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The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1976
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DIVERGENT MELODRAMATIC HEROINES OF THE MID-VICTORIAN
PLAY; OR, THE WOMAN WHO DOESN'T FAINT

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Margo J. V. Mellick, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1976

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Approved By
Roy B. Bowen
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To my husband, David, whose faithful behind the scenes help and work on his wood lathe made the paper possible.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Most people are quite familiar with the ideal woman projected for the Victorian era. They have seen her in the novel; they have watched her in reproductions of the nineteenth century melodrama. And, although they may not be aware of it, they frequently have been influenced in their own attitudes towards today's woman by social traditions which carry the imprint of the Victorian period.

The ideal Victorian woman, both in the literary world and in the real world, was faithful, modest, beautiful, and delicate. Her whole reason for existence was in order that she might someday marry and be a mother. Both prior to and during her life as wife and mother, she was to be a model of morality whose unselfish love was to serve as a means of salvation for herself and as a model to those around her. Woman, not having the attribute of reasoning, was to rely heavily on her heart, for therein lay her greatest powers. Intellectually and physically she was man's inferior, but morally she was his superior. Woe to the woman who did not live up to her calling as a paragon of virtue, for she who
fell must pay and pay heavily. Usually fiction called for such a woman to die; less frequently she retired to a convent. In any event, her life was forever scarred.

The ideal Victorian woman also was obedient. Before marriage her duty was to her father; after marriage it was transferred to her husband. Even if he betrayed her, she was to be faithful in the hopes that he might somehow be retrieved. (Critics of the reformers who sought legislation to protect the wives of immoral and brutal men went so far as to say that, since a woman's God-ordained profession [for which she had been trained since childhood] was to be a wife and mother, the woman whose marriage was a failure, for whatever reason, must be regarded simply as was a man who had failed in business. No amount of reform could help her.){\textsuperscript{1}}

**Need for the Study**

A great deal has been written on the subject of women in the Victorian novel. Books and articles consider the ways in which fictional women fit the ideal image and the ways in which they deviate from it. Studies have been devoted to the many nineteenth century advances in women's

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{\textsuperscript{1}}J.A. and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), p. 43, citing the Saturday Review, November 12, 1859, "Queen Bees or Working Bees?".
rights which are reflected in Victorian novels. A few particularly helpful examples include Hazel Mews's *Frail Vessels: Woman's Role in Women's Novels from Fanny Burney to George Eliot*, Patricia Thomson's *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal, 1837-73*, and E.M. Delafield's *Ladies and Gentlemen in Victorian Fiction*.

Study of the Victorian drama, on the other hand, reveals quite a different history. Despite concern throughout the century with the "woman question," despite innumerable books and articles on the place of woman in Victorian society, no one seems to have seriously considered the question of the woman in the Victorian drama except as she is seen at the end of the century. A frequent assumption is that, because the novel was so much more active in championing the rights of women, the drama contributed virtually nothing along that line until Henrik Ibsen. It has been assumed that, because the Victorian drama well deserves the stigma of being considered non-literary, low-brow, spectacle-oriented, and, moreover, generally stolen from the French, that it is totally impotent and unworthy of study. Consequently, theatre literature offers a most inadequate acquaintance with what the drama was doing and saying during the Victorian era. Students of English generally avoid Victorian drama in favor of the well-known novels and poetry of the age; students of theatre study actor-managers, stage-effects, and acting styles—but seldom more than a small
fistful of the plays before Tom Taylor at the earliest or, more likely, Arthur Wing Pinero. Indeed, students likely will not be faulted if they do not know the name of a single Victorian playwright before Taylor, Pinero, or Wilde. Granted George Rowell has performed a valuable service with his The Victorian Theatre, but he concentrates only on the major writers, and then hurries toward the end of the century as quickly as possible. Richard Southern's The Victorian Theatre is interested primarily in the physical structure of the theatres. Lynton Hudson's The English Stage 1850-1950 and E.B. Watson's Sheridan to Robertson are both valuable aids, but neither addresses itself to women in the drama. Anthologies which exist tend to reprint the same five or ten plays.

Perhaps the closest any study has come to really working with the large amount of early and mid-Victorian dramatic literature is in the area of the popular melodrama. However, even here the woman has not been singled out for special attention, but rather has been viewed as simply one among several stock characters. Two books which have been quite helpful in this study are William Disher's Melodrama: Plots that Thrilled and William Paul Steele's The Character of Melodrama. The former book has been particularly valuable in that it considers some of the more obscure melodramas selected for the present study. Disher's study does not pretend to be more than an overview, however, and does
not follow any particular theme nor attempt to prove any point, but simply offers an interesting look at specific melodramatic plots.

A careful scrutiny of Books in Print and of Dissertation Abstracts International also reveals no study in the area of women in Victorian drama before the end of the century. Undoubtedly there is good reason for this. Much of Victorian drama fits very well into the stereotyped image frequently held as a result of the kind of "hiss the villain" fun-reproductions which not infrequently constitute the bulk of many people's knowledge of the melodrama. Indeed, in the melodrama's black and white world, it is most usually true that a heroine fills the role of innocent, beautiful, pathetic, fragile, delicate, but fearfully wronged victim. Deviations from the ideal image of wife and mother do, however, appear occasionally. Many such deviations are subtle and are often partially obscured by other, more "ideal" characteristics in the woman in question. But the fact that divergent female images do appear, however infrequently, throughout the dramatic literature of the century, increases somewhat the significance of these early plays in leading toward the Noras and Mrs. Tanquerays which rocked the theatrical world in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and, perhaps, helps the drama to share somewhat with the novel credit for creating the conditions which made the later plays possible.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is not to attempt to find hidden literary values where they do not exist—nor is it to maintain that major social statements were being made in early Victorian drama. In indicating the lack of adequate studies in the area of women in Victorian dramatic literature, it is not the contention of this writer that such plays as were hacked prolifically off the board of Scribe and Sardou claim literary merit to stand them among the works of Henrik Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, or William Butler Yeats. But it is her contention that, however poorly the plays of such little-knowns as Sydney Rosenfeld, Edward Stirling, and W.T. Moncrieff may compete among recognized dramatic literature, they still deserve greater concern than the perfunctory dismissal which usually lumps all drama of the time into one loathsome, offensive, if slightly humorous, category—if for no other reason than because the very duration of these plays says a great deal about the relationship between society and the drama. Clearly, longevity alone cannot invest drama with a value it never possessed, but coupled with what that longevity has to say about the role of theatre in the shaping and reflecting of the Victorian notion about women, it certainly poses adequate reason for investigation. The intention of this writer, then, is to look at the drama of the period with
more openness as to the characteristics of these early plays than usually is evidenced, to show categories which grow out of the plays themselves, rather than simply to subsume the women in all Victorian plays under the rubric of the commonly accepted ideal. The writer will investigate wife and mother images in even relatively early Victorian drama which deviate from the standard images assumedly expected by society and from those which generally appear in both the novels and the dramas of the time. The reader should be aware that many, if not all of the women categorized as divergent, would perhaps not have seemed so unusual to a contemporary audience as they do to a modern day reader. The primary reason that such dramatic heroines are seen as divergent, in fact, is because of certain stereotyping of the Victorian drama which has occurred since that time. Just as in real life the Victorian woman frequently did not reflect the ideal image, so the Victorian dramatic character also at times did not. Victorians, as a rule, were not particularly surprised by either failure to reflect the ideal. Moderns for some reason, are, and just as in the real life situation we have been quick to label Victorians hypocritical, so in the dramatic world we have chosen to ignore the women who do not fit the usual image. In this paper those long-neglected divergent women will be discussed.
Methodology and Organization

The time period chosen for this study is primarily Victorian, but several plays are culled also from the years immediately preceding the actual reign of Queen Victoria. Of the plays which illustrate divergent images of women, one is chosen from the late 1820's and two from the early 1870's; each decade between 1830 and 1860 is represented by at least four and not more than nine plays. Certain other plays are discussed more briefly.

The approach to this study is largely thematic—dealing with the content of the plays rather than with the manner in which that content is presented, since the plays' greatest values do not lie in their literary worth. "Ladies" will constitute the bulk of the study because it is primarily to ladies that the etiquette books of the time, which lay down the guiding principles of the ideal woman, are addressed, and because ladies are the principle female characters to be discussed in the plays.

The term "ladies" as employed here may encompass women of nearly any class—not, of course, always in the sense of actual nobility, but in the sense of reputation, demeanor, and decorum. Geoffrey Best in his Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1875 suggests that "nature's gentlemen" were considered to exist throughout much of the period—men whose "morality, selflessness, courage, self-control, independence [and],
responsibility" sanctioned them as "uncommon, admirable and civilised," and cites the last chapter of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859) in which is stated that any virtuous Briton could reach the goal of true gentlemanliness, as evidence. This "second" sort of gentleman, of course, "could be relied on not to push in where he wasn't wanted," and, contrary to the gentleman born to that title, he could easily, by wrong behavior, lose his right to be considered a gentleman.²

Assumedly, a similar kind of system existed for the opposite sex, so that a woman of low station could, by her behavior, be considered a kind of "nature's lady." Indeed, it is interesting to note that in many of the plays in which a woman is not a lady by virtue of her birth (neither so known from the beginning of the play nor discovered to be the case at the end), she still manages by her language and decorum to convey a more elevated tone than do many of those around her in her same social station. The woman of this period who had earned the right to be seen as "respectable" --from whatever class she derived--might reasonably expect to be accepted as one of these second order ladies. Thus, the ladies considered in this paper fall principally into

either of two categories of lady—either the lady born to her title or a "nature's lady"—though there are also a few examples of the fraudulent lady who aspires to claim the title of lady without being either born to it or truly respectable.

For the most part, only plays which were meant to be taken seriously are considered in the present study since a combination of widely different genres could become a complicating factor. There are, however, definite references to some plays which lie outside the area of the drama, melodrama, and tragedy wherever extenuating circumstances suggest that the play might be helpful.

The second chapter deals with a general background of the social milieu—dominated by a discussion about society's attitude toward women. Consideration in some depth is given to the contemporary expectations for a lady reflected in the popular and didactic literature of the period and in the laws. The paradoxes which proliferate the Victorian period are pointed out—particularly as they reflect on a very evident double standard of morality. Chapter III first briefly discusses conditions in Victorian theatres, then considers (1) drama's ideal image of woman as wife and mother and (2) the flawed heroine who must pay for her fall. The next four chapters deal with divergent images of woman as wife and mother in the drama: Chapter IV—the woman who must choose between the role she is expected to play as a woman and her
larger role as a human being, or the dilemma situation.
Chapter V—the woman who has committed a moral sin, but who finds her way back to respectability without having to pay so heavily as the "ideal"—that is, without having either to die or to enter a convent. Chapter VI—the woman who is patently evil. Chapter VII—the woman who plays traditional male roles, often a reversal situation with the male in the usual female role.
CHAPTER II

A CHAPTER OF BACKGROUNDS

Victorian Paradoxes

As modern generations read about the Victorian period, they often are awed, first by the apparent purity and primness of the people, then by a growing awareness of how far from such a goal most Victorians actually came. Indeed, despite the fact that the Victorian era often is identified with immense sexual inhibition, history records that London alone gave grudging sustenance to many thousands of prostitutes. Brothels were operated in which "ladies of the night" and clientele alike averaged age fourteen or younger. The era of the fainting and sheltered lady who wore white gloves even at home in order to indicate her life of leisure was also the era of the working woman whose family were left to fend for themselves in the streets at mealtimes because she had neither the time to cook nor the simplest of culinary skills. The age which dictated that women leave the table an hour before the men in order that the men might drink and smoke alone also bred countless alcoholics among its domestic servants (including women) who conventionally
were paid a portion of their wages in beer.

Even while married women were being treated as legal nonentities and there was serious discussion as to whether or not a woman could safely handle academic subjects like logic due to her inherent inability to reason, there were also numerous women authors of considerable repute arising throughout the country—some of them writing about the inherent inability of women to reason. And so the temptation is to look at the paradoxes of the Victorian period with loathing and disgust—seeing massive incongruities existing side by side and calling the age callously hypocritical.

Along with Jerome H. Buckley of The Victorian Temper, however, this writer believes that "facile repudiation of the Victorian era seems, in truth, quite as outmoded as the attitudes we can no longer recapture."¹ One quickly learns that, just as with other ages one cannot accept broad, all-encompassing appraisals of the time, so even with the Victorian period. Within any society, struggling with the changes and problems it invariably faces, there will be paradoxical elements. Changes do not come easily and all at once. And the fact is that England during the nineteenth century was facing changes brought about by inventions and discoveries for which she, as a nation made up of single,  

frail, human beings, was not completely prepared. Within a relatively short time, an England which still clung to many ways of the Middle Ages, was being melted and forged into a shape very closely approximating the modern industrial world. Can there be any wonder that certain impurities blemished the shiny surface of the age?

The Victorians were not themselves blind to many of the incongruities of their day. Indeed, Buckley calls them "their own severest critics, possessed of an amazing capacity for detachment...." They recognized the immense transition they were being forced to make. And, unlike genuine hypocrites, they often wrote candidly about their frustrations. Richard A. Levine cites both Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill in his introduction to Backgrounds to Victorian Literature: Arnold spoke poetically of the day as living between two worlds--the one dead, the other powerless to be born, while Mill declared, "Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones."
The Ideal Woman

How did the woman fit into this changing Victorian scene? Who was she? What was her part in society? If one may accept the view of the many etiquette books written during the period, the role of wife and mother in Victorian England, although not the only role a woman might fulfill, was certainly the primary one, and the only one to which most young women aspired from childhood. It was to that end that a girl's entire education led. Even as a child she was taught to attempt to personify the ideal woman a suitable man might choose to marry in the hopes that she might, thereby, escape the odious fate of spinsterhood.

The world in which an ideal woman of the nineteenth century lived was the world of the home. As the man was the master of the home, so she was its center. She was to be protected from the outside world and its evils; for her, they were not supposed to exist. And so the role expectations for women followed a form which did not entirely coincide with what the real world was actually like.

The ideal which permeated the atmosphere was an ideal taken seriously only by the middle class—though it generally was fully endorsed by the upper class as well. Indeed, the upper classes were notorious during this time for their sense of wanting to "improve" those in the lower stations—probably no more from altruistic feelings than from
(at least for the first half of the century) a growing concern that what had happened to the wealthy in France could as easily happen to them. It is a general principle recognized by the Victorian sociologist, Henry Mayhew, and many sociologists of today that in numerous ways the upper class and the lower class have more in common with each other in certain behavioral characteristics than either class has with the middle sector of society by virtue of the fact that neither upper nor lower class generally has much to lose by their behavior. It is the middle class, which aspires to move up, and, perhaps newly risen from a lower rank, fears falling back to the dreaded station, which most readily is affected by rule books and codes of behavior. In the area of women, however, the rules which applied in the middle class seem also to have been accepted in the upper class—at least insofar as those standards regulated the relationship between the sexes within the upper rank, and especially so far as outward respectability was concerned. To a large measure women were never so secure within a given social rank as were men, and so, while some standards of behavior societally enforced for the middle class might be overlooked by upper class members, standards which related to the behavior of women often were adhered to very stringently.

The lady of the upper class could, then, lose her social standing, for the double sexual standard operated even more strictly, if possible, than the class structure,
and a woman of the upper classes, though she might still be considered a lady by right of birth, could quite a bit more easily lose her claim to that title in fact by virtue of behavior which stepped quite "too far" beyond the societally accepted norm, than could an equally placed gentleman. She could also, through no fault of her own, find herself as hundreds of young women did during the financial crisis of the eighteen seventies, cast out upon the world as an unwanted dependent -- dowryless, impoverished, and, unlike many a gentleman likewise cast upon his own, be totally unable to find acceptable means of employment. Here the woman was confronted by one of the insoluble dilemmas which often filled her life. Although to work was considered dishonorable and demeaning, an avenue resorted to only by the woman who had no other choice, at the same time a part of the working definition of the term "respectable" included independence. Of course, it never would have been openly espoused that women, who were supposed to be dependents, were, by virtue of that fact, looked down upon, but, nonetheless, operationally that seems to be the case. Thus, when a woman lost her male "benevolent dictator" -- whether through her own fault or not -- she could quite readily fall into a considerably less well thought of category. A woman done out of her inheritance by a villainous male relation, a woman running away from her adulterous husband, could find herself without money enough to keep up the aura of
respectability for long. Many the woman who discovered to her surprise and horror the fact of her virtual non-existence before the law and in the eyes of society without a man.

