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Undermining The Angelic Restrictions Of First-Wave Feminism: What The New Woman Did, Didn't, And Wouldn't Do

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UNDERMINING THE ANGELIC RESTRICTIONS OF FIRST-WAVE FEMINISM: WHAT THE NEW WOMAN *DID*, *DIDN'T*, AND *WOULDN'T* DO

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my dear son, Reilly Asher. Although you may not remember, you have been on this journey with me from the very start. You have shaped my path and inspired me to tread forward.

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Nathan Foerstner. You renewed my mind and my spirit, and you never doubted my path or my potential.

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INTRODUCTION "SHE HAD POWER IN HER PURITY": FEMINIST POTENTIAL AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN 1895[1]

In 1939, Virginia Woolf describes her battles "with a certain phantom," with shadows like those that suppressed female sexuality in 1895 (58). She explains that she has finally killed The Angel of the House[2], the ghost whose shadow is reminiscent of the "chief beauty" of womanhood: Purity (59). Woolf realizes that she must catch this phantom "by the throat" if she wants to express "the truth about human relations, morality, sex" because "all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot

[1] In *The Woman Who Did*, the narrator describes Herminia's mission: "She had power in her purity to raise his nature [Alan's] for a time to something approached her own high level" (32). See page 45 for an analysis of this quotation.

[2] In referencing "The Angel in the House," I am referring most generally to the iconic Victorian image of femininity as featured in Coventry Patmore's 1854 narrative poem. In Victorian literature and art, the woman who embodied this "Angelic" feminine ideal is stereotyped as a saintly, passive, selfless, submissive, pure, and sexless wife and mother. This is the depiction of ideal womanhood that Richard Altick explores in the foundational text of Victorian studies *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature* (1973). Altick argues that "convention dictated a rigorously stereotyped personality" for the middle-class woman: "she was The Angel in the House, to borrow from the title of Coventry Patmore's hugely popular versified praise of domestic sainthood and the mystical, non-fleshly institution of marriage" (53). Altick acknowledges that many "leading novels" of the period challenged this womanly ideal through literary images of "the nonconforming woman"; nonetheless, this "revered cluster of Victorian domestic virtues served as a norm" for which "writers frequently mounted an outright or covert attack on the unrealities and perversions of the prevailing womanly ideal, the myth of domestic accommodation and tranquility" (56). In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (1982), Nina Auerbach notes that the Victorian Angel is much different from the "traditional" masculine angel of the Romantic Period: "As heir to this tradition, the Victorian angel in the house seems a bizarre object of worship, both in her virtuous femininity with its inherent limitations—she can exist only within the family, while masculine angels existed everywhere—in the immobilization that the phrase suggests" (70). The Angel of the House that resonates in the Victorian period "is defined by her boundaries," and it is within the domestic sphere that she becomes "the source of order" (Auerbach 71). As Auerbach points out, the mythical Angel has many guises (much like the literary figure of the New Woman), and this construct can be both empowering and oppressive. In "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel" (1992), Elizabeth Langland further develops this nuanced perception of The Angel by focusing on "the intersection of class and gender ideologies in a Victorian icon—the 'Angel in the House,'" in order to argue that "the wife, the presiding hearth angel of Victorian social myth, actually performed a more significant and extensive economic and political function than is usually perceived" (290-291). Langland also argues that "the portrait of middle class women" in the Victorian period is complex and that many Victorian writers challenged the monolithic image of The Angel through representations of femininity that were "less constrained, imprisoned, and passive than the victim discerned in conventional gender-inflected interpretations" (303). Building on these studies which recognize the complex perceptions of the Victorian Angel, I identify the first-wave feminist projection of ideal womanhood as "the angel," a designator which suggests that the late-nineteenth century feminine construct is still very much rooted in the moral and sexual standards of The Angel but that it has undergone some revisions.

be dealt with freely and openly by women" (59-60). The Victorian purity ideologies that maintained the vitality of The Angel were also instrumental in facilitating the possibility of this murder in that they exposed the limitations of The Angel's wings. Near the end of the nineteenth century, social-purity feminism and the New Woman fiction under its influence attempted to revise or reinvent The Angel in order to promote or present feminist goals through a reinvented construct of collective femininity, which I refer to as the angel[3]. Although social purity relied on rather traditional views of sexuality and gender—views which feminists today would label outdated and embarrassing—such ideas and strategies served as feminist tactics at the turn of the nineteenth century. The countless efforts to depict new womanhood shaped by old theories of purity and virtue reveal a key moment in feminist history because they called for a transition in feminist thought. Before the death of the Angel, women had to recognize that she was there and that her presence was tyrannical, and the purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the intertextual New Woman novel participated in this process of exposing the angel and was therefore integral in redirecting feminist thought.

In *New Women, New Novels* (1990), Ann Ardis points out that the conventions of New Woman fiction which "previously have been taken as signs of its aesthetic deficiency" point to the author's scheme of purposely joining the cultural, political, and literary conversation of The Woman Question (3). She explains, "They [the authors of New Woman novels] do not want to be read singly or separately; moreover, they choose not to be silent about the intertextual debate in which they participate" (4). One example

[3] At the end of this chapter, I provide a more in-depth description of how I differentiate between "The Angel" that constructed Victorian ideals of femininity and the image of "the angel" that pervaded first-wave feminist discourse and New Woman fiction at the turn of the century.

of this intertextual dialogue is clearly illustrated in the direct literary responses to Grant Allen's popular New Woman Novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), most notably through Victoria Cross's (Annie Sophie Cory) *The Woman Who Didn't* (also published in 1895 in Lane's Keynotes Series) and Lucas Cleeve's (Adelina G. I. Kingscote) *The Woman Who Wouldn't* (1895). The intertextuality of these three New Woman novels is historically and culturally contextualized in social-purity feminism, the marriage debate, and the reticent sexual politics of the late-nineteenth century, and to date no scholar has examined in depth and detail the formal commonalities of these three texts or their interdiscursive and intertextual relationship with first-wave feminism. Building on Ardis's premise that New Woman texts are founded on intertextuality, this study explores the "intertextual debate" that develops as a result of the textual, discursive, and ideological exchanges among Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, its explicit literary rejoinders of 1895, and first-wave feminist thought (4). Thus, I will situate these texts in a fresh historical context, and I will develop a critical intertextual project not hitherto undertaken. My exploration of intertextuality among New Woman writers and other socio-political rivalries for the discourse of liberation will derive from my analysis of these three 1895 novels; however, in order to analyze thoroughly the interdiscursivity of these texts, this study is also informed by a multitude of late-nineteenth century contributions to "The Woman Question," the marriage debate, and social-purity feminism.

In an 1895 review of *The Woman Who Did* published in *Liberty (Not the Daughter but the Mother of Order)* Herman Kuehn writes, "The book has great merit as a stimulus to thought on a question that cries for solution, and such a book as "The Woman Who Did" is not written in vain. It is an integral part of the Insurgent Literature of our

times, and in the ranks of the rebel troop it is not important that each volunteer be full six feet tall" (6). Kuehn's description here is significant because it introduces an initial framework for understanding the intertextual structure of the texts in this study: *The Woman Who Did* can be viewed as an implicit intertext of "Insurgent Literature," and it also serves as an intertextual point of reference in that it will stimulate more "thought" in the form of both the explicit and implicit intertexts that follow (6). Although, as Kuehn anticipates, *The Woman Who Did* encouraged many responses which could be identified as intertexts, I am interested in how it incited the immediate and explicit literary responses of Lucas Cleeve and Victoria Cross. *The Woman Who Did* was published in February of 1895, and by October, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. had published Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, and John Lane published Cross's *The Woman Who Didn't* in Volume 18 of Keynotes Series[4]—two more pieces that join the ranks of "Insurgent Literature" in their attempts to tackle the Woman Question through unconventional critiques of marriage.

The Woman Who Did elicited other direct responses such as *Punch's* "The Woman Who Wouldn't Do," and numerous other indirect responses,[5] yet I have limited the scope of my project to these three novels. John Frow argues that unless a text directly calls attention to its origin, "the identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation" (46). My identification of *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* as

[4] John Lane (The Bodley Head) had also published *The Woman Who Did* in the February of 1895 (Volume VIII) issue of the Keynotes Series. It instantly became a popular bestseller and was printed in nineteen editions in 1895 and four more in 1896.

[5] Many New Woman Novels published after Allen's could fit into this intertextual web based on their classification in the New Woman genre. See page 4 in Ann Ardis's *New Women New Novels* and Appendix E in Ruddik's 2004 edition of *The Woman Who Did*. See "The Man Who Wrote a New Woman Novel: Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and the Gendering of New Woman Authorship" (2005) by Vanessa Warne and Colette Colligan for a thorough analysis of "The Woman Who Wouldn't Do" and other related parodies of Allen's text.

intertexts derives from both of these approaches as some of the cross-textual references are literary and overt and others are discursive and interpretative. The repetition of the phrase "The Woman Who" followed by the transformation of the verb (Would, Wouldn't, Didn't), reference each other in obvious ways and thus illustrate intertextuality in the most general sense of the term. The syntactic title paradigm "The Woman Who" harks back to Allen's text, and critics of Cleeve's and Cross's novels repeatedly made this connection in their reviews. Wolfgang Karrer posits that "intertextuality in titles and mottoes thus not only reproduces bits of earlier texts, but also conflicting systems of title codes, carrying different social and cultural capital" (130). In a series of related titles, "intertextuality itself," he argues, "thus becomes a product and tool of social reproduction, reflecting hierarchies in society and reproducing them at the same time" (130).

In this way, Karrer suggests that even seemingly overt examples of intertextual devices are subject to various degrees of interpretation. Karrer points out that intertextual titles often reveal a hierarchical relationship between the first title and the subsequent titles which reproduce or transform the original. Although his framework does not take authorship and gender into account, it is apparent that in this hierarchical ranking of intertextual titles, the canonical texts which occupy the higher positions are patriarchal, male-authored texts. Karrer's methodology of locating intertextuality as way to examine "questions of ranking, authority, ideological reproduction and hierarchical overcoding" is useful in my analysis, which traces the title sequence from Allen to Cleeve and to Cross (123). The application of Karrer's concept to the three texts in this study creates what Karrer refers to as a "top-down tree" organizational chart in which *The Woman Who Did*

occupies the highest position, followed by *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* equally positioned as second-rank texts "entitled to overcode certain assigned areas" of the first text (125).

In the 1890s, assenting and negative reviewers of these texts reiterated this top-down model in the way that they evaluated how well *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* responded to *The Woman Who Did*. Some literary commentators approached Cleeve's and Cross's novels as successors of Allen's and assessed to what extent either of these texts successfully overwrote or replaced their precursor. Most critics agreed that *The Woman Who Did* was poorly written, that it was no literary masterpiece, yet they were little concerned with the literary merit of *The Woman Who Wouldn't* or *The Woman Who Didn't.* The titles *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* served to classify each work as descendants of Allen's popular novel, and therefore critics explored whether these rejoinders offered "a use value" that was lacking in *The Woman Who Did* (Karrer 133). These second-rank, female-authored novels were legitimized through ties to a second-rate, but first-rank father text. Contrary to Kuehn's prediction that *The Woman Who Did* would cultivate a productive intertextual conversation—one that would encourage more "stimulus to thought on a question that cries for solution"—critics often overlooked the potentially transformative intertextual relationship of the texts (6). Whereas Kuehn encouraged open and unrestricted membership to "the ranks of the rebel troop"[6] because more "volunteers" meant a more diverse and forceful discussion, many critics manipulated intertextuality as a means of ranking and of asserting the authority of the original text (6).

[6] I use "open" and "unrestricted" here because when Kuehn writes, "and in the ranks of the rebel troop it is not important that each volunteer be full six feet tall" (6), he implies that individuals do not need to meet any requirements to enter the debate and that all contributions are productive in some way.

In “Silly or Shocking,” published in *The Literary World* on September 20, 1895, the review of *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* and *The Woman Who Didn’t* begins with a tribute to Allen: “It is not at all likely that Mr. Grant Allen, when he issued to an expectant world ‘The Woman Who Did,’ can have foreseen the mutilated versions of his capital title” (200). The descriptor “capital” finds its origin in the Latin word for head, and according to the *OED*, the first meaning of the word “had to do with the head or top of something.” Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, the adjective “capital” was also used to mean “excellent,” a definition of the word which the *OED* now describes as “old-fashioned.” Regardless of its exact use here, “capital title,” positions *The Woman Who Did* above the “mutilated” titles that follow. At the very least, if “capital” only designates *The Woman Who Did* as the primary title (not as a first-rate or excellent one), it is clear by the use of the word “mutilated” that *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* and *The Woman Who Didn’t* have damaged the integrity of the original title. In this review from *The Literary World*, the author notes, “To secure a good title is a very valuable help to a book. A phrase that the tongue takes kindly to is often the means of stimulating the sale of a work that is, as a matter of fact, fit for little else than the wrapping up of butter” (200). Before the reviewer delves into an actual review of either of the texts, he concludes that *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* and *The Woman Who Didn’t* offer no literary or social “use value” in comparison with the “the most successful member of the ‘Keynote Series’” (referring to *The Woman Who Did*) (200). *The Woman Who Did* is not only referred to as the “parent” text, but its second-rank children (or should I say daughters), even by way of their intertextual titles, are unauthorized responses.

In order to appeal to pathos, the writer of this review (which I believe we can assume is male), continues: “The chivalry that is due from a male to a female prevents us from dismissing *The Woman Who Didn’t* as so much paper proper for the menial uses of the shopkeeper, though we feel compelled to say that, in our opinion, it is a record of wasted time. It is the most feeble counterblast that ever came from an antagonist. It is not able enough to command attention” (200). The review then continues with a two-sentence synopsis of the text and concludes by reiterating that “creatures of this sort” (like the heroine of Cross’s *The Woman Who Didn’t)* are “not worth three and sixpence” (200). Since the author of *The Woman Who Didn’t* is female, the reviewer makes a half-hearted attempt at politeness, but his overly condensed and simplified discussion of the text (devoid of character names or narrative details) suggests that it is not only a waste of time to read *The Woman Who Didn’t* but that it is also a waste of time to thoroughly or fairly review it.

The commentator’s opinion of Lucas Cleeve’s *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* follows the same line as his opinion of *The Woman Who Didn’t*: he concludes by warning readers that “Opalia also is not worth three shillings and sixpence” (200). Although he presents the same negative view of both texts, he privileges his discussion of *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* by offering a fuller discussion of the text, complete with the names of the main characters. Furthermore, his analysis of *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* reveals that he objects to each text for different reasons. *The Woman Who Didn’t* is a “feeble” response—a weak attempt of a woman writer without the authority to “command attention” (200). In differentiating between the two offences, he writes: “Worse and Worse. In Miss Victoria

Crosse's[7] 'The Woman Who Didn't' there was more of a folly than of viciousness, but in *The Woman Who Wouldn't* the order of these unattractive qualities must be reversed" (200). *The Woman Who Didn't* is foolish and nonsensical, but *The Woman Who Wouldn't* is malicious and immoral and therefore "worse." He continues, "Surely there is no beyond for the incapable and the dirty after this performance on the part of Lucas Cleeve, into whose sex it will not be profitable to inquire. It is rumoured that a lady has done this thing. That is impossible" (200). Although he states that it is unimportant to determine the author's gender, we see that authorial gender influences both of these reviews. He is able to easily dismiss *The Woman Who Didn't* because he classifies it as feminine—a powerless and delicate response that he expects from a woman writer. Yet, a "lady" writer is incapable of such a strong attack, and the only way he can contextualize the potential threat posed by *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, its viciousness or frank discussion of sexual relations, is by discounting the "rumours." *The Woman Who Didn't* is rubbish because it is not an aggressive response and, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* does not measure up to Allen's original because it is too aggressive. According to this reviewer, nothing would serve as an adequate response to *The Woman Who Did*, and any attempt that openly challenges traditional views about marriage and sexuality is waste of time.

Through its emphasis on intertextual titles, the review in *The Literary World* reiterates a hierarchal ranking between the three texts, but it also serves to challenge the basis of such a system wherein the top-ranked text undeservedly occupies a privileged

[7] The review in *The Literary World* uses "Crosse" rather than "Cross." The spelling of Cross's name varied from publication to publication. Shoshana Milgram Knapp notes that "even her given name has been difficult to determine" because "biographical information on Cross is sparse" ("Victoria Cross" 80). Knapp suggests that Cory's pseudonym served as a "complicated joke" intended to reference "the Victoria Cross, a medal awarded for military heroism, for her value in defying mores of the day" (81). Knapp, who has extensively published on Cross and her works, uses "Cross" rather than "Crosse," and throughout this project, I also use this spelling except for when I include direct quotations that include the 'e' in the original text.

position. The review in *The Literary World* designates *The Woman Who Did* as an unanswerable and superior "original" text:

> Signs are not wanting that Mr. Grant Allen's 'The Woman Who Did' is ephemeral; his characters have been described as puppets, his arguments as inconclusive. However these things may be, one thing is quite certain; the original that has set so many foolish tongues clacking deserves a better fate than to be the cause of such unpleasant stuff as is contained in this book by Lucas Cleeve. It is not unlikely that this volume will kill the whole controversy. We hope so, for it is plain that if each of those who are trying to make a few pence out of Mr. Grant Allen's title decides to outdo his or her forerunner, we shall have to employ a waste-paper basket instead of a reviewer. (200)

The reviewer fails to justify why *The Woman Who Did* "deserves a better fate" and instead gives the impression that Cleeve's text has done more than defame the original title. Ultimately, he argues that no connection exists between *The Woman Who Did* and the "unpleasant stuff" of *The Woman Who Wouldn't.* That the original could prompt a response so threatening is as "impossible" as the rumor that a woman authored such a response. Although it would seem that the purpose of a literary review would be to evaluate the literary merit of the texts, "Silly or Shocking?" attempts to dissuade the audience from reading *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* not because they contain literary shortcomings (after all, so does *The Woman Who Did*), but because they do not logically follow Allen's lead. The purpose of this so-called review is not to disparage bad literature but to delegitimize the intertextuality of these misunderstood or threatening intertexts.

Other publications tended to follow this trend in their treatment of Cross's and Cleeve's texts. For example, "Our London Letter About Books" published in November of 1895 *The Review of Reviews,* explains:

> It is a testimony to the success "The Woman Who Did" has had that "The Woman Who Wouldn't" heads the list, for it is written with the direct object of controverting Mr. Allen's novel. But although it has not the particular faults which made Miss Cross' "The Woman Who Didn't" so unwelcome, it isn't good enough to be commended to your attention. And after all, you agree with me, Mr. Allen's story is its own best antidote. (626)

Here, the reviewer recognizes *The Woman Who Wouldn't* as a calculated response to *The Woman Who Did*, but reiterates the opinion of *The Literary World* by denouncing its worth and reestablishing the supremacy of the original title. Evidently, *The Woman Who Did* had satiated literary and cultural conversations, and publications articulated that they had enough of the hype. In *The Athenaeum's* brief review (September 21, 1895) of *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, the commentator begins, "'The 'Ohe, jam satis!' of the wearied reviewer does not seem to make much impression on writers and publishers of nympholeptic stories" (382)[8]. The review continues by explaining that in the "first one or two romantic expositions of the sex-problem in its sharpest form there was something like an adequate reason. Almost every human problem may, at least once, demand literary expression as a right, or may obtain it without very serious protest" (382). In classifying Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't* as one of the many novels guilty of "indefinite repetition of the same thing," the reviewer suggests that the controversies regarding marriage and sex have already been fully explored—that the subject has been exhausted (382).

The reviews that I have discussed illustrate the approaches literary publications used to sever *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* from their parent

[8] According to E.H. Michelsen in *A Manual of Quotations from the Ancient, Modern, and Oriental* (1856), the Latin phrase "Ohe, jam satis!" from Horace translates to "Oh! There is now more than enough" and denotes satiety and disgust (193).

text. These reviews recognized intertextuality among the titles in order to condemn *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* as inferior or inconsequential texts, but they discounted or obscured the thematic intertextuality of these three texts. By showcasing these texts as deficient and meaningless, critics concealed the dynamics of interrelations and evaded how the intertextual dynamics functioned in connection to their societal and cultural context. In situating the critical responses to *Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* as products of and responses to the larger cultural debates on marriage and femininity, we can read these reviews as an ongoing effort to stifle the many controversies sparked by the New Woman and to contain her threatening potential.

Literary critics in the 1890s tended to highlight the conventional characteristics of the New Woman heroine in an attempt to present her as a consistent and recognizable character type, but, at the same time, they also suggested that literary representations of the New Woman were very diverse. This taxonomy is best described in Hugh E. M. Stutfield's "The Psychology of Feminism" (1897). Insomuch as critics were fairly unified in their views that the New Woman or "The Modern Heroine" or "The Woman of Today" is not the woman of the "olden days" (for Stutfield, the woman of the past "was less troubled about the nature of her soul" and hardly interested in "baring," "dissecting" or "probing into the innermost crannies of her nature" (105), critics also distinguished among New Woman types to further classify these heroines. Stutfield, for example, suggests that the modern woman is a "sort of walking enigma"—that New Woman novels thematically share their "neverending delight" in investigating feminine psychology but do so by offering contrasting psychological sketches of women (104). Stutfield offers three variations of new womanhood in the heroines of the "Grandian

school" (after Sarah Grand), the "neurotic school," and "the Woman's Rights woman." Stutfield describes writers of the Grandian school as those who present "the moral and mental perfection of the modern incarnation of the modern spirit" (107). He associates the neurotic school with George Egerton and identifies these New Woman novelists as more artistic but overcome with "modern nervousness" (110). For Stutfield, the neurotic-school writers are wild, purely subjective or overly general and tend to "make a study of incomprehensibility, and raise mystification to the level of a fine art" (110). Stutfield continues to allude to Max Nordau's theories as he aligns the neurotic New Woman type with an "intense and morbid consciousness of the ego in woman" (110). Unlike the Grandian writers, those of the neurotic school find self-sacrifice "out of fashion" and look to self-development instead. The last of Stutfield's sketches, the Woman's Rights woman, is identified as a heroine who is overly interested in "all the isms"—the woman who makes it her business to discuss politics and Parliament with her lover (111).

Surprisingly, Stutfield's New Woman taxonomy still flourishes in current criticism to some extent[9]. In "The 'New Woman Fiction' of the 1890's" (1973), A.R.

[9] Although current scholars still delineate New Woman types much like Stutfield did, they have also revised the definition of the New Woman genre and re-classified New Woman novels in terms of current feminist thought. In *The Woman Who Did and The Woman Who Wouldn't,* Allen and Cleeve depicted their heroines as New Women; they created recognizable female characters and didactic narratives that were associated with the popular genre of the 1890s. Therefore, in 1895, these two novels were received as New Woman novels. *The Woman Who Didn't,* on the other hand, lacks the hard-hitting polemics and the recognizable New Woman heroine that contemporary audiences associated with the New Woman genre. Knapp notes that various late nineteenth-century critics "typically ignored Eurydice's distinctive qualities and displaced her from the center of attention" ("Victoria Cross" 82), which suggests that it did not exactly fit the qualifications to be considered a New Woman novel. Today, we can draw on the discursive methods and gendered perception of the male narrator in order to position the novel as both New Woman and feminist, yet when it was published in 1895, the absence of the predictable New Woman heroine and conventions served to disentangle it from other New Woman novels. Thus, we have seemed to revise and refigure the qualifications of the genre in order to make New Woman fiction synonymous with feminism today. In current literary criticism, the novels of the purity school (which actually represented the first wave New Woman novel) are deemed inferior New Woman texts because they are far afield from modern feminist agendas. The novels of the Neurotic School are exemplar New Woman (feminist) novels (even

Cunningham distinguishes between two types of the New Woman novel and accredits Stutfield with the coinage of the "less radical" of the two—that of the purity school (179). The other New Woman representation, according to Cunningham, is more radical, more sexual, and more psychological, much like Thomas Hardy's "bachelor girl" Sue Bridehead (179). In this New Woman novel, the heroine is still a "bundle of nerves," like Stutfield's neurotic heroine, but "provide[s] a far greater contribution to the expanding knowledge of feminine psychology" than those of the purity school (A.R. Cunningham 182). Grant Allen, along with Sarah Grand and "Iota," are typical novelists of the purity school, and Cunningham suggests that the "successful" novels of this school (*The Woman Who Did, The Heavenly Twins* and *A Yellow Aster)* "were included in the New Woman fiction because they said new things about what women could and should *do* rather than about what women *were"* [emphasis in original] (181).

Cunningham's reasoning—that such works feature a nontraditional heroine with "the same ideas of fulfillment"—echoes much of the criticism that surfaced after the publication of *The Woman Who Did* and much of the criticism that surrounds the novel today (182). Ann Ardis, Sally Ledger, Kate Flint, and Jane Eldridge Miller all acknowledge the novel's popularity, success, and wide readership, but they also agree that *The Woman Who Did* has been inaccurately classified as a New Woman novel. Elaine Showalter perceives Allen's representation of the New Woman as a fulfillment of male sexual fantasies, as "a heroine made notorious to feminists' disgust" (*Literature* 184), and Kate Flint argues that the novel's plot "calls into question its right to be considered in the same terms as feminist works" (295). Although all of these critics

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though in a letter to Ernst Foerster, Egerton admits she has never met or written about a New Woman) (Egerton 1).

recognize the many guises of the New Woman, Sally Ledger is most aware of the New Woman's "multiple identity": "Textual representations of the New Woman (particularly unsympathetic representations) did not always coincide at all exactly with contemporary feminist beliefs and practices" (1). Yet, Ledger also argues that the "textual configurations of the New Woman at the *fin de siècle* are as significant historically as the day-to-day lived experience of the feminists of the late Victorian women's movement" because "the relationship between textual configurations of the New Woman and the beliefs and practices of feminist women, was, undoubtedly, dialectical" (3, 4).

To say that Herminia Barton or Opalia Woodgate or Eurydice Williamson fully encompasses the ideals and practices of first-wave feminism would mean that there was a single school of feminist thought at the end of the nineteenth century, which as the aforementioned scholars have explored, is not the case. In this study, I venture away from the binary model that most recent scholars use to classify New Woman texts as either feminist or anti-feminist and examine the ways in which *The Woman Who* heroines discursively and thematically engage with first-wave feminism. By focusing on this dialectical exchange of feminist ideas and practices as they were manifested in feminist publications and campaigns at the turn of the century, this approach allows us to reshape our current critical position and reexamine how the anti-feminist elements and "unsympathetic representations" in the texts often do coincide with the "feminisms" of the late-nineteenth century (Ledger 1). This is a feminist project that looks to better understand first-wave feminist ideology through popular intertextual representations of the New Woman, and in order to investigate the feminist potential of these texts—to see how they cultivate a transition in the history of feminist thought—I assert that we must

also transition to a new critical approach, one in which literary debates about titling, or ranking, or classification do not regulate the "use value" and analysis of these intertexts (Karrer 133).

In the 1890s, despite critics' allegations that *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* "ranked" as nugatory and unrelated texts, the sales of both of these novels suggest that British and American consumers were still invested in the intertextuality of these texts and in discovering the "use value" of *The Woman Who* titles[10]. Although specific details regarding the sales of these two novels are scarce, a few sources indicate that *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* were popular and widely read. In "English Notes," *The Bookman* lists *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* as "leading publications of the moment" (244). According to Lorna Sage in *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English*, the first edition of Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't* "sold out in three weeks" (136). This was Cleeve's most popular publication of her approximately sixty novels (Sage 136). It was Cross's *Anna Lombard* (1901) that proved to be her most successful novel, but given the popularity of Lane's Keynotes series and the backing of a title that echoed the "best-selling *succès de scandale*" (Allen's *The Woman Who Did)*, we can conclude that *The Woman Who Didn't* was also a well-known publication of its day ("Introduction" Gail Cunningham x).

[10] In the preceding paragraph, I argued that the feminist potential of the intertextual dynamics of these tests has been thwarted by our dualistic approach to the New Woman novel (feminist/anti-feminist), and I called for a new critical approach invested in cultivating nuanced readings of texts that are considered anti-feminist by today's standards. Here, I draw a parallel between the contemporary reception and the current reception of the novels. In 1895, the popularity of these novels suggests that there is cultural value in these texts and the conversation that they engaged in. The public bought and read *The Woman Who* intertexts even though the critical conversation was shaped by arbitrary discussions about literary rankings and authority. That they did so seems to support my claim that we too must approach these texts in new way.

Many of the reviews that jointly dealt with *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* endorsed a very limited connection among the three texts based on titular sequence, and this initial relationship commissions a greater exploration of how these texts shape one another. As Frow explains, "the form of representation of intertextual structures ranges from the explicit to the implicit" (45). The linking of titles, as I previously stated, can serve as an explicit intertextual indicator, as does Cleeve's declaration in the direct announcement in the preface to *The Woman Who Wouldn't.* Cleeve writes:

> Some years ago, in a speech in the House of Commons, Mr. Labouchere exclaimed, "If any one contradicts me, I will contradict him again." And I must confess that I was possessed with a little of this spirit when I began this work, and so I fancy have been all those who have answered Mr. Grant Allen's admirable work, the "Woman Who Did." As someone has said, there is no reason that these answers should ever stop. "The Man Who did Not," "The Woman Who Did Not," and others have followed each other in quick succession, and there is no reason that the "man Who did," and the "man Who Wouldn't" should not follow. (i)

In the same way as Kuehn, who, in referring to *The Woman Who Did*, writes, "The book has great merit as a stimulus to thought on a question that cries for solution," Cleeve views *The Woman Who Did* as a vehicle for generating questions and responses, and, also like Kuehn, she realizes that The Woman Question "cries for a solution" (Kuehn 6). Cleeve recognizes the fruitfulness of contradiction and suggests that the multiple and diverse "answers" are vital components in the trajectory toward improving the relations between the sexes. In *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact,* Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis remind us that "it is important not to bring in late twentieth-century feminist agendas to considerations of the nineteenth-century Woman Question. Victorian feminism is not a simple story of a radical break with tradition" (9). It is a

process marked with controversy and debate. *The Woman Who Did* served as one source of this debate by questioning the validity of the institution of marriage in an extremely popular arena. It provoked individuals to respond—to agree or disagree or reexamine personal beliefs. In a letter to the Rector of Haslemere in defense of the novel, Allen writes, "my sole object is to arouse inquiry and interest" (Clodd 171). Thus, Cleeve writes that she raises her "feeble voice in answer to the 'Woman Who Did,'" and illustrates the transformative power of interrogation, the strength of one "feeble voice" among many (vi).

The connection between Cross's *The Woman Who Didn't* and Allen's *The Woman Who Did* is less defined. Cross does not directly refer to Allen's text or position her novel as a response to *The Woman Who Did*. Consequently, some scholars have argued that Lane cleverly retitled her work in order to piggyback on the success of *The Woman Who Did*[11]. Cross's contemporaries also suggested this possibility. For example, in *The Critic* Arthur Waugh writes of *The Woman Who Didn't*: "It is not to be supposed that this tale is in any sense a pendant to Mr. Grant Allen's novel, with which it has absolutely no connection (77). In a review in *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jeannette Gilder clarifies that *The Woman Who Didn't* "is not a sequel to 'The Woman Who Did,' and does not suggest it to the slightest degree. The title was chosen because it seemed to be the only one that would fit" (34). These speculations that dispute the explicit intertextual connection between *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Did* do not eliminate *The Woman Who Didn't* as a possible intertext. Frow reminds us that "the identification of an intertext" can be an interpretative act rather than an assertion of "conscious authorial intention," and more importantly, the intertextuality of these three novels informs my analytical methodology:

[11] See Knapp's "Victoria Cross" page 81.

it is through a collective, intertextual reading that we are able to jointly position these novels as a "*cultural* text" [emphasis in original] in which the struggles of the New Woman heroine signify and critique the very "complex network of codes" that hindered first-wave feminist progress (Frow 46, 47).

Thus, my interpretation of these New Woman novels as a cultural text in the history of feminist thought materializes through a reading process that is both flexible and versatile. According to Michael Worton and Judith Still, "what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilization of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it" (1-2). My aim in intertextually analyzing *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* is not to prove or assert Allen's influence on Cross's and Cleeve's texts; rather, I suggest that through a fluid method of reading these three texts, we are able to, as Frow describes, "reconstruct the cultural codes which are realized (and contested) in texts" (46). Graham Allen writes, "the act of reading" thrusts us "into a network of textual relations," and in order to unfold the meaning(s) of a text, we must "trace those relations" (1). "Reading," he explains, "thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations" (1). Although many New Woman scholars have alluded to the intertextual dynamics of these three texts, no scholar has fully explored these dynamics or extensively traced how meaning is generated through textual intersections. In fact, of the three texts in my study, only *The Woman Who Did* has received a considerable amount of critical attention from scholars. Much like the articles published in 1895 in *The Literary World* and *The Review*

of Reviews, *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* are only briefly mentioned in conjunction with Allen's title. Shoshana Milgram Knapp and Melisa Brittain have made significant contributions in introducing Victoria Cross and her works to the field of New Woman scholarship, but these publications lack extensive intertextual analysis of *The Woman Who Didn't*[12]. Aside from Ann Ardis's succinct discussion of *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* studies of Cleeve and her works are nonexistent[13]. These factors, along with the understanding that New Woman texts, as Ardis explains, "do not want to be read singly or separately" necessitate this project (4).

When New Woman literature emerged as a popular literary field of feminist study in the early 1990s, Sally Mitchell posed an important question about the future direction of New Woman studies: "But should anyone at this point be starting to work on the New Woman, or has the rediscovery been done and the subject exhausted?" (581). Her query, although it addresses the New Woman texts of the late nineteenth century, is one that literary scholars wrestle with as they begin research in a number of genres and periods, and it is a question that we must continue to ask if we hope to make meaningful, new contributions to the field of literary studies. However, Mitchell's inquiry is especially significant in New Woman criticism because the trend that she evaluates in her essay written over ten years ago now—the projects of "mere 'rediscovery'" and plot summaries of forgotten New Woman texts (methods that she explains "will no longer do")—still shapes much of the research today. Of course, like Mitchell, I acknowledge

[12] See Knapp's "Real Passion and the Reverence for Life: Sexuality and Antivivisection in the Fiction of Victoria Cross" (1993), "Stead Among the Feminists: From Victoria Cross Onward" (1993), "Revolutionary Androgyny in the Fiction of 'Victoria Cross'" (1996), and "Victoria Cross (Annie Sophie Cory)" (1999). Also see Brittain's "Erasing Race in the New Woman Review: Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard*" (2001).

[13] See Ann Ardis's *New Women New Novels* pages 52-53 and 95-96.

that there are many scholars who have responded to the call for focused textual, literary, historical, and cultural analysis of New Women fiction; however, it is rather alarming that scholars still maintain their distance from the actual *texts* of these texts, especially from the New Women novels that lack belletristic merit or that fail to measure up to today's feminist standards.

Although Allen's *The Woman Who Did* seems to fit both of these categories, the immense popularity of the novel and *The Woman Who…* conversation that followed suggests that these intertexts deserve more attention then they have been given. Furthermore, I argue that *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* warrant a different type of critical evaluation—an approach which privileges the cultural rather than the literary value of these texts and one which is attuned to the way that these popular novels possess feminist value today because of the way that they reflected and subverted the social purity ideologies that shaped feminism in 1890s. We cannot discount or undermine how these New Woman intertexts exposed the public imagination to new feminist direction and potential; well-written or not, they were widely circulated and immensely popular. *The Woman Who Did* was one of the best-known novels of John Lane's Keynotes Series; it sold thousands of copies and was reprinted in over twenty editions. The Keynotes Series included nineteen volumes of short stories and fourteen novels by many New Woman writers such as George Egerton, Evelyn Sharp, Gertrude Dix, Victoria Cross, and Netta Syrett, and some of these works have recently become more accessible and affordable due to digital technology and scholarly publishing projects like the Late Victorian and Early Modernist Women Writers Series. Yet as Marion Thain and Kelsey Thornton explain in the series' introduction,

many of these works are still “difficult to obtain” or lack “good editions” for research and teaching (n.pag.) In 2004, Broadview Press recognized the need to publish Allen’s 1895 bestseller, and this critical edition of *The Woman Who Did* edited by Nicholas Ruddick includes reviews and supplementary material that attest to the novel’s cultural value: “*The Woman Who Did* offers to the reader today perhaps the most conventional entrée into the labyrinth of *fin de siècle* sexual politics” (11).

Yet, even since the “publication of this “good” edition, scholars have tended to avoid an extensive analysis of *The Woman Who Did* for several reasons. First of all, most scholars agree that *The Woman Who Did* is a poorly written and overly dramatic polemical novel which lacks aesthetic merit. Secondly, its heroine, Herminia Barton, represents both the New Woman and Victorian Angel to the extreme, and thus some scholars stray from a close inspection of the text to a discussion of Allen’s failed attempts at feminism. Aside from a handful of articles which discredit the literary worth of the novel or criticize its patriarchal discourse, this most notorious New Woman novel has not received the consideration that it deserves with regard to its intertextuality with female-authored New Woman novels or to its cultural association with the discourses of social purity and late-nineteenth century feminism. We find “The Woman Who Did” as a catchy phrase or a footnote in practically every New Woman anthology or critical text, and, in some cases, we may be able to locate a paragraph or even a page of plot summary. However, our understanding of this novel—who “The Woman” is, what she did, how her story was told, and why we pay tribute to her—is much too rudimentary. The rediscovery of Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* seemed only to recover a title, although the intertextual and interdiscursive conversation surrounding the text suggests that we must read beyond

the catchphrase and beyond the textual codes of the "father" text. In doing so, we are able to trace contradictory sexual politics in all three texts and see how these reflect cultural and social codes. Thus, I argue that we can read Allen's ideological inconsistencies as well as anti-feminist elements of the intertexts as first-wave feminist failures.

Ruddick aptly positions *The Woman Who Did* "at the centre of a discursive web whose filaments reach deep into late Victorian culture," which means that it is constructed by multiple cultural discourses that transpire and retreat inside and outside of the textual perimeters (11). The discursive heterogeneity of the text is reinforced by various narrative techniques and thematic elements which foster the conflation of Herminia's language with that of the narrator's, her individual struggles with those of her sex, and her suicide with the regeneration of humanity, and the array of competing ideologies that inscribe Allen's heroine also inscribe Cross's and Cleeve's New Woman heroines. Cross and Cleeve absorb and attempt to rework these mergers between patriarchal authority and female agency, the heroine and her suffering sisters, and personal sacrifice and greater human good in their texts, but to some extent, these women writers present similar conclusions and employ the same formal operations as Allen. The New Woman novel, as a vehicle for challenging the basic logic of Victorian womanhood, presents not only the struggles of the heroine but also the complexities of representing such struggles. The New Woman novel gained popularity and appealed to readers due to its generic New Woman characters and plots, but it also sought to define narrative strategies capable of depicting new female identity as both autonomous and universally achievable. My examination of the intertextual exchange and interplay of these three texts positions the larger framework of social-purity feminism at the very center of this

process of literary representation. The textual commonalities and variances of male and female writers serve as a way to explore feminism at the turn of the century. These texts, culturally situated in the social-purity movement, reflect how feminist aims transcribed by traditional patriarchal ideologies exposed the myth of the angel, and in doing so, they called for a transformative feminism sundered from her shadow—for feminist goals free from the limitations of feminine purity.

Thematically and discursively, the intertextual interrelationship of these three novels presents a site for us to explore each text's potential to absorb, maintain, question, and transform cultural values. Whether we view these texts as "feminist" or "anti-feminist" by current standards, these novels, as contributions to the debate on The Woman Question, play a significant role in the development of feminist thought. In the very act of challenging the status quo, in trying to rethink and reform traditional standards of feminine purity, these texts regress to patriarchal stereotypes. Thus, they point to a transitional moment in feminist history, to the very impasse of developing feminist consciousness and redefining women's sexuality. Male and female writers depicted new women with new freedoms and new narratives; they challenged longstanding truths of what constituted "proper" feminine action and practice. Therefore, in many ways, they exposed that conventional knowledge regarding women's position was socially constructed by patriarchal structures.

Judith R. Walkowitz argues that "feminists were limited by their own class bias and by their continued adherence to a 'separate sphere' ideology that stressed women's purity, moral supremacy, and domestic virtues. Moreover, they lacked the cultural and political power to reshape the world according to their own image" ("Male Vice" 89).

The Woman Who… novels employ different scenarios in which their New Woman heroines attempt to alter the relations between the sexes— "to reshape the world" in the Angel's image—and through these fictional actualizations of feminist missions, each narrative confronts the limits of patriarchal discourse to inscribe a new womanhood and imagine feminist potential. More significantly, through intertextuality, the cross-fertilization of social-purity ideology and discourse, and the narratorial allusions to feminist campaigns and debates, these novels join forces in order to reproduce and challenge feminist strategies at the turn of the nineteenth century.

By employing and critiquing Victorian constructions of the virtuous, pure woman and by appropriating the discourse of the social-purity movement into their fictions of feminism, these three texts reveal that the demands of ideal, feminine purity are practically and theoretically incompatible with the demands of individual liberty. Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois point out that today "there seems to be a revival of social purity politics within feminism," but, because we "have possibilities for sexual subjectivity and self-creation today that did not exist in the past," current social-purity feminist movements seek to undermine rather than uphold sexual norms that oppress women (50). Gordon and DuBois also argue that today we have something else that we did not have before—"a history of 150 years of feminist theory and praxis in the area of sexuality" (51). By reading these texts as sites of competing voices—as mergers and denunciations of social-purity ideologies and Victorian purity doctrines—we can reconceptualize the regressive and progressive elements of these texts as indicators of the feminist dilemma that shaped late-nineteenth century gender politics.

The prominent historical studies of first-wave feminism and social-purity ideology acknowledge the ambivalent nature of first-wave feminism. Leslie Hall, Judith Walkowitz, Shelia Jeffreys, Lucy Bland, and Margaret Jackson have collectively shaped our current nuanced understanding of nineteenth century feminism as a movement that was both productive and self-defeating. Some scholars, like Hall, tend to privilege the latter description: "In making it clear that sex and gender relations were a problematic area, by providing individual evidence, by destabilising accepted categories, feminism and social purity had created a context within which existing sexual conventions could be interrogated, laying foundations upon which a science of sex might be erected" (50). Others, like Walkowitz, are more empathetic to how the anti-vice and moral reform campaigns undermined libertarian feminist goals of protecting and empowering women ("Male Vice" 80). Because I wanted to determine how and to what extent *The Woman Who* series engages with first-wave feminist theory and practice and how it evaluates the feminist potential of social-purity sexual politics, I approached each chapter without a predetermined position. I wanted to move fluidly between these two positions and between the three novels in order to allow my intertextual and interdiscursive analysis to guide my conclusions. Thus, each chapter recognizes the New Woman's feminist potential—how she challenges the traditional constructs of ideal femininity and female sexuality or deconstructs patriarchal myths—and each chapter also traces how the New Woman reconstructs the very oppressive structures that she hopes to dismantle—how she cannot rethink her individuality or her sexuality outside of the dominant views. This, I believe, is what Annette Kolodny refers to as our purpose as feminist critics—to take up "playful pluralism"—a task that is responsive to many critical and theoretical

possibilities, “but captive of none” (1397). Through a “plurality of methods,” we are able to avoid the oversimplification of any text—“especially those particularly offensive to us” (1397). The goal, she claims, is to generate “an ongoing dialogue of competing potential possibilities” among feminists (1397), and in the case of *The Woman Who Did*, the very act of challenging its classification as an anti-feminist novel and by positioning it among the direct responses of women writers enables me to explore its feminist potential.

Although this study examines both male-authored and female-authored texts, I do not intend to privilege the male literary tradition or to suggest that gender in texts is transparent or insignificant. Furthermore, I do not want to discredit the foundational contributions of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and thus my aim is not to level the playing field between male and female artists. I understand that that the woman writer’s struggle is marked with the “phenomena of ‘inferiorization’”—that her artistic efforts at self-definition are differentiated from the efforts of male writers (50). Indeed, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, “the literature produced by women confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives” (64). Studies like those of Gilbert and Gubar, which highlight how women writers manipulate and escape the influence of male authors (and of patriarchy), have made significant contributions to the recovery of women’s writing and to feminism; however, such studies as Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland suggest, “have depended upon sustaining a clear opposition between the insights available to men’s and women’s literature” (12). In gynocritical inquiries, there is no space for us to acknowledge or examine the feminist

value of male writers who criticize patriarchal traditions in some way or who attempt to write a new story for women.

The Woman Who Did, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* address women's issues, investigate women's rights for independence, and promote social movements to change cultural practices, but by depicting a strict pattern of purity as a means of reform, they catalyze a demand for a complete oppositional ideology—a new way for women to think about themselves, a feminist consciousness severed from the shadow of the angel. Throughout this project, I use "the angel" rather than "The Angel in the House" or "The Angel" to distinguish between the mythical feminine construct that was housed in the pages of Victorian literature (The Angel in the House) and the revised feminine construct that began to take shape in the late-nineteenth century (the angel). By 1895, first-wave feminism and New Woman writers significantly challenged the Victorian ideal of womanhood and had done much to rethink and revise the separate-sphere ideology which had confined woman to the private sphere and solely defined her 'nature' in connection to her domestic duties. I explore each of these processes in the following chapters; however, here I provide a brief sketch in order to develop my definition. Social-purity missions brought women into the public sphere where they became moral agents of change and active political voices, and, therefore, they traversed the physical and ideological boundaries that shaped the Victorian construct of femininity. The feminist attack on marriage and the patriarchal customs that oppressed women promoted liberal ideals of equality and individual rights, and these feminist initiatives that encouraged choice among women further illustrated that 'ideal' feminine behavior was no longer regulated by the passiveness, compliance, and self-sacrifice of the

good Victorian wife. Finally, through feminist campaigns to overturn the Contagious Diseases Acts, women cultivated a new discourse of sexuality; they fought for the bodily rights of prostitutes as well as for themselves, and they rallied against the double moral standard and the way it sexually oppressed women.

All of these efforts to empower, protect, and liberate women demonstrate that the construct of ideal womanhood had undergone extensive revisions—that women were beginning to rethink the conventions that had restricted their actions and their ideas. To some extent, these initiatives of feminist 'angels' revised and transformed "womanhood" in emancipatory ways and allowed women to explore potential avenues of self-fulfillment and notions of self-worth far from The Angel's House. Yet even though women experienced newfound public and political mobility and seemed to be moving forward, first-wave feminists were beholden to their reinvented construct of collective womanhood, but this construct was much less a reinvention than it was a refashioning: it was the angel who had escaped The Angel's House but not The Angel's Wings[14]. In Woolf's "Professions for Women," which I describe at the beginning of this chapter, she provides this description of "the Angel in the House" for "a younger and happier generation" who "may not have heard of her":

[14] In anti-feminist articles that that saturated the press at the turn of the century, critics often recognized that women were no longer bound by the traditional womanly ideals of The Angel, and in response to what Janet Hogarth referred to as the "sex mania in art and literature," these traditionalists urged for the revival of The Angel's presence and prevailing influence (592). For example, in "Literary Degenerates" in 1895, Hogarth writes, "May the angel soon find her wings again, or may she, at least keep her diabolical manifestations out of print" (592). This example, which depicts the public's sentiment and nostalgia for The Angel of the past, inspires the Angel/angel distinction in this study. At the end of the nineteenth century, first-wave feminism and New Woman fiction had reshaped womanly standards and practices, yielding a new image of the angel, but the angel had certainly not escaped the societal and cultural forces which beckoned her to "find her wings again" rather than try to escape their shadow.

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. (58-59)

The model of womanhood that emerges in the late nineteenth century certainly challenges these Angelic parameters, yet Woolf reminds her readers that there is one more all-encompassing, distinguishing feature of this "phantom": "Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace" (59). Not all first-wave feminists were official members of social-purity organizations or participants in the philanthropic missions to purify society, but first-wave feminism, as illustrated by its initiatives and campaigns, depicted in multiple addresses and articles, and explored in the fictional 'feminisms' of the New Woman, was a movement committed to social-purity ideals—to the standards of moral and sexual purity that had inscribed The Angel and continued to restrict the feminist potential of the angel.

As Mary Douglas argues, the search for purity is paradoxical as "purity is the enemy of change"; it only leads to contradiction (162). In the same sense, as these New Woman intertexts explore the limitations imposed by purity politics, they conclude by stifling potential radical messages. However, before Herminia Barton commits suicide or Opalia D'Arcy gives in to Alan's carnal desires or Eurydice Williamson returns to her unfulfilling marriage, each text questions the ideological, discursive, and practical implications of purity. Each heroine poses thought-provoking questions about the power of her purity and about the potential of purity politics to provide agency or facilitate change. These New Woman novels challenge the patriarchal concept of marriage and

traditional romantic logic through representations of unconventional femininity marked by female desire. The heroines' desires—which shape much of their narratives—interrogate the potential of feminine purity, and even if each text concludes by endorsing the power of purity, these unsettling issues open up a larger conversation about the validity of feminist ideologies rooted in existing sexual stereotypes.

Another theoretical concept that intersects this entire study is protofeminism or feminist potential, as I refer to it. The majority of scholars who pay any attention to *The Woman Who Did* reveal that it is precisely one of those "offensive" texts which has been simplified into a novel marked by Allen's patriarchal discourse, misogyny, and overwhelming support for the double moral standard. In order to challenge this perception, I would like to offer another reading which highlights the protofeminism or the feminist potential of *The Woman Who Did.* My usage of the term protofeminism refers to a tradition which anticipates and lays the groundwork for feminism by stimulating conversation and eliciting responses. Together, *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't, and The Woman Who Wouldn't* provide an intricate cultural framework for understanding the problems posed by essentialist theories of first wave feminism.

Barbara Arnett Melchiori, one of few scholars who validates Allen's effort to emancipate women in *The Women Who Did,* suggests that Allen, like his heroine Herminia, writes "the despairing heart-cry of a soul in revolt" (106). Melchiori asserts that although readers may be "left with a number of caustic doubts concerning the validity of this novel," especially as a result of Herminia's suicide, "the good faith with which it was written is beyond question" (129). In justifying Allen's "good faith,"

Melchiori seems to posit that Allen's intentions exceed the problematic patriarchal discourse of the text, and, as much as we claim to dissociate texts from their authors, our understanding of New Woman texts and their relationship to feminism is often shaped by our perceptions of the writer. Because many New Woman fiction writers were also simultaneously publishing articles and essays on The Woman Question and some were actively pursuing feminist political and economic reform, we often look to the author to gauge his or her implied intentions. In the many analyses of the implications of the novel, scholars such as Melchiori observe that professionally Allen was a scientist who admitted that his fiction writing was "hackwork" and that he "had no hesitation in using all the tricks of the trade" in order to produce popular best sellers (45). Even if he did exploit and manipulate the conventions of the New Woman genre for personal gain and public recognition, Melchiori suggests that Allen surpassed his primary purpose:

> What I find so interesting about his technique of gathering material is that he so often went beyond his original intention of providing entertainment and amusement and produced more serious novels than he had originally intended, thought-provoking novels which run the serious risk of upsetting the firmly held ideas and principles of the more conservative of his contemporary readers, something that a best-seller can in no wise be allowed to do. (45)

My argument regarding the protofeminism of *The Woman Who Did* will develop from the method of disconnecting the text from the author's intentions in order to achieve what Alan Sinfield refers to as the practice of reading dissidence. For Sinfield, "dissidence" implies "refusal of an aspect of the dominant, without prejudging an outcome" (820). The "dissident potential" of a text, according to Sinfield, "derives ultimately not from essential qualities in individuals (though they have qualities) but from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it

attempts to sustain itself" (814). In the process of opposing the traditional institution of marriage, Allen invokes the very structures that he sets out to disrupt, but does this mean that the text's potential for dissidence is contained? If we are to trace the feminist potential of *The Woman Who Did*, we must shift our examination from Allen to intertextual and interdiscursive dynamics that are woven into all three texts. Here we find "the awkward, unresolved issues, the ones in which the conditions of plausibility are in dispute" (Sinfield 818).

Sinfield asserts that "conflict and contradiction stem from the very strategies through which ideologies strive to contain the expectations that they need to generate" (814). This process is demonstrated by each text's attempts to make sense of or stabilize competing ideologies and by each text's concluding rearticulation of the dominant discourse. For example, in order to make *The Woman Who Did* plausible in England at the turn of the century is to rely on the notion that Herminia must sacrifice herself and her convictions, that she must accept her fate as a fallen woman. As Jeanette Shumaker points out, "the essential woman that she tries to become cannot flourish within a culture that opposes her"; therefore, through Herminia's self-destruction, "Allen's initially subversive" novel turns "conservative" at the end (41). Yet, as Sinfield posits, "Readers do not have to respect closures . . . We can insist on our sense that the middle of such a text arouses expectations that exceed the closure" (819). It is precisely this middle—the liminal space of the text where feminist and antifeminist ideologies compete—which exposes the unsettling questions that need plausible, feminist answers.

To examine the dissidence of the texts as protofeminism, each chapter will intertextually analyze *The Woman Who Did The Woman Who Wouldn't,* and *The Woman*

Who Didn't and their dialectical exchanges of first-wave feminist ideas and practices. I have organized this analysis by identifying three conversations in which first-wave feminism and these New Woman novels intersect, or, in other words, I take up three competing cultural narratives that the texts respond to on thematic, narrative, and discursive levels and trace how they use and/or attempt to dismantle these opposing voices. In Chapter 1, "Good Angels to the Rescue: The Fictionalization of the Social-Purity Mission," I examine the intertextual dialogue between *The Woman Who* series and social-purity feminism. I draw on the social-purity platforms, messages, and agendas of feminist leaders like Frances Power Cobbe, J. Ellice Hopkins, and Lucy Re-Bartlett in order to reveal how these texts fictionalized the missions of social purity by fashioning their New Women as social-purity feminists who seek to change the world around them by fulfilling their roles as moral guardians and by elevating their purity. Throughout this discussion, I argue that the textual encounters with social-purity theory and practice challenge the monolithic definition of the pure woman and undermine the transformative power of the angel in order to redirect feminist thought beyond the current purity politics. In Chapter 2, "'Exactly as She Wills': Marriage Reform and the New Woman's Search for Authentic Liberty," I turn my attention to how *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* simultaneously enlarged nineteenth-century feminist arguments about marriage reform and subverted the dominant feminist ideologies that fueled such arguments. I argue that these New Woman texts project new romantic and marital situations, and in doing so, they shape an intertextual critique of the patriarchal values that restricted feminist progress and thwarted the liberal goals that first-wave feminism sought to accomplish. By focusing on the issue of "active choice" with

regard to marriage, these texts reflect how the first-wave feminist endorsement of "free choice" was wrought with contradictions: women were "free to choose" only to the extent that their self-made choices respected conventional sexual and moral standards.

Chapter 3, "Individual Passions and Collective Virtues: First-Wave Feminist Sexual Politics and the Sexual Education of the New Woman," follows up what the previous chapters have all alluded to: how the New Woman's encounters with social-purity politics and with the issues of the marriage debate threatened to unveil the "instinctively shrouded" topics—the reticent sexual politics that emerged into the public conversation as a result of feminist campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts. I start by examining the public's anxiety about a society that was beginning to abandon the customs of decency and silence that had regulated the thoughts and behaviors of women and protected their moral and sexual purity, and this discussion foregrounds my subsequent analysis of Josephine Butler's efforts to spearhead a feminist campaign to overturn the Contagious Diseases Acts and dismantle the double sexual and moral standard. *The Woman Who* intertexts merge with the aftermath of these feminist campaigns by appropriating prostitution and slavery phraseology into their narratives, and in doing so, the texts echo the sexual ideology of first-wave feminism, especially in instances in which the texts elevate the "natural" maternal function of woman or extol her collective feminine identity as a means to foster personal empowerment and social change. However, *The Woman Who* series is also invested in the idea that each individual heroine must carve out her own pathway and seek personal fulfillment, and as each narrative explores this idea of self-definition in conjunction with alternative images of female sexuality and individualized approaches to sexual knowledge, the texts challenge

their commitment to first-wave feminist politics and values. Thus, as each text interrogates the social and cultural forces that regulate women's access to sexual knowledge and construct female sexual identity, they jointly produce an intertext wherein the "unpractical utopianism" of the New Woman heroine parallels the oppositional sexual politics of the first-wave feminism.

In an effort to assay how the late-Victorian woman's press evaluated the literary representation of women at the turn of the century, Molly Youngkin argues that feminist publications like *Shafts* and *The Woman's Herald* emphasized that successful feminist fiction featured heroines who "needed to assert agency in the same manner real-life women did: they needed to experience a transformation of *consciousness* to realize their condition, articulate their condition through *spoken word*, and use *concrete action* to change their condition" [emphasis in original] (7). Using Youngkin's framework as well as other feminist evaluative modes of 1890s literary criticism, I plan to trace how the conventions of the New Woman novel limited a text's potential to depict the heroine's agency and consciousness in a feminist fashion. The construction of the fictional New Woman was restricted by the standards of the genre; authors employed similar measures to depict this new heroine, but, in doing so, they often rendered unreal and unbelievable female characters. Thus, it was tricky to do both—to write the New Woman and depict real women. Yet, in my effort to find feminist potential in this discursive web of female characters who *did*, *didn't*, and *wouldn't*, I suggest that we can read their abundance of active roles and bold credos as attempts to combat constructions of passive and purposeless femininity. Even if this activity—as a form of resistance—is ultimately consumed by the confines of purity, the heroine as rationalist, warrior, martyr, savior,

teacher, rhetorician, and protester arouses "expectations that exceed the closure" (Sinfield 819).

If we read *The Woman Who Did* as an intertext too deeply immersed in (male and bourgeois) patriarchal structures, it is easy to label it anti-feminist. Indeed, the text is shaped by essentialism and eugenics, but many Victorian feminist platforms were also founded on such concepts—that women were the "naturally" superior sex, armed with piety and motherhood and capable of purifying an inferior and vulgar race of men. With the abundance of woman writers at the turn of the century, especially writers like George Egerton who was committed to "put[ting] her own sex" into her works, why waste our time with a "woman who did" what a man thought she should do (1)? Why is it important to recover Cleeve's "feeble" response or Cross's seemingly stereotypical heroine and situate these texts with Allen's and within a network of social purity, feminism, and sexual politics? In my attempt to open up other possible readings, I carry on Cleeve's contradictory (and intertextual) spirit that she offers in the Preface to the *Woman Who Wouldn't*:

> Some years ago, in a speech in the House of Commons, Mr. Labourchere exclaimed, "If any one contradicts me, I will contradict him again." And I must confess that I was possessed with a little of this spirit when I began this work, and so I fancy have been all those who have answered Mr. Grant Allen's admirable work, the "Woman Who Did." As someone has said, there is no reason that these answers should ever stop." (i)

As Cleeve commits to "add" her "quota to the many arguments his [Allen's] book has given rise to," I intend to do the same, but I hope to do so by uncovering another intertextual web to shape our understanding of these texts (iv). Feminism—at the turn of the century and today—is shaped by dialectics, by the processes in which we ask new

questions and examine texts in various contexts. Allen asked his readers: How can women claim independence and maintain purity? Cross and Cleeve absorbed the question and experimented with possible revisions, and in so doing they rendered unsatisfactory *feminine* answers and posed *feminist* questions about the nature of the relationship between purity, sexual desire, independence, and social conventions. During this process of textual and discursive exchange and appropriation, Allen, Cross, and Cleeve revised purity rhetoric and refigured purity plots in order to construct new heroines committed to old conventions. Individually, each text is marked with contradictions and double visions. Collectively, these texts are unable to figure a method to fully empower and liberate the New Woman heroine through her purity. They do, however, open up a dialogue about women's moral rights and sexual desires; they raise unsettling questions. These queries are stifled by narrative closures that establish traditional Victorian femininity. Yet, in this closure, *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and The *Woman Who Wouldn't* provide one vital conclusion: Such questions would not (and could not) be answered by the problem novel of the nineteenth century or by the pure angel who was housed in its pages.

CHAPTER 1 GOOD ANGELS TO THE RESCUE: THE FICTIONALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL-PUITY MISSION

The relationship between nineteenth-century feminism and social purity suggests that the ideology and practices of the women's movement at the turn of the century were far afield from the sexually radical politics of post-sexual-revolution feminism. Rather than severing all ties with Victorian respectability and traditional patriarchal standards, first-wave feminists endorsed sexual and moral purity—not sexual freedom—as a means for women to gain power. Consequently, foundational historical studies tend to depict the social-purity movement as antithetical to feminism because of its anti-sexual, repressive, and evangelical tendencies. However, in the last twenty years or so, the contributions of scholars like Lucy Bland, Shelia Jeffreys, Judith Walkowitz, and Lesley Hall have negated this antagonistic view in favor of a more complex understanding of how first-wave feminism utilized social-purity discourse and traditions in productive and protofeminist ways. Hall points out that "there is often assumed to have been a vast dichotomy in the late nineteenth century between an emergent scientific discourse of 'sexology' on the one hand, and feminism and the related social purity movement on the other"; however, both movements "were fighting, on somewhat different fronts, a common enemy that privileged the (white, upper-/middle-class heterosexual) male in both actual law and in social practice" (36, 37).

Like these scholars, I fully acknowledge, as Hall describes, "the extremely ambivalent nature of social purity in practice, with its tension between policing and punishment on the one hand, and rescue and support on the other," as well as the apparent limitations of a women's rights movement founded in traditional Victorian sexual politics

(36). Therefore, it is necessary to extend the work of these scholars to consider further the dynamic role that social-purity discourse played in advancements of women's rights and in the development of feminist though, by identifying how New Woman Novels integrate social-purity rhetoric and how they reinforce but also undermine social-purity philosophy. In this chapter, I present an intertextual analysis of the correlation between *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, and *The Woman Who Didn't* and social-purity theory and practice to show that these texts produce new directions for feminist thought. Through various fictionalizations of the social-purity mission, *The Woman Who* intertexts confront the ideological and practical constraints of ideal femininity. They challenge the monolithic definition of the pure woman, undermine the transformative power of the angel, and discredit the efficaciousness of her mission, and as a result, these texts call for a feminist future unfettered from the "feminine" past of The Angel.

The aforementioned scholars have paid considerable attention to the correlation between social purity and feminism. However, most of their studies draw on non-fictional texts, historical phenomena, and biographical accounts related to the women's movement and the development of sexology. Hall argues that "in making it clear that sex and gender relations were a problematic area, by providing individual evidence, by destabilizing accepted categories, feminism and social purity had created a context within which existing sexual conventions could be interrogated, laying foundations upon which a science of sex might be erected" (50). As scholars have demonstrated thus far, we find evidence of this foundational context in social-purity publications, first-wave feminist campaigns and correspondence, and political occurrences; however, less attention has

been paid to the interdiscursive and intertextual relationship of New Woman fiction, first-wave feminism, and social purity. Thus, because *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* were immensely popular publications that produced and responded to this context of transitional sexual politics, this chapter looks to further explore the nature of this foundational moment through the cultural analysis of these texts and their relationship to various social-purity ideologies and campaigns.

In Frances Power Cobbe's 1881 preface to *The Duties of Women*, a series of lectures she previously delivered to women in London and at Clifton in 1880, she begins by warning her readers that even though "the woman's movement" has facilitated many advancements for women, women must prepare themselves to face the "dangers" that lie ahead (7). She reminds women that they are "bound" to "lift" themselves up by "the ideal of womanly virtue" and by their commitment to morality (8). In order for the woman's movement to be powerful and effective, Cobbe asserts that it must remain on an honorable path:

> What we wish to accomplish, and what it is our imperative duty to strive to accomplish with all our might is to direct aright the great progress in question, to set up sign-posts of warning against those wrong turnings in the road which can only lead to destruction, and to point all eyes which we are permitted to direct up to the straight, clear way before us,—the one only safe, true way of progress,—the way of DUTY. (8)

Cobbe urges women not to be led astray by the "adoption of looser and more 'Bohemian' manners" or by "that fatal laxity of judgment regarding grave moral transgressions" (8). She classifies such "faults and mistakes" as "deadly perils to the whole movement for the advancement of women" and implores "every woman who sympathizes with the movement" to commit herself to one lofty mission: "to make society *more* pure, *more*

free from vice, either masculine or feminine, than it has ever been before, not to allow its law to become one shadow of a shade less rigid" (8, 9).

Like many New Woman novels, *The Woman Who* series was intensely embroiled in The Woman Question on many fronts; however, by individually incorporating social-purity discourse and agendas into their narratives, these texts jointly produce an intertextual and interdiscursive conversation wherein traditional feminist politics enter uncharted sexual territories. *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* reiterate, reappropriate, and challenge social-purity ideals. In some ways and to different extents, these texts reproduce Cobbe's feminist vision of purity, progress, and the angelic feminine construct, yet, through their critique of social-purity politics, these texts also inscribe the very "deadly" sexual and moral "perils" that first-wave feminists sought to overcome (Cobbe *Duties* 8). In doing so, *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* function less as "sign-posts of warning" against destructive "wrong turnings in the road" and more as indicators that the road to women's liberty must eventually diverge from the "straight" and "clear" path of the dutiful Angel (Cobbe *Duties* 8).

Although first-wave feminism encompassed a number of tactics and approaches, Cobbe's general philosophy—one of social-purity feminism which emphasized women's responsibility to serve as moral agents of change—dominated feminist ethics at the turn of the century[15]. As Lucy Bland explains, the feminist social-purity campaigns of the 1880s and 1890s focused the majority of their efforts on "the 'purification' and

[15] See Anne Mellor's *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (2002) for a discussion of how this social purity approach emerged in late-eighteenth century and early-nineteenth century feminism.

'civilization' of both public and private worlds" (*Banishing* 97). First-wave feminists sought to curb immoral behavior through philanthropy and legislation because as Bland describes, "immoral behavior was viewed with as much suspicion as overtly political beliefs and activities" (*Banishing* 97). Thus, instead of abandoning the spirit of "Victorian moral and social reform," many feminists "combined a liberal stress on their right to freedom of the streets, with a religious emphasis on the moral superiority of the 'pure' woman" in hopes of transforming "the public world for the benefit of all" (Bland *Banishin*g 97, 123, 122). By tackling the issues of prostitution, sexual abuse, and the sexual double standard, social-purity organizations like The Social Purity Alliance, The Moral Reform Unit, The National Vigilance Association, and The Ladies National Association afforded women a public voice in a male-dominated society and proved to be effective in generating the legal reform of women's civil rights.

The duty of social-purity feminists as captured by Cobbe's phrase—"to make society *more* pure, *more* free from vice, either masculine or feminine" (*Duties* 9)—was predicated on the belief that women were morally superior to men and therefore "naturally" equipped to purify public life for the benefit of all individuals. As Bland explains, "the current and dominant definitions of femininity, sexuality, and morality provided not simply 'raw material' for the new feminist ideas, but they of course also represented many of the assumptions about women which feminists were reacting *against"* (*Banishing* 48). Rather than completely revolutionizing traditional ideas of feminine nature—the very ideas that justified separate-sphere ideology—first-wave feminists drew on long-standing patriarchal beliefs in order to, as Bland describes, construct a "feminist ethics which, in explaining the basis of existing immoral practices,

pointed the way to greater morality in the future" (*Banishing* 48). This new feminist philosophy was founded on the nineteenth-century ethos of female sexual purity—that women were asexual and passionless. Furthermore, in an effort to rid society of the sexual double standard which oppressed women, a majority of feminists not only accepted this dominant feminine construct but also embraced it as a means to combat what they saw as destructive male sexuality.

In Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, the narrator draws on social-purity discourse in order to portray Herminia Barton as an ideal woman who is capable of purifying the world around her. She is a "real woman" in both "face and form,--physical, intellectual, emotional, moral" (Allen 11, 10). During his visits with Herminia at Mrs. Dewsbury's, Alan discovers that he "had never before seen anybody who appeared at all points so nearly to approach his ideal of womanhood. She was at once so high in type, so serene, so tranquil, and yet so purely womanly" (23). In the early stages of their courtship, the narrator emphasizes Herminia's purity—the way in which she fulfills the traditional feminine construct in all possible ways, and the narrator also points out that Alan is a "true man"—ultimately in need of a "good angel" to rescue him from his natural base desires (11). Being "over thirty and still unmarried," Alan is described as being "a trifle fastidious"—still "waiting to find some woman who suited him" (31). Thus, Alan is at a point in his life when "he should be settled" in order to avoid "the lowest depth of emotional disgrace" (32)[16]. Herminia functions as the good woman who will "preserve him" (32). The narrator explains, "it was her task in life, though she knew

[16] See John Tosh's *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (2007) in which he argues that the redemptive qualities of the home, matrimony, and fatherhood constructed the masculine ideal of the Victorian period.

it not, to save Alan Merrick's soul. And nobly she saved it" (32). Here, the text highlights Herminia's inborn sense of duty—her propensity to serve as man's moral guardian and spiritual savior because she harnesses the power of ideal womanhood.

Thus, Alan falls in love with Herminia, and he also "admire[s] and respect[s] her" (Allen 32). More importantly, the narrator comments that Alan fully understands Herminia's function in his life: "She had power in her purity to raise his nature for a time to something approaching her own high level. True woman has the real Midas gift: all that she touches turns to purest gold" (32-33). The premise that the narrator presents here—that women's power for reform lies in their purity and true womanliness—echoes the fundamental philosophy of social-purity feminist doctrines. The entirety of *The Duties of Women* focuses on "the special ways in which women may use their power to purify and amend society," and at the heart of Cobbe's message is the premise that women can accomplish this goal in the very act of elevating their womanly natures: "If a woman herself be pure and noble-hearted, she will come into every circle as a person does into a heated room who carries with him the freshness of the woods where he has been walking—'the smell of the field which the Lord hath loved'" (166). Cobbe insists that "the power of any individual to do good"—to facilitate any change in "the family, the home, in society, and in all public work…must depend almost measure for measure on the extent of that individual's power for sympathy,--the wideness and warmth of his heart" (*Duties* 167). She asserts that "it is here, in the faculty of noble, disinterested, unselfish love that lies the true gift and power of our womanhood" (*Duties* 168). Cobbe continues, it is this gift—this special power that women possess—"which makes us, not the *equals to* men (I never care to claim such equality), but their e*quivalents*, more than

equivalents in the moral sense" (*Duties* 168). Once again, Cobbe emphasizes the heightened moral status of women and outlines the systemization of first-wave feminist thought: women are "*more than*" man's counterparts—that is, they occupy a superior position to men [emphasis added] (*Duties* 168).[17] Consequently, *The Woman Who Did* envisages this axiom of first-wave feminist philosophy through its focus on Herminia's moral mission. Herminia seeks to raise Alan to "moral heights he had hardly yet dreamt of," and the narrator is careful to discern that such moral heights were "the best of which he was capable" (Allen 33). Alan cannot occupy the same moral ground as Herminia because a woman's morality naturally supersedes that of man—she possesses a power exclusive to womanhood[18].

Herminia's role as moral guardian positions her as a mouthpiece for social-purity agendas like those expressed by Cobbe, and, in this way, she embodies the characteristics of the traditional heroine. Additionally, Herminia's propensity for self-sacrifice and martyrdom further reflects the constructs of Victorian femininity that social-purity feminists utilized to their advantage in an effort to eradicate the double standard. Cobbe's social-purity platform emphasizes that women are able to "conquer"—to affect the world around them—by striving for "the divine breath of higher life" and by harnessing the "self-sacrificing love" that is inherent to women (*Duties* 168). This drive to conquer—to

[17]Cobbe's assertion echoes that of Miss Jenkyns (Deborah) in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851). Mary explains, "Miss Jenkyns ... altogether had the appearance of a strong-minded woman; although she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! she knew they were superior" (12).

[18] Cobbe's rhetoric here is reminiscent of Florian's concluding speech in Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847). Florian envisions a future in which man will "gain" in "moral height" because of woman's guidance; however, he is careful to discern that man will maintain his physical strength and woman will maintain her moral influence (1213). Florian suggests that it is these "distinct" differences which will improve the relations between the sexes (1214). Similarly, Cobbe's approach is one that celebrates women's "special power" (or difference) as a means to facilitate change.

do good in the world—is evident in Herminia's willingness to save Alan from moral corruption, and it is also evident in her plan which envisions her self-sacrifice as the means to purify humanity. She explains to Alan: "it never occurred to me to think…my life could ever end in anything else but martyrdom . . . For whoever sees the truth, whoever strives earnestly with all his soul to be good, must be raised many planes above the common mass of men around him; he must be a moral pioneer, and the moral pioneer is always a martyr" (Allen 44). Just as Cobbe asserts that women are beacons of "the Godlike thing in human nature" (*Duties* 168), Herminia, too, believes that "good life can but end in a Calvary" (Allen 45).

Herminia's theories are closely aligned with social-purity ideology, and she utilizes the social-purity discourse of feminine virtue, Godliness, and privileged female morality in order to justify her vision. As Jeanette Shumaker points out, *The Woman Who Did* "confirms the Victorian stereotype of good women as sacrificial moral leaders who idolize the men they love" (45). However, as Shumaker also mentions, Herminia's ideal femininity is at odds with her radical views of marriage and purity, and therefore "the novel is both radical and conventional in its treatment of fallen women" (45). Insomuch as Herminia exhibits the characteristics of conventional womanliness in her roles as martyr and moral guardian—crucial roles which empowered social-purity feminists and cultivated first-wave feminist politics—she diverges from the mainstream social-purity platform in her formulation and execution of an "irregular compact" of free union, economic independence, and equal-partnership parenting (Allen 69), and she is certainly willing to accept the repercussions that this improper arrangement will bring. Herminia reasons, "Other women have fallen, as men choose to put it in their odious dialect; no

other has voluntarily risen as I propose to do" (Allen 48). Here, Herminia reconstructs the fallen woman and inscribes her with a positive, uplifting potential. Instead of associating the fallen woman with her descent into sexual promiscuity and immorality—what Herminia identifies as "odious" patriarchal constructs—she contends that her "fall" is actually an ascension—an act of progress. For Herminia, the rejection of conventional sexual practices does not qualify her as a sexually corrupt or fallen woman as society would traditionally label her because she is not a victim of sexual temptation. Instead, she is an active participant in a plan of her choosing, a plan that she believes will incite the dismantling of the "vile foundations" of patriarchy (48). Herminia explains to Alan, "Brave women before me have tried for awhile to act on their own responsibility, for the good of their sex; but never of their own free will from the very beginning" (46). She reasons that her calculated defiance of sexual marital conventions—her willingness to "fall"—will serve the ultimate blow against the institution of marriage. Herminia boldly relinquishes her social honor in the name of freedom and personal principle. Ambiguously, she is both fallen woman and moral pioneer. Or, in her estimation, she reasons that it is precisely her deliberate fall which will empower her and other women to reach new moral heights. She proclaims to Alan, "Here, of my own free will, I take my stand for the right, and refuse your sanctions!" (48).

Thus, shortly after Alan and Herminia enter into their "irregular contract," Alan ventures to Herminia's cottage on Bower Lane, and Herminia, "dressed from head to foot in a simple white gown, as pure and sweet as the soul it covered," presents herself to him:

> Her cheek was aglow with virginal shrinking as she opened the door, and welcomed Alan in. But she held out her hand just as frankly as ever to the man of her free choice as he advanced to greet her. Alan caught her in his

> arms and kissed her forehead tenderly. And thus was Herminia Barton's espousal consummated. (Allen 77)

Once again, Herminia represents the ideal woman—pure, passive, and virginal, but this ideal construct of womanliness directly opposes what is about to ensue—the relinquishment of her purity to a man to whom she is not legally married. Furthermore, her virginal passivity is overshadowed by her active role in initiating their sexual encounter: she is dressed in a white gown when he arrives, and she "frankly" gives her hand to him—to the man that she has actively chosen to be her "friend" not her husband. Finally, this scene presents the trappings of the traditional wedding night, and the narrator even refers to their union as an "espousal," yet the entirety of Herminia's life is motivated by her duty to dismantle the "vile" institution of marriage, which she likens to slavery and prostitution[19].

In constructing a self-proclaimed feminist heroine who intentionally chooses to fall, *The Woman Who Did*—regardless of its manifestation of social-purity ideals—ultimately deviates from the social-purity platform through Herminia's display of radical purity politics. The novel maintains that Herminia is pure, godly, and good even after she and Alan consummate their relationship. In the six months following the beginning of their free union, Herminia continues to teach at Carlyle Place Girls' School and keeps her own cottage on Bower Lane. The narrator describes these months as "the happiest time" of Herminia's life (Allen 78). She enjoys Alan's "sweet converse and companionship" when he drops by to visit, and because Herminia is "too free from any taint of sin or shame herself ever to suspect that others could misinterpret her actions, Herminia [is] hardly aware" of how the neighbors gossip about her "relations with the tall gentleman"

[19] See the final chapter for a discussion of the marriage/prostitution analogy.

who frequents her home (78). And although Herminia openly defies traditional sexual standards, the narrator contends that it is the gossiping neighbors—not Herminia—who are misguided in their judgment: "Poor purblind Bower Lane!" A life-time would have failed it to discern for itself how infinitely higher than its slavish "respectability" was Herminia's freedom" (79). Additionally, the narrator continues to assert Herminia's morality in light of the community's concerns: "To the pure all things are pure; and Herminia was dowered with that perfect purity" (79). It is here in these early stages of their relationship that the text continues to redefine purity through Herminia's example. Herminia's "perfect purity"—her spotless womanhood—thrives regardless of her lifestyle—a lifestyle that, according to nineteenth-century decorum would typically warrant shame and scorn for an unmarried woman. Thus, through the use of the word "dowered," the text redefines purity as an essence—as a natural gift that Herminia possesses through personal principle and mental determination[20]. Through Herminia, *The Woman Who Did* suggests that purity is a state of mind maintained through the preservation of a woman's pious and dutiful resolve—that a woman's nature can remain idyllic even when society deems her actions to be adulterated.

The Woman Who Did continues to assert that society is unable to comprehend Herminia's infinitely higher, perfectly pure nature—that Herminia is surrounded by "low minds" who are deluded by their "woman-degrading and prostituting morality" (Allen 88). The narrator is extremely critical of Herminia's community—a society engrained

[20] "Dowered" also invokes a reference to the word dowry. In traditional marriages, the term dowry usually refers to the material goods, property, or money that the wife contributes to the marriage. Thus, the word is often associated with the very mercenary-like marriage customs that Herminia wants to avoid. In the final chapter, I discuss how *The Woman Who Did* employs slavery and prostitution phraseology to criticize the transactional practices of marriage; however, it is worth noting here that the union of Herminia and Alan is not predicated on financial gain or tangible things.

with the ideology that "what is usual is right; while any conscious striving to be better and nobler than the mass around one is regarded at once as either insane or criminal" (88). What the "mass" views as Herminia's wrongdoings—her sexual deviance and disregard for social norms—is, according to the novel, a legitimate attempt to be "better and nobler" (88). Herminia seeks to uplift women from oppression by transforming the image of purity. For Herminia, "unchastity…is a union without love," and just because her union with Alan is not sanctioned by lawful marriage, it does not mean that she is impure or unchaste (98). Shumaker argues that Herminia eludes the miserable fate and disapproval that usually accompanies the fallen-woman heroine of the early nineteenth century: "No longer must the fallen woman reform to be idealized. Because chastity has a new meaning, her so-called fall is an illusion" (46). However, just as Herminia's neighbors were unable to conceive her fall as ascension, nineteenth-century readers of the novel also failed to accept Herminia's reinvented feminine ideals as valid. Anti-feminists and feminists alike unfalteringly clung to old meanings. They embraced traditional definitions of feminine purity and chastity as the standard for all women. By combining the standards of conventional feminine purity and morality that pervaded the construct of The Angel in the Victorian Period with the liberal feminist goals of freedom and equality for women, social-purity feminists validated their mission to transform society. Thus, because Herminia ultimately rejected these feminine sexual mores that were central to the angelic first-wave feminist platform, her commitment to social-purity ideals was an illusion; her fall, regardless of how she justified it, was real, and it was just that: a fall.

Thus far, I have illustrated how Herminia's seemingly individualized feminist philosophy is not intrinsic or newfangled. It is heavily comprised of social-purity feminist

principles and discourse. Yet what makes Herminia's theories neoteric and what dismantles her social-purity program is her radical redefinition of purity. Therefore, in configuring a heroine who is both Angel/angel—"perfectly pure," exceedingly moral, and self-sacrificing—and fallen—sexual and socially deviant—*The Woman Who Did* confounds Victorian types of femininity. Herminia is a heroine who eludes classification in the pure/fallen dichotomy that structured nineteenth-century ideology. Conceptually speaking, how can a woman be both "fallen" (impure) and angelic (pure, inherently good and respectable)? For late-nineteenth-century readers, this image of femininity was disconcerting and unconceivable, perhaps even profane.[21] Yet Herminia flaunts this unthinkable construction of womanhood as proof of her "moral purity and moral earnestness," as an innovative weapon which will generate change (Allen 80). Thus, the novel creates a vision of feminist potential empowered by the reconstruction of femininity—by the dismantling of the rigid sexual standards that oppress women. *The Woman Who Did* invents a heroine who exposes the paradoxical nature of the traditional feminine ideal, and in doing so, it suggests that the transformative power of the woman's movement may lie beyond traditional notions of purity. In other words, the novel imagines feminist potential through the revision and eventual reinvention of the angel.

The Woman Who Wouldn't and *The Woman Who Didn't* further expose the limitations of feminist potential inscribed by traditional notions of femininity by

[21] In presenting this disconcerting representation of purity, *The Woman Who Did* enhances the compassionate portrayal of the fallen woman that we see in novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) or Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). These texts also erase the boundaries between sexual purity and spiritual purity but do so by deemphasizing the heroine's role in her fall and by highlighting her victimhood. *The Woman Who Did*, however, thematically reframes the purity conversation through its emphasis on Herminia's active role in calculating and controlling her fall. See Susan Bernstein's "Confessing and Editing: The Politics of Purity in Hardy's Tess," from *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* (1993) for further discussion.

engaging with social-purity politics and by highlighting the conceptual battle between feminine purity and masculine passion. By formulating oppositional pairings related to purity/passion—virtue/vice, Divine/human, spiritual/physical—these texts draw on social-purity rhetoric and, much like *The Woman Who Did*, they contribute to an intertextual conversation which destabilizes the binary logic that structured Victorian notions of gender. Although first wave feminists refashioned the Victorian ideal as a source of power and independence for women and reinscribed The Angelic so that it was no longer in the service of Man, first-wave feminist ethics were still heavily influenced by traditional gender politics and by the dominant ideological dualities that sanctioned a woman's cultural and societal position. Thus, by challenging these binary structures, these texts also display how the angel—even the reclaimed and repurposed image of her—undermines feminist potential and inhibits feminist progress.

In *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, Opalia Woodgate's experiment of marital celibacy results from her desire to facilitate women's liberty through "a crusade against passion" (Cleeve 87). In both the lives of her friends and in the lives of poor "fallen" women, Opalia constantly confronts the "the horrible unpoetic results of satiated passion," and thus she contends that the only way to uplift women from their subjugated position is to "resist certain encroachments which had been instituted by men" (35). Specifically, Opalia challenges the womanly ideal perpetuated by a patriarchal society and highlights how this male-authored construct of femininity is marked with inconsistencies and contradictions. Opalia points out that she, like other women, has invested everything to conform to the feminine ideal—to remain pure in body and in mind. She thinks, "What was the good of educating a girl to purity and modesty, if in one night that education was

negatived?" (11). Consequently, she cannot comprehend how to maintain her physical and spiritual purity in a marriage "bound by the horrible bestial ties that degraded other women" (162).

Whereas Herminia's definition of ideal femininity situates purity as an essence—as an inherent mental and emotional state—Opalia's view of ideal womanhood is informed by the traditional definition of purity as the preservation of both spiritual and physical integrity. According to societal and cultural standards of femininity, women were to remain pure in both body and mind prior to marriage, and after marriage, they were expected to sexually submit to their husbands yet still preserve the semblance of physical purity. Women who consummated their marriages were considered to be good women and ideal wives because they were passionate about their domestic duties and apathetic toward sexual intercourse and physical gratification. It was only through this ambiguous notion of marital purity and renunciation of sexual desire that married women could theoretically continue to meet the demands of ideal femininity. Yet Opalia is unconventional in believing that there are no exceptions to authentic purity; not even legal marriage justifies a woman's fall. Opalia exposes how the construct of ideal femininity is incompatible with marriage because the sexual requirement of marriage defiles a woman's bodily purity. Both Herminia and Opalia seek to illustrate the hypocrisy of the pure/fallen dichotomy, but rather than redefining its limits, Opalia actualizes its constructs and extends its parameters into the territory of marriage.

For Opalia, marriage "[mars] perfect love" because "it put[s] an end to all the modest maidenly ways" of woman (Cleeve 10, 11). For a woman, the conjugal requirement of marriage "means the woman giving up everything"—she must relinquish

the very purity that has predicated her existence as an ideal woman, and in doing so, she makes a "terrible sacrifice"—her very being (13, 15).[22] Thus, because Opalia feels that "Real love" and companionship can thrive without physical passion and because she is terrified of "the ordeal" that follows a marriage ceremony, Opalia declares, "What is the good of feeling as I do if I do not carry it out?" (8). Thus, when she falls in love with Alan D'Arcy and he proposes that they get married, Opalia is intent on carrying out her plan—on preserving her sexual purity and cultivating an unblemished union with her husband.

As Jeffreys explains, for some feminists, "lust meant the male desire for sexual intercourse, imposed on woman against her will, or with indifference as to her consent, with appalling consequences to women in diseases, unwanted pregnancy, and ill-health, and with little or no attention to tenderness, affection or what might give the woman pleasure" (*Spinster* 39-40). Therefore, in an effort to avoid such circumstances, many feminists promoted ideas of "psychic love"—the possibility of finding "individual spiritual satisfaction" if "they were able to rise above fleshly concerns" (Jeffreys *Spinster* 40). Although, as Jeffreys points out, the devaluation of sexual activity was a "mainstream" feminist tactic, women still needed to fulfill their roles as mothers, so marital sex could not be completely avoided (*Spinster* 40). However, in the late nineteenth century, many militant feminists promoted "the elimination of genital sexual activity between men and women as far as possible" in an effort to eradicate the

[22] Margaret Oliphant's "The Story of a Wedding Tour" (1894) explores how Janey quickly learns that Rosendale's idea of "love" in marriage does not coincide with her romantic expectations. Instead of finding companionship and love in her marriage, Janey learns of her husband's lust and cruelty. She experiences "a disenchantment and disappointment which was almost more than flesh and blood could bear" (Oliphant 407). This is precisely the type of "terrible sacrifice" that Opalia fears and therefore vows to abstain.

oppression of women that resulted from their sexual subjection (Jeffreys *Spinster* 35). Jeffreys explains that the "promotion of the ideas of continence and psychic love" were "representative of mainstream feminist opinion"; however, she points out that there were some variations regarding the proposed tactics and solutions (*Spinster* 40).

For feminists then, celibacy and/or the devaluation of sexual activity served as the means that women could use to transform the relations between the sexes—to reinvent love and marriage in a way that was fulfilling to both man and woman. However, such images of female celibacy, especially in New Woman fiction, were misunderstood and misrepresented by the traditionally minded public. For example, in "Celibacy and the Struggle to Get On," published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1894, Hugh E. M. Stutfield proclaims that the New Woman novelist is embracing celibacy in order to put "the end-of-the-century young man on his trial" by convincing female readers that "man is a vile, degraded being, diseased and enfeebled, as a rule, both in mind and body, and in every respect thoroughly objectionable" (777-778). The New Woman, who has rebelled "against her natural instincts" and refused to "to seek intercourse" with man, warns female readers that "no decent-minded girl ought to touch him with a barge pole" (777, 778). Stutfield continues, "from our clubs, from the moral gutters where we lie wallowing, we will stretch forth our hands to meet those of the lady novelist and her angel helpmates (789). In order to renounce the New Woman as the moral savior of man, Stutfield contends, "I do not believe that men of our day are any more misogynists than their forefathers" (781). He argues that men may be "less romantic" than they were in the past, but only because of the "gloom and uncertainty of the present business outlook" (781). To Stutfield, bachelorhood is not a mark of selfishness or viciousness as the New

Woman suggests; it is, at times, a “dire necessity” (781). Men find it difficult settle down in matrimony simply because “they cannot afford the luxury of a wife” (781). In a direct address to Sarah Grand, he asks, “Does she know nothing of the daily wear and tear, the mental strain and worry, of commercial and professional life?” (782).

It is Stutfield’s position then, that the New Woman’s justification for celibacy is unfounded because her depiction of man is uninformed. However, it is Stutfield who misinterprets the motives of the New Woman. As suffragette and spiritual feminist Lucy Re-Bartlett explains in *Sex and Sanctity* in 1912, “Feminine celibacy and its increase is a question which is engaging the attention of a considerable number of people today, yet amidst all that is written and spoken in regard to it, the deepest causes remain generally undefined” (304 Jeffreys *The Sexuality Debates)*. Re-Bartlett argues, “we hear a good deal about unequal population, and economical difficulties, but those deepest internal causes which are resident in the changing nature of woman herself, are either not set forth at all, or set forth falsely” (304). Stutfield’s views which inaccurately depict women’s propensity for celibacy are representative of the mainstream understanding of the issue, and it is precisely misguided ideas such as these that Re-Bartlett attempts to debunk. In an effort to outline a “wider comprehension” of the meaning of celibacy, Re-Bartlett argues that many women have begun to embrace celibacy as a mere tactic of “self-preservation”—as a basic human instinct to “preserve the species” (306). She asks, “May it not be that the mental and moral life of woman today has need of something of the same fierce instinct of self-preservation if it is to be preserved to do its ultimate work in society, and that women who feel this new life stirring in them are being only true and faithful in not bowing to conditions which would crush it?” (307). Furthermore she

argues that girls' schools are inspiring females with a "sense of new possibilities" (306). Re-Bartlett writes, "along with the new development of brain is going also a great development of the moral life—woman's value, woman's independence, woman's dignity, are all things which the modern school girl is beginning to feel strongly" (306). Inspired by these stimulating mental and moral horizons, a woman may turn to celibacy as an immediate form of protest—as a way to voice her discontent of "unfair laws" or "the attitude of the average man" (306, 307).

Re-Bartlett identifies self-preservation and discontent as two of the reasons why some women embrace celibacy. She labels these women "mental women," meaning that they possess new mentalities shaped by their society and are therefore "connected with changes in form" in response to the present upheaval (307). However, Re-Bartlett identifies another type of woman "whose celibacy has a deeper origin" and who is "entitled to an even deeper respect" (307). This type of woman is associated with a change in spirit, and this "spiritual woman" embraces celibacy for greater purposes beyond the transformation of the relations between the sexes (307). For the spiritual woman, "it is simply the struggle for existence—that struggle which all humanity has waged—lifted to the spiritual plane. It is the soul here which is crying out for room to breathe, but just as all humanity has cried out in the physical world" (309). She "fights desperately with herself and with man," and she must stand "away from man until he understands" (310). This "warrior maid" as Re-Bartlett calls her, realizes that "the day has passed in which the purely gentle woman was she who could do most for man," and she waits for the day when she will unite with a "warrior man" who understands and

shares in her "vision of the wider life" for it is only then that "the wings of liberty may cease their anxious beating and fold themselves in peace" (310).

By contextualizing *The Woman Who Wouldn't* in the anti-feminist and feminist sentiment that framed the celibacy conversation at the end of the 19th century, we are able to see how the novel engages with social-purity feminism, and we can become more familiar with the background that shaped the reviews of the text in 1890s. In New Woman scholarship to date, no scholar has published any extensive textual analysis or literary commentary on *The Woman Who Wouldn't* in order to highlight its historical and cultural connections to the social-purity movement. This lack of critical attention may be due to its sparse circulation or to the belief that this poorly written novel does not merit any serious literary attention. Undoubtedly, much like the other New Woman novels of my study, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* is no literary masterpiece. Yet, also like the other novels in this study, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* was extremely popular; despite being labeled as a "silly book" by *The Literary World*, the first edition sold out in three weeks (200). *The Saturday Review* insisted that the novel was "simply an essay in what one might call serious pornography" to "be extensively read by the nasty-minded pure" (387.). Reviewers were also very critical of the novel's heroine. L.F. Austin of *The Album* labeled Opalia a "foolish freak," (n.pag.), and *The Literary World* commented that "Opalia is not worth three shillings and sixpence" (200). According to these reviews, the premise of the novel was preposterous and Opalia's notions and approach to sexual equality lacked any semblance to real life. *The Saturday Review* stated, "the book is in no way a contribution to the sexual question, because the writer is evidently quite unaware of the nervous physiology of the matter" (387).

It would seem then that Cleeve's contemporaries belittled Opalia and her ideas about celibacy in a similar fashion to that of Stutfield: both discredited the validity of women's concerns regarding the issue of celibacy and both seemed to be made anxious by these concerns. As Re-Bartlett affirms, such critiques "failed to grasp" the "deeper significance" of what the "majority of people" has judged as "madness" (295). In an effort to combat the misguided opinions of society, Re-Bartlett suggests that "the enormous power of these women militants to suffer and to sacrifice themselves for an impersonal Cause is the one thing which thoughtful people at this moment should be finding worthy of consideration" (295). Re-Bartlett acknowledges that even though some of these examples of "woman's militancy" (the promotion of celibacy for example) may certainly be "immature expressions," they are nevertheless evidence of radical revolt that "cannot be suppressed" because they attest to "a spiritual uprising" (296). Thus, even if Opalia's preference for celibacy is seemingly "foolish" or shortsighted by nineteenth-century standards or if Cleeve's treatment of celibacy is seemingly counterproductive by today's standards, Opalia's "immature expression" is, according to Re-Bartlett, relevant to a larger conversation "for it forms part of a new social conscience which all the progress of the times is serving to augment" (296). Re-Bartlett's perspective enables us to locate feminist potential in Opalia's cause—it emphasizes how Opalia's disavowal of cultural norms is the result of "a newly awakened consciousness" (298). She turns to celibacy—to an immediate and accessible physical response—as "only a 'strike'-a temporary protest- an appeal" (Re-Bartlett 298). Opalia's revolt "constitute[s] woman's revolt, not against man, but against certain false social condition which her soul has grown too large to let her any longer tolerate" (298).

The Woman Who Wouldn't even goes so far as to anticipate the cultural scrutiny that it will receive through its portrayal of the unsupportive and unenlightened individuals who try to convince Opalia to rethink her plan. For example, when Opalia attempts to discuss her feelings with her mother, she realizes that it is "a hopeless task" (Cleeve 7). Mrs. Woodgate tells her daughter, "In my day girls knew nothing of these things, still less spoke of them" (7). Opalia informs her mother, "It is not the knowing, dear mother, it is the not knowing that is the suicide of women's happiness, it is the not acting on that knowledge" (7). Here, Opalia illustrates how she feels impelled to act—to physically do something in order to validate her knowledge. The narrator further describes Opalia's response to others who are skeptical of her plans: "'You are an extraordinary girl,' her mother and a thousand others would say over and over again, but Opalia would say, with earnestness, 'what is the good of feeling as I do if I do not carry it out?'" (8). Once again, Opalia identifies celibacy as a way to actualize her revolt. As Re-Bartlett explains, women are confronted with "their own helplessness to bring any remedy"—to actually transform the world around them (297). Re-Bartlett notes that as a result, "many women are moved to things far deeper and more tremendous"; in their hearts rises a cry "somewhat like this: 'If I cannot *help*, at least I will not *acquiesce*….*I will know no man, and bear no child, until this apathy be broken through—these wrongs be righted'*" [emphasis in original] (297).

Opalia is unwilling to acquiesce; she hopes that through "a conquest of self and steadfastness of purpose"—abstaining from sexual activity with her husband—she will become "the first really emancipated woman" (Cleeve 162). More so, Opalia believes that her unprecedented and uncompromised purity will facilitate much more than her

individual liberty; she trusts that her example will serve to enact "the restoration of womanhood in its original sense, the original Divine sense before the Fall" (96). Opalia is determined to prove that in order for a woman to truly be the angel that she has been trained to become, she must unite "oneself with the Divine in all the glory of its holiness" (96). Opalia approaches women's liberty through a relentless dedication to Victorian sexual codes of female purity, and her narrative chronicles how she struggles to embody the prescribed ideal feminine role of The Angel in the House and of a Madonna in Heaven.

When Opalia informs Alan of her terms—that she will marry him in a church and "afterwards be a true, loving sister" to him—Alan attempts to dissuade her by saying, "don't let some foolish ideas mar our future happiness" (Cleeve 18). Here, Alan demonstrates that he too is one of the majority—that he does not understand Opalia's purpose, and his response seems to anticipate the reviews of the novel. To Alan, Opalia's ideas are "foolish," and he further belittles her when he warns her not to "weary" herself with "so much self-analysis and analysis of life" (18). Instead, Alan tells Opalia that she should acquiesce and that she should "be thankful" that she is an ideal woman who has been given a favorable lot in life: "You are placed in this world to enjoy yourself and to be happy, to take what the gods have given you in the shape of charming, good-looking young husband, with great ability, to say the least" (18). In other words, Alan emphasizes that women should be passive and satisfied with their lives, yet Opalia feels that the only way she can be content is by upholding her "principles" (18). Opalia assures Alan that she loves him and tries to convince him that her undying, pure love should be enough for him—that "the blessing of God is not for human gratification, but for the union of man

and woman for the purposes of greatness and perfection" (19). She reasons with him and contends, "The Church cannot make holy what would otherwise be unholy" (20).

Although Alan is terribly disappointed, he acknowledges that Opalia's position is justifiable. The narrator describes how Alan implicates himself in the situation:

> It all seemed so true when she said it; he had a horrible shameful feeling that now that she had offered love which he had pretended was all he coveted, it was no good to him. It revealed to him what his thoughts had been since he had met this beautiful woman, only a longing for possession unacknowledged to himself. She offered what was supposed to be the most beautiful thing, 'Love,' and it was like Dead Sea fruit to him. (Cleeve 20)

Yet their many "long talks" prior to this moment led Opalia to believe that Alan had "seemed to acquiesce" (21). Opalia thought that Alan "was the one man who would unite with her to establish her principles and to help her"—that he was different from other men—that Alan was capable of thriving on the type of pure, unadulterated love that Opalia had offered him (21). Opalia had hoped that Alan, like herself, was willing to make "the tiny sacrifice" for the greater purpose of "build[ing] up the future" for women and men alike (18-19). When Opalia learns that Alan is unwilling or unable to suppress his sexual desires in exchange for unblemished purity and love, the narrator concludes, "If Alan failed, all men would fail; Alan had been nearer in ideas to her than anything she had ever read or anyone she had ever spoken to and many men had made love to her; and if Alan failed, then all indeed, was lost" (22).

Opalia's commitment to celibacy is not motivated by her disgust of men but by her desire to do more for mankind. Opalia stands as the "warrior maid" who desperately wants Alan to be the "warrior man" who will share her "vision of the wider life" (Re-Bartlett 310). The entire text chronicles Opalia's struggle to understand herself and to

actualize what Re-Bartlett identifies as “a new social conscience” (296), and it does so by creating a narrative in which the heroine’s celibacy serves to magnify the unrealistic standards that society places on women. The central premise of Opalia’s philosophy echoes that of social-purity feminists: both envisioned the possibility of erasing the sexual double standard by holding men accountable to the same level of physical and moral purity as women. However, most feminists recognized that marriage sanctioned the occasional sacrifice of one’s physical purity for the purpose of reproduction, and both feminists and traditionalists accepted this moral contradiction because it was central to the preservation of ideal womanhood. If women confronted the reality of this deep-rooted opposition, then married mothers could no longer be pure and angelic. Thus, if society began to see the construct of the Angel of the House for what it really was—an unattainable, mythical construct—then they would be forced to re-evaluate traditional notions of proper femininity and purity. However, *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* exposes this impasse—it highlights how celibacy is the only true expression of ideal femininity because it is the only practice that preserves a woman’s physical and moral purity. In doing so, it exposes how the transformative power of social-purity feminism is founded on a myth—on an unreal representation of purity. And if women were not pure, then how could they successfully purify society?

Despite these inconsistencies that structured Victorian notions of femininity, social-purity feminists were not yet ready to abandon the longstanding tradition of the Angel of the House. Instead, they emphasized her power to transform the lives of women through campaigns that sought to change attitudes and behaviors of men. Rather than shirking the conventional feminine ideals, first-wave feminists attempted to expand the

ideology of The Angel and promote purity among men; they reasoned that both women and men alike would greatly benefit if all of society adhered to the moral and sexual standards of the ideal woman. One such campaign was led by J. Ellice Hopkins, a woman who, according to Jeffreys, "had more influence than any other woman or man on the development of 1880s social purity" (*Spinster* 9). Jeffreys points out that although Hopkins is "not generally mentioned in connection with the history of feminism," her "position was almost identical to that of the most radical feminist campaigners" (*Spinster* 9). After 1866, the majority of Hopkins's efforts focused on eliminating the degradation of women and purifying society through the prevention of prostitution, a task which she believed was dependent on reforming men's sexual behavior (Jeffreys *Spinster* 10). According to Jeffreys, Hopkins's "work and influence lie behind the creation of the Ladies Association for Friendless Girls, the White Cross Army and the Church of England Purity Society," and her message of equal purity standards for both sexes also triggered the formation of many purity organizations and purity leagues (*Spinster* 10).

What Opalia had envisioned for Alan—a denial of the male sexual urge in exchange for godliness and morality—was the very message that Hopkins popularized in her many articles, pamphlets, and public speeches. Thus, in addition to the way that *The Woman Who Wouldn't* engages in an intertextual conversation about the public's perception of female celibacy, it also offers a critique of the evangelical social-purity platform as promoted by feminist campaigners like Hopkins. As absurd as Opalia's marital experiment seemed to reviewers, Opalia's theories were certainly substantiated and contextualized in the rhetoric of social purity, and, thus, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* did indeed contribute to and complicate "the sexual question" of the day—the very

conversation that Hopkins sought to advance through her feminist, social-purity agenda (*The Saturday Review* 387). According to Hopkins, men's base sexual immorality—their natural inclination for sexual activity—was a mythical justification, not a biological fact. Thus, her platform called for the reform of men's sexual behaviors, and she approached this task by appealing to men's Christian sensibilities and by publically criticizing the Church of England for its negligence and hypocrisy. And although her central goal was to eliminate the degradation of women and the sexual corruption that resulted from prostitution, her rhetoric encompassed the position that spiritual and sexual purity would regenerate individuals and empower the nation. According to Hopkins, the adoption of equal sexual standards for men and women would prove to be the panacea for society's problems.

In "The Apocalypse of Evil" published in *The Contemporary Review* in 1885, Hopkins appeals to her readers' fear of degeneration and disorder and asserts that the adoption of a new masculine ideal—an ideal which privileges absolute purity and Godliness—will combat such looming threats. Hopkins writes that the nation's only hope of reinstating "God's order"—a state wherein man will function as "head of the woman to guard her from all that makes her unfit to be mother of the race, and the woman will be the heart of the man to inspire him with all noble purpose"—is through a commitment to equal sexual and moral standards for men and women (341). She argues that such a feat begins with the training of young boys—in teaching them that "if they would have a clear brain, a firm nerve, and a strong muscle, then they must be pure, and purity is looked upon as manly" (341). Hopkins' reinvented vision of masculinity emphasizes that purity

is as vital "truth and courage" (341).[23] Her logic follows the reasoning that productive companionate relationships between healthy-minded men and fit, dignified women are the cornerstone of desired societal order and the result of God's intended purpose for humanity. Such relationships can only be experienced in instances wherein "the woman requires the man to come to her in holy marriage in the glory of his unfallen manhood, as he requires her to come to him in the beauty of her spotless maidenhood" (341).

In order to offer a convincing argument to a public that was receptive to the threats of degeneration and concerns of "fit" reproduction, Hopkins positions the value of male purity at the very crux of her campaign, and she reports that her message of male purity is one that the country is beginning to embrace. She writes, "I know young men who have joined this crusade in whom a nobler passion to rid the world of woman's great wrong has burned all baser passions in their blood, and who, fighting all that is base and foul and impure and mean and vile in our life, have in Christ's strength slain it in themselves; men 'whose strength is as the strength of ten' because 'their heart is pure;' men cut out of one solid chrysolite" (342). The "crusade" that she refers to was generated by the establishment of the Church of England Purity Society under the Archbishop of Canterbury on May 25, 1883. In a Church of England Purity Society Pamphlet entitled "Purity and the Prevention of the Degradation of Women and Children," which was circulated in 1884, Admiral Alfred Philip Ryder reports that over

[23] It is worth noting here that Hopkins' rhetoric (as well as the rhetoric adopted by The Church of England Purity Society) couples the notion of male purity with traditional masculine ideals such as good health, strength, and bravery. In an age of much cultural anxiety about the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in England, Hopkins strives to present an ethos of "manly" purity in order to distinguish between the moral and physical purity of ideal Protestant men and the absolute celibacy of Roman Catholic priests who were often depicted as effeminate and unmanly. See F. Knight's section on "Christian Manliness" in Chapter 1 ("'Male and Female He Created Them': Men, Women, and the Question of Gender") from *Religion in Victorian Britain: Culture and Empire* (1997) for further discussion.

500 men attended the inaugural meeting of this society (25). In "The Preliminary Report of the Executive Committee," the Church of England Purity Society published their intentions and plan of action to promote the following:

1. Purity among Men.
2. A Chivalrous Respect for Womanhood.
3. The Preservation of the Young from Contamination.
4. Rescue Work.
5. A Higher Tone of Public Opinion. (Ryder 25)

According to Ryder's report, the Council of the Church of England Purity Society "are indebted to their friend and Lady Referee, Miss Ellice Hopkins" for providing them with a "list of suggestions" that they relied on in order to articulate the proposed objectives for their organization (26). Although membership in the Church of England Purity Society was restricted to men over the age of 18, Hopkins was a key figure in developing the society's mission, and she continued to serve the society in her role as a public educator by speaking to many gatherings of men and by publishing pamphlets/material that were circulated to male members. The message at the core of all of Hopkins' literature and campaigns—the insistence on equal standards of purity for men and women—was readily adopted as "one of the cardinal principles of the Church of England Purity Society" (Ryder 36). The society's prayer, which was composed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and circulated to all its members, reiterated not only that men were capable of maintaining their purity but that such a commitment enabled men to "fight manfully against the corruption that is in the world" (37). Members prayed to remain "pure in heart" and in body in order to "see God" more clearly (37), and they were required to promote the five principles of the society in an effort to declare that "Purity is 'equally obligatory on men and women alike'" (36).

Hopkins's involvement in The Church of England Purity society reflects her message that "mass meetings are powerful agents in purging the moral atmosphere and letting in these great purifiers, light and air" (338). And although Opalia's philosophy draws on Hopkins's overall message and thus theoretically aligns itself with social-purity politics, Opalia's skepticism of the church's efforts to promote purity exposes the shortcomings and limitations of social-purity practices. The narrator explains, "perhaps nothing was so revolting to Opalia as Mrs. Kerr herself, a pale wan little woman, expecting her eleventh baby, while the Rev. Arthur Kerr preached sermons on purity on Sunday evening to congregations of celibate young men" (Cleeve 47). Here, the text critiques a church-organized purity initiative, much like that of The Church of England Purity Society. Once again, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* presents the contradictory politics of social-purity ideology and reiterates Opalia's skepticism of a movement void of universal standards. Just as she condemns the sustainment of a feminine ideal of purity fraught with inconsistencies, Opalia also struggles to understand the contradictions between the reverend's messages and his practices; she asks herself, "Oh! What was meant, what was God's intention?" (Cleeve 47).

Much like Opalia's, Hopkins's crusade for remedying society's "great moral problems" was motivated by evangelical revivalism—by a desire to reconnect with, as Hopkins calls it, "the divine possibilities of our humanity" (333, 340). Yet, as much as Opalia believes that she will reach these "divine possibilities" through genuine physical and spiritual purity, she questions whether or not men can follow this same path, and after some time, Opalia realizes that Alan cannot accept the terms of her marital arrangement—that he cannot reach the divine heights for which she strives. The narrator

explains, “he could not agree, he could not in all the passionate vigour of his manhood promise what she had asked” (Cleeve 27). Throughout their engagement, Alan hopes that Opalia will change her mind, that she will “one day realize that the demands of love are instituted by God, and that there is no degradation in them,” but Opalia remains steadfast in her purpose and decides that she has no other choice but to end their engagement (30). After regretfully dissolving their engagement, Opalia is “more firmly convinced every day that without sacrifice no good was attained, that the instinct of perfection, the thought of an ideal future could alone save the world from falling hopelessly into immorality, selfishness, and ultimate damnation, towards which it was drifting” (44). Thus, she presumes that she is blessed with the knowledge of “God’s intention”—with a sense of purpose that men like Alan and even Rev. Arthur Kerr do not possess (47).

Although Opalia concludes that she cannot marry Alan, she still wonders “whether woman’s mission was to sacrifice herself to man, so that man would realize the beauty of woman’s sacrifice?” and “whether men were taught anything by woman’s love?” (Cleeve 44). For days, she ponders these questions and contemplates her decision while she busies herself with church, “early walks,” and “hard work” (50). Yet, all her activities, “reasoning,” “argument,” and “heartache,” “brought no solution and no real comfort to the soul of Opalia” (50). It is not until she encounters Alan’s painting in the Academy that Opalia begins to make sense of her situation. She gazes at his painting titled “Purity and Passion,” and the picture speaks “straight to her, as Alan’s soul was speaking to her when he painted it” (50). The narrator describes what Opalia sees in Alan’s painting during what is described as “the most terrible moment of her life” (52):

> It had but three prominent figures. The picture represented three figures standing at the gates of heaven. Vaguely the gates were represented as golden bars coming from vaults of blue, and with columns like opals and rainbows. All was a hazy blue and gold and faint glory, while beyond a mist of golden light showed vaguely the entrance to the other world. Groveling in darker vaults of blue crouched the eternally damned. At the very gates stood a young man gazing longingly at a future, but a rosy-faced woman was dragging him away with her naked white arms. The sensual mouth, the wild excited air, all depicted this figure to be a portrait of Passion leading the young man to destruction, while his gaze remained mournfully, despairingly turned to the white-robed figure of Purity waving him away from the gates of heaven, and in that pure expression, half of severity, half tender pity and deepest love, Opalia recognized her own face. (51)

At this moment, the narrator explains that Opalia can almost hear Alan's voice calling to her and saying "Save me, save me" as if "the laws of God" seemed to sanction her to return to him (52).

The message that Opalia takes away from Alan's "Purity and Passion" echoes Alan's situation as he struggles to resist the advances of Lady Morris, a married woman who has hired him to paint her portrait. As Alan and Lady Morris spend time together in his studio which is "charged with that extraordinary sexual electricity which rules the world," Alan "follow[s] a feverish dream of a woman who was not his ideal," but all the while, he thinks of Opalia (Cleeve 62, 70-71). When he reminisces about Opalia, he feels "like a man who, having communed with angels on the heights of a mountain, has descended to earth again" (71). He recognizes that Lady Morris is certainly a "beautiful woman," and tries to justify accepting her offer of love, but he always returns to his "Madonna-like love" for Opalia (55). Yet Lady Morris is persistent; she longs for Alan to declare his passion, for "the triumph over the unknown woman" who occupies Alan's thoughts while they are together (71). As Alan continues to spend more time with Lady Morris, he begins to fall prey to her: "Opalia's image, her influence, both were waning,

just as our good angel (as we are told in childhood) veils his face and goes back to heaven if he sees us do something naughty" (81). Finally, after Lady Morris instructs Alan to visit her one night when her husband will be out and bluntly offers him "all that Opalia kept back," Alan vocalizes the very words that Opalia imagined when she was confronted with his painting (85). "Opalia! Opalia! Save me!" Alan cries (85). He continues, "Can you not see what you are doing? Can you not understand that your mission, the mission of all pure women, is to fight against the other women, not against men? We are the weak, you are the strong, but you don't know it. Your curse is, that you do not know why you are in the world" (85).

As Alan thinks of what is to ensue with Lady Morris, he calls out to his angel, to the woman who will save him from the destruction and damnation that he envisioned in his painting. Thus, at this moment in the narrative, Alan's situation mirrors that of his painting: he must choose between salvation or damnation, and those two choices are bound in two opposing feminine forms, one good and one evil. In the painting, evil takes the form of "a rosy-faced woman" with exposed "naked white arms" and a "sensual mouth"; in "the wild excited air," she is "dragging" the mournful "young man" toward damnation (51). Conversely, the good "white-robed" woman is "waving" him in the other direction; her "pure expression" gently beckons him to her "deepest love" and tenderness (51). As Nina Auerbach notes in "The Rise of the Fallen Woman," such nineteenth-century artistic expressions of the fallen woman and her evil potential are all too familiar: "her prone form becomes so pervasive an image that it takes on the status of a shared cultural mythology" (29). Auerbach reflects that "then and now, she seems to enlightened minds a pitiable monster, created by the neurosis of a culture that feared female sexuality

and aggression and so enshrined a respectably sadistic cautionary tale punishing them both" ("The Rise" 31). Contrary to the representations of the fallen women that Auerbach discusses—those examples in art and literature which challenge the mythical construct of the fallen woman by envisioning alternative outcomes for her and inscribing her with uplifting spiritual potential—Alan's portrayal of the fallen woman in his painting as inspired by the example of Lady Morris certainly adheres to the Victorian stereotype of "a woman her readers might dream about but could not live with" (Auerbach "The Rise" 33). The "portrait of Passion" in the painting, much like Lady Morris, is sexually and spiritually threatening and must be cast out of Alan's life if he is to save himself from the perils of evil. In direct opposition to passion is "the white-robed figure of purity" which symbolizes the good, chaste woman in Alan's life: Opalia. Alan's representation of purity and passion in his painting reflects the dominant cultural ideology which compartmentalizes women into two distinct categories: pure and fallen. The pure woman is sexless, angelic, gentle, and passive, and the fallen woman is sexual, sinful, excited, and detrimentally active. In this dichotomy, the ideal woman maintains her proper place in society precisely by resisting passion. Furthermore, according to social-purity feminists, the ideal woman serves as man's moral savior; it is her duty to rescue him from his own debased sexual nature.

Although Alan's painting reproduces the purity/passion pure/fallen good/evil cultural construct of femininity, he begins to understand how his desire for Opalia is antithetical to the preservation of these rigid boundaries. The narrator explains, "one of the greatest enigmas of Alan's life just now was the impossibility of realizing, or thinking of Opalia in the sense in which she would be thought of" (Cleeve 73). In other words, he

cannot regard her wholly as “the figure of purity” that she is because what Alan ultimately wants is for Opalia to succumb to passion: the only ending he is able to depict is “himself by her side, his arm encircling her, their lips meeting in that one first kiss” (74). Alan desires Opalia over Lady Morris because Opalia perfectly adheres to the feminine ideal—because she is not the wild, improper temptress that Lady Morris is. Yet Alan’s attraction to Opalia is further fueled by the potential collapse of the boundaries that separate these two women—by the contingency that the pure woman is a mythical construct. Alan requires that Opalia exist as the “white-robed figure of purity” in his painting—that she conform to the feminine ideal in public and in his mind—but he desires her to submit to passion in private in order to serve him as his dutiful wife.

Opalia also struggles to stifle “the enemy” that is “gnawing at her very heart”—her passion for Alan (Cleeve 88). The narrator explains, “What to her seemed worst of all was the fact that she knew that this deep passion people talked of was burning in her heart for Alan” (69). Yet, Opalia believes that by giving into such a “delicious” “dream,” she would “sink to the level of all those others whose very being seemed to begin and cease with passion” (70). Opalia wants to remain that “white-robed figure of Purity” of Alan’s painting because she is haunted by the other extreme portrayal of femininity: the fallen woman image—the wild, sensual woman whose insatiable appetite for passion corrupts and contaminates society. This is the crux of Opalia’s predicament; she is unable to accept the passion that she feels for Alan because she is influenced by the cultural understanding that associates sexual passion with the destructive nature of the fallen woman. However, Opalia is also burdened by her womanly duty to save Alan—to rescue him from sinking into sexual and moral depravity in his dishonorable relationship with

Lady Morris, and she knows that in order to "save" him, she will eventually have to relinquish the defining characteristic of her ideal womanhood—her purity.

Through Opalia's ongoing conflict, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* critiques the rigid binary structure that shaped nineteenth-century perceptions of femininity and exposes how the constructions of ideal femininity—woman's "natural" inclination for purity and passionlessness—were at odds with the feminist social-purity agenda because, as illustrated by Opalia's situation, her propensity to serve as Alan's moral savior depends not on her heightened purity but on her willingness to sacrifice it. Thus, by confounding the distinctions between purity/passion, virtue/vice, spiritual/physical—the very oppositional pairings that regulated proper femininity—the text undermines the transformative power of feminist thought predicated on and highly invested in the preservation of such boundaries. Furthermore, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* poses complicated questions about the capacity and implications of self-sacrifice as a natural feminine tendency which empowers women to transform the world around them. Opalia wonders how self-sacrifice serves as "woman's mission" in life, especially when that sacrifice contradicts the very womanly ideal that she seeks to maintain (Cleeve 44). Additionally, Opalia confronts the ideological premise that is central to first-wave feminist thought as she questions whether or not a woman is able to purify society—to transform man's morality—through her relentless selflessness; she asks, is man capable of realizing "the beauty of woman's sacrifice?" and are "men taught anything by woman's love?" (44). According to social-purity doctrines like those of Cobbe and Hopkins, a woman's chief power to transform the relations between the sexes lies in her ability to assert her natural womanly virtues. Moreover, as demonstrated through

Hopkins's establishment of male purity leagues, social-purity feminists also maintained that men were capable of adopting the same practice of passionlessness that was inherent to women. However, as Opalia examines the power and efficacy of womanly virtue as a questionable agent for change, the text reveals how the ideals of passionlessness and selfishness present conflicting interests in the lives of women. Furthermore, as Opalia begins to identify with Alan and recognize that she too has a propensity for passion, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* momentarily positions woman on the same moral ground as man. Such analogous representation of male and female desire was certainly disadvantageous to feminist campaigns that insisted that women were naturally purer than men and therefore capitalized on woman's difference in an effort to convince men to adopt her superior standards. As Opalia attempts to stifle her passion, she wonders, "Is woman so different to man? Is not the very rivalry of the sexes a proof of their similarity?" (Cleeve 49), and although the narrative eventually reestablishes the distinction between masculine and feminine virtues and reasserts woman's position as man's moral savior, these issues that Opalia explores during her prolonged period of doubt (which comprises the majority of the narrative) are hardly resolved in the dubious and impetuous conclusion of the novel when all of Opalia's "degradation" and "suffering" is "wiped out" in the "compensating joy" of maternity (225)[24].

Whereas *The Woman Who Wouldn't* critiques the limitations of social-purity feminist politics by highlighting Opalia's internal struggles to mediate change without compromising her ideal femininity, Victoria Cross's *The Woman Who Didn't* also contributes to this intertextual and interdiscursive conversation but does so through the

[24] See the final chapter for a discussion of maternity.

portrayal of the male perspective. Thus, by using the male point-of-view in order to further develop the purity/passion virtue/vice binaries that structured the dominant discourses of female desire, *The Woman Who Didn't* revisits the unresolved questions of *The Woman Who Wouldn't.* Much as Alan is engrossed with the "perpetual worship" of Opalia—the "immaculate Madonna" whose "image haunted him" (Cleeve 152-153, 108), Evelyn experiences a similar attraction to Eurydice: "The thought of her filled my mind to running over, just as her presence, her image, seemed to weigh upon my physical senses" (Cross 25). During their journey on a boat to Marseilles, Evelyn, who is on leave from his six year post in India, befriends Eurydice Williamson after she boards the ship at Aden. After they spend a week together aboard the ship, Evelyn becomes enthralled by Eurydice because, as he explains to his friend Dickinson, "she's certainly totally different from any other woman I've ever met" (13). He admits, "I can imagine her carrying a man away into any folly—even marriage" (13). Surprised by Evelyn's interest in marriage, Dickinson attempts to persuade him that Eurydice would not complement his lifestyle: "Yes. She is a divine creation, I admit, most impressive and very nice at a safe distance, but do you know I think she'd be rather an awful sort of person to marry! Fancy coming home late, drunk, and seeing her sitting waiting for one with that marble face and those level eyebrows" (14). Since Evelyn has just commenced a one-year leave from his post as a "hard-worked Indian officer," Dickinson is familiar with Evelyn's "irresponsible gaiety" and his bachelorhood existence (6). Thus, Dickinson reminds his friend of the appeal of frivolous women, and as they survey the women around them, Dickinson replies, "I daresay she'd do all right for you; the little one's more my style, she's a touch of barmaid about her; keep you cheerful" (14). However, Evelyn is not convinced by

Dickinson's appeal and therefore responds by saying, "Surely when one marries one does not want a repetition of the women one may have known before marriage?" (14). Evelyn admits that he "should prefer a change"—a woman unlike the ones he is accustomed to, and he is convinced that Eurydice is certainly unique (14).

Evelyn's fascination with Eurydice continues to grow as they spend their days sitting "side by side on the deck talking," and he discovers that Eurydice definitely offers him that change that he desires (Cross 17). Evelyn is refreshed by their profound conversations. He boasts, "Two philosophers in ancient Athens could hardly have discoursed more indefatigably in one of their covered walks than she and I upon that covered deck" (17). Evelyn is so impressed by Eurydice's wit and reasoned locution that he believes she is greatly affecting his intellect: "She roused it from the apathy into which it had sunk during six years of the empty, frivolous life of an army man in India" (17). Eurydice "seem[s] to reinfuse" Evelyn's brain with "the vigour" it had once had when he was younger (18). Additionally, Evelyn also explains, "And her influence on my moral being was as great" (18). He elaborates, "In every word, in every sentence she uttered, in the whole length of those dispassionate conversations we had, there was gradually unfolded before me the beauty of an elevated, and yet extremely sympathetic character, and all the better part of my own was drawn irresistibly towards it" (18).

Evelyn's avowal of Eurydice's "elevated" character and her propensity to awaken his "better nature" echoes the perspectives of both Herminia's Alan and Opalia's Alan: all three male characters are enthralled by good angels who assert themselves as divine moral guardians. Herminia "had power in her purity to raise" Alan's nature to "her own high level" (Allen 32), and Alan likens his encounters with Opalia to interchanges "with

angels on the heights of a mountain" (Cleeve 71). Thus, *The Woman Who Didn't* joins an intertextual conversation with *The Woman Who* series, and, by emphasizing women's heightened moral status and scrutinizing her ability to purify or elevate those with whom she comes in contact with, the text employs social-purity theories. Although much like *The Woman Who Did* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, *The Woman Who Didn't* provokes many questions about the practical application and potentiality of such theories.

After only a week of knowing Eurydice, Evelyn admits, "I knew that I loved her, and loved her with the best and noblest love one human being can feel for another, the love that has its roots in reverence and its fruits in devotion, the love that thinks only of the object, and will deny its own to gain its idol's pleasure" (Cross 18). This confession suggests that Evelyn has undergone a moral transformation—that, because of Eurydice, he is able to harness his "best" nature—to become selfless and honorable for and because of this divine woman. Evelyn is convinced that Eurydice will accept his love, and in this climactic moment when Evelyn feels "the first fresh light of Love breaking into" his life, he ventures to find Eurydice. He sets out "with an uncertain [tremor][25] of feeling" because "for the first time a personal prayer" is on his lips (18). At this moment, Evelyn also suggests that he is on the brink of a spiritual awakening—that his love for Eurydice has moved him to prayer. He searches the deck for Eurydice, and in the dark "the mast swung an electric light, pouring a shower of tremulous transverse rays through the cordage" (18). There, he finds Eurydice "sitting idly" beneath "the full flood of light, that

[25] The 2009 General Books edition of *The Woman Who Didn't* contains the word *pemor* rather than *tremor*, which is an error. I consulted John Lane's 1895 edition which is digitized on Google Books in order to locate the correct word.

seemed to descend upon her like a mantle of silver"; there, in his moment of enlightenment, Evelyn sees his angel adorned with a heavenly glow (18).

Evelyn's description of Eurydice suggests he looks to her as his moral and spiritual savior—that her sympathetic and noble nature is leading him to a "heavenly awakening"—a "new era" of his life (Cross 15). This self-transformation that Evelyn envisions as the result of his relationship with Eurydice suggests that Evelyn is reinventing himself on various levels. Firstly, he proclaims that he is becoming more virtuous; he is ready to abandon his bachelorhood lifestyle and turn his attention to honoring and loving a woman. Secondly, Evelyn begins to reexamine his spiritual nature; he acknowledges an absence of spiritual devotion in his daily life but turns to prayer to aid him in his pursuit of the woman he perceives to be a divine angel. Additionally, Evelyn begins to reformulate his attitude about female companionship and about the intellectual capacity of women. Evelyn realizes that companionship with the "cheerful" "barmaid" type of woman—the pleasing but intellectually stunted "plaything"—is no longer appealing to him because through his "mental contact with a mind like Eurydice's," Evelyn begins to understand that woman may be man's intellectual equal—that he has been underestimating and undervaluing what women are able to contribute to a relationship. Not only is Evelyn surprised by Eurydice's mental agility, but he also explains, "and her influence on my own intellect was very great," which indicates that Evelyn recognizes her "tremendous power" (17). In this avowal, Evelyn credits Eurydice for his newfound insight in the same way that he aggrandizes her for cultivating his path to moral and spiritual reform. Thus, much as the other novels emphasize the "special ways in which women may use their power to purify and amend society," *The Woman*

Who Didn't portrays Eurydice as the ideal social-purity heroine—as Evelyn's moral guardian and spiritual savior (Cobbe *Duties* 166).

In addition to Evelyn's proclamations of his burgeoning self-transformation—his frank discussions in which he directly acknowledges a change in attitude and perception—the text also reiterates the materialization of Evelyn's reform through the vivid descriptions of the natural setting around him. Upon Evelyn's realization that Eurydice's uniqueness is unprecedented, Evelyn reaches a turning point in his life and asks himself if she is possibly the "missing portion" of his own "broken and incomplete being" (Cross 14). As he contemplates whether or not Eurydice can "restore" his life, he gazes out at the sea to watch "the rising of the Young Day" and sees "broken shafts of light" appearing "above the dark line in the horizon in the East" (14). Impressed by the "overhanging blackness of the night," the "blackness" of the sea, and the "darkness of the sky," Evelyn witnesses the coming of a new day (15). In this symbolic sunrise scene, "bars of crimson light" disrupt the darkness, "transforming the uncertain, trembling pallor and shades of the water into one soft, subtle mysterious harmony of mauve" (15). Evelyn stares at the horizon as "unhesitatingly, triumphantly, with overpowering sovereignty, the great Day [rises] in its mantle of clear light;" the "shadows" and the darkness disappear into "one brilliance of purest gold" (15). Filled with a "confident gladness" in his heart, Evelyn concludes, "the ever marvelous mystery of the dawn was past. It was glad, joyous, certain Morning that smiled upon the sea" (15).

This passage metaphorically illustrates Evelyn's transition from moral and spiritual darkness to a newfound consciousness—to a "heavenly awakening" facilitated by Eurydice's divine influence and discernment (Cross 15). The "fresh day" ushers in

light, certainty, and harmony, and the invigorating imagery parallels Evelyn's restorative journey that has resulted from his encounters with the enlightened Eurydice. Evelyn describes the forthcoming "new era" of his life as a time for personal, spiritual, and social progress, and through this characterization, *The Woman Who Didn't*, appropriates the turn-of-the century social-purity discourse which positioned the New Woman as the catalyst for cultural, political, and social transformation (15). In "Is the New Woman a Myth?" published in *Humanitarian* in 1896, Mrs. Morgan-Dockrell echoes Evelyn's sentiment in her depiction of the spirit of the age: "There is the breath as of a new spring in the moral and spiritual atmospheres, fraught with intimations of more abundant life and light to all mankind" (339). Furthermore, Evelyn's "awakened enthusiasm" for life, for something new and unique, is, according to Morgan-Dockrell, the fashionable ideology (339):

> The remnant of the old order stand aghast, clinging affrightedly to their traditions; meanwhile the new order hastens forth eagerly, heralding and welcoming the fuller entrance of the New Era. That very word "new," strikes as it were the dominant note in the trend of present-day thought, present day effort and aspiration. (339)

Through Evelyn's search for a new beginning, *The Woman Who Didn't* illustrates this spirit of the age that Morgan-Dockrell identifies, and the text further exemplifies Morgan-Dockrell's theory because Evelyn's eagerness for change is circumscribed by Eurydice's potential. At the center of all "these new facts and entities," Morgan-Dockrell writes, "the new woman appears to be immeasurably the first in importance, the most abounding in potentialities and in common interest" (340). According to Morgan-Dockrell, the "genuine new woman"—the woman who warrants the interest of world because of her capacity to transform society—is she who "typifies and makes for, of all

things, regeneration and purification" (344). She embraces her womanhood in order to convince man "that in the intellectual sphere as in the physical there cannot be natural and healthy creation without the co-operation and amalgamation of all the mental attributes, male and female" (344). Morgan-Dockrell comments that the "genuine new woman" has joined forces with "some of the ablest men of the century" in order to cultivate the "forward movement" of society (344), but she concedes that "the new man has not as yet lifted up [an] announcing voice" (340). In other words, Morgan-Dockrell acknowledges that the new woman is still awaiting the arrival of her helpmate: the genuine new man who celebrates women's potential and adopts her elevated moral and spiritual standards. This new man shares the new woman's view that "the needs and desires of the world are not those of men alone," and, therefore, he "harmoniously" works with her in order to facilitate "the world's regeneration" (345). Morgan-Dockrell is certain that, "he [the new man] is coming; after whom, perhaps, the millennium followed by a new heaven and earth (340). Until that day, society is left with "a realistic picture" of "a nineteenth century man of the world" who, along with "hundreds of thousands like him are content for women to remain, of the poor doll they call a normal woman" (350).

Morgan-Dockrell's depiction of the "the genuine new woman" combats the widespread, threatening images of the New Woman as a "source of contagion, of moral defilement, and corruption" (314). Much like social-purity feminists, Morgan-Dockrell upholds the rigid boundaries that constructed ideal femininity. She argues that women should be granted the human right to develop co-equally and exist with men in both the private and public sphere because society is in need of guidance with regard to religion, morality, and virtue—the very purifying correctives that women "naturally" are able to

provide. Thus, at the center of much first-wave feminist propaganda is the insistence on women's equality for the benefit of mankind and the justification of women's freedom to the extent that women exemplify traditional femininity and embrace natural womanly attributes in an effort to better serve as man's "helpmate" (Morgan-Dockrell 345). Theoretically, first-wave feminism aimed at liberating women from the confines of patriarchy; however, discursively, first-wave feminism was heavily focused on appeasing patriarchal audiences—on convincing men to support women's causes. In doing so, it promoted a message not of the "new" woman but of the under-valued, potential power of the "old" angel. She had not changed; she was just demanding a "new" helpmate, and she was convinced that she could make this happen—that all her persistence would eventually usher in "the new man."

Herminia and Opalia both share a similar vision and initially believe that their chosen partners will function as helpmates and join them in their fight for emancipation. However, as each narrative discloses, neither Alan proves to be capable of occupying woman's moral or spiritual ground. Nonetheless, many social-purity campaigns concentrated their efforts on transforming the typical "nineteenth century man of the world" (Morgan-Dockrell 350) into The New Man, a man who embraced the same moral and spiritual ideals as the angel. As illustrated through much of Hopkins's teachings and her endorsement of purity leagues for men as well as through Cobbe's doctrines that publicized the transformative power of "pure and noble-hearted" womanhood (*Duties* 166), first-wave feminists were highly invested in preserving and propagating ideal feminine virtue. They embraced purity, selflessness, morality, and spirituality—prescribed feminine ideals which for so long rendered them powerless and inadequate for

the public sphere, and in an effort to gain a voice in a patriarchal society, they recast these feminine virtues as agents of change—as weapons of emancipation not subordination. Despite much feminist effort to prove the efficacy of this ideological approach, the New Woman novels in this study perpetuated an intertextual and interdiscursive conversation that unveiled the shortcomings of a plan of action steeped in old feminine traditions. First-wave feminists promised new directions for women, but their efforts were misguided by an unwarranted anticipation of the New Man's arrival. *The Woman Who Didn't* further complicates this issue by putting the feminist program to the test; albeit a fictional account, Evelyn's narrative actualizes the potential praxis of Cobbe's and Hopkins's theories on a micro-level. Through the male point of view, the text presents and investigates the process that first-wave feminists propagated as a means to reshape the world for their benefit: a woman's power to reform the world one man at a time.

Throughout the beginning of the novel, Evelyn's confessions lead readers to believe that he is a "new man" in the making—that he is as Morgan-Dockrell identifies, one of the men "sincere of soul and earnest of purpose" who welcomes "the New Era" as "a new spring in the moral and spiritual atmospheres" (339). Evelyn also distinguishes himself from the typical "nineteenth century man of the world"; unlike his emblematic friend Dickinson, Evelyn is no longer pleased with childlike, mindless women (Morgan-Dockrell 350). In his love for Eurydice and in his acknowledgement of her intellectual and moral worth in his life, Evelyn affirms the efficacy of the feminist platform: men will greatly benefit from interactions with women who are no longer confined to the lives of "poor doll[s]" (Morgan-Dockrell 350). The New Woman—a woman who is afforded the

right to fully and freely develop "every power and faculty,"—is a "nobler human creature," a "more useful citizen," a "fitter mother of children," and, most importantly, a "more loyal helpmate for a true man" (Morgan-Dockrell 350).

Thus, as Evelyn provides us with evidence that he is on the verge of reform because of Eurydice's exemplary influence, *The Woman Who Didn't* initially validates the theoretical approach that shaped feminist thought at the turn of the century. However, when Evelyn learns that Eurydice is married, his spiritual and moral transformation—his journey to becoming a New Man—comes to a sudden halt. When Evelyn confesses his love to Eurydice, she is offended by his advance; she asks him, "How can you say that word [love] to me?" (Cross 19). She had no intention of deceiving him, and she thought he knew she was married, but Evelyn assures her: "No, I swear I did not know it" (20) Upon hearing the news, Evelyn is "paralyzed" and speechless (20). The word "married" jars his senses, and he begins his descent back to the meaningless life that he once knew: "All emotion was lost, all feelings made level in one sickening blank" (20). He also begins to abandon his newfound dedication to virtue: "The word stirred a mad unreasoning rebellion with me. A rebellion of all those finer, purer, more tender instincts that had sprung up round the main passionate impulse of love for her this girl as I had thought her" (20). Evelyn realizes that he cannot possess Eurydice as his "object" of "worship" (18), and, therefore, he re-evaluates the authenticity of his moral transformation: "The gentleness, the reverence, the consideration that ran through all my thoughts regarding her, and that I sedulously encouraged and cultivated for her sake, had been like delicate flowers growing on the sides of a volcano and co-existent with the subterranean flames" (21). Thus, Evelyn admits that his self-reform is somewhat

disingenuous because it was not self-motivated. Furthermore, he acknowledges that he has not fully abandoned his old ways and attitudes: they secretly coexist with the new appearance he has been cultivating.

Evelyn continues to describe this moment as the decisive end of his moral progress: “And as in eruption of the volcano the flowers perish, are annihilated and obliterated in the flow of boiling lava, so now all those holier, more tender impulses, sank submerged under the liberated tide of underlying passion” (Cross 21). Evelyn is overcome with passion, and although he realizes that “it is not the function of the sane mind to dwell upon a desire which is absolutely beyond its attainment,” his desire for Eurydice is heightened by the thought that he cannot have her (25). Thus, Evelyn reveals that the “better part” of his nature is overcome by his lust, and as a result, Eurydice is reduced to an object of Evelyn’s desire (18):

> It was extraordinary, the indefinable, irresistible fascination that the thought of her, the image of her, possessed for me. I resented it, wrestled with it, struggled under it in vain, the mind was passing through an inexplicable phase, completely subjugated, unnerved and unstrung by the abstract contemplation of pleasure which it fully recognised, absolutely impossible of attainment. (25)

Although in this passage Evelyn describes his predicament as a psychological struggle, his active verb choices suggest that he is also experiencing a physical reaction in conjunction with his mental torment. That Evelyn both “[wrestles]” and “[struggles]” with the thought and image of Eurydice evokes the impression of a sexual encounter. (25). Coupled with the forceful volcanic imagery of flames, lava, and eruption, this passage depicts Evelyn’s insatiable sexual appetite. Without the promise of sexual finality—the physical “pleasure” that he ultimately seeks with Eurydice—he cannot

function (25). Furthermore, without the hope of "attainment," Evelyn is no longer engrossed with his attempt to "cultivate" himself into a new man. During their final meeting aboard the ship, full of "holy determination and resolve," Eurydice informs Evelyn that they must never see each other again (27). Evelyn marks this moment as the "death" of their "love" (27), and thus, this moment also marks the end of a short-lived era of self-reform.

After their departure, Evelyn explains, "I realized so keenly that I had done my duty in the matter by accepting my dismissal, that I could allow myself a little license now, for in the male moral code we make a little virtue go a long way" (Cross 30). Thus, he goes back to his old life and re-adopts "the male moral code"—an exclusively male standard that rationalizes vice as a "natural" response to life's hardships. After six months, when Evelyn and Eurydice accidentally meet at the train station in Dover, Evelyn distinguishes his code from that of Eurydice:

> For six months she had been treading the clean narrow path of duty, temptations passed, difficulties overcome, and I for those same months had been wandering further into the mire of personal satisfaction, all temptations embraced, all difficulties avoided. I could see as in a mirror held up to me what her days had been, pure and clear, and filled with a wearying unsatisfying virtue, dragging after each other in intolerable tedium, which she had the strength to endure and the will to live through, and mine seemed lost, as I looked back, in a mist of mere degradation. (33)

Here, Evelyn outlines the differences between men's and women's ethical standards, but his evaluation of these two diametrically opposed lifestyles is rather ambiguous as neither the male propensity for vice or the female propensity for virtue seems to offer any redeeming qualities or personal fulfillment. Therefore, the text further develops its critical inquiry into the feminist potential of womanly virtue. Evelyn surely finds

Eurydice's elevated morality and purity admirable and attractive; however, contrary to social-purity rhetoric, "the ideal of womanly virtue" falls short as an agent of change (Cobbe *Duties* 8). In *The Woman Who Didn't,* feminine virtue fails to purify society, empower women, or induce men to reform. Furthermore, through its portrayal of Evelyn's unyielding sexual desire, the text discredits the argument that men are capable of being held to the same moral and sexual standards as women. As illustrated through the imagery of the erupting volcano, in man's natural world, "delicate flowers" of purity and morality cannot "[co-exist]" with "the subterranean flames" for long (Cross 21).

Moreover, all three of *The Woman Who* intertexts challenge the construct of ideal femininity by dismantling the binary structures (pure/fallen, purity/passion, virtue/vice) that regulated the distinction between the proper, worthy angel and the improper, dishonorable woman. Consequently, because first-wave feminist philosophy extolled the image of the angel as its agent of change, these intertexts also developed a complex critique of feminist ideology. As I examined earlier in this chapter, in *The Woman Who Did,* Herminia revises notions of feminine purity and merges the pure/fallen feminine constructs into an unthinkable version of ideal womanhood. Likewise, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* examines the purity/passion dichotomy in order to reveal the ambiguous border between the ideal and the fallen woman, and, through the exploration of Opalia's desire, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* also undermines how the purity/passion binary serves as a marker of sexual difference between women (asexual) and men (sexual).

The Woman Who Didn't develops another thread of this conversation through its inquiry into the nature of virtue and vice. Near the end of the novel when Evelyn hopes that Eurydice has changed her mind—that she has finally "given way, yielded" her

principles—Evelyn asks himself, "Could it be…that both Virtue and Vice are essentially tiring in their nature? Could it be that the human being is not fitted to sustain an extended course of either one or the other? In a natural state, he would alternate one with the other, and in this mixed existence his moral character perhaps most fully develops and expands itself" (Cross 36). Here, rather than reestablishing the virtue/vice dichotomy as the ideal ethical organizing principle—as the border that separates woman from man or the ideal woman from the fallen one—Evelyn suggests another ethical model, one in which individuals pursue a "mixed existence" rather than one that is culturally prescribed for them. Whereas Evelyn initially admired Eurydice's unwavering virtue and even sought to emulate her angelic example, he now develops a new theory:

> Perhaps there is something attenuating to the mental fibres in long continued virtue: the soul, the heart, the moral muscles become cramped by it: they are deprived of all that movement and exercise natural to them, in the fervours of repentance, passionate remorse and agonized regret consequent upon error, and they degenerate as the body does, of which all its muscles are not brought properly into play. (37)

Plainly, Evelyn's discussion of individual freedom here stands in direct opposition to first-wave feminist philosophy. For nineteenth-century feminists, unfaltering virtue was a mandate for all women, and they were convinced that the dispersal of feminine virtue would purify society and emancipate women from the confines of patriarchy. However, it is here in this radical idea that *The Woman Who Didn't* presents its most feminist premise—one which envisions a path for women that is without culturally constructed moral obligations. As Evelyn imagines a "mixed existence" for women—an approach which no longer relegates women to the confines of the virtue/vice, pure/fallen, or good/evil pairings—the text discredits the monolithic model of womanhood that informed traditional cultural values and that fuelled the first-wave feminist agenda. Thus,

it momentarily exposes the fictitiousness of the angel and rejects the singular definition of women as inherently virtuous and pure.

Furthermore, much like *The Woman Who Did* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, *The Woman Who Didn't* presents another scenario in which the angel fails to reform man or purify the world around her. In the end of the narrative, Evelyn realizes that he has once again misinterpreted Eurydice's intentions. She has most certainly not transitioned from "virtue to vice" as he had imagined; she has only befriended him in order to exert her "higher moral nature" over him (Cross 37). Unsatisfied with friendship and wearied by his efforts to lead an "exemplary" life in order to please an unattainable woman, Evelyn admits that he has been duplicitous: "But the reform was not a radical or deep-seated one, since no reform enforced or induced by outside circumstances can be so. The very soul of all true self-reform is in a personal revolutionary ardour which can prompt and sustain the reformation, independent of and in spite of outside influences. All other self-reform is a mere counterfeit" (43).

As I will examine in the following chapter, the narratives of Herminia, Opalia, and Eurydice illustrate that "true self reform" is manifested from within an individual; these New Woman heroines actively and independently shape their identities and their ideas about marriage based solely on personal principle. However, as I have indicated in this chapter, the crux of the problem that hindered first-wave feminism was insistence on the idea that feminine virtue could "prompt and sustain the reformation" of society (Cross 43). *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and *The Woman Who Didn't* pinpoint this dilemma: Herminia, Opalia, and Eurydice embrace their duties as moral and spiritual guardians, but their purifying missions are unsuccessful in transforming the lives

of their male partners, and more significantly, their efforts do nothing to empower women. *The Woman Who* intertexts devise narratives in which the heroines attempt to actualize social-purity theories, and as these narratives trace the transition from theory to practice, they uncover not the transformative power of ideal femininity but its many limitations and inconsistencies. Consequently, as these novels produce a critical intertextual and interdiscursive conversation about the transformative potential of social-purity feminist ideology, they also foster a complex investigation into the very boundaries that constructed ideal womanhood. They suggest that feminism may need to look to some other agent of change, to some other theory which recognizes women's "mixed existence" because the angel may not be as powerful or as stable as she seems.

CHAPTER 2 "EXACTLY AS SHE WILLS": MARRIAGE REFORM AND THE NEW WOMAN'S SEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC LIBERTY[26]

In "The Modern Woman and Marriage," published in *The North American Review* in June of 1895, Elizabeth Bisland writes, "Criticism of the marriage relation is in the air . . . . Every book-stall is heavy with similar discussions in dialogue, carried on by the puppets of fiction" (753). In an effort to evaluate the "significance of this criticism," Bisland explains that for generations woman has "fought polygamy with incessant hatred; not only for its injury to herself but for its constant menace to her children" (753, 754). Thus, Bisland argues, "to-day the world is a woman's world," because she has been victorious in her "conquest"; "Monogamous marriage is the foundation stone on which has been built her power" (754). The logic that she follows, then, is that "it would be natural to suppose" that women would devote their energy to protecting "this jewel, so hardly won" and "so long toiled for"; Bisland also presumes that a woman would "cling" to marriage "all the more as education broadened her capacity for reflection and deepened her consciousness of self" (754).

By 1895, feminists had won many "conquests" through campaigns to legally reform marriage laws in order to grant women more economic and political equality. But even after the passage of The Infant Custody Acts of 1873 and 1886, the Married Woman's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, marriage was certainly no "jewel," and the world was far from "a woman's world" as Bisland had maintained. These legal reforms, which resulted from feminist campaigns structured on liberal principles, were, as Mary Lyndon Shanley points out, "crucial prerequisites for the reconstruction of gender relations in both the family and the state,"

[26] The phrase "exactly as she wills" is from Mona Caird's "Marriage" (1888). See page 136.

but these legislative victories did not procure the egalitarian model of marriage or the male-female equality that feminists sought to establish (19). Throughout *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895,* Shanley illustrates that the Victorian feminists' preoccupation with legal reform and their use of "the liberal principles of freedom and equality" as a means to emancipate women obscured the social and economic factors responsible for the subjection of women (12). Thus, it is not surprising that New Woman novels showcased the discriminatory sexual politics and cultural injustices of the marriage system, and in an effort to uncover the "real cause" of women's slavery, New Woman novels expanded the marriage debate into complex territories outside of the political realm ("The Woman Who Did" RSY 6).

These New Woman novels, like *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* exposed these real predicaments; they suggested that legal reform alone could not alter the dominant ideological structure that enslaved women[27]. These texts simultaneously enlarged nineteenth-century feminist arguments about marriage reform and challenged the dominant feminist ideologies that fueled such arguments. In doing so, *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* offer convincing arguments about the necessity of changing the public's attitude about marriage reform and highlight the limitations of feminist reform rooted in conservative sexual politics. The heroines of these texts employ a variety of feminist positions, and their fluidity illustrates the complex and at times restrictive nature of

[27] By 1895, many legal reforms designed to protect a married woman's physical, property, and custody rights had been passed; however, as A. James Hammerton points out in *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life,* the "resistance" that "became central to the formulation of larger visions of feminist change" was less preoccupied with legal reform and more focused on exposing the "private protests" of women (n.pag.). This approach to remedying marital injustice by way of ideological reform (rather than by legal reform) is illustrated by *The Woman Who* texts, which seem to overlook some complications regarding marriage law.

feminist politics at the turn of the century. *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* model alternatives to and challenge patriarchal marriage, although I do not suggest that any of these texts independently provided an ideal solution to the marriage crisis. Instead, this chapter situates these novels in the multidimensional context of the marriage debate in order to uncover how in the very act of imagining new romantic ideologies and marital situations, these texts shaped an intertextual critique of the patriarchal values that limited feminist progress. The narratives of Herminia, Opalia, and Eurydice were dynamic in enlarging the imagined possibilities for feminist thought and women's actions in the marriage debate and beyond.

Antifeminists like Bisland were quick to denounce marriage reform on the premise that the advancement and education of women "[seem], as usual, a dangerous thing" because these developments have facilitated erroneous theories about marriage (754). She purports that the modern woman uses "the loud cry for 'the development of her individuality'" to obscure her underlying motives (755). According to Bisland, women abuse the liberal feminist creed of self-development in order to claim their right to "every thing pleasant" and justify their exemption from duties (755). She closes her essay with a severe remark: "This enmity to and destructive criticism of that fair temple of life called marriage—built by women's hands out of women's hearts—seems like a madness" (755).

Bisland contends that with the dismantling of polygamy and the establishment of marriage, the relations between man and woman have transformed from "a mere contract of sensuality or convenience" to "the happiest of bonds" based on "mutual love and well-being" (754). She fails to consider how this companionate model in which both man and

woman are equally happy and fulfilled—very possibly an ideal "built" by women—does not adequately represent the dominant customs and practices of the marriage system. What Bisland defends is not the institution of marriage but an ideal that is not widely practiced. This is precisely the discrepancy that many feminists drew on to argue for marriage reform. For example, in "Marriage: A Retrospect," (1896), sexual radical and woman's rights advocate Edward Carpenter begins by pointing out the distinctions between "the real marriage"—the union of "two hearts in lifelong dedication and devotion"—and "the actual marriage"—what most individuals know and experience each day (78, 79). Carpenter compares actual marriage to "the wretched idol of the savage to the reality which it is supposed to represent" (79). Carpenter's aim, much like the aims of feminists concerned with marriage reform, is to debunk the myth that current marital customs ensure that marriage is, as Bisland describes, a "fair temple of life."

Liberal feminist ideology at the turn of the century did not disparage unions of mutual love and development. Instead, it exposed the ways in which the current patriarchal and sexist practices of marriage impeded such relations. Because, as Philippa Levine explains, "marriage, for the nineteenth-century woman, was perhaps the single most profound and far-reaching institution that would affect the course of her life," it is not surprising that the Woman's Movement concentrated on the political and social ramifications of marriage ("So Few Prizes" 150). Anti-feminists denounced the need for marriage reform on the basis that it was "madness"—an absurd, unachievable expectation. As Bisland bluntly states, "woman simply may not eat her cake and have it too"; she must make some sacrifices for the "tenderness, protection, and support" of her husband (755). Additionally, as Levine points out, individuals critical of the "feminist

perspective" misrepresented feminist campaigns designed to "realign the rights of partners" within the institution as a crusade to "undermine the practice or prevalence of marriage" (*Victorian Feminism* 141). Levine clarifies that "the feminist assault... was not on marriage, and indeed many looked forward to a time when the situation allowed real harmony and equality between the married couple" (*Victorian Feminism* 141).

Yet, according to Bisland in "The Modern Woman and Marriage," such 'assaults' on marriage needed to come to an end. She solicits the public to witness the outcry against marriage as the mere "madness" of "the half-baked, shrieking sisterhood," and in making this call to action, she taps into the cultural anxieties that surrounded the feminist movement and literary representations of the New Woman (755). Bisland warns the public that if a woman focuses too much on her desire for equality and independence, she will be unable to properly care for her offspring. Thus, Bisland argues that questioning the current system of marriage puts the survival of the race at stake: "To adequately supply the new generation with health, brains and nerve force she must husband her resources and yield herself to the generosity and tenderness of the man and trust to his care" (755). Bisland warns the public that the marriage debate is dangerous in its potential to unfit women for motherhood and, in turn, produce physically and mentally defective future generations. Bisland and other critics with similar views recognized that marriage reform threatened gender roles in the private sphere but that it also had the potential to transform social and sexual conventions in the public sphere. Thus, in an effort to preserve the "Eternal Feminine," Bisland associates feminist ideals with degeneration and regards marital reform as an unhealthy mania.

In *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England*, Janet Oppenheim discusses how at the turn of the century, "degeneration, allegedly spreading outward from the individual bearer of disordered nerves, placed the family in the very front ranks of its victims" (277). Degeneration theory, she explains, emphasized that "the family was an institution at risk," and this notion "lent moral urgency to the antifeminist campaign of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (277). Antifeminists suggested that if women were more concerned with self-development or reform than with the well-being of their children, they shirked their social responsibility and compromised national security. According to Ruskinian notions that pervaded Victorian perceptions of femininity, the safety of the Victorian family was dependent on obedient and fulfilled wives who are sheltered from the "anxieties of outer life" and who take pride in their domestic functions of "sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision" (77). In "Of Queens' Gardens," John Ruskin maintains that "terror, doubt, and division"—forces that should not contaminate the home, the wife, or the children—lurk outside the family dwelling (77). Antifeminist campaigners coupled Ruskin's well-known standards with degeneration theories in order to emphasize how feminist ideas and aspirations polluted homes and minds; women's rights campaigns threatened the very structure of the patriarchal marriage and family, and, therefore, feminist thought compromised the health of the nation. As Chris Willis explains, "it is not the social problem but the campaign against it which is seen as unhealthy: feminism is seen as an illness for which marriage and maternity are the cure" (63).

In addition to the charges that feminist thought would be physically damaging to the future generations, many critics proclaimed that the scrutiny of marriage in New

Woman fiction would trigger the moral degeneration of the English people. In "*Tommyrotics,*" published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in June of 1895, Hugh E. M. Stutfield urges the public to beware of and suppress the "morbidity" of "new" literature—popular novels of the day that are called "modern" simply because they challenge "commonplace and old-fashioned notions" (841). He labels Grant Allen one of these "erotomaniac authors" filled with "the anarchical spirit" of the age ("*Tommyrotics*" 839, 837). Stutfield writes, for Allen, "the sacredness of the marriage-tie is apparently mere old-fashioned Tory twaddle in the eyes of our *révoltés*" *(*839-840). Allen's "contempt for conventionalities" and parading of the sexual instinct are symptoms of what Stutfield refers to as a "moral cancer"—a disease that is sure to spread if individuals do not fight for what is natural and decent, if they do not cling to "the old ideals of discipline and duty, of manliness and self-reliance in men, and womanliness in women" (843, 845). In order to prevent a moral epidemic and preserve the minds of "cultivated people whose instincts are still sound and healthy," Stutfield urges the public to boycott "nasty books and plays" (845, 844). If not immediately diffused, "the modern spirit of revolt" against marriage, against traditional femininity, against conventional decorum found in the "new" fiction of the day could incite a moral apocalypse (844). According to Stutfield, it is better for individuals to accept and not "fear" what has been "natural" for so long unless they are willing to accept the ramifications of their queries: an appalling nation devoid of ethics, honor, and decency ("*Tommyrotics"* 844).

Victorian ideologies insisted that the welfare of the nation, the well-being of future generations, and ideal femininity were dependent on traditional marriage practices. For antifeminists and traditionalists, it was crucial that the public be protected from

messages that challenged or rejected the institution of marriage because such messages also threatened the prominent domestic ideology which saturated the nation after the rise of industrialism. At the core of the ideology of separate spheres was the concept that wives and mothers were 'naturally' fit to serve as the moral guardians of the home, and in order to maintain this ideology that was responsible for ordering the lives of many individuals, traditionalists argued that marriage-reform literature and unconventional thoughts about relationships and the family compromised the image of "the angel."

Thus, it is not surprising that the public was outraged by Herminia's gospel of free love and denouncement of marriage in *The Woman Who Did*. Overpowered by the radical anti-marriage premise of the novel, even feminist critics were unable to evaluate *The Woman Who Did* as a contribution to turn-of-the-century marriage debate—to analyze the ways in which it expanded the liberal feminist platform of marriage reform. According to such critics, the text had one central purpose—to dismantle the institution of marriage. Because Herminia blatantly argues *against marriage*, some critics disregarded the possibility that *The Woman Who Did* contained any valid points *about marriage*. In *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction, and Other Essays on Kindred Subjects* (1897), conservative feminist and marriage theorist Elizabeth Rachel Chapman states: "one of our best known and most popular men of letters is openly and deliberately heading a literary crusade for the abolition of marriage and the family" (33). Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a well-known suffrage advocate and liberal feminist, makes a similar claim in an 1895 review in *Contemporary Review*: "The central idea of Mr. Grant Allen's book is that marriage means slavery" (631). Feminists like Fawcett and Chapman labeled Allen an "enemy" of the woman's movement in order to reiterate that *real* New Women

wanted to reform marriage and divorce laws to ensure women's social and legal equality. Furthermore, as Patricia Stubbs explains, "orthodox feminists condemned the novel and its author" because, "as usual, they were afraid that public discussion of sexual questions would give the suffrage campaign a bad name" (118).

The Woman Who Did, by openly presenting an attack on marriage to the public, incited a discussion of the private issues that many feminists thought best to ignore. The central focus on marriage and its connection with sexuality and maternity could potentially shift feminist discussion into what Stubbs refers to as "more crucial areas of oppression" (118). Indeed, women objected to Herminia's purported feminism and argued that she was an idealistic representative of a free woman, but the majority of the feminist backlash against *The Woman Who Did* was based on the premise that the destruction of marriage in fiction is immoral and lawless. In turn, many feminists, who embraced their purity and roles as moral guardians in order to fight for women's rights, maintained that Herminia was immoral and damaging to their cause. Thus, the free-love scenario of *The Woman Who Did* is indicative of the "unstable ethical thinking" of the times (Chapman 13). Chapman proclaims that "true art," is dependent "upon sound morality"; it must not "appeal to the lower instincts" of nature (13). Similarly, liberal feminists, working within the confines of domestic ideology, promoted the image of the true woman whose moral superiority would purify the licentiousness of the public sphere. For liberal feminists, *The Woman Who Did* and its mouthpiece Herminia represented the very public "lower instincts" that the woman's movement sought to suppress.

In his analysis of the reception of *The Woman Who Did,* Ruddick writes, "That Herminia, a lady, might actually welcome and enjoy sexual activity unsanctified by

marriage so contravened the Victorian conception of respectable femininity that it was almost impossible in 1895 for female critics, regardless of political affiliation, to endorse the novel" (26). Thus, most female critics agreed with Fawcett's notion that the "social revolution" sketched in the text "would amount in its practical result to libertinage, not to liberty" and would ensure the degradation and subjection of women (Fawcett 630). On this point, the new generation of women's rights activists and the old generation inclined to support conservative feminine values generally agreed: without the constraints of marriage, women would fall prey to their sexual instincts. For example, Margaret O.W. Oliphant, whom Philip Davis and Brian Nellist describe as "a natural rather than ideological feminist" who often demonstrated her sympathy for "the individual female predicament" in her works of fiction, much like many liberal-minded feminists, reiterates the destructive potential of Allen's social revolution ("Introduction" *Hester* xv, xiv)[28]. In "The Anti-Marriage League" (1896), Oliphant suggests that Herminia's anti-marriage stance results not from her aspiration for independence and reform but from her desire for uninhibited sexual activity. According to Oliphant, both Allen and Herminia are "sowing" sentiments "like seed among the fools" (146). Oliphant contends that there is no justification for the immodesty of the novel and claims that Allen's "false theory" of female sexuality "corrupts the morals, debases the conversation, and defiles the thoughts" of proper young women (144). Like Fawcett and Chapman, Oliphant argues that fiction must uphold moral standards and maintain a tradition in which the "sacredness and mystery" of "the wonderful origins of life are instinctively shrouded" (149). Through a

[28] My reference to Oliphant's "The Story of a Wedding Tour" (1894) in Chapter 1 reveals that Oliphant was certainly sympathetic to the injustices that women faced in marriage; however, as depicted by Oliphant's muted discussion of sexual matters in "The Story of a Wedding Tour" (the narrator alludes to Rosendale's unwanted sexual advances but does not elaborate or dwell on this issue), Oliphant maintained that writers needed to tactfully approach such sacred subjects, not promote or celebrate free love.

free-love scenario, *The Woman Who Did* unveils the "private" issues that were shrouded by marriage, challenges the Victorian understanding of sexual purity, and makes young women readers susceptible to the destructive potential of their "lesser passion" (Oliphant 144).

The aforementioned reviewers object to Herminia's anti-marriage stance because they associate free unions with the dissolution of the family, the overthrow of morality, and the base celebration of promiscuity. However, *The Woman Who Did* contests these accusations through the traditional marriage-like relationship of Herminia and Alan, through its insistence on and glorification of motherhood, through its commitment to revised concepts of morality and purity, and through the assertion of Herminia's ideal femininity. Consequently, critics who recognized these conservative elements were more supportive of the text because they maintained that *The Woman Who Did* cleverly presented a case for free love in order to undermine it and expose its follies. For example, in "Recent Novels," the reviewer from *Spectator* argues that the book is very effective in enlisting "feeling in favour of the institutions which Mr. Grant Allen intends to attack" (215). Similarly, in *Review of Reviews*, W.T. Stead writes that individuals with "the saner view of the relations of the sexes will rejoice that what might have been a potent force for evil has been so strangely overruled as to become a reinforcement of the garrison defending the citadel its author desires so ardently to overthrow" (208). Other critics disagreed with Allen's theories but applauded the audacity of the novel. In *Academy,* Percy Addleshaw writes of Allen: "He is so eager to offend our most sacred prejudices…. [He] has looked for our weak places so assiduously, and probed them with

such malicious energy, that we cannot but regard him with a certain uncomfortable suspicion" (209).

Whether critics condemned or endorsed *The Woman Who Did,* their reactions suggest that in some way or another the text transgressed moral and sexual boundaries—it "probed" the marital issues that were off limits to both feminists and antifeminists. The results of this exploration may very well be inconclusive; *The Woman Who Did* hardly solves the marriage problem. Yet as a pioneering enterprise into "weak places," *The Woman Who Did,* in conjunction with *The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* initiates a crucial investigation into the dynamics of liberal feminism and sexual inequality.

In *The Woman Who Did* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* Herminia and Opalia devise marital experiments with the goal of reinventing the relations between the sexes. In *The Woman Who Didn't,* Eurydice upholds the traditional standards of marriage, but all three heroines, regardless of their goals, expose the complex and contradictory nature of late-nineteenth century feminist politics. Theoretically, Herminia's arguments are founded on liberal ideas of individualism and reason. She describes herself as a rational being who is capable of making informed decisions about her life. When Alan questions her views regarding marriage and claims that she has not fully considered the consequences of her "dangerous conclusion," Herminia responds: "Why, Alan, haven't I had my whole lifetime to think of it? What else have I thought about in any serious way, save this one great question of a woman's duty to herself, and her sex, and her unborn children? It's been my sole study" (Allen 38). Although, as Levine points out, many first-wave feminists at the end of the nineteenth century chose marriage over free union

or single life, the general stance of the woman's movement "had been to encourage choice among women and to free them from considering marriage as the only or highest aspiration of their lives" ("So Few Prizes"172). By approaching the issue of marriage in this way, first-wave feminism sought to dismantle the stereotype of women as passive, irrational beings. Implicit in the argument that women could choose if, to whom, and under what conditions to marry is the larger aim of the woman's movement at the turn of the century: to show that women, like men, could be independent and free-thinking citizens. However, as illustrated by the feminist reactions to *The Woman Who Did* and by the strategies of the woman's movement, this new identity of active, rational femininity is acceptable only to the extent that it coexists with the old image of the pure and proper Angel.

Herminia, Opalia, and Eurydice exhibit many characteristics associated with this new image of femininity. Neither Herminia nor Opalia passively enters into relationships; they both have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about love, about marriage, and about what they want to accomplish in life. This convention, a hallmark of New Woman literature, can be traced back to many nineteenth-century marriage novels that feature similar moments wherein the heroine ponders the direction of her life with regard to marriage. In the New Woman novel, however, the heroine's introspection is prevalent, central, and public. Furthermore, the New Woman novel plots new potential outcomes for the heroine: she not only spends time contemplating marriage and love, but she also acts on her thoughts by pursuing a path other than traditional marriage. Many New Woman plots and heroines reiterate the ideals of first-wave feminism in the way that these texts are concerned with recreating female identity and displaying women as active

agents who are interested in and intend to shape their own futures based on personal principle.

The marriage plots of the Victorian period are replete with heroines who acknowledge and feel oppressed by the cultural standards which dictate their life options, and although these narratives critique Victorian marriage practices while attentively, and, at times, sympathetically incorporating feminist concerns, many of these narratives only scratch the surface of the women's rights issues that later saturate New Woman novels at the turn of the century. Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864/1865) for example, serves as one of these Victorian texts that is both fueled by marriage plots and also attentive to the female characters' dilemmas generated by the process of marriage. The text highlights Alice Vavasor's question—"What should a woman do with her life?"—as the female predicament that drives Alice's narrative and the narratives of the other female characters in the text. (Trollope 110). Alice, much like Herminia and Opalia, feels that there is "something to be done" beyond marriage (110). Although Alice is pressured to secure a respectable marriage, she constantly searches for purpose in her life and spends years contemplating whom she should marry, while her cousin Glencora is coerced into accepting a loveless marriage because it will grant her social mobility. Alice's questioning of a woman's position and direction in life serves as a thematic element that weaves into the subplots of Glencora, Kate Vavasor, and Arabella Greenow, and this critique of female agency with regard to marital issues is one that resonates in many other Victorian novels reiterating the significance of marriage in the lives of women and signaling women's growing discontent with the traditions of the Victorian marriage market.

Can You Forgive Her? dabbles in some liberal feminist ideals through Alice's propensity to challenge marriage practices and Victorian domestic ideology, and like the general ideology of first-wave feminism, the text emphasizes the importance of a companionate marriage founded on mutual love and suggests that women's active involvement in the marriage process plays an important role in ensuring this ideal marriage. The bulk of Alice's narrative, much like the narratives of Lucilla Marjoribanks in Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) or Perdita Winstanley in Eliza Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* (1880), is shaped by her pre-marriage introspection—by a necessary period of private contemplation and public dilemmas which lead her to chose the right husband. Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) also examine the dynamics of ideal femininity and a woman's purpose in life to the extent that these texts emphasize the unfavorable marital outcomes that materialize as a result of the heroine's misguided decision and disregard for her own desires. For example, in *Hard Times*, when Mr. Gradgrind presents Louisa Gradgrind with Mr. Bounderby's marriage proposal, she tells her father that she has never even considered the idea that her "aspirations and affections" would play any role in shaping her future (Dickens 98). Surprised by her father's query as to if she had "entertained in secret any other proposal," Louisa replies, "what other proposal can have been made to *me?* Whom have I seen? Where have I been? What are my heart's experiences? (97). Louisa admits that she has been denied the opportunity to play an active role in her own life and therefore resigns herself to what she knows best: duty, submission, and "needed to assert agency in the same manner real-life women did: they needed to experience a

transformation of *consciousness* to realize their condition, articulate their condition through *spoken word* sacrifice[29].

Middlemarch's heroine Dorothea Brooke chooses to marry Mr. Casaubon because she believes that her marriage to this man will illuminate her life. She reasons, "what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who was more learned than Mr. Casaubon?" (Eliot 80). Fueled by her desire for knowledge and by her yearning for a life filled "with action at once rational and ardent," Dorothea is soon disappointed when she realizes "her feeling of desolation was the fault of her own spiritual poverty" (180). Much like Louisa, Dorothea realizes that her "brief narrow experience of her girlhood" (180) has not prepared her for "the monotonous light of an alien world" (181). Although Dorothea reasons that she "had married the man of her choice" and had "the advantage over most girls" in "that she had contemplated her marriage chiefly as the beginning of new duties," *Middlemarch* emphasizes that Dorothea's life decisions were "the mixed result of young and noble impulses struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state" (784). In Dorothea's second marriage to Will Ladislaw, she finally finds a life "filled with emotion" and the "beneficent activity" (782) that was missing in her marriage to Mr. Casaubon, but this second, companionate union is also depicted as a sacrifice of Dorothea's selfhood—as a failure to generate the social change that she envisioned. The narrator explains, "Many who knew

[29] Louisa's decision to marry Mr. Bounderby is also motivated by her brother Tom. Tom encourages Louisa to accept the proposal because it would be a "splendid thing" for him if they "might be so much oftener together" (Dickens 92, 91). Tom also suggests to Louisa that she should marry Mr. Bounderby because it would grant Tom a bit more freedom in his working environment. Tom's influence over Louisa reiterates her sense of duty and sacrifice: she is willing to enter an unfulfilling marriage in order to benefit her brother.

her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in certain circles as a wife and mother" (783).

In this brief examination of these two Victorian heroines and their confrontations with the limits of choice with regard to marriage, we can notice two contrasting trajectories. Louisa agrees to marry Mr. Bounderby because it seems to be the only logical choice: she has not cultivated any personal desires that would be subjugated by marriage. On the other hand, Dorothea *does* aspire to reform "conventional life," but she relinquishes her aspirations twice and eventually settles for the "hidden life" of a woman as prescribed by society through conventional marriage (Eliot 785). Thus, as Laurie Langbauer discusses in *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel,* "Dorothea's characterization engages our feminist sympathies" because she possesses a nontraditional vision—one that challenges the feminine position and longingly gazes toward the masculine sphere (227). As Langbauer suggests, Dorothea is "torn between the desire to be different from her world and her recognition of the impossibility of being so," yet "she accepts her ordinariness" (227). Through the character of Dorothea, Eliot displays "the limits of the possibilities for directly willed feminist change" (Langbauer 231).

As Jeanie Thomas aptly observes, "*Middlemarch* makes no claim to be a sacred text for a new feminist ideology" (394); instead, by focusing on women's "evolving understanding of limitation," (392) Victorian texts such as *Middlemarch* begin to shape a vision of how the possibility of real feminist change is hindered by a cultural commitment to ideal womanhood—by the compulsion to maintain an image of the selfless and pure angel. The New Woman heroine is still undoubtedly plagued by the

sexual stereotypes that the Victorian heroine begins to recognize and challenge, but if we trace the fictional portrayal of feminist ideals from the traditional marriage plot to that of a New Woman heroine like Herminia or Opalia, we find that not only do New Woman narratives contain aspects that seek to position women as active agents in shaping their destinies, but that New Woman heroines personally tailor destinies which could potentially exist outside the constraints of traditional marriage. Many New Woman heroines begin to reject the "conventional life" that subsumes Dorothea. The New Woman heroine cultivates a new tradition wherein the mere "understanding of limitations" (Thomas 392) is simply not enough. She devises experiments in order to overthrow such restrictions—to transcend the "ordinariness" of a woman's lot in life; she privileges her personal convictions and aspirations in an effort to eradicate the social restrictions that bind her.

Much like the ideology of first-wave feminism, neither *The Woman Who Did* or *The Woman Who Wouldn't* completely abandons the prescribed gender roles associated with "natural" femininity and with the traditional marriage plot of the Victorian period, but in comparison with earlier texts, these New Woman novels forcefully anticipate the new sexual politics that will accompany a new romantic ethos. Joseph A. Boone explains that "a definition of marriage as the union of fundamentally opposite, rather than simply different, sexual beings who need each other's 'halves' for 'completion' has infiltrated nearly all traditional literary representations of romantic love" ("Modernist" 375). He suggests that "the effect of such dichotomization of the sexes in life, as in fiction, has been to uphold as "natural" mutually exclusive definitions of masculinity and femininity that inevitably fall into a hierarchical pattern of dominance and subordination supporting

patriarchal values" ("Modernist" 375). The Victorian courtship plot emphasizes that regardless of their attempts, women cannot resist what is most "natural,"—the eventual submission to male authority. In *Can You Forgive Her?*, Alice's rejection or challenge of traditional femininity comes to an end in marriage; she overcomes what the text portrays as momentary confusion and reasserts her natural temperament. In the classic Victorian marriage plot, Boone explains, "the idealized outcome in marriage may be attained or deferred, celebrated or abused," but the trajectories of these texts "almost always move toward a final stasis that…cuts short any serious or prolonged questioning of the social ethos of marriage underlying the fictional construct" ("Modernist" 376). As a result, Boone argues, such texts "help sustain the reader's belief in the social mythos, or fiction, of an analogously ordered system governing social reality and cultural convention"; they present "the illusion of the finality of the end"—social and cultural stability in the "closed 'truth' of the marital ideal" ("Modernist" 376). Unlike the traditional courtship plots of the nineteenth century, which, as I have suggested, evaluate and criticize marital practices and gender stereotypes to some extent, *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, and *The Woman Who Didn't* challenge the illusion of marriage as inevitable or definitive and open the conversation to account for the contingent aspects of relationships.

The polemical nature of these texts and their indignant heroines alienated first-wave feminists, and it is not surprising that present-day feminist critics are equally irritated by Herminia's resentful feminist attitude and overemphasized purity. In 1895, Fawcett writes of Herminia, "She converses in set speeches several pages in length, and she repeats with tiresome iteration on every alternate page or so, that she is the one woman in the whole world who is really free" (627). Fawcett concludes, "There is indeed

nothing human about her," and this opinion has endured as a valid conception of Herminia, especially in comparison with the aforementioned heroines who are indeed multifaceted characters of the realist tradition (629). However, just as *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Wouldn't,* and *The Woman Who Didn't* dispute the inevitability of the marital ideal, these texts also challenge the literary tradition of courtship plot. The Victorian heroine of Trollope or Eliot may be more complex and therefore more "human" by both late-nineteenth century and present-day literary standards, yet, as I previously discussed, their narratives serve the purpose of offering "insight into the restrictions on women's development and the complex social and psychological dynamics that maintain those restrictions" (Thomas 393-394). Conversely, *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Wouldn't,* and *The Woman Who Didn't* function as propaganda tools in the marriage debate. They depict immediate feminist change and new female identities rather than alluding to the necessity of such transformations. Despite their unbelievable heroines and narrative inadequacies, these polemical New Woman novels were successful in publicizing and popularizing the very real issues stifled by the structure and ideology of the traditional social system in place. As Fawcett contends *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Wouldn't,* and *The Woman Who Didn't* do not uphold the literary tradition of realism that readers appreciated and expected; they did not provide readers with the "human" heroines of the great Victorian novel. However, the popular narratives of these newly formulated (unpolished), polemical heroines offered readers a new approach to the social and cultural problems of their predecessors by confronting a society that was staunchly resistant to change and by challenging a feminist ideology that was moving toward change much too timidly.

In *The Woman Who Did,* the narrative is shaped by Herminia's drawn-out questioning of and resistance to marriage, and although many scholars have read Herminia's continual resistance as a means for Allen to fictionalize his evolutionary and hedonistic theories, I contend that we can also see Herminia's desire to restructure romantic practices as a productive confrontation with first-wave feminism. Victorian feminists campaigned for marriage reform on the basis of liberal principles. In "Marriage: As It Was, As It Is, and As It Should Be" (1882), Annie Besant, woman's rights activist, freethinker, socialist, and Theosophist, draws on Jean Jacques Rousseau's doctrine of *The Rights of Man* (1789) in order to compel her audience to realize how this "accepted doctrine" of universal rights excludes women (392)[30]. She reiterates the common nineteenth-century feminist standpoint by pointing out how society endorses "sexual" rights, not "human rights" insomuch as "they are only rights of *man*, in the exclusive sense of the word" (392). Thus, in an effort to establish that "women, as well as men, 'are born and remain free and equal in rights,'" feminist campaigners like Besant exposed how marriage laws violated the human rights of women (392). She quotes Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (9th ed, bk. I, pg.129) in order to reiterate "that the first of the 'absolute rights of every Englishman' is 'the legal and uninterrupted enjoyment of his life, his body, his health, and his reputation'" (396). "The second right," Besant continues, "is personal liberty" ("Marriage" 396). First wave feminists embraced these tenets of classical liberalism to the extent that these doctrines aided in their campaign for parliamentary reform, and they focused their attention on how the state was responsible for the oppression of women.

[30]Besant echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's paternalistic theories. See pages 157 and 158.

The feminist reaction to Herminia's proclamation of personal liberty, though, reveals the limits of first-wave feminism—an ideology which was still deeply immersed in the patriarchal culture of the angel. Although feminists concentrated on the establishment of women's legal and personal rights within marriage, Herminia's idea of personal liberty, because it rejects patriarchal standards of femininity *and* the institution of marriage, is invalid and unacceptable. Herminia's concept of freedom that she describes to Alan transgresses the oppressive social and cultural conventions unaltered by the political gains of the feminist movement. In an effort to justify her anti-marriage stance to Alan, Herminia explains, "If I love a man at all, I must love him on terms of perfect freedom. I can't bind myself down to live with him to my shame one day longer than I love him; or to love him at all if I find him unworthy of my purest love, or unable to retain it; or if I discover some other more fit to be loved by me" (Allen 74). In theory, Herminia reiterates the liberalist view that an individual deserves "uninterrupted enjoyment" in life, and as Herminia points out, in order to ensure such a life, an individual may feel the need to make provisions for the unforeseen in romance.

For Herminia, marriage "compels" a woman to "promise what no human heart can be sure of performing," to feel what one might not always feel (Allen 74). Thus, Herminia's approach is not only radical because of the way she links freedom with moral autonomy but also because she blatantly discredits the institution of marriage based on the logic that it cannot guarantee the "happily ever-after." Herminia suggests that the trajectory of love is uncertain and that each individual's experience varies; true liberty includes one's right to make provisions for an unpredictable future. Here, Herminia's argument in support of free union over marriage is unsettling because she challenges the

nineteenth-century construct of ideal romantic love. As Joseph Boone explains, the middle class supported the image of the companionate marriage as "not only an imaginative but also a practical necessity"; romantic companionate marriages became "intrinsic to personal and societal well-being alike" ("Modernist" 375). Fundamental to this image of the harmonious romantic union was the popular belief in love (and therefore also marriage) as the fulfillment of one's destiny: man and woman, once incomplete halves, now complete each other forever. Albeit not the tenderest way to convince Alan of her love and commitment to him, Herminia's approach is sensible in that she is wary of love as it has been culturally constructed. She remains honest with herself and with Alan, and she does not allow romantic idealism to cloud her judgment.

Through its attack on marriage, *The Woman Who Did* guides the courtship plot into unknown territory and emphasizes the very contingencies that the traditional romance novel would dissolve in marriage. The text makes an argument that marriage is not the closure that unites two "fundamentally opposite, rather than simply different, sexual beings" (Boone "Modernist" 375) and even goes further to question the permanence and validity of the companionate model itself. Herminia realizes that one day she may find another "very dear" friend and create another "kind of friendship that nature makes possible" with another man, and, by doing so, she refutes the idealized romantic trajectory and discourse that structured public life (Allen 72). The text's attack on marriage coupled with its proclamation of a liberal romantic ethos alarmed many critics, who, by 1895, had definitely encountered a host of anti-marriage and marriage-reform literature. Unlike its precursors, *The Woman Who Did* pushed the boundaries in "the crusade against marriage" (Oliphant "Anti-Marriage" 144). Oliphant warns the public

about the underlying purpose of this anti-marriage message: "It is to displace love altogether, that faithful union of Two upon which pure and progressive society is built, which is expressed not in one action but in a hundred, which means the perfect fellowship of joy and sorrow, of interests and hopes, of mutual help, support, and consolation, which is more certainly to be obtained in marriage than in any other connection or companionship on earth" ("Anti-Marriage" 144).

Oliphant's contention, that the institution of marriage is responsible for creating and maintaining a "pure and progressive society," was a popular argument in many anti-free love publications. For example, Bisland contends that the "foundation stone" of monogamous marriage is the very institution that has enabled women to tame "the sensual dominant brute"—the savage, uncivilized man of the past (754). Chapman, who supported marital reform but condemned "the practical" and "the theoretical rejectors of marriage," writes, "What blindness does it appear not to see that, in the actual state of society, to throw discredit upon marriage is not to progress, but to relapse, by leaps and bounds, into bygone levels of civilizations" (122). According to Chapman, free love is not a "progressive" practice but a "barbaric" reversion—a degenerative force with the potential to "let loose the forces of disorder" and incite a moral apocalypse (122-123). To such critics, the only romantic option, regardless of an individual's outlook, was legal marriage. Legal marriage would ensure the betterment and moral purity of society. Free unions, on the other hand, had a dangerous potential to dissolve the timeless values of romantic attachments and to obliterate the human bonds of love, understanding, and companionship.

Although many staunch marriage supporters portrayed free love as a means to transform individuals into erotomaniacal, selfish, savages, the faction of feminists who promoted free love maintained that free unions would facilitate the development of a purer, just, and advanced society. Jeffreys reminds modern readers that although "the words 'free love' are likely to conjure up an image of casual promiscuity," some first-wave feminists chose free love "because it could give them more power to control access to their own bodies" (*Spinster* 43). For example, in "Women of the Future" published in 1899 in *Westminster Review*, Arabella Dennehy describes marriage as "a mere piece of social mechanism for subjugating women," and opts for free union because it would grant "each sex an equal voice, and make love the only law regulating the relationship between the sexes" (43). She argues that "the franchise is really of secondary consequence as compared with individual freedom," and she asserts, "until it is recognized that a woman has moral rights as extensive as those of man, the mere enlargement of legal rights will be of little value" (43). For individuals like Dennehy, it was imperative that women's rights activists strive to transform women's lives beyond the political spectrum, and free love unions offered some women a way to reconceptualize individual rights in this manner. Dennehy's approach is similar to that of Mona Caird, who also anticipates that "if the progress of society gradually raises women to independence . . . we shall have a totally different kind of people to deal with from the men and women today" (*Morality* 142). Much like other feminists who supported the free love tradition, Caird envisions a future of monogamous unions based on "internal" or personal law and "social sentiment" instead of the "artificial or legal tie" of the State (*Morality* 125). Caird's goal in advocating a new ideal of free unions is to suggest that "the principle of liberty" is

without a "rational limit" (*Morality* 124). She argues that couples who create a "real bond" based on "affection and friendship" will foster "a higher form of society, a higher level of morality, and, above all, a more progressive tendency," and that "it is probable that unions may exist outside the law but inside society" (*Morality* 125).

Despite the negative publicity that it received, nineteenth-century feminist free-love philosophy was rooted in the very values of progress and morality that critics claimed were threatened by the practice and ideas of free love. The basis of free-love ideology, as demonstrated by the aforementioned publications as well as by *The Woman Who Did,* offered society a way to reexamine the interrelationship between marriage and personal liberty, and it did so by developing new avenues of woman-centered thought and feminist potential. As much as Caird argues against marriage practices, she allows that her vision of unrestricted liberty with regard to free unions is in a nascent state. In "Marriage," published *Westminster Review* in 1888, Caird writes, "First of all we must set up an ideal, undismayed by what will seem its Utopian impossibility. Every good thing that we enjoy to-day was once the dream of a 'crazy enthusiast' mad enough to believe in the power of ideas and in the power of man to have things as he wills" (196). The radical scenarios devised in many New Woman texts seem to echo Caird's assertion—that the exploration of options that society may label impractical or even ridiculous may, after some trial and error, prove to be a productive task.

The Woman Who Did participates in this forward-looking dialogue by presenting radical romantic possibilities for Herminia's future, and in doing so, the text privileges personal sovereignty over the dominant monolithic concept of love. Herminia does not accept the romantic outlook of the masses; instead, she develops an individualized

"philosophy"—one that best suits her life and her purposes (Allen 60). At all costs, Herminia defends her right to be true to herself; thus, she creates and manages the terms of her relationship with Alan. Herminia is self-reliant and is willing to defy cultural conventions for the sake of her convictions. In theory, Herminia reiterates many of the liberal arguments of first-wave feminism; she wants to prove that women are self-sufficient, free-thinking individuals. Levine reminds us that "the common view within the movement had been to encourage choice among women," and, after all, Herminia's message to Alan and to readers alike is that she has the right to formulate options and exercise her personal choices ("So Few Prizes" 172). Yet the diverse feminist reactions to *The Woman Who* intertexts show how first-wave feminists devised a concept of freedom limited by angelic parameters. Herminia propagandizes the right to sexual autonomy and endorses the right to sexual freedom, but she also upholds the monogamous values promoted by free-love feminists and traditionalists alike. Herminia never exercises her free-love right to choose another partner; even after Alan's death, she remains single and never fully asserts the personal liberty that she claims to have. Her radical principles exist as, to borrow from Caird, "the dream of a 'crazy enthusiast'" ("Marriage" 126); however, for most feminist critics, Herminia's individual credo is too extreme and inharmonious with the collective feminine ideal of nineteenth-century feminism. First-wave feminists encouraged and supported liberty for women to the extent that emancipation resulted from "womanly"—not individual—choices, and because of the theoretical free-love premise of the novel, readers were unable to view the novel as the propaganda tool that it was.

The reviews of *The Woman Who Did* and the series of marriage-debate articles published in America in *The Conservator* in 1895 illustrate the tension between proclaimed liberal feminist ideology and a social reality heavily governed by traditional cultural conventions. In her review, Charlotte L. Abbey reiterates the feminist stance on women's liberty and marriage and calls readers' attention to how women have gained some basic human rights in that they own their bodies and manage the direction of their lives. Abbey explains,

> At a time when it is generally recognized as introducing the institution of marriage, men obtained possession of women by force, and established the system in order to hold those whom they called their own. In the course of evolution, however, our conceptions of right have become so modified that women have now the privilege of choosing whether they will marry or not marry. (36)

Thus, much like many of the feminist reviewers of the novel, Abbey maintains that the next course of action is to "reform the marriage contract," not to, as Allen's novel suggests, sanction free love as an alternative model (37). Abbey echoes other feminist theories in proclaiming that "evolution demands the marriage sacrament" (37). She equates free love with "promiscuous intercourse" and argues that such immoral behavior "would not be in the interest of health and progress" and would not aid in the protection of the "family relations" (37). Abbey's position in the marriage debate, like that of many first-wave feminists, is shaped by the very theories responsible for women's oppression. However, her commitment to social eugenics and uncompromising moral standards is, like that of many of her contemporaries, coupled with liberal principles that suggest radical feminist potential. She writes, "woman must own her own body as much in marriage as out of it" (37), but first, she establishes that "the path to true freedom is only

through the subordination of the animal self in man and its transmutation into the human" (37). Thus, a woman's right to control her own body is dictated by the very act of denying that she has a body. For feminists, the liberal principle of bodily ownership is reserved for good women who make good choices, for angels who "see beyond the physical and the sensuous to the eternal" (38). In an age when contraception was most uncertain and women were without access to sexual education, free-love philosophy—although informed by liberal principles and armed with feminist potential—was a risky venture. As illustrated by *The Woman Who Did,* free love generated tragic social and personal consequences; thus, for the majority of first-wave feminists, the most appealing method for securing women's bodily rights was through strict adherence to traditional modes of feminine purity and sexuality.

Thus, it is not surprising that the feminist reaction to *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* was both less prevalent and less severe than the outcry against *The Woman Who Did.* Like Herminia, Eurydice and Opalia defy traditional feminine stereotypes, but unlike Herminia, these two heroines, regardless of their doubts about marriage practices, ultimately make good "womanly" choices that maintain the cultural standards of femininity. Furthermore, neither Eurydice nor Opalia challenges marriage customs to the extent that either denies its permanence or sanctity; thus, both heroines reiterate a faith in the dominant romantic ethos and in the companionate-model ideal. In comparison to the reviews of *The Woman Who Did*, the critical reception of *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* suggests that these female-authored New Woman texts hardly threatened the institution of marriage or compromised the image of the angel. For feminists and traditionalists alike, *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The*

Woman Who Wouldn't were considerably safer responses to a lethal parent text, and these reactions indicate the complex nature of the larger cultural debate that surrounded the first-wave feminist movement and the figure of the New Woman.

Because of the efforts of scholars like Shoshana Milgram Knapp and Melisa Brittain, present-day feminists recognize the work of Victoria Cross as feminist literature. However, Knapp argues that in 1895 *The Woman Who Didn't* was "misleadingly marketed" alongside of *The Woman Who Did,* and reviewers of the novel "uniformly miss the point" and its psychological or ethical engagement with feminism ("Revolutionary" 9). In response to Knapp's claim, Brittain aptly points out, and I agree, that it is more productive to examine the implications of Cross's reviews than to reiterate how Cross's critics "misunderstood the writer's intentions" (76-77). Brittain suggests that her approach enables "feminists studying the 1890s New Woman" to "examine the forms of social production particular texts both supported and challenged" (79). Through her analysis of imperialism and interracial marriage in Cross's *Anna Lombard* (1901), Brittain emphasizes how "particular representations of the New Woman often simultaneously challenged and reinstated hegemonic ideologies of white middle-class femininity" (79). Herminia, Eurydice, and Opalia serve as such models—liminal heroines who figure as both New and Old Women—but in the context of the marriage debate and in the afterglow of Herminia's "unwomanly" individualism, we can read the reception of *The Woman Who Didn't* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* as a testament to the public's investment in marriage and in the angel.

Even if the public, as Knapp argues, overlooked the feminist dimensions of *The Woman Who Didn't,* the handful of underdeveloped reviews do suggest that Cross's

bestseller did not alarm conservative critics or outrage feminists. As indicated by *The Critic* in 1896, readers were a bit baffled by the "weird happenings in the story" but were ultimately reassured by its "moral lesson," which reiterated the sanctity of marriage and the feminine ideal: "the woman (who did not) professes herself, as she is expected to do, satisfied with the path of duty" (56). Eurydice holds that marriage is "a glorious institution" and, despite her developing friendship with Evelyn, she keeps her commitment to her unfaithful husband (Cross 24). Certainly readers would have identified Eurydice's independence, eloquence, and latchkey as signs of her New Womanhood, but traditionalists were satisfied by what they perceived as the restoration of Victorian femininity. Eurydice resists the temptation to fall, and despite some of her more unconventional qualities, her individualism does not displace the social and sexual responsibilities that society demands of "true women."

The scanty reviews of *The Woman Who Didn't* suggest that the novel's endorsement of marriage and emphasis on true womanhood pacified conservative critics. The feminist critical response to the novel was also nondescript because *The Woman Who Didn't* fictionalized the philosophy of first-wave feminism—the development of new femininity, of women's liberty and individualism, articulated through traditional feminine ideals of self-sacrifice and duty. As I previously discussed, feminists were appalled by *The Woman Who Did* because Herminia's individual choices compromised her sexual purity and challenged the dominant romantic ideal. Yet we find that all three texts feature heroines who are autonomous and who emphasize the importance of making decisions based on personal principles, not cultural standards. Like Herminia, Eurydice is not concerned with generalized morality or with society's opinion. She justifies her decision

to remain married in the same way that Herminia justifies her decision to refuse marriage. Eurydice explains to Evelyn, "I don't live for the world's sympathy, I live for my own duty. To be true to myself is my principle and the only guide I have" (Cross 23). By framing Eurydice's commitment to her position as a married woman as an individualized choice rather than a cultural mandate, the text idealizes passivity when it is actively chosen by the free-thinking New Woman. In other words, self-sacrifice and purity—two hallmarks of the passive Victorian heroine—are the very characteristics that ensure Eurydice's personal liberty. Eurydice does not wish to abandon the patriarchal values that are associated with her position as woman and wife; instead, she internalizes these oppressive standards and clings to them as personal duties. Feminists accepted *The Woman Who Didn't* because Eurydice represented what Rita Krandis refers to as the "ideal heroine" of the feminist novel at the turn of the century: "a composite of a traditional type and an enlightened, rebellious nonconformist, a feminist" (89). As Krandis explains, "the true feminist heroine has experienced gender-based oppression," sees "her relation to systematic sexism," and "gains a new subjectivity, one that makes her own oppression apparent to her" (90). Krandis also reminds us that this new feminist heroine has "severed some (although not necessarily all) attachments to Victorian patriarchal valuations of women" (90).

It seems then that Herminia would fit Krandis's description of a new feminist heroine, yet, as I have previously discussed, many reviews claimed that Herminia damaged the feminist cause. Thus, as much as the ideal heroine was a liminal figure, a conglomeration of the eternal feminine and the liberated New Woman, she was, first and foremost, an angel. Such a heroine could, as Eurydice does, recognize her subjugated

position and freely share her opinions and time with the opposite sex, but the heroine of the first-wave feminist tradition was not ready to sever her attachment to Victorian sexual politics and conventional romantic ideology. Like Eurydice, she can only temporarily dream of such things. Although she is tempted to leave her bleak marriage in hopes of finding "the most satisfying sphere in which two love-inspired minds can move," Eurydice realizes that this action would severely compromise her integrity (Cross 24). She is a heroine who illustrates the liberal values that fueled the woman's movement: physical integrity, individuality, and the freedom to make decisions. Eurydice vocalizes her personal credo to Evelyn—"Always to do that which I consider right and honourable, independent of loss or gain, or praise or condemnation"—and thus portrays herself as self-reliant (23)[31]. Eurydice also maintains that she is independent, unaffected by the dominant cultural and social codes that govern most women. She explains, "Others may say what they please, for their opinion I care not at all, but my own good opinion I must have. I could not live without it" (23). Much like Herminia, Eurydice argues that she must "be true" to herself at all costs, yet the feminist reaction to each of these heroines reveals the way in which first-wave feminism promoted liberal values to the extent that women's choices reflected proper moral and sexual behavior.

In a response to Dr. Abbey's review of *The Woman Who Did*, E.C. Walker distinguishes himself as a critic who recognizes the arbitrariness of women's freedom, like that presented through Eurydice's example. Walker writes,

[31] In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Jane offers a similar response to Rochester: "I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man…Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be" (270).

> When Dr. Abbey declares that 'women have now the privilege of choosing whether they will marry or not marry,' she apparently forgets that that privilege—as all other privileges—is hedged about with conditions. If a woman chooses to be a lover or a mother without marrying she quickly discovers that this asserted freedom of choice is a ghastly mockery. Being the mother of the most healthy and bright children outside of marriage, she is a pariah; being the mother of diseased and stupid children within marriage, she is a virtuous woman, whom other women teach their children to respect. She is free to choose only the part in life that her neighbors think that she ought to choose. Such freedom is merely the counterfeit of real liberty. (73)

In his rebuttal of Abbey's statement, Walker offers an accurate representation of a woman's position in society should she assert her right to act as Herminia does. Just as none of the New Woman heroines is free to choose, in the sense that her decisions could potentially grant her comfort and happiness, women found that the costs of asserting freedom beyond what was socially acceptable tended to negate the very contentment that liberty should provide.

What Walker notices about the social and cultural limitations of women's freedom also manifests itself in the critical reception of *The Woman Who* intertexts and in their contributions to the ongoing marriage debate. In *The Woman Who Didn't*, Eurydice is free to choose what is socially permissible, and, therefore, as Walker points out, her freedom is "the counterfeit of real liberty" (73). Nevertheless, Eurydice prevails as an ideal heroine—a New Woman who chooses to embrace her inner angel. Herminia, on the other hand, tests the limits of a woman's privilege of choice and asserts "real liberty" in making bold, truly individual choices about sexuality, marriage, romantic ideology, and maternity. Just as Herminia's resolve is rejected by her peers and by her daughter, her example is condemned by feminists and conservatives alike. As Walker explains, women's decisions regarding sexual matters were hardly free choices, and the intertextual

conversation provoked by Allen, Cross, and Cleeve reveal how society was hesitant to attack the restrictive conditions of women's freedom when they included issues pertaining to sexual liberty. As Oliphant explains, referring to the discussion of sexual matters in literature, such a subject "has been proved to be the most damaging in the world as a subject for thought and for the exercise of the imagination" ("Anti-Marriage" 145).

The Woman Who Did and *The Woman Who Didn't* enlarge the marriage debate by challenging the authenticity of first-wave feminist liberal values beyond the realm of what society considered proper choices for women. The reaction to these texts illustrates how first-wave feminism devised a concept of liberty that was fashioned by a sexual double standard; there exists a collective cultural understanding that a woman's freedom to choose translates into a woman's right to choose only what is morally acceptable. Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't* further examines the illusory nature of women's liberty and hastily concludes by suggesting that in order for women to find peace in marriage and fulfill their Godly duties as "the keeper of man's soul," they must relinquish their newfangled ideas and aspirations of emancipation (217). However, throughout the majority of the text, Opalia challenges the parameters of personal liberty by asserting her right to opt out of sexual activity with her husband. Opalia's experiment to alter existing marital practices, much like Herminia's, coincides with what Levine identifies as a major issue in the women's movement: "the feminist accent on participation and decision" ("So Few Prizes" 159). Levine cites the efforts of feminist women who focused their attention on expanding women's freedom to include "choice about the form of marriage," and she argues that "in essence, such women were enacting a formative and critical change in

women's participation in marriage" (159). In *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* Opalia eventually conforms to traditional marital sexual practices and reasserts her "natural" feminine position as purifier of man's soul, but prior to this conventional narrative closure, the text explores liberal feminist ideas that, unlike Opalia's "degradation" and "suffering" are not subsumed by the "compensating joy" of maternity (Cleeve 225).

As much as I have examined how these three intertextual literary representations of the New Woman illustrate the conglomeration of ideas and discourses that constructed the woman's movement at the turn of the century, I have also, for organizational purposes, attempted to distinguish between each of these links to some extent. Therefore, in Chapter 1, I examined the ways in which these 1895 novels functioned in connection to the social-purity movement, and thus far in this chapter, I have positioned these texts in the liberal feminist arguments of the marriage debate. However, all along, I have also been analyzing the mounting tension between old standards of Victorian respectability and morality idealized by the image of the angel and new visions of active, independent femininity captured by the phenomenon of the New Woman. The marriage debate provided an arena for all of these elements to commingle and disperse, and specifically *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* sparked a productive intertextual dialogue through the confrontation of social-purity sexual politics and liberal feminist ideas. Previously, I have examined the ways in which *The Woman Who Wouldn't* highlights many social-purity feminist ideals through Opalia's "crusade against passion," but at the same time, Opalia's asserted celibacy is also indicative of the liberal feminist concern for the bodily integrity of married women—the human right over one's own body.

Opalia, like many feminists at the turn of the century, does not reject marriage altogether, but she is very much invested in reforming marital customs in order "build up the future" (Cleeve 19) where relationships are built on true love, friendship, and mutual respect. Opalia takes her purifying role to extreme measures and appropriates social-purity discourse to argue that ideal marriages are celibate ones. Opalia believes physical passion robs couples of their emotional and intellectual ties and degrades a wife to the position of her husband's slave (13). Girton-educated and "instinctively" "ahead in the fashions of the day," Opalia predicts that women will gain freedom and power when they join men "to resist certain encroachments which had been instituted by men" (35). Opalia, who is searching for a way to generate the emancipation of women, formulates new ideas about sexuality and maintains that sexual activity infringes on the rights of all women regardless if they are single or married. Through an allusion to *The Woman Who Did*, Opalia positions her philosophy and her plan as a productive alternative to Herminia's impulsive and indulgent behavior and believes that she has discovered the best way to transform the relations between the sexes. She tells Alan, "I read a book once . . . in which the heroine would not go through the form of marriage in church for fear she should lose her liberty, yet every action of her life showed that her liberty had gone, whether she defied the conventional laws of society or not. Her life was an utter failure" (17). Ironically, the driving force behind Opalia's mission, much like Herminia's, is a woman's right to exercise sexual authority over her own body. However, Opalia, who is adamant that she will control the terms of her relationship and rightfully reject marital sexual conventions, is also convinced that Herminia's life was "an utter failure, because it was defiance, not sacrifice" (17). Opalia's reaction to *The Woman Who*

Did further illustrates the quandary at the core of women's movement: first-wave feminist politics were often contradictory. In the same way that a woman's "right to choose" the terms of her marriage was hemmed in by social and moral conditions, liberal notions of a woman's right to bodily autonomy were severely limited by pervasive moral and sexual standards and by the limited and secretive distribution of birth-control information.

As Lucy Bland demonstrates throughout *Banishing the Beast*, first-wave feminists were "not easily compartmentalized" into "social purity feminists and feminists supporting sex reform" (xix). She argues that "many feminists moved between positions; on some occasions where they deemed it useful, they used the language of sex reform, on other occasions they deployed a language and politics of social purity" (xix). Opalia's emphasis on sacrifice rather than defiance as the tool women should rely on in order to assert their freedom reflects the influences of social purity. Opalia is driven to purify marital relations through self-control and self-sacrifice, by resisting the sins of the flesh, by being passive rather than defiant, and by serving as a moral guardian to her future husband, and all of these practices are easily identifiable as social-purity customs. Insomuch as Opalia exhibits all the feminine attributes of an ideal heroine—the perfect blend of Victorian angel and inspired New Woman—she also challenges the patriarchal values and conventional marital practices intrinsic in maintaining this ideal image.

Many feminists argued for a woman's right to have control over her own body, and this issue became a major issue in feminist politics following the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. After the efforts of social-purity campaigns fostered the repeal of the acts in 1886, feminists continued to focus their efforts on ways

to ensure the personal autonomy of single and married women. They addressed issues related to sexual violence, divorce, economic independence, and sexual education for women. Bland explains that "feminists strove to construct a new and inspiring vision of the ideal marriage in which the sexes were equal, an equality that included female bodily autonomy and a sexual relationship of the highest morality" (*Banishing* 134). In order to distinguish the concept of marital sex from its associations with prostitution, unwanted pregnancy, and sexual exploitation and transform marriage into a moral, respectful, and just experience for women, many feminists, much like Opalia, looked to develop relationships that provided mental and spiritual, rather than physical passion. Shelia Jeffreys argues that "continence and psychic love" were "mainstream" responses that feminists used to devalue sexual activity and promote equality for women within marriage (*Spinster* 40). In an effort to highlight a woman's worth aside from her reproductive function and combat the stereotype of man as a sexual beast, feminists realized that they had to develop alternatives to patriarchal practices in their private, married lives. Today, it is doubtful that feminists would find a sexless marriage or a life void of sexual pleasure as viable tactics for asserting women's rights, but in 1895, philosophies of celibacy and sexual continence posed many threats to prevailing constructions of femininity and masculinity. *The Woman Who Wouldn't* explores the limits of these popular feminist responses.

Feminist politics at the turn of the century were heavily infused with the ideology of the angel—the image of woman as a pure, moral, and asexual being, and in keeping with this feminine stereotype, feminists also recognized their duty to make sacrifices for the good of others or for the welfare of the nation. The majority of the psychic love and

continence philosophies that surfaced as a means to safeguard the bodily integrity and personal autonomy of women suggested that wives should designate the frequency of sexual activity in order to avoid unwanted advances and unwanted pregnancies. Feminists promoted chastity and continence in their effort to ensure the protection and individuality of married women, yet they did not completely reject their sexual duties to their husbands or assert their right to celibacy. By 1895, feminists had significantly challenged many of William Acton's patriarchal theories on sex and gender, yet it is evident that Acton's vision of the "perfect ideal of an English wife and mother" still permeated the feminist perception of womanhood (214). In the 1875 edition of *Functions and Disorders of Reproductive Organs*, which was first published in 1857, Acton describes model wives as "kind, considerate, self-sacrificing, and sensible"; she is "so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence, but so unselfishly attached to the man she loves as to be willing to give up her own wishes and feelings for his sake" (214). According to Acton, good wives must overcome their "natural repugnance for cohabitation" and fulfill their marital duties to their husbands (214). Acton was unsympathetic to women's complaints about traditional sexual customs in marriage and even urged women to stop "exaggerating their supposed grievances" when they are "called upon to fulfill the duties of wives" (214).

In the feminist campaign for marital reform, compulsory sexual activity and the oppressive physical and mental conditions it created for women were actualized and not "supposed grievances," and, for most feminists, marriage signaled an inevitable sexual self-surrender. Insomuch as feminists attempted to challenge Acton's theories and bring a female point of view to the public's perception of women's marital experiences, the

general feminist attitude toward sexual activity within marriage was still heavily influenced by traditional concepts of Victorian femininity and wifehood. Of course, feminist arguments opened a conversation about the links between sexual objectification and the oppression of women, but even the more radical feminists that I will discuss in the following chapter—feminists who directly tackled the dominant philosophy of sex and campaigned for sexual education for women—did not openly and completely endorse the practice of celibacy in marriage as Opalia attempts to do. Most feminists, in some way or another, embraced their womanly duties and continued to promote an image of the chaste wife and mother, an image that, as Oppenheim states, "stood at the very center of middle-class social relations" (202). Frances Power Cobbe captured this feminist attitude in her 1882 series of lectures entitled *Duties of Women*, and by 1895, it is evident that the feminist understanding of wifedom still maintained the image of pure and dutiful angel. Cobbe explains, "The perfect human life, as conceived by the cultivated moral consciousness, is essentially a life of chastity, not, of course, of *celibacy*…but of real chastity, fidelity in marriage or a pure single life" (*Duties* 59). Cobbe contends that "the mutual promise of Conjugal Union" and "a mutual engagement of exclusive fidelity" of each partner are among the "*natural"* obligations of the formal marriage contract and "the one essential promise among monogamous races" (*Duties* 119). Cobbe definitely believed that marriage was not the only or proper destiny of all women and that some women "are better suited for friendship than marriage," but she adds that when a woman does chose to marry, she must accept her sexual duty (*Duties* 170). Cobbe's "course toward a free and ennobled womanhood," in which she envisions a future where women are "infinitely happier," "infinitely nobler" and "infinitely more

useful," is, much like other first-wave feminist visions, founded on what Cobbe identified as "the eternal principles of morality"(*Duties* 24, 25, 26).

Although first-wave feminists were intent on revising and reconsidering "the application" of these everlasting moral duties, they were not eager to confront the basis or validity of the moral structure itself or examine how this commitment to morality and duty was eternally at odds with unrestricted human rights (Cobbe *Duties* 26). *The Woman Who Wouldn't* exposes the contradictions inherent in the Victorian construct of female sexuality and morality. Opalia inquires into the moral and social development of women and presents a logical case: if women are conditioned and expected to be pure, sexless, and extremely moral beings, then how can they justify and embrace the sexual requirement of marriage—what Opalia calls a "terrible sacrifice," a surrendering of "everything in the world" (Cleeve 15, 14). Opalia is determined to take a stand, to be a wife who rejects what has been culturally constructed as the natural obligation of marriage—conjugal union. In devising a strategy in which she refuses the "natural" duty of marriage, Opalia creates an alternative "unnatural" image of femininity; she becomes a deviant and abnormal wife in the very act of upholding the moral standards, that, prior to marriage, served as the very indicators of proper femininity.

The Victorian era stressed that women were naturally inclined to self-sacrifice, and first-wave feminism embraced self-sacrifice as a womanly privilege and duty, as women's secret weapon which would enable them to transform and purify society. Rather than rejecting Acton's idea of the model wife, feminists argued that society would greatly benefit if women were given the right and the opportunity to share their benevolence with the public sphere. In theory, Opalia supports this traditional feminine ideal, and this is

most apparent when Opalia identifies her dignified plan as "sacrifice" in contrast to Herminia's lowly scheme of "defiance" (sacrifice being the preferred and proper means for women to be successful in their efforts). However adamant Opalia is to distinguish her life choices from that of Herminia, it is evident that Opalia also pursues an undeniably rebellious marital trajectory. In her commitment to marital celibacy, Opalia tests the limits of equality and freedom for women; she explores the possibility of formulating a personal life plan uninfluenced by traditional cultural practices and gender stereotypes. Opalia maintains that marriage does not alter a woman's right to complete and uninterrupted power over her physical body and mental well-being. Her theories seem to develop from social-purity traditions, but even social-purity feminists like Cobbe acknowledged that sexual intercourse within marriage was integral to the physical health and moral fitness of their husbands. They believed that a conjugal relationship, as Oppenheim describes, helped a man to "master his own debasing instincts" and curb his appetite for unsanctioned sexual activity with prostitutes (202). Yet Opalia is hopeful that she can serve as Alan's moral guardian solely through her extreme emotional and spiritual commitment. She believes that a companionate, loving marriage is not contingent on her sexual self-sacrifice.

Opalia's marital experiment is theoretically informed by social-purity ideals, but when put into practice, her personally-tailored marriage plans illustrate a liberal approach to the marriage question, one that Caird publicized in 1888. In "Marriage," Caird announced that "the ideal marriage" should be a *"free"* one, designating that "the idea of a perfectly free marriage would imply the possibility of any form of contract being entered into between the two persons, the State and society standing aside, and

recognizing the entirely private character of the transaction" (196). Caird, unlike Cobbe, dismisses the notion that marriage is wrought with natural obligations; it is a personal matter and is not subject to cultural traditions or social expectations. Caird writes, "even the idea of 'duty' ought to be excluded from the most perfect marriage," which illustrates a radical vision marriage—one in which prescribed gender roles, traditional sexual practices, and dominant romantic ideologies are insignificant ("Marriage" 196). Caird's outlook on marriage is informed by the "fundamental principle" of human rights; within ideal marriages "there must be a full understanding and acknowledgment of the obvious right of the woman to *possess herself* body and soul, to give or withhold herself body and soul exactly as she wills" [emphasis in original] ("Marriage" 196).

Caird's vision for "freedom in marriage" entails many interconnected elements, and I will expound on some of these ideas in the following chapter, I revisit here Caird's philosophy in order, once again, to point out inconsistent and, at times, self-defeating approaches to women's rights at the turn of the century. Caird, unlike the majority of first-wave feminists, promoted a more authentic message of women's rights wherein a woman's freedom of choice materializes beyond what Walker identified as fabricated liberty. The first-wave feminist movement campaigned for women's freedom of choice and right to bodily integrity, but, as I have emphasized, it did so through the glorification of women's *natural* characteristics and abilities—through the very sexist social theories that naturalized separate-sphere ideology. Caird admits what other feminists were wary to accept: the diverse and individualized manifestations of women's liberty—female responses that may not coincide with "acceptable" social practices. Caird's approach to marriage is notably similar to modern feminist thought because her theories were founded

on the understanding that feminine nature was socially constructed. Before she turns to the subject of marriage in her essay, Caird writes, "it is necessary to clear the ground for thought upon this subject by a protest against the careless use of the words 'human nature,' and especially 'woman's nature'" ("Marriage" 185). Recognizing that "the eternal law of being" is a myth, that "woman's nature" is wrought with "innumerable contradictory dogmas," Caird suggests that marriage must be free from "all social philosophies" ("Marriage" 185). Thus, in marriage, there need not be a self-sacrificing angelic wife whose freedom is dictated by a pervasive standard of moral and social duty.

Caird's feminist vision—that a woman's freedom actually entails the liberty for her to do with her body "exactly as she wills"—exemplified the general feminist cry for women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy, but, as I have argued thus far, *The Woman Who* intertexts fictionalize and test the limits of this liberal philosophy in the context of the marriage debate. *The Woman Who Wouldn't* entertains the possibility that marital love and commitment can exist without physical passion—that men can value women as equal companions rather than as defeated sexual objects and that women actually possess the right and the power to, if they will it so, "withhold" their bodies, even from their husbands. Opalia is determined to create and maintain a relationship which highlights the "true vocation of women"—to illustrate the potential for woman to "live out her own life without being bound by the horrible bestial ties that degraded other women" (Cleeve 161, 162). As much as *The Woman Who Wouldn't* focuses on the emancipation of women and Opalia's determination to create an alternative marital path for women, especially through sexual education and awareness, it ultimately undermines Caird's philosophy and refigures the position of women by naturalizing their socially

constructed roles. Opalia's resolve to withhold herself from her husband—to do exactly as she wills in marriage—cannot withstand the pressure she feels to give way to what society identifies as woman's "natural" duties as wife and moral guardian. When Alan is finally seduced by Lady Morris, it is Opalia who is overcome with "the sense of failure,"—she takes responsibility for his infidelity, for his "transitory passion, a temptation from which it behooved her to save him" (Cleeve 195, 194). In order for Opalia to find happiness, she must accept the conditions of liberty. As Lady Neath explains to Opalia, "God has made woman the keeper of man's soul. Till woman recognizes that her whole mission in life is the redemption of man's soul either by the education of the sons or by the winning of her husband, there will be no peace, no happiness in the world" (Cleeve 217-218). Opalia's sexual surrender suggests that women must settle; they can only be emancipated to the extent that they accept the social and natural conditions which eternally dictate female behavior.

The Woman Who Wouldn't, *The Woman Who Did*, and *The Woman Who Didn't* merge radical and conservative feminist politics with the unpublicized issues of the marriage debate and weave an intricate web that showcases the circumstantial approach to and conditional nature of women's freedom at the turn of the century. As much as I have focused on how Herminia, Eurydice, and Opalia reflect the angelic restrictions that constructed the ideal New Woman heroine and guided the feminist agenda, it has also been my purpose to show how these three texts, through intertextuality and interdiscursivity, aided in exposing that such parameters were at odds with liberal principles and counterproductive in the protection of a women's basic human rights. As contributions to the marriage debate, *The Woman Who* intertexts hardly offer any

concrete direction for legal reform; instead, they imagine new marital trajectories and devise alternative romantic ideologies, and in doing so, they confront the limits of liberal thought at the turn of the century.

These texts are shaped by the diverse voices in the marriage debate, and they intersect and shape one another. In these dynamic encounters, the issue of authentic freedom collides with its fraudulent substitute. The conversation provoked by this dialectic reflects what Walker identifies as a major impediment to the progress of marriage reform in 1895. He argues that "the bulk of mankind will not permit the modification of institutions in the direction of liberty and justice" because "the old is clung to with stupid persistence until the evils it generates become so oppressive that their victims must revolt or perish" (73). Walker, who claims to represent "the radical" position of his generation, asserts that society must focus on reform that "advances towards freedom of choice"—genuine, free choice uninhibited by an "unnatural and cruel social code" (73, 74). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Didn't* accentuated and complicated the notion of free choice with regard to the marriage debate, and as I will examine in the next chapter, these texts also centered in on the reticent sexual politics of the marriage debate—feminist issues that needed to be unveiled to procure social and cultural reform "in the direction of liberty and justice" (Walker 73).

CHAPTER 3 INDIVIDUAL PASSIONS AND COLLECTIVE VIRTUES: FIRST-WAVE FEMINIST SEXUAL POLITICS AND THE SEXUAL EDUCATION OF THE NEW WOMAN

By contextualizing *The Woman Who* intertexts in both the social-purity mission and the marriage debate, I have illustrated how these texts confront the limits of the angelic and therefore unveil the ideological and cultural constraints that thwarted the progress of first-wave feminism and infringed upon the authentic liberty of women. Through the fictionalization of social-purity practices and through the projection of new romantic trajectories, *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* destabilize the homogeneity of ideal femininity and reconceptualize the social and cultural position of women, interrogating the opposition between the ideal and the fallen woman as well as the opposition between woman and man. As demonstrated by the critical backlash against the premises and heroines of these New Woman novels, traditionally minded members of late-nineteenth century society were hesitant to rethink the standard monolithic definition of womanhood or to reevaluate marriage practices because such interrogations would inevitably facilitate an investigation into the problematic construction of female sexuality and desire. In this chapter, I turn my attention to how *The Woman Who* intertexts facilitate this threatening investigation as they interrogate the reticent sexual politics of the late-nineteenth century in protofeminist ways. As these popular texts publicized and investigated what Margaret O.W. Oliphant identified in "The Anti-Marriage League" (1896) as "instinctively shrouded" topics, they did not unveil definitive answers nor did they assemble a unified image of female sexuality to replace the old (149). Instead, they uncovered a multitude of questions and a multiplicity of representations; thus, they began to project a new, plural image of

womanhood—one that discredited the consolidating power of the angel and permeated the (pure/fallen, virtue/vice, purity/passion) borders that constructed and confined her sexuality.

In order to better understand how *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* contribute to this process of exposure and transformation, we must first contextualize these texts in the critical conversation which sought to consolidate traditional ideology and reaffirm that the angelic mandates of purity and virtue are equally applicable to both life and literature. As illustrated by much of the literary criticism published by women in the late-nineteenth century, writing was yet another vehicle for purifying society. Thus, as Mrs. H. R. Haweis describes in *Words to Women: Addresses and Essays* (1900), women writers must understand their responsibility and "take a much more serious view of their power over men" (69). Women writers "have the strength and courage and polish of men," but what distinguishes them from men is their ability to "keep those qualities for the *spiritual* and not the *animal* level" (Haweis 68). Haweis draws on social-purity rhetoric in order to urge women writers to distinguish themselves from men—to assert their moral superiority on the page because so much is at stake:

> I do think we ought never to forget that not only the eyes of our immediate and closest men are upon us—but the eyes of the whole world just now; that every book and article and paragraph we women write, is going to do something to push the world on or to push the whole world back into animalism. We are all mothers, as it were, of the whole world, and our teaching and our example are going to make or mar those who listen to us. (69)

According to Haweis then, the woman writer must uphold her "feminine" duties and embrace the lofty mission that has been prescribed for her. Although Haweis recognizes

the power of a woman to write "from the *woman's special* point of view,"—to harness her "inner" and "earnest" thoughts and disclose the unknown—Haweis suggests that these individual practices are permissible only if they coincide with a collective "womanly" vision and uphold conventional feminine ideals (68).[32]

As I have examined in Chapter 1, Frances Cobbe contends that "the one only safe, true way of progress" is paved with purity and virtue (*Duties* 8), and Haweis echoes these social-purity ideals in order to show how this dictum is also applicable to the writing practices and textual content of women writers. As Haweis distinguishes between female and male writers, she reiterates the opposition between elevated spirituality (feminine) and base animalism (male) in order to highlight the privileged position of women. Additionally, she reiterates the pure/fallen dichotomy through her (either/or) depiction of "good" and "bad" women writers. The ideal woman writer uplifts society because she is dedicated to "holy work, cleansing, repairing, [and] beautifying," and the fallen woman writer is "like the proverbial penny-a-liner, *soiling*, and *blackening* the *ephemeral white*" (Haweis 71).[33] As Haweis explains, the text of the women writer must be pure and holy: "Let us write on enduring *parchment*—that will take no ink till it is *washed*—let us so cleanse, so beautify the page, and take the pen in hand only to be *Recording Angels*" (72). In literature as in life, women are confined by their angelic duties to purify society. They

[32] The logic that Haweis follows here is very similar to the line of reasoning that informed the feminist approach to "free choice" in marriage, which I discuss at length in Chapter 2. Haweis presents what appears to be a liberal argument in that she recognizes a woman's right to literary self-expression—her propensity to record her "inner" and "earnest" thoughts (68); however, this liberty which allows a woman to disclose what she thinks or how she feels, much like her liberty "to choose" a romantic trajectory, is fraught with limitations. She is free to express herself as long as her individual ideas are conditioned by and coincide with the acceptable feminine "point of view" of the collective.

[33] Here, Haweis's derisive representation of the Penny-a-liner (a Victorian term for a writer who is paid one penny per line) coincides with the popular view of these journalists and popular fiction writers. Penny-a-liners were often described as shameless and vulgar hacks who disregarded decorum in an effort to make a living.

are only permitted to express "*women's special* point of view" as long as that viewpoint serves to naturalize and celebrate ideal femininity (Haweis 68). The woman writer who strays from this lofty purpose and pursues a special individualized point of view that may not coincide with the collective construct of womanhood is, much like the fallen woman, a deviant who defiles society. Her works are called "inaccurate, ill-digested" and "ill-natured"—dirty and impure by traditional standards—not because they are actually fallacious or obscene but because they recast female sexuality and explore alternative modes of female desire (Haweis 68). Haweis contends that such women writers are threatening because they deviate from the literary practices of the "Recording Angel"; they boldly attempt to record the very ideas that the angel could never explore.

As Haweis reiterates first-wave feminist discourse in order to focus on the privileged ability of women writers to "clean" the world and purify society through their publications, she also upholds traditional notions about the function and content of literature in general and participates in a larger discussion in which conservative feminists and non-feminists alike adamantly fought to preserve moral principles in both male and female-authored texts. Maintaining the ideology of Victorian respectability, many critics asserted that the direct or indirect discussion of sexual matters in literature would foster devastating effects on lives of the nation's youth, especially on the lives of young, impressionable girls. As I touched upon in the last chapter, the public outrage against *The Woman Who Did* was not entirely fueled by the novel's attempts to expose the injustices of the marriage market; many proto-feminist Victorian novels had certainly tackled this issue prior to the New Woman novel. The backlash against the novel was predicated on the claims that Allen's evaluation of marital practices was vulgar and

immoral because his discussion was immersed in sexual topics, and the public was unwilling to entertain a conversation that permeated such "private" borders.

This anxiety about the threatening potential of "unclean" literature is illustrated in Margaret Oliphant's staunch criticism of Allen's *The Woman Who Did* insomuch as she is reluctant to "sully" her lips and directly refer to the aforementioned topic ("Anti-Marriage" 138, 144). Nonetheless, Oliphant contends that Grant Allen is terribly misguided in his portrayal of marriage alongside "the lesser passion" (sex) because such a combination minimizes the many manifestations of the "union of Two" to one "supreme incident,"—to one "narrow" and "degrading" "false theory" (144). Oliphant forecasts the damage that such a reductive theory can bring: "it corrupts the morals, debases the conversation, and defiles the thoughts" of readers (144). Mrs. Amelia E. Barr offers a similar warning in *The North American Review* in 1890:"Words are realities: they have the power to evoke ideas, which shall evoke facts" (458). Both Barr and Oliphant assert that the "sacredness and mystery" of "the wonderful origins of life" should remain "shrouded" (Oliphant 149)—that "immoral conversation" threatens to rob women of "the bloom of innocence that men have always respected as the great charm of maidenhood" (Barr 458). Reading "immoral books" leads to "unwholesome brooding" which leads to "sin" (Barr 462).

Proper women and pure girls must be protected from sensual literature because it arouses "a prurient curiosity" and "open[s] for imagination the door into forbidden ground" (Barr 459). This "forbidden ground" is paved with alternative representations of female sexuality and desire, and, as skeptics like Barr and Oliphant recognize, such textual territories "have the power to evoke ideas" (Barr 458). Thus, both Oliphant and

Barr contend that a woman's innocence is best maintained by her ignorance—by protecting her from the discussion of any sexual matters, and therefore they both object to literature that might provoke such discussions. Yet, Oliphant acknowledges that to some extent the damage is done—sexual politics have already seeped into the domestic sphere and altered the dynamics of family discussion: "The conversation of the drawing-room is already most sensibly affected. Things are discussed freely and easily which it would a few years ago have been a shame to mention or to think of" ("Anti-Marriage" 149). And although Oliphant realizes that the conversation has become more candid, she is also confident that the threat is contained, that *The Woman Who Did* may have altered the rules of conversation, but it will not alter the impenetrable rules that fashion a woman's life. Oliphant remarks that she does not "imagine" that any woman would actually attempt to follow Herminia's example, and in this respect, Oliphant is pretty accurate, especially given Herminia's struggles and tragic fate ("Anti-Marriage" 145).

As Oliphant had predicted, *The Woman Who Did* did not directly or independently transform the sexual behavior of young women; however, as Oliphant also concluded, the novel, in conjunction with its intertexts and the various initiatives of first-wave feminism and social-purity organizations, did contribute to the changing dynamics of the drawing-room conversation. And it was precisely this dissemination of ideas, possibilities, and knowledge into the domestic sphere—the publication and popularization of the very forbidden issues that were previously unknown or inaccessible to women—that eventually enabled women to create and explore a discourse of sexuality beyond the traditional patriarchal lens that had normalized the binary structuring of womanliness and that had naturalized sexual determinism.

As I discussed in the first chapter, feminist social-purity campaigns of the late-nineteenth century focused their efforts on the purification of society and on the elimination of the sexual double standard in order to empower women and improve the relations between the sexes. First-wave feminists embraced conventional notions of female purity and glorified their angelic potentials rather than promoting sexual freedom and sexual pleasure for women, and thus it would seem that their contributions to the area of sexuality were rather retrogressive. However, as Shelia Jeffreys argues, we must reevaluate our understanding of the area of sexuality in the context of the nineteenth century: "we must look at the area of sexuality not merely as a sphere of personal fulfillment but as an area of struggle in which male dominance and women's subordination can be most powerfully reinforced and maintained or fundamentally challenged" ("Free From" 629). Moreover, it is vital that we distinguish between what we identify as contributions to the area of sexuality *today* and what actually enabled women to participate in and reshape the conversation *then*, when feminists had to convince a patriarchal society that they not only had a right to join a public conversation but also that their opinion mattered.

The development of a feminist discourse of sexuality certainly precedes and expands beyond the nineteenth century, and its genealogy encompasses a multitude of cultural and historical events and influences; however, many scholars who examine how first-wave feminism contributed to the area of sexuality pinpoint the significance of the 1870s campaigns to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts[34] and the efforts of the Ladies

[34] The Contagious Diseases Acts (originally passed in 1864, expanded in 1866 and 1869) were a series of three statues which granted the state with the power to regulate prostitution and compel prostitutes (as well

National Association (LNA), which was founded by Josephine Butler in 1869.[35] The political maneuverings and campaigns of feminist and social-purity organizations like the LNA as well the relationship between first-wave feminism and the social, cultural, and legal politics of prostitution in England have served as the sources of many late-nineteenth century feminist studies; therefore, I do not intend to reproduce a full account of these genealogies.[36] My purpose here in examining the first-wave feminist responses to the Contagious Diseases Acts and first-wave feminists' concern with the rights of prostitutes is to examine why and to what extent *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* utilize the discourse of prostitution, engage with the feminist issues prompted by anti-vice social purity campaigns, and reshape the discourse of sexuality in proto-feminist ways.

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as any woman who the police suspected of being a prostitute or of having a venereal disease) to undergo demeaning medical examinations.

[35] See Judith R. Walkowitz's "Male Vice and Feminist Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain" (1982) and *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992); Emma Liggins's "Prostitution and Social Purity in the 1880s and 1890s" (2003); Shelia Jeffrey's "'Free From all Uninvited Touch of Man': Women's Campaigns Around Sexuality, 1880-1914" (1982) and *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (1997); Lucy Bland's "'Purifying' the Public World: Feminist Vigilantes in Late Victorian England" (1992) and *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (1995); Joy McGibben's "Josephine Butler and the Social Purity Feminists: Their Relevance at the End of the Twentieth Century" (1995); Anne Summers's "'The Constitution Violated': The Female Body and the Female Subject in the Campaigns of Josephine Butler" (1999); and Philippa Levine's *Victorian Feminism: 1850-1900* (1987).

[36] See Paula Bartley's *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (2000); Paul McHugh's *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (1980); Judith R. Walkowitz's "The Politics of Prostitution" (1980), *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (1980), "Male Vice and Feminist Virtue: Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain" (1982) , and *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992); Emma Liggins's "Prostitution and Social Purity in the 1880s and 1890s" (2003); Shelia Jeffrey's "'Free From all Uninvited Touch of Man': Women's Campaigns Around Sexuality, 1880-1914" (1982) and *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (1997); Lucy Bland's "'Purifying' the Public World: Feminist Vigilantes in Late Victorian England" (1992) and *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (1995); and Philippa Levine's *Victorian Feminism: 1850-1900* (1987); Margaret Hunt's "The De-Eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Shelia Jeffreys" (1990); Joy McGibben's "Josephine Butler and the Social Purity Feminists: Their Relevance at the End of the Twentieth Century" (1995); Melissa Raphael's "J. Ellice Hopkins: The Construction of a Recent Spiritual Feminist Foremother" (1996).

When women began to speak out against the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1870s, they asserted their right to debate in a public forum, and, more so, they asserted their right to acknowledge, discuss, and analyze the oppression of prostitutes—to challenge the male-dominated sexual discourse that constructed female sexuality. As Judith Walkowitz points out, this public crusade to overturn the Contagious Diseases Acts marked a pivotal moment in the history of feminism because women "opposed the sexual and political prerogatives of men" and "started a discourse on sex" ("Male Vice" 80). She explains that the public was "shocked" by the many "middle-class ladies" who participated in the campaign and "mounted public platforms across the country" in order to openly denounce the sexual and class discrimination that the acts perpetuated ("Male Vice" 80). The C.D. Acts-repeal campaign opened up a new forum in which women began to address and analyze the very sexual issues that were considered off limits for proper ladies. They began to openly debate the bodily rights of prostitutes, which, in turn, mobilized a more complex critique of female sexuality and of the injustices of the sexual double standard that affected all women. As first-wave feminists entered this male-controlled and male-constructed territory of sexuality, they declared that they would no longer accept the code of sexual ignorance that patriarchy had inscribed for them. As C.D. Acts-repeal campaigner Josephine Butler noted in *An Appeal to the People of England on the Recognition and Superintendence of Prostitution by Governments* (1870), "let it not be supposed that it has cost us little to break through the rule of silence imposed by society upon women, when such matters are to be treated; nor that it has been at a small cost to ourselves that we have gone into the matter in all its details" (146 *The Sexuality Debates*).

In an effort to curtail the spread of venereal diseases, the C.D. Acts set up a process in which prostitutes had to undergo invasive physical examinations, confinement, and possible medical treatment or be subject to criminal charges and imprisonment for their refusal to comply with such measures. Emphasizing the way that the law singled out prostitutes as agents of vice and disease and ignored the culpability of the male patrons, Butler contended that the C.D. Acts perpetuated "the rule of silence" by publicly and legally validating the very myths that women were trained to tolerate and respect: that the subjection of women was necessary for the maintenance of men's sexual well-being and that the double moral standard was indeed justified by men's propensity for sexual activity. As Butler describes in 1870, such a system does little to "stamp out disease" because it authorizes the immoral behavior of men: "Its effect upon those large classes of men to whom, in default of religious principle or a high moral training, the laws of the country are a guide to conscience, is to teach them to look upon fornication not as a sin and shame, but as a necessity which the State takes care that they shall be able to practice with impunity" (*An Appeal* 111). Because the C.D. Acts failed to mandate equal measures on both the female prostitute and the male patron, Butler argued that the legislation excused the sexual immorality of men and avowed that men "are utterly and hopelessly the slaves of their own passions" (111).

Rather than silently and passively accepting that the C.D. Acts were founded on solid ideological principles, repeal campaigners embraced their social-purity mission and sought to undermine the notion that men were 'naturally' lustful and animalistic and instead promoted a new ethical model in which both of the sexes would be bound by the same moral and sexual standards. As I examined in Chapter 1, first-wave feminists

advocated that all men and women should adopt the moral and sexual standards of the ideal woman and that each sex's equal commitment to sexual and spiritual purity would serve to remedy society's problems. Thus, in order to transform the moral and sexual behaviors of men, social-purity feminists (such as Hopkins) advocated the formation of male-purity leagues and popularized a new masculine ideal—the cultivation of a new man who would serve as woman's moral and spiritual equal and support her intellectual development. To address the threatening sexual and moral behaviors of women, feminist campaigners sought to reclaim and reform prostitutes who had become victims of seduction and/or of poverty. This philanthropic approach to the reformation and rescuing of prostitutes was a typical practice of many charitable women throughout the nineteenth century; however, the C.D. Acts-repeal campaigns of the 1870s, which empowered women to "break through the rule of silence" and openly engage in a frank discussion of male and female sexuality (Butler *An Appeal* 146), engendered a way of conceptualizing the victimization of prostitutes in conjunction with the collective sexual oppression of women. Although Butler and her followers waged an attack on the C.D. Acts and therefore directly critiqued how the double moral standard unfairly influenced prostitution-related legislation in the public sphere, this campaign indirectly incited a larger-scale evaluation of the sexual injustices that infringed upon the private lives of women. As Butler realized, the social and legal implications of the C.D. Acts reached far beyond the public streets of the prostitute: it is a social issue that "threatens the purity and stability of our homes" and "degrades all womanhood through foul associations of thought and feeling" (*An Appeal* 127).

LNA members rallied behind Butler, crusaded to protect their fallen sisters from "a system" that authorized "*wholesale and legalised indecent assaults upon women*," and their efforts eventually led to the repeal of the C.D. Acts in 1886 (Butler *An Appeal* 127). In addition to successfully overturning the acts, the LNA campaigns were instrumental in providing women an opportunity to develop a female-centered discursive tradition in the male-dominated arena of sexual politics—to assert their influence and their demands in the public sphere. As Mary Lyndon Shanley describes, "Parliament was not used to hearing arguments concerning sexual hierarchy in the domestic and public realms, much less that public policy systematically sanctioned men's sexual exploitation of and economic power over women" (81). Not only was Parliament unaccustomed to women's political opposition, but even more so, women's effort in the repeal campaign generated other concerns for a traditionally minded public who were accustomed to societal, cultural, and political conventions informed by the dominant patriarchal structure. Women's mobility in the public world, as well as their propensity to discuss "private" issues in public, threatened to erode the borders between the public and the private spheres. As women entered what Butler described as a "chamber of horrors" (*An Appeal* 146)—the forbidden sexualized world of the prostitute and of man—they directly mobilized a conversation about the sexual double standard as it manifested itself in the injustices of prostitution. As a result of this initiation into sexual politics on behalf of their fallen sisters, first-wave feminists cultivated sexual knowledge, an interrogatory mode, and a discursive tradition which enabled and empowered them to address their sexual subjection in the private sphere—to unveil the "chamber of horrors" that haunted their domestic lives.

Thus, as Oliphant had feared, “the conversation of the drawing room” was greatly altered in that women were no longer adhering to ‘proper’ feminine decorum to the extent that they vocalized private issues in the political arena and reevaluated the implications of these issues in the private sphere (“Anti-Marriage” 149). As Walkowitz describes, women used “the feminist politics of prostitution” as a way to “speak publicly about sexual passion and about sexual danger”; however, their approach which elevated women’s ‘natural’ ability to purify and reform society, “reinforced assumptions of sexual difference, particularly the prevailing Victorian association of sexual desire with maleness” (*City* 6, 9, 7). In other words, feminists tended to view prostitutes as victims of male vice and economic pressure. Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois explain that although first-wave feminism battled against the sexual oppression of women, it did so by perpetuating a conservative view of female sexual morality (48). Instead of reevaluating the dominant perception of women’s asexuality and passionlessness and exploring alternate possibilities which allowed for a more radical view of female sexuality, “feminists consistently exaggerated the coerciveness of prostitution. They insisted that the women involved were sexual innocents, helpless young women who ‘fell’ into illicit sex” (Gordon and DuBois 43). Thus, as Gordon and DuBois assert, “feminists remained committed to the containment of female sexuality within heterosexual marriage and maintained that men should adhere to women’s higher standards of sexual morality (47).

Although feminists capitalized on their greater morality and modesty as justification for their political and social involvement in ‘public’ affairs, many commentators still believed that it was best for women to remain at a safe distance from any such “immodest” discussions and that middle-class women’s direct involvement with

the prostitution debate magnified and unveiled the very improper conversations that women ought to avoid. In the beginning of this chapter, I described some of these journalistic critiques which urged the public to protect women from the threatening potential of "unwholesome" literature and "degrading" conversations. Now I turn my attention to how these patriarchal sentiments also shaped some of the public's response to the C.D. Acts-repeal campaigns. In Annie Besant's *The Legalisation of Female Slavery in England* (1876), she commences by analyzing the source of the public's disapproval: "Reaction from Christian cant upon this subject, and the rightful recognition of the sacredness and dignity of human nature, physical as well as mental, have to a great extent prejudiced many of the Secular party against the society agitating for repeal" (91-92). Besant asserts that this "bitter indignation" against the leaders of the repeal movement is groundless because "there is nothing in the speeches made at the meetings of the society to which the most prudish could object, unless, indeed, they object to the question being dealt with at all" (92). Barr's position in "Conversational Immoralities" validates Besant's conjecture, for Barr contends that not only should the issue of prostitution be suppressed but also that the charitable missions to help the prostitute—what she refers to as "dark-life studies"—are "dangerous" because encounters with such "haunts of sin" threaten to defile a proper woman's moral and sexual purity (460). Although Barr finds rescue work to be very problematic, she momentarily suspends her critique and offers the following statement to relate her support for charity work: "to seek and save the lost is truly a noble mission" (460). She follows up this declaration by saying that "if moral scavenging is to be done" in order to "seek and save the lost," it is a job primarily for men associated with the church and secondarily for women who are mothers or widows;

it is not to be undertaken by unmarried girls (460). However, the reference to charitable work as "moral scavenging" seems to be disingenuous attempt at encouraging philanthropic efforts and at empathizing with "the lost," and as illustrated by the following passage, it is evident that Barr finds nothing "noble" or advantageous about one's charitable work with or sympathy for the prostitute:

> The present laxity in the morals of conversation has come from various causes. One has certainly been an imprudent and perhaps in many instances, an unclean and spurious charity. Never before in the history of Christendom have unchaste women been the subjects of so much attention. The broad Saxon names designating them, unsparing in their condemnation, unmistakable in their meaning, have been put aside for others euphemistic enough for good society, and thus unnamable things have been made namable. It is a very significant breaking-down of decent barriers. The "whore" and the "courtesan" have become "fallen sisters" and "unfortunates," "Magdalens" or "*lorettes*"; and a sentimental sympathy has familiarized young girls with conditions of which they ought absolutely to know nothing. (460)

What Barr sees as threatening—the dismantling of "decent barriers" between the prostitute and the middle-class woman and the naming of "unnamable things"— are the very arguments that first-wave feminists used to fight against the sexual oppression of women and the distinct tactics that enabled women to reshape the dominant sexual discourse. Butler's approach in soliciting public support for the rights of prostitutes was to reveal how the borders between the public and the private spheres were imaginary—how, contrary to public beliefs, the home and the proper middle-class family was in no way protected from the physical and psychological effects of prostitution. As Butler reminds the public, "the innocent" are suffering as a result of the diseases transmitted by the "intermediate class"—the "adulterous husbands and fathers, who are dispensing disease and death in their families" (*An Appeal* 123). Butler's depiction of men's culpability in the contamination of the home distorts the traditional Ruskinian image of

the ideal Victorian husband and father—the man who "encounter[s] all peril and trial" in the "rough work" of the "open world" and who "guards the woman from all this" in order to maintain his home as refuge from the horrors of the public world (Ruskin 77). And as Butler points out, "certain persons resent, as if it were an indelicacy, any allusion to the most important link": the unfaithful husbands who are responsible for defiling the sanctity of the home (*An Appeal* 123). The women who were involved with the repeal campaigns began to assert their roles as intermediaries between the public and private spheres, but contrary to Barr's contention, it was not their encounters with the vice of the public world that caused the "breaking-down of decent barriers"; instead, their "sentimental sympathy" for prostitutes—their mission to seek justice for women in the public sphere—revealed the fictitiousness of these borders (460).

The transmission of disease from the street to the home offered undeniable proof that the home was directly susceptible to the damaging effects of public vice and immorality; therefore, campaign leaders like Butler and Besant reminded their adversaries that "discussions to which they object only become necessary through the existence of the evil attacked, and that the lack of modesty lies in the commission of the evil, and not in the endeavor to rescue the victims of it" (Besant *Legalisation* 92). Thus, they claimed it was their duty to intervene in the politics of prostitution because as Butler describes, the issue "*directly strikes* at the physical and moral life of tens of thousands of women" [emphasis in original] (*An Appeal* 127). In addition to the rationale that it was vital that women intervene in order to protect their "fellow sisters" from the injustices of the law, feminist repeal campaigners began to examine the ideological implications of prostitution on a larger scale and argue that it "degrades all womanhood" (*An Appeal*

127). Thus, as feminists articulated an argument about how the C.D. Acts infringed upon the prostitute's *"absolute sovereignty over her own person,"* they reconceptualized the prostitute as a rightful member of the female collective (Butler *An Appeal* 126). As a result of this initiative which focused on the human rights of prostitutes, first-wave feminists also further dismantled the public/private divide as they turned their attention to how this legally-sanctioned subjection of women and public encouragement of the double sexual and moral standard also infringed upon women's rights in the private sphere.

The feminist rhetoric used to describe the prostitution crisis in nineteenth-century England often depicted prostitution as a system of slavery in which "the souls and bodies of tens of thousands of women are deliberately, and under the direction of the government, sacrificed to a supposed necessity" (Butler *An Appeal* 112). Specifically in reference to the mandatory medical exams sanctioned by the C.D. Acts, Butler argues that "women who are terrified to submission again and again to the ordeal which this law requires them to submit to, are reduced by it to the character of wild beasts" (*An Appeal* 112). According to such repeal publications, the C.D Acts promoted "the institution of the slavery of women" because of its "open denial…of the sacredness of the individual human being" (Butler *Social Purity* 39). Butler purposely incorporated the language of "the Great Abolition movement," [37]*(Personal Reminiscences 227)* into her appeals for the rights of the prostitute, and, by association, feminists utilized the rhetoric of slavery in arguments beyond the prostitution debate in order to portray how all women were

[37] In *Personal References of a Great Crusade* (1896), Butler acknowledges how William Lloyd Garrison has inspired and guided her: "he started me on the study of the great Abolition movement, a cause which, indirectly, has done much for our own" (227). Throughout her autobiography, Butler also makes numerous references to "the abolition" of the C.D Acts. These examples, along with the many references to "the slavery" of women illustrate how first-wave feminist arguments often paralleled those of the abolitionists.

enslaved by the injustices of patriarchy. In *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896), Butler contends that women's identification with the prostitute empowered their cause and solicited public fear: "Such a proclamation, coming from the woman's sides, strikes a kind of terror in the hearts of our adversaries, such as even the noblest man's voice does not inspire. Why? Because it is the voice of the slave herself, and her oppressor, with the abettor of oppression, fears, saying to himself, like Herod, 'It is John the Baptist whom I have beheaded; he is risen from the dead!" (280)

In this passage, Butler conflates the distinction between the prostitute and her middle- class sister campaigner as they speak with one voice: that of the slave. This slavery imagery alludes to Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments as outlined in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and the merger of private and public sexual politics that resulted from the repeal campaign at the end of the nineteenth century revived and expounded on these liberal feminist claims that Wollstonecraft had explored at the end of the eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft's radical depiction of marriage as a form of legal prostitution resurfaced as a standard premise of the marriage-reform debate at the turn of the nineteenth century. The poetics of prostitution granted feminists a language to facilitate a direct, and, at times, hostile attack on marriage, and, thus, many New Woman novels appropriated and amplified this rhetoric in productive ways. This transfer of expression from first-wave feminist politics to New Woman fiction is yet another illustration of how the New Woman novel functions as an intertext of social-purity feminist politics, and it also demonstrates how the New Woman novel participates in an interdiscursive conversation that was responsible for reshaping Victorian sexual politics.

The parallel between prostitution and marriage became pivotal to many first-wave feminist arguments and New Woman narratives as a result of the repeal campaign; however, this theme had certainly been developed well before the late nineteenth century. As mentioned, most scholars agree that Wollstonecraft was the first liberal feminist to define marriage as legalized prostitution;[38] however, it is worth noting that this analogy, which had become a keystone of late-nineteenth-century feminism, had been propagated in many other examples of British art and literature, especially through portrayals of marriage which critiqued the mercenary practices of matchmaking and espousal[39]. Additionally, according to Lucy Bland, the marriage/slavery analogy that saturated many first-wave feminist arguments "was not new" (*Banishing* 131)[40]. Prior to the New Woman Novel, many authors (both men and women) had criticized the mercenary quality of marriage and challenged the notion of a husband's ownership of his wife, and these contributions culminated in the marriage debate that ensued at the turn of the century. As Susan Kingsley Kent explains, by the late nineteenth century, feminists' "adoption of a commercial idiom to speak about the institution most exalted by Victorians" united "feminists and even avowedly anti-feminists" in their position about the state of marriage: "marriage, finally, was only a legal form of prostitution" (249, 250). It was the public circulation and acceptance of this understanding that finally enabled first-wave feminists to take a crucial step forward and do more than just expose the marital

[38] In *Banishing the Beast*, Lucy Bland notes that according to Wollstonecraft's biographer Claire Tomalin, Wollstonecraft was the first to use this phrase (see pages 132 and 338).
[39] For example, William Hogarth's series of paintings *Marriage à-la-mode* (1743-1745) explored the devastating effects of marriages that resulted from commercial contracts instead of mutual affection and attraction.
[40] See pages 131-132 in Bland's *Banishing the Beast* for specific examples.

injustices that plagued women: they were finally positioned to demand and enact legal reform[41].

In Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, Herminia's evaluation of marriage is saturated with prostitution and slavery phraseology, and she insists on a free union with Alan so that she is able to evade the injustices that plagued married women. Following Alan's suggestion that he and Herminia should get married, Herminia offers him a rather dramatic explanation of why she cannot accept his offer:

> Think how easy it would be for me, dear friend…to do as other women do; to accept the *honorable marriage* you offer me, as other women would call it; to be false to my sex, a traitor to my convictions; to sell my kind for a mess of pottage, a name and a home, or even for thirty pieces of silver to be some rich man's wife, as other women have sold it. [emphasis in original] (41)

Here, Herminia emphasizes the ways in which traditional marriage is like a business transaction because women carelessly "sell" themselves and relinquish their principles in exchange for all the benefits of a marital union: social status, propriety, and financial security. The "mess of pottage" allusion depicts how women are often shortsighted because they are lured by the seemingly immediate profits of marriage and ignorant of the sacrifices that they will have to make in return for such artificial gains. As Cicely Mary Hamilton identifies in *Marriage as a Trade* (1909), because women have "always been far more completely excluded from direct access to the necessities of life," marriage serves as their only means of self-preservation (17). Hamilton asserts that for a woman to secure domestic stability and property, she only has "one form of payment" at her

[41] In Chapter 2, which provides a thorough examination of the marriage debate, I argue that in comparison to the feminocentric marriage novels of the Victorian period which focus on the exposure of marital injustice, the New Woman novel is more invested in facilitating change and does so by devising experiments and imagining alternative possibilities.

disposal: “it was demanded of her that she should enkindle and satisfy the desire of the male…In other words, she exchanged, by the ordinary process of barter, possession of her person for the means of existence” (17).

This is precisely the “ordinary process of barter” that Herminia is adamant about avoiding; she is unwilling to enter into a conventional marriage because she views it as “a commercial trade or undertaking” (Hamilton 18). Thus, Herminia and Alan’s “irregular compact” is devoid of all the monetary customs that accompany conventional marriage—the very customs which enable men to purchase and enslave women in marriage : “Not for worlds would she import into their mutual relations any sordid stain of money, any vile tinge of bargaining. They could trust one another; that alone sufficed for them” (Allen 76). The narrator explains, “She had always been self-supporting…and she would be self-supporting still. To her mind, that was an essential step towards the emancipation of women” (73). In the future, in a community of “perfect liberty” (74), Herminia envisions a society in which “prospective mothers” could be “relieved as far as possible from the stress and strain of earning a livelihood,” (75) but she acknowledges that in the “present barbaric state of industrial slavery” (74), “economic liberty” and “self-support” serve as the only defenses against patriarchal tyranny. The economic superiority of man functions to preserve his social superiority over women and is thus “irreconcilable with the perfect individuality of woman” (70). Herminia wants to share her life with Alan because they are “friends and lovers” (76); she is determined to abandon all the oppressive traditions of “the *régime* of the manmade patriarchate, where the woman and the children were the slaves and chattels of the lord and master” (70). Herminia will not be bought or sold in a series of “settlements” or “business

arrangements" (76); she wants to "freely" give herself to Alan in order to maintain full possession of her body and her principles.

By highlighting how marriage is unprofitable for women, *The Woman Who Did* directly challenges the Victorian romantic ideal—the model in which, as Joseph Boone describes, marriage functions as the "most desirable end of existence" because "lovers are rewarded with the bliss of matrimony" ("Wedlock" 65). Additionally, by emphasizing the transactional nature of marriage, the text interrogates another aspect that was vital to the preservation of conventional marital ideology: the opposition between the ideal and the fallen woman. That prostitutes were players in a commercial system of sexual barter was a social actuality—a widespread occurrence in the seedy public world. Correspondingly, marriage and domesticity served as the ideal woman's safeguards—as the very mechanisms of stabilization that distinguished the position of the proper middle-class woman from that of the fallen woman. Thus, as I have examined throughout this chapter, traditionalists made many attempts to thwart the efforts of the C.D. repeal campaigns because the presence of middle-class women in the public sphere and the revised definition of womanhood that it produced—one that embodied both the ideal and fallen woman—threatened to erode the very polarizations that upheld the patriarchal traditions and dominant sexual dynamics of society. Beyond the political arena and the activity of the C.D. repeal campaigns, the threats continued in the form of the bold New Woman heroine, who, like Herminia, unabashedly defends her position that "*honorable marriage*" is nothing more than domestic slavery and prostitution [emphasis in original] (Allen 41).

In addition to *The Woman Who Did* redefining marriage as a monetary enterprise and thus alluding to the shared experiences of wives and prostitutes, the language that Herminia uses to describe marriage—a system of "vile slavery" "sustained" by "unholy sacrifices" and "buttressed" by "unseen horrors"—further develops this connection and destabilizes the distinctions between wife/prostitute and private/public (Allen 41). Although Herminia does not directly identify the marital atrocities of which she speaks, the narrative's incorporation of the first-wave feminist discourse of female slavery in conjunction with the way that the text actively engages in the late-nineteenth century marriage debate draws attention to the issue of women's bodily and sexual rights. Feminist concerns over the physical rights of women arose in response to the C.D. Acts. They argued that the acts permitted women to be "sacrificed to the 'necessities of men'" and legalized a process in which women "be literally made slaves, equally obedient to the call of the doctor who heals and to that of the man who infects, holding their bodies at the hourly order of each class, with no right of self-possession, no power of self-rule permitted to them" (Besant *Legalisation* 95). This passionate evaluation of the laws and social attitudes that enslaved prostitutes by robbing them of their human right to assert control over their own bodies, enabled women to publicly discuss taboo issues and empowered them to further scrutinize how women were sacrificed to the demands of men in other aspects of life.

When Herminia informs Alan, "I know what marriage is, from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what unseen horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttressed; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained, and made possible," she relies on the same arguments and phraseology that feminists used to shape their philosophies about

prostitution (Allen 41-42). In doing so, the text blurs the distinctions between the experiences of prostitutes and wives: both are oppressed, and both are victimized by the unjust systems and patriarchal principles that perpetuate the emotional and bodily enslavement of women. This provocative correlation that Herminia develops and reiterates is certainly a radical premise—one that induced the criticism of many of Allen's contemporaries. For example Millicent Garrett Fawcett's review of the novel scrutinizes Herminia for her many lengthy "set speeches" in which "she regards marriage as 'a vile slavery'" because Fawcett claims that Herminia's arguments are much too contrived and her position is "preposterous" (627, 626, 630). Fawcett contends that Herminia has no merit as a "real or human" character because of her many nonsensical and rehearsed "speeches" about the cruelty of marriage (627). With regard to the literary development of Herminia as a dynamic fictional character, Fawcett's assertion is certainly validated by the heroine's "tiresome" and didactic delivery of her views (627); however, beyond the novel's literary shortcomings, Herminia's "set speeches" (627) tap into a very "real" and thriving polemic about the slavery of women—of both prostitutes and wives alike.

The first-wave feminist campaigns that focused on sexual subjection of prostitutes created a woman-centered discourse of sexuality, and this critical discourse enabled women to extend their critique of the enslavement of women as it existed in the private sphere. This examination of "marital tyranny" as Frances Power Cobbe identified it included a number of interrelated issues[42], yet many of these evolving arguments

[42] First-wave and social-purity feminists were involved in numerous reform campaigns throughout the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were designed to improve the relations between the sexes and the position of women by focusing on suffrage, education, temperance, abolitionism, violence against

accentuated the ways in which womanhood as a whole was degraded by the public politics of prostitution because traditional marriage practices also perpetuated the double moral and sexual standard and justified the objectification of women in the private world (*Wife-torture* 225). Thus, when Herminia identifies marriage as "vile slavery" and refers to the "unseen horrors" and "unholy sacrifices" that it supports, she expands her critique of marriage and offers a fuller definition of marriage as slavery—one which accounts for both the mental and the physical abuse that women encounter as a result of marriage. Herminia further develops this analogy when she boldly tells Alan, "I know on what vile foundations your temple of wedlock is based and built, what pitiable victims languish and die in its sickening vaults; and I will not consent to enter it" (Allen 48). Here, Herminia depicts wedlock as a material place—as a "temple" of captivity wherein "victims" are subjected to intense suffering and death—and in presenting this graphic illustration of marriage as a site of women's bodily harm and mortality, the text offers a heightened view of the sexual dangers of marriage and alludes to the very physical threats that feminists were finally beginning to speak out against.

Fawcett criticized Allen for reiterating that "marriage means slavery" without "attempting to prove it," (631) and although Herminia's speeches do not identify specific examples in order to support this definition, the public had certainly become familiar with the popular feminist rhetoric of slavery and with how feminists employed the marriage/slavery argument in order to campaign for the physical protection and bodily integrity of married women. For example, as Jeffreys points out, Elizabeth C.

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women, property rights, and child custody rights. See Philippa Levine's *Victorian Feminism: 1850-1900* (1987) and Shelia Jeffrey's *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (1985) for a thorough historical account of these interrelated issues.

Wolstenholme Elmy was one such feminist campaigner whose publications do "not distinguish between the experience of bodily slavery for women, whether it is in marriage or prostitution" (*Spinster* 34). In *Phases of Love* (1897) for example, Wolstenholme Elmy asserts that women's subjection stems from man's "general vision" which classifies a woman as "a due offering to his own sensual propensities," and, as a result, he focuses on "checking and crushing out any effort or aspiration of hers to a fuller mental status or personal independence, which might prove not so submissive to his baser scheme" (348). Wolstenholme Elmy contends that the entirety of a woman's life is filled with such horror because she never fully possesses her own body: she is "a slave, a spoil in warfare, a concubine…to be used as a convenient item for matrimonial sale or barter" (348). This pattern of subjection, what Herminia alludes to when she refers to "unseen horrors" and "unholy sacrifices," is, according to Wolstenholme Elmy heightened in a woman's espousal:

> Frequently, however, and shamefully, woman is left to enter upon marriage without true knowledge or any warning as to the real nature of the wife's so-called 'duties' therein; its possible physical relations, of perhaps the most repugnant or even perilous character to herself—abuses and excesses, resultant often in misery and suffering or premature death—but which she finds to be assumed as part of the 'iron contract.' (350)

Insomuch as *The Woman Who Did* appropriates this emerging feminist phraseology and alludes to the physical suffering and death that wives endure as a result of "continual unwelcome intimacies," "unjust marital conduct," and sexually transmitted diseases, Herminia's proposed solution, unlike the rhetoric that she uses to describe it, is difficult to historically contextualize in feminist tradition because it is comprised of theoretical contradictions with wide-ranging implications. In keeping with traditional first-wave feminist sexual discourse, Herminia asserts that marriage is a system of

slavery that robs women of their physical and civic rights; however, she does not encourage marriage reform or embrace celibacy as a means to remedy the relations between men and women.[43] The text also does not locate a solution in feminist social-purity politics by maintaining that the only way to secure equality for women is to purify society—to erase the double sexual and moral standard and encourage all men to emulate the standards of feminine morality and purity. Instead, *The Woman Who Did* provides a model of women's liberty in which radical and conservative projections of female sexuality converge—a pathway for women's emancipation that is initiated by Herminia's unconventional sexual politics yet sustained by conventional maternal ideals. It imagines a heroine who is both sexualized and "stainless," "passionate" and principled (Allen 223, 56). Thus, *The Woman Who Did* confronted the public with a disconcerting image of female sexuality. As Dr. C. Willett Cunnington writes in *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century* (1936), it was precisely this "Exhibitionism" of the novel "that provoked so much alarm": "The whole basis of Victorian family ethics was disputed; was Woman entitled to regard the instincts of sex as though they were mere physical faculties to be utilized at her own pleasure, when Authority had definitely pronounced them to be a moral incubus?" (301, 299).

During the late nineteenth century when many feminist campaigners sought to discredit the notion that male sexuality was 'naturally' aggressive and animalistic, the prospect that a woman could exhibit the same type of unrestrained sexuality for the

[43]Although feminists were concerned with issues of sexual and moral inequality in marriage, they did not generally support free union as a viable remedy. Instead, they embraced their roles as moral guardians and attempted to purify the institution of marriage rather than completely abandon it. See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of dominant first-wave feminist marital ideology. Other feminist responses included promoting the empowerment of women through marital celibacy, but as I discussed in Chapter 1, this was certainly not a mainstream approach.

purposes of pleasure was certainly a radical assertion, and it was also an issue that, according to many conservative critics, respectful authors had no business exploring. Yet, despite many initiatives to "keep the conversation pure" in order to preserve the sexual innocence and morality of young women, the New Woman novel emerged as a site where writers and the public readership challenged the traditional construct of female sexuality and attempted to produce representations of women that deconstructed the social, medical, and scientific discourses that 'naturalized' women's inferior but morally-valuable positions as wives and mothers[44]. In "The New Woman, Childbearing, and the Reconstruction of Gender, 1880-1900," Loralee MacPike argues that the project of "rethink[ing] human nature and human relations through restructurings of the sexual roles

[44] The intertextual and interdiscursive connections between first-wave feminist ideology and New Woman fiction that I focus on in this chapter illustrate one late-nineteenth movement to reform sexual attitudes; however, it is worth noting the study of sexuality in the 1880s and 1890s was influenced by many other contributions. As Lesley Hall describes in "Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," some sex reform movements shared similar theoretical positions with those of social- purity feminists in that sexologists like Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Patrick Geddes, and J. Arthur Thomson "were definitely opposed to the double moral standard" (49). Yet as evidenced in the publications of Carpenter, his attempt to, as Stephen Brooke explains, "liberate the body and sex from the shame in which both were cloaked," (20) depicts a vision of sexual education which is far afield from the first-wave feminist agenda. For feminists, sexual education was vital to women for the sake of preserving purity, and for reformers like Carpenter, sexual education was a means to publicize how sexual pleasure "was the foundation of a regenerated body politic" (Brooke 20). Thus, feminists and sexual scientists like Carpenter supported the eradication of the double sexual standard, yet they had very different ideas about what sexual and moral standard should take its place. Whereas feminists sought for men to adopt the purified moral and sexual that characterized ideal femininity, Carpenter's vision of sex reform was much more radical in that it looked to abandon classic moralism altogether to the extent of promoting homosexuality as the "the possible lifeblood of a new world" (Brooke 21). Also See *Edward Carpente*r *and Late Victorian Radicalism* (1990) edited by Tony Brown. This radical argument for sexual reform was also illustrated by Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds in the 1897 edition of *Sexual Inversion.* Loralee MacPike argues that Ellis's redefinition of "homosexuality as part of a normal continuum of human sexuality" had radical potential in that it allowed him to reconstruct "same-sex activity within a larger realm of normal sexuality independent of childbearing"; however, by privileging the notion that "women's sexuality was inherent rather than socially conditioned," Ellis's new sexual taxonomy, as well as that of Carpenter, were both limited by traditional definitions of female sexuality that privileged "the power of biology" (375). Although this study primarily focuses on what scholars have categorized as "feminist ideas on sexuality" (Shelia Jeffreys, for example, uses this phrase to refer to first-wave feminist contributions to sex reform like those of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and Frances Swiney) and, more specifically on how these feminist movements were manifested in *The Woman Who* series, I acknowledge that many other areas of sex reform emerged at the turn of the century and that first-wave feminist politics and sexology responded to and shaped one another in multiple and complex dialectical exchanges.

of the New Women," was contingent on the development of a revised concept of motherhood that was never fully realized (374). Thus, MacPike points out, the New Woman novel actualized "the collision between women's rights and childrearing," (380) by either using "the New Woman as a negative backdrop against which "real" womanly behavior, as defined by childbearing, can be foregrounded and validated" (379) or by "destroying the New Woman through childbearing" (381). In either instance, this inability to "disentangle" the New Woman from the pervasive ideology of the family which "is the foundation of Western civilization and which expresses itself through compulsory motherhood," renders the New Woman's world "unimaginable" (MacPike 387).

As a treatise on free love, *The Woman Who Did* anticipates the New Woman's potential to reshape the discourse of sexuality, but it also proves to be a problematic task in view of society's longstanding commitment to the Victorian maternal ideal. Prior to motherhood, Herminia is an independent, determined, and proud New Woman. She is wholly committed to securing "perfect liberty of choice and action" for women, and, in an effort to do so, she demonstrates the radical extent of her beliefs by embracing her sexual freedom and openly engaging in sexual activity with a man who is not her legal husband (Allen 74). However, aside from the scene of their consummation which depicts Herminia's active role in their sexual encounter (she awaits Alan's arrival and "frankly" welcomes his sexual advances) — Herminia's sexuality is subdued, not radical or revolutionary (Allen 77). As MacPike explains, *The Woman Who Did* depicts a model of female sexuality that coincides with the traditional feminine construct: it is "nonthreatening" because it is "monogamous," and Herminia exhibits her passiveness

through her "willingness to subordinate herself to her lover's superior mental ability" (380). Additionally, Herminia's adherence to the conventional sexual standards of passivity and purity is contrasted with the text's many references to Alan's ideal masculinity, and this structure reiterates typical gender constructs: "Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis,--the male, active and aggressive; the female, sedentary, passive, and receptive" (Allen 82). Alan is virile, strong, and dominant, and Herminia is "woman enough by nature to like being led" as long as it is "the right man"—the man of her own choosing (58).

Despite the narrator's traditional portrayals of Herminia's sexuality, the narrative itself is constituted on the reader's acknowledgement of her active female sexuality—by what Herminia boldly "did." Furthermore, the text is fueled by Herminia's attempts to de-stigmatize what she did by projecting a new model of women's sexuality which replaced the sinful and shameful sexual deviance of the fallen woman with the potentially transformative and empowering sexual freedom of the New Woman. These alternative depictions of female sexuality were certainly threatening because they disconcerted the construct of the ideal woman—the passive and passionless Angel of the house—and if the sanctity of the feminine ideal was eroded, then the patriarchal structure of the middle-class family was also at risk. However, as MacPike describes, the threat of Herminia's discordant sexuality is mitigated through her devotion to the Victorian ideal of motherhood (380-381). Herminia's radical sexual theories exist alongside her very traditional understanding of women's 'true' function: "Herminia was far removed indeed from that blatant and decadent sect of 'advanced women' who talk as though motherhood

were a disgrace and a burden, instead of being, as it is, the full realization of woman's faculties, the natural outlet for woman's wealth of emotion" (Allen 138).

The figure of New Woman was inextricably linked to public debates about women's 'natural' functions and 'natural' instincts, and as Herminia's distinction here illustrates, feminists were also divided about the issue of maternity. As Emma Liggins explains, "the relationship of maternity to female fulfillment in 1890s fiction remained uncertain, variously represented as a burden and a source of regenerative female power" ("Bad Mothers" 27). One such example of what Herminia identifies as the "advanced woman['s]" position on maternity materializes in Mona Caird's *Daughters of Danaus* (1894) (Allen 138). Hadria (Fullerton) Temperley, the novel's New Woman heroine, boldly asserts that motherhood is both biologically and culturally oppressive, and she rejects the essentialist argument that women are 'naturally' equipped for and emotionally fulfilled by the duties of motherhood. Hadria does not reject "motherhood *per se"* (Caird 342) but motherhood as it serves as a "means and method of woman's bondage" in the "present social state" (341). Hadria contends that "for thousands of women," the "birth of their children is an intolerable burden," and rather than sentimentalizing the child as a joyful reward for the "fierce misery" of childbirth, Hadria purports that "a woman with a child in her arms" is a "symbol of abasement, an indignity"—a reminder of her past "humiliation" and present "chains" that have been forged "of her own flesh and blood" (342, 341). Hadria discloses these radical ideas to her sister-in-law Henriette, and because Henriette views women as 'naturally' self-sacrificing and instinctively maternal, Henriette finds Hadria's notions "insane" (342). In an effort to redirect Hadria away from such insulting accusations and reassert the sanctity of motherhood, Henriette

reminds Hadria of the "potency" of the "maternal instinct." In her response, Hadria delineates how even that which is seemingly 'natural' is "shamefully presumed upon": "Strong it [the potency of the maternal instinct] obviously must be, if industrious cultivation and encouragements and threats and exhortations can make it so! All the Past as well as the weight of opinion and training in the Present has been at work on it, thrusting and alluring and coercing the woman into her man-allotted fate" (Caird 342).

Caird's theories which identified maternity as women's "man-allotted fate" rather than her "*Nature*-allotted" one, were certainly nuanced ideas that probed beyond the conservative scope of mainstream feminist positions [emphasis in original] (*Daughters* 342). First-wave feminists reshaped notions of women's bodily rights, privileged the notion of voluntary motherhood, and asserted that women should have the right to abstain from sexual intercourse with their husbands except for the purposes of procreation; however, they maintained conventional perceptions of the social role of women and of female sexuality as it was dominantly configured within the context of motherhood. In addition, many feminists embraced motherhood as their special function and used essentialist theories in order to create solidarity among women. Even George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne), whom Elaine Showalter describes as being "seen as one of the most sexually-charged of the New Women writers," ("Introduction" xii) elevated maternity as a source of agency for women: "Woman is, if she could only realize it, man's superior, by reason of her maternity—the negation of that is her greatest cowardice" (Egerton 2). In a similar fashion, Herminia contends, "every woman should naturally wish to live her whole life, to fulfill her whole functions"—to fully realize and proudly accept "the orbit for which nature designed her" (Allen 73-74). According to this

prevailing understanding of women's special maternal function, if a woman considers herself too "advanced" to embrace this customary trajectory, then she is not brave enough to seize her power.

Through its clearly-depicted essentialist theories about maternity, The *Woman Who Did* inscribes a familiar pathway for women—a 'naturalized' route in which the Angel is rewarded for fulfilling her maternal and moral duties. However, through its investment in free love and sexual freedom, the text carves a second pathway, and this alternative route is uncustomary in that it is both 'unnatural' and unideal by cultural and social standards. Therefore, the text reasserts that Herminia (and all "good" women) should adhere to a collective identity of womanhood through maternity, but this message is at variance with Herminia's insistence on free love as the only means to protect her "individuality" and "freedom" (Allen 42). According to Herminia's theories, which she expresses to Alan, she must reject "the ordinary terms of civilized society" (42) and avoid "the beaten way" that other women blindly follow (47) in an effort to forge and follow her own solitary route: "I choose rather to be free. No fear of your scorn, no dread of your bigotry, no shrinking at your cruelty, shall prevent me from following the thorny path I know to be the right one. I see no temporal end" (47). As noted by many literary critics at the turn of the century as well as today, it is precisely these antithetical sexual politics which convolute Herminia's feminism and the feminist potential of the text. Allison Cotes astutely identifies this contradictory nature of the text that troubled audiences then and continues to do so now: "Grant Allen…wants to have it both ways"; the "full consequences of the plot" can only be materialized through Herminia's unconventional sexuality, "but at the same time, Grant Allen insists on the conventional male/female

relationship" as well as on "the old Victorian ideal of the sanctity of motherhood" (8, 10) Cote further adds, "This kind of disparity between theory and plot is one of the things that makes *The Woman Who Did* such an unsatisfactory novel" (8).

To end the analysis here and attribute this disparity to the structural deficiency of *The Woman Who Did* is to ignore the text as a site that reproduces dominant cultural, social, and political structures. Additionally, if we do not contextualize these oppositional politics of the text in the historical and cultural practices that shaped them, then we run the risk of overlooking how *The Woman Who Did,* by engaging in an interdiscursive and intertextual conversation, unveils and challenges the ideological constraints of a feminist tradition rooted in the existing patriarchal structures. That *The Woman Who Did* fails to invent a radical representation of woman is not surprising because it attempts to do so by converging new notions of sexual freedom with old notions of Angelic maternity. When Herminia discovers that she is pregnant, she must envision herself as both sexually liberated New Woman and mother; she must determine a way to continue along on her self-made "thorny path" where she can maintain her freedom and autonomy despite her transition into motherhood—into a collective feminine experience that is traditionally constructed on the precepts of conformity and submission rather than on emancipatory feminist politics of self-development and individual fulfillment. Additionally, after Alan dies of typhoid, Herminia must rethink her role to be "father and mother in one"—to take on all of the parental responsibilities of her daughter Dolores (Dolly). Thus, the text draws attention to what Ann Taylor Allen describes as "the maternal dilemma,"—the predicament of merging individuality and motherhood that she explores in her book *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970.* Ann Taylor Allen explains

that "the conception of motherhood as a dilemma" surfaced in the 1890s as a result of feminist efforts to promote "freely chosen motherhood" as a "realistic—though still often unattainable—aspiration" (1). As this predicament became a central focus for many women, feminists attempted to create solutions by "extol[ing] motherhood as woman's distinctive contribution to society" and by developing a "maternalist ideology and practice" founded on "utopian visions of a world where motherhood would enhance rather than limit women's freedom" (Taylor Allen 13).

In order to create arguments that privileged motherhood as a source of agency and power, feminists often appropriated the discourse and theories of eugenics. As Lucy Bland posits in *Banishing the Beast*, eugenics offered feminists "the potential of scientific validation and reinforcement of moral purity beliefs" (230). "Genetic purity and moral purity" proved to be a productive pairing in that they "mutually" reinforced one another in their alleged philanthropic aims (Bland 230). In addition to these benefits, feminists looked to eugenics to capitalize on their motherly duties: "But within the Eugenic Programme women were not simply the objects of eugencial direction, they were also the subjects of eugencial didactics" (230). Thus, in their role as educators to other women, feminists "were to be at the forefront of pronouncing on 'responsible motherhood,'" and this potentially offered women "substantial power—power to dictate to others—not dissimilar from that exercised within philanthropy" (*Banishing* 230).[45] My purpose in

[45] Although a more in-depth discussion of eugenics, feminism, and population control is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting a few contextual elements here. First, as Lucy Bland points out, even non-eugenist feminists appropriated the discourse of eugenics. Second, although feminists were focused on issues related to moral and sexual purity, by incorporating the rhetoric of eugenics (the production of 'fit' offspring and the purification of the race), they implicated themselves in the miscegenous ideals of the eugenics movement, and as Bland describes, this is certainly upsetting to feminists today. Third, eugenics may have appealed to feminists, but as Bland mentions, "in many cases, eugenists were explicitly anti-feminist in their accusations against the women's movement as the promoters of sterility" (234). See

providing this brief description of the relationship between feminism and eugenics here is to reiterate how a tradition of elevated motherhood permeated the cultural landscape and informed the late-nineteenth century feminist agenda. Liberal feminist politics cast new light on the physical and emotional struggles of mothers; however, feminist claims for women's rights to individuality, personal fulfillment, and influence in the public sphere drew on the rhetoric and imagery of women's privileged and empowered role as mothers. This model imposed restrictions on feminist progress, for it was framed in contradictions and ambivalence. How could society recognize the New Woman as an autonomous individual if she continued to resort to her collective identity as mother?

As illustrated in *The Woman Who Did,* Herminia, who realizes that her original "mission had failed" because of Alan's death, actualizes this predicament when she embraces motherhood in order to cultivate her utopian feminist vision (Allen 138). The narrator explains that motherhood will grant Herminia "social and moral salvation," and initially, when Dolores (Dolly) is still a child, motherhood affords Herminia personal strength, a renewed sense of faith in her cause, and a means to re-actualize her mission (Allen 138). She projects her hopes onto her daughter, who will become "the world's true savior" by "tak[ing] up the task" that Herminia is unable to complete (138, 128). Herminia reasons that Dolly's "noble birthright of liberty" destines her to become "the apostolate of women" (138), and it is through the prospect of her daughter's commitment to her mother's spirit of individualism and reform that Herminia finds fulfillment: "Her

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Chapter 6 ("Eugenics, the Politics of Selective Breeding and Feminist Appropriation") in Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast.* Also see Linda Gordon's article "Why Nineteenth Century-Feminists Did Not Support 'Birth Control' and Twentieth-Century Feminists Do: Feminism, Reproduction, and the Family," (1982) in which she illustrates that unlike the eugenicists, first-wave feminists advocated voluntary motherhood and abstinence, not the legalization of contraception, as a means of population control.

one wish now was to make Dolly press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling she herself by mere accident had missed so narrowly. Her own life was done; Alan's death had made her task impossible; but if Dolly could fill her place for the sake of humanity, she would not regret it" (150-151).

Despite the narrator's insistence that "every good woman is by nature a mother,"—that women should embrace their gendered duties—the text challenges the premise that this collective notion of maternal feminine identity also functions as a means of individual fulfillment and empowerment for the New Woman (Allen 138). Herminia looks to motherhood as a fresh start and as an opportunity to redirect her feminist mission, and thus the text entertains the possibility that feminists can create a new world by way of "old" motherly ideals—that motherhood can serve to "enhance rather than limit women's freedom" (Taylor Allen 13). However, as Herminia discovers after about twelve years, motherhood is only partially fulfilling. The narrator explains, "And she was happy in her life; as far as a certain tranquil sense of duty done could make her, she was passively happy" (Allen 151). Post-motherhood, Herminia is certainly not the same "vigorous" and animated woman that she once was (10). Herminia's sense of herself and the world around her is no longer dynamic; she acquiesces to a disconnected life in which duty is the only form of happiness and fulfillment that she knows. In embracing her 'natural' role as a "devoted mother," she must relinquish her identity as a free-thinking and autonomous New Woman and become "a machine for the production of articles and reviews" in order to support herself and her daughter (151). Through these examples then, the text suggests that Herminia relinquishes her New Womanliness in order to become a good mother who is self-sacrificing, passive, and passionless. However, the

text also reminds readers that Herminia is invested in motherhood for its feminist potential. Herminia is willing to sacrifice her happiness and her creative freedom and devote everything to her maternal duties not only because she is 'naturally' a selfless mother, but because Herminia believes that her sacrifices will yield personal triumph. She reasons that "if Dolly could fill her place for the sake of humanity," then all her sacrifices and suffering would be worthwhile (151).

By depicting Herminia's maternal duty as an agency for personal fulfillment, *The Woman Who Did* subverts the Victorian construct of the selfless mother, and it appropriates the first-wave feminist discourse of maternal empowerment through its examination of the competing interests between motherhood and individualism. For Herminia, ideal motherhood serves as a way for her to redirect her feminist vision: she must sacrifice herself so that her daughter can rise up in her place. However, Dolly has no desire to take up her mother's mission. In fact, despite Herminia's diligence in guiding Dolly toward "the freest and most rational ideas," Dolly's moral and social outlook is extremely commonplace (Allen 180). Dolly demonstrates none of her mother's iconoclasm, free-spiritedness, or feminist energy; "she show[s] her individuality only by evolving for herself all the threadbare platitudes of ordinary convention" (180). As Herminia is confronted with the unsatisfying reality of her daughter's character, the text asserts that her individualistic model of motherhood has failed:

> To Herminia this slow discovery, as it dawned bit by bit upon her, put the final thorn in her crown of martyrdom. The child on whose education she had spent so much pains, the child whose success in the deep things of life was to atone for her own failure, the child who was born to be the apostle of freedom to her sisters in darkness, had turned out in the most earnest essentials of character a complete disappointment, and had ruined the last hope that bound her to existence. (182)

As indicated in this passage, Herminia's inability to successfully mother Dolly in her New Womanly ways is too much for her to bear. Through references like the "final thorn" and "last hope," the narrator foreshadows Herminia's suicide as a direct result of Dolly's atavism (Allen 182). Herminia's suicide occurs five years later shortly after Dolly, who is seventeen and "informally engaged to Walter Brydges," learns of her illegitimacy and informs her mother that "no right-minded girl who respected herself" could continue to associate with a woman like Herminia (199, 218). Dolly, who is angered and ashamed that her mother had "cruelly" denied her the justice of "an honorable birthright," seeks the guidance and protection of her paternal grandfather, Sir Anthony Merrick (214). Impressed that Dolly is "a sensible, modest, and healthy English maiden," and sympathetic to the "sad history" that Herminia had imposed upon her, Sir Anthony Merrick offers to make Dolly his adopted daughter, give her his last name, and support her marriage to Walter (215). Dolly joyfully accepts her grandfather's proposed arrangement, although she laments that she cannot go through with the marriage. Dolly informs her mother of her plans and explains why she regretfully cannot marry Walter: "For, of course, while *you* live, I couldn't think of marrying him. I couldn't think of burdening an honest man with such a mother-in-law as you are!" (218-219). That night, Herminia drinks a phial of prussic acid, and "like some saint of the middle ages," she takes her own life (223). She leaves Dolly a letter in which she begins by describing her suicide as an act of maternal self-sacrifice: "I had but one task left in life—to make you happy. Now I find I only stand in the way of that object, no reason remains why I should endure any longer the misfortune of living" (220). Yet, the narrative foreshadows that Herminia's suicide is motivated by other reasons—that Herminia is not easily codified as

a traditional fallen mother who must offer up her own life in order to redeem her wrongdoings. Because the text dismantles the typical pure/fallen construct of woman and recasts Herminia's sexual freedom as ascension rather than a fall, *The Woman Who Did* insists that Herminia is "pure and good," not fallen and sinful (33). Thus, if the text consistently rejects that Herminia is a fallen woman, then it would follow that we are not meant to read Herminia's death as the inevitable fate of the fallen woman—as final sacrifice for her sexual transgressions.

Instead, the conclusion of the novel functions to reiterate what the narrator has insisted on all along—Herminia cannot thrive and facilitate social progress in a world that is unwilling to challenge the dominant cultural and moral codes. The remainder of Herminia's letter revisits what the text had earlier foreshadowed—that Herminia's "complete disappointment" in Dolly's orthodoxy had finally run its course and "had ruined the last hope that bound her to existence" (Allen 182). Even in her last moments, Herminia maintains that her cause was one "of truth and righteousness" and that her course was just (221). Herminia's error was that she overestimated the power of her maternal individualism: "My darling, I thought you would grow up to feel as I did; I thought you would thank me for leading you to see such things as the blind world is incapable of seeing. There I made a mistake; and sorely am I punished for it" (221). Here, Herminia discloses that she is being "punished" for the "mistake" of misguided aspiration—for believing that she would be capable of making Dolly "feel" and "see" beyond the dictates of the "blind world" (220, 221). Yet in the concluding lines of the novel, the narrator reasserts Herminia's blamelessness: her "soul" is "stainless" (223). Herminia dies because she is a social and moral visionary; she is stifled by the "ordinary

inhabitant" of society, who, like Dolly, is bound by an "ineffable slough of moral darkness" (182).

The conclusion of *The Woman Who Did* insists that even though Herminia is not successful, her contribution will serve as the foundation for future social progress: "Not for nothing does blind fate vouchsafe such martyrs to humanity. From their graves shall spring the glorious church of the future" (Allen 223)[46]. However, the text is never able to articulate exactly how this "glorious church of the future"—how more free-thinking New Women will "spring" up from the efforts of martyred New Women like Herminia if, as the novel asserts, individual identities are naturally constituted, not culturally constructed. Through the example of Dolly, the text maintains that the belief systems of individuals are biologically determined—that nature bestows each human being with an essential nature, with a self uninfluenced and unaffected by social, cultural, or political forces: "There is no more silly and persistent error than the belief of parents that they can influence to any appreciable extent the moral ideas and impulses of their children. These things have their springs in the bases of character: they are the flower of individuality; and they cannot be altered or affected after birth by the foolishness of preaching" (183-184). The text also 'naturalizes' gendered identities, especially in regard to female identity, which, according to the text is 'naturally' maternal. Thus, these many essentialist

[46] Throughout *The Woman Who Did* the narrator employs religious rhetoric to describe Herminia's character and her mission, and Herminia's direct discourse also reiterates how she identifies herself as "a moral pioneer" and "a martyr" (44). Herminia specifies that her life's goal is to "seek the Truth before all things" in order to "emancipate" the world from "social and moral slaveries" (25). Early on in the narrative, when Herminia explains why she must reject Alan's offer of marriage, she tells him, "Every great and good life can but end in a Calvary" (45). This element of foreshadowing along with narrator's frequent emphasis on Herminia's purity and righteousness substantiates that Herminia's death is not a shameful act of self-redemption for her falleness. Instead, as the Calvary reference suggests, Herminia's martyrdom mirrors that of Jesus: her soul is "stainless," her cause is just, and her admirable and heroic death will inspire future followers ("the church of the future") (223).

assumptions foreground a narrative which ultimately asks readers to rethink the very essentialist notions that 'naturalized' feminine sexual purity.[47] Through Herminia, this contradiction is manifested in her "unpractical utopianism:" she envisions a perfect world where women can become free individuals, but she herself is unable to imagine a new image of woman severed from her collective maternal identity and duties.

In "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did:* Spencerian Individualism and Teaching New Women to Be Mothers," Brooke Cameron argues that *The Woman Who Did* illustrates Grant Allen's attempt to actualize the development of "self-regulating and independent" individuals through "the Spencerian ideal of progressive evolution" (281). Cameron points out that "despite his firm commitment to nature's absolute authority," *The Woman Who Did* illustrates "Allen's deeper struggle to balance the natural and the social individual" (284). As a result, Allen asserts that New Women must be properly guided toward liberation and "must be taught to recognize their individualism as bound up with service to social reproduction and evolutionary process" (Cameron 291). In this model, the New Woman becomes an autonomous individual and joins "the glorious church of the future" because she has been culturally conditioned to naturalize motherhood into her identity (Allen 223). Her potential to become free and free-thinking is hinged with the condition that she must "freely" think of herself as a maternal individual.

That *The Woman Who Did* portrays some skepticism about a noninterventionalist model wherein "nature" is solely responsible for cultivating women's maternal instincts

[47]In Chapter 1, I argue that *The Woman Who Did* develops a radical redefinition of purity by rejecting the notion that the ideal woman must adhere to traditional standards of sexual purity.

reiterates a cultural anxiety about the New Woman's threatening potential to create a vision of womanhood in which woman is severed from her "natural" position. Similarly, this cultural anxiety about woman's sexual function also pervaded and informed first-wave feminist ideology at the turn of the century: like Herminia, feminists struggled to de-naturalize the arguments that sustained their oppression, but when liberal notions of individualism and self-fulfillment raised questions about women's sexuality and sexual functions, feminists often reasserted an image of collective feminine identity wherein women were instinctively pure, moral, and maternal. Additionally, as evidenced by feminist campaigns at the turn of the century, feminists engaged in conversations about sexual issues in order to speak out against male sexual behavior, to raise awareness about the sexual dangers that women face, and to implement a new sexual code which encouraged both men and women to adhere to the standards of sexual and moral purity.

This approach to sexual issues served as a general framework for most feminists even throughout the sexology and sex reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Jeffreys explains, "the work of the sexologists and their popularisers introduced a whole new way of thinking and talking about sex"; however, "their ideas were directly at variance with those of feminists involved in the campaign to challenge the construction of male sexuality" and refute separate sphere ideology (*Spinster* 128).[48] It was not until the 1920s that women began to exhibit new attitudes about their sexuality, but as Jeffreys illustrates, these campaigns arose in response to the

[48] See Chapter 7, "Antifeminism and Sex Reform before the First World War," in Shelia Jeffrey's *The Spinster and Her Enemies.* Jeffrey describes how historians tend to praise Havelock Ellis (and the contributions of other late-nineteenth and early-twentieth sexologists) for challenging "the puritan sexual morality of the nineteenth century" and for asserting that women could experience sexual pleasure and had a right to do so (129), but she asserts that "from a feminist prospective his contribution does not look positive" (129). Jeffreys analyzes how Ellis uses theories of innate difference to redefine sexual relations in a way that objectifies women and reasserts their submissiveness, and she therefore contends that "Ellis's views can be recognized as staples of antifeminist ideology today" (129).

sexology movement: “Rather than being about the opening up to men and women the possibility of sexual choice, the 1920s sexual revolution was about narrowing women’s options to the role of complements to men in the act of sexual intercourse” (*Spinster* 192-193). “New Feminism” of the early twentieth century promoted models of active female sexuality and pleasure and privileged women’s roles as mothers, but in doing so, it yielded to the demands of sexologists who “did not suddenly take a humanitarian interest in maximising women’s sexual response” (*Spinster* 185). As Jeffreys describes, “rather they took an interest in quelling feminism and women’s critique of men’s sexual behavior by eliciting from women a sexual response the sexologists believed to be intrinsically linked with total surrender to men’s power and dominance” (*Spinster* 185).

The trajectory of feminism and sexology from 1895 to the 1920s is certainly much more complex then the brief description that I have offered, but since this chapter focuses on how the New Woman novel contributes to an ongoing struggle to reconstruct female sexuality, it seems significant to point out how even this later projection of the feminist position on women’s sexuality exhibits women’s inability to facilitate change on their own terms, to deconstruct the “natural” forces that restricted their feminist aims in some way or another. In the late nineteenth century, feminists clung to what was deemed to be “natural” and ideal womanly behavior: moral and sexual purity. In the early twentieth century, new feminists also gravitated toward what culture prescribed as “natural” womanly behavior, but by then male sexologists had developed a new perception of natural law. In this new model, women were no longer “naturally” asexual or sexually nonresponsive: they had sexual capacities and erotic desires, and within a heterosexual marriage, women had a right to sexual enjoyment. Both of these models

maintained that woman was "naturally" maternal; however, in opposition to the Victorian representation "in which woman was allowed to be reproductive but not sexual in her own right," early-twentieth-century feminism eroticized reproduction: women received "physical gratification" for fulfilling their natural duties as wives and mothers (Jeffreys *Spinster* 139). Nonetheless, feminist vision during both the pre and the post- First World War eras was regulated by woman's commitment to her "natural" sexual functions, and because authoritative scientific, medical, and cultural influences were able to manipulate definitions of nature to serve their own purposes, feminist ideals were often constructed upon the very patriarchal foundations that women sought to dismantle. Feminist progress was incessantly thwarted by cultural interventions designed to socially condition women into their "natural" roles. As illustrated by *The Woman Who Did*, the New Woman's notions of sexuality and individuality are potentially threatening; however, her "unpractical utopianism" is evidence of her struggle to control the means of her ideological reconditioning and develop a new self-awareness—a feminist consciousness that is pragmatic and effectual because it is no longer responsive to the culturally imposed injunctions of nature.

First-wave feminists realized that the first step toward gaining some control over the dominant discourses which defined their identities was to assert their right to voice their opinions in the public sphere and to confront the "chamber of horrors" that pervaded the public and private lives of women (Butler *An Appeal* 146). As I examined in the beginning of this chapter, traditionalists maintained that the "decent barriers" that separated the pure from the fallen and the clean from unclean must remain intact (Barr 460). They reasserted the sanctity of separate spheres to argue that women pose risks to

their moral and sexual purity when they enter threatening public spaces or when they come in contact with any ideas capable of arousing "a prurient curiosity" (Barr 459). Yet feminists recognized that they could not empower themselves or their cause without knowledge, and the New Woman novel became a vehicle for that knowledge—for naming the "unnamable things" and unveiling the veiled issues which, for too long, had been kept from women in the name of respectability (Barr 460).

Consequently, as illustrated by both the backlash against New Woman writers who tackled "instinctively shrouded" topics in their literature and the Secular party's objections to the tasteful and respectful campaigns against the C.D. Acts, many members of society certainly did support a model of ignorance for young women and maintained that even for the beneficent purposes of education or philanthropy, women should not deal with such topics (Oliphant 145)[49]. This opposition to the emergence of a more open

[49]In the Ignorance versus Education debate, those in favor of "ignorance" opposed any form of sexual education for women. However, it is worth noting that the arguments in favor of education were still highly conservative with regard to what content women should be exposed to and how that content should be delivered to them. Supporters of female sexual education believed that access to sexual knowledge would help to protect women's sexual integrity. Thus, in contrast to other sex reform movements of the late nineteenth century, this feminist movement sought to reform public opinion about a woman's access to knowledge, but it did little to challenge the dominant sexual attitudes and the standard of sexual behavior that defined womanhood. In other words, feminists may have sought to 'reform' the system of sexual education, but their purpose in supporting this change was to safeguard the traditional image of female sexuality; they argued that more women would be pure and angelic if they were not so ignorant of sexual matters. This is the approach used by *The British Medical Journal* in its 1896 reviews of Wolstenholme Elmy's *Baby Buds* and Lucas Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* which are both identified as sexual education publications. Although *Baby Buds* is as a sexual education manual, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* is a work of fiction, *The British Medical Journal* notes that each of these texts are valid and worthwhile contributions to the field of sexual education because they tactfully discuss sexual matters for the purposes of prevention. Of *Baby Buds,* the critic writes, "The author considers that it is far better to teach children simply and seriously how life originates than to let curiosity become prurient and inquiry indecent. . . A very difficult and delicate matter is treated with considerable skill, although many will think that it had better have been left alone" (28). Of *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* the critic writes, "In this story very *risqué* matters are treated with considerable deftness and delicacy. Though the light from within must in each individual be the guide to deliver from the pitfalls of sensuality, it may be well that the conscience of some be aroused on the possible prostitution of marriage" (28). In contrast, Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* (which was originally co-authored with John Addington Symonds and published in 1896), which is certainly a major contribution to the debate about sexual education, was not well-received or recognized as proper sexual education material. See Sean Brady's *John Addington Symonds and Homosexuality: A*

dialogue about sexual issues as well as women's involvement in it generated much public debate about the moral and sexual education of young girls. Following the publication of Barr's "Conversational Immoralities" in 1890, *The North American Review* further developed the debate by publishing "Audacity in Women Novelists," by influential literary critic George Parsons Lathrop. Although Lathrop is initially sympathetic to Barr's concerns regarding the dangerous potential of sensual conversations, he refutes her position and asserts that in order to protect a young woman from "contamination," the focus must be on building up her spirit, an outcome which is best achieved through "the right training" and "clear knowledge," not through ignorance (610). Lathrop contends that women authors are vital to this task of education, and he applauds them for choosing "to deal frankly with sin and vice and crime as a part of the spectacle of life" (614). According to Lathrop, discussions of such topics are often "mortifying" and "unpleasant," but much like feminists acknowledged the ill-effect of silence, Lathrop also acknowledges how progress begins with exposure: "But as we are all obliged to live under the shadow of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it will be wise to make the best of our lot, and to throw as much light as possible into the shadow, in the hope of finally dispersing it" (614). He adds, "women can aid in doing this quite as well as men, and possibly, in the end, much more efficaciously than men" (614).

Lathrop proclaims that the field of literature as well as society benefits from a culture that values women's free expression and access to knowledge; however, Lathrop's support here seems to extend beyond his interest in women's social function: "The instinctive and vigorous advance of women towards the free and open discussion of

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Critical Edition of Sources (2012), in which he discusses the scandal of the text's publication as well as the public's resistance to sexual knowledge about homosexuality (31-32).

matters which are possibly of even more vital moment to them than to any one else appears to me most encouraging" (616). These open discussions of sexual issues are so important to women because exploration allows for possibility, for unregulated thought and ideas. Lathrop writes, "If women express themselves freely in books, they will learn to understand their own nature better than they do now, and men also will understand it better" (617). The problem with Lathrop's reasoning here is that he assumes that there is but one "nature" to discover. Although Lathrop misconceives the outcome of women's free expression, his argument in support of knowledge over ignorance and its potential to foster individual self-development for women is a notable contribution to feminist progress. For, once woman is granted the license to "freely" think, she will find, as Mona Caird describes, that "'Human nature' has more variety of powers and is more responsive to conditions than we imagine. It is hard to believe in things for which we feel no capacity in ourselves, but fortunately such things exist in spite of our placid unconsciousness" ("Marriage" 197).

As a contribution to the late-nineteenth-century debate about women's sexual ignorance, Lucas Cleeve's *The Woman Who Wouldn't* illustrates that through the very act of interrogating sexual topics, the New Woman novel is able to inscribe a new discursive direction which explores alternative representations of female sexuality. In doing so, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* asserts the New Woman's right to self-actualization and self-definition and beckons her to harness these newfound rights in order to confront and dismantle the social and cultural forces that 'naturalized' her identity. In the preface to the first edition of the novel, Cleeve declares that her literary work is purposefully crafted to attack the notion that ignorance is the safeguard of women's innocence. She defends

Allen's *The Woman Who Did* against critics' claims of indecency and impropriety, and also given that *The Woman Who Wouldn't* explores the same subject matter as *The Woman Who Did,* it is evident that Cleeve positions herself as a proponent for women's right to sexual knowledge. Cleeve explains that *The Woman Who Wouldn't* serves as "an appeal to all those who have daughters": "The age of ignorance (miscalled innocence) is over, and it behoves those who can influence our women to influence them rightly, and to give them some good reason for marriage" (v).

In the preface to the second edition of *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* Cleeve defends herself against the "uncultivated" and "narrow-minded" reviews from critics who claimed that her novel is "indecent" (vii-viii). Once again, Cleeve affirms her position by reminding the public that "the question of marriage and the relations between husband and wife" is certainly not immoral or indecent (viii). Cleeve reports that the first edition of her novel sold out in under three weeks and that more are being printed to "meet the demand" (vii). She then reasons, "let us hope" that "the dear, pure-minded, Sunday-loving, cleanly British public would not clamor for it [the novel] as they are doing now" if it was indeed an "an indecent book" (viii, vii). Cleeve points to the novel's commercial success as proof that it was about time that a novel frankly examined the negative effects of women's ignorance—that the public was receptive to a new tradition of privileging knowledge over naïveté. Cleeve also cites that "the greatest praise" that she has received is "the certainty of the spirit of bitter animosity it has aroused in *men"* [emphasis in original] (viii). Cleeve explains that she had "expected this" response from men and that she "rejoice[s] at the realization" of her expectations (viii). That the circulation and content of *The Woman Who Wouldn't* provoked fierce opposition from traditionally

minded men suggests that they recognized how women's access to knowledge and propensity for free thought potentially threatened to dismantle the underlying patriarchal forces that regulated the social and sexual interactions between men and men. The production and control of sexual knowledge was yet another way for men to maintain absolute power over the bodies and minds of women.

The lesson that *The Woman Who Wouldn't* provides readers about the sexual education of young women is that it is the duty of good mothers to inform their daughters about the sexual requirements of marriage and guide them to understand marital sex as part of God's plan. The narrative chronicles how Opalia's confusion and misjudgment about the relations between the sexes could have been avoided if her mother had only been more open with her. Instead, Mrs. Woodgate belongs to the generation of ignorance; when Opalia seeks her sexual advice, Mrs. Woodgate responds by referencing past conventions: "In my day girls knew nothing of these things, still less spoke of them" (Cleeve 7). And because Mrs. Woodgate was accustomed to ignorance as a young girl, she maintains this tradition with Opalia. As a young woman, what Opalia learns about these intimate matters is by chance, and what she discovers is absolutely terrifying:

> Many years afterwards she told her husband what it was [that] had given her these thoughts. It was not the Girton teaching, but a conversation she had overheard without her wishing it between her brother and a man cousin the day of a wedding. Opalia had been a bridesmaid. Oh, how miserable she felt to be a woman at all. How she had crept to her room with tingling, flaming cheeks, to think that during the day and night that was what people thought about. The clergy, the verger, the guests, all knew the ordeal that was to come. Oh, to think that the end of their prayers in God's House, the lovely music, the lovely flowers, the pure white robes, the lovely faces of the bridesmaids, all that was sweetest and purest was to end thus. And all the world knew it. (8-9)

This incidental encounter with sexual knowledge forms the basis of Opalia's outlook on marriage, and through "daily contact with passion in its lowest and most degrading forms," Opalia becomes more and more convinced that her commitment to celibacy is the only sure way to escape the degradation and the horrors of wifedom (Cleeve 87). Throughout Opalia's individual quest for sexual knowledge, she only encounters images and situations that portray sex as dangerous and destructive force: "Everywhere passion and its results were exhibited in the most horrible form" (47). As Opalia discovers through the example of Mrs. Kerr, even sexuality espoused in motherhood is appalling: Mrs. Kerr is a "pale wan little woman, expecting her eleventh baby," yet she is married to a reverend who preaches celibacy to male purity leagues (47). Given Opalia's moral education which coincides with the ideal Victorian construct of "purity and modesty" and all the threatening images of sexuality that confront Opalia from day to day, her disgust and terror seem to be felicitous and judicious responses (11). How is Opalia to conceive of sex in any other way, and why, after all that she has seen, would she be willing to debase her purity and "sacrifice her principles" to engage in an act that devours and defiles everything and everyone around her? The majority of the narrative is dedicated to exploring these dilemmas, and eventually, after Alan is seduced by Lady Morris, Opalia's predicament consumes her: "The question now was whether she should submit for the sake of retaining her husband's love, or whether she should leave him for ever. The problem was too great for her. Either way she could not see before her. In one moment to undo the cherished ideas of her life was as hard and repugnant to her as the idea of leaving Alan" (206).

It is not until Opalia seeks comfort and advice from Lady Neath that she finds peace and answers to her many questions. Lady Neath is a stranger from Whitechapel, who prior to Opalia's discovery of Alan's unfaithfulness, sends Opalia a letter offering guidance. She writes to Opalia, "Forgive a stranger for addressing you, but your eyes speak from a world through which I have been. You, who preach, do you not need solace and comfort?" (180-181). When Opalia is confronted with the reality of her husband's affair, she is seized with "despair," "deep sadness" and "degradation," and in her moment of great agony, she recalls Lady Neath's letter and decides "yes, it had been sent her by a kind providence" (196, 199). This plot element is certainly contrived to say the least, yet Lady Neath functions as the wise, spiritual mother who is able to conclude the precautionary tale of *The Woman Who Wouldn't* by informing Opalia what she should have learned in the first place: "God has made woman the keeper of man's soul. Till woman recognizes that her whole mission in life is the redemption of man's soul either by the education of the sons or by the winning of her husband, there will be no peace, no happiness in the world" (218).

As Opalia learns life's great lesson and finally finds peace and joy with Alan and her child, Cleeve also completes her "appeal" in support of a new model of sexual education for young women: mothers must provide their daughters with sexual knowledge because, left to their own devices, daughters may find that, like Opalia, their happiness may be thwarted by the "greatest curse"—the "power" of self-analysis (v, 43). Through her self-exploration, Opalia cannot articulate a way to meet the competing demands of purity and passion. Thus, much like Herminia, Opalia is a New Woman who must be redirected to nature. She must learn that "men [are] not built the same as women,

and that the only possible life between men and women [is] the recognized one" wherein woman must "submit for the sake of retaining her husband's love" (Cleeve 205-206). Thus, the text seems to overturn its initial subversive potential because it looks to control the sexual 'knowledges' that women may acquire as a result of self-exploration. Much as *The Woman Who Did* aligns the New Woman's individuality with her social function, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* emphasizes a woman's right to access sexual knowledge as a means to reposition her sexual identity within the confines of ideal femininity and to extol woman's sexual sacrifice as the fulfillment of her 'natural' function to appease and redeem man.

In *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, the 'proper' knowledge that Opalia receives from Lady Neath enables her to accept the 'natural' terms that have constructed female sexual identity. As a result of her education, she is rewarded with "the beautiful compensation" of motherhood, and once again, the text maintains that for a woman self-fulfillment and individual happiness can only be attained within the 'natural' order of things (Cleeve 217). In the closing lines of the novel, the narrator proclaims that "for the horrors of womanhood, God [provides] a compensating joy, the exquisite, incomparable joy of maternity," and the narrative concludes by referencing Opalia's joy, which she has finally attained as a result of her compliance (225). Although *The Woman Who Wouldn't* affirms that maternity has resolved all of Opalia's dilemmas and that Lady Neath's theories have adequately answered all her questions, this narrative solution fails to work out all of the complex theoretical concerns that Opalia unveils during her quest for self-knowledge. The novel attempts to warn readers about the follies of a young woman's misguided inquisitiveness, yet in the very process of developing this lesson, Opalia's interrogation

of female sexuality and the dynamics of sexual power cultivates a space for the New Woman to challenge the monolithic model of female sexuality on her own terms.

Through her commitment to celibacy, Opalia seeks to embody the feminine ideal of purity in both theory and practice; in other words, she attempts to actualize her identity within a prescribed collective construct. Yet, in her efforts to elevate sexual purity as the only means to emancipate women to and to engender a marital relationship that coincides with this theory, Opalia begins to experience sexual desire: "Passion, the all-absorbing passion, which she met and combated everywhere, was wearing away the hours of her life, and twixt her longing to be with Alan, and her fear of meeting him, her life became almost intolerable" (Cleeve 88). Given that Opalia has ever only conceived of "passion in its lowest and most degrading forms," Opalia's acknowledgement of sexual desire challenges the model of sexual purity that she has inscribed for herself (87). Additionally, Opalia's "longing to be with Alan" depicts an image of female sexuality that does not correspond with proper feminine behavior (88). As indicated in this passage, Opalia is not pure in mind and in thought: she actively thinks about satisfying her fleshly desires and recognizes how unbearable life is without the prospect of sexual fulfillment. Furthermore, Opalia questions whether she will be able to sustain her mission of sexual purity because she is so overcome with sexual longing. She is filled with "fear" by the idea of meeting Alan because she experiences sexual desire that she may want to suppress.

The Woman Who Wouldn't eventually reestablishes the tie between female sexuality and maternity and repositions Opalia's sexual behavior within the realm of her 'natural' reproductive function, yet this does not overwrite Opalia's attempt to understand

her sexuality on her own terms—on the basis of her individual wants and desires rather than on the ideals that 'nature' has prescribed for her. Thus, the other lesson that *The Woman Who Wouldn't* presents is how difficult it is for the New Woman to break free from the rigid binaries that structured ideological frameworks in both literature and in life. As depicted in Alan's painting, Opalia has been culturally conditioned to see two competing visions of woman: one is a "figure of Purity," and the other is a "portrait of Passion" (Cleeve 51). The pure woman exerts the "deepest love," because she is 'naturally' pure and good (51). In marriage, she becomes the angel of the house by maintaining her sexual innocence, and it is only she who can thrive as an ideal wife and mother. Conversely, the passionate woman is 'unnaturally' "wild" and "sensual," and her sexual deviance leads her down a loveless path (42). In this model, "female nature" is regulated on a continuum of two extremes: on one end is the pure and passionless "good" woman and on the other is the unvirtuous and sexualized "bad" woman. Opalia suppresses her sexual desire because she constantly confronts the limits of this dichotomy and realizes that within this restrictive model there is no way to merge sexual passion with ideal love, even in heterosexual marriage. Thus, in exploring notions of proper female sexuality and women's sexual education, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* exposes how the cultural construct of 'female nature' does not truly define woman. As Opalia discovers that she cannot be codified within this fabricated design, she exposes its instability, and more importantly, she inscribes a path for possibility and plurality:

> But all her soul was crying out against that one sacrifice demanded of her. Oh, if some wonderful third way out could be discovered—neither love nor passion—would she not seize hold of it? Could it be that they were never to blend? Was she to lose love because she would have nought to do with passion? (42-43)

In the dualistic model that regulates proper feminine behavior, love (by way of purity) is always separate and opposed to passion, but what Opalia desires is to have both—to establish a loving marriage with Alan and to embrace sexual passion. She is unable to imagine this "third way" because in marriage woman's purity directly opposes her husband's passion—her sexual identity is constructed on selflessness and sacrifice, and her sexuality is never self-defined, self-fulfilling, or self-motivated. She is only allowed sexual agency in terms of her duty to reproduce or to save a man from his own base sexual nature. Opalia embraces celibacy and rejects sexual activity not because she is 'naturally' pure and passionless but because it is the only way she can assert her right to sexual self-definition. She does not want "to succumb, in order to 'keep Alan straight,' as the vulgar expression has is," nor does she want to "[succumb] for the sake of peace" (Cleeve 209). Opalia also seeks to reject the rationale that female sexuality is a tool of manipulation— a means to keep Alan "by her side by the common ties of passion, which keeps any man to any woman" (209). In this way, *The Woman Who Wouldn't* creates new images of female sexuality and portrays how the free-thinking New Woman begins to cultivate a tradition that values women's sexual consciousness and sexual awareness. In doing so, it rejects the old model of women's sexual ignorance and instead of replacing it with a model of sexual knowledge to encourage women's sexual innocence, it begins to imagine a third way whereby women are empowered to produce and control the sexual knowledge that defines them. As expressed by the narrator in *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, "When women [begin] to know themselves, their position with men would be different" (43-44); it is only through new knowledge that woman will no longer "succumb" to the

cultural pressure to pit purity against passion and will finally be empowered to create a passionate definition of sexual identity on her own terms.

As *The Woman Who Didn't* proposes, this project of cultivating a heterogeneous definition of womanhood and female sexuality entails not only the overthrow of the essentialist monologue that collectively inscribed women's sexuality within her "natural" functions, but it also means waging an attack on the nation's ubiquitous moral fabric—on escaping the moral and ethical codes that pervaded public politics and private lives and informed the structures of patriarchal control as well as the programs of first-wave feminist resistance. In order for the New Woman to harness her power, she needs to articulate a new identity that is not regulated by dichotomous terms that constructed female sexuality (purity/passion) or moral and sexual standards (virtue/vice). Much as *The Woman Who Wouldn't* postulates that the New Woman requires a "third way" to self identify her sexuality and her future, *The Woman Who Didn't* advances a similar possibility by interrogating virtue/vice, the dualistic model of ethics that standardized and gendered male and female sexual behavior. In this model, active sexual desire is always identified as vice, and it opposes virtue, or moral and sexual purity. Also implicated in this ethical ideology is that vice (active sexual desire) is 'naturally' male and virtue (all-encompassing purity) is 'naturally' female. The relationship between a man and woman translates into a battle between vice/passion and virtue/purity, and as illustrated by *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, woman is only able to articulate her sexual identity within the confines of this model: it is either manifested as vice like Lady Morris's deviant and destructive sexual desire, or her sexual identity is completely desexualized and repurposed as virtue—as a selfless act designed to mitigate vice and purify man.

As demonstrated by both Herminia's and Opalia's narratives, these either/or constructs restrict the New Woman's transformative potential because neither her theories nor her actions can completely escape their pervading influences. Eurydice's situation is no different: despite her confession that a relationship with Evelyn would complete her existence and create "the most satisfying sphere in which two love-inspired minds can move," she must stifle her passion to retain her virtue (Cross 24). Although *The Woman Who Didn't* concludes by reestablishing a model wherein female virtue remains diametrically opposed to male vice and by repositioning the sexual identity of New Woman within its proper bounds (Eurydice resists sexual temptation and returns to her marital duty), unlike *The Woman Who Wouldn't,* Cross's text does not glorify Eurydice's compliance or suggest that she will be rewarded for her sacrifice. Instead, the text presents Eurydice's unyielding virtue and sexual selflessness as "the whole tragedy of this woman's life" (22). Eurydice is unable to escape "these laws of life" which confine women to virtue and purity because, there exists no "third way," or as Evelyn identifies it, no "mixed existence" available to woman (22, 36). Eurydice cannot "transition from virtue to vice," even for love and true self-fulfillment, because she has no way of conceptualizing her sexual identity on any other terms besides vice/virtue (37).

The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Wouldn't, and the Woman Who Didn't do not produce completely new representations of female sexuality, nor are their portrayals synonymous with one another, yet through various cultural interpretations and discursive interrogations, these three New Woman Novels inscribe a proto-feminist intertext by challenging the continuum of "truisms" that defined female sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century. If the New Woman was to escape the dualistic thinking that

constructed femininity on the dichotomous terms of purity/passion or pure/fallen, it was inevitable that she would also need to rethink the way these binaries had become indistinguishable from the ethical frameworks of good/evil or virtue/vice. Instead, the first-wave feminist campaigns that responded to the Contagious Diseases Acts worked within this traditional ethical framework in order to direct both men and women in the direction of purity, morality, and virtue. Undoubtedly, the repeal campaign and the dialogue that it prompted were game-changing moves for the women's-rights movement because they positioned women as the central players in public debates about their own sexual oppression in the public and private spheres. Their initiative to seek *equality* for women through a program of *equal* sexual and moral standards was an insightful approach given the extent to which social, political, and medical discourses exploited notions of women's inherent morality and purity in order to argue that the existence of unequal ethical standards adequately reflected women's and men's dissimilar 'natural' propensities for virtue and vice. Thus, the equalization of ethical standards was a potentially productive approach for feminists; however, rather than cultivating new codes of morality that could actually enable women to define their sexuality outside restrictions of purity/passion, it became a project of moralistic intervention and sexual control. As first-wave feminists battled against passion and vice in order to empower and liberate women, they failed realize that this continuum of thought based on the dichotomous terms of purity/passion and virtue/vice undermined their own goals. *The Woman Who* intertexts chronicle that failure through the "unpractical utopianism" of their New Woman heroines, but they also begin to anticipate a future feminist tradition in which

women will begin to deconstruct the cultural and social oppositions that constructed the angel and fictionalized the terms of her ‘natural’ collective identity.

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ABSTRACT

UNDERMINING THE ANGELIC RESTRICTIONS OF FIRST-WAVE FEMINISM: WHAT THE NEW WOMAN *DID*, *DIDN'T*, AND *WOULDN'T* DO

by

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This dissertation provides an intertextual reading of Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895), Victoria Cross's *The Woman Who Didn't* (1895), and Lucas Cleeve's The *Woman Who Wouldn't* (1895) in order to historically and culturally contextualize these popular New Woman novels in social-purity feminism, the marriage debate, and reticent sexual politics of the late-nineteenth century. By examining the ways that *The Woman Who* heroines discursively and thematically engage with first-wave feminism and by focusing on this dialectical exchange of feminist ideas and practices as they were manifested in feminist publications and campaigns at the turn of the century, I argue that these texts confront the patriarchal ideologies that transcribed first-wave feminism. These intertextual encounters reveal the limitations of first-wave feminist ideals and call for a transformative feminism sundered from the influence of The Angel and from the old theories of purity and virtue that preserved this collective construct of womanhood.

The Introduction provides an overview of my argument and identifies the critical framework, research, and terminology that foreground my analysis. It closely examines the critical reception of the novels in the late nineteenth century in order to legitimize the

intertextuality of the novels. It is through intertextuality that we are able to trace the contradictory sexual politics in all three texts and see how these reflect the ambiguous cultural and social codes that constructed ideal femininity.

In the remainder of the dissertation, I take up three competing cultural narratives that the texts respond to on thematic, narrative, and discursive levels and trace how they use and/or attempt to dismantle these opposing voices. In Chapter 1, I examine the intertextual dialogue between *The Woman Who* series and social-purity feminism in order to argue that the textual encounters with social-purity theory and practice challenge the monolithic definition of the pure woman and undermine the transformative power of the angel in order to redirect feminist thought beyond the current purity politics. In Chapter 2, I turn my attention to how *The Woman Who Did, The Woman Who Didn't,* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* simultaneously enlarged nineteenth-century feminist arguments about marriage reform and subverted the dominant feminist ideologies that fueled such arguments by projecting new romantic and marital situations. Chapter 3 follows up what the previous chapters have all alluded to: how the New Woman's encounters with social-purity politics and with the issues of the marriage debate threatened to unveil the reticent sexual politics that emerged into the public conversation as a result of feminist campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Here, I discuss how *The Woman Who* intertexts merge with the aftermath of first-wave feminist campaigns by appropriating prostitution and slavery phraseology, by uncovering the tension between liberal feminist values and maternity, and by exploring the idea of self-definition through alternative images of female sexuality and individualized approaches to sexual knowledge. Thus, as each text interrogates the social and cultural forces that regulate women's access to sexual

knowledge and construct female sexual identity, they jointly produce an intertext wherein the “unpractical utopianism” of the New Woman heroine parallels the oppositional sexual politics of the first-wave feminism.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Jane K. Asher is a Ph.D. Candidate in the English Department at Wayne State University. She received an M.A. in English from Oakland University in 2006 and a B.S. in English from Central Michigan University in 2003. Her research interests include Victorian literature and culture, nineteenth-century gender studies, and New Woman scholarship. She is currently a composition and literature instructor at Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan. She resides in Sterling Heights, Michigan where she is also a wife, mother, culinary enthusiast, marathoner, and gardener.