in *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (1908). Discussing the concept of homosexuality, Carpenter wrote by way of example: '[w]e all know women with a strong dash of the masculine temperament, and we all know men whose almost female sensibility and intuition seems to belie their bodily form'. Those of a homosexual inclination were, by default, crossing the boundaries of gender, and by doing so they became a superior type of humanity, possessed of the best masculine and best feminine qualities. In the male homosexual, Carpenter maintained '[w]e find a man who, while possessing thoroughly masculine powers of mind and body, combines them with the tenderer and more emotional soul-nature of the woman—and sometimes to a remarkable degree'. The female invert's possession of more traditionally masculine qualities made her 'often fitted for remarkable work, in professional life, or as the manageress of institutions, or even as a ruler of a country'.⁴⁸

Carpenter divided love relationships into biologically or spiritually procreative:

As ordinary love has a special function in the propagation of the race, so the other has a special function in social and heroic work, and in the generation—not of bodily children—but of those children of the mind, the philosophical conceptions of our lives and our society.⁴⁹

By affirming the importance of heterosexual relationships and employing the language of eugenics in which the mundane phraseology surrounding having children was upgraded to a matter of national importance through emphasising the 'propagation of the race', Carpenter was finding a place in the eugenic society for the homosexual. Yet, by conveying the importance of 'the other' love in

⁴⁸ Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*: (London: George Allen, 1921), pp. 17, 32, 36.

⁴⁹ Bland, p. 264, Carpenter, 1921, p. 70.

‘social and heroic work’ he was also drawing upon the notion of ‘Greek love’ as a more powerful motive force of ‘heroic deeds’ than heterosexual love, an idea that was developed by Symonds. Homosexual love was directed outwards, towards society, and heterosexual love inwards. For Carpenter, ‘homogenic’ love was synonymous with ‘Comrade love’, a term he used frequently in his pamphlet:

it is difficult to believe that anything except that kind of comrade-union which satisfies and invigorates the two lovers and yet leaves them free from the responsibilities and *impedimenta* of family life can supply the force and liberate the energies required for social and mental activities of the most necessary kind.⁵⁰

Edith Lees Ellis, wife of sexologist Havelock Ellis and one of the ‘inverts’ he studied for his work on *Sexual Inversion*, was later to preach the importance of homosexuals in their predilection towards ‘spiritual parenthood’.⁵¹

Both Carpenter and Symonds were defending male homosexuality against the charges of deviance that were commonly levelled at male same-sex sexual activity. In 1909, M. D. O’Brien responded to Carpenter’s ‘Homogenic Love’ in ‘Socialism and infamy: the Homogenic or Comrade Love Exposed: An Open Letter in Plain Words for a Socialist Prophet’ (1909):

Ultra-sociability of this demonstrative kind may be agreeable to Socialists, but individualists do not want it, and do not mean to have it. Let the comrades keep all of it for themselves... The practice of your vile homosexuality quite unfits its slaves for the duties of married state, and causes them to turn from their wives to male ‘comrades’ who are more capable of satisfying their unnatural appetites.⁵²

This critique was typical in that it acknowledged male homosexuality only as a possibility. Female homosexuality was far less controversial, largely due to the fact that female same-sex relationships were rarely identified as being of a sexual

⁵⁰ Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, 1894, p. 141.

⁵¹ Bland, p. 295,

⁵² Quoted in White, p. 29.

nature. As Bland has pointed out, 'sexual feeling was often assumed to be heterosexual by *definition*, most obviously in the case of the widely held view of sex's function as reproductive'.⁵³ Few women identified their love for other women as sexual even though they were open about their desire to 'kiss and caress' their beloved, and some, such as Frances Power Cobbe, even identified female companions both as 'husband' and 'wife'.⁵⁴ It was not until the development of sexology in the late nineteenth century that lesbianism came to be publicly recognised and scientifically classified as a sexual orientation.⁵⁵

When lesbianism was defined, sexologists emphasised the need for differentiating between those whose lesbianism was 'congenital' and those whose lesbianism was by 'inclination'. When Havelock Ellis published *Sexual Inversion* he 'was insistent that one needed to distinguish the 'true' invert, for whom inversion was congenital and thus inevitable, from the 'artificial' invert or 'pseudosexual', who was basically homosexual through inclination'. Writers on homosexuality, as Bland shows, were concerned that the women's movement was 'encouraging not true inversion but its 'spurious imitation'.⁵⁶ The latter kind of female homosexuality was especially threatening because it suggested that women were capable of adapting themselves to life without men. Evidence of sexual activity among factory girls that Ellis drew from Italian sociologist Nicefero indicates the extent to which anxieties about female homosexuality were linked to fears of female independence and male displacement:

From midday till 2 p. m. , during the hours of greatest heat, when all are in this condition, and the mistress, in her chemise (and sometimes, with no shame at the workers' presence, even without it), falls asleep on the sofa, all the girls, *without one exception*, masturbate themselves.

In Ellis's writing, fear of 'false' homosexuality among women was linked to fears of female independence. Women were not only capable of earning their own living, they were also able to sexually please each other, making men entirely redundant. Those who engaged in such activities were not considered by Ellis to

⁵³ Bland, p. 169.

⁵⁴ Marcus, pp. 51-53.

⁵⁵ Bland, pp. 169-170.

⁵⁶ Bland, pp. 263, 264.

be 'real' homosexuals, but were merely pretenders to male positions of power, as the image of factory girls pretending to be men during sexual activity conveys: 'some of the girls retire into the fitting-room, and having fastened their chemises round their legs and thighs with pins, so as to imitate trousers, play at being men and pretend to have intercourse with others'.⁵⁷

Carpenter, too, believed the women's movement was responsible for growing numbers of female sexual inverts, but his tone was more enthusiastic, for he noted that 'a growing consciousness among women that they have been oppressed and unfairly treated by men, and a growing unwillingness to ally themselves unequally in marriage' had 'caused the womankind to draw more closely together and to cement alliances of their own'. Pointing out that such alliances were important to the campaign for women's liberation, he was implicitly encouraging same-sex relationships between women.⁵⁸

The suggestion that the advancing women's movement was creating more 'artificial' homosexuality among women suggests that homosexuality or homosexual relationships could be political choices as well as congenital sexual urges. When Carpenter expressed his hope that female relationships would help women towards equality, he was anticipating Adrienne Rich's idea of the 'lesbian continuum', a network or community of women defined by 'the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support'. Rich argued that a culture of 'compulsory heterosexuality' prevented the female bonding necessary to female emancipation: 'Woman-identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality'.⁵⁹

Viewed in such terms, female homosexuality becomes less about sexuality and more about politics, less a question of women loving women and more a question of throwing off the patriarchy. If women chose to make their sexual alliances with women rather than men then men would become redundant.

A Lesbian Utopia: Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore*

⁵⁷ Nicefero, paraphrased in Havelock Ellis, *Studies in Psychology: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davies, 1904), p. 128.

⁵⁸ Carpenter, *Homogenic Love*, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5 (1980), 631-660 (pp. 649, 657).

Clapperton was born in Edinburgh in 1832 as one of twelve children. Returning from boarding school in England in 1848 she was prompted to begin her self-education by Robert Chambers, author of *Vestiges of Creation*.⁶⁰ In her two non-fiction works, *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (1885) and *A Vision of the Future Based on the Application of Ethical Principles* (1904), she explained her theories of social improvement through evolution. Clapperton wrote her only novel, *Margaret Dunmore, Or, A Socialist Home* (1888), to illustrate the application of her theories. *Scientific Meliorism* was the first of three works devoted to her vision of eugenic socialism.⁶¹ Declaring herself to be a socialist in the widest meaning of the term—in fact, declaring everyone to be a socialist according to this definition—she devoted her work to the development of what she defined as ‘real socialism’.

Towards the idea of Socialism society must slowly move, but crude socialism in method has gone astray, and real socialism is yet in an early stage. Of the term—socialism—the only definition wide enough to be scientifically correct is this—*concerted action for social ends*. This definition makes us all *socialists*, for no one, not even the strongest individualist in theory, will deny that for social ends concerted action is necessary.⁶²

Socialism, in Clapperton’s opinion, was not so much a possibility as the inevitable goal of an advancing civilisation that was developing greater social sympathies.

Clapperton’s socialism was heavily influenced by Malthus, Darwin, and Spencer, she therefore proposed a solution that included strategies towards population control as well as the systematic moral training of every individual from birth. This moral training was to take place in what she calls ‘associated’ or ‘unitary’ homes, that is to say, socialist communes designed to ensure the

⁶⁰ S. M. den Otter, ‘Clapperton, Jane Hume (1832–1914)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55282>, accessed 7 March 2012].

⁶¹ Jane Hume Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (London: Kegan Paul, 1885).

⁶² Clapperton, 1885, pp. 396–397.

development of co-operation rather competition. She predicted, however, that the sexual instinct could initially prove to be problematic in the associated home. Sexuality, she recognised, was an instinct every bit as competitive and selfish as the capitalistic impulse that drove the accumulation of property. Primarily, male sexuality was the main problem; women did possess the sexual instinct too, she assured her readers, but female sexuality was less ‘animal’ and more ‘social’ than male sexuality:

The instinct is in all men keen and strong, whereas in many women who have tenderness and all the sympathetic qualities largely developed, the appetite from which these latter have arisen is in itself extremely weak, and sociality in them dominates animality.⁶³

In this manner, Clapperton, like eugenic and social purity feminists, aligned women with the reason/culture end of the gender dichotomy, and aligned men with natural instincts. It was her belief, however, that most people could, with sufficient training, be taught to control unruly instincts.

Clapperton’s ideas were illustrated in *Margaret Dunmore, Or A Socialist Home* in which we follow Margaret, a young spinster, who sets up a socialist commune with the help of her friends.⁶⁴ Founded upon the friendship of Margaret and Miss José, a relationship that bears the hallmarks of a ‘romantic friendship’, Clapperton’s commune is an early version of the ‘homogenic’ utopia later imagined by Edward Carpenter.⁶⁵ What prevents Clapperton from imagining an exclusively female community such as those described by Martha Vicinus in *Independent Women* is the emphasis that her own social philosophy places upon eugenics and the importance of right breeding.⁶⁶ Instead, Clapperton reaches a compromise in which the women in the commune allow their relationships with each other to take precedence over their own (actual and potential) sexual relationships with men. Female community is essential to the spread of a moralised and indeed feminised model of humanity; if heterosexual relationships are vital to the survival of the commune through the birth of children, the homosocial relationships between women are essential to ensure that

⁶³ Clapperton, 1885, p. 173.

these heterosexual relationships are based on spiritual and rational love rather than physical passion.

The most recent discussion of *Margaret Dunmore* by Wendy Parkins, 'Domesticating Socialism and the Senses in Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore: Or, A Socialist Home*' (2011), astutely notes that the success of the commune depends heavily upon 'the regulation of the senses as a mark of "civilization"' and observes that 'self-transformation is closely linked to self-regulation' in Margaret's commune.⁶⁷ While Parkins notes the importance of 'rational self-control', sensory regulation is only one aspect of the 'self-control' that the commune relies upon; the other, and perhaps more crucial element to the success of the commune, is the regulation of sexual desire. What Parkins has missed is how the idea of social change through self-control facilitates the female same-sex relationships upon which the commune is founded and sustained.

For the commune to run smoothly, passion must first be transformed into an enduring and all-embracing spiritual love. The transmutation of sexual to spiritual love sets up female same-sex relationships as being the ideal since they represent both a powerful feminine ethic and a chaste spiritual connection. The socialist commune that Margaret and Miss José found together represents the complete triumph of a feminine ethic based on mutual service over the competitive and individualist male spirit. What emerges in this narrative is a complete repudiation of the competitive 'masculine' ethics of the public sphere and the capitalist industries. The women of the commune are depicted as caring and enterprising mothers and efficiently enthusiastic domestic workers who happily throw off all claims towards individuality, while the men are shown to be

⁶⁴ *Margaret Dunmore* has been discussed by Duangredi Suksang, who views Clapperton as a champion of equality and eradicator of gender distinctions: '[b]elieving in Spencerian evolutionism, Clapperton envisions an egalitarian society in which men and women share equal partnership in their pursuit of happiness for all' (Duangredi Suksang, 'Equal Partnership: Jane Hume Clapperton's Evolutionist-Socialist Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, 3 (1992), 95-107 (p. 96). This is a misreading of a novel in which men are relegated to the margins of the narrative; they are mostly permitted appearances when they are chastised or corrected by the women of the commune. Sally Ledger has provided a more accurate reading of the gender dynamics of the novel, pointing out that 'whilst domestic labour is organised on a 'mutual service basis' (p. 24) in the *Socialist Home*, it is a mutuality of women rather than of men' (Ledger, 1997, p. 51).

⁶⁵ Michael Matthew Kaylor, *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians, Hopkins, Pater, and Wilde* (Brno: Masaryk University Press, 2006), pp. 343-344.

⁶⁶ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985), passim.

⁶⁷ Wendy Parkins, 'Domesticating Socialism and the Senses in Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore: Or, A Socialist Home*', *Victoriographies*, 1 (2011), 261-286 (p. 282).

competitive and sometimes hostile towards the communal spirit of the home. One of the hostile needs to be regulated is male sexuality. Joe and Frank, the two young married men who come to live in the commune with their wives, threaten the harmony of the community; Joe because of his 'individualist' possessiveness of his wife, and Frank because of his unregulated sexuality that turns itself towards Margaret once his wife is busy looking after their child and taking part in the daily life of the commune.

Margaret Dunmore begins with a young woman explaining to her best friend how she fell into a deep depression because she realised that she would most likely never marry. In a letter to her friend Vera, Margaret Dunmore explains how she has been rescued from a phase of 'egoistic sorrow' (p. 2) rooted in her status as an unmarried woman, a state which she has not chosen: 'not the echo of a whisper of an offer of marriage has ever come my way!' (p. 1). She counts herself among 'that surplus million of women for whom dame Nature, affluent as she is, has nevertheless provided no husbands' (p. 1). Her considerable private fortune means that she does not have to make a living for herself either by marrying or seeking paid employment. The problem of Margaret's spinsterhood is emotional rather than economic; the lack of romance has left her feeling 'often very, very miserable' and free to indulge in 'egoistic sorrow' (p. 2). Margaret has been raised to expect marriage, but not to actively solicit for it; having been told by her mother in her youth to 'let a' the lads alane, and yer own gude-man will come to ye', she has found herself with no prospects of marriage and has deemed herself a 'surplus' woman at the age of twenty-seven (p. 1). Disappointed by her single status—'romance was what I looked for in my girlish life' (p. 1)—Margaret lapses into a self-pitying depression that leaves her without any interest in life. Hitherto, romance has evidently taken the shape of heterosexual relationships in Margaret's mind until she encounters Miss José, 'the last descendant of a very ancient French family' (p. 57) whom she meets when she is trapped in a train following a railway accident, and who offers her a different prospect in life.

Clapperton is drawing upon the problem of the spinster, or the 'surplus' woman, that emerged in 1851 when the census revealed the existence of 400,000

unmarried women.⁶⁸ While W. R. Greg's article in the *National Review* viewed the spinster as an inversion of the natural order and women's place within it as wives and mothers, Frances Power Cobbe saw the surplus women as evidence that '[t]he old assumption that marriage was the sole destiny of woman, and that it was the business of her husband to afford her support', was not in accordance with the provisions made by nature.⁶⁹ The rising number of spinsters suggested that the value of women in nature was not merely determined by their reproductive qualities; Cobbe implied that spinsterhood was ordained by nature with a view to accomplishing greater things than marriage and motherhood. Although she may have identified herself with the cause of spinsters, Cobbe, however, lived openly with another woman, Mary Lloyd, whom she referred to alternately as her 'husband' or 'wife', as well as her 'beloved friend', paralleling heterosexual marriage. Women could be spinsters and single in the sense that they were not married to men, yet they may have had relationships with women that they themselves likened to marriage. Such relationships gave women the economic and legal independence of single women, but also the love and affection that (ideally) marriage offered to women. When Cobbe imagined a different purpose for spinsters, a life filled with social work and philanthropic activity, she was most likely aware that some spinsters would have had the same type of same-sex relationship that she herself had with Lloyd, and that some of her female friends had with each other.⁷⁰

In 'Celibacy vs Marriage' published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1862, Cobbe suggested that more women were discovering the benefits of celibacy over the prospect of making an unhappy marriage. Her idea of celibacy, however, did not mean solitary living; she suggested that most spinsters would find themselves female companions: '[n]or does the 'old maid' contemplate a solitary age as the bachelor must usually do, it will go hard but she will find a *woman* to share it. And more—(but it is a theme we may not treat of here)'.⁷¹ Was Cobbe suggesting that women would live together for more than mere companionship? Cobbe's comparison of the 'old maid' and the 'bachelor' suggests that it was far

⁶⁸ Richardson, 2003, p. 35.

⁶⁹ W. R. Greg, 'Why are Women Redundant?', *National Review*, 14 (1862), 434-60 (p. 436), Frances Power Cobbe, 'What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?', *Fraser's Magazine*, 66 (1862), 594-610.

⁷⁰ Marcus, pp. 51-53.

⁷¹ Cobbe, 'Celibacy vs Marriage', *Fraser's Magazine*, 65 (1862), 288-235 (p. 233).

easier for women of a homosexual inclination to set up house and home with other women than it was for homosexual men. If Cobbe was thinking of homosexuality and female same-sex relationships when she spoke of spinsterhood, she was making an early plea for same-sex love as being of great social importance.

It is this kind of relationship that Margaret establishes when she meets Miss José. In her letter to her friend Vera, Margaret describes her first meeting with Miss José which occurred when they ‘passed a long night together’ in a ‘snowed-up train’ following a railway accident (p. 1). Without Margaret explaining anything about her current state of mind, Miss José is able to ‘pluck[...] out the secret of [her] discontent’, which convinces Margaret ‘that [her] innermost being was like an open book before her mind’s eye’ (p. 2). What Margaret tells Vera of her first meeting reads almost like a romantic encounter: they spend the night together (although out of necessity more than anything else) and they seem to be able to communicate without words. This impression is strengthened by Margaret’s explanation that ‘since then we have had frequent and intimate intercourse’ (p. 2), by which she means conversation, yet the use of ‘intimate intercourse’ to define their interactions, inevitably draws comparisons to sexual intercourse. Furthermore, Margaret’s assertion that her relations with Miss José have transformed her—‘I am no longer Margaret the unhappy, but, a Margaret whose youth has been restored to her’ (p. 3)—suggests that Margaret has finally gained the romance that was lacking in her life. The prospect of a romantic relationship with Miss José is heightened if we consider that Vera too writes to Margaret of her own love life and her secret engagement to Joe Ferrier. Margaret and Vera are thus two old school friends exchanging details about their lovers. All this points towards Margaret and Miss José as soul mates brought together by fate in which a ‘railway accident’ becomes Margaret’s ‘lucky day’ (p. 1).

Clapperton’s non-fiction contains little about the idea of same-sex companionship, instead, she called for easier relations between the sexes and occupations for women beyond marriage. In *Scientific Meliorism*, Clapperton pointed out that girls and women were more likely to suffer disappointments in love than men simply due to the fact that women outnumbered men in the world. To remedy such disappointment, Clapperton suggested that girls’ education

should not focus so strongly upon getting married, and that girls should be taught to find an alternative purpose in life. To clarify her point, Clapperton quotes from Sarah Ellis, author of the definitive work on women's duties, who argued that 'half the miseries of young women and half their ill-temper might be avoided by domestic activity, *because* there is no sensation more cheering and delightful than the conviction of having been useful'. Clapperton widens women's activities beyond the domestic and suggests that 'intellectual pursuit' and 'activity (bodily and mental)' is the 'panacea for the emotional pains of youth'.⁷² Here, she draws attention to the way that women are taught only to expect romance and motherhood, and sets up the scene for Margaret to carve out a new path for herself. Yet, the alternative that Clapperton offers is a form of metaphorical motherhood for Margaret, in which she becomes the 'nursing mother' (p. 55) of a socialist home.

Offering women metaphoric motherhood as a substitute for biological motherhood may confine women to the gender roles that they are hoping to destabilise, but it is also a method used to validate same-sex relationships (whether sexual or not) in a social and political climate that placed greater stress upon the reproductive duties of citizens. As Clapperton herself was a firm eugenicist, same-sex relationships must fit into her idea of a society gradually improved by eugenic breeding and moral training. This dual model of improvement, with equal emphasis placed on heredity and education, validates the non-procreational relationships formed by women. Furthermore, by employing the language of parenting and kinship to describe the social activities of these women, she emphasises the connection to eugenics.

