

The Shift in the Social and Moral Ideology of Gender Relations between the Early Victorians and the Late Victorians

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to unfold the shift in the moral and social ideology of gender relations between the early Victorians and the late Victorians as reflected in the works of distinguished authors of the two periods. It reflects the views of righteous early Victorians of women as angels, devoid of sexual feeling or passion, and the wage of slipping from the path of chastity is always death. Despite the efforts of reformers and major writers of the period like Dickens, Gaskell, and Kingsley to help present women, who are victims of pressing harsh social conditions, Esther Barton, Nancy, Mary Barton and their likes have had no other chance but to die. By 1887, the high noon of Victorianism had passed. Women with a new spirit refused to conform to the angelic role of wife and mother. Herminia Barton, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Esther Waters represent an upside-down situation. The angel is out of the house, and the door is left open for them to turn over a new life. They pave the way, not only for the emergence of the new woman, but also the rise of a liberated feminism of the new century. The comparison between the two periods shows the transition from Victorianism and Modernism, in terms of literary style, social thoughts, and jargon used. Moreover, by forming connections between authors and time periods, one better understands the cultural progress, and gets an insight into the big picture of change in the Victorian literature and society as a whole.

Keywords: Victorian, woman, angel, moral, new.

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era was an exciting period in which many literary, social, political, and religious movements flourished. It was called the second English Renaissance. Despite all the positive achievements, the era witnessed some disturbance, strikes, industrial actions and violent clashes which shocked the stability of the British society. It was against this background that philosophers, thinkers, social reformers and writers protested. They raised their voices against the rigid attitudes and stiff moral and social norms, and called for love, understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness among members of society.

As literature is the mirror of society, many writers of distinction and quality, bearing in mind the idea that they must engage in the problems and the social ills of their time, took upon their shoulders the burden of influencing, reforming and instructing their reader, and bringing about a change in the social and moral norms of society. They tried to examine the public official attitudes connected with women, and the prevalent notions of piety, domesticity,

purity, and obedience which framed womanhood. To most Victorians, piety meant an utter devotion and reverence to parents and family. Domesticity was the quality of home life; what a woman should do and should not. Her job was to keep her house cheerful, maintain religion, and act as the family's nurse and cook. A woman should remain pure and certain improper books must be avoided. They were, socially and morally, regarded as frail vessels that must be taken care of, and were viewed as mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters who must be looked after. They are expected to accept and obey what men say and do, and their duty was to look after the home. The husband was the protector of woman's virtues. He had the ultimate power to establish the rules of the home; he "Knows Best"; and his authority and commands were generally unquestioned.

The moral standard was unfair and treated women, morally, as inferior to men and "more culpable when they fell" (Cockshut 1977, 16). In this respect, illegitimate relationships with men outside the wedlock were prohibited and seen as unpardonable crimes, and women who had unlawful liaisons were not welcomed in

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respectable gatherings and the wage of such a sin was quite often death. They were not allowed to associate with their fellow sisters for fear of contamination and infection, and only death could erase their failings and flaws.

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

Conventional Victorian understanding, which was based on Biblical examples, regraded woman as “an angel” who must care for her family and sacrifice herself, her wants and needs for others. Even the symbolic concept of true womanhood, as envisaged by early Victorian writers, could not completely erase what was visible as evidence of women’s subordinate status; she could not vote, could not own property, and even when it came to employment; her wages were lower than what a man earned in the same job. Women were excluded from the professions of law and medicine, from colleges, and from church. So, they were told to be passive in a totally male-dominated world.

This study attempts to show the shift in the moral and social values between the early Victorians and the late Victorians as reflected in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837), Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Charles Kingsley's *Yeast* (1850), Thomas Hardy's *of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894), and Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895). These novels have been chosen to reflect "the shifts and changes in attitude towards women" at that time (Buckley 1981, 6). In their handling of the concept of womanhood, the novelists revealed the harsh social conditions, poverty, and the stark economic needs of poor women; and how they were unable to break the double-standard code of morality which rendered them prisoners of the house and private life.

Dickens, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley, Allen, Hardy, and Moore could be called iconoclastic and unique in certain key respects. Each found him/herself running against the trend, just like their protagonists, and at the same time, trapped by the laws of their time which were harsh and often unjust. Hence, they considered themselves as the cultural leaders who must grasp the problem of the time like wakeful minds, and be prepared to assail prevalent stupidity and vicious traditions. In this respect, this paper concentrates on selected early and late Victorian novels that mirror the attitudes and treatment of women who broke or violated the predominant

norms of the feminine behaviour, and the way society reacted to them.

Most Victorian novelists, if not all, attempted to employ their works as instruments for effecting social reform. In this regard, the Victorian novel was the form of art that could reflect the significant elements of life ... and it was the genre addressed most amply to our daily experience ... speaking 'a universal language because it rest[ed] on a basis of experience which is in some degree common to all'. (O'Gorman 2002, 18-19)

The first three works *Oliver Twist*, *Mary Barton*, and *Yeast* depict the way of life and the established social and moral values of the early Victorians which tried to open people's eyes to the specific social and economic conditions of the time and the acute conditions of poor girls, and the selfish exploitation to which women were generally subjected by their masters and landlords.

The focus of *Oliver Twist* on Nancy, who is depicted innately as mild with a heart of gold, but the social values and the moral concepts branded her as depraved and morally stained. Despite the fact that her "life has been squandered in the streets, and among the most notorious dens of London, there was "something of the woman's original nature left in her still" (307). In this respect, she has no other option but to die. She cannot enter the respectable world, nor is she allowed to join her fellow sisters because she is morally blemished. Many Victorian readers have sympathized with her or felt sorry for, yet no one was ready to let her live happily and spend the rest of her life in the felicity that her fellow sisters enjoy in the family circle. Though she considers herself lost "almost beyond redemption" (312), she ends up making the ultimate sacrifice for a child she hardly knows.

Dickens was anxious to expose the truth about such a woman as Nancy. He told Forster "I hope to do great things with Nancy, (Collins 1962, 96) but, as he confessed in the third preface to the novel in 1850, the literary fashion and the moral conventions of the 1840s made him try to "banish from the lips of the lowest characters" introduced "any expression that could by possibility offend." (vi) The characterization both revealed and concealed the subject. In a work of fiction meant for general reading and entertainment, Dickens clearly felt that there was a limit to the degree to which he could be

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outspoken. Even the bluntly identifying phrase, (the girl is a prostitute), was cut from later editions of the preface.

Nancy is not presented to the reader as a woman who basely sells herself for personal gain. She is presented as a victim, a youthful sacrifice to Fagin's greed. She had stolen for him when "a child not half as old as" Oliver and had been "in the same trade" of prostitution for "twelve years since" (104). Such fall, as there is, has been from a state of which she could never have been aware. She is the only member of Fagin's gang who is able to show sincere human feelings and selfless love. She feels a human sympathy for the prisoners when she passes a prison, and tells Sikes that if he were among them, "I'd walk round and round the place till I dropped, if the snow was on the ground, and I hadn't a shawl to cover me" (99). Through her, Dickens "emphasizes the, fact that even the vilest environment cannot utterly obliterate or corrupt the principle of good in its victims" (Johnson 1952, 181) Though Nancy has fallen as low as a woman can fall, yet deep in her heart there is still something of the woman's original nature left which links her with humanity. She is touched by Rose Maylie's compassion and acts as Oliver's protector and Sikes's tender and devoted "wife", "I cannot leave him," she says of Sikes to Rose May lie, even "if I knew that I was to die by his hand at last"(273). Her redemption is shown in human terms.

Throughout the novel, Nancy is convinced that her own position is hopeless; she is portrayed as a good person in nature, but she has drifted so far from honest ways that no return is possible. Thus, she is looked at as immoral. Taking into account the date of publication of the novel, and the growing concern about social issues and the strict moral attitudes of conservative readers, Dickens could not take her back or let her live.

In *Mary Barton* (1848), Mrs Gaskell presents poor women striving to find a spot of light in society, and climb up the social ladder and occupy a place in their surroundings. Mrs Gaskell wrote many novels, but still, *Mary Barton* can give the readers the flavour of difference. Despite the fact that the title of the novel is *Mary Barton*, the story of Esther, who falls into the trap of seduction which finally drags her to death is effectively highlighted and given prominence. Gaskell's own interaction with the working-class inhabitants of Manchester motivated her to write this novel in

which she relies heavily on her first-hand experience in the city. She personally concerned herself with the issues of female employment, the education and rehabilitation of lost women and their plight. She was committed to using her works for the purposes of bringing to light those social issues which she knew to exist in the hope of improving public attitudes. In her "Preface" to the 1848 edition of the book she wrote, "I know nothing of Political Economy or the theories of the trade. I have tried to write truthfully". The "truth of *Mary Barton* is not political or economic, but the truth of the human heart". The novel is about industrial conditions and the disturbing predicament of the poor with hunger, disease, and death by starvation.

While Gaskell's novel attempts to gather sympathy for Esther, it also conveys a hidden message that meets, at one point or another, with the message of the other novels of this study, which is to expose the stern social and moral codes and move into a more lenient, loving, and sympathetic understanding. She uses her novel to focus on the dishonesty of the established moral and social values and beliefs of her age and to re-establish a new stage put forward to her readers. Therefore, Esther is portrayed as a victim of the prevailing economically unequal class, and morally irresponsible industrial relationships. The importance given to the woman's role as a wife and a mother made her the angel of the house. Middle class revulsion at unchaste women was in proportion to this strained adoration of female purity. Loss of chastity would render the girl "morally depraved" and socially unacceptable. No decent person would risk the slightest contact with her, and her "touch, even in the extremity of suffering", was shaken off "as if it were pollution and diseases" (Greg 1850, 450). The only way left open to her to sustain herself was to descend deeper into a world of misery and continuous suffering.

Esther is portrayed as an easy victim of deception, financial necessity, and desertion which leave her to face the alternative of prostitution or starvation. Her baby falls ill and though she writes to the father for help, she "never g[ets] an answer" (86). Under the pressure of poverty, starvation and dejection, and pushed by her love and wish to save her sick baby, she resorts to the street. She tells Jem: it was winter, cold, bleak winter; and my child was so ill, so ill, starving. And I could not bear

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to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together; —oh, her moans, her moans, which money could give the means of relieving! (186)

Her guilt is softened as much as possible, and she is shown as “forced to a life of suffering and misery, and “has to dull her senses” (Wright 1965, 69) with the constant stupefaction of drink to carry on. Mrs Gaskell makes of her, “a figure whom readers (or she herself) look at with sympathy instead of condemnation. Suffering and humiliation do not harden her heart.” (Badinjki 2018, 28) Like Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, Esther meekly “accepts society's view of herself as an outcast, she is filled with remorse and grief over her own sinful life, but makes no attempt to regain respectability” (Rubenius 1950, 177-8). She accepts her fate and refuses Jem's offer to help her come home; “I cannot. I could not lead a virtuous life if I would. I should only disgrace you ... you can do nothing for me. I am past hope” (188-9). There is “no reformation for her; she has to die” (Badinjki 2018, 31). She accepts the sanctuary Jem offers only at her dying hour and comes back as “a wounded deer” returning to its “lair... to die” (456). As Nancy dies, raising the white handkerchief as an emblem of repentance, Esther dies “with a soul reverting to innocence” (Wright 1965, 69). She held “the locket containing her child's hair still in her hand, and once or twice kissed it with a long soft kiss. She cried feebly and sadly as long as she had any strength to cry, and then she died” (456). She is buried in the same grave with John Barton, the murderer, under the inscription, “For He will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger forever” (38: 457), which, Patricia Beer writes, “carries the whole weight of Victorian sorrowful wrath”⁸³. Nevertheless, it is ultimately forgiving.

The last novel to look at in this group is *Yeats: A Problem* (1850) by Charles Kingsley. The most distinctive fact about this novel is Kingsley's treatment of the social and moral issues, which include the miserable condition of women at that time. To a great extent, *Yeats* can work as a fictional version of the reports of other social writers of the period about the harsh economic conditions, and the relentless social and moral values that pushed poor women to the street and to their inevitable dilemmas. In his attempt to draw people's attention to the social and economic evils, Kingsley used these tainted

figures. Mary, the working class handsome girl, is shown as victims of the prevailing social class division, and morally irresponsible relationships. He was aware of the inner moral reformation which England needed. His novel contains an obvious social and moral commentary, and, like *Oliver Twist* and *Mary Barton*, can be regarded as a novel of reform which would bring about social improvement. Like Carlyle, Kingsley “did not want to upset the social order of his time, but he called the socially privileged to solve the question of acute poverty, which he felt was at the heart of England's problems” (Diniejko 2010, Victorianweb). The novel criticizes the established social and moral norms, and Kingsley refers to the Victorian concept of “The Angel in the House”, whose delight was to be led. He mocks the stereotyped image of woman set forth by those conservatives and old-fashioned people, who do not believe in reform, and arrogantly stick to their limited and rigid values.

Kingsley's direct and over-explicit attack, according to Anold Kettle, gave the novel “its notoriety and led a number of the readers of *Fraser's Magazine* to threaten to withdraw their subscriptions” (Kettle 1982, 183-4). In his portrait of “The Village Revel”, and in his exposure of the evils, Kingsley wanted, as A. Pollard believes, to “shatter the notion that dirt and disease existed only in industrial towns, and that life in the country was healthy and idyllic” (Pollard 1970, 210). It is among the taunted and the degraded poor of the village that we see Mary, a “coarse, handsome” and “showily-dressed girl” (181), who keenly tries to discover the man who has ruined her?

Mary follows the conventional way to prostitution. She has been seduced and later deserted. It is through her that Kingsley shows the sexual exploitation to which such girls were subjected, and makes his attack on the hypocrisy and the moral dissolution of upper-class gentlemen:

Curse you gentlemen all! Cowards! You are all in a league against us poor girls! You can hunt alone when you betray us, and lie fast enough then? But when we come for justice, you all herd together like a flock of rooks; and turn so delicate and honourable all of a sudden—to each other.... tell him you saw me; tell him you saw Mary; tell him where and in what a pretty place, too, for maid, master, or man! (181)

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In his treatment of Mary's miserable case, "Kingsley's swerves from the established literary conventions of the period. He does not show her as responsible for her fall, nor does he let her alone bear its consequences. It is a common responsibility for both the seduced and the seducer" (Badinjki Agitation, 2). Mary does not accept her condition meekly and "pines away, as other Victorian characters in the literature of that decade would do under similar circumstances, for sin. Her letter to her seducer does not contain the traditional meek admission of sin and horror-stricken feelings of guilt, nor a sentimental yearning for repentance, but rather a spiteful language and an eloquent accusation of moral depravity and dishonesty" (Badinjki 2016, 2).

In order to raise the sympathy of his readers, Kingsley portrays Mary as an innocent lady whose only flaw is that she is poor. She acts like a purely economic victim who, just like Nancy and Esther, was driven out of the respectable world by want. She was demoralized by promises of love, marriage and becoming a lady. For her, "love [was] eternal. Death may part lovers, but not love" (118) while for the Victorian society the situation was much more complex since there were certain social and moral values that must be followed in order to gain social respect. Therefore; Kingsley, in comparison with Dickens and Mrs Gaskell, dealt with the issue of marriage and love on the basis of the prevailing social and moral convictions. The story closes with "no hint of a possible reconciliation or a return to respectable society" (Badinjki 2016, 3). It is not known what becomes of this lost soul, yet from Bracebridge's explicit admission that there is "no second chance for those who---", (Kingsley 1851, 231) we can guess at her future.

THE ANGEL OUT OF THE HOUSE

The later decades of the century witnessed new notions, new concepts, and new attitudes. By 1887 the high noon of Victorianism had passed, and although the Queen continued to be very much alive, the Victorian epoch was already petering out and the remaining years, rather than quietly winding up the century, seem to have marked the inauguration of the new one (Reckitt 1958, 269). Dickens died in 1870, Charles Kingsley in 1875, and George Eliot in 1880; Thackeray, Mrs Gaskell and the Brontes were already dead. A number of other famous writers died during this period: Bulwer Lytton

and J.S. Mill in 1873, Caroline Norton in 1878, and Disraeli in 1881. At the death of Thomas Carlyle in 1881, Gissing wondered "Does it not seem now as if all our really great men were leaving us, and, what is worse, without much prospect as yet of any to take their place. Where are the novelists to succeed Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot? What poets will follow upon Tennyson and Browning when they, as must shortly be the case, leave their places empty? Nay, what really great men of any kind can honestly be said to have given tokens of their coming?" (A. Gissing 1895, 92). In his article "When Did Victorianism End?", Maurice Reckitt tends to look at the last dozen years of the century as belonging to another epoch. They, he writes, "are not an epilogue to Victorianism but rather a prologue to Edwardianism" (Reckitt 1858, 269).

People were moving away from family prayers and churchgoing towards 'weekends out of town', the race-course and other pleasures (Trevelyan 1980, 581). Topics of conversation which were not considered "proper" for women became the subject of novels and plays, and were read and discussed by the young of both sexes. Serious attempts were also made to understand and interpret the nature and function of sexuality in the human personality, thus shifting sexuality from the area of moral discourse to that of the scientific (Stead 1885, 1-2). The new sentiments and tendencies of the period elicited a change in the manners and morals of many girls and young women: They were no longer brought up to consider their lives circumscribed by the home. In their varied search for emancipation, girls with a new spirit refused to conform to the traditional role of wife and mother. Novelty during this decade became an object to be sought for its own sake. For the young, any happening sufficiently new was good, and expressions such as "up to date" and "new" came to have special significance. In religion, social relations, politics and business, as R.C.K. Ensor writes, "men grown contemptuous of the old ideals were stridently asserting new ones" (1936, 304). G.M. Trevelyan writes: "In the nineties — the *fin de siècle*, as the time was called — a change in the direction of levity, if not of laxity, was observed" (Trevelyan 1980, 581). Conventional marriage for the "new woman" was found wanting, and, as Gail Cunningham writes, "little better than slavery" (10). Major writers such as Hardy and George Moore joined the battle and

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began to deal with marriage and married life with more frankness and freedom than before. There were open calls for a change in the social habits and in the dominant sexual ideology, and central questions of moral and social behaviour were seriously looked into and passionately debated. This spirit of revolt and growing freedom is mirrored in the novels of the period in general, and in those dealing with social and moral issues in particular. Writers such as Hardy, Grant Allen and George Moore were prompted by the desire to free women from the shackles of the moral and social values to which they were tied down. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, (1891) Hardy delineates Tess as a victim of circumstances, and in defiance of the moral standards, he introduces her to his readers as a "Pure Woman".

While "seduction" is treated in most of the novels we have so far looked at as a crushing blow which cripples the ambitions and hopes of its victim, and transforms her into a passive, and abject creature, From the very beginning of the novel Tess is portrayed as a "pure woman" who strives to become a lady. She is seduced by Alec, her baby dies, she is disdained by Angel, and at the end executed, let alone the fact that she is morally and socially stained and rejected. Nevertheless, Hardy portrays society as false, wrapped and stiflingly oppressive that it is hard to see how it can be repaired. Through *Tess*, he tries to reveal the fact that people are victims of unseen power, economic necessity, social and moral codes that work as fetters which control people's destiny and destroy their happiness in the name of freedom. Moreover, he shows people as victims of unjust social forces which turn deeds into a mockery of their intentions, and so they should be judged by their will rather than by the deeds.

In *Tess*, Hardy makes it the point from which her heroism begins. In his preface to the fifth edition, he wrote:

This novel being one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after and event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least as the virtual ending of her enterprise and hopes.

Tess is not the traditional degraded fallen woman. Seduction does not break her, and she is able to recover her spirit in the first few days after her return to her family. The "chatter", the "laughter" and "the good-humoured innuendoes" of her former school fellows and

friends who called upon her (believing her to have captured the heart of a romantically dangerous gallant) revive her spirits, and "as the evening [wears] on, she ca[tches] the infection of their excitement, and gr[ows] almost gay" (II, 71). When her illegitimate child is refused the benefits of the church, she baptizes it herself, and more important is the fact that she—different from previous early sisters—never seems to lack employment. She is almost always able to earn a living for herself. She works in the fields, and later, she gets a place as a dairymaid at a farm in Talbothays where she meets Angel Clare. By allowing Tess to recover her spirits and giving her employment, Hardy asserts the view that a fallen woman is not lost, and that she still has potential growth and renewal. His appeal is "Let the truth be told—women do as a rule live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look about them with an interested eye" (III, 88).

Tess is, in a way, unique among Hardy's heroines in being quite clearly the victim of men's cruelty. Between them, Alec D'Urberville and Angel Clare shatter her happiness and cripple her life. For the pseudo-aristocratic Alec, Tess, the poor working girl, is no more than an insignificant creature "to toy with and dismiss" (IV, 130). He sees her as something "belonging to him... She cannot ... exist apart from him", nor have any being apart from his being. For she is the embodiment of his desire" (Lawrence 1936, 483). Even his flirtation with her takes the form of imposing his will on a creature he possesses "he stood up and held [a strawberry] by the stem to her mouth, 'No—no! She said quickly ... 'I would rather take it in my own hand'.... 'Nonsense!' he insisted; and in slight distress she parted her lips and took it in (I, 34).

Tess of the D'Urbervilles marks a particularly important moment in Hardy's representations of women in sexual and marital relationships" (Boumelha 1982, 117). Despite her liaison with Alec, Tess is still described as pure, perhaps because Hardy reflects upon the idea of the great movement in the moral and social criteria of the early Victorians to modern. Hence, *Tess* "is not merely the tragedy of a heroic girl, but the tragedy of a profound community baffled and defeated by processes beyond its understanding or control" (Brown 1975, 158). At the end, Hardy reveals an obvious sympathy towards Tess. Tess is executed not because of

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adultery, but because of committing homicide. Then, Hardy is fully aware of the changes taking place at that time, so he sets forth his protagonist as a victim who "walks on" as "a figure which is part of the landscape, a fields woman pure and simple" (Lodge 1975, 165).

Many people found the sub-title of the book "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented" offensive and criticized Hardy's depiction of sex, and dark pessimism, yet the novel was praised for its call for dealing with the problems in society. In his explanatory note to the first edition, Hardy anticipated the objections and answered them briefly:

I will just add that the story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as an attempt to give artistic form to a true sequence of things; and in respect of the book's opinions and sentiments, I would ask any too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels, to remember a well-worn sentence of St. Jerome's: If an offence come out of the truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed. (Explanatory note to the first edition)

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is measured as a major transitional model between the hard-headed moralists of the first half of the century and the serious, visionary novelists of today.

In Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894), Esther triumphs at the end over her society and finds out her way to utter happiness and glory. George Moore through *Esther Waters* was totally in touch with the underlying worries and ambitions of his era. "He registers the changing emphases on feminism ... in the serial and novel forms of the tale and sees therein a documenting of the New Woman's dilemmas" (Pierse 2006, xiv). The protagonist, Esther Waters, is a unique character, who leads a "life of trouble and strife," (402) and whose suffering is no less than any other female character of the other novels but still, her end is the most prominent one among them all. She becomes a lady, a true one, a wife of her ex-lover and seducer, and her illegitimate offspring becomes a source of honour and makes her at the end a very proud woman indeed.

Though Esther is an unmarried housemaid, who becomes pregnant and is abandoned by her footman lover, still Moore offers her an opportunity to be accepted back in society, the same society that punished her fellow sisters

fifty years ago. This leads to the fact that the sphere that Esther Waters experiences is not the same moral and social one that each Dickens, Mrs Gaskell, and Kingsley experienced. In dealing with the subject of seduced and forlorn maids, Moore concentrates on his heroine's uniqueness rather than on her statistical conventionality. Unlike many depraved women of previous novels, Esther is not presented as a spiritless woman disgraced by sin, nor as a shadowy figure lurking in the background of the story. There is no crying out against fate, nor is an early death in the river an end to her trouble. She is a new kind of heroine who accepts the child as her responsibility in life, fights courageously the social injustices and exploitation she faces in her unfavourable position as an unmarried mother, and struggles for the life of her boy "against all the forces that civilisation arrays against the lowly and illegitimate" (172). She endures hardships, resists temptation, and perseveres in fulfilling her commitment to her child with a dedicated and resolute determination which dramatizes not only the strength of maternal instinct, but also the resiliency of the human spirit.

Moore's fallen heroine not only finds marital happiness under the roof of her seducer, but receives help and support from her mistress Mrs Barfield. In contrast to stereotyped heartless employers, Mrs Barfield helps Esther with money, and voluntarily writes a character" for her. Even Esther's fellow servants at Woodview, unlike the house-maids in *Oliver Twist* who taunt Nancy, are sympathetic and drink to the health of her unborn baby. "We don't think any the worse of you; why, that's an accident that might happen to any of us"(93), says one of them.

Like other writers who dealt with this subject, Moore uses the fallen woman's story as a vehicle for social criticism and reform. In a reply to an interview in the *Daily Chronicle*, Moore declared that his motivation in writing the book had been "a love of humanity, a desire to serve humanity" (Hone 1936, 206). He boasted, on other occasions, that more than any other novel of the period, *Esther Waters* had awakened Christian compassion for the poor. Havelock Ellis's reminiscences confirm Moore's humanitarian motivation:

One occasion I specially recall when ... he stopped me to talk with deep emotion ... of the fate of young women who are compelled, by the

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hostile attitude of society, to destroy their illegitimate babies. Such tender human sympathy was one of his most pronounced traits, though it may perhaps surprise those who regard him simply as an apostle of art for art's sake. (Ellis 1950, 314).

By allowing Estner, the poor seduced maid to rise, successfully fulfil the sacred task of rearing her illegitimate child, and prevail, the progress of the fallen woman in the Victorian novel has turned a full circle. She changes from a shadowy and degraded figure of squalor and pathos to a respected and loved heroine, and from a living indictment of social evils to a fully human person.

Moore by his happy ending scores success and announces to the world those outdated social and moral standards are no more there. This has paved the way for Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895). Herminia Barton not only rejects marriage as "slavery", but condemns the whole idea of setting up a domestic union with a man. In his preface, Allen ridicules what his former generation believed to be as opprobrium. Accordingly, Allen stated; "but surely no woman would ever dare to do so, said my friend. I knew a woman who did, said I; and this is her story" (1). The fact that the title itself represents an utter sarcasm out of the whole Victorian harsh moral and social doctrines, which still want to grasp their fist over people.

Herminia Barton, the protagonist, is portrayed as an independent and self-confident woman who stands alone in the face of traditional social and moral codes and manages to start all over again. She rejects marriage as 'slavery', and condemns the concept of establishing a domestic union with a man. She is able to survive while "other women have fallen, as men [or society] choose to put it in their odious dialect: no other has voluntarily risen as I propose to do" (22). Therefore; Allen attacks society's conventional notion of the "Angel in the House", the concept of womanhood, the marriage institution, and portrays, through Herminia, a new image of a lady who is a champion and a paragon of the whole womanhood of her time.

Like her rebel sisters who figured prominently in the works of many major and minor writers in the second half of this decade, Herminia Barton not only rejects marriage as "slavery", but condemns the whole idea of setting up a domestic union with a man. Although she gives

herself freely to her lover, she refuses to join him, keeps a separate lodging, and earns her own living. Possessed by a sense of mission to regenerate society, she refuses to yield to pressure, or to compromise with her principles, and devotes herself to fulfilling her beliefs and raising her illegitimate child.

In her first speech, Herminia expounds her views on female emancipation and explains that her interest lies in the social and moral emancipation of women. She says that she left college without a degree because "The whole object of the training was to see just how far you could manage to push a woman's education without the faintest danger of her emancipation (1: 6).

Allen's attack does not focus on society's treatment of those who break its moral code by seeking love outside marriage as much as on the existing morality which upholds marriage as a sacred institution. Like her rebel sisters of the day, his heroine and mouthpiece, Herminia Barton, believes that marriage should be sanctioned by love rather than social forms, and that personal relations have a better chance of success when the element or compulsion is absent. She rejects the "marriage contract" as an "absurdity" which makes a legal obligation of "what no human heart can be sure of performing"(3: 41), and vows never to marry because she finds the marriage institution in itself repugnant: "I know on what vile foundations your temple of wedlock is based and built, what pitiable victims languish and die in its sickening vaults (3:46). She defies the moral conventions which brand her as "fallen", and she sees herself as a genuine pioneer of female sexual freedom:

Here, of my own free will, I take my stand for the right, and refuse your sanctions! No woman that I know of has ever yet done that. *Other women have fallen, as men choose to put it in their odious dialect: no other has voluntarily risen as I propose to do* (3: 46).

What distinguishes the book from the works of other contemporary writers of the period is Allen's exaltation of his fallen heroine and his raising her to a saintly status. He praises her for defying the conventional moral codes of society, and transmutes her from a victim into a martyr. He continually reminds his reader that this is to be her fate, and puts innumerable speeches to that effect in her own mouth: "It never occurred

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to me to think" ... my life could ever end in anything else but martyrdom" (3: 42).

Though the visual implications of Allen's metaphor may bring into mind Mrs Gaskell's presentation of Ruth, the change in the moral climate between the periods that these two novels represent is complete. While in *Ruth* (1853) adultery was under attack, now in *The Woman Who Did* and many other "fin de siècle" novels, it is marriage which is under attack. The devaluation of virginity in many novels of the period to the level of a technical rather than absolute measure of purity brought about an integration in the late Victorian novel — especially the novels of the last few years of the century — between the character of the "fallen woman" and that of the "new woman". Many heroines who fit into the Victorian category of "fallen", "outcast" or "impure" were identified as "new" women. They were no longer the degraded and broken heroines who deserve pity and sympathy, nor could they be dismissed as "prostitutes" or "fallen" but "emancipated" heroines with liberal ideals who were meant to win the reader's admiration and respect. Through this association, the fallen woman as a victim of the social injustice who deserves pity and sympathy became outdated and was utterly quashed. The new century brought a new world and new approaches to the questions of the relation of the sexes.

What distinguishes Allen's work from the works of the others, as Hardy has proclaimed, is the fact that it was a "true book" behind which "lay[s] a radical anthropological awareness which Allen played a significant part in disseminating" (Greenslade 2005, 16). Thus; *The Woman Who Did* and other fin-de-siècle novels mirror the shift in the social outlook and moral values that occurred at the end of the century, nineteenth century, so to speak.

CONCLUSION

By contrasting the novels of the early part of the century with those published at the close of the century, one can become aware of the shift in the social and moral standards, and in the philosophy and ideology between the early Victorians and the late Victorians. Both the image and the treatment of the concepts of 'The Angel in the House' and womanhood underwent radical changes. The late Victorians, like in Hardy, Moore, and Allen represent an upside-down situation. In other words, they had broken the familial tyranny, where the whole concept of

"The Angel in the House" and the notions of womanhood were completely rejected. They portray their female characters as victims of the social and moral system. They are let out of the house and are given a justification for their failings, and above all, let the door open for them to turn over a new life.

The late Victorians paved the way not only for the emergence of the new woman, but also for the rise of liberated feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century, which shattered the pictures and the old belief of the early Victorian picture of the Angel in the House'. They were let out of the patriarchal domain, and as a result, they were no more seen as mothers, sisters and daughters or wives, but human beings, who have rights and should obtain a proper position in culture and society. They paved the way not only for the emergence of the new woman, but also the rise of a liberated feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The comparison between the two periods allows one to trace the transition from Victorianism and modernism in terms of literary fashion and in the social thoughts and the language used. This transition along with the integration of feminist ideals shows the steady increase of the general public knowledge of psychology and tolerance of sexual exploration in literature, and this, in turn, paved the way for later authors to examine sexual issues in relationships in a realistic and open way without fear of social obstruction. Reflecting on the change that had come over the public taste, Rhoda Broughton, who had been considered somewhat improper in the 1860s, later wrote: I began my career as Zola, I finish it as Miss Yonge; it's not I that have changed, it's my fellow countrymen (Lubbock 1928, 25).

More research can be taken up by tracing the works of D. H. Lawrence, who sought fresher ways of expressing what his fellow authors took to be new kinds of experience seen in new ways. He did not only refute the traditional concept of marriage, love and relationships, but explored with outspoken candour, the sexual and psychological relationships of men and women as we see in his controversial outspoken novels *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1921), and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

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