In the lower orders, the largest percentage of the ideal female expectations simply were not economically feasible. The women had to work, thus they became independent; thus they had no time for domestic skills and charity and all the pretty "accomplishments." The lower orders often lived in very close proximity to others (If Mayhew is accurate, often ten adults of both sexes slept immodestly in the same cheap lodging house room.)—thus the women of this class could hardly pretend, let alone actually claim, an ignorance of the "indelicate."

Many of the guidelines, then, for the ideal woman of the Victorian age point rather more directly to the middle and upper classes than to the large number of people who made up the lowest rankings of society. Nonetheless, the same codes of behavior which the middle class hoped would propel them into a still higher rank seem to be projected

4 Goldwin Smith tells the sad story of cruel George IV's (reign 1818-1830) estranged wife, Queen Caroline, in A History of England (2nd ed. rev.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 558. In spite of being a member of the British royal family by birth, she was allowed to die in the home of a friend "bitter and Penniless."

onto society as a whole—at least for any woman who would be seen as respectable enough to claim the title of a nature's lady. Geoffrey Best writes that "it cost something to keep up a respectable front" and continues by saying that "large numbers of mid-Victorians were thus shut out from the possibility of practising respectability."\(^6\) Frequently without the means to appear even minimally respectable, the lower class girl, of course, seldom acquired the "graces" requisite for ladylike behavior.

Despite the fact that the industrial age had brought large numbers of lower class women into the factories as laborers, the ideal image assumed a delicate, protected creature who always needed (and had) a man on whom to lean. Despite the fact that London boasted an infamous number of prostitutes, the Victorian ideal demanded that women be totally innocent of sexual knowledge—even to the point of ignorance. Indeed, it is perhaps in their treatment and expectations of women that the Victorians stand the most vulnerable to attack as hypocrites, for, while it is true that many of the shocking inconsistencies of the day were brought to light by the Victorians themselves, it is, nonetheless also true, that large numbers of publications for and/or about women persisted in viewing the woman throughout most of the century as some sort of noble and ideal, yet fragile

\(^6\)Best, p. 263.
and vulnerable creature. Either she retained her respectability and was viewed as an angel, or she was sullied (however slightly) and became a total outcast. There was no place for her to stand as a human being.

The Woman as a Delicate Trap

The popular and didactic literature of the period reflects many of the current attitudes about the basic essence of woman—including her natural abilities, her accomplishments, and her preparation for her potential role as wife and mother. Although during the course of the nineteenth century the policy of keeping women in almost total ignorance was being challenged, there were still plenty of people of both sexes perfectly willing to believe that the woman's place was in the home. Not only did many Britishers claim it to be the better course of action for women to be educated to the graces and the domestic skills rather than being introduced to more rigorous studies, but some even declared it to be the only acceptable course. Writers like Alexander Walker and the well-known contemporary moralist, Hannah More, saw women as being equal to but different from men in that while a bright woman might possess imaginative ability and the ability to memorize, her male counterpart would possess in addition to that a greater facility for analyzing and reasoning. A bright woman, therefore, was well-advised to show a fair amount of intellectual
humility. 7 Indeed, the still persistent notion that an intelligent woman who wishes to marry should hide her mental prowess was actively promoted by Dr. Gregory's eighteenth century A Father's Legacy to His Daughters which remained a great favorite throughout much of the period.

The Victorian woman might well admit to being the intellectual and physical inferior of man, but she reserved for herself the right to a moral superiority—albeit of a strange order, for, despite her alleged moral advantage, she also was seen to be more easily tempted, more vulnerable, and thus more needing of protection. As the great moral force, it was the duty of the woman to be the light in the home, to be the stabilizing core both for her children and for her husband. If she had fewer freedoms and responsibilities outside the home, she was to be assured that no one had greater duties within it. Indeed, on her frail shoulders was placed the responsibility of protecting the sanctity of the family hearth by making home such a pleasant place that her husband would have no reason to resort to his club. Even her moral leadership, though, was to be of a subtle kind, for, given the scriptural imperative for the subordination of woman to man, she was committed to obeying the man in her life—whatever quality of husband and father he

might be.

Of course, in order that a woman might have the opportunity to warm the hearth for her husband and to submit herself completely to his will, she first had to acquire that husband. And because the Victorian ideal woman automatically was assumed to be necessarily dependent on a man (and was, in fact, virtually rendered so by law), she was from girlhood taught to behave in a manner which would be conducive to the capturing of a noble male heart. Indeed, the fear of remaining a single woman and disintegrating into an old maid, was such a legitimate one that often the education necessary for the ideal woman was more geared to the acquisition of her husband than to the duties she would be expected to fulfill after the marriage ceremony. L. Maria Child writes unhappily of the fact that the education of little girls so frequently involved a disproportionate attention to the thought of matrimony. "As soon as they can walk alone," she bemoans, "they are called 'little sweetheart,' and 'little wife.'"8 And Wanda Fraiken Neff in Victorian Working Women tells of those who, denied the opportunity of marriage they had anticipated almost since birth, continued even into middle age to behave as young girls. Such women, says Neff, were treated as children by

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their parents—given a token allowance to spend only on clothing, required to ask permission in order to take a trip or simply to absent themselves from the drawing room—this even in wealthy homes. 9 Whenever need arose for a helping hand, it was the spinster sister or aunt or daughter who was expected to lend it. She was the servant of everyone and the mistress of none—not even of herself. Small wonder that all the aims of a well-intentioned mother were directed towards seeing her daughter safely married.

In order to attract a man, it was assumed that a young lady should, in addition to beauty, modesty, and "womanly grace," possess a certain number of accomplishments. These accomplishments, while they certainly should make her competitive with other young ladies, should not be so finely developed, however, as to make her competitive with a professional, for that would be crass, and might even indicate the possibility of a woman's working for a living. The list of accomplishments expanded throughout the period, but a few basic ones indicate the general tendency: piano playing, singing, drawing, painting, dancing, speaking a smattering of French, fancy sewing, crocheting, and, at moralist Thomas Gisbourne's sanction, the one acquiescence to the intellect, 

"a memory stored with useful and elegant information...."\textsuperscript{10}

This over-attention to superficial accomplishments met with well-deserved censure from many sources. Hannah More, Sarah S. Ellis, Mrs. Hugo Reid, J.W. Parker, and even Thomas Gisbourne number among those who condemned the over-emphasis as being useless and artificial. Some censured the practice because they felt the woman more properly needed to be trained for her role as wife and mother. Others, with increasing frequency as the century progressed, spoke out because they disagreed both with the practice of teaching only the accomplishments thought requisite to catch a husband and with the assumption implicit in that practice that all women would someday be wives and mothers. Both groups of protesters, however different their assumptions about a woman's actual role, favored more practical educational values. Progressive writers of the time, however, looked more squarely at life the way it was, and decreed that women (at least of the middle class, if not of the upper) should just as surely be trained for a profession as were the men. Dinah Maria Craik courageously\textsuperscript{11} maintained, for example,


\textsuperscript{11}The Athenaeum reviewer of the book (February 6, 1858), p. 177, would not necessarily see her statement as "courageous," for he calls her "Thoughts" "mild and good and humane—sensible, too, but verging on the commonplace." Yet
that women as individuals were at least as different from each other as they were from men in general, that as human beings first and foremost, women as well as men, had the right to expect to be self-dependent and the obligation to be educated with that assumption in mind.12

Although some rebels against the prevailing system of educating girls in the accomplishments cited the right of the human mind (whether housed in the head of a female or not) to learn, many more attempted to cajole parents into forsaking the status quo by reminding them of the significant role played by mothers in the early education of their sons. Still, the accomplishments persisted as the major form of education for most middle and upper class girls in the very serious game of catching a husband.

The Woman as a Status Symbol

The woman's concentration on husband-hunting could not fail to have an impact on the man, and while the male might "worship" the fairy graces of woman, might grow elegant in

he also indicates that they are thoughts he wishes women would think, and suggests that they "mark the progress of opinion and indicate a higher tone of character and a juster estimate of women's position [than the fashionable books of some few years before]."

12 Dinah Maria (Mulock) Craik, A Woman's Thoughts about Women (Columbus: Follett, Foster and Company, 1858), p. 20.
her praise, might even, if he were gifted, write poetry about her as William Wordsworth did, he also was very much aware of his own supremacy. Indeed, the extensive interest in cultivating the accomplishments almost to the exclusion of more domestic talents was itself a way in which the middle class male could indicate the social prestige which he was able to draw to himself and his family. Mrs. Sanford indicates that wives of husbands with modest means often were so concerned lest anyone discover that they, themselves, had baked a pudding or a cake, that they actually denied their talent and claimed to know nothing at all about the kitchen. J.A. and Olive Banks suggest that the years between 1840 and 1870 show a shift in the values of the middle class woman from the perfect wife to the perfect lady. "There was, we might say, a repudiation of the purely domestic virtues precisely because of their association with a rather more lowly past." Many middle class women knew only too well how hard the lot of lower order women was. If they could convince men of their "angel-like" qualities, and thus escape that kind of drudgery, so much the better for them, they reasoned. The middle class male, unable to claim


14 Banks, p. 12.
prestige in the same way in which earlier, upper class males had been able to (that is, by clearly indicating a lack of need to labor for a living), instead relied on the grand show he could make by his home, the number of servants he had, the education he gave his son, the accomplishments his daughter possessed, and, not unlike the Hollywood-style gangster who kept his woman in diamonds and furs, by the obvious leisure and sumptuous garments of his wife. Victorian Friedrich Engels, like the Banks and Wanda Fraiken Neff in more recent days, noted the use the man frequently made of his wife as a kind of showcase for his wealth. And, indeed, a careful look at women's clothing of the period aids in an understanding of this viewpoint, for, although after the French Revolution, men's clothing generally became more functional and comfortable, women's garments

15 Carl Kohler in A History of Costume (New York: Dover Publishing, Inc., 1963), p. 374, suggests that, in order to avoid even the suggestion of being an aristocrat during the Reign of Terror, Frenchmen (of all classes) banished all ornamentation from their dress. "Even wealthy men went about wearing the blue linen pantaloons and short jacket (car-magnole) of the working man and the red cap of the galley-slave—the symbol of the Jacobins." After the time of danger was past, the men held onto the more comfortable lines (which spread, as was customary, to England), but the women, who never had relinquished their fancy wigs, for example, soon moved away from the simple lines. Mario Praz ("The Victorian Mood: A Reappraisal" in Levine's Backgrounds to Victorian Literature), p. 73, hypothesizes that much of the reason for this move on the part of the men was that, given the changes brought about by greater sentiment in favor of democracy and the subsequent pre-emption of the
(especially after 1820) returned to the more elaborate and involved approach to dress with padding and numerous petticoats, and by 1857 the crinoline, which allowed for a still wider skirt without adding additional weight as more petticoats would have done. The ever-popular tight corseting which complemented the crinoline and impeded the ability to breathe did little to encourage physical activity, and, as much as the crinoline, became the butt of jokes and the despair of sensible people. Fashion-conscious middle class strivers, however, were oblivious to such censure, and further augmented the illusion of conspicuous leisure in the female by the custom, mentioned earlier in this paper, of wearing light colored gloves even in the home in order to suggest a luxurious life style, and fragile foot-gear which suited the wearer for little other than sitting or indoor walking.

Obviously, the encumbrances of her costume kept the woman thus attired from engaging in anything which could be described as work, and thus preserved her, fresh and dainty, nobleman's position by the wealthy industrialist, indolence ceased to be an index to wealth for the man. He was no longer looked down upon for working.

Even sleeves were so wide during some portions of the period that small crinolines with ten or twelve wire hoops were needed to shape them.

Kohler, p. 433.
as still one more status symbol to her husband's growing wealth. At the same time, however, the handicaps under which she daily operated, gave further "proof" of her own inferiority, so that while she built her husband's prestige (and thus her own, many women erroneously thought), she actually diminished her value as a separate human being. The husband, after all, could march, strong and brave into the daily fray, while she demurred and fainted.— No mention was made of the fact that he, of course, was not corseted and laced til he could barely breathe—that he was not encumbered by petticoats and crinolines.

The Woman as a Legal Dependent

As a virtual possession of her nearest male relative, the Victorian woman, especially the wife, had little or no legal existence apart from that man. A woman whose husband or father was kind and humane seldom had reason to chaff under the laws of Victorian England, but not all women were so happily circumstanced. Mrs. Sanford might very well reason that "she knows that she is the weaker vessel, and that as such she should receive honor," but that did not keep an unscrupulous man from taking advantage of the woman whom custom and laws alike rendered his inferior. Despite

\[18\] Winslow and Sanford, p. 15.
the fact that Hannah More wrote complacently in 1852 that women enjoyed, among other things, "the blessings of reasonable laws," John Stuart Mill, fully a decade and more later (1861 writing, 1869 publication) could point to innumerable deficiencies in the legal system as regarded women.

There is no doubt that the legal status of women in Victorian England was a problem. As early as 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women challenged the assumption that men could be expected to represent fairly women's needs. Yet this same notion persisted for many years after her time. Sociologist William Thompson in his 1825 writing sounded a battle cry for women to awaken to their right to "perfect equality with men" and to demand equal treatment under the law.

The women of England, however, did not awaken quickly, and, when Mill wrote the extremely controversial The Subjection of Women and published it in 1869, nearly all of the laws which the earlier writers had opposed were still in effect. Certain tides, though, were beginning to turn in

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19 More, p. 12.

favor of more liberalized laws for women. Part of the reason for this awakening may have been an increased awareness of particular case studies in which men had horribly mistreated their wives and/or daughters—under the sanction of the law, as in one cited case of a husband who had willed his wife's property to his illegitimate children. One of the best-known of these cases was the legal predicament of Sheridan's talented granddaughter, Mrs. Caroline Norton, whose story had been brought before the public eye off and on since about 1835 when she finally had left her cruel husband. Despite her social position, despite her talent and intelligence (She was a successful writer and editor of the *Keepsake*.), Mrs. Norton was not allowed even to appear in court to defend herself when her vindictive husband tried to sue her for divorce on trumped up charges of adultery. She was denied even a countersuit on the basis that because she had on previous occasions returned to her husband (for the sake of their three children), she implicitly had condoned his cruelty and infidelity. In 1839, after almost continuously being kept from her three children for five years, Mrs. Norton was able by the use of a male pseudonym to help in the passage of a law which permitted any mother of irreproachable character to petition the Lord Chancellor for a hearing before a special court. In 1842 she took

advantage of this law and was granted limited control of her children for the purpose of directing their education. By 1853, however, the Norton name was back in print. A part of the very money which Mrs. Norton had earned by writing against the antiquated laws of the country was now being demanded by her erstwhile husband as his natural and legal due. Mrs. Norton responded by writing still harder on the need for more equal treatment under the law.\(^{22}\) It was not, however, until the last decade of the century that a solid divorce law, protecting the interests of the wife as well as the husband, came into effect.