When Margaret and Miss José decide to set up a 'a Provincial Communistic Group' where they hope to 'rear children of a purely Socialistic type' (p. 23), they are creating a surrogate family for themselves and devoting themselves to what Edith Lees Ellis would later call 'spiritual parenthood'.⁷³ The purpose of the commune is distinctly eugenic, for Miss José believes, like Clapperton, that 'for true progress the first and most necessary step is the creation of a modern domestic system, favourable to bringing into the world a new type of

⁷² Clapperton, 1885, p. 189.

⁷³ Bland, p. 295. In 'Eugenics and Spiritual Parenthood' Ellis pondered the fate of the 'peculiar people' who were neither 'feeble-minded' nor 'imbecile', Mrs. Havelock Ellis, *The New Horizon in Love and Life* (London: A. & C. Black, 1921), pp. 55-69 (p. 56).

humanity' (p. 22-23). By nurturing the inhabitants of the commune to 'spontaneously reject competition in industry, and rise above class distinction', socialism will become an instinct rather than an ideological leaning. Metaphors of motherhood abound in Miss José's explanation of women's mission in socialism. Repeatedly, she speaks of socialism as a child, still in its infancy, which will be nurtured by women.

Our socialism, believe me, is the legitimate child of freedom, although as yet as a mere babe in swaddling clothes. The world is too old now to worship at an infant's shrine. Our attitude is no longer supplicatory, but tenderly protective. Humanity will cherish, nourish, patiently uphold the baby footsteps of its future king; in one word, it perceives that childhood is sacred. (p. 21)

Miss José evidently finds it difficult to express what socialism is to her without using metaphors of motherhood. Even after declaring that she 'must drop these figures of speech' (p. 21), she again refers to socialism as a child, and women as the mothers who will nurture that child. Margaret's socialism, she tells Martin, is 'the Socialism of the new era, which she carried as a babe in her bosom, and does not expect it to accomplish great things. She allows it must creep before it can run' (p. 22). Instead of marrying and having children, Margaret and Miss José are effectively having a child together when they create their commune. In this manner, Clapperton is anticipating Edward Carpenter's discourses upon the social usefulness of same-sex relationships. The terminology of homosexuality does not feature in *Margaret Dunmore* (in fact, there were few terms to describe love between women since 'sexual inversion' and 'uranian' love did not appear until the 1890s) but the notion that same-sex relationships may serve just as valuable a purpose as heterosexual and procreative relationships runs through the idea of the woman-led commune.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Much has been written about how new terminology and the definition of sexual preferences in the late nineteenth century as either hetero or homosexual have affected our understanding of sexuality. For various discussions of this topic see Bland, pp. 261-264; Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. xx-xxv; Marcus, pp. 10-13.

Rather than focusing on male homosexuality as the source of 'heroic deeds', Clapperton is exalting same-sex female relationships and presents male heterosexuality as the basis for social discord. Masculine heroism, encapsulated in Miss José's interpretation of masculine attempts at a socialist revolution, is dismissed with the aid of reproductive metaphors when she dismisses male efforts 'to give birth to socialism' as 'abortions, nothing more' (p. 21). Because men lack the physical ability to give birth to children, they lack also the ability to give birth to political and social movements. Miss José is inverting the birth metaphor employed by Marx, in which pregnant societies give violent birth to new societies, and is suggesting that the birth of socialism will be violent only if it is at the hands of men.⁷⁵ Male revolutionary socialism, Miss José suggests, has so far succeeded only in destroying itself, whereas women's reproductive and nurturing qualities will allow them to produce socialism and reproduce socialist children. Because of their violent tendencies men are failing to create anything, let alone an equal state. Here, the metaphor of motherhood is used to envision a peaceful socialist matriarchy, which is pitched against a violent male socialist tradition. Margaret repudiates Marxist socialism with its emphasis on destruction and instead affirms her commitment to a Utopian socialist tradition which distances itself from violent upheaval, and exalts the position of the feminine.⁷⁶ The patient, nurtured and nurturing socialism of Miss José and Margaret is contrasted against the more aggressive socialism advocated by Miss José's Monsieur Martin, and Miss José invites him to join them in a commune where he will see how socialism can work peacefully under the guiding hands of women.

As the founder of the commune Margaret will be its creator and mother, but she will also be an ideological mother, raising the inhabitants of the commune to be good citizens. Martin is impressed by Margaret, but he is not convinced that biological motherhood can be translated into a wider care of the community: '[p]oor child! By simple motherhood she would accomplish more for the race than by this regenerative scheme of hers' (p. 56). Martin's rejection of metaphoric motherhood is fed by his appreciation of Margaret as fine specimen of 'noble, refined womanhood' (p. 48), and his own possible desires for her. His own disappointment that a woman such as Margaret should give up the prospect

⁷⁵ Anthony Wright, *Socialisms Old and New* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 44.

⁷⁶ Poldevaart, p. 44.

of marriage and turn instead towards the establishment of a socialist commune is evident: 'if I were only English and some eight years younger' (p. 56).

Eventually, Margaret and Miss José prove Martin wrong and their experiment in communal living is such a success that they decide to spread the ideas of the commune to the outside world.

What makes women's relationships with one another so morally significant in Clapperton's eyes is the uninterrupted and strengthened feminine power that she presumes exists in such relationships; her idealisation of female relationships depends heavily upon the notion of a gendered morality, with women representing the chaste and moral side. This is reflected in the separate spheres ideology that dominates the structure of the commune, in which the women spend their time on domestic chores and childcare duties, and Frank and Joe, the two young men that come to live in the commune with their wives, travel to Liverpool where they have retained their professions. As such, the rural commune essentially follows the notion of suburban life, where the commercial aspects of life were separated from the pure home life by a train or omnibus ride. Margaret Marsh has suggested that the suburbs protected 'women and children from the evils of city life at the same time as maintaining a virtuous male presence in metropolitan business and politics'.⁷⁷ In Clapperton's commune, the idea of 'a virtuous male presence' in the public sphere, however, is an oxymoron.

When Victorian domestic ideology dictated that the public side of life was morally tainted, it also implied that the men who occupied that sphere were stigmatised by association; the feminised space of the home was endangered by the elements of public life that men inevitably brought back. Because Frank and Joe keep their paid occupations in Liverpool, their presence threatens to introduce the aspects of capitalist life that the feminised space in the commune is seeking an escape from. Before the commune can be declared a success, Frank and Joe must be purged of their capitalistic and competitive tendencies, which find their expression in jealousy and sexual desire, they and must learn to place the needs of the community before their own. While their wives settle into the commune and happily devote themselves to their domestic duties, meaning also that they

⁷⁷ Richard Dennis paraphrasing Margaret Marsh in *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 209.

are spending more time with female company than with their husbands, both Joe and Frank exhibit anti-social tendencies that must be curbed if the commune is to survive.

Joe notices, half-displeased, a change taking place in Vera during their first weeks living in the commune: '[t]he timid, emotional, lady-like little Vera became transformed into an active, bustling little wife, whom her husband hardly seemed to know!' (p. 118). Domestic labour strengthens Vera's character; she is no longer 'timid' or 'emotional', and this change to her character makes her more assertive in her marriage to Joe. The domestic activities of his wife, which are performed for the benefit of the entire household rather than for Joe specifically, serve to remind him of his failure to provide for his wife, and dent his masculine pride. He sees Vera's domestic duties almost as a love rival, as they take Vera away from him and intrude upon the time they spend together: 'she parted from him lovingly to greet with affection the workers upstairs, and accomplish the service apportioned to her, whether in the kitchen, refectory or elsewhere' (p. 118). The 'workers upstairs' are of course the other women in the commune, with whom she shares domestic duties. Vera is coming to appreciate the community of women and is now seeking out female company instead of spending time with her husband. Furthermore, keeping company with women strengthens her both physically and mentally.

Joe's disapproval of Vera's activities marks his reluctance to give up the ideal middle-class life that she has already happily relinquished: while Vera embraces the new life and experiences, a self-transformation that allows her to participate in the creation of socialism, Joe clings to his old ideals. When he begins to scold Vera for neglecting her wifely duties, she turns to her duties in the commune as a way of asserting her independence from Joe. A quarrel with Joe produces a flurry of domestic activity from Vera: '[n]ext day a bustling activity characterised Vera. Her housemaid duties not being burdensome, she instituted an unnecessary cleaning in her mother's room' (p. 122). For Vera, domestic labour becomes an expression of autonomy from the middle-class aspirations of her husband; housework allows her to create an identity for herself as a working woman rather than a lady of leisure.

Her enthusiasm for domestic work is the perfect preparation for motherhood, but when an escalating quarrel with her husband causes her to

miscarry, she declares that she is 'glad, not sorry, for what has happened' because she believes that they are 'not fit to be parents' (p. 126). This is where Clapperton's eugenic agenda becomes clear. Vera's miscarriage is blamed upon the anti-social disposition of her husband; when she declares they are 'not fit to be parents', what she really means is that Joe is not fit to be a father because he is too self-centred. Once again masculine assertive qualities have proved themselves to be abortive and in direct opposition to the nurturing and life-giving aspect of womanhood. Vera's miscarriage, however, proves to be a turning point for the couple. Like a good eugenicist, she is glad of the miscarriage because Joe's indifference towards the children of the commune have proved him to an unfit parent, 'I saw you so cold, so harsh to children! I thought, an innocent life is here, and no nest of real love prepared in the father's bosom' (p. 126). In the face of such accusations, Joe is prompted towards a reflective mood, 'For the first time, he felt awed, reverent, before the mystery of womanhood' (p. 126). He now accepts the status of women as the life-givers and moral guides of society. He tells Vera that 'perhaps a fellow like me should try to develop the paternal instinct' (p. 127), and he begins to spend time with the children in the nursery of the commune. Vera and Joe embark upon the study of physiology in order to equip themselves for future parenthood.

As we leave Vera and Joe to follow the fates of the other members of the commune, Clapperton suggests that the passion between Vera and Joe is gone and that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Here she echoes Wollstonecraft's view that too much love or passion in a marriage makes for bad parenting skills and a disrupted household. 'A master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion', Wollstonecraft wrote in her *Vindication*, 'they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society, and engross the thoughts that should be otherwise employed'.⁷⁸ Clapperton, too, demonstrates through the story of Vera and Joe that love can be intense, but that love does not mean that two people are suited to live together in harmony. Vera and Joe have been fooled into thinking that they are perfect for each other because they love each other.

Clapperton points us towards the idea that a rational love based on mutual

⁷⁸ Wollstonecraft, p. 96.

needs and desires would be a much more stable foundation of the family. Her endorsement of rational over romantic love is part of her eugenic agenda; couples should be matched by their mutual suitability for breeding rather than by a force as chaotic and unpredictable as romantic love. Women's supposedly less passionate nature, as Richardson has pointed out, made them better at selecting partners that would make better parents: '[r]esisting male passion, women, as the bearers of moral biology, would initiate the replacement of romantic love by rational eugenic love'.⁷⁹ While Vera's judgement of Joe may be initially clouded by her love for him, she is the first to recognise that they have made a mistake in being driven by their desires. Once their passion for each other has faded, Joe and Vera can devote themselves to the true purpose of heterosexual coupling according to the eugenic ideal, namely, having children.

Clapperton's onslaught upon heterosexual romantic love continues with the story of Frank and Rose, the second married couple in the commune. Having only recently married when they move into the commune, Frank and Rose's relationship begins to deteriorate because of Rose's commitment to the other inhabitants. Rose begins to spend a great deal of time comforting a young woman who has recently moved into the commune, and Frank forms a romantic attachment to Margaret when they begin the study of chemistry together. Margaret decides to give it up, and tells Frank, '[m]y love for the physical science has grown to a passion of late, and my human life is hurt by it. I mean my human interests have become less important to me' (p. 154). Margaret's renunciation of chemistry shows her collectivist spirit as she is willing to give up any pursuit that does not benefit the commune or society at large, and it also demonstrates her repudiation of passion. When her 'love' of science grows into a 'passion', she must renounce it; love is acceptable, but passion is not. Passion is here linked to selfish indulgence and the neglect of 'human life'. Instead, she decides that they should embark upon 'the scientific examination of social economics' (p. 157)—a discipline they can utilise for the welfare of the commune.

After giving birth to a child, Rose has left the commune to visit her parents, her brother Basil rebukes Rose for leaving Frank to amuse himself while she is away, and tells her that Frank 'is devoting himself to Margaret; and, by

⁷⁹ Richardson, 2003, p. 56.

George! I would do the same if Emma forsook me as you do him. *La Maison* is not like a bachelor-lodging; and husbands, well they are no more stocks and stones than other men' (p. 162). While Basil is ostensibly rebuking his sister for neglecting her husband, and pointing out that men have sexual needs that must be met somehow, and he is also reminding Rose that the commune is not a homosexual establishment, and that the men will seek their pleasure with other women if their wives are more interested in spending time with other women.

Rose, however, does not return home when she receives the summons, and when Frank comes to her parent's house she suggests an amicable divorce if his affections lie elsewhere. Frank pleads with her and attributes his faults to his biology: 'I am but a man with the frailties of flesh and blood, you are a saint, still we are one, indivisible' (p. 167). If Frank is to overcome the failings of his own flesh and blood, he must become one with his wife; only when they are 'indivisible' will Frank find respite from his desires as Rose provides the control and conscience that Frank lacks. The coupling of Frank and Rose unites the polarized masculine and feminine. Rose, however, cannot control her husband's sexuality single-handed; this is a situation that can be resolved only by female co-operation. Frank is sent abroad, and Margaret comes to visit Rose where she proposes her own explanation for Frank's temporary straying. She tells Rose that men are 'cruelly betrayed into unworthy deflections not from baseness of any kind, but simply from the absence of a habit of introspection' (p. 170). Men's sexual sins spring from bad habits and a permissive culture rather than from a natural inability for restraint.

The incident provides Margaret with an insight into the failings of the male psyche, and a strategy to help men understand and control their desires; she tells Rose that from now on 'we shall train our boys carefully to self-observation [...] they ought to possess a rational knowledge of their feelings as well as their thoughts. Then the instincts, the senses, would be under control, whilst love—the purest noblest love could always be free' (p. 170). Margaret is here proposing that instincts can be brought to submission by reason: with a little training, men like Joe and Frank can be 'domesticated', like pets. By the end of the novel, we meet a renewed Frank: 'his domestic instincts had budded and flowered, his emotional and moral forces strengthened, and the latter had become conscious' (p. 195).

When we take into account Clapperton's private correspondence, the idea of training men to exercise sexual restraint may not have applied to the lower classes. In a hitherto unpublished letter to Patrick Geddes, written two years after the publication of *Margaret Dunmore*, Clapperton argues that 'artificial checks' would be a more realistic solution for the 'degraded' classes:

Experience goes against yr. inference that moderation in sexual indulgence secures infrequency of pregnancy & you base yr. theory of population selection on that false assumption. Why not have frankly espoused neo-malthusianism? Just the ignorant, the gross the degraded there is no other means—moderation forsooth in perhaps the only pleasure besides drinking that the base nature can enjoy!—cut off the breeding of that type & what is the social bad result? Drinking is infinitely worse to my mind. Does this shock you I wonder.⁸⁰

This letter shows us a more unpleasant side of Clapperton's eugenic theories in which certain classes were considered irredeemably 'gross' and 'degraded'. It is hardly surprising that she did not include in her novel an opinion that she thought might shock Geddes, the author of an outspoken book upon sex, in private correspondence. 'Moderation in sexual indulgence' may have been a feasible solution when dealing with the middle-classes and the 'respectable' working-classes, but regarding members of the residuum, sexual restraint would mean taking from them 'the only pleasure besides drinking. Instead, she suggests 'neo-malthusianism', or as we know it today, contraception.

A far more extreme version of Clapperton's notion of a feminised utopia later appeared in the ideas of Clapperton's contemporary, Frances Swiney, who not only imagined a utopia without men, but predicted that evolution would lead to the natural extinction of the male half of the human race. 'For Swiney', Joy Dixon points out, 'there was only one sex, the feminine: men were simply imperfect women, physiologically and spiritually'.⁸¹ Using a mixture of biblical prophecies and contemporary evolutionary discourse, Swiney predicted that '[t]he

⁸⁰ Jane Hume Clapperton, letter to Patrick Geddes, October 15th 1890, National Library of Scotland, MS. 10525, f. 57.

⁸¹ Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 2001, p. 168.

man shall become of the substance of the woman; the male shall be reabsorbed into the female nature' and '[t]he supremacy of the Eternal Feminine will be gained'.⁸²

Clapperton's scheme of social reform, as outlined in *Margaret Dunmore*, relies on a mixture of nature and nurture. This dual approach to social change that gives equal emphasis to eugenics and character reform, creates a possibility of choice in whether people wish to become biological parents or spiritual parents. As such, this approach encourages same-sex relations. Through her emphasis on rational love rather than passionate love, Clapperton was not merely advancing a eugenic agenda, but was creating an ideological space for same sex couples to inhabit. Although Clapperton was writing before the discourse of the collectively inclined and less carnally minded invert as manifestation of an androgynous (or even feminised) ideal, these ideas surface in *Margaret Dunmore*. Clapperton, however, is not so much evoking an androgynous ideal as a feminine ideal: while the masculinity of the men is re-moulded into a more feminine shape to suit the needs of the commune, the women retain their essential feminine qualities. Once the men have been tamed, masculinity disappears from the commune as Miss José plans to have a conference on motherhood. If there is only one sex in Clapperton's commune, that sex is female.

Socialism and Androgyny in Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers*

Little is known about Gertrude Dix apart from the reiterated fact of her brief membership of the Bristol Socialists. After publishing two novels, *The Girl from the Farm* (1895) and *The Image Breakers* (1900), she disappears from view completely. When Dix's novel *The Image Breakers* was published, one reviewer from the *Athenaeum* advised potential readers who might be concerned that they would find in the novel 'another viewy, garrulous, Socialistic story of half-baked theorists and fanatistical communities', to lay aside their fears; '[t]he fear is groundless', the reviewer assured readers, 'Miss Dix is not much of theorist, but she is a fervid romancer. The socialism is a background rather an atmosphere, and the love stories of these two women, who certainly do their best to break

⁸² Frances Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession: Or, The Feminine Principal in Evolution, Essays of Illumination* (London: Ernest Bell, 1906), p. 74.

some very respectable images, are exceptionally tender and pathetic'.⁸³ Another reviewer, more astutely, was less dismissive of the politics of the novel, and remarked that '[t]he peculiar psychological problem presented [...] is the influence of two conflicting principles upon each character—the claims of the individual and the claims of humanity'.⁸⁴ This reviewer recognises the social and political importance of the two love stories that dominate the narrative, and contrasts the 'strong and self-reliant' Leslie and Redgold with whom love is 'the only solvent of life', to Rosalind and Justin, 'visionaries, idealists', who 'strive to regard it as a spiritual convergence of two wills acting towards the higher altruism'.⁸⁵ As this reviewer noted, the novel explores two different ideologies of love, and examines how they relate to society, by contrasting the lives of the two female friends. But what the reviewer does not notice is how the love stories of the two women are merely symbolic of their political choices and desires.

Given that Dix herself was involved with the Bristol Socialists, it is hard to imagine that she choose the socialist motif simply as a background for the love stories of the novel. Instead, I argue that the love stories and the socialist elements are connected to the two main characters' belief that different forms of love will help them establish ideal egalitarian relationships, whether with society as a whole or simply with a corresponding companion. This novel, too, explores the possibility of establishing a utopia through same-sex companionship, but the possibility is abandoned early on when the two main characters turn instead towards companions of the opposite sex.

In *The Image Breakers*, we follow two women, Rosalind Dangerfield and Leslie Ardent, linked by their names to danger and passion, as they attempt to reconcile their duties towards society with their own personal needs. The novel combines the diverse ideologies of the late nineteenth-century into one narrative and charts the confusion that occurs as the heroines attempt to work out which ideology will provide them the path to salvation. This results in a narrative that is often fragmented and confusing, and the reader does no better than the characters in working out what is what. Ideological leanings are constantly shifting, along with the personal relationships that accompany them. Both women are drawn to

⁸³ 'The Image Breakers, *Athenaeum*, 3806 (1900), p. 438.

⁸⁴ 'On the High-Plane', *Outlook*, 6 (1900), p. 536.

⁸⁵ 'On the High-Plane', p. 536.

socialism because it promises them a society based on love and equality—both between the sexes and the different classes. Socialism, however, appeals to them for different reasons; Leslie hopes that socialism will usher in an era of economic and sexual independence for women; Rosalind, on the other hand, sees socialism as an escape from the tainted worlds of industry and sex. Both of these characters are in search of their own utopia, and the fundamental differences in their outlook upon the world leads the friends to take two separate paths in life, leads them to pursue two contrasting forms of love relationships.

Ardis reads the novel as an affirmation of love as a feminist self-expression, and maintains that the feminist revolution, in Dix's writing, is not 'somewhere "out there" in the public sector, waiting to be achieved almost magically; the revolution will be achieved gradually—one relationship at a time'.⁸⁶ An intimate relationship between two women that is filled with political meaning and dreams of equality is cut short when the two women choose instead to form their most intimate relationships with men. Sypher affirms that '*The Image Breakers* acknowledges women's sensuality, their passion for women as well as for men (stopping short of overtly representing lesbian or free-love heterosexual relationships)'. Dix 'hovers on the edge of exploring, even applauding, female homosocial, if not lesbian relationships' and although Rosalind and Leslie choose heterosexual love over female companionship, the 'novel subtly and consistently desires such a community of women'.⁸⁷ Yet to assume that Rosalind and Leslie *choose* to pursue relationships with the opposite sex because of patriarchal indoctrination, as Rich suggests women do, is to vastly simplify the situation.

There are two reasons the lesbian continuum, although desired at some point by both characters, fails to materialise in the novel. One is that nineteenth century discourses upon homosexuality and homosocial relationships, as we have seen, often ignored or glossed over the sexual element of such relationships. Because the feminist agenda of Dix's novel emphasises the importance of recognising female heterosexual desire, the relationship between the two women falls into the background. Although Dix may wish to represent a female same-sex relationship, she cannot accept the ostensible celibacy for her characters that

⁸⁶ Ardis, p. 52.

⁸⁷ Sypher, 1993, pp. 134, 137.

such a relationship would mean. Another reason for the failure of the lesbian continuum is the two women's deep-seated belief in a dualistic universe in which men and women are each others' opposites and therefore complement one another perfectly. Through *The Image Breakers*, Dix is suggesting that until the male/female dualism is broken down women cannot bond properly, as they are made to feel that same-sex relationships are inadequate.

This dualism was essential to notions of androgyny that were vital both to nineteenth century socialism and to fin-de-siècle gender politics. Pointing out the importance of the androgynous union of masculine and feminine to the romantic poets, Diane Hoeveler has explained how the concept of androgyny is 'a mythic fantasy of fleshly redemption through erotic union with the other'; 'Androgyny as a hierogamy, mystical marriage, exists as a form of radical heterosexuality, a celebration of sexuality as a manifestation of a transforming religious power'.⁸⁸ The concept of androgyny was important to the utopian socialists of the 1830s and 40s; in an essay entitled 'The Man-Power, the Woman-Power, and the Man-Woman Power', Goodwyn Barmby, who founded the Communistic Church with his wife Catherine, wrote:

In fine, to be a true communist, or Socialist, the man must possess the woman-power as well as the man-power, and the woman must possess the man-power as well as the woman-power. Both must be equilibrated beings...Grace be to those in whom woman-nature and man-nature are present equilibrated and active. We hail them as true priests of humanity, as the veritable social apostles.⁸⁹

Naomi Andrews has identified two forms of androgyny: one in which the male and female is united in one body, which blurs the boundaries of what is masculine and what is feminine, and another that focuses on the union of male and female as two distinct and separate entities, in which their bodies retain their gender identities.⁹⁰ The first notion of androgyny as the combination of male and

⁸⁸ Diane Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Woman Within* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 22, 12.

⁸⁹ Hoeveler, 1990, p. 118.

⁹⁰ Naomi J. Andrews, 'Utopian Androgyny: Romantic Socialists Confront Individualism in July Monarchy France', *French Historical Studies*, 26 (2003), 437-457 (p. 440).

female in the same body glorified the ‘uranian’ or the ‘invert’, the second viewed the achievement of androgyny as ‘an idealized marriage, combining in harmony the feminine and the masculine’, which retained the heterosexual gender dynamic.⁹¹ *The Image Breakers* invokes this second concept of androgyny through the spiritual union of male and female in separate bodies, it is this that Rosalind tries to achieve by choosing a relationship, which is first platonic and which later becomes sexual, with Justin Ferrar rather than choosing feminine companionship. She does this because she pledges allegiance to a socialist creed that dictates that the socialist state will be founded upon the chaste union of men and women.

Leslie and Rosalind’s friendship is at its passionate pinnacle at the beginning of the novel before their male companions have entered the picture, and the narrative charts the events which will eventually tear their friendship apart. The relationship between the two women bears all the hallmarks of the romantic friendship between a young girl and her slightly older mentor that Havelock Ellis classified as preceding ‘normal’ heterosexuality.

A school girl or young woman forms an ardent attachment for another girl, probably somewhat older than herself [...] upon whom she will lavish an astonishing amount of affection and devotion. This affection may or may not be returned; usually the return consists of a gracious acceptance of the affectionate services.⁹²

Romantic friendships between women were often considered as a crucial element of a girl’s intellectual and emotional development.⁹³ Novelist Dinah Maria Mulock described such relationships as ‘not *friendship*, but rather a kind of foreshadowing of love; as jealous, as exacting, as unreasoning[...]as vivid and sincere as any after-passion into which the girl may fall... Yet it is but a dream, to melt away like a dream when love appears’.⁹⁴ Leslie is at first infatuated with Rosalind, but her feelings for Rosalind are presented as being the immature

⁹¹ Andrews, p. 440.

⁹² Ellis, 1904, pp. 130-131.

⁹³ Marcus, pp. 38-39.

⁹⁴ Dinah Mulock Craik, *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women* (London: Hurst & Blackett, undated), p. 169.

product of a sexuality that has not yet fully developed: a girlish love rather than womanly passion.

Initially, Rosalind and Leslie's relationship appears to be the medium through which they can both escape the constraints of gender, and the complexities introduced by monogamous heterosexual relationships. Rosalind is in the process of freeing herself from a marriage that constrains her political commitment and wishes instead to live in a socialist commune that values fraternal bonds over sexual relationships. She dreams of a commune made up of 'a brotherhood of men working together, in which competition will be absent, labour and its results equally divided, and all the horrible commercialism which blights the earth resolutely shut out!' (p. 53). It is telling that Rosalind imagines a 'brotherhood' rather than a sisterhood, as she attempts to establish a 'fraternal' bond with Justin Ferrar, the leader of the Burminster Socialists rather than staying with Leslie. Even as she shies away from heterosexual coupledness, she privileges masculine company over female company. Rosalind is taking part in what Rich calls 'Male identification', meaning 'the casting of one's social, political, and intellectual allegiances with men'.⁹⁵

Rosalind's socialism has little to do with revolutionary socialism or Marxism and more to do with the religious socialism that viewed socialism as the practical application of Christ's teachings that flourished in the late nineteenth century.⁹⁶ For Keir Hardie, socialism was not a replacement for religion, but its practical application: he spoke of socialism as 'the embodiment of Christianity in our industrial system'.⁹⁷ Katherine St John Conway, a prominent member of the Bristol Socialists was converted to socialism during a church service, 'never shall any human being, so long as the world suffers wrong, know one moment's real communion with the mind of the Master until they have actually thrown their lot in with the poor and the oppressed'. D. B. Foster saw in the ILP's prosaic decree of 'Public Ownership of the Means of Production, Distribution, and Exchange' 'the way to that Kingdom of God on earth for which I had prayed and worked so long'. 'I saw', Foster explained, 'that the New Jerusalem, the City of God,

⁹⁵ Rich, p. 645.

⁹⁶ Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), 5-56, see also Himmelfarb, pp. 335-349.

⁹⁷ Himmelfarb, p. 335.

though a long way off, was a possibility, and the vision drew me with irresistible attraction'.⁹⁸

Rosalind, too, sees in socialism the means to establish a 'New Jerusalem', and it is her conception of socialism as a religion rather than political system that makes her follow Justin Ferrar through various failed attempts to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. In Rosalind's eyes, Justin, as the leader of the Burminster Socialists, is invested with divine authority. Her first glimpse of Justin, a man she knows only through correspondence, establishes his status as a Christ-like figure in Rosalind's mind:

In the early dark of the November afternoon the Socialists' lantern—a curious parchment thing, painted with mottoes—had swung out like a flower of light, and she had seen a face—Justin Ferrar! She had never met the man, and yet at once she knew him. His face, a long oval, with a high forehead and pointed beard, irresistibly reminded her of the ideal portraits of the Nazarene. Her first thought of him was that he could be stern—stern as the Christ with the knotted cord to drive the money-changers out of the temple. (p. 31)

Justin appears as the image of Christ with a lantern that features in William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World*: a man who carries with him, and is, the light of the world, a redeemer and a saviour. Through his resemblance to Christ, Rosalind recognises him instantly, without ever having seen him before, as Justin Ferrar the socialist visionary whose arrival in Burminster has been anticipated as the second coming of Christ: 'and when *he* comes [...] you'll see, all sorts of things will happen' (p. 16). Like Christ, who drove 'the money-changers out of the temple', Rosalind hopes that Justin will drive the capitalists out of Burminster.

If Justin is Rosalind's divine saviour, her gateway to a new and improved world, Leslie initially imagines Rosalind as hers: Rosalind is to her 'the portress of a modern world' who has 'given her the freedom of intellectual regions as full of new delights as woods in spring', and is 'bound by some subtle link to the

⁹⁸ Yeo, 1977, p. 12.

women of ancient faraway times' (p. 6). Leslie, too, initially attributes Justin with something akin to divine authority as she imagines him, with far more mixed metaphors of Christian mythology, as 'a knight-errant, at the blast of whose trumpet all the ramparts of Philistinism must fall down' (p. 16). She imagines that Justin's arrival will set Rosalind free: '[s]he saw Rosalind moving from the prison of the Priory to the world awaiting her' (p. 16). She imagines Rosalind and Justin as two parts of the same who will together usher in socialism.

When Justin is unable to set Rosalind free from the shackles of her marriage, and life returns to its ordinary hum-drum existence, Leslie loses faith in the divine powers of Justin, and realises that they are only men and women: 'there were no heroes now, no gods, almost no goddesses, no capitalistic ciphers who did not count: only men and women—sad, unaccountable, wonderful women and men!' (p. 39). This is the first event in Leslie's progression away from the religious socialism of high ideals that Rosalind pledges allegiance to, towards a socialism that is more materialistic and practical.

That womanhood is not valued in the socialist community becomes clear when Justin initially rejects Rosalind's contribution to the socialist cause because he discovers that the R. Dangerfield who contributed to his socialist journal was a woman rather than 'another man, a fellow-reformer of philosophical type like himself' (p. 28). In Justin's opinion, a woman cannot be a 'fellow-reformer' by definition. Rosalind is assailed from both sides by woman-hostile institutions: her marriage restricts her independence and holds her in bondage, economically and sexually, to her husband, and the socialist movement that she attempts to join scorns the contribution of women. The result of this is that Rosalind wishes to renounce her womanhood altogether; she wishes to be seen not as a woman, but as 'a human being—equal and comrade', and she tells Leslie 'Sex! Sex! I had almost grown to loathe the fact of its existence' (p. 58). Her rejection of womanhood also means rejecting Leslie and instead following Justin who has come to recognise a political affinity between the two.

Leslie, on the other hand, comes from an all-female community that has been fully supportive of her activities in the public sphere. Raised by two maiden aunts, who themselves have rejected heterosexual coupledness in favour of female and sisterly company and marriage in favour of professional lives, Leslie is free to come and go as she wishes. Her Aunt Letitia allows Leslie to educate her in

the tenets of socialism although she remains cautious: 'I admire these Socialists, you know, dear; but the worst of it is, one never knows where one is with them' (p. 19), and she takes part in the socialist meetings 'attended by young clerks, students and high-school mistresses, and an occasional working man in his Sunday clothes' (p. 39). Even Aunt Julia, the sterner of the two, indulges her niece with 'the extravagance of a daily paper' during 'the great dock strike' (p. 39), suggesting the manner in which she softens to Leslie's socialist ideals. Female community therefore seems like an entirely natural thing to Leslie, and she imagines that she and Rosalind will live in harmony together.

A year later, when Leslie receives a letter from Rosalind containing a 'loving invitation' to join her in a 'farm colony' (p. 79), she happily leaves the 'Home for the Children of Missionaries' (p. 79) where she has worked for the past year to join Rosalind in 'the little heaven on earth' (p. 79). Remembering the trouble that Rosalind has been through, she muses that things will be different in the commune where there will be '*no men*—at least, no men to form disturbing elements' (p. 80), and she dreams of a female communion with Rosalind void of complications and distractions. At this point in the narrative, Leslie only views men as impediments that will prevent her and Rosalind from coming together. Once these obstacles are removed, she imagines that Rosalind will desire her company more than anything. When she sees Justin her hopes of a peaceful community with Rosalind are dashed: '[n]othing now would be as she had hoped. No; men spoiled everything' (p. 80). The commune is on the brink of collapse, and Rosalind and Justin have been evicted owing to suspicions that they are involved in a free-love relationship.

The collapse of the commune spells the definitive end of Leslie's dream of female companionship with Rosalind. Her disappointment at the end of her utopia is profound: 'in her rage of disillusion, disappointment, she could have thrown herself by the wayside to weep out the loneliness of her heart' (p. 83). But when Leslie is sent to meet Redgold, a friend of one of the financiers of the commune who has been summoned to smooth things over, her view of the world suddenly changes, and a new utopia presents itself to her in the form of sexual love. Yeazell has suggested that the heroines of the 'Condition of England' novels of the 1840s choose their political allegiances when they choose their lovers, and in this sense, the men in the novel are reduced to ciphers that signify

the women's desired paths in life: Redgold represents a different path from the spiritual road that Rosalind is pursuing with Justin.⁹⁹

Even at that moment it was impossible not to notice the contrast between the two faces, types of the soldier and the mystic; the one powerful, full fleshed, genial, easy, tolerant [...] the other proud, yearning, narrow, sensitive, with mingled brooding bitter sweetness, remote from the crowd with its crude common needs, uncomprehended and uncomprehending. At that moment each of the two women looked upon the face that inured to her, seeing it in all its beauty, with none of its limitations (p. 93).

Redgold and Justin represent two different types of socialism prevalent in the late nineteenth century: one that focused on material and economic conditions, and another that was more interested in the spiritual and moral condition of man. Dix is clearly offering a critique against the more spiritual type of socialism represented by those who followed the Fellowship of the New Life, the group that split from the Fabian Society under the leadership of Thomas Davidson in 1883. Justin's 'narrow' socialism is presented as being, 'uncomprehended and uncomprehending'. Born of 'brooding bitterness remote from the crowd with its crude common needs' it is at once a socialism that does not understand the needs of the common man, and a socialism that the common man cannot understand. Its high ideals, Dix seems to say, are both pointless and incomprehensible. Rosalind and Leslie thus choose their love according to their creed: Leslie chooses Redgold, who is practical and strong, because of her desire to engage with the real world; Rosalind chooses Justin because she wishes to pursue the spiritual path.

Viewed in this light, the novel becomes less a tale of how the lesbian continuum is disrupted by compulsory heterosexuality and more a tale of political awakening and how political creeds may disrupt friendships. Leslie and Rosalind are established early on as being considerably different in the way in which they view the world. Although Leslie has dreamed of living in harmony with

⁹⁹ Yeazell, p. 126.

Rosalind, such a partnership will never work as they have different ideas about socialism. Despite her affection for Rosalind, Leslie has at times been frustrated with the impracticality of her idealism and her inability to recognise the need to engage with practical politics. Rosalind's socialism is detached from the real world and Rosalind herself is 'as far away from the ugly mud-coloured world as the Madonna' (p. 53).

Dix depicts Redgold as being highly sceptical of the communal experiments that her other characters are engaged upon. Redgold laughs off the scandal at the commune and speculates that the commune might have been successful 'as a sort of monastery for men only' (p. 95), but he quickly scorns the notion of same-sex communities and monastic living; unlike Rosalind, he rejoices in the chaos and competition that sexuality brings, and sees the celibate spiritual life—'a game hardly worth the candle' (p. 95)—as not being worth living. In Redgold, Dix has created a character who does not dream of a utopia, but who instead insists that '[t]he real fight is with the world as it is, not with some figment of our own brains we can never realize' (p. 95). Dix portrays Leslie as being impressed by his practical mindset and imposing personality, and when she compares him to Justin he seems to her to be 'full fleshed' (p. 93) and 'a *real* man' (p. 106) compared to the 'narrow' Justin (p. 93).

Leslie no longer wishes to follow Rosalind's path, but instead wishes to carve out a career for herself: '[I]f, the unknown, self, the unknown—how were these two hidden qualities to be best fused together and welded into worthy stuff but in the real—in Redgold's world' (p. 101). Redgold, and the possibility of sexual discovery, presents a material world of sensual possibilities—'the real'—as opposed to the spiritual anti-materialism of Rosalind's socialism and the anti-sensualism of her relationship with Justin. It is only after meeting Redgold that Leslie decides she will not follow Rosalind in her pursuit of a communal village. She tells Rosalind that she will not join her in the colony: 'I wish to go my own way—fight my own battle' (p. 102), and she decides to go to London ostensibly to seek a career as an illustrator, but always with the thought of meeting Redgold again.

To go with Rosalind and join her in her socialist life means a life apart from reality, sequestered in a small commune populated by idealist dreamers. Rosalind imagines that Redgold is responsible for Leslie's conversion, when, in

fact, Leslie has been turning away from Rosalind's idealism for some time. Rosalind warns Leslie against Redgold, seeing in his face with 'the heavy jaw' and the 'mouth hidden by the moustache' the 'signs which speak infallibly of the sensual type engrossed on material planes' (p. 106). Redgold symbolises a degenerate and 'sensual' type of man interested only in 'material' things, and Rosalind suspects him of working an 'evil magnetism' to 'attract women' (p. 106). There is a distinct similarity between the terminology that Rosalind is using and the language of Kate Mills, who wrote to the future Mrs Karl Pearson, Maria Sharpe in 1889, warning her of 'the incomprehensible power of magnetic currents...that draw men and women together'.¹⁰⁰ Mills, who joined the Theosophical Society in 1891, was merely one of many who advocated chastity between men and women and who exhorted women to beware of the sensual world. In Rosalind's eyes, Redgold is the serpent who lures Leslie away from the true path, enticing her from her spiritual ideals by offering her a world of flesh. But Rosalind herself is depicted as being seduced by Justin's ideas about chaste relations between the sexes and his blindness towards gender; she equates being with Justin to being elevated to a higher state: 'to be with him is to live in the pure atmosphere of some peak above the clouds' (p. 103). Because Justin is able to see beyond her gender and beyond her physical body, she is no longer living in the material world but is existing in the incorporeal state to which she appears to Justin.

The sexual philosophy of Rosalind and Justin is a conglomeration of several overlapping strands of late nineteenth-century theories about the relationship between sex and society. Like the Theosophists, Edward Carpenter hoped for the "transmutation" of the sexual impulse onto the spiritual plane'.¹⁰¹ But if Carpenter presented same-sex relationships as the remedy for love that was individualistic and sensualistic, Rosalind hopes that she will be able to pursue her communal and chaste ideal through a spiritual and professional relationship with someone of the opposite sex. This is because she agrees with the notion of men and women as each others' polar opposites and complementaries. She evokes the notion of spiritual parenthood to justify the non-sexual nature of her relationships with Justin:

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Bland, p. 166.

¹⁰¹ Carpenter, *Sex Love*, p. 21.

Our work is our child. Love must have its fruit. It is a conscious union of complete beings who desire to produce some beautiful thing for the world's sake. And an idea, Leslie, formed from the masculine intelligence and the feminine love is the one deathless and immortal child. (p. 168)

When she equates their work to a child, she employs the same argument used by those who viewed the importance of same-sex relationships as lying in the creation of ideas rather than heterosexual procreation. Yet, she is arguing that even ideas, like children, are best created through the union of male and female opposites. Rosalind thus removes the idea of spiritual parenthood from the realm of homosocial relationships and places it instead in chaste heterosexual relationships.

Yet, the chaste relationship that Rosalind aspires to cannot be maintained once sexual tension begins to build between her and Justin. In her portrayal of the progression of Rosalind and Justin's relationship from chaste spiritual companionship to a sexual relationship, Dix shows how the ideal of chaste companionship for men and women functions merely as a precursor to sexual bonding. Rosalind and Justin cannot forget their bodies, no matter how hard they try. Justin's long neglect of his health brings on a lengthy illness that changes his attitude towards Rosalind and towards sex. No longer does he view Rosalind as his equal and comrade; instead the illness through which Rosalind nurses him transforms their comradeship into 'a lower sort of relationship to that of our equality and comradeship' (p. 157). Justin now views Rosalind's devotion to the idea of chastity as the remains of a 'the old Judaism with its curse on nature' (p. 161). Fearing that their relationship will develop into a sexual relationship, Rosalind sends Justin away, but his departure leaves her 'weak and listless', lacking in both 'inspiration' and 'enthusiasm' (p. 213).

Whether or not Rosalind and Justin enter a sexual relationship has been debated by critics of the novel. Sypher maintains that the novel 'is silent about the ultimate fate of their relation; all the reader knows is that their celibacy causes a strain between them'. However, circumstances strongly suggest that they do

become sexually involved, as Ardis maintains.¹⁰² Rosalind justifies a sexual relationship with Justin on the grounds that it would be a completer union of male and female, and a repudiation of the marital bond that still holds her. Dix suggests that relationships between men and women cannot be chaste, that desire somehow or other always makes itself known.

After a prolonged battle with herself and her motives, Rosalind convinces herself that the love between her and Justin—no longer chaste but sexual—has been ordained by fate, an idea which is strengthened by Justin's coincidental return to her the same day she has decided to summon him, and leads her to believe in 'some sort of telepathic sympathy, some subtle bond' (p. 226) between them. To help her make a decision about Justin, Rosalind returns to Leslie, who is blissfully in love with Redgold, and when Rosalind speaks to her, she seems to speaking to her younger self. Leslie tells Rosalind that 'love is everything' and settles Rosalind's mind upon recalling Justin (p. 223). Chastity no longer seems necessary to Rosalind as she is convinced that 'indeed they were souls meant for one another—one man, one woman, out of the millions in the inimical world' (p. 226).

We are made to understand that Rosalind and Justin now enter a sexual relationship, and aimlessly embark upon writing a book together that celebrates free love, and the sexual union of men and women. Yet, rather than being soulmates, Rosalind and Justin drift further apart as he falls deeper into free love theories drawn from mysticism, and Rosalind reverts to her old religious ideas. Her own fears about her relationship with Justin finally make her realise the value of female companionship, and what it has cost her and Leslie to form alliances with men instead of with each other. When she goes to see Leslie, for what will be the last time, it becomes clear that she projects her own anxieties about her relationship with Justin onto Leslie's relationship with Redgold. Fearing that Leslie will marry Redgold and disappear into obscurity, dependency and 'respectability', or worse, live as his mistress, Rosalind releases a tirade against conventional marriage and male 'sensualism'; she tells Leslie that women must stand together: 'Dear sister woman, you know that it is only by our making a stand—we women together and the men who see with us—that the world-

¹⁰² Sypher, p. 135, Ardis, 1997, p. 135.

sickness is to be cured' (p. 274). Rosalind has hitherto succeeded in convincing herself that her own relationship with Justin is 'not merely for our own selfish indulgence, but in obedience of something higher' (p. 275), but when she warns Leslie against her 'passion' and 'love' for Redgold and tells her that she 'can feel the man's magnetism in the air' and fears that 'he has put some evil spell upon' her (p. 275), and 'infected [her] with his own sensual views on life' (p. 278), it is really her own feelings towards her relationship with Justin that are surfacing.

Rosalind now understands the extent to which her own love for Justin has prevented her from maintaining a relationship with Leslie and from helping her friend in need. What she thought was a pure impulse geared towards helping humanity was really 'alloyed and selfish' (p. 278), and not the lofty love that she dreamed of. Confused by her new doubts about the purity of her relationship with Justin and the doctrine of free love which they have been espousing together, Rosalind seeks respite from her thoughts in a nearby church. This act of seeking shelter in the church symbolises her return to her religious roots. Having arrived at socialism by way of religion, she now returns to the religious foundations of her socialism, and it is here among 'the sexless voices' of the chapel that she finally finds her ideal of androgyny.

When Rosalind leaves the church, her perception of sin, and particularly the sins of men against women, is heightened. She suddenly becomes aware of the presence of prostitutes in her vicinity: 'she understood now what sort of women they were who went to business at four o'clock in the afternoon' (p. 285). The prostitute here serves as a powerful symbol of the male sexual exploitation of women that she now sees everywhere:

From East to West, the great city was thick-sown with the poison-flowers of sin. In every corner, in every court of it, the hideous sacrifice of women! [...] She seemed to see the souls of women like white moths or flowers, expanding, rising, caught in the great breath of men's desires. (p. 286)

She begins to realise that Justin, too, has been exploiting her; she has served as his muse, the female union that would make him god. When Justin confesses that he never loved Rosalind, but used her and her love as a muse—'You inspired me,

you gave me beautiful thoughts' (p. 385), 'You made me a god' (p. 386)—Rosalind realises that she has been used. To Justin, Rosalind has only ever been a woman in the abstract, merely representing a feminine principle that he has needed to complement the masculine principle within himself. In her analysis of the androgynous ideas of the romantic poets, Hoeveler indicates that the celebration of 'the feminine principle [...] is not easily correlated with 'real' women in the historical or sociological sense'. Dix is suggesting that when a man worships the feminine principle in the quest for the androgynous ideal, as Justin does, he views women only as an abstract, an ideal. As Hoeveler points out, '[t]he male poet is in love not with actual women; he is instead incorporating the essence or the idea of the feminine into himself. He cannibalistically absorbs her perspectives, values, and qualities, and in doing so tries to convince himself that he is a divinely creative androgynous being, both male and 'female'.¹⁰³ In this sense, the union of male and female that the androgynous principle dictates resembles the idea of marital coverture according to which the wife was absorbed by the husband.¹⁰⁴ It is a measure of just how far Rosalind is moving away from Justin's spiritual socialism that she cannot accept such a position for herself.

The socialist notion of an androgynous union between man and woman is ultimately revealed to be just as exploitative as the middle-class marriage. It is this that finally draws Rosalind away from her spiritual ideals and that makes her recognise the material reality.

the thought, "He never loved me," filled her with a sense of self-loathing and degradation, and she told herself that she was like a woman who wakes up to the fact that her husband only married her for an heir. (p. 386)

Dix shows how the exaltation of womanhood becomes a pretext for sexually exploiting women, luring them into sexual relationships on the grounds that free love is key to the regeneration of mankind. The idealisation of femininity involved in socialism risks losing sight of real women through the worship of abstract notions of womanhood.

¹⁰³ Hoeveler, 1990, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Harman, pp. 2-3.

Conclusion

Both *Margaret Dunmore* and *The Image Breakers* explore the idea of female relationships as being the most equal form of companionship; the former novel does so blatantly, and the latter does so more tentatively. Although they emphasise the importance of female intimacy and love, they both ostensibly subscribe to the idea that sexual relationships are heterosexual by default. Because nineteenth-century discourses that sought to normalize the existence of homosexuality, and especially female homosexual relationships, tended to gloss over the element of sexual desire in such relationships, they often failed to account for female desire. Emphasising the importance of same-sex relationships frequently meant neglecting female sexual desire or recasting it in terms of spiritual union.

In *Margaret Dunmore*, same-sex relationships are the ideal exactly because they lack the problematic dynamic of heterosexual relationships. Equality, both in terms of gender and class, means eradicating the sexual passions because they underpin the unequal status of men and women and foster a competitive instinct. Clapperton's exaltation of female same-sex relationships depends upon these relationships being of a non-sexual nature. This, however, does not mean that Clapperton did not recognise that relationships between women could have a strong erotic and sexual component. Certainly, Margaret's description of her meeting with Miss José, and the manner in which she relates her feelings surrounding this event to her old school friends suggests that Clapperton recognised an element of physical desire in Margaret and Miss José's relationship. While she may have been writing out sexual desire from same-sex relationships, Edith Lees Ellis was doing the very same more than thirty years after the publication of *Margaret Dunmore* when she suggested that the 'abnormal', the term she chose for the homosexual, was destined for 'clean living and renunciation'.¹⁰⁵

Eventually, Dix argues, editing out desire in lesbian relationships means that women will inevitably be drawn into heterosexual relationships. Late Victorian sex-reformers frequently assumed that sexuality was flexible, was

¹⁰⁵ Ellis, 1921, p. 62.

subject to cultural norms and could be trained, regulated, or diverted towards its 'right' or 'better' object, from physical to spiritual and from emotional to rational; Dix does not think that this is the case. *The Image Breakers* explores the possibility of female companionships, but because the novel makes the assumption that adult sexual desire is necessarily heterosexual, the idea of a lesbian continuum is dismissed because it seems too much like the idea of compulsory feminine chastity that the novel seeks to explode.

Chapter 4.

‘Quite a different class of Dolls’: Doll-desire and love of the poor in late nineteenth-century children’s fiction

So far, I have explored the idea of a specifically feminine moral agency by concentrating on the connection between women’s social and political work and their romantic and sexual experiences. In chapter one I explained how the female sexual instinct was validated as a source of altruistic action because of its link to maternal and procreative urges, and showed how this resulted in the delayed love plot. In Chapter 2, I examined the fictional depiction of female reformers’ involvement in industrial reform, and suggested that these narratives show greater anxieties about the role that sex has to play in the arena of social reform. In Chapter 3, I explored the connection between homosexuality and socialism, arguing that the ‘uranian’ came to signify the ideal selfless persona that underpinned the creation of a socialist state. In this chapter, I return to the concepts discussed in the Chapter 1, namely, the idea that there was a connection between sexual desire and altruism. By attributing the female sexual instinct to the desire for motherhood, biologists were legitimising female sexuality, however, by extension they were also hinting at its innate existence, and it follows that this would also be present, in some shape or form, in young girls. In this chapter I turn to children’s fiction of this period, and examine how the ideas discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis surfaced in children’s literature in the late nineteenth century. My focus lies upon narratives in which a girl’s relationship with her doll forms the pivot around which a story of philanthropy or philanthropic endeavour (or lack of it) is developed.

In the girl’s relationship with her doll we find replicated the fears and hopes surrounding female sexuality in the nineteenth century, because, as Sharon Marcus has pointed out in her wonderfully innovative study of doll-fiction in *Between Women*, the girl’s doll-love simultaneously represents and re-enacts motherhood, the homosocial desire of female relationships, and heterosexual courtship.¹ Marcus argues that doll-narratives are both ‘sociology for girls’, which provide girls with ‘a lesson in philanthropy’, and that they offer an

¹ Marcus, p. 149.

exploration of the interplay between female power, maternal urges, and sexuality. Girls' love of dolls was constructed in an erotic manner, and was understood by adults to be a form of desire that later morphed into sexual desire. The doll was both 'a token of the mother's pre-sexual childhood and a harbinger of the daughter's sexual future'.²

Marilyn Ferris Motz has suggested that adults fetishised girls' relationships with dolls because they viewed them as symbolising an impossible feminine ideal, namely, the state of being both a mother and a virgin: '[a]s the embodiment of uncorrupted femininity, of maternal sentiment freed from sexuality, the girl and her doll presented in concrete image a self-contradictory Victorian ideal: she was a maternal virgin'.³ I suggest instead that doll-narratives recognise the girl's love of dolls as a foreshadowing of the sexual instinct, doll-narratives allowed authors to explore female erotic desire in young girls in a manner that was acceptable, creating a non-threatening discourse of juvenile sexuality. Drawing on Marcus's analysis of doll-fiction, this chapter argues that doll-narratives serve to replicate the dynamic of the adult philanthropic novel through an interplay of philanthropy, mothering, and sexual desire. I expand Marcus's idea and suggest that by linking doll-love to altruistic activity, as the novels and stories discussed in this chapter do, they help to legitimise juvenile female sexuality, seeing in it the potential for both motherhood and social motherhood, rather than viewing it as pathological or animalistic.

Doll-fiction, which emerged as a genre in the early nineteenth-century, exploded in the late nineteenth century in part due to an increasing interest in the child mind. These narratives emerge in a context in which anxieties about the sexuality of children surfaced as part of a wider concern with the psychology of the child. As Sally Shuttleworth's extensive study of the rise of child-psychology *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* demonstrates, conceptions of the child spanned a wide range, from the

² Marcus, pp. 159, 161.

³ Marilyn Ferris Motz, 'Maternal Virgin: The Girl and Her Doll in Nineteenth Century America', in *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishes and Fetishism in Popular Culture*, ed. by Ray Broadus Brown (Ohio: Bowling Green, 1982), 54-68 (p. 54-55). For other readings of doll-fiction see Miriam Formanek-Brunell, *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), Lois Rostow Kuznets, *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), Beverly Lyon Clark and Margaret R. Higgonet's *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys: Gender in Children's Literature and Culture* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 2000).

romantic notion of the child as a natural innocent, to the idea that children, closer to nature as they were, were inherently sinful.⁴ When evolutionary theory spawned the idea of a lower, savage human ancestor, children were imagined as the atavistic ancestor, and the process by which the child grew into an adult was likened to the development of the human race through evolution. As Shuttleworth points out, ‘the child was seen to mirror in its early years ancestral forms of the species, both human and animal’.⁵

Romantic ideas of the child as innocent and pure, and the Lockean idea of the child as a blank slate, contended with ‘a more venerable belief in the inherent depravity of children, which the disciplinary agents of society had to restrain’.⁶ Those who invested their psychological theories in the ‘inherent depravity of children’ also raised concerns about childhood expressions of sexuality, viewing these as evidence of child’s animalistic nature. Speaking of the child in *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (1867), Henry Maudsley cautioned his readers against accepting ‘preconceived notions of its primal purity, innocence and natural inclination to good’, and warned instead that ‘the impulses which actually move it are the selfish impulses of passion’.⁷ Tellingly, in Maudsley’s writing, the child is transformed from a young person into a thing; where the personal pronouns ‘their’ and ‘them’ would function just well, he has chosen the impersonal ‘it’. Maudsley cited the case of a three year old ‘who was constantly putting herself into the most indecent attitudes, and used to practice the most lascivious movements against any piece of furniture’, and who grew up to be a ‘nymphomaniac’ to support his theory that the animalistic impulses that produced sexual feeling in children would, if they remained unrestrained, lead to nymphomania in adulthood.⁸ When J. Braxton Hicks informed readers of the *British Medical Journal* that ‘sexual feelings exist from earliest infancy’, he

⁴ Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ Shuttleworth, p. 4. ‘Similarly, within the emerging field of anthropology, women, children and savages were repeatedly linked together as figures who stood outside the unstated norms of white middle-class masculinity’ (p. 4).

⁶ Janet Oppenheim, *‘Shattered Nerves’: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 259.

⁷ Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1868), p. 322, also quoted in Oppenheim, p. 259.

⁸ Shuttleworth, p. 191. Maudsley, p. 325.

presented this as a ‘well-known’ fact.⁹ These were by no means the only ideas concerning the sexuality of the child circulating in the late nineteenth century. When Hicks commented on the prevalence of sexual feelings in early childhood, he was responding to claims that sexual desire only manifested itself after puberty with the awakening of the reproductive organs, and which therefore excluded the possibility of its existence in young children.¹⁰

Placed in such a context, doll-narratives allowed authors to explore the potential existence of a juvenile sexuality and to view it not as leading to a life of vice but as fostering child’s altruism and preparing them for a life of both parenthood and philanthropic endeavour. The stories discussed in this chapter all interact in various ways with the late nineteenth century culture of social concern with the problem of poverty, and the development of an altruistic character. Young middle-class girls were not venturing into the city slums like their older female relatives, but they were encouraged to take part in the philanthropic culture of the late nineteenth-century in ways that were more suited to them. Several philanthropic societies formed branches particularly for children. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children formed the Children’s League of Pity in 1891.¹¹ Barnardo’s Society published *The Children’s Treasury and Advocate of the Homeless and Destitute*, a journal aimed at middle-class children, which told them about all the work that Barnardo’s did for destitute children.¹² The highly religious journal *The Children’s Friend* encouraged its readers to read novels about the lives of the London poor, and particularly those by Brenda: ‘[i]t will, we trust, lead them to feel a deeper sympathy for the poor outcast children who have “no homes” but the dark arches and cellars of our big cities’.¹³ It was through fiction that children were to learn about the lives of the poor.

⁹ J. Braxton Hicks, ‘The Croonian Lectures on the Difference Between the Sexes in Regard to the Aspect and Treatment of Disease’, *British Medical Journal*, March 24th (1877), pp. 347-349 (p. 348). Also quoted in Shuttleworth, p. 191.

¹⁰ Hicks, p. 348. For a discussion of the contradictory perception of childhood sexuality in the late nineteenth century, see R. Danielle Egan and Gail Hawkes, ‘Producing the Prurient Through the Pedagogy of Purity: Childhood Sexuality and the Social Purity Movement’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 20 (2007), 443-461 (p. 452-453).

¹¹ Pamela Horn, *The Victorian Town Child* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1997), p. 29.

¹² *The Children’s Treasury and Advocate of the Homeless and Destitute*, 1 (1875), p. 9.

¹³ ‘Pity the Poor City Arabs’, *The Children’s Friend*, 126 (1871), 92 (p. 92).

Toward the late nineteenth century Edward Salmon lamented the quality of girl's fiction and called for less overtly didactic fiction. 'Girl's literature', Salmon argued, 'would be more successful than it is if it were less goody-goody'. Exactly what Salmon means by 'successful' is never explained, nor does this emerge in the context; it could either imply commercial success, or how well it succeeds in teaching a child a lesson, or simply how enjoyable a book was. While Salmon agreed that literature had an important task in imparting wisdom to the young, he argued—perhaps sensing the tendency for rebellion against authority in the young—that if an author had a moral point to make 'he must point it in the facts of his narrative: not in a sermon, which plays the part of rearguard to every incident' (p. 516). Novels for girls faced the challenge of imbuing middle class girls with suitable values without being what critics commonly termed 'preachy'.¹⁴

In this chapter I will first discuss the significance of doll-narratives in the nineteenth century, and will then go on to explain the perceived connection between doll-love, motherhood, and altruism. A detailed analysis of Brenda's *Victoria-Bess: The Upps and Downs of a Doll's Life* (1879) follows, which shows how Brenda contrasts erotic passion and motherly love by comparing the relationship that two little girls have to the same doll. In *Victoria-Bess*, Angela's initial passion for her doll as an erotic object and her eventual abandonment of her doll are closely linked to her scorn for the poor. Then I look at Alice F. Jackson's *The Dolls' Dressmaker* (1891), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905).¹⁵ In *The Dolls' Dressmaker* the mutual doll-love of two young girls becomes the catalyst for cross-class fellowship. Doll-love simultaneously facilitates the homosocial bonding between a young working-class girl in the slums and a middle-class girl from a comfortable background, while it also prepares both girls for the future duties of motherhood. *A Little Princess* (1905) shows how Sara's love for her doll comes from a mothering instinct that prompts her to form friendships with the other girls, and that fuels her philanthropic interest in Becky, the scullery maid. These doll-narratives are the closest that

¹⁴ Edward Salmon, 'What Girls Read', *Nineteenth Century*, 20 (1886), 515-521 (p. 515).

¹⁵ Brenda, *Victoria-Bess: The Upps and Downs of a Doll's Life*, in *Victoria-Bess and Others*, ed. by Gillian Avery (London: Gollancz, 1968), Alice F. Jackson, *The Dolls' Dressmaker* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1891), Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess: Being the Whole Story of Sara Crewe, Now Told for the First Time* (London: Frederick Warne, 1905).

children's literature comes to the pattern of heterosexual adult courtship analysed in Chapter 1 and also to the idea of the lesbian continuum discussed in Chapter 3.

After this I divert the attention away from the doll and onto the doll's house, reading the dolls' house in the context of women's philanthropic activities in the homes of the poor, and shows how dolls' house narratives simultaneously participate and subvert the notion of what Beth Sutton-Ramspeck calls 'literary housekeeping'.¹⁶ Sutton-Ramspeck has observed that 'increases in women's education, workforce participation, and political activism' in the late nineteenth century, coincided with a greater sense of responsibility for domestic labour among middle-class women; she explains this surging interest in housework as part of a campaign to 'reenvision housekeeping as representing responsibilities with enormous impact: making the food supply safe, "cleaning up" society, improving the human race through "public motherhood"'.¹⁷

Alice M. Mitchell's *Two Dolls' Houses* (1895) and Hodgson Burnett's *Racketty-Packetty House* (1906) take a different approach: rather than seeking to teach girls sympathy for the poor, these novels mock the various conventions and platitudes of social reform, and in this sense, these works advocated a more modern approach to social reform.¹⁸ In the same way that the sexual lives of the heroines of the novels discussed so far are inseparable from their social and political activities, the girl's relationship to her doll is central to her relationship with the poor, or to those more unfortunate than her. As in the adult philanthropic discourses and novels, the notion of a specific feminine moral agency was constructed through the girl's natural aptitude for motherhood, which was symbolised by her relationship with her doll.

My reading of the novels and stories in this chapter is inevitably from the adult point of view, and I focus on these novels as they would have been written by and read by adults for their children. Most of the points made in this chapter would have passed by young readers. When adults wrote fiction for children, and especially very young children, they were also writing for adults, inserting cultural and symbolic reference points that allowed adult readers to make

¹⁶ Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, *Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Sutton-Ramspeck, p. 2.

¹⁸ Alice M. Mitchell, *Two Dolls' Houses* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895), Frances Hodgson Burnett, *Racketty-Packetty House* in Avery, 1968.

connections and draw inferences that to which child reader would be mostly oblivious.

Doll-Fiction and Doll-Love

As the subtitle makes clear, *The Adventures of a Doll: Compiled with the Hope of Offering Amusement and Instruction* (1816), by Mary Mister, is a classic example of a doll narrative that was meant both to amuse and instruct its reader. It contained pearls of wisdom based on a doll's observation of the world: after watching a spoilt young lady, the doll tells the reader: 'experience has since convinced me, that young ladies, as well as dolls, will always attract more praise by a retiring sweetness and modesty, than by all the glare of dress and beauty'.¹⁹ Generosity to the poor is also a quality much valued by the doll narrator, who laments the consumer culture that she herself is part of. When she is purchased by a young lady and taken home to see 'the profusion of expensive toys which was scattered about the apartment', she notes with disapproval, 'as much money had been spent in useless trifles, in this one visit to London, as would have supported a poor family of children for weeks'.²⁰ The irony of her observation is that she herself would have been left in the shop if her young lady had been more interested in giving her money to the poor. In *The Adventures of a Doll*, the doll functions as a social commentator; because of her doll status, she simultaneously possesses inside and outside information about the world she inhabits.

A different angle is taken in *Miss and Her Doll: Or The New Year's Gift* (1821), a series of verses accompanied by engravings that show us a little girl's joy in the doll that her mother gives her. Intended to 'instil into [...] tender minds the principles of morality', the gift of a doll is meant to educate the girl as to her true purpose in life. The little girl's promise to be kind to her doll demonstrates that the relationship between girl and doll is analogous to that of mother and child, 'my little miss, to you I'll be/As kind as my Mama to me—'.²¹ In the verses that follow, the little girl is described teaching her doll to walk, giving her doll breakfast, and putting her doll to bed, but she also intends to give

¹⁹ Mary Mister, *The Adventures of a Doll: Compiled with the Hope of Offering Amusement and Instruction* (London: Darton, Harvey, and Darton, 1816), p. 3.

²⁰ Mister, p. 7.

²¹ Anonymous, *Miss and Her Doll: Or a New Year's Gift* (London: J. Souter, 1821), Verse 1.

her doll a moral education by teaching her to be ‘gentle, good and kind’.²² In *Miss and her Doll*, doll-play amounts to little more than the playful enactment of motherhood.

If *Miss and her Doll* is an example of the doll-tale as setting a precedent for future maternal duties, Julia Maitland’s *The Doll and her Friends: Or Memoirs of the Lady Seraphina* (1858), is an exploration of the powerlessness of the doll as symbolic of women’s position in society. In this novel an uncomfortable link is formed between lack of both will and mobility and the production of the ideal feminine type. The story opens with an explanation of the doll’s purpose, as Seraphina, the doll narrator, tells us: ‘I belong to a race the sole end of whose existence is to give pleasure to others’.²³ Frances Armstrong insists that we should not interpret Seraphina’s position as an analogy of the female condition, because ‘Seraphina learns to distinguish between herself and human beings’, and ‘[t]he careful distinctions she draws prevent readers from making easy analogies between dollhouse dolls and housewife [sic]’.²⁴ Seraphina’s mission statement, echoes Wollstonecraft’s acerbic declaration that ‘the mighty business of female life is to please’, a fact which she went on to blame for the inferior position of women in society. ‘[T]aught only to please’, Wollstonecraft complained, ‘women are always on the watch to please’.²⁵

When Seraphina points out that dolls ‘are a race of mere dependents’, ‘[u]nable to change our place or move hand or foot at our own pleasure, and forced to submit to every caprice of our possessors, we cannot be said to even have a will of our own’, she draws analogies between the state of dollhood and the state of womanhood.²⁶ As Janet Oppenheim has observed, medical discourses established that women were ruled by their reproductive systems: ‘biology dominated women’s lives, utterly beyond the regulatory power of the individual will [...] [a]t the heart of the heart of virtually all medical attitudes towards women’s nerves, health, and character was the presumed weakness of the female will’.²⁷ Despite the dolls’ supposed lack of will (or maybe even because

²² *Miss and Her Doll*, verse 2.

²³ Julia Maitland, *The Doll and her Friends: Or, Memoirs of the Lady Seraphina* (London: Griffith and Farran, 1862), p. 1. This is also quoted in Marcus, pp.162-163, and Armstrong, p. 47.

²⁴ Armstrong, p. 47.

²⁵ Wollstonecraft, p. 126.

²⁶ Maitland, p. 2.

²⁷ Oppenheim, p. 181, see also Poovey, 1989, p. 11.

of it), she becomes an important influence upon her owner. Grown women will, Seraphina points out, ‘attribute to our influence many a habit of housewifery, neatness, and industry’ (p. 1), qualities vital to the ideal woman. Seraphina points out the incongruity inherent in the idea that an object that cannot itself perform these functions is assigned the status of a moral and domestic teacher.

But to our *influence*, our silent, unconscious influence alone, can such advantages be ascribed; for neither example nor precept are in our power; our race cannot boast of intellectual endowments; and though there are few qualities, moral or mental, that have not in their turn been imputed to us by partial friends, truth obliges me to confess that they exist rather in the minds of our admirers than in our own persons.

What is implied is that the doll does not only impart habits ‘of housewifery, neatness, and industry’, but also the value of ‘silent’ influence upon heterosexual courtship.

When Seraphina is purchased and taken home to a family with young children, she is viciously attacked by her new owner’s brother. Here, Seraphina’s inability to speak and protest against her treatment, is analogous to the woman suffering in silence from men’s abuse. Realising that Geoffrey is intent upon mischief, Seraphina recalls how she ‘shuddered to see him approaching my end of the room’ and ‘longed for the gift of speech to represent to him, that if he would but leave off looking at me, I should give him no offence; but alas I was silent and could only stare as hard as ever’. Geoffrey hangs her by the neck, and afterwards receives a stern telling off from his governess.²⁸ Armstrong maintains that Seraphina ‘makes it clear that her purpose is to be “of use” and that she feels no pain, thus implicitly exonerating children from guilt when they chose to transform or mutilate her’. On the contrary, mere psychical pain is not the issue, it is instead Seraphina’s fear and her inability to protest against such behaviour, which we are meant to glean from the incident. Armstrong reads Seraphina’s earlier assertion that she is there to please as meaning that it is part of her very purpose to be ill-treated: ‘[t]o a doll’, Armstrong claims, ‘there is no such thing

²⁸ Maitland, pp. 51, 52.

as *abuse*' because to abuse means to use something for other than its designed purpose.²⁹ This conclusion sits uneasily with Seraphina's description of her constant powerlessness and her fear of Geoffrey. It is clear that she gets no pleasure from knowing that she is to be used and abused by whosoever pleases to do so.

Although a boy is the doll's principal tormentor in the above example, the theme of the doll as abused by its owner, or 'mother', was well-noted by Victorian child psychologists who often used Maggie Tulliver's treatment of her doll in *The Mill on the Floss* as an example of such behaviour.³⁰ An article on 'Dolls' in *Chamber's Journal*, for example, contains the story of a little girl who abandons her doll when the doll receives a new face. The doll, 'Franky' catches scarlet fever and is looked after by 'three (imaginary) nurses' because his mother fears that her other dolls will catch scarlet fever from him.

One day, her maternal affection overcame her fear of contagion and she penetrated the sickroom, caught him up from his cradle, and kissed him passionately; but the sight of his sickly face and idiotic expression was too much for her, and, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she cast him away with loathing and disgust.³¹

The maternal feelings of the young girl are paired with disgust for her less than perfect child, and revulsion overcomes her maternal feelings. When Franky is left on his own to perish from scarlet fever, the author of this article speculates about similar incidents of parental abuse or neglect of dolls, and wonders 'how many cases would be revealed to the public, were all the lumber rooms and 'doll closets' in the United Kingdom to undergo strict investigation'. He employs the rhetoric of the shocking exposés of parental neglect and abuse such as 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', which was not only shocking because it uncovered the ongoing abuse of children, but also because it suggested the widespread presence of hidden atrocities: '[w]hat startling revelations and harrowing details there would be', he predicts, 'and what a fearful list of

²⁹ Armstrong, 'The Dolls' House as Ludic Space, 1690-1920', *Children's Literature*, 24 (1996), 23-54 (p. 47).

³⁰ George Eliot, *The Mill on The Floss* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 31-32.

³¹ 'Dolls', *Chambers's Journal*, 5 (1888), 97-99 (p. 98).

mutilated and disfigured bodies, and unrecognisable remains, we should have to make!’.³²

Rather than being the victims of abuse, the girls themselves become the abusers of their powerless victims; and the outcome of their crimes is more gruesome than any real case as they leave the dolls ‘mutilated’ and ‘unrecognisable’. While the author’s suggestions are playful in manner, he is still imagining young girls as being the perpetrators of horrific crimes. Girls, he is suggesting, are perhaps not as innocent as they are perceived to be; their maternal instincts—which he underscores in this article—do not necessarily make them good mothers. Instead, the passionate love that girls invest in their dolls too easily turns to hatred and cruelty when their dolls disappoint them.

In 1896 American professor G. Stanley Hall collected a vast amount of information on the subject of children’s relationships with their dolls. Hall sent out questionnaires to school children (boys included) asking them various questions about their relationships with dolls: whether or not they played with dolls, what personality traits their doll had, what their doll ate etc. The answers that he received were compiled into a wealth of information about doll-play and were published in *Pedagogical Seminary*, but it was left to James Sully, the prominent British psychiatrist, to draw conclusions about what could be learned about the psychology of the child from studying their relationship with their dolls.³³ Sully declared that ‘[y]ou will get more knowledge of child-nature by studying one child’s doll worship with something like thoroughness, than by collecting millions of scrappy observations’.³⁴ Sully concluded that girls’ doll-play was an example of their maternal aptitude and their natural altruism, but he also suggested that girls who played with dolls exercised a deep-seated desire for power.

In the various accounts of the children’s intense devotion to their doll, Sully found several examples that pointed to the child’s natural ‘altruism’, and their predisposition towards ‘self-sacrifice’. To illustrate this point he tells us of a five year-old boy ‘who half-starved himself in order to feed “an old nut-cracker in the unusual form of Punch”’; Sully called his behaviour ‘self-denying charity’.

³² ‘Dolls’, 1888, p. 98.

³³ G. Stanley Hall and A. Caswell Ellis, ‘A Study of Dolls’, *Pedagogical Seminary*, 4 (1896), 129-175.

³⁴ Shuttleworth, p. 269.

Using a mixture of new (altruism) and old-fashioned (charity) terminology to signify the child's exhibition of selfless behaviour, Sully was engaging with contemporary debates regarding the roots of altruism:

Mr Herbert Spencer thinks that he has found the earliest germs of human tenderness in the mother's pitiful care of her wee offspring. The feeling for 'teeny' things is a well-marked characteristic of children, especially girls; and the doll seems to be beloved because it is just wee enough to be made a nursling of.³⁵

Sully suggests that the child's care of their doll is a manifestation of parental feeling and draws upon Spencer's notion in the *Data of Ethics* in which he argued that motherhood, and a parent's readiness to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their offspring was the earliest form of altruism, to argue that children too, are naturally altruistic. Sully would no doubt have been familiar with the discourses that connected the maternal urges to the sexual instinct, and particularly *The Evolution of Sex*, published in 1889. In fact, he suggested that the girl's loss of interest in her doll during adolescence was prompted by 'the development of a new feeling of maidenly modesty', implying that adolescent girls abandoned their dolls owing to some sort of knowledge of the connection between motherhood and sexual activity.³⁶

The altruistic and mothering appeal of caring for dolls, Sully argued, was only one part of the attraction. Doll-play, he suggested, also offered children a chance to wield the power that they themselves lacked, and often represented 'a child's natural desire to get away from subjection, and to try her hand at the power of authority'.³⁷ He perhaps recognised that exercising power would appeal particularly to powerless girls, or perhaps he recognised in contemporary doll narratives, the woman's desire for power channelled through the girl's control of her dolls. Thus, he attributed to the girl's relationship with her doll the same

³⁵ James Sully, 'Dollatry', *Contemporary Review*, 75 (1899), 58-72 (pp. 64, 71)

³⁶ Sully, p. 71.

³⁷ Sully, p. 71.

qualities that were commonly attributed to motivated women's philanthropic activities, a mixture of mothering and power-wielding.³⁸

While a girl's love for her doll may be praised as an example of altruism, it can just as easily be viewed as a selfish passion. Possessiveness and jealousy feature strongly in tales in which girls learn to overcome their passion for their dolls and share their dolls with others. Ideally, the girl in such tales learns to overcome her selfish love for her doll and learns to share it with a less fortunate friend. When Frances Low of the *Strand Magazine* solicited contemporary celebrities for memories and thoughts about the dolls they had played with as young girls, Helena Faucit Martin, an actress, recalled the doll as being connected to her first self-less act. 'The earliest act of pure self-denial I can remember', Faucit wrote, 'was when I surrendered my sweetest, newest doll [...] to a poor young cousin who had lately lost her mother'.³⁹ The gift of a doll to an unfortunate girl was an example of the utmost self-less behaviour, since the surrendered doll was often very dear to its original owner. Such gifts also gave girls an opportunity to participate in a culture of philanthropy that they would have learned about from female relatives.

In *The Girls' Own Paper* Henrietta Barnett who, together with her husband Samuel Barnett, formed one of the philanthropic power-couples of the late nineteenth-century, appealed for more gifts of dolls in 'What Girls can do to Hush "The Bitter Cry"'. Mrs Barnett explained to her girl-readers that 'the thousands of children hidden behind the tall even walls of our pauper schools, have, in spite of discipline, a most hungry love for dolls and toys, which loving hunger cannot be satisfied unless the lady girls will be more industriously helpful at home'.⁴⁰ By addressing her readers as 'lady girls' Barnett differentiated her readers from the working-class children they were enlisted to help. As such, Barnett employed the terminology of middle-class moral supremacy that was used to strengthen middle-class women's position as social reformers.⁴¹ This highlights the extent to which the idea of social motherhood was a discourse upon class as well as gender.

³⁸ See Yeo, 1992, pp. 63-86.

³⁹ Frances H. Low, 'Distinguished Women and Their Dolls', *Strand Magazine*, 8 (1894), 250-257 (p. 251).

⁴⁰ Henrietta Barnett, 'What Girls Can do to Hush "The Bitter Cry"', *The Girl's Own Paper*, 240 (1884), p. 691.

⁴¹ See Livesey, 2004, pp. 245-246.

Making clothing for dolls to be given away to the poor was not only considered to be a good deed for the sake of helping others, but was also good domestic training for girls who would later be able to make their own clothing based on the skills they acquired. In 1893, *The Girl's Own Paper* announced a doll's dressing competition to close in February the following year. The competition 'intended to show how much our girls know of dressmaking and how they would make their own gowns and underclothes'. Entries were required to bear a certificate from 'a parent, minister, or teacher, assuring us that the work is the competitors own', and once the prizes had been announced, the dolls were to be given away to 'the children of hospitals, poor children's societies, and workhouses'.⁴² The follow-up article, published the following year, tells us that each girl who submitted a doll received a certificate signed by the recipient of the doll, which thanked the maker for her 'kind trouble and sympathy with one in suffering'. 'In this way', the article continued, 'each donor and worker knows exactly where her little doll is carrying on its mission of love and light'.⁴³ When a girl shares or gives away the doll she values so much, she overcomes her own desires, in similar manner to the women who renounced love in favour of charity.

Victoria-Bess: Cruelty and Desire, Love and Squalor

Brenda, whose real name was Georgina Castle Smith, was a prolific writer of children's books from the 1870s onwards. Her most commercially successful novel, *Froggy's Little Brother* (1875), which tells the story of two young brothers struggling to survive in the slums after the death of their parents, is one of the most prominent examples of the street-arab tales that became popular among children during the late nineteenth-century.⁴⁴ Relying on a mixture of sentimentality and social realism, Brenda sought to alert her young readers to the social injustices of contemporary society.

Brenda's later novel, *Victoria-Bess* was published in 1879, and it too, was concerned with teaching children sympathy for the poor.⁴⁵ Told retrospectively

⁴² 'Our Doll Competition', *Girl's Own Paper*, 721 (1893), p. 46.

⁴³ 'The Doll Competition', *Girl's Own Paper*, 744 (1894), 404-406 (p. 406).

⁴⁴ For more on *Froggy's Little Brother* see Julia L. Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone, *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, and J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 99-101.

⁴⁵ Brenda, *Victoria-Bess: The Upps and Downs of a Doll's Life in Victoria-Bess and others*, ed. by Gillian Avery (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968).

by the eponymous doll-narrator, *Victoria-Bess* is the story of a doll's journey from riches to rags, and the moral lesson she learns along the way. Starting her tale as a Parisian Doll in Cremer's, the finest toyshop in London, Victoria-Bess is purchased by a spoilt young girl and goes to live in splendour in Eaton Square. Here, she becomes a status symbol to her snobbish and conceited owner who shows her off as a display of her wealth. Victoria-Bess is initially proud and pampered, but when her owner Angela loses interest in her, she becomes one of the many neglected dolls who are the victims of the middle-class girl's greed and desire for new things. She is first abused—her nose is accidentally knocked off—and is then neglected when she is left in the dark at the back of Angela's toy-closet. As she travels down the rungs of society, she learns to appreciate the loving virtues of the poor children who once gazed at her in the shop window, as opposed to the selfish desire of her mistress to show off her doll.

The novel presents two very different types of doll desire: one is an entirely sensuous desire for beauty and for an object that displays wealth; the other is based on a desire to love and to be loved. These two types of doll-love, I argue, represent sexual desire and mothering love respectively, and Brenda makes a clear distinction between the two. A spoilt middle-class child and a poverty stricken little girl each represent one of the forms of doll-love: Angela is the spoilt, mean-spirited little girl for whom Victoria-Bess is initially purchased; Moggy is a younger poor child who admires the doll in the shop window knowing she will never be able to afford it. Taking great pride in her appearance, Victoria-Bess is incensed when she notices two 'girls of seven or ten, raggedly dressed, hair unkempt, faces dirty' admiring her through the shop window in which she is placed. The two girls speculate about the price of the doll and rightly guess that they could not afford her. Recalling this episode in retrospect, Victoria-Bess now feels only shame for her 'disdain and scornful disgust' towards these two young girls (p. 17).

Angela is everything that Brenda believes children should not be. She is rude to her parents and servants, and she never says please; she rules the household and her every whim is catered for by her foolish parents. From the moment she enters the shop, Brenda depicts Angela as only being interested in herself and her own needs; she pushes through the crowd of customers and expects to be served before anyone else. The manner in which Angela's desire

for the doll is portrayed shows that it is a symptom of her selfishness and greed and her wish to assert her superior social status.

In contrast to Moggy's motherly desire to hold the doll in her arms, Angela's desire for the doll is distinctly erotic because of the fetishistic depiction of the doll's and Angela's clothing. Victoria-Bess describes her own dress for her imagined rapturous girl reader:

I wore white thread stockings, which were so fine as to shew the pink wax through, and on my feet were dainty little pink kid boots, very high in the ankle, with two tassels in front, and military heels, which had been made in Paris specifically to fit me. (p. 16)

The focus here is on the texture and the transparency of her clothes; her 'fine' and 'dainty' clothes exhibit her value as a commodity, and mark her as the plaything of the children of the higher classes. What is striking about this passage is that it bears a strong resemblance to the salacious descriptions of stockings and boots that abounded in nineteenth-century literary pornography. In works such as *The Romance of Lust* (1879) and *The Autobiography of a Flea* (1887) descriptions of the stockings and boots of the female participants frequently precede explicit depictions of sexual encounters. The praise of a lover's stockings is incorporated into a letter presented as evidence at the divorce courts in *The Romance of Lust*: 'God bless you for speaking so often of your pretty rose-coloured silk stockings. I like them so much and adore you for wearing them, although it is not the custom, above all in the day time'.⁴⁶ Observing the scene in front of him, the insect narrator of *The Autobiography of a Flea* described how the young woman he had attached himself to 'denuded herself of her drawers and petticoats, and retaining only her exquisite dress, silk stockings and pretty kid boots, offered herself to their admiration and lascivious touches'.⁴⁷ When Victoria-Bess sees Angela, the little girl who becomes her new owner, enter the shop, she admires

⁴⁶ *The Romance of Lust* reprinted in *The Wordsworth Book of Classic Erotica* (London: Wordsworth, 2007), first published in 1879, Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study in Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London: publisher, 1966), p. 66.

⁴⁷ *The Autobiography of a Flea* reprinted in *Classic Erotica*, 2007, p. 603. In *Empathy and the Novel*, Suzanne Keen has pointed out that '[a]ll that is required for porn's success is an effective transferral of the arousal of the protagonist to the bodies of its viewers', or readers as the case is here, p. 40.

her clothes like she herself has been admired: '[s]he wore beautiful clothes, and very high French boots like mine, only hers were of black kid and mine were of pink, and she had dark embroidered silk stockings' (p. 26). Through these fetishistic descriptions of the both Victoria-Bess's and Angela's stockings and boots, Brenda situates the doll and the child-owner as both erotic objects to be admired and as subjects capable of erotic appreciation.

Marcus has pointed out that the girl's relationship with her doll often bears the hallmark of courtship, and she argues that the doll can be read as an erotic object, comparing the girl's purchase of her doll to 'the purchase of a female slave for a harem'.⁴⁸ In this case, Angela's demands for the doll almost read as though she is picking out a prostitute: "I want the pink doll in the window," said the child, again pointing towards me with her muff. "Does she undress, and has she other clothes, and can I buy her a bed?" (p. 27). The doll, in a sense, becomes Angela's trophy wife—an expensive and beautiful object bought to show off her own wealth and which is cast aside when Angela finds something even more exclusive.

We could read Angela's desire for the doll and for clothing and the bed as a display of early sexuality; she wants for her doll 'a lovely little bed hung with blue silk, and perhaps a crimson counterpane embroidered with roses and flowers' (p. 29). Brenda makes it clear from the start that Angela is a child who expects her desires and appetites to be fulfilled, as she drives home with a packet beside her containing 'rich pound cake and ratafia', 'into which with one hand she kept continually dipping' (p. 29). Later, she has no dinner, but instead comes to the table to partake of a dessert consisting of 'crystallised apricots' and 'cherries and almonds'. Her love of fine fabrics and her appetite for sweetmeats signal her as being a child of appetites and desires, and if she is not a sexual being at the moments, her desire for such things prefigures a sexual desire. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas has pointed out, '[i]n most Victorian writings, whether in novels, magazines or conduct books, food always acted as a veiled metaphor for sexuality, most improper in the respectable Victorian woman'.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Marcus, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy-Tales and Sensation Fiction* (London: Ashgate 2007), p. 54. Christina Rossetti's poem *Goblin Market* (1862) makes the connection between female appetite for sweet things and sexual appetite.

Although the qualities just described make for a thoroughly spoiled child, what really identifies Angela as an example of how children should not behave is her utter contempt for those less fortunate than herself. When she drives out in a carriage with Victoria-Bess, she holds her doll up to other girls so that they may see and be jealous; she only does so, however, if the girls seem reasonably well-to-do. Poor children must not even look at Victoria-Bess, and Angela shields her doll from their gaze. When her cousin Katie comes to visit, Angela scorns her cousin's ragdoll and shows off Victoria-Bess. Already versed in the fine art of the subtle put-down, Angela inquires of Katie, '[d]o you like rag dolls? Do you think they are nice?', forcing Katie to confess that she does not 'think they're so pretty as wax [...] but they *last* much longer' (p. 41). Privileging the practical over the pretty, Katie demonstrates an understanding of modest economy that suggests she is capable of reigning in her desires. When she asserts that she is 'very fond of Mignonette', even though she is not as beautiful as Victoria-Bess, she becomes an example of suitable doll-love: hers is not the feverish desire for beauty but instead the wish for a durable companion. Brenda presents Katie's love for her doll as a far more prudent, durable, and altogether more commendable form of love, than Angela's sensual desire for her doll's beauty.

The fortunes of Victoria-Bess change when Angela's parents return from the Paris World Fair with a new toy that replaces her in Angela's esteem. A quacking mechanical duck becomes Victoria-Bess's replacement and is a symbol of the stupidity of Angela and her parents. Victoria-Bess is locked in the toy-cupboard when she breaks her nose after falling off a chair, and is forgotten about until she is rescued by a friend of the family: 'I know of a home for her, where she'll be received, and warmly welcomed, poor thing' (p. 64). Victoria-Bess is taken to the Hospital for sick children where she encounters her new owners in whom she recognises the little girl whom she had once held in contempt: '[g]azing up into her face I recognised in her, Moggy, one of the little ragged Regent street girls who, in her big boots and with her arm in a sling, had wandered up that fine December morning to admire me.' (p. 73). Now, Victoria-Bess loses her sense of contempt for the poor, she no longer shrinks from their gaze and even longs to be held in their loving arms. Noticing that the doll has been 'treated [...] *very* badly', Moggy explains that she 'will love you all the more, dear, and nobody sha'nt never hurt you again' (p. 74).

The novel ends with an address to the child reader, urging them never to throw out their old dolls and instead give them to those who will appreciate and look after them. The overt moral of the story, directed to the child-reader through the doll, is that children should be kind to those who are less fortunate than themselves. But there is another moral to the story that appears as we follow the progression of Victoria-Bess's own erotic love for her owner, which arises from Angela's beauty, to her familial love of Moggy. As such, the tale privileges familial and motherly/daughterly love over erotic love. The passionate love that Angela feels for her doll is linked to her own selfishness; she wishes merely to possess the doll, and Victoria-Bess ends up being abused and forgotten when she no longer caters to her mistress's taste. In this sense, it is also a tale of 'right' love, in which the protagonist learns to distinguish between transient and passionate love that springs merely from appreciation of superficial appearances and the more enduring form of love that is rooted in maternal feeling.

Good Mothers and Bad Mothers: Alice F. Jackson's *The Dolls' Dressmaker* and *A Little Princess*

In Alice F. Jackson's novel, *The Dolls' Dressmaker*, the doll is used to symbolise the working-class child's right to a childhood, and the little girl's mothering instinct, as well as providing a vehicle for cross-class bonding. *The Doll's Dressmaker* is unique because it is one of the few children's novels in which a young middle-class girl is granted entrance to the city slums. Instead of merely hearing of slum-work from older relatives, as in Margaret Keston's *A Girl's Experiment* (1899) and Emma Marshall's *Eastward Ho!* (1890), Lucy Playfair, the child protagonist of *The Dolls' Dressmaker*, accompanies her philanthropic mother into the city slums.⁵⁰ When Mrs. Playfair hears of a poverty-stricken dolls' dressmaker living in the slums with a young daughter, she decides to pay them a visit, and resolves to bring her own daughter. Following the pattern of philanthropic doll-giving, Mrs Playfair decides that Lucy shall accompany her on her visit to the dolls' dressmaker and that Lucy shall bring a doll as a gift. The narrative then develops around the relationship between Lucy and Jess, the

⁵⁰ Margaret Keston, *A Girl's Experiment* (London: the Religious Tract Society, undated), Emma Marshall, *Eastward Ho!* (London: James Nisbet, undated, fifth edition).

daughter of the dolls' dressmaker, which is facilitated by the girls' shared love of dolls.

Jackson joins the nineteenth-century psychologists who believed that a girl's relationship with her dolls mimicked the mother-and-child dynamic that would take place in the future. This is particularly evident in the manner in which Jackson portrays Lucy's decision in choosing which doll to give to Jess: her difficulties in choosing spring from the fact that 'they were all alike to the little mother's heart' (p. 36). Realizing that her daughter views her dolls as her children, Mrs. Playfair offers to buy Lucy a brand new doll to give away, but Lucy declines her offer: '[a] new one wouldn't have much sympathy—it stares so' (p. 37). Eventually, Lucy settles on one of her baby-dolls, Seraphina, and explains her motivation behind the choice of the doll as follows:

Seraphina, you scarcely understand, my darling, but it is best that you should go. The others I'm afraid, have stuck-up manners, and might sneer at the little girl's poor home; that would make her shy of them. You, you precious baby, will just lie in her arms and comfort her, and—and I'll come and see you sometimes. (p. 38)

Lucy's relationship with her doll serves to identify her as both a motherly and philanthropic child.

The doll facilitates the cross-class relationship that develops between Lucy and Jess, a relationship that can be viewed in terms of the homosocial desire frequently present in female friendships. Although Jess is initially too shy to greet Lucy, when Jess sees the doll, she whispers '[a]in't she beautiful! [...] A BABY!' (p. 40), and she bends 'forward, and presse[s] a rapturous kiss on Seraphina's pouting baby lips' (p. 40). The narrator comments upon the scene as though she was a present observer: 'I cannot tell which was more enraptured, Lucy with Jess, or Jess with Seraphina' (p. 40). Jess's reaction when she sees the doll becomes a point of affinity between the girls, and Lucy wishes that she had Jess for a sister: 'Darling little thing! So pretty! She understands dolls—ah, yes! If Jess had been [...] her cousin, her friend; better still, her sister' (p. 44). Jackson depicts Lucy and Jess as falling in love with each other over the doll: Lucy loves Jess because she loves Seraphina, and Jess loves Lucy because she

has given her Seraphina: ‘Lucy fell head over heels in love with Jess; she thought her a beautiful, beautiful, beautifullest girl’ (p. 41). When Lucy tells Jess that the doll is hers to keep, she receives a declaration of love in return: ‘taking Seraphina back close to her heart, said vehemently, “ I love you, I love you!” and gazed with a world of love into Lucy’s sweet loving face. And Lucy loved Jess, too’ (p. 41).

These passionate declarations of love suggest the manner in which female friendships were conceived of as being romantic predecessors of sexual love. And because doll-love precedes the intimate friendship that develops between the girls, it is shown to be a vital component of both mothering desire and the sensual appreciation of female beauty that makes Lucy fall in love with Jess. The boundaries between doll-love, sisterhood, and sensual love, break down to extent that the narrator herself ‘cannot tell’ which is which. Jackson’s portrayal of the two girls’ relationship indicates that the love that is necessary to truly transform philanthropic relationships into cross-class bonding evolves from the love of the doll.

In *The Dolls’ Dressmaker*, the doll is also used to broach the subject of cross-class adoption, which, as Elizabeth Thiel explains, was a common occurrence in street-arab fiction, in which ‘the child protagonist is invariably relocated to a middle-class environment, or one that at least displays middle-class conventions’. Such fiction functions on the premise that ‘such children *could* ultimately be saved, though their parents might be past redemption’.⁵¹ *The Dolls’ Dressmaker* differs from the novels that Thiel discusses, such as *Jessica’s First Prayer* (1867) and *Lost Gip* (1873) in that Jess is later incorporated as a fully functioning member of the middle-class Playfair family, when Mrs. Playfair decides to adopt Jess in order to rescue her from her drunken mother, rather than simply being transferred to a household that incorporates middle-class values.

As the friendship between the girls grows, Jess begins to wonder what her relationship is to the doll, since Lucy is the doll’s real mother. This is where the subject of adoption is raised for the first time.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth Century Children’s Literature and the Domestic Ideal* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 44.

“What am I, then?” asked Jess in a distressed voice, stretching out her arms for Seraphina, and holding her close to her heart, as if she feared the baby might be torn from her grasp, could no satisfactory relationship be established. (p. 52)

Jess’s fear of losing the doll is relieved when Lucy explains the concept of adoption and tells Jess that she is the adoptive mother of the doll: ‘[s]ometimes when people have no children, they take another person’s child and bring it up as their own; they call it adopting. I know an old gentleman and a lady who never had any children, so they took a little girl from an orphanage, and adopted her.’ (p. 52). “And so, Jess,” said Lucy, “you’ve ‘adopted’ Seraphina” (p. 52), ‘Although I’m her mother, you are her adopted mother, and as I’ve given her up to you, she belongs to you more than to me’ (p. 53). Jess generously decides that ‘we can both be her mothers’ and ‘hold[s] Seraphina up for Lucy to kiss’ (p. 53). The discussion of the concept of adoption and the confirmation that adoptive children belong more to their adoptive than their real parents who have given them up foreshadows the conflict in maternal rights that is to come later in the novel.

In Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess*, Burnett uses the doll in a similar manner: Sara’s doll allows her to create her own surrogate family when she is left at boarding school. *A Little Princess* was originally published in 1887 as *Sara Crewe: Or, What Happened at Miss Minchin’s*. In 1905 Burnett published an expanded version of the story, *A Little Princess: Being the Whole Story of Sara Crewe, Now Told for the First Time*, that devoted more time to Sara’s life at Miss Minchin’s before her father dies and she is left penniless. Roderick McGillis has ‘noticed that Sara Crewe likes things she can dominate’ and he reads this urge as an ‘unpalatable’ example of an ‘imperial attitude’, and claims that Sara is guilty of looking down upon those she is helping.⁵² Yet later, McGillis warns readers against seeing Sara’s ‘good works’ as being ‘typical of the charity activity of many middle-class Victorian women’, and urges us instead to read her actions in the context of ‘the social revolution that was beginning to take place in England in the late nineteenth century with the founding of the Socialist League and the

⁵² Roderick McGillis, *A Little Princess: Gender and Empire* (London: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 40, 75.

Working Man's Movement'. In McGillis's eyes, Sara is both imperialist and socialist, upholding the idea of a natural hierarchy with the white middle-classes at the top, yet simultaneously attempting to overthrow it. I wish to approach this novel from a different angle, by viewing it as an exploration of female altruistic power.

Sara constructs her identity at Miss Minchin's around two female archetypes: the mother and the princess. While these archetypes both represent ideal feminine states, they also signify positions of considerable power. In the child's world, the mother is the supreme ruler, however she may be limited in other ways. McGillis remarks upon the significance of the princess idea: '[t]he princess is an ideal devoutly to be wished: obedient, agreeable, dutiful; she exhibits inner beauty [...] For a female to act with sensitivity and grace, politeness and generosity is to act like a princess—in fact, to be a princess'.⁵³ On the contrary, Sara's princess fantasy is not so much a fantasy of ideal femininity as a fantasy of altruistic power.

The recurring theme from which *A Little Princess* draws its title, is a notion of ideal girlhood analogous to the notion of ideal womanhood set forth in Ruskin's *Of Queens' Gardens*. Ruskin recognised a universal desire for power, that belonged to women as much as men, 'there is in the human heart an inextinguishable instinct, the love of power, which, rightly directed, maintains all the majesty of law and life, and, misdirected, wrecks them'. Ruskin urges women not to suppress their desire for power, as he suspects many of them do, but instead to seize that urge towards power and use it for the public good.

For Heaven's sake, and for Man's sake, desire it all you can. But *what* power? That is all the question. Power to destroy? the lion's limb, and the dragon's breath? Not so. Power to heal, to redeem, to guide, and to guard. Power of the sceptre and shield; the power of the royal hand that heals in touching.⁵⁴

Ruskin's call to women, in which he urged them to seize the power that was rightfully theirs, an altruistic power to change the world, is echoed in *A Little*

⁵³ McGillis, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Ruskin, p. 169.

Princess. To Sara, the princess, like Ruskin's queen, symbolises something more than wealth; she stands for an ideal state of girlhood virtue similar to the ideal state of womanly virtue embodied in Ruskin's idea of the woman as queen. Sara represents benevolent power as opposed to the malicious power of Lavinia and Miss Minchin. The ideal of femininity that Miss Minchin advocates is based on appearance and superficial manners; it is materialist and economically savvy, but lacks inner virtue. Her job is to produce young ladies with the artificial charms perfect for snaring wealthy men in the marriage market. Sara presents a different form of femininity that emphasises character rather than outward appearances. In the tyranny of the market-place, however, Miss Minchin's greedy femininity threatens to triumph over Sara generous femininity. Her fantasy of being a princess ultimately pays off as her nice manners and her generosity towards street children incites the curiosity of her well-meaning neighbours, and ultimately leads to the restoration of her rightful position. The moral of the story is that it is how girls behave that makes them princesses.

A Little Princess, as McGillis remarks, 'situates itself in several Late Victorian/Early Edwardian themes'; set at a girl's school that is designed to produce refined young ladies, it delves into the heart of ideal femininity, and what it means to be a lady, or a princess.⁵⁵ The princess combines ideal womanly virtues with a potential for almost unlimited power. But, like Ruskin's queens, girls must earn their royal power by demonstrating that they can put it to good use. When Sara is likened to a princess because of her wealth, and more importantly, because of her 'perfect manners', she adopts the idea and pretends that she is princess, 'so that I can try and behave like one'. The character of Sara draws upon Ruskin's idea of the woman as queen, but it also provides girls with a more age-appropriate aspiration: she does not keep her fantasy to herself but wants her friend Ermengarde to pretend that she too is a princess.

Sara is very aware that that her power and the generosity that accompanies it, depends upon her status as the heiress of her father's wealth. Once the money is taken away, Sara is completely powerless, and even the fantasy world that she has built around herself crumbles bit by bit. She goes from being an all-powerful goddess, queen, and princess to being a completely

⁵⁵ McGillis, p. 15.

powerless domestic drudge. The only thing that can restore her power is the recovery of the money that is rightfully hers. Without money, female benevolence and sympathetic power is transformed into passive femininity.

The doll that Sara is given before her father returns to India comes to symbolise the inner benevolence that manifests itself in her motherly behaviour towards the younger pupils, and her philanthropic actions towards Becky, the scullery maid. Yet this doll also serves the double purpose of representing her father's parental inadequacy and his economic incompetence. Instead of safeguarding his daughter's future, he spends a vast amount of money on buying and dressing a doll that is ultimately useless to his daughter when he dies. The doll becomes more like Sara's double than her actual child. Captain Crewe has already furnished Sara with a 'wardrobe much too grand for a child of seven', consisting of velvet dresses, and lace dresses and embroidered ones' and 'boxes of tiny gloves and handkerchiefs and silk stockings' (p. 11). There is a suggestion that Captain Crewe projects onto Sara the relationship that he had with his wife; he refers to her as his 'little missus' (p. 68), and her costly wardrobe is the result of his desire to buy gifts for a long-perished wife. The doll, too, is given a wardrobe far too grand for a doll. Rather than being taken to a doll's dressmaker, the doll is taken to a children's dressmaker and bought bespoke outfits to match Sara's.

Emily was bought and actually taken to a children's outfitter's shop and measured for a wardrobe as grand as Sara's own. She had lace frocks, too, and velvet and muslin ones, and hats and coats and beautiful lace-trimmed underclothes, and gloves and handkerchiefs and furs. (p. 13)

The doll is to be half companion, half child, and Sara sees the relationship between her and the doll as being comparable to that of mother and child: she wants the doll 'to look as if she was a child with a good mother' (p. 13). That Sara is 'a motherly young person' (p. 41) is manifest not only in her relationship to her doll, but also in her relationship with the other pupils at the seminary. When she settles into her new school she is immediately drawn towards the children who are unhappy or are being mistreated. She forms a motherly relationship with some of the other children, helping them with their homework,

and looking after them in various ways: '[s]he was a motherly young person, and when people fell down and scraped their knees, she ran and helped them up and patted them, or found in her pocket a bonbon or some other article of a soothing nature' (p. 41). She first forms a friendship with Ermengarde St. John after she sees her being scolded in front of the class by Miss Minchin: 'It was a way of hers always to want to spring into any fray in which someone was made uncomfortable or unhappy' (p. 27). Sara befriends Ermengarde by showing her Emily, and presenting Emily as another friend: 'Emily, you must listen. This is Ermengarde St. John, Emily. Ermengarde, this is Emily. Would you like to hold her?' (p. 33). Sara also befriends Lottie, the youngest of the girls at the seminary, who, like Sara, is motherless. Lottie is subject to passionate outbursts in which she screams and cries that she has 'no ma—ma—ma-a' (p. 46), and Sara calms her down by explaining that she herself 'will be your mamma [...] We will play that you are my little girl. And Emily shall be your sister' (p. 49). In this manner, Sara creates a surrogate family for Lottie with herself as an 'adopted mother' (p. 49), and the doll as Lottie's sister.

Sara's nurturing tendencies do not just extend to the children of her own class, for she also takes an interest in Becky, the little scullery maid.

'If I *was* a princess—a *real* princess,' she murmured, 'I could scatter largess to the populace. But even if I am only a pretend princess, I can invent little things to do for people. Things like this. She was just as happy as if it was largess. I'll pretend that to do things people like is scattering largess. I've scattered largess.' (p. 64)

Exactly where Sara has come across the phrase 'scatter largess' is unclear; but since it is not a phrase commonly used among children, and Sara is a well-read child, it is safe to assume that she has come across it in one of the many books she has read. In her role towards Becky, she becomes a little philanthropist, bringing her things to eat and looking after her. Although it is part of her fantasy, in which she is a princess, her benevolence is ordained by 'Nature' with a capital 'N', demonstrating that it is inherent.

If Nature has made you for a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart; and though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that—warm things, kind things, sweet things—help and comfort and laughter—and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all. (pp. 75-76)

Sara, however, sees her own situation and her disposition as the result of blind luck or ‘accident’: ‘how I shall ever find out whether I am really a nice child or a horrid one. Perhaps I’m a *hideous* child, and no one will ever know, just because I never have any trials’ (p. 38). The difference between generosity and altruism, is that Sara sacrifices nothing in her benevolence to the other children. She knows that her wealth gives her power and privilege, but she is determined to put those two things to good use. Unlike Lavinia who ruled the school prior to Sara’s arrival ‘because she was capable of making herself extremely disagreeable if the others did not follow her’ (p. 39), Sara’s power stems from the fact that she does not make herself disagreeable.

When Sara’s eleventh birthday comes around, everything changes. Captain Crewe’s suggestion that Sara gets another doll for her birthday is met by Sara’s ominous prediction that this will be ‘the Last Doll’ (p. 77). She writes a letter to her father full of a sense of foreboding and replete with knowledge of her own mortality.

‘I am getting very old,’ she wrote; ‘you see, I shall never live to have another doll given me. This will be my last doll. There is something solemn about it [...] No one could ever take Emily’s place, but I should respect the Last Doll very much; and I am sure the school would love it. They all like dolls, though some of the big ones—the almost fifteen ones—pretend they are too grown up’. (p. 77)

What seems like ‘quaint’ (p. 77) solemnity to Captain Crewe, is actually an uncanny, if unprecise, prediction of how Sara’s life is about to change. Her birthday party, when she is given the last doll, is interrupted by the announcement that Captain Crewe has died and left his daughter nothing but debts to Miss Minchin. ‘The Last Doll’, like Emily before her, becomes a symbol of excessive

wealth foolishly spent. But before that, the fine doll introduces an element of decadence to Sara's party, like a Roman orgy of pleasure for children: '[w]hen she took out the Last Doll it was so magnificent that the children uttered delighted groans of joy, and actually drew back to gaze at it in breathless rapture' (p. 85).

Never had the schoolroom been in such an uproar. There were lace collars and silk stockings and handkerchiefs; there was a jewel case containing a necklace and a tiara which looked quite as if they were made of real diamonds; there was a long sealskin and muff, there were ball dresses and walking dresses and visiting dresses; there were hats and tea gowns and fans. (p. 86)

We are made to understand this as the moment when an empire—Sara's empire—overreaches its power and collapses. When Captain Crewe's solicitor calls to inform Miss Minchin of Captain Crewe's death, he is taken into the schoolroom where the Last Doll sits with all her fine clothes scattered around her. To him, the doll is symbol of Captain Crewe's foolishness and his 'mad extravagance': "'A hundred pounds,' Mr. Barrow remarked succinctly, 'All expensive material, and made at a Parisian modiste's. He spent money lavishly enough, that young man'" (p. 89).

Sara's life of privilege and her childhood ends when her father dies; she is moved into a cold attic and is made to run errands and teach the younger children; Miss Minchin announces her change in station by telling her: '[y]ou will have no time for dolls in future' [...] You will have to work and improve yourself and make yourself useful' (p. 102). Miss Minchin and the servants of the seminary treat her cruelly, and she descends into a state of misery and semi-starvation. Without her father, or his money, she is powerless to improve her own situation 'she was treated as if she was nobody's concern, and her heart grew proud and sore' (p. 114). She is also estranged from all her old friends, apart from Becky, because she imagines that they do not want to know her due to her low status. When Sara lashes out at Ermengarde when she clumsily enquires if Sara is 'very unhappy' (p. 117), she drives a wedge between her former caring self and her new degraded and unhappy self. It is Ermengarde who makes the

first step towards renewing the friendship, and Sara confesses to her that she believes that her new situation is a test of her own goodness: “[y]ou see, now that trials have come, they have shown that I am *not* a nice child. I was afraid they would. Perhaps”—wrinkling her forehead wisely—“that is what they were sent for” (p. 122). She sees her situation as a test of her own moral strength, Sara uses Emily’s passive state to strengthen her own resolve.

When you will not fly into a passion people know you are stronger than they are, because you are strong enough to hold in your rage, and they are not, and they say stupid things they wish they hadn’t said afterward. There’s nothing so strong as rage, except what makes you hold it in—that’s stronger. It’s a good thing not to answer your enemies. I scarcely ever do. Perhaps Emily is more like me than I am like myself. Perhaps she would rather not answer her friends, even. She keeps it all in her heart. (p. 150)

Here, Sara sees Emily as symbol of restrained stoicism and compares her battle against her rage to Emily’s silence. Sara sees the passiveness that others have ridiculed in dolls as being a sign of the doll’s strength, and she tries to emulate this strength, knowing that if she loses control over herself, she cannot maintain a position superior to her enemy. She cultivates her own passive acceptance of her condition, drawing upon the idea that she is morally superior to her tormentors because she is capable of controlling her rage. Her defensive stance is similar to the ‘wise passiveness’ employed by the gothic heroine who ‘wait[s] for the tyrant to self-destruct through the consequences of his own misguided evil deeds’.⁵⁶ Restraining her passion, she knows, will make her stronger than her enemies, but this restraint is not always easy: ‘though she tried to satisfy herself with these arguments, she did not find it easy’ (p. 150). However, she does not link her behaviour to silent feminine compliance, she instead imagines that she performs her duties with a masculine stoicism, “‘Soldiers don’t complain,” she would say between her small, shut teeth, “I am not going to do it; I will pretend this is part of a war”’ (p. 144).

⁵⁶ Hoeveler, 1998, p. 95.

Sometimes her imagination does not stretch far enough. If we recall Sully's suggestion that the doll offered the child a chance to reverse their own subjection, Sara is only ever violent towards her doll when she feels at her worst and at her most powerless state. One evening, after a particularly bad day, she returns to her attic and strikes her doll. 'Emily's stare seemed so vacant, her sawdust legs and arms so inexpressive, that Sara lost all control over herself' (p. 151). The dolls' static appearance is so provoking to Sara that she strikes the doll.

I can't bear this [...] I know I shall die. I'm cold; I'm wet; I'm starving to death. I've walked a thousand miles today, and they have done nothing but scold me from morning until night. Some men laughed at me because my old shoes made me slip down in the mud. I'm covered with mud now. And they laughed. Do you hear? (p. 151)

The incident where Sara strikes her doll becomes such a cathartic moment that we are invited to wonder whether what might have killed Sara was not starvation and cold, but her own pent up anger at those who mistreated her. With 'a tempest raging in her young breast', 'Sara lost all control over herself', '[s]he lifted her little savage hand and knocked Emily off the chair, bursting into a passion of sobbing—Sara who never cried' (p. 152). When she strikes her doll she is transformed from a little princess into a 'little savage', she reverts to a more barbaric stage of humanity, and the atavistic child within her is finally exposed: "You are nothing but a *doll*!" she cried. "Nothing but a doll—doll—doll! You care for nothing. You are stuffed with sawdust. You never had a heart. Nothing could ever make you feel. You are a *doll*!" (p. 152). All the rage that Sara has withheld from Miss Minchin, from the servants who mistreat her, and the students who sneer at her, is poured out over the life-less doll. The doll serves as a safe outlet for her rage; Sara has not exposed her anger to the enemy and she can therefore maintain her dignified position by withholding her rage in public. "You can't help being a doll", she said with a resigned sigh, "any more than Lavinia and Jessie can help not having any sense. We are not all made alike. Perhaps you do your sawdust best" (p. 152). This statement, made in favour of

biological determinism, absolves the doll and Sara's schoolfriends from any guilt in their treatment of her.

Children attacking their dolls in times of perceived or genuine ill-treatment became a commonly acknowledged truth after George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, an episode recalled by most of those who wrote about girls. Shuttleworth reads the incident where Maggie abuses her doll, the 'fetish', as being Eliot's reflection of our 'animal ancestry'. According to August Comte, Fetishism represented a stage of human development, in which 'man conceives of all external bodies as animated by a life analogous to its own'.⁵⁷ Sara's doll is never called a fetish, but her attack upon the doll, when she realises it cannot help her is a classic example of the destruction of the fetish. This is where Sara stops pretending and hoping that the doll will one day come alive. She quickly recovers herself and the story is resolved when the friend of her father who invested with him adopts her. It is because she is so downtrodden that Sara elicits sympathetic responses from Ram Dass, and is finally rescued from her situation at Miss Minchin's. Ultimately, it is the passive heroine, the one that refuses to talk back, that is rewarded.

Uproarious households: The Dollhouse Corrected

In the second half of this chapter, I move away from the relationship between girls and dolls and focus instead on girls' relationships with their dolls' houses. Frances Armstrong has demonstrated that the dolls' house was a space where the ordered world of middle-class domesticity could be overturned.⁵⁸ The Dolls' house narrative, therefore, is a genre that is particularly suited to questioning the premises of domestic ideology upon which much of the female reformer's authority rested. Alice M. Mitchell's *Two Doll's Houses* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Rocketty-Packetty House* both employ the girl's relationship with her doll's house to explore the philanthropic middle-class woman's relationship to the houses of the poor.⁵⁹ As such, these novels situate themselves in the context of the late nineteenth-century movement for simultaneously improving the homes and the character of the poor. As Livesey and George Behlmer have pointed out,

⁵⁷ Shuttleworth, p. 97, 98.

⁵⁸ Armstrong, p. 39.

⁵⁹ Alice M. Mitchell, *Two Dolls' Houses* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895).

the homes of the poor, as a space that reflected the character of the poor, and carried the potential to improve it, became the main targets for social reform and were scrutinised by women eager to read the homes of the poor: 'the intimate spaces of the poorest working-class homes yielded up their contents to the reader of character and a moral aetiology was traced in these items.'⁶⁰ Behlmer argues that 'gaining access to a home—being invited across its threshold—might mark the crucial first step in a public campaign to re-moralize private life'.⁶¹

Octavia Hill, the pioneering housing reformer funded by John Ruskin, explained to her readers in the *Nineteenth Century*: '[y]ou cannot deal with the people and their houses separately'. 'The principle on which the whole work rests, is that the inhabitants and their surrounding must be improved simultaneously'.⁶² When Hill took to the London slums as the first rent collector, she imagined a symbiotic relationship between the home and its inhabitants, in which the character of the poor would evolve as their homes were improved. Evoking the truism that 'cleanliness is next to Godliness', her sanitary discourse traces a direct line between the spotless home and the unblemished character of its inhabitants. Recalling the tenets of domestic ideology, Hill gave women the authority to enter the homes of the poor as district visitors and rent collectors, and the homes of the poor thus became public property in the interest of the welfare of the nation. Women's philanthropic activities, and especially those which involved entering and to a certain extent controlling the homes of the poor have been interpreted as a form of wielding power.⁶³ Elliott has pointed out that women's philanthropic work was as much about broadening their power in the public sphere as it was a quest to rescue the working-classes from abject poverty and moral degradation.⁶⁴

A legacy for Hill's ideas can be found in the aesthetic movement of the 1890s, in which not only cleanliness, but the idea of 'truth' in interior decoration, became a major factor in character development. Douglas Mao's study of the Aesthetic movements discourse about childhood, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic*

⁶⁰ Livesey, 2004, p. 47.

⁶¹ George K. Behlmer, *Friends of the Family: The English Home and Its Guardians, 1850-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 2.

⁶² Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (New York: State Charities Aid Association, 1875), pp. 47-48.

⁶³ Elliott, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Elliott, p. 11.

Environment, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960, shows how the movement sought to instil an appreciation of beauty and truth in children as part of ‘the growing human organism’s molding by surroundings and circumstances’.⁶⁵ Taking the link between character and aesthetic surroundings to a comic extreme, Oscar Wilde suggested in his lectures on ‘The Decorative Arts’ given in 1882, that ugly wall-paper could ‘lead a boy brought up under its influence to a life of crime’.⁶⁶

In the context of late nineteenth-century housing reform movements based on the individual supervision of middle-class women landlords, dolls’ house narratives offer some interesting comparisons. The dolls’ house, with its open side by which the user manipulates the contents, must have been a dream for the social reformer as it offers the possibility of surveying all the rooms in one building simultaneously. As Armstrong has pointed out, the dolls’ house is a child-friendly version of Bentham’s Panopticon, and the dolls are the prisoners in need of surveillance and correction.⁶⁷ *Two Doll’s Houses* and *Racketty-Packetty House* locate the social reformer and the surveillance of the homes of the poor that such reformers undertook as adult expressions of the child’s doll-play.

Sutton-Ramspeck argues that there was a ‘conflict between Aetheticism and sanitary science’ which ‘encouraged greater appreciation of women’s responsibilities for home design’.⁶⁸ Women’s interest in domestic matters, cleaning, decorating, and sanitising, both their homes and the homes of the poor, Sutton-Ramspeck suggests, was part of both a literal and figurative call to, as New Woman novelist Sarah Grand put it, ‘set the human household in order’.⁶⁹

Let there be light. We suffer in the first shock of it. We shriek in horror at what we discover when it is turned on that which was hidden away in dark corners; but the first principle of good housekeeping is to have no

⁶⁵ Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environment, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1900* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 1.

⁶⁶ Mao, p. 1

⁶⁷ Armstrong, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Sutton-Ramspeck, p. 106.

⁶⁹ Sutton-Ramspeck, p. 175.

dark corners, and as we recover ourselves we go to work with a will to sweep them out.⁷⁰

Koven has written at length upon middle-class women's attitudes to dirt, describing how the middle-class women who went to live in the slums sometimes found the dirt and filth they encountered an insurmountable barrier to 'sisterhood'.⁷¹ Middle-class women, Koven suggests, were both attracted to and repelled by the dirt in the slums, and the dirtiness of its inhabitants: 'elite women saw themselves as altruistic social housekeepers who devoted themselves to bringing order and cleanliness to the lives of their poor sisters' (p. 191). The irony, as Koven has pointed out, was that middle-class women's homes were often clean only because they employed working-class women to do their cleaning.

Children's fiction becomes a vehicle through which the authors can criticise the tenets of social reform without in any way implicating themselves. In other words, *Two Dolls' Houses* and *Racketty-Packetty House* allowed Mitchell and Burnett to question the idea that a clean environment precipitated good character, without suggesting that the middle-class establishments abandon their hygienic standards. When Mitchell and Burnett both invite their readers to view women's philanthropic activities as a form grown-up adult doll-play, it is not clear as to whether a girl's love for her doll prefigures her adult altruism or if her adult altruism is merely an extended version of childhood doll-play. The boundaries between the woman and the child become blurred in a manner that infantilises women's interest in slum-dwellings, and which mocks the conflation of cleanliness, morality, and economic prosperity that was central to district visiting schemes and gradual sanitary reform. These two novels metaphorically turn social mothers into little girls playing with dolls' houses.

The title of Mitchell's story for girls, *Two Dolls' Houses* evokes Benjamin Disraeli's division of England into 'Two nations', one rich and one poor. In *Sybil or Two Nations* (1845), Disraeli described

⁷⁰ Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review*, 158 (1894), 270-276 (p. 276), also quoted in Sutton-Ramspeck, p. 194.

⁷¹ See Koven, 2004, pp.191-92.

Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.⁷²

Two Dolls' Houses suggests that the 'gulf' between the rich and the poor is still 'impassable' despite the enormous effort undertaken in the late nineteenth century to bring the two nations together.⁷³ Mitchell builds her narrative around a little girl's relationship to two dolls' houses, one is constructed to represent a West End house, and the other an East End house (yet both of the houses are constructed in this middle-class girl's bedroom). A young girl, Daisy, and her adult male cousin, Mr. Clieve, together embark upon a scheme to renovate Daisy's shambolic dolls' house and morally transform the disreputable dolls to create a respectable middle-class dolls' household. Renovating the house allows Mr. Clieve to teach Daisy about the relationship between beauty, external order, and ideal character. As a contrast to this, Mr. Clieve suggests that they create a slum dolls' house: '[w]e'll have a West End dolls'-house. We will have a Slum dolls'-house as well' (p. 110), and it is at this point that the narrative takes a strange turn. While the disordered house and questionable morals of the middle-class doll family are easily remodelled to fit the middle-class ideal under the guiding hand of Mr. Clieve, he refuses to allow any improvements for the slum family that he creates for Daisy. Aimed as much at the mothers who might read such books aloud to their children as at the children themselves, *Two Dolls' Houses* is a sharp satire on the social reform movements aimed at improving the urban poor in the late nineteenth century, and is also a shrewd commentary on the division of gender that governed such movements.

Instead of having a virtuous adult presence, Daisy's instructor is her cousin Mr. Clieve, an idle gentleman painter. When Mr. Clieve is sent to cheer Daisy up as she recovers from influenza while her father is away on business, he turns Daisy's attention to her dolls' house. He listens with interest as Daisy shows him around the dolls' house and recounts the story of the inhabitants.

⁷² Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil or the Two Nations* (Penguin: Middlesex, 1980), p. 96.

⁷³ Disraeli, p. 299.

They are a rather disreputable and shambolic middle-class family, which consists of Mr. and Mrs. Boltupright and their six children. Mr. Boltupright spends his evenings drinking at his club rather than keeping Mrs. Boltupright company; Mrs. Boltupright has lost all interest in her appearance and has also lost control over the family servants.

Papa said that sort of man preferred his own company to his wife's when he couldn't get any other, and she was better off without him if she only knew it. Papa arranged this room. It is a smoking dining-room. These little bits of wood are pipes, that is a whisky bottle, and those things on the sideboard are li—liqueurs. (p. 55)

What becomes clear is that the dolls' house as it is currently arranged is more a product of her father's imagination than hers. Rather than attempting to replicate the middle-class domestic ideal, Daisy's father has chosen to model the dolls' house on exactly the opposite. Perhaps he does this because he is aware of how far his own single-parent household falls from the ideal.

The manner in which Mitchell portrays Mr. Clieve suggests that we should view him as belonging to the late nineteenth-century aesthetic movement that hoped to transform the people through aesthetic interior decoration. Mitchell shows that to men such as Mr. Clieve, a gentleman artist, there is a clear connection between the dilapidated condition of the house and the disorganised household. While Daisy provides a rich commentary upon the lives of the doll inhabitants as she guides Mr. Clieve through the various rooms of the dolls' house, Mr. Clieve only comments on the external appearance of the inhabitants and the dolls' house rooms. He does not express any concerns, or any moral approbation, about Mr. Boltupright's drinking, his ill-treatment of his wife, and the manner in which the servants take advantage of the household, it is instead the lack of tidiness, and the odd colours with which the dolls' house has been decorated that strike him as being most alarming.

The solution that Mr. Clieve presents to the disorder is a renovation and redecoration of the dolls' house: 'it strikes me that Mr. and Mrs. B.'s house and household want remodelling [...] Altering, white-washing, painting, and papering' (p. 64). Daisy and Mr. Clieve start redecorating the house, introducing

light colours instead of the bright and brash colour scheme chosen by Daisy's nurse. Mr. Clieve's dislike of the clashing colours that Daisy's nurse favours, is a clear commentary on the perceived differences in taste between the social classes. We can tell from Nurse's thick accent that she is a cockney, as she explains that she drew the brightly coloured 'howl' (p. 27) that hangs on the wall in Daisy's bedroom. To Mr. Clieve, Nurse's preference for bright colours is a sign of her lack of refinement as a lower-class woman. Instead, Mr. Clieve decorates the dolls' house bedroom in the green and yellow tones which became synonymous with the aesthetic movement after the Gilbert and Sullivan opera *Patience*.⁷⁴ As Anne Henderson has pointed out, 'colour became deeply inflected with the class rhetoric of aestheticism; "greenery-yallery" demanded natural dyes and subdued colours, unusual hues and subtle shades'.⁷⁵

Apart from decorating the interior of the dolls' house, other changes include improvement to the inhabitants clothing, reduction of children and a new head for Mr. Boltupright. Mrs. Boltupright is given a new pretty gown to rectify her slatternly appearance, and the number of children the Boltuprights have is magically reduced from a troublesome seven to a manageable three—the reason for this being, as Mr. Clieve explains, that they do not have enough rooms for all their children: '[y]ou see, there are so few rooms. It really can't be good for all these children to sleep in one' (p. 96)—and they are given new servants who do not take advantage and allow their friends and family to take their meals at the house.

Along with the material renovations made to the dolls' house comes an inevitable moral improvement of its inhabitants. When Mr Boltupright is given a new head, he is reformed from being a 'selfish brute' and he acquires a preference for coffee over whisky: 'Mr. And Mrs. Boltupright were as happy as they could be, and everything was comfortable and straight' (p. 101). The middle-class home of the Boltuprights initially contains all the attributes commonly ascribed to slum-dwelling working class families which were certainly considered a sign of bad character, such as intemperance, slovenliness,

⁷⁴ Mao, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Anne Henderson, 'Spindly Furniture and Frail Women: Furniture, Fabric and the Feminine Body Shape in the *House Beautiful*, 1850-1890', in *Networks of Design: Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International Conference of the Design History Society* ed. by Fiona Hackney (Boca Raton: Universal Publishers, 2009), 135-139 (p. 137).

indifference concerning the running of the household, and too many children. These flaws are quickly corrected by Mr. Clieve and the Boltupright's home is transformed from an overpopulated, badly decorated, and unaffectionate middle-class home into a home that easily lives up to the Victorian domestic ideal.

Once they have finished renovating the dolls' house, Mr. Clieve thinks of something else that will keep Daisy amused, and tells her that they will make another dolls' house:

We will have some dolls that have nothing [...] quite a different class of dolls. Poor dolls. Dolls living in cellars and attics. Deserving dolls and bad dolls. Dolls that would work if they could, and dolls that won't. We will see what we can do for them, and what we had better do for them. (p. 110)

The slum house is created for the amusement of Daisy, who has nothing better to do while her father is away. Yet when Mr. Clieve creates the poor dolls, he is perpetuating the idea that there was such a thing as 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, yet while he is happy to use the word 'deserving', he substitutes 'undeserving' for 'bad' which reflects the idea that some poor were morally worthy, 'good', and deserving of help, others were 'bad' and not deserving of help. By the late nineteenth century the term 'deserving poor' was falling out of favour with social reformers who refuted the idea that the poor could either be 'deserving' or 'undeserving'. One writer expressed his distaste for the term in the *Saturday Review* because of its 'vicious meaning', and noted that use of the phrase 'deserving poor' signified a 'priggish and erroneous estimate of the lower orders', 'narrow prejudice'.⁷⁶ This seems a rather accurate description of Mr. Clieve who perpetuates the idea that many who were poor were poor because they had chosen to be so by refusing any kind of work, and living hand-to-mouth upon alms. When Mr. Clieve begins to construct a narrative around the slum-dwellers, it becomes apparent that his ideas about the poor appear to be constructed from outmoded myths about the idleness, drunkenness and excessive breeding of the urban poor. He also clearly shows his contempt for the slum-

⁷⁶ 'The Deserving Poor', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, 44 (1877), p. 330.

dwellers by giving them the name of Slum Grub, revealing that he thinks of the poorest poor as nothing but vermin: ‘this is Mr. Slum Grub. He is very idle, very dirty, very tipsy—generally’ (p. 130). Mr Clieve evidently believes that the poverty of slum-dwellers is due to their own character flaws.

Mr. Clieve constructs a poor family in the cellar out of the babies that they took from Mrs. B. Taking one of the dolls that previously belonged to the Boltuprights household, “she will have to be dressed rather worse than this”, he said; “we shall want your scissors” (p. 129).

When he married he had work and was doing very well. Then he took to drinking, and the more he drank the thirstier he grew; then some odd people that he met told him that it was a shame that he should have to work at all, when other people had money and some of them no work to do. The more he listened the more discontented he grew and the less work he did. What little he did was done so badly that one day he was turned away. Then poor Mrs. Slum Grub had to take to working. She had enough to do at home, for there were four children then. Now there are more’. (p. 130)

Mr. Clieve attributes to Mr. Slum Grub all the common platitudes about slum-dwelling families: drinking, laziness, and wife-beating. When Daisy enthusiastically exclaims, “Let’s change him”, Mr Clieve reigns in her enthusiasm by telling her ‘we will do what we can to help him help himself’ (p. 131). As such, Mr. Clieve takes on the role of educating Daisy in the tenets of philanthropy for the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor in a manner that echoes the authoritative discourses that chastised and infantilised women in paternal tones for their ‘indiscriminate charity’.⁷⁷ The message of such texts was that women’s sympathetic interest in the poor was commendable, but the ways in which they practiced their well-meaning towards the poor were a sign of inferior minds. Mitchell’s text, however, invites the reader to question upon which authority Mr. Clieve—an idle gentleman painter—is permitted to speak about the

⁷⁷ As Susan Kahn has shown, this discourse extends as far back as the sixteenth century: see *Industry of Devotion: The Transformation of Women’s Work in England, 1500-1660* (Guildford: Colombia University Press, 1987), p. 160.

poor. All Daisy's altruistic instincts are curbed by Mr. Clieve who is confident that he himself knows better how the Slum Grubs may or may not be helped.

By comparing Mr. Clieve's renovation of the middle-class home to his refusal to allow any improvements to the situation of the slum family, Mitchell exposes the hypocrisy inherent in the discourses of philanthropy and moral worthiness in the late nineteenth century. To Daisy, helping the Slum Grubs initially seems as easy as helping the Boltuprights, but Mr. Clieve has other plans for his constructed family, and Mitchell suggests that while middle-class families are easily helped by the likes of Mr. Clieve, different rules apply to those who live in the slums. While the Boltuprights were given everything to help them to a better life, the Slum Grubs are only helped in so far as they can help themselves. Mitchell depicts Daisy as being very fond of Mr. Clieve, she categorises Mr. Clieve as being 'a nice sort of man' (p. 25), and she unquestioningly accepts Mr. Clieve's guidance regarding the two dolls' houses, believing him to be very knowledgeable about the subject. To a contemporary reader thoroughly invested in breaking down the distinctions between the classes, however, Mr. Clieve would most likely be an example of the worst kind of social reformer; he judges the needs of the poor to never need what they never had, and believes in keeping them at a certain level of poverty: '[t]hey don't need as many things as the Boltuprights, for they never had them, and would only waste them if they did have them' (p. 132).

The novel shows how the middle class constructed the working class. The poor are presented as dolls that the middle-classes can control, and their homes are invaded by the middle-classes who come to criticise the homes that they have helped to construct. Mr. Clieve establishes the behaviour of the family according to his own understanding of how poor people live, illustrating how far the homes and the behaviour of the poor are shaped and controlled by the leisurely middle classes:

[Daisy] watched in silence as Mr. Clieve spread the floor with dust, and strewed the cabbage leaves about, and dropped a little soot into the fire-place. Then he placed a rickety little table in the middle of the room, and put a broken chair or two near it. (p. 134)

As Mr. Clieve sets out to show Daisy what the homes of the poor look like, the construction of a slum-dwelling family home appears like an act of malicious vandalism. He even makes Daisy complicit in the act of soiling the Slum Grub's flat as he has asked her to collect rubbish and cabbage leaves before she knows what they are intended for.

Mr. Clieve asks Daisy whom they should help first. Daisy maintains that the Slum Grubs are in more urgent need of help than Miss Wren; Daisy and Mr. Clieve play out a scenario in which Daisy is Mrs B, and Clieve is Mr. and Mrs. S, and Mr. S takes all the food that have they been given for himself. Mr. Clieve's solution to the problem is simplistic and unrealistic as the refined Miss Wren is offered a position as a Lady's companion. Daisy never questions Mr. Clieve or asks him how he knows these things about the poor, she simply accepts what he says as the truth. The novel ends abruptly when Daisy's Papa comes back.

The novels discussed in this chapter have different layers of meaning that might not be revealed to younger readers. To a child reader, Mr. Clieve might appear to be helpful and knowledgeable about the problem of poverty. To an adult contemporary who was well versed in the social questions of the day, Mr. Clieve's opinions about the poor and the remedies that he proposes would seem at best old-fashioned, and at worst ignorant and priggish. Everything that Mr. Clieve does, from controlling the poor dolls and refusing to let Mr. Slum Grub keep any employment that he obtains, to spreading cabbage leaves and dirt over the Slum Grub's flat, merely reinforces that idea that the middle-classes have created the poverty of the working classes and are responsible for the squalor of the urban poor.

The connection between a tidy house and good character that social reformers believed would prove the salvation of the poor is completely dismantled in Burnett's *Racketty-Packetty House*. Racketty-Packetty house is the Victorian dolls' house that Cynthia, a little girl, inherited from her grandmother. Unlike her grandmother, who took pride in her beautiful dolls' house, Cynthia has let the house and the dolls in it fall into neglect: 'Cynthia was not a good housekeeper and she did not re-cover the furniture when it got dingy, or re-paper the walls, or mend the carpets and bedclothes' (p. 117). Burnett thus situates her story in the context of the late Victorian drive for housekeeping, but she uses the dolls' house to suggest that housekeeping is little more than housekeeping and

that it has no greater significance beyond appearance. She dismantles the idea that a tidy house is a sign of well-formed character, and dismisses the notion that being good necessarily means being clean. By showing that the 'shabby' and the 'disrespectable' can happily coincide with ethically desirable qualities, such as thrift, inventiveness, co-operation, and kindness, Burnett overturns the idea of 'respectability'.

When Cynthia is given a new dolls' house, Tidy Castle, Racketty-Packetty house is pushed 'into the unfashionable neighbourhood behind the door' (p. 116). During the reign of Cynthia's grandmother, the dolls had enjoyed all sorts of luxuries: 'they had parties and balls and were presented at Court', but when they fell into Cynthia's hands, '[t]heir house had grown shabbier and shabbier, and their clothes had grown simply awful' (p. 117). The dolls do not mind their fall from grace, in fact, they have more fun now that they enjoy the freedom it brings: '[w]hen Peter Piper lost almost the whole leg of his trousers he just laughed and said it made it easier for him to kick about and turn somersaults and he wished the other leg would tear off too' (p. 119).

The dolls live a joyful life together, but their happiness is threatened by the arrival of Tidy Castle. Here, instead of the peace and quiet of the upper classes being destroyed by the poor, the dolls' way of life, with its shabbiness, is under threat. Cynthia, of course unaware of the dolls' sentient existence, threatens to burn the house as it is 'too disgraceful to be kept in any decent nursery' (p. 121). The dolls are understandably upset as they like their house the way it is: "'I don't care how shabby it is," he said. "It's a jolly nice old place and it's the only house we've ever had"' (p. 121). Yet when Tidy Castle arrives, the dolls amuse themselves by watching the castle, 'instead of being jealous of their grand neighbours, the Racketty-Packetty House People began to get all sorts of fun watching them from their windows' (p. 122). They mimic the dolls in the Tidy Castle for fun and decide to have a ten-course dinner of turnips and to give themselves titles: Peter Piper becomes a duke.

Burnett has named the dolls of Tidy Castle, 'Lady Gwendolen Vere de Vere' and 'Lady Muriel Vere de Vere', after the cruel and proud aristocratic lady of Tennyson's poem, 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere', which indicates that she shares the sentiment of the speaker in Tennyson's poem who declares: 'Tis only noble to

be good'.⁷⁸ Like the Lady Clara, Lady Gwendolen is 'haughty' (p. 122), and Lady Muriel is 'cold and lovely and indifferent' (p. 123). One day, Lady Patsy, one of the Tidy House dolls, returns from hospital after suffering a broken leg. Lady Patsy is different from the other dolls: she 'neither turned her nose up, nor looked down the bridge of it, nor laughed mockingly' (p. 128). Burnett transforms the premises of Tennyson's poem—the proud aristocratic lady preying on the hearts of low-born men—when she allows Lady Patsy of Tidy Castle to fall in love with Peter Piper of Racketty-Packetty House. Like the Lady Clara of Tennyson's poem who is 'wearied of the rolling hours', Lady Patsy is bored by her staid existence in Tidy Castle, but unlike Lady Clara, she amuses herself by watching the Racketty-Packetty House dolls from her window and falls in love.

Burnett presents the shabbiness of Racketty-Packetty House as a source of immense attraction to Lady Patsy, who wants to escape from her weary existence in Tidy Castle. In his analysis of middle-class women's attraction to the slums, Koven has suggested that '[d]irt was not only a visible sign of poverty but a marker of a sexualized "primitive" to which highly cultured single women were drawn'.⁷⁹ Burnett, and more importantly, her character Peter Piper, seems to be aware of the erotic pull that women experienced towards dirt: Peter Piper's courting activities include showing Lady Patsy the parts of Racketty-Packetty House that are particularly run down: 'Peter Piper showed her the holes in the carpet and the stuffing coming out of the sofas, and the feathers coming out of the beds, and the legs tumbling off the chairs. She had never seen anything like it before' (p. 133). Unlike the real life-reformers that Koven described, Lady Patsy wishes to immerse herself fully in the squalid life of the Racketty-Packetty House dolls without experiencing the desire to clean them or to tidy up. In order to truly transgress the social boundaries, Burnett suggests, middle-class women must give up their obsession with tidiness and cleanliness.

Things change between the two classes of dolls when Cynthia plays that the castle dolls have scarlet fever and then forgets about them. The prospect of contagion in the city slums is reversed, and it is instead the Tidy Castle that becomes a source of disease. The Racketty-Packetty dolls hear the groans of the castle dolls in the night and rush to Tidy Castle to help, and as they nurse the

⁷⁸ Tennyson, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁹ Koven, 2004, p. 188.

dolls back to health, the Tidy Castle dolls learn the true value of their poor and untidy neighbours: ““Oh you shabby disresponsible darlings!” she said. “Never, never, will I scorn you again. Never, never!”” (p. 135). While the two classes of dolls have now made friends with each other, a new threat presents itself to the dolls. The princess, grand-daughter of Queen Victoria, is coming to visit, and nurse and Cynthia want to burn the dolls’ house before she arrives. But when the princess arrives, she is utterly charmed by the old dolls’ house—‘How funny and dear!’—she is given the dollhouse and, in a toy version of the rags to riches tale, restores the house and the dolls to their former glory: ‘you shall all be dressed beautifully again and your house shall be mended and papered and painted and made as lovely as it ever was’ (p. 140). Thus Burnett herself cannot resist the idea of tidying up the dilapidated home of the poor dolls, which suggests how deeply ingrained the idea of cleanliness was, but her Racketty-Packetty House dolls retain a sense of the absurdity in such ideas.

The dolls in the other dolls’ houses used to make deep curtsies when a Racketty-Packetty House doll passed them, Peter Piper could scarcely stand it because it always made him want to stand on his head and laugh. (p. 141)

Racketty-Packetty House breaks down the idea of tidy respectability as a sign of moral character, and instead presents tidiness as a quality of people who are unable to have fun. What makes the story less radical is of course the fact that the Racketty-Packetty House dolls are aristocrats who have fallen hard times, rather than being truly low-born, nevertheless, it attempts to dismantle the connection between cleanliness and good character.

While the renovation of the dolls’ house in *Two Dolls’ Houses* results in the moral improvement of the inhabitants, by the time *Racketty-Packetty House* was published in 1907, the chain of cause and effect which was presumed to exist between outward cleanliness, moral character, and material wealth is broken as the Racketty-Packetty house dolls are shown to be of a higher moral calibre than their neighbours, even though they have a dirty, shabby house, and have only turnips to eat. Both novels do contain similarities pertaining to their social mobility plots. In the later novel, the restoration of the dolls to their former glory

is possible through the adoption of the princess, and depends on the royal lineage of the dolls. In *Two Dolls' Houses*, the restoration of the middle-class household is dependant upon their inherent middle-class right to respectability, whereas the Slum Grubs are fixed in their poverty and are destined to spiral downwards.

In this chapter I have suggested the ways in which doll-fiction mirrored the premises of the adult philanthropic novel: courtship, homosocial, and motherly love are all featured in the doll-narratives of the late nineteenth century. Doll-love, if it is the 'right' form of love, is connected to wider altruistic urges. Furthermore, the doll-narrative, in the form of dolls' house fiction becomes a vehicle by which female writers can examine the assumptions that underpinned the idea of social motherhood. In this sense, rather than being simply providing the vehicle for childhood indoctrination of accepted social views, as John Stephens has maintained, children's fiction can instead examine the workings of commonly accepted ideological positions.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ 'Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed are shared by author and audience', John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), p. 3, Thiel, p. 11.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with the idea that the philanthropic romance of the late 1880s and the 1890s was fuelled by the notion that the sexual instinct and the altruistic urge to help those in need were closely linked. Drawing upon Allen's idea of the romance novelist as 'the best friend of human improvement', I expanded this idea to suggest that the romance plot is itself partaking in the culture of altruism of the late nineteenth century. As such, the romance elements of the novels discussed in my thesis are not, as twentieth-century critics such as Armstrong, Bodenheimer, and Yeazell have argued, a diversionary tactic through which novelists could articulate public conflicts under the guise of exploring private relationships. Instead, late nineteenth-century female novelists viewed matters of sexuality, in which I have included courtship, romance, sexual desire, marriage, the rejection of heterosexual coupling, and doll-love, as not only having a wider political significance, but being in themselves intrinsically political. These plots, I have suggested, were responses to the idea that philanthropic women were making up for a sexual deficiency in their own lives, as well as hoping to educate their readers through the workings of sympathy. The novel, I pointed out in the introduction, became an important tool in constructing the altruistic self, for readers were expected to transfer their sympathies for fictional characters and situations onto the outside world.

In *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922*, Ann Ardis has suggested that the novel itself was gendered as it was considered to be a feminine form.¹ In an astute analysis of Beatrice Webb's attempt to construct for herself a more masculine and objective model of social reform, Ardis demonstrates how Webb flirted with the idea of becoming a novelist, but ultimately rejected this idea and instead adopted a more masculine form of documentary narrative when writing about the working classes. Novels, Ardis shows, were linked in Webb's imagination to erotic fantasies—'building castles in the air' and 'making up love scenes'—which seemed to hinder serious thinking and to 'waste' her faculties.² The novel, Ardis suggests, was conceived in Webb's mind as a feminine and

¹ Ann L. Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

² Ardis, 2002, pp. 16-23, p. 19

amateurish form achieved ‘without the drudgery of mastering a difficult and tedious groundwork’—the direct opposite of the ‘[o]bjectivity, systematic analysis, professionalism’ that Webb strove towards in her own investigations.³ Webb formed part of a growing body of women who rejected the feminine idea of sympathy and feeling in their dealings with the poor and who sought instead to assert professional authority through the scientific and systematic analysis of poverty. What the novelists discussed in this thesis are doing is the exact opposite of Webb’s own enterprise—her own struggle to shake off the taint of unprofessionalism associated with female philanthropy—instead, these novelists assert, through the novel, the value of a feminine ethic and the idea of discovering ‘a moral universe [...] inscribed on the heart’.⁴ By merging politics with romance, the authors discussed in this thesis were defending what they saw as a feminine form of expression, influence, and ethics. To use the novel as an instrument of social reform, as these novelists did, is to reaffirm the importance of the sympathetic imagination.

Where Webb saw the erotic imagination as obstacle that needed to be overcome in order for her to become a competent social reformer, the novelists I discuss in this thesis incorporated the erotic imagination into their heroines’ social enterprise. Returning then, to Elliott’s idea of women’s philanthropic activities as evidence of women’s ‘ambitious’ desires as opposed to Freudian conceptions of women harbouring only ‘erotic’ desires, I suggest that the novels discussed created a space in which the ‘erotic’ and ‘ambitious’ desires were allowed to co-exist.

My last chapter ended with Burnett’s *Racketty-Packetty House*, published three years before 1910, the year that Virginia Woolf credited as the turning point in human nature and the birth of the modernist self. When it comes to the position of women, however, the change took place far earlier and it was ushered in by the philanthropic woman, as Woolf herself seems to have recognised. When Woolf published her late Victorian and early Edwardian family saga *The Years* in 1937, the late Victorian philanthropic woman appears in the shape of Eleanor Pargiter. When she steps onto an omnibus in 1888, she seems to a male observer ‘a well-known type; with a bag; philanthropic; well nourished; a spinster; a virgin; like all

³ Ardis, 2002, pp. 19-21.

⁴ Yeo, 1992, p. 68

the women of her class, cold; her passions had never been touched, yet not unattractive'.⁵ The string of assumptions that this male observer makes about Eleanor based upon a momentary encounter in an omnibus—she steps on his toe—reveals much about the manner in which Woolf suggested that men viewed the new type of woman who was more interested in helping the poor than getting married. To the male observer, philanthropic activity is not only the mark of the passionless middle-class woman—a substitute for sex—it is also the means by which women assert themselves in the public sphere. The philanthropic woman, constructed in Woolf's imagination as Eleanor Pargiter, is a transitional figure, one that appears simultaneously as a passionless Victorian spinster, and a fearless woman in the public sphere who is oblivious to the men whose toes she steps on as she progresses.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 87.

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