In the meantime, John Stuart Mill had written *The Subjection of Women* in which he clearly laid out the legal injustices under which women suffered. By law, he said, the wife was the actual bondservant of her husband. She could acquire no property without him, and once it became hers (even by inheritance), it immediately became his. As soon as the marriage was complete, the wife's rights, property, and freedom of action immediately were absorbed by her husband. The only obligation a man had to his wife was that he was responsible to third parties for her acts, just as he was for the actions of his cattle or his slaves. The children of a union were the man's by law, and even when he died, his wife did not become the legal guardian unless he

\(^{22}\)Ibid., pp. 240-241.
had named her so in his will. If a wife decided to leave her husband, she could take nothing with her, and he had the right to force her to return or to take any earnings or gifts from her even if she had acquired them years after having been separated from him. It was not until 1882 that married women were granted the freedom of acquiring and exercising ordinary rights of ownership as if they were single, and not until 1886 that the mother was made guardian of her young children either alone or jointly with the father's appointed guardian. As late as 1895, though a wife could leave a husband as a result of persistent cruelty or wilfull neglect, and could take her under sixteen age children which the man would have to help support, she could not remarry, and if adultery were proved against her, the decision could be reversed.

As is evident in the Norton case, even the wealthiest Englishmen could do little to help their married daughters. Though they might utilize contracts to set aside the law to a certain extent, they could succeed only in part. The money would have to pass through their daughter's hands, but the husband might then violently take the money from her immediately without fear of either punishment or compulsory restitution. 23

The woman, especially the wife, was in a very real sense regarded by the law as a child. Often she was treated that way by her husband as well. She was not included in any of her husband's major decisions and knew nothing about his business. Paul Blouët suggests that the Victorian woman knew so little about her husband's business, in fact, that she often found herself either suddenly installed in an elegant new home or relegated to a modest one on a moment's notice and with no consultation whatever. "She follows the furniture," writes Blouët. Many women, of course, responded to such treatment by acting like children, but, increasingly larger numbers of women sought freedom from the bonds of convention and law during the Victorian era. Slowly, by claiming the need of better education for governesses and for nurses, educational facilities for women began to appear.

The pressures put on society for reform, meantime, did not diminish, for whatever changes were effected, still more needed to be made, and thus an active debate ensued between those who favored a radical change in woman's status and those who saw such changes as a threat to all decent people everywhere. Arguments pro and con continued throughout the century—continued because the status quo was threatened,

continued because more and more women were reaching out to
take what they considered to be rightfully theirs. Numerous
books were written supporting the status quo not, this
writer contends, because the status quo was endorsed by all, but rather because its supporters could see the first signs of its fall. Moralists were horrified as early as the 1830's by the fact that some lower class working women were daily defying the laws and insisting on keeping their wages for themselves, were going out drinking "with the girls," and generally asserting their independence.25 According to The Athenaeum of March 18, 1843, the Report of the Commissioner on the Employment of Children, etc., shocked the more genteel of the nation by describing the mothers of the future lower class as "hardened and demoralized into something worse than the worst men." They "drink, swear, fight, smoke, whistle, sing, and care for nobody," the report declared.26—Is it possible that the middle class was afraid that any woman who was granted equality and who worked would become like these women?

The Woman and the Double Standard

Many women were concerned with the double sexual standard they saw in operation. Whatever the Victorian

25 Neff, pp. 53&55.
26 The Athenaeum, No. 803, March 18, 1843, p. 257.
ideal might have been, they knew that ordinary women had to live with rules and customs which all too frequently did not suit their lives. Despite the rather uniform image projected for her in the many books and periodicals of the time, the woman of nineteenth century England stubbornly refused to be pushed into a mold. She may have been well aware that the role of wife and mother was the preferred role, but preferred or not, the fact is that she was also the prostitute; she was the working woman--city or country; with increasing regularity she was the governess--reduced to servitude by the fact of her family's financial loss, or, worst fate perhaps of all, she was that most despised and neglected of women, the old maid.

The pervasive double standard of morality was debilitating for many women of the day. Because the ideal Victorian woman was supposed to be innocent of all sexual knowledge in order to be a likely candidate for marriage, her seduction was considered a sin against nature from which she could be purified only by a life of penitence or through the expedient of death. Because she was supposed to be in the home with her children, the working woman was considered "an affront against nature and the protective instincts of men," and thus could be paid a pittance for long hours of labor. Ironically enough, it was at least partly because of this very double standard which was supposed to demand more of women than of men and, therefore, call them to
excellence, that just the opposite result far too often occurred.

The prostitution which polite society generally attempted to ignore in the hopes, perhaps, that it would disappear, no more ceased to exist than did the legs which the more delicate-minded also refused to name. And it was, unfortunately, to this, woman's oldest profession, that the woman unable by other efforts to earn enough money to stay alive, so often was led. Whether she worked as a maid, as a governess, as a seamstress, or as a factory worker, the woman on her own generally was so underpaid and so overworked as often to be forced to choose between prostitution and starvation—particularly if she happened to have any children to support. (In order to discourage illegitimate children, the law forced the mother to pay for virtually total support of such children.) Consequently, there were many "part-time" prostitutes who looked to the streets only when absolutely necessary, but who still helped flood the already full market. Janet Dunbar in The Early Victorian Woman—Some Aspects of Her Life tells the tale of young girls far from home and family who frequently were fired from positions as maids without notice or references. For such frightened young women, penniless and alone, prostitution became an almost welcome trap. Indeed, although the

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romantic notion of the drugged victim deflowered by a villain and held prisoner in a brothel was probably seldom the case given the large number of readily available prostitutes, there is no doubt but that in innumerable, more subtle ways, many young women virtually were forced into a promiscuous sexual life.

Just as the working woman might easily succumb to the temptations of selling her body, so too might the young girl who, because of an untimely pregnancy, found herself an enemy of society. The unfortunate practice of lumping all unchaste women into a single category— that of the professional harlot— very likely encouraged women guilty of mere fornication to become just exactly what they were thought to be. Thus the fallen daughter of a decent family found fewer restraints urging her to mend her ways than she found encouragements to continue in them. If she was to be branded as if she were a prostitute, anyway, why should she not at least have the financial benefits of that profession? The only woman whom society even half-way forgave was the innocent victim of a single seducer— and even she, though not considered a whore, was viewed as forever "soiled."²⁸ (Indeed, literature of the period frequently compelled such a soiled innocent to suffer the same fate of death as her

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more guilty sister.) Hannah More perhaps best epitomizes the sanctioned attitude toward the fallen woman, and clearly shows how such sternness could further degrade the unfortunate one. Speaking of the "criminal," More suggests that, while the woman should be encouraged to repent, she should not be restored too quickly to the society she had "so grievously offended." As a matter of fact, writes More, if the wretched woman had herself sought the restoration, that probably indicated that she was not yet sufficiently penitent, since a truly contrite person would be intent on righting herself with God, not with men. To restore such a criminal to society, suggests More, "is perhaps to tempt her to repeat her crime, or to deaden her repentence...." 29 Clearly such reasoning would not be conducive to helping restore a woman to a respectable place in society, and thinking, sensitive women could not help but be aware of that fact. Small comfort to the victim of this double standard that the eminent Hannah More should loftily tell her that she should not "lament it as a disadvantage attached to [her] sex, that [her] character is of so delicate a texture as to be sullied by the slightest breath of calumny, and that the stain once received is indelible..." because, after all, that very circumstance should help her to be all

29 More, p. 41.
the more scrupulous in avoiding the very appearance of evil.30

In spite of the fact that she could not help but know about prostitution, the ideal Victorian lady was to be protected from all mention of anything so "indelicate." Mrs. Reid, in her 1840 A Plea for Women asks agonizingly,

Is a woman one instant so perfect that vice is not even to be mentioned in her hearing; and the next—fallen perhaps through her very ignorance of evil—such a monster that her condition cannot be mentioned to her more virtuous or more fortunate sisters?31

Dinah Craik in 1858 made a still stronger statement in openly avowing that very good girls can become fallen women:

"I have heard it affirmed by more than one lady—by one in particular, whose experience is as large as her benevolence—that many of them are of the very best; refined, intelligent, truthful, and affectionate."32 Personal chastity, however significant, does not, by its loss,

indicate total corruption or entail permanent, degradation; that after it, and in spite of it, many estimable and womanly qualities may be found existing, not only in our pictureseque Nell Gwynnes and Peg Woffingtons, but our poor every day sinners: ...

30Ibid., pp. 208-209.

31The Athenaeum, No. 853, March 2, 1844, p. 190, quoting Mrs. Reid's A Plea for Women.

32Craik, p. 225.
Till we allow that no one sin, not even this sin, necessarily corrupts the entire character, we shall scarcely be able to judge it with that fairness which gives hope of our remedying it, or trying to lessen in ever so minute a degree, by our individual dealing with any individual case that comes in our way, the enormous aggregate of misery that it entails.  

Dinah Craik's view, at mid-century, of the fallen woman, not as a totally depraved creature, but as a redeemable woman who might, indeed, be a very good woman in all ways save one, is a view which foresees the changes evolving in women's status during the last years of the nineteenth century. It is a view reflected around mid-century by novelists like Mrs. Gaskell (Ruth, 1853, especially). It also is a view which came to the theatre. Craik mentions Peg Woffington and Nell Gwynne in the above quotation, and it is, I believe, significant that among the dramas populated by ideal heroines were also numerous plays about these two well-known "fallen women." Indeed in 1852 only a few years before Craik wrote as she did about fallen women, perhaps the most famous play about Peg Woffington of all, Masks and Faces (to be discussed in Chapter V), appeared with great success on the London stage. In Masks and Faces Peg Woffington not only was treated kindly, but, in a large measure she outshines the respectable wronged wife, Mabel, with whose husband she is in love.

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33 Ibid., p. 227.
Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth*, which argues for the rights of a fallen but otherwise pure woman who even dies in the end, was met with a great deal of public censure. According to Barbara Sawdey's unpublished dissertation on Mrs. Gaskell, the condemnation of *Ruth* in critical writings continued for several decades after its publication. Despite the fact that some critics praised the novel, Mrs. Gaskell received accounts of its being removed from library circulation as unfit for family reading and was told by two men that they had burned her book and by a third that he had forbidden his wife to read it. Yet *Masks and Faces*, which preceded *Ruth*'s appearance by a good year, had no such problems, and enjoyed not only a successful run but successful revivals as well. No doubt part of the reason for this is that the play simply assumes the rights of a respectable woman for Woffington rather than arguing for them (as Mrs. Gaskell does for *Ruth*); part of the reason, doubtless, is that Woffington was such a familiar character on the Victorian stage. But another reason also can be ascribed. Is it not possible that a somewhat different set of rules and expectations applied for the drama than for the novel—governed

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by the different nature of the separate audiences for the two? The restrictions imposed on the drama were, in large part, artificial ones resultant of the function of the office of the Lord Chamberlain—and, therefore, not necessarily indicative of the taste of the audience. The acceptance of those dramas which did pass without censure (or, in some cases, were sneaked in) may, then, be somewhat more of an index to the facts of the matter. Having now discussed at some length the nature of the ideal Victorian woman, in the next chapter we will pursue her into the drama of the time—taking into account the somewhat different nature of the audiences for the drama than for the novel.
CHAPTER III

THE IDEAL HEROINE AND HER AUDIENCE

It is my intention in this chapter to suggest that the disparate views of Victorian audiences as being, on the one hand, middle class evangelical prudes and, on the other hand, rowdy and unaesthetic boors, need not result in a claim for hypocrisy which supports the notion that only the most ideal of women would have been tolerated by Victorian audiences. In order to support the idea that these audiences were, indeed, more open to the divergent female than commonly has been supposed, I will contend that the highly diverse audiences of the time often were amoral and were more inclined to judge a play on whether or not it excited them than on any ideological stance it might support.

Having discussed the possibility for an audience's acceptance of the divergent female so long as her story was adequately exciting and her character well enough portrayed, I will present the drama's ideal female from whom, in the chapters which follow, we will trace her less circumspect sisters.
The Rowdy Victorian Audience

Judged beside the ideal Victorian heroine, women in the nineteenth century theatre usually were considered to be morally loose. Indeed, many actresses did little to diminish the prevailing image. It, therefore, seems particularly absurd to imagine such actresses continually playing the pathetically colorless innocents of the stereotypical melodrama, and the feeling of irony does not diminish as one thinks about many of the audiences for which they played.

For the entire first half of the century "audiences were too frequently composed of the lowest class of society," according to Ernest Reynolds of Early Victorian Drama. Drunkenness, theatre riots, and prostitute-client arrangements often intruded themselves on the play—especially after nine o'clock while the half price system was in effect. During the five hours and more of theatrical entertainment, beer venders and orange sellers plied their trade even during the performance—while audience members often conversed loudly in the brightly lit (until well past mid-century) auditorium, and hissed actors for whom they took a dislike.\(^1\) Of course, no one would claim that all audience members during even the worst of years behaved in an immoderate, attention-demanding fashion, but most would

\(^1\)Ernest Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama: 1830-1870 (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons LTD, 1936), pp. 52-53.
probably agree with E.B. Watson that the "much larger horde of the uncouth" who had come into the theatre with the democratizing trend of the early nineteenth century, could not help but have a detrimental affect on the audience as a whole.\(^2\) Charles E. Pearce quotes from an unidentified contemporary periodical written about 1825 which claims that

> The front rows of the dress circle, as it is ridiculously called, at both houses are filled with extraordinary-looking people who suck oranges or munch apples between the parts and look wildly about them as if they expected to see acquaintances.\(^3\)

The taste of the Victorian audience member for much of the period reflects Lynton Hudson's description: "love, passion, lust, and blood."\(^4\) That sensation was a notable part of their demand clearly is seen in the success of numerous plays on subjects like bigamy and murder. It is particularly curious to note the great interest in the subject of bigamy. Conjecture as to the reason for this interest leads us in several directions. First of all, there probably was more bigamy during the nineteenth century than there is today simply because communication was more of a


problem and because divorces were almost impossible to obtain in many cases. Contemporary periodicals cite a, to us, disproportionate number of bigamy incidents. Perhaps more important to this present discussion of the Victorian audience, however, is the likelihood that a play on bigamy was about as close as a Lord Chamberlain-guarded playwright could get to the exciting theme of actual adultery. An adulteress seldom was seen on stage in her sin. Usually, she was shown after the fact, paying for her sin. (See The Stranger, pp. 115-121.) If she was seen living with her partner in adultery, reason generally was given for supposing that they were not living together in sexual unity. (See Lost in London, pp. 78-81) A woman bigamist, however, could readily be presented on the stage in her "sin." She might even, as in the case of Ellen Wareham (See pp. 87-89.), have children by both men. Audiences delighted in the excitement of an unsuspecting, ideal heroine caught in the ugliness of bigamy. Indeed, critics tired of such subjects long before the public as a whole; in 1873 an Illustrated London News critic says plaintively, "We are weary of plays in which bigamy is the main argument," but, nonetheless, is forced to conclude his review with the comment, "It was favourably received." (Several plays which have bigamy as

5 The Illustrated London News, LXII, March 22, 1873, p. 274.
a theme will be considered in later chapters in this study.)

Throughout much of the period, plays which presented professional thieves in a favorable light were frequent and popular. In the third quarter of the century, as more middle class members began to attend the theatre, some questioned the morality of plays of that type, and one very popular stock piece called *Jack Sheppard* even was withdrawn after a "general call prohibiting its performance." The *Illustrated London News*, though, records the fact that the play was successfully sneaked back upon the boards under a new title in 1873. Sensation, apparently, appealed to the more sedate, middle class audience of mid-century too. And spectacle? Who has not read of the aquatic displays, of the fires staged, of the historically authentic set pieces? As for the display of flesh on stage, even in 1871 when large numbers of the middle class were attending theatre, *The Athenaeum* could say that, contrary to some thoughts, the short skirts girls in burlesque wore were not at fault for the demise of burlesque—that in fact no man or woman was shocked by such a thing. And we notice elsewhere candid appraisals of the thigh of one lady or another in a breeches role.

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7 *The Athenaeum*, No. 2255, January 14, 1871, p. 56.
The Diverse Victorian Audience

To imagine an audience which thrilled at "love, passion, lust, and blood," as being not only satisfied with the bland, innocent heroine of the stereotyped melodrama, but even outraged when language such as "Oh, Lud" and "God" was used, is almost incredible. Yet records indicate that there were, indeed, instances of audiences damning plays which, according to the critics, were immoral, and other instances of audiences heckling actors whose moral lives had been brought into question. Of course, the easiest way to resolve such a strange incongruity would be to attribute it to Victorian hypocrisy. To do so, however, would simply continue the myopic view of the age which is in part responsible for the lack of awareness of the non-typical view of women in Victorian drama. It has been the unfortunate tendency of many writers to conflate the whole of the Victorian era before the end of the century into one homogeneous package of middle class hypocrisy. Interestingly, if one is to look at the account Henry Mayhew writes of many of the lower class people who faithfully attended certain of the theatres, he cannot help but see that these people were not hypocritical in nature—that, indeed, most of them were only too willing to discuss their lack of sympathy for the strictures
of middle class evangelical morality.\(^8\)

In light of such information, recent writers like Michael Booth have begun to take notice of the need to look more carefully at specifics like the year of performance and the theatre of performance before saying anything in particular about the social significance of any play. The ease with which the often maligned middle class has been blamed for the blandness of fare throughout the period, for example, comes into question when one begins to realize that that class was not the predominate one in all of the theatres for the entire Victorian period. Indeed, by the eighteen thirties and forties, writes Booth, "the concept of the same theatre for all classes of patron had disappeared." The working class had its own theatres in the East End, on the South Bank, and on the fringes of the West End.\(^9\) Clive Barker would suggest that, in addition to the major and the commonly known minor playhouses, there were also very active theatres about which little has been recorded in the usual channels because they were run by members of the working class. (Research into the fare provided at these theatres might, indeed, supply answers to the source of some of

\(^8\)Henry Mayhew, *passim*.

Allardyce Nicoll's most intriguing-sounding titles on the handling of women.) Barker writes that of the unstamped working class newspapers which he had had a chance to look at, four of them were devoted entirely to theatre, and most of them carried theatrical news and criticism—indicating, among other things, that several Chartist leaders were playwrights. Of course, to make any assumptions about the fare at these little known theatres can be at best conjectural at this point—though the politically radical nature of many of them ought certainly to encourage investigation, and might even suggest a possible major change in current perceptions about Victorian dramatic significance. What we can say, surely, even now is that the middle class clearly did not control the entire Victorian theatre, for while the audience at one theatre might, indeed, be primarily middle class, the audience at another might not. Furthermore, we cannot assume that the middle class members frequenting the theatre during most of the years with which this study is concerned would have included the highly ideological religious segment of society. They might have sat to one side and condemned the theatre en toto, but they certainly cannot be supposed to have been a part of its audience.

Some Specific Audiences

Unfortunately, not a great deal has been written about the audience characteristics for particular theatres at particular periods. But, although we may not at this point be able to provide conclusive information about the audiences to which specific theatres catered, we do have certain clues which can be helpful. One of these clues comes from the time of day at which the particular theatre opened. Before 1817 the curtain always rose at 6:30, according to E.B. Watson; after that time, a 7:00 curtain was instituted for "high life," and opera, which catered to the most elite, always started at 8:00. The minor theatres, writes Watson, kept hours suited to their social positions: Whereas in 1832 the Italian opera began at 8:00 and Drury Lane and Covent Garden at 7:00, the Queen's, Adelphi, and Strand all started at 6:45, the Surrey and Sadler's Wells at 6:30, and the Coburg at 6:15.\(^\text{11}\) We also may safely assume that West End theatres would, generally, be more for the better classes then attending, while borderline and East End theatres usually would house the lower classes. Henry Mayhew indicates that the costermongers, for example, who, when possible attended theatre three times a week, went almost exclusively to theatres on the Surreyside. The theatres he

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\(^{11}\)Watson, p. 97.
specifically mentions are the Surrey, the Victoria, the 
Bower Saloon, and (less frequently) Astley's.\textsuperscript{12} Clive 
Barker writes that the Royal Coburg (later the Victoria), 
which in 1818 had catered to a fashionable audience, by 
1830 played almost exclusively to a local audience.\textsuperscript{13} The 
Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre informs us that the 
Victoria presented "melodramas of the most sensational kind" 
and that after 1833 it gradually sank to the level of a 
Blood-tub,\textsuperscript{14} the lowest form of gaff (improvised theatre 
with an inadequate company dealing "robustly with a 
repertory of melodrama").\textsuperscript{15} The Olympic, which housed sev­
eral of the plays to be discussed in this study, was cele­
brated primarily for burlesque, and, while Madam Vestris was 
there between 1830 and 1839, catered to a fashionable audi­
ence.\textsuperscript{16} The Adelphi, at which numerous of our plays were 
performed, was most famous for melodrama of the more in­
timate and domestic type--commonly referred to as "Adelphi 
drama"--though, interestingly, an 1862 review suggests that, 

\textsuperscript{12}Mayhew, I, 15. 
\textsuperscript{13}Barker, p. 17. 
\textsuperscript{14}"Old Vic Theatre," The Concise Oxford Companion to 
the Theatre, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll (London: Oxford Univer­ 
\textsuperscript{15}"Gaff," ibid., p. 195. 
\textsuperscript{16}"Olympic Theatre," ibid., p. 392.
because of the filth and general discomfort of the place, "few ladies will visit [it] let the attractions be what they may." Location, predictably, had a great deal to do with the quality of the audience. Even when, around mid-century with the appearance of Samuel Phelps (1843-1862) and later the Bancrofts (1865-1880), the more fashionable audiences began to populate East End theatres like Sadler's Wells and the Prince of Wales (formerly the Queen's), neighborhood audience members continued among the spectators. A.C. Ward, for example, reprints an 1867 Times article which states that,

the Prince of Wales's Theatre, though it has been fashionable for two years, is by no means in a fashionable neighbourhood, and the gallery must be peopled by many of those working men who patronized it when it was the humble 'Queen's'.

### The Cause of Audience Upheavals

If we cannot attribute audience upheavals against impure plays and actors entirely to middle class evangelical zeal, what then is the cause? And, for that part, is finding another cause necessarily of any significance, anyway?

17 Reynolds, p. 47, citing an unspecified 1862 review.

After all, it may be argued, if there was strong sentiment against anything which stepped away from the trodden path of the feminine ideal, does not that give sufficient reason for supposing that the image of the stereotyped virtuous heroine was the only one to be tolerated? Why should the cause of that intolerance be significant? To begin with, it just might be an erroneous assumption to conclude immediately that any play which presents a non-typical heroine and which also was damned by the public was damned necessarily because of the non-typical heroine. This researcher, for example, read a play which she considered fairly radical for the period and which had been damned by its audience. Her immediate assumption was that the unusual female image and the adverse audience response were somehow related. Upon reading further in other reviews, however, she discovered that the production and the unconvincing structure of the play obviously were more at fault than was any overlay of unpopular ideology. (See Chapter IV, p. 96.)

In dealing with the question of cause, then, we find that we must go even further back than that; we must begin to question our previous conceptions about the "what." Instead of asking the question "Why did the Victorians react against the divergent female in this play?"--a question for which a stereotypical answer is quickly available, we must ask "Why did this particular audience react against this particular production of this play?" If the date and
theatre of production are so significant in assessing the likely audience as Booth would suggest, then we must investigate more closely known audience eruptions in light of these two factors. Very quickly we will discover that some of the most often cited audience reactions against plays may, indeed, be easily attributable to middle class evangelical purity, but that is because they occurred either early or late enough in the century to have been subject to the more stringent moral requirements of the then predominate middle class. Such causes, however, must not be readily imposed upon the entire century nor upon all theatres, and when we find audiences reacting against plays, we always must look to see if it is possible that there is another cause for their adverse reaction. There is some reason, for example, to believe that middle class reactions against Ibsen's plays late in the century may have been caused less by shock at his "immoral" characters than by a combination of other factors—among them (1) the fact that Ibsen was not British. Reviews throughout the period reflect strong feelings of nationalism. Riots were caused sometimes because audiences were unhappy with what they considered too much foreign influence in their theatres. (2) the fact that Ibsen's plays were generally more mentally taxing than was the usual London fare. The claim has been made that the typical British spectator was pleased only with that on which he did not have to reflect for enjoyment.
Critics who compare and contrast Victorians to their contemporary Frenchmen often reflect the sentiment expressed by one Athenaeum writer that, while the French public went to the theatre in order to be excited by and to express their feelings on any matter of significance to the general good, the British, on the contrary, went to the theatre as an escape from such issues. A similar idea comes from the pen of Henry James who in 1877 wrote,

I remember nothing in Paris that corresponds with the laugh of the English gallery and pit --with its continuity and simplicity, its deep-lunged jollity and its individual guffaws. But you feel that an English audience is intellectually much less appreciative.

(3) the fact that Ibsen's artistic concern made the "points," of so much significance to an audience aware of its own power to judge and damn, such a part of the aesthetic whole as to be almost invisible to the sensation-seeking. "To thoughtful Frenchmen," writes Watson, "nothing is more important in the theatre than art. To thoughtful Anglo-Saxons, except for aesthetes and literati, nothing is perhaps less so." Londoners were not accustomed to plays which had so much to say. They yearned for spectacle, and

19 The Athenaeum, No. 329, February 15, 1834, p. 130.
Henrik Ibsen was decidedly more verbal than visual.

Reactions against Henry Arthur Jones's controversial *Saints and Sinners* in 1884 might also have had other causes than moral indignation. Jones, himself, attributes the adverse reactions not so much to a sense of purity on the part of the audience as to a feeling of being cheated out of their rightful, non-thought-provoking entertainment. Perhaps one remark which Jones overheard at the first production and recorded best sums up much of the response. He writes: "One sentence fell upon my ear, uttered in a puzzled, distressed, dissatisfied tone, 'A lot of folks going into a little chapel!'"

The Amoral Audience

It is most difficult to understand why an audience which often had little interest in scrupulous adherence to Christian principles in their own lives should have been so prudish as to demand circumspect language in their theatrical entertainment—unless we grant the possibility that one cause was as good as another to start a riot for a group which considered that it was not being well enough entertained and which had a proclivity for rioting anyway, and maybe a little too much beer in their bellies. William

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Archer is paraphrased in The English Stage as claiming in the 1880's that, contrary to popular opinion, British drama was even less moral than the "wicked French drama." "Whereas the French drama was deficient in morality, the English drama," according to Archer, "had no morality at all."23

That Archer's allegation is also true for earlier parts of the century is buttressed by the fact that alongside claims that the British could not bear the "indecent" on stage, is substantial evidence throughout the era of numerous plays glamorizing the seamy side of life. The Adelphi, for example, which was for over forty years considered to be most reflective of public taste according to an 1858 Spectator review, was strongly criticized in The Athenaeum of 1834 because,

crime has become so common in this theatre, that half-a-dozen murders more or less can make very little difference in an evening's entertainment—and yet, it is not worn out, as the vociferous 2/3 applause on Monday night clearly proves.24

A few years later The Athenaeum complained more bitterly over an "immoral" production about Madame Laffarge while she was on trial, and implored the stage licenser to step in

23 Hudson, p. 204.

24 The Spectator, XXXI, Part 1, June 5, 1858, p. 595. That comments on Adelphi taste reflected poorly on the public as a whole is seen by such evidence as the above quotation. The Athenaeum, No. 365, October 25, 1834, p. 788.
since "the approbation by the public and toleration by the press tend strongly to confirm the opinion that the popular mind is not sufficiently enlightened, nor the feelings of the public sufficiently refined."\textsuperscript{25} In writing of Benjamin Webster's \textit{Aurora Floyd} at the Adelphi in 1863, Henry Morley charged that "the players, who seek only to please the palate of the town, will cook the garbage that is in demand. Omelets are accounted flavourless; a strong taste in the mouth is the one thing desired."\textsuperscript{26}

That the Adelphi audience was not isolated in its enjoyment of intense, violent, "immoral" drama is evident in an 1873 \textit{Illustrated London News} review of \textit{Stone Jug} (a formerly condemned play given a new title):

\begin{quote}
What are we to say to managements that seize with such avidity the opportunity of performing a morally objectionable drama? Their name is now legion. Finally, what are we to say to the public that so eagerly patronises the wrong-doing?\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Other theatres which came in for similar castigation include the Surrey, which audience was typified by a \textit{Punch} review in 1841 as wanting actors with "lungs of undeniable efficiency, limbs which admit of every variety of contortion, and a

\textsuperscript{25}The Athenaeum, No. 680, November 7, 1840, p. 892.


\textsuperscript{27}The \textit{Illustrated London News}, LXII, March 29, 1873, p. 307.
talent for broad-sword combats;"\textsuperscript{28} the Victoria, and the early Sadler's Wells. (The 1841 \textit{Punch} asserted that the audiences there "would tear up the benches if they dared to murder out of sight, without being told what is going on.")\textsuperscript{29}

Although such sketchy information as we have been able to provide at this point is hardly conclusive proof that much of the Victorian theatre audience was open to non-traditional figures like the women to be discussed in the following four chapters, I would like to speculate that, for the most part, Victorian objection to a play was much more likely to occur if the play failed to entertain that audience (i.e. to offer sufficient points, spectacle, and/or sensation) than because of any ideological differences between playwright and audience. Of course, to say that an audience was more fun-seeking than prudish is not to establish that serious issues were frequently dealt with—in fact, quite the contrary. But, if we are to perceive our Victorian audience as being generally more entertainment-oriented and less ideological than commonly is assumed, then we also may be more open to the possibility that certain subjects often thought ignored in the theatre of the time were indeed handled—though not, perhaps, handled in a decidedly didactic manner.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Punch}, I, July 31, 1841, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Punch}, I, October 23, 1841, p. 180.
The Theatre Audience Versus the Novel Public

Once we have begun to realize that the educated middle class was not, necessarily, the major supporter of Victorian drama, it is easier to see how the novel and the drama could have had somewhat different audiences, and how, although the medium of the novel almost always has the advantage for innovation over the medium of the drama, the Victorian theatre audience may have granted drama greater latitude (wherever the Lord Chamberlain did not stop them) than commonly has been assumed.

Although, certainly, the readers of novels included people of all classes, the fact remains that, for reasons of leisure time, accessibility to libraries, money, home environments, and literacy, the middle class is the group which comprised most of the novel-reading public. Lynton Hudson writes that while "Society scrambled for boxes to hear the latest Italian prima donna," "the middle class stayed at home and read the latest novels from Mudie Library." 30 To this group were added in the first half of the century another group, dubiously considered the lower middle class. Richard D. Altick says this new mass audience for printed material came mostly from among "skilled workers, small shop keepers,

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30 Hudson, p. 17.
clerks, and the better grade of domestic servants." Imme-
mediately we can see that the preponderance of such a group as
this must have had serious consequences for the "inborn"
freedom of the novel, given that many of these people were
either evangelical or at least deeply affected in their up-
ward strivings by evangelical idiosyncracies—which often
kept them from attending the theatre altogether. As the
nineteenth century proceeded, middle class members gained
more and more leisure time, but until well past mid-century
the ways in which they could spend that time were severely
limited for some of them by evangelical doctrines. Theatre
and the music hall were off-limits for many of these people,
and so the novel became their primary entertainment. Indeed,
in a sense, it became almost public entertainment within the
sub-cultural world of the evangelical community in that the
novel so frequently was read aloud within the family circle.
Therefore, there is a sense in which the Victorian novel had
to pay debts similar to those the theatre traditionally has
had to pay. Indeed, Altick tells us that, after the first
third of the century, middle class pressure groups were quite
effective in modifying the way novels were written to suit
their tastes. After all, if novels were to be read in

\[31\] Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader: A So-
cial History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900 (Chicago:

\[32\] Ibid., pp. 124-125.
family circle where everyone from father to spinster auntie to virginal adolescents could hear them, some appearances must be kept up; novels became public—a kind of pseudo-theatre.

One of the reasons for supposing the theatre to have been significantly less innovative than the novel during the Victorian period has been that there was generally more public indignation about specific books on the market than about particular plays. If, however, one assumes more pristine audiences for the novel than for the drama, and if one realizes that, given the nature of the two media, the decidedly wicked novel could be read on the sly, then openly condemned by the self-same person, while a play would cease to exist if it were condemned—thus diminishing the possibility of having one's cake and eating it too, the reasons for such a disparity begin to be less simplistic. Indeed, the nagging suspicion arises that, perhaps, theatre audiences simply were less easily offended. Certainly reviewers' comments about audience moral discernment would buttress that notion.

Even though the theatre had to contend with the Lord Chamberlain's censorship, which often reflected the most prudish of middle class tastes, it at least did not, for much of the period, have to worry about a circumspect middle class audience. Though the Lord Chamberlain's evangelical tastes were imposed upon the theatre superficially (as such tastes
were generally then imposed upon any area in which the impressionable, and, therefore, potentially dangerous, working class existed), the real tastes of audiences can, nonetheless, be seen in their reception to the material they received and encouraged and in speculations as to why they responded as they did.

Lest there be any misconception, it is not the purpose of this study to contend that the drama was more innovative than the novel. (Indeed, the fact that many plays were based on previously popular novels would obviate that claim.) The purpose is merely to suggest that there may have been more room than generally has been thought for such characters as the divergent heroine to stand—even in the plays routinely reviewed by major newspapers of the day. It is not this study's purpose either to assert that divergent images of women in serious drama were frequent on the stage. Present information supports the ideal image as the predominant female figure in serious dramatic literature—with the possible exception of characters which make a single, small step outside the traditional role and then return quickly to the safety of the ideal image. (See Chapter IV.)

The Ideal Woman in Dramatic Literature

Rather than dealing with a large number of plays which reflected the ideal for the edification of the lower orders in the audience, we will limit ourselves to just three major
examples—one of the woman who remains pure and ideal throughout the entire sequence and two of the woman who errs and pays the ultimate penalty for that "crime." Where applicable, other plays which also reflect the ideal will be cited as well.

Whatever differences there may have been between their two audiences, Victorian dramatic literature and Victorian novels presented much the same ideal heroine—and for a very good reason: many Victorian plays were directly derivative of contemporary novels. The dramatic literature of the time, however, lent itself particularly well to the presentation of an ideal since the ever-popular melodrama dealt in stereotyped characters. The ideal Victorian woman as reflected in both the novel and the drama takes her cue from the ideal propounded in more didactic literature. Indeed, Patricia Thomson in *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-73* suggests that Dr. Gregory's *Legacy to His Daughters* be used as the paradigm of the popular ideal since it was a contemporary, established book of conduct for over one hundred years. Clearly, many fictional writers of the period endorsed Gregory's notion of the ideal, for according to Hazel Mews, certain Victorian novelists generally show approval of the woman (1) who evidences fortitude in public and in

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bearing personal disappointments, (2) who exercises self-control when she finds herself falling in love with a man who has not yet declared himself, (3) who does not indulge in secret marriage, but seeks the consent of her family.\(^{34}\) (Mews also indicates that, except for the "fall," Elizabeth Gaskell's much maligned Ruth [Ruth] fits the ideal in being beautiful, ignorant, innocent, gentle, submissive, and loving.) Wives were to obey always, no matter what their own opinions might be; they never were to risk shattering their husbands' honor. As a matter of fact, a man's honor, writes Mews, "must not only be in no danger, it must be seen to be in no danger at all times and under all provocations.\(^{35}\)

Like the ideal woman of the novel and of didactic literature, the ideal heroine of the drama is often long-suffering, self-sacrificing, dutiful, and pure. She is not, however, so frail as her didactic counterpart, and says William Paul Steele, she often is capable of defending herself boldly. She is willing to suffer rather than to see the villain win. However, he reminds us, "her femininity often gets the better of her, and she faints at the sight of blood."\(^{36}\)

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 128.

\(^{36}\) William Paul Steele, The Character of Melodrama: An Examination Through Dion Boucicault's "The Poor of New
Here we see a somewhat more active character than the ideal which didactic literature would present, and as we will show in a later chapter, sometimes, in fact, the stage heroine became very bold indeed, and fainted, if at all, only incidentally. The villainess/heroine who appears occasionally throughout the period, is even further from the ideal, of course. Significantly, she not only breaks from the ideal in being wicked, but also in bringing, as Michael Booth suggests in speaking of the villain, whatever "intelligence, design, and thought" there is to the melodrama.

Though the ideal dramatic heroine may sometimes have had more spunk than her didactic sister, when she fell or pushed her way in where she did not belong, she was just as likely to suffer. "In melodrama as nowhere else," writes Booth, "the wages of sin is death." Of course, he reminds us, this is not generally true for the fallen hero. He may have been a drunken gambler who deserted his family but he is, nonetheless, usually forgiven so long as "he finally repents and plays the man." Just as the fallen heroine must suffer,

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38 Ibid., p. 11.
so the bossy wife must be tamed, and drama reinforces the didactic ideal of a submissive, obedient wife by the assertion and reassertion at the end of many plays of the husband's marital superiority over the wife who has too long had her own way. 39

The ideal stage heroine, then, as the ideal novel heroine, conforms in many ways to her counterpart in didactic literature. One notable exception is the fact that suicide is condoned for the fallen fictional woman, though it would doubtless not be (at least not overtly) for the real woman to whom didactic literature refers. Here the romantic yearning offers poetic license so that, while the fallen heroine may not expect to live and regain her former place in society, she may fade away, forgiving and being forgiven.

In order that we may better see the way in which the Victorian ideal is worked out in the stage heroine, let us look at three plays which present such an ideal.

Isabelle; or, A Woman's Life (January 27, 1834, Adelphi Theatre)

Isabelle, By J.B. Buckstone, which was revived at frequent intervals as late as 1851, presents an ideal woman both

as girl and as wife and mother. Isabelle could scarcely be more perfect: She marries a man who loves her and whom she loves. Her family approves the union. She is eager to marry the man of her dreams, but she does not forget to sigh appropriately as she leaves her childhood home. When we next see Isabelle, she has become an elegant lady. Her language and decorum reflect less the country lass now and more the genteel behavior of the wealthy. As Act II begins, Isabelle is awake at two in the morning dutifully waiting for Eugene, who often is away from home, to return. When he finally comes in, rather than appreciating the fact that she has waited up for him, he is annoyed. Her questions meet the rude response that women cannot understand the sorts of problems men have and therefore have no right to offer any advice or ask any questions. At last, he orders her to go to bed. All this Isabelle accepts with little resistance. Indeed, later, when a servant confidentially tells Isabelle that she has found and read a love letter to Eugene from another woman, Isabelle strongly defends him and his right to privacy, and though she is tempted to read the letter herself, she resists. Clearly, this is the correct sort of behavior on her part, for our playwright reinforces Isabelle's goodness and trust under such difficult circumstances by having Eugene say of her in an aside, "She's a good creature, and worthy of being loved by a far better heart than
Isabelle's trials continue. Eugene is revealed to have committed a crime in his youth, and in disgrace leaves home. No longer the wife of a respected general, but rather the widow of a dishonored runaway whom rumors say has drowned, Isabelle returns to her old village to rear the children alone. Fifteen years pass, during which time Isabelle does not breathe a word of condemnation to her growing son about his father, and she frequently sighs for her lost love.

Not only is Isabelle faithful in Eugene's absence, but, when he returns, she is forgiving. Their own son, Vincent, now twenty and a soldier, saves Eugene (whom he does not yet know) from the wicked betrayer Scipio who has accosted him and is about to kill him. As Scipio lies dying from the wound Vincent has inflicted, Isabelle has an opportunity to show her mettle as an ideal woman. Discovering that the wounded form belongs not to her son, as she has feared, but to her husband's blackmailer, she is at first unwilling to help him. Then, as a woman, as a mother, she relents:

Yet he is in his last agony; and, perhaps, repentance—the deeds of the past may now be crowding in upon his brain, and maddening him; he is dying—with no friend near him—he has

known the fond care of a mother—a mother who would not leave him to perish, even though he were a felon, a murderer—and can I? no, no, I must, I will succour him. 41

Isabelle's role as a moral leader, as the redeemer of men, is fulfilled. She has, however, still another evidence of this moral character to show. When the contrite Eugene attempts to confess his wrongs to their son, Isabelle, still preserving the father's good name, insists that he remain silent. Vincent is not to know of his father's wrongs. And she? She forgives Eugene immediately upon his asking. "Let the past be as a dream," she tells him. 42

Isabelle has endured. She has endured a husband who was unfaithful and unloving, who refused to share himself with her. She has endured the shame and ignominy of a husband whose wrongs have made him fall from great heights. She has endured the shame of being deserted, and the pain of believing herself widowed to rear her son alone. And through it all, she has been gracious and giving and forgiving. Not only has she received her fallen husband back into her loving arms, but she has concealed Eugene's wrongs from Vincent in order that the father's honor may be intact. She even has offered the human touch to her greatest enemy in his last hours. She has been faithful, submissive, and true, and she

41 Ibid., p. 57.
42 Ibid., p. 59.
at last has her reward. Clearly, the playwright regards her behavior as the ideal for which to strive, because at the play's end, he has Isabelle step forward to address the ladies in the audience:

Dear girls, may your bright hopes never be shadowed by disappointment; and when you become wives and mothers, think sometimes of Isabelle; and let her story teach you the best of all life's lessons—patience, fortitude, and a strong trust in all that is good; believe me, you will then find happiness when you least expect it.

The men, also, are addressed, but there is no great moral for them to learn, in spite of the fact that it was the man and not the woman in the play who erred.

Gentlemen, if any portion of our Woman's Life has touched your hearts, all that we can ask of you in return, is, your approving hands. 43

The audience for Isabelle was obviously a good one, for as already has been noted, the play was repeated frequently during a period of at least ten to fifteen years. The Athenaeum reviewer also verifies its popularity, for, he says despite the fact that he does not personally have much for a play of that sort (one which covers so many years), "the public, at least the Adelphi public, does not agree with us." 44 That they were not alone is reinforced not only by the fact that the play lasted for so long, but also by

43 Ibid., p. 60.

44 The Athenaeum, No. 327, February 1, 1834, p. 91.
the fact that this Adelphi audience, as we may recall (See pp. 58-59.), was claimed to have been most reflective of public taste.

Adeline, The Victim of Seduction (September 9, 1822, Drury Lane)

The second play we will consider presents an ideal woman who falls and must pay for that fall with her life. The play, by John Howard Payne, tells the tale of a most innocent young woman whose "seduction" was in the guise of marriage, who, indeed, made only the error of disobeying her father, but who, nonetheless, felt compelled to suicide by the play's end.

In the first scene, we discover with Adeline that the man she thought herself married to and with whom she has just passed the night, is not really her husband--that the marriage ceremony was a hoax. Immediately, she realizes that she is ruined--all because she disobeyed her father. Adeline's first mistake is her only one, for once she realizes what has happened, her sole desire is to flee. She will not stay to be a mistress, even though everything now points to her lover's being much wealthier than she had supposed. To emphasize her lack of care for worldly goods, Payne has her change back into the simple clothes in which she left her father's house. Then she begs the good-hearted country servant to help her escape. He is touched, and in
his thoughts, reveals Adeline's basic goodness:

Kertsler (alone): Poor dear girl! She wants to escape—aye, there's your true virtue; anybody may tumble into bad ways, but there's always something sterling about those that do the best they can to scramble out of 'em.  

The count, whom Adeline knows as Fabian, and whom she thought she had married, also confirms her basic goodness when he remorsefully tells his friend that a girl "who for two years resisted every artifice, is at least entitled to respect."  

Unlike heroines we will meet in later chapters, Adeline is not able to help herself and must wait for others to rescue her. Although Kertsler is able to climb over the stone wall which surrounds the villa to gain help, Adeline never thinks of such a possibility, just as she offers but feeble resistance when the baron, who has been charged with guarding her, tries to force her into the house, and relies instead on "Powers of mercy!" to "save [her] from these monsters!" Characteristically, however, Adeline's courage appears when her old blind father, who has come to rescue her, is being threatened by the baron with a sword. Standing between the two men, she says, "Take, take my life, but do not

46 Ibid., p. 9.  
hurt my father!"\textsuperscript{48} This courage, though, is of a passive nature.

In addition to Adeline's already mentioned qualities as an ideal woman, we soon are made explicitly aware of another quality of the ideal to which Adeline had not paid sufficient attention--the quality of having a stronger heart but a weaker head than a man. Although Adeline's father, Dorlin, had warned her about his suspicions of Fabian, Adeline had not heeded his warning. Secure in her belief that Fabian really loved her and meant to marry her, she had followed her innocent heart to destruction.

When the broken-hearted Adeline finally learns from Fabian's own lips that although they are husband and wife "before heaven," they are not married in the eyes of the world, she says that she will bury Fabian's crime with her in her tomb so that after she is gone, he still will be welcome to visit her father and weep with him over her loss. (Already Adeline sees herself as marked for the grave, and talks of receiving her death blow from Fabian--a romantic notion.)

Fabian is overwhelmed by Adeline's magnanimity and purity, but he is not more impressed than is his wife, the countess, when she visits the girl she supposes to be an immoral mistress only to discover her an innocent and betrayed girl who had had no idea that "Fabian" was really

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 15.
Count Wilhelm, much less that he already was married.
Dorlin, however, is less ready to forgive, and when Adeline
refuses to pray heaven's bitterest curse on her seducer, he
pushes her away, unpardoned. Distraught, the fallen innocent
first sees to the financial security of her unrelenting
father, then, calling out forgiveness to her betrayer, she
throws herself from the bridge into the river. Though she is
rescued almost immediately, she dies in the arms of her now
remorseful parent.

No better model of the ideal woman marred by a single
error could be found anywhere. Adeline is as pure as the
clichéd driven snow, but even so, she, not Fabian (Count
Wilhelm), is the one who cannot live again in polite society,
who, indeed, has no right to live at all, apparently. The
only solution is that she must die. The fact that she dies
by her own hand is somewhat nullified by all the statements
she makes which assume her already dead as soon as Fabian ad-
mits to his seduction of her. Even before she has committed
the final deed, she says to herself,

Yes, Adeline is dead! True she still flutters
at the horizon's edge, like light's last linger-
ings when the day is gone. I must know the
whole truth: all hope will then be gone, then
all--Adeline will be no more! 49

Adeline's significance, of course, is enhanced by the
fact that the play opened at one of the two patent houses at

49 Ibid., p. 27.
a time in which large numbers of the new mass audience might well have been in attendance. The early date of 1822 helps establish the ideal heroine as a paradigm from which later stage females might diverge.

Lost in London (March 16, 1867, Adelphi Theatre)

It will be useful, perhaps, to note briefly another play in which there is a fallen woman—but this time one who dies of natural causes rather than by her own hand. Lost in London, by Watts Phillips, is rather late in the period for such a paradigm fallen ideal, but some significance, I believe, lies in the fact that the theme and treatment were still popular by 1867. The Examiner reviewer admits the play to be composed of very old-fashioned materials, but, he says, it is put together and acted in such a way that "if it gets its due, [it] should draw good houses to the Adelphi for a hundred nights to come."\(^{50}\) The very fact that the play was produced at the Adelphi indicates something of its popularity with the common people.

Briefly, Lost in London tells the story of a young working class wife who is tempted to the exciting life of London by her former lover, the handsome young master who employs her miner husband. Nelly does not, of course, make the fatal

\(^{50}\)The Examiner, No. 3086, March 23, 1867, p. 184. According to The Examiner, Lost in London had been written and was ready for production some years earlier than the 1867 date.
decision all alone. While she is in a near faint from the excitement of resisting temptation, the young master, Gilbert Featherstone, whisks her away to London. Her husband, Job, heart broken, follows, hoping to find her. Six months pass before finally he locates her at Featherstone's home, miserable in the midst of a gay ball. He takes her to a cottage in London where an old friend nurses her in the fatal illness which she has contracted mysteriously as a result of the shock of Job's sudden appearance. Job has vowed never to look on Nelly's face again, but in her last moments they talk and are reconciled. She dies in his arms while the silvery light of the moon shines upon her figure, "flooding it as with a glory," according to Phillips's stage directions.  

Once again, everything is done to be sure that the heroine is seen to be an ideal woman caught in a single weakness. In the very midst of his first grief, Job is quick to say that "her heart ain't bad--she niver had a bad heart, my poor Nell." And Nelly, clearly, has not enjoyed her six months in London as is attested to by Gilbert's comment when he sees her as he comes into the house, "Curse this weather! Snow without, and (glances over shoulder at Nelly) ice within." However gentle and kind he may be, Nelly does

52 Ibid., p. 225.
53 Ibid., p. 231.
not respond. She has not, despite her one mistake, become a mistress. She is not enjoying her sin, not at all.

Although Nelly speaks in the genteel, correct language of a lady (unlike any of her fellow country folk), she does not fit into London society; Gilbert chastises her for saying in public that she does not like wine; he observes, too, that she cannot play the piano and that she fell asleep at the opera. Obviously, she has chosen to not blend into the new life; her heart is still back in the country with Job. Any mention of her old home makes her turn pale with grief; she clutches her heart and grows faint when a song about a false lover is sung, and when her old friend, Tiddy, meets her by chance, she sobs that her heart is breaking.

However good and repentant she may be, it is, nonetheless, fated that Nelly must die. Indeed, it seems rather clear that that is a fate to be desired at this point—-that even death is preferable to the shame she has brought upon herself and her husband, Job, for when Tiddy prepares to announce the news of Nelly's flight to Job in the very first act, and he asks anxiously if Nelly is dead, she responds, "Worse nor that!—far worse—."54 In this necessity for Nelly's death, the Examiner reviewer concurs: "Nelly dies--there is no flinching from the bitter end that is the true

54 Ibid., p. 231.
end to such stories."55

It is evident that Nelly's sin has laid heavily upon her in that her heart is constantly "breaking." Well before her last illness, she, like Adeline, talks of herself as dying. Like Adeline, too, it is only in her last moments that she is reconciled to the one she has wronged, and in that reconciliation and the giving of her life, she is saved. As Job's last words and gestures tell, "I shall find her there. (He points upwards with a bright, hopeful look....)"56

Phillips's request for a glory to shine on Nelly's face further emphasizes the sense of her final redemption.

Many other examples of the ideal woman exist. Fragile, passive women victims appear in The Children of the Castle (1857) with a faithful wife who is victimized in her husband's absence by a male relation, in Henriette the Forsaken (1834) with an Adeline-like girl whose only weakness is falling for a man of a different social level because she is vain and enjoys fancy things (She goes to a convent.), in Esmeralda: or The Deformed of Notre Dame (18__) with a young girl who will not marry an evil man she does not love even to save her own life, in The Rag-Picker of Paris and the Dress-Maker of St. Antoine (1847) with a seamstress who, however much tempted, remains pure, in Louison, the Angel of the

Attic (1843) with a noble young woman who reconciles two men who would kill each other and even tears pieces from her wedding gown to bind the wounds of her "would-be" lover, and in the ever popular Black-Ey'd Susan (18__) with a young wife who is faithful in all ways and against great odds.

The familiar Victorian ideal woman was, of course, common in nineteenth century drama. Not all theatrical heroines however, were completely ideal. In fact, a fairly large number of them fit quite easily into the category of ideal woman driven to be divergent by a dilemma situation. It is these women who will be the subject of Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

THE VICTORIAN IDEAL CHALLENGED

BY A DILEMMA

Of all the unexpected images dealt with in this paper, the image of the woman who must choose between her role as an ideal Victorian woman and her role as a human being (where those two roles conflict) initially appears to be the weakest—not because it so seldom exists, but simply because it seems so obvious to us when it is mentioned. It is part and parcel of all drama. The fact, however, that the stereotype is often the case both in Victorian drama and in current perceptions of it, makes it necessary for us to pay more attention to even the small ways in which Victorians deviated in the direction of reality from the model stage female. Perhaps our best approach would be to look less at the heroines themselves and more at the heroines within the situations in which their playwrights put them since the heroines who deviate from the ideal image often seem to be no different from those who do not; they simply are placed into situations in which they must, at least, become active agents in the resolution of the plot line.
In this chapter we will deal with nine different examples of a heroine in a situation which requires that she behave in a way which, while it may be quite normal for an average, moral human being, is outside the range of the ideal Victorian heroine.

The Robber's Wife (January 7, 1830, Covent Garden)

The heroine in Isaac Pocock's The Robber's Wife is a good example of a woman in a dilemma. In her father's extended absence, Rose has married his greatest enemy, a man who has robbed her father and her guardian and has even killed the latter. After her marriage, although she is unhappy in her lot as a robber's wife, she, nonetheless, accepts it and even plays a role in her husband's game to rob travelers at his inn. She, along with him, disguises herself in order that they may be able to ply their "trade" in secret. In the first act, just as she is about to unload still another traveler's pistols as he sleeps, she discovers (and keeps quiet for shame) the fact that the traveler is actually her own father, returned after ten years abroad. Knowing that her husband will not stop at murder in order to gain the traveler's money, and quite aware that he would be especially happy in the deed if he knew the man to be her father, Rose plans how she may hope to save both her father and her husband—yet knowing all the while that she probably must lose one, for she reflects to herself, "which must
I give up, husband or father?—my heart clings to both, yet, if I can save one, the other surely dies.¹ Ultimately, Rose is forced to decide in favor of her father by the sheer fact of her husband's complete wickedness.

Although Rose, as an ideal woman, has an obligation to follow her husband wherever he leads, she finally finds that, as a human being, she must abrogate that earlier duty in order to be true to a larger one. She has for nearly ten years fit the mold of the ideal woman in that she has stayed with her man in spite of everything. Though she clearly has made a mistake in marrying Mark at all, she has not compounded that mistake by leaving him. Indeed, although she has served as his accomplice all these long years, even the law would not hold her guilty on that count since she is his wife²—though the law would, without doubt, hold her guilty if she attempted to leave her husband and find her own way in the world. Rose's situation has all along not fit the ideal pattern, but she, nonetheless, has felt the need to


²Henry Mayhew tells the tale of a family of counterfeiters who all were caught by the police in the act of coining. The thirteen year old daughter was imprisoned for two years; the father was transported for fifteen years; the mother, however, was judged to have been merely obeying her husband's commands, and so was allowed to go free. See Mayhew, IV, 379. Historians cite other similar cases.
live according to the dictates of that prescribed ideal. It is only in the extremity that she for the first time must make a decision which is not based on the ideal.

In stepping away from the ideal image, at last, the playwright clearly acknowledges more of the reality of life than generally was admitted to by the current proponents of the ideal from whom so many of our current perceptions have come. Indeed, it was to just such problems as Rose's that feminist-sympathizers addressed themselves. It is striking to note that, at the time when The Robber's Wife was presented in 1830, there was already beginning public debate about the rights of a wife married to a villainous husband, and shortly the famous Norton case would become public knowledge. (See pp. 31-32.)

When Rose steps from the path of the ideal in deserting her husband, she is not penalized for doing so, but instead is rewarded for having done the right thing by being forgiven and welcomed into the arms of her loving father once again. Now, this may seem like quite the normal situation, but the fact is that the ideal woman could not be expected even to conceive of such a problem, let alone have to confront it. It simply is not a part of the role of the ideal woman. Put into such a situation as the playwright puts Rose, even the most ideal of Victorians could not choose differently than she did. And the very fact that Pocock placed Rose in that situation in which she must, necessarily,
deviate from the standard, ideal image is significant. It seems evident that his primary aim was not to hold tenaciously to a common middle class image of what a heroine might do, but rather to create an exciting and acceptable play. The heroine may have begun as a middle class shrinking violet who merely was buffeted about by fate, but, when the playwright needed a "body" to see that Rose ended up in her father's arms and not her husband's, Rose became as capable as any hardy, working class girl in the audience. As for the audience, we will remember that since the play pre-dated the end of the patent houses, it doubtless was peopled by large numbers of working class persons who would have empathized with Rose's situation and would have seen nothing out of the ordinary in her non-ideal behavior.

Ellen Wareham (April 24, 1833, Haymarket Theatre)

Three years later, J.B. Buckstone's adaptation of the story of Ellen Wareham was successfully presented in London. In it the popular theme of bigamy emerges. Once again we have an innocent heroine who is placed in a precarious position, but as with other dramas which allow for a more human heroine, Ellen's situation is such that she must be an active agent in her own destiny. She must choose ———

3 The plot comes from a tale in Lady Dacre's popular book, Recollections of a Chaperon.
between returning with her two children to her first husband whom she has never loved, and staying with her beloved second husband and their child. Despite her second husband's urgings that they flee the country, Ellen, moralizing that he could never respect her as his mistress, returns to husband number one. So far that sounds a great deal like what the ideal woman would do—assuming that she had gotten herself into such a non-ideal situation. However, if we look a little further, we can see that neither choice can keep her within the folds of the ideal Victorian heroine, for in either case she must leave children behind; in either case she deserts a man whom she has vowed to honor and obey. The author seems purposely to have made it impossible for Ellen to fit the mold of the ideal Victorian heroine.

A further deviation from the ideal comes in the fact that Ellen's husband, the one to whom the Victorian heroine always should be true, becomes a kind of villain whom she must fight when he claims sole custody of their children and charges her with bigamy in the courts. That Ellen's decision to fight Cresford is applauded by the author is evident not only in the fact that she wins the court case, but also in the fact that Cresford soon dies—freeing her to return to her true lover, for, although Ellen complies with Cresford's dying request that she destroy Hamilton's wedding band, yet, even as Cresford dies, he sees an image of Hamilton and says to his wife, "May you yet be happy!"
Bless you, Ellen--bless you!"\(^4\)

Even though Ellen has been pushed into a non-ideal situation in which she necessarily must respond non-ideally, she still is regarded as a heroine. Both the reviewer of the London Times and of The Examiner indicate their basic approval as well. Clearly, there is little if any concern about the moral obligation of Victorian Ellen to Cresford. The Examiner critic puts things into perspective when he writes that,

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the climax of excitement is in the trial for bigamy,...the difficulty, therefore, is to get rid of the first husband in as summary a way as possible, (short of murder or suicide,) in order to attain the poetic justice of restoring the virtuous heroine to the arms of the man she really loves.\(^5\)
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The critic seems to be much more concerned with the trial excitement than he is with the maintenance of any sort of female image. This is, indeed, a pattern which we will see repeated again and again--both critics and audiences (in particular) ignoring breaks from the pattern of an ideal female so long as their enjoyment gauge reads "full." The Haymarket audience of 1833 was no exception.

\(^4\)John Baldwin Buckstone, Ellen Wareham (London: John Dicks, No. 837, n.d.), p. 16.

\(^5\)The Examiner, No. 1317, April 28, 1833, p. 261.
Blanche of Jersey (August 9, 1837, Theatre Royal, English Opera House)

Blanche of Jersey, a musical romance by R.B. Peake, Esq., gives two examples of women who become the play's prime movers in undoing a wrong and bringing the plot to a satisfactory conclusion. Both women are in dilemmas in which they must choose between stereotypically womanly behavior and their larger roles as human beings. Peake has arranged the plot so that poor Blanche alone must actively attempt to save her father from an unjust sentence to death, for early in the play, the only male who could have become the active agent for her (her fiancé), sails away, not to return before the play's end.

Young fragile Blanche, who clearly is the ideal woman from the play's beginning, knowing that her father's death warrant from the king is in the daily mail, determines to rob the carrier of this ominous message. She dresses as a young man and goes to the tavern at which the mail arrives. Now, if the primary object had been to help Blanche maintain her stereotyped image, it could easily have been accomplished at this point; Blanche at least could have been allowed to sneak the letter out of the mail carrier's pouch. But all Blanche's attempts in that direction are abortive. Instead, she must use the pistols she has donned to perform a robbery on the road. Brandishing the guns, Blanche accosts the mail carrier, and when he demurs, she threatens
to kill him if he does not obey. Although we have no way of knowing whether or not Blanche actually would have shot the carrier since he at last complies with her request, we do know that she is absolutely committed to obtaining the warrant—committed enough that she acknowledges beforehand that "it is more than likely that my life will be the forfeit of the act I meditate." Blanche's situation has moved her from the straight and narrow paths of the stereotyped heroine into the real world in which flesh and blood human beings fight to see justice done. She may faint, like any of the lacy darlings so usually associated with the nineteenth century melodrama, but not before she has first shown her mettle with a gun.

When Blanche's attempt to save her father's life fails, our second woman steps in to resolve the problem. Barbara, an old blind woman who has been befriended by Blanche's family, rightly surmises that her son, Claude, is guilty of the murder for which Blanche's father is about to die. Acknowledging that it might appear unnatural, Barbara, nonetheless, says that if Claude does not confess his deed, she will do it for him. "Waver not, Claude;" she urges, "you know me--it will be a cruel task for a parent to denounce her only child--but I will do it." Now, while this is


7Ibid., p. 33.
obviously the appropriate moral behavior for Barbara, it is also true that, just as she herself said, such behavior would not be considered natural in the ideal woman. She, a mother, performs the unnatural act of "sentencing" her son to death.

Two women, Blanche and Barbara, become the agents for change in Blanche of Jersey. They do not sit idly by, victims of circumstances, while Blanche's father dies on the scaffold, but instead, whatever the cost may be to themselves personally, plunge in to do the work that needs to be done.

Again we must recall that the English Opera House, as most other houses, could not do legitimate drama until after 1843. This fact coupled with the fact that opera frequently was highly romantic in character presumably would allow greater latitude for the adventures of a heroine even in a straight play. Further, we may assume that the audience would have contained disproportionate numbers of the usual opera patrons—the upper class.

The Lucky Horse Shoe; or, Woman's Trials (November 27, 1837, Drury Lane)

The Lucky Horse Shoe is significant for a couple of reasons in addition to the presentation of a divergent female: In the first place, it directly confronts the problem of the innocent wife and mother with an exceedingly
wicked husband who takes their child away from his wife, throws her out of the house, carries on an affair with another woman while still married, and in all this is supported by the law. In the second place, The Lucky Horse Shoe was presented during the very time that Mrs. Norton (See Chapter II, p. 31) and her similar ill-fated story were current in the press, and heated debate continued based on the need to protect women from such non-ideal husbands. As in the earlier play, Ellen Wareham, we once again have a husband invoking the law in order to take a child away from its mother. The Lucky Horse Shoe, however, is more didactic in its intent, and the husband is more clearly villainous. Indeed, the play comes fairly close to making a real social comment when Graylingford announces his intention to keep the child and Ellen responds,

> The law?—nature denies your claim; the very brutes assert their right, and will not yield their young; and when reason adds her power to instinct, think you a mother will obey?

For all the bravado in that speech, however, Ellen is not quick to deviate from the ideal pattern. In situation after situation she conforms to the standard, stereotyped image. She follows her heart, is easily deceived, is a devoted mother, refuses to flee with her wronged and long-lost lover even when she has only just learned that her cruel,

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8 Tom Parry, The Lucky Horse Shoe; or, Woman's Trials (London: Samuel French, Publisher, 377, n.d.), p. 18.
unfaithful husband will throw her out the next day without her child, and at the very end of the play plans to raise an alarm to save the life of her erstwhile mate. She never deviates from the ideal except in minor matters until, at last, she is driven to behave as no ideal heroine ought. Even then her behavior, unlike that of the other heroines we have discussed so far, is of a passive nature, and, therefore, it may be argued that she does not, indeed, veer from the path of the ideal at all. The fact is, however, that the same Ellen who, only moments later is capable of stopping the potential murderer of her son with a bullet, does nothing at all to stop him from killing her unlovely husband. The only thing which intervenes between her stated intention to save Graylingford's life and his murder before her very eyes, is her shocked overhearing of Graylingford's plan to discredit her with her father in order to obtain a divorce and marry another woman. Our only conclusion can be that jealousy triumphs over total goodness, and she allows her husband to die. Since Ellen is able only moments later to find the courage to confront and kill the murderer when her son's life is involved, we must assume that it would have been possible for her to have done something to have averted her husband's death as well. Though of course, the ideal heroine ought not to take up arms, still she might have screamed to alarm the house or warned Graylingford in time or at least have attempted to talk the potential murderer
out of his plan—using all her female morality. Since she obviously had planned to help Graylingford, something apparently had changed her mind. It seems fair to assume that the salt of his finding another mother for her son rubbed into the wound of his past indignities to her gives the needed impetus to Ellen to raise no objections as she hears Graylingford about to die. That may be behavior suitable to the normal human being, but it surely has no place in the life of the ideal Victorian heroine.

It would have been helpful to our case if we could write that _The Lucky Horse Shoe_ was instrumental in changing the laws and mores which then saddled the unfortunate woman with an intolerable husband, but, the fact is that the play was a complete flop, so it seems very unlikely that it had any measureable effect on anyone. _The Athenaeum_ had only one comment to make: "A melo-drama, of the domestic sort, called 'Woman's Trials,' was received with shouts of laughter; but of so 'domestic' a turn is it that it declines appearing in public again."\(^{9}\) The London _Times_ reviewer takes more time to discuss the flaws of the piece. He finds nothing unusual in the material at all and, indeed, faults it with being too much like the melodramas of twenty years before—only not so well organized. Despite a number of fine actors (including Mrs. Stirling as Ellen), the play

\(^{9}\) _The Athenaeum_, No. 631, November 30, 1839, p. 910.
was not able to get off the ground because of several misadventures: The baby, who should have made the audience cry, unfortunately, made them laugh, and once he was even missing so that "Mrs. Stirling had to look sentimental over an empty coverlet." As if that were not enough, the poor woman's pistol did not go off when she fired at the wicked Robert who planned to kill her child, so that the blood on his clothes and his death soon after as the conclusion of the piece were simply ludicrous. It seems fair to assume, then, that while the play certainly did not succeed, its failure must be attributed more to technical faults and cliche treatment than to any audience dissatisfaction with the advocating of a change in the laws and social mores for women. If anything, the Times reviewer is more unhappy at the sentimental, ideal nature of Ellen than he, apparently, is at her refusal to bow to an evil mate, for he writes somewhat loftily that

the wife hates her husband as much as she ought always remembering that she is a mother, the expression of which reminiscence is generally the cue for the appearance of the aforesaid baby, wrapped up in a shawl, and crowned with a picturesque cap.

If the laughing, hissing Drury Lane audience was as unhappy with this display of sentimentality as was the reviewer, then perhaps we see an audience somewhat in advance of its

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10 The Times (London), November 28, 1839, p. 5.
literature.

Still another problem with the reviews appears when we note that The Times records that Ellen shot Robert accidentally in a fainting fit. If this were so, it would certainly weaken our case since it would indicate that perhaps Ellen really did not have the ability, the stamina, to courageously confront the murderer. It is possible that in production this was the choice made; the script, however, does not indicate that at all, but rather suggests that Ellen deliberately chose to kill a fellow human being to protect her child and herself. I would suggest that, given the mechanical failure of the gun to fire, the actress may have behaved somewhat differently than the script suggested in an attempt to cover the problem. Or, perhaps, the poor woman was merely asking sympathy from the unhappy audience.

Poetic justice was done at the expense of Ellen's totally ideal character. In the end, Frankton (the old lover) joins Ellen as she kneels by the side of her child, pointing to the body of his dead father. We cannot doubt that they will marry and live happily ever after. Poetic justice, again, takes precedence over circumspect Victorian ideals.

Elizabeth Mowbray; or, The Horrors of Feudalism (1844)

The divergent heroine for Charles Dillon's 1844 play, Elizabeth Mowbray, finds herself in the midst of a Gothic
horror story. Although she clearly is an ideal woman (Her father refers to her as "her sainted mother's counterpart."), under stressful situations she three times must make a choice which temporarily consigns her to the non-ideal. Even before we meet Elizabeth, she has had to make such a decision. Three years before, in order to avert an arranged marriage to the villainous Malvern, she had eloped against her father's wishes, with her true lover, Edward, and so scorned filial obedience. Now, thinking her husband dead, she returns home with her child, only to discover that Malvern has become her father's deadliest enemy. In spite of her father's lack of forgiveness, she offers herself as a sacrifice to Malvern to save his life and fortune. Clearly, this is the human being in her rather than the virtuous woman. What ideal heroine would hide away her only child and give herself, body and soul, for any purpose whatever, to a man so wicked as Malvern?

Upon learning that Elizabeth has a daughter, Malvern orders the girl killed and convinces Elizabeth that her own father has done the deed. Crying for revenge, she signs the charge of murder upon her father which Malvern hastily puts before her. The playwright has placed Elizabeth in an untenable position; in order to be true to the love

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11Charles Dillon, Elizabeth Mowbray; or, The Horrors of Feudalism (London: Printed and Published by the Proprietor, Three Falcon Court, 145 Fleet Street, 1844), p. 192.
she felt for her child (now presumed dead), she must condemn to death the man who is her father and who, therefore, has great claims of love upon her.

Although Elizabeth is as quick to faint as any ideal heroine, she also shows physical resistance which would befit a man. Indeed, she herself says that her "woman's strength is, by madness influenced, equal to manly power." When she at last realizes what Malvern has gotten her to do to her father, she attempts to strangle the villain with her bare hands. He can be rid of her only by the aid of two henchmen who enter the room and force her from him. Where is the delicate heroine now? It would have been out of character enough if she had attacked him with a weapon, but no ideal woman ever would stoop to such a show of brute force as to attempt to kill a man with her own frail little hands.

Like the other heroines in this chapter, Elizabeth, doubtless, settled back into a more ideal existence, once the great trials of her life were over, but as we see her in the play, she reveals time and again that in a crisis situation, feminine ideals often must be abandoned. Further, although we do not know the place of production for Elizabeth Mowbray, we surely are aware of the popularity of the Gothic melodrama. Apparently striking effects coupled with a taste for terror took precedence over feminine ideals in such tales. The very popularity of the Gothic melodrama
implies a sanction of characters like Elizabeth Mowbray.

The Sin and the Sorrow (September 17, 1866, Grecian Theatre)

On September 29, 1866, The Athenaeum announced that a new play by Henry Leslie had been received enthusiastically by a crowded house, and predicted its continuing success. Delighted audiences watched as Anita, a young Mexican bride, falsely claimed to be her British husband's mistress in order to save him from a charge of bigamy—thus besmirching her own honor in a way no Victorian ideal ever could do. (The fact that Anita is Mexican is, of course, significant in that the choice of a non-British origin more easily could allow for less than ideal behavior. However, it also is significant to note that except for the fact that the play begins in Mexico, there is no real linkage of Anita to that country. Her language and decorum fit the Victorian model very well. Indeed, by the time of the bigamy charge, Anita and Harland have been living in England for some time.)

While there is no doubt that the ideal wife should do all in her power to support and help her husband, there is also no doubt that that does not extend to claiming herself to be a fallen woman—for such, indeed, she then would be judged to be. Furthermore, the ideal woman ought at least to have fainted from the shock of being however innocent a

12 The Athenaeum, No. 2031, September 29, 1866, p. 409.
party to bigamy before embarking on any course to save her husband; Anita does no such thing. Indeed, she shows remarkable self-possession under the circumstances and is at least as calm as Harland. As soon as she is aware of the portent of the villain Pedro's message, she begins plotting to destroy her marriage certificate (conveniently on her person), and when Pedro asks for a light, deftly offers him the certificate, all ablaze.

We will hear more about this play in the chapter on reversal situations, for there is a very real sense in which Harland plays the role usually given to the woman, while Anita is thus placed in a role ordinarily reserved for the man.

**Woman's Love; or, Kate Wynsley, the Cottage Girl**

Like Ellen Wareham, Kate Wynsley of *Woman's Love* cannot escape making a decision which places her outside the mold of the paradigm female. Twice her creator has written her into situations in which, however ideal she may be, she cannot help but choose an alternative which does not fit the ideal image.

When we first meet Kate, we discover that, in supporting her husband's needs and desires, as any ideal woman

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\[13\] Allardyce Nicoll lists a play of this title by Thomas Egerton Wilks as having been performed at the Victoria on April 22, 1845. A later version by an unknown author is cited for the Strand on January 28, 1856.
ought, she has concealed her marriage to him and has lost her reputation for virtue—something which no ideal woman ever should allow. Even when her beloved uncle tells her she must leave his house because she has not been honest with him about the fact that she has a child hidden away in Gloucester, Kate keeps her secret. She has been willing, however reluctantly, to be separated from her child; she has allowed her reputation of virtue to be besmirched in order that her husband might not lose the inheritance which his uncle promised to leave him only if he never married. In order to be true to the ideal of faithfulness to her husband, she necessarily has broken faith with two other ideals.

After a series of mishaps in which Kate and her husband, Clitheroe, are separated and assume each other dead, Kate takes a position in India as governess to a young girl who turns out to be her own daughter, now living with Clitheroe and his second wife. Once again Kate is placed in a position in which she must make a decision which cannot help but cause her to violate the limits of the ideal woman. Caught in a dilemma between allowing her daughter to continue to live with a stepmother who uses her harshly and the wish to protect the Lady Adeline from going mad (as Clitheroe has unwittingly suggested would probably happen if Kate were to reappear), Kate decides to leave her child and husband forever. Fate intervenes (Lady Adeline drowns,
conveniently.) and Kate is not, then, forced to carry out her intent. If fate had not intervened, however, her choice to leave Castledale Castle unknown would have meant that Clitheroe and Lady Adeline would have continued to live in loveless adultery and that her own daughter's life would have been ruined. But Kate chose to allow that rather than to tell the truth about herself and risk Lady Adeline's madness—a choice which would have appeared self-serving for an ideal woman.

Apparently in instances like this, the Victorian rule of thumb was to choose whichever alternative would make the decision-maker more unhappy. In other words, if neither decision could give pure pleasure, then a person's duty was to choose the one which would give the more pain. That way, fate might have mercy, and poetic justice have sway in the end. In this sense, of course, Kate's ideal nature remains intact by Victorian standards, though by the generally understood ideal of Victorian womanhood, it does not. No doubt, however, the playwright's greatest concern was to tap audience empathy, anyway, and that is probably his real reason for Kate's choice. The fact that the play was performed at mid-century at two of the popular working class theatres—the Victoria and the Strand—lends further credibility to the notion that the playwright had little concern to be totally consistent with current middle class conceptions of the ideal.
Miriam's Crime (October 9, 1863, Royal Strand Theatre)

Miriam's Crime, by Henry T. Craven, at first seems to present a woman truly ideal in every way. Miriam is loyal, loving, and demure, a woman who gives up a fortune in order that the man she loves (but who loves another) may receive the inheritance and marry the woman of his choice. But on a second look, we begin to realize that the general ideal nature of Miriam is stressed so that some of her less than ideal behavior perhaps will be overlooked. This is, in fact, the opinion of two of the reviewers of the play, both of whom acknowledge the play to be a definite success, while, nonetheless, maintaining that such material is not suitable for use on the stage. The reviewer for The Illustrated London News, for example, complains about the audience, and in doing so, reveals his own more stringent standards:

The extent, however, to which modern audiences are indifferent to the morality of a plot, provided the dialogue be neatly written and the characters respectably sustained by popular favourites, might reasonably provoke a public censor to a severe condemnation, if the public were really amenable, which it is not, to rebuke.\(^\text{14}\)

The reviewer for The Athenaeum also protests the handling of such subjects. "The main incidents of the drama," he writes, "are liable to objection on the score of social morals. But," he continues,

\(^{14}\) The Illustrated London News, XLIII, October 17, 1863, p. 398.
Mr. Craven has only sinned in company with Miss Bradden [a popular novelist of the time] and other similar romancers, who, in painting the strong-minded woman, are not careful to avoid 'a little wrong' if 'a great right' be contingent on its commission.

The Athenaeum reviewer finds no excuse for handling the theme at all, except that it gives an actress the opportunity to display her abilities in a trying situation. As for Miriam's conduct, he does not see her portrayal as an ideal woman as at all credible. She, after all, is clearly as criminal as the villain of the piece, except that her motives are pure, and that, apparently, does not absolve her of wrongdoing in his opinion.

What was Miriam's crime which audiences apparently accepted in spite of reviewers such as these? Miriam's first "crime" was to fall in love with a man before he had indicated his love for her. Having committed this indiscretion of which no ideal woman ought to be guilty, she was chastened to learn that Bernard loved another, but took comfort in the fact that at least he did not know "the humiliating truth." Later, however, in order that he might not

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15 The Athenaeum, No. 1877, October 17, 1863, p. 504.

16 That the play was popular is attested to by the fact that an 1873 review of a production of the play claimed it to be still, after ten years, "frequently given at different London theatres." The Athenaeum, No. 2402, November 8, 1873, p. 606.

see her as a jealous fortune hunter, she was forced to confess her love to him, and in the confession, she saw herself as having "scandalized [her] sex," as being "degraded...in his sight." In addition to these small deviations from the ideal, though, Miriam also was guilty of the still greater crime of burning a will in which she was left nearly the entire estate of a wealthy woman friend so that the woman's next of kin (Bernard) might inherit the property instead. Her motives, clearly, were pure since, although she loved the young spendthrift, she knew he did not love her and so wanted to help him avoid the temptation of marrying her for the money. He loved another? Very well, then; she would make it possible for him to be happy with the woman he really loved. Miriam, faced with a choice between the crime of destroying a will, and allowing Bernard to feel obligated to her, chose to commit the crime.

Complications, of course, arose, and since the will was gone the entire estate was claimed by the old woman's reprobate brother. Miriam's crime had brought her loved one only trouble. Grieved, she attempted to make things right, and when she discovered that an earlier will naming the nephew as heir still existed, she picked a lock to salvage it and right the wrong. Once again, Miriam had a choice to make. She had to choose between picking a lock (clearly a criminal

\[18\] Ibid., p. 20.
offence) in order to retrieve the estate from a wicked man, and allowing things to go on as they were with Bernard living in poverty and the evil uncle living in splendor. Once again she chose the crime, the "lesser wrong." Of course, everything ended happily, with Miriam still inheriting the estate—but this time in a proper way, as the wife of the man to whom it really belonged.

Even such a conclusion as this, however, apparently absolves Miriam of her crimes only in the eyes of her audience. For the thinking critics it does not. Critics throughout this period were concerned with the number of plays in which criminals were presented as heroes and heroines. They must have been particularly concerned over Miriam because of the fact that she was so clearly ideal in every other way. Obviously, the author of the play also was worried about this point, for he makes a special effort at the play's end to get the audience publically to excuse Miriam for her wrongdoing. Bernard, who at last has fallen in love with Miriam, defends her against those who would call her criminal, and claims that hers were "innocent crimes."

And Miriam responds,

> Will all look upon me with the lenient eye
> that you do? (to Audience) Can a right mo-
> tive justify a wrong act? Dare you say "no!"
> you, who in your kindness so ever slow to
censure—so ever quick to encourage, give
such an example? Our immortal bard has
taught how few of us can escape in the mere course of justice. Mercy we look for—and at your hands.

The audience gave mercy. The romantic notion of the play, the poetic justice of such a conclusion, clearly were of greater importance to them than the preserving of an ideal. Unlike the reviewers who, indeed, might have created a completely pallid theatre with heroes and heroines conforming strictly to certain ideal standards from which they never deviated, the audience for Miriam's Crime encouraged at least some variety in their heroine.

Woman's Faith (1835)

Woman's Faith by William Bayle Bernard, presents a woman as pure and virtuous as any ideal could fathom. Yet she, like many other such women, is destined to make a choice which does not fit the ideal in any way. Louise's first love, Edouard, had been tempted into an indolent and immoral life which finally resulted in his arrest for forgery and subsequent sentence to life in prison. Because Louise had been so repelled by Edouard's attempt to force her into sexual relations with him and by his life style in general, she had married another man whom she admired but

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19 Ibid., p. 30.

20 Allardyce Nicoll lists this play by Bernard as having been done at the English Opera on November 2, 1835.
could not love since her heart still belonged to Edouard.

When, as a young widow, Louise discovers Edouard to be one of the three robbers in her house (He had escaped from prison and had been on his way to drown himself when he had been forced into the robbery.), she is quick to offer her forgiveness to the penitent man. Although Edouard is quite intent on turning himself in to the police who surround her house, Louise throws herself into his arms and reveals a plan which is not altogether worthy of the ideal Victorian woman:

Louise: (Rousing herself with energy.) Stay, stay, Edouard! If you love me, I conjure you to listen to me. If you have not atoned sufficiently, were not a life passed in some foreign country, in the active exercise of all your early virtues, a far more grateful spectacle to Heaven than the useless misery of a prison?

She has money, says Louise; she can get him out of France where he will be safe—and free. If Edouard truly loves her, he will consent. "Louise," he reminds her, "this cannot be; you know not the consequences of involving yourself with a convicted felon." Yes, but she does know, counters Louise. Now he must hide.

When the police refuse to believe Louise's explanations, especially after they notice Edouard's hat on the floor, she proceeds to tell a fine story about how, her husband having died only recently, she had hoped to keep it secret that she has remarried so soon. There is a gentleman
hiding in her bedroom, she says, but he is her new husband with whom she had been about to embark on their honeymoon when the robbery had occurred. She appeals to the soldiers' feelings as gentlemen and requests that they keep secret what might appear an indelicacy. Then she leads Edouard, garbed in traveling clothes, out to meet them, and introduces him as her husband. The soldiers are satisfied and leave, upon which she throws herself into Edouard's arms, crying, "Edouard! You are saved!" We are left to suppose that Louise and Edouard traveled together to a distant land and there lived out their lives in freedom and happiness.

Louise's love for Edouard has made her both a criminal and a liar—neither of which offense is acceptable for the ideal Victorian woman, and yet Louise clearly is meant to be the heroine of the piece. Everything else she has done and said throughout the entire play has mirrored her virtue. Though these last choices in favor of Edouard's freedom over the preservation of the law are wrong from the viewpoint of preserving any ideal image, they certainly allow for a kind of poetic justice for Louise, and as such, we may assume, were approved by the audience.  

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21 It is unfortunate that I have been unable to find any contemporary reviews to prove or disprove my assumption. However, the fact that the play was performed in 1835 at
The women we have discussed in this chapter are the mildest deviations from the ideal Victorian heroine. Indeed, they all represent the ideal most of the time, and we are firmly convinced that they will return to behaving in a totally circumspect, ideal fashion as soon as their own particular crises are over. As a matter of fact, we already see this return to the ideal at the conclusion of some of the plays—Miriam of Miriam's Crime being perhaps the most obvious with her more appropriate acquisition of a fortune via marriage rather than directly. The deviations occur, no doubt, not because a writer has decided purposely to abrogate the ideal, but rather because theatrical custom and reality provide a firm basis for the deviations. For that same reason, and because they are such slight deviations, audiences apparently were not disturbed at all by such non-ideal behavior.

Although the nine plays discussed in this chapter comprise the bulk of such plays in my experience, there seems to be little reason to suppose that they were unusual, and I am sure that the unexpected images found in this chapter, especially, are unexpected only from the viewpoint of one who has come to the plays with a stereotyped ideal in his head. A special significance of plays like those presented the English Opera House, no doubt allowed for greater latitude in the direction of romance. (See Blanche of Jersey, p. 92.)
in this chapter is the recognition that the Victorian era was not so greatly unlike our own twentieth century in allowing for dilemmas to alter the way in which even the rigid middle class rules applied to the stage female. In the chapters which follow we will look at heroines whose deviations from the ideal are perhaps more startling, but we must never forget that the possibility for those more apparent deviations is based firmly in the fact that Victorians did, indeed, allow for a situation to alter the behavior of even the most ideal of heroines.
CHAPTER V

FALLEN WOMEN WHO RETURN TO RESPECTABILITY

Because the ideal Victorian woman so often is identified with the stringent moral codes of the period, it is particularly interesting to note instances in which a fallen heroine does not have to pay the ultimate price of either death or retirement to a convent in order to be accepted back into legitimate society. The fact that Dumas fils' *La Dame Aux Camelias* was so horrifying to the British public as to not have been accepted in its original form until the close of the century, makes the forgiven sinners who are the theme of this chapter more surprising yet. As we look at these fallen women, we notice that they, through their playwrights, often simply take the rights of a respectable woman without all the discussion in which a novelist might get involved. If there is justification given for the forgiveness of these women, it is usually of a romantic type set in a highly dramatic section of the play so that any gifted actress should have been able to move the audience into emotional approval without involving their heads at all. (Sometimes the character who is easily forgiven is an
actress, and actresses were given greater moral license than were other women.)

Of course, none of the women in this chapter, whether her end fits the ideal or not, is a truly wicked person. Indeed, even the Magdalen who must die is often more pure than anyone else in the play. (See Chapter III.) Her only sin is usually that of a single indiscretion, and that committed out of ignorance. But, however pure her motives and chaste her heart, if a single deed may be considered to place her outside the boundaries of correct society, she is considered, in the ideal situation, a lost woman who must pay society's price. Indeed, there is reason for supposing that such dire consequences often reflected real life situations. Although some of the slight indiscretions committed in the plays would not net a real life girl the awesome consequences of the social outcast, it is, nonetheless, quite true that an out of wedlock pregnancy frequently did result in just those very consequences--either death (often by her own hand) or ostracism (making a convent palatable) or, perhaps, further moral degradation as a prostitute (an alternative not easily considered in dramatic literature).

In this chapter we will consider a number of plays which, in varying degrees, present the woman who pays the lesser price for her moral sin than the ideal Victorian woman usually is thought to have paid. We will look first at three erring wives, then at three false daughters, and
finally at three unmarried women whose moral behavior is of a questionable nature. Although the plays in this chapter must not be seen to have been so relatively common as the plays in Chapter IV, they still must be seen as significant in that there is a fairly wide variety of theatres represented as having housed them. It is true that the plays I discuss in this chapter comprise most of those I have read which fall easily into the appropriate category, but the fact that they are relatively few in an amazingly prolific age is helped somewhat by the fact that they also were so universally accepted by their disparate audiences.

Erring Wives

The Stranger (Throughout much of the period)\(^1\)

The first of the plays we will consider which presents a woman who pays a lesser price for her moral sin is Kotzebue's The Stranger. The play is especially significant in that its Magdalen is both a wife and mother. Although The Stranger is rather earlier than our period, the fact that it was "constantly acted in England through the nineteenth century"\(^2\) according to M. Willson Disher and the fact


that it is mentioned as a point of comparison in a number of reviews of other plays during our period makes it, I believe, of some significance to the study.

Mrs. Haller is our first erring wife. As a fallen woman, it is her lot to live for a time as a kind of recluse before her penitence for having left her husband and children for another man is sufficient for her forgiveness. Such a life of denial initially may appear to be a mere substitute for the convent, and therefore, not a novel treatment at all, but the fact is that the Stranger (Mrs. Haller's wronged husband) also endures a self-imposed life of seclusion as a result of her behavior. He, as well as she, lives apart from their children, and indeed, his life style is more characterized by denial than is hers. Mrs. Haller becomes known in the community in which she lives as a generous person who does all she can to help others in need—a typical form of repentance not unlike the reclusive repentance of Elizabeth Gaskell's Lizzie Leigh. Her deeds of charity, however, do not outshine the similar acts performed by the Stranger. Whatever Mrs. Haller has done to merit forgiveness, her husband seems to have done also—thus diminishing the significance of her reformed spirit somewhat.

\[Lizzie Leigh\] tells the story of an unwed mother who spends the rest of her life in a small rural area doing deeds of charity in order to pay penance for her sin against society.
since she is not the lone shining star. Yet in the end she
is forgiven by the Stranger—and more than forgiven; there
is every indication that she and her husband and their two
children will become a family again. Just as the play is
about to come to the usual sort of conclusion in which the
two part forever in this life, their children are brought on
by friends who hope for a reconciliation between them, and
the curtain falls on Mrs. Haller and the Stranger in each
other's arms, the children clinging to them.

Mrs. Haller does not, of course, ask for this recon-
ciliation, does not feel that she merits such grace. In-
deed, when she and the Stranger meet for the first time in
three years, she offers him a document which acknowledges
her adultery so that he may divorce her and remarry without
difficulty; she refuses his offer of money; she does not
even expect his forgiveness, but asks only that he will not
curse her memory. That Mrs. Haller's sins are counted as
grievous ones is quite evident. Yet, the playwright con-
stantly points to society's need to forgive the penitent.
When the countess (one of the aforementioned friends) first
learns of the adulterous disgrace, she is repulsed, but then
she reminds herself,

Yet she is unfortunate; she is unfriended!
Her image is repentance—Her life the proof.
Be still awhile, remorseless prejudice, and
let the genuine feelings of my soul avow—
they do not truly honour virtue, who can in-
sult the erring heart that would return to
her sanctuary.

Even the countess's brother, who had fallen in love with
Mrs. Haller, is generous, despite his own grief at learning
her to be the fallen wife of his old friend. When Mrs.
Haller tells the baron that she dare not look into the eyes
of an honest man, he responds by claiming her restored to
good society:

If sincere repentance, if years [three!] without reproach, do not give us a title to man's
forgiveness, what must we expect hereafter?
No, lovely penitent! your contrition is com-
plete. Error for a moment wrested from
slumbering virtue the dominion of your heart:
but she awoke, and with a look banished her
enemy for ever. (pp. 52-53)

Furthermore, the baron believes that the Stranger also will
forgive Mrs. Haller: "I know my friend. He has the firm-
ness of a man; but with it the gentlest feelings of your
sex." (p. 53)

In pleading for Mrs. Haller with the Stranger, the
baron, remarkably, tells his friend that part of the blame
must be his own:

Who told you to marry a thoughtless inexperi-
enced girl? One scarce expects established
principles at five-and-twenty in a man, yet
you require them in a girl of sixteen! (p. 56)

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4 Kotzebue, p. 40. Further references are noted in
the text.
Yet, even while he says this, the baron is aware of the social consequences of the Stranger's forgiveness of his estranged wife, for prior to pleading her case, he has weighed the problems carefully:

What can I answer when he asks me, whether I would persuade him to renounce his character, and become the derision of society? For he is right; a faithless wife is a dishonour! and to forgive her, is to share her shame. What though Adelaide may be an exception; a young deluded girl, who has so long and so sincerely repented; yet what cares an unfeeling world for this? (p. 54)

Time and again Kotzebue points to the rule of society and finds it wanting. Three different people—Mrs. Haller's benefactress (the countess), her disappointed would-be lover, and her wronged husband—all wrestle with societal pressures, and end by forgiving the repentant sinner. Clearly, Kotzebue sees their individual decisions as victories for the right. Clearly, he counts the Stranger also to be guilty in the sins of his wife. Clearly, he does not concur with the Hannah Mores who would deny a fallen woman any happiness in this life. Mrs. Haller's sin is behind her. Whatever she may have done in the past will be remembered against her no more. We may assume that all will now be restored to her—family, husband, wealth; and she, a wiser woman, will profit by her mistake and live a totally circumspect life with a husband who also has learned from his mistake.
In the "Remarks" at the front of the already cited version of *The Stranger*, we learn that this play, which conveys a "somewhat questionable moral" in that a penitent adulteress is received back into her former rank in society, "which by all laws but those of the drama, she had irrevocably forfeited," was indeed well received by its audiences. "Of the many who have witnessed its representation," claims the writer, "we verily believe, there is not one, critics excepted, but has hailed the denouement with the most pleasing emotions."\(^5\)

In citing reasons for the willingness of audiences to forgive Mrs. Haller, the preface says that, despite her easy step into infidelity which "proves that her credulity is as easy as her virtue" (She allowed her seducer to convince her that her husband was unfaithful to her.), her prettiness, "in tears too! is at all times a powerful advocate; for beauty, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins."\(^6\) We will hear more later in this chapter about the fact that if the penitent sinner was pretty enough and a popular enough actress, she could be forgiven much. As for *The Stranger*, London's first Mrs. Haller was played by the ever popular

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\(^6\) Ibid., p. 7.
Mrs. Siddons, and the character was later portrayed by other well-known actresses—Miss O'Neil, Mrs. Sloman, Mrs. West.\(^7\)

Apparently, later in the century there was more question as to the appropriate ending to the play, for a review of East Lynn in The Athenaeum on February 10, 1866 indicates that the conclusion of The Stranger sometimes differed from the original script. "One lady," the reviewer writes, "concludes it with a death, another with a reconciliation."\(^8\)

The fact remains, however, that in at least a large number of productions, Mrs. Haller was forgiven and received back into the bosom of society in spite of her sins; she was set up as a fallen ideal who paid only three years of her life and a few pretty tears instead of meeting with death or being sent to a convent.

"Dropping at a wronged husband's feet was the correct procedure for erring wives,"\(^9\) according to Disher. We shall see more of that posture in the two plays that follow. The Divorce and Broken Ties both offer wives who have erred—fallen women who repent and pay less heavily than they ideally must.

\(^{7}\)Ibid., pp. 8&9.

\(^{8}\)The Athenaeum, No. 1998, February 10, 1866, p. 213.

\(^{9}\)Disher, p. 104.
The Divorce (October 19, 1832, Adelphi Theatre)

Although S.J. Beazley's play is billed in its written edition as a "comedy in one act," a contemporary London Times review of it favorably compares the play to The Stranger, so we may suppose that it was meant to be viewed with some degree of seriousness. The review also indicates that the moral propounded in The Divorce is less questionable than is the one in The Stranger. Indeed, it is true that, unlike Mrs. Haller, for whom a reconciliation and a happy future were possible, Madame de Merville has no chance for happiness. The reason The Divorce is included in this chapter is not because she does not suffer, but because (1) she does not suffer to the extent of death or confinement in a convent, and (2) her husband and her ex-husband seem to be suffering at least as much as she is.

When we first meet Madame de Merville, we learn that two years before she had left her husband and little boy to be married to Edward de Merville, the man she had loved before her father had pushed her into a marriage with Lord Clifford. Lord Clifford, upon hearing that she loved another, had agreed to the divorce she had requested (she thought because he had no feeling for her). During the course of the play, however, we and the erring wife learn

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10The Times (London), October 23, 1832, n.p.
that she indeed had been very much loved by her first husband, who had thought only to make her happy. She and her jealous second husband accidentally meet with Lord Clifford and her four year old sickly child at a spa, and de Merville, deciding that he cannot cope with the problems of going against society's demands in being married to a divorced woman, leaves his wife of two months, traveling in one direction from the spa while the husband and the little son rush away traveling in the opposite direction. The desolate wife is left totally alone—as she says, "forever." Both men, however, have told her before they left that "the rest of my life must be devoted to misery!"\textsuperscript{11} Although Madame de Merville must endure the pain of loneliness, she does not bear the penalty alone, for the two men also live on in misery. Furthermore, she does not die; in fact, if anyone is going to die, it appears that it will be Edward. When he deserts her, he leaves a note saying that he does not accuse her, that he leaves his fortune to her, that—"I fly—I know not where—perhaps to death! Farewell for ever!"\textsuperscript{12}

Clearly, this short play is attempting to get across a very strong message against divorce—which the playwright strangely seems to think it easy for a woman to get in

\textsuperscript{11}S.J. Beazley, \textit{The Divorce} (London: John Dicks, n.d.), pp. 21&22.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
England in 1832. According to one of the play's characters, divorce could not be easier. At the top of Ludgate Hill, he says, is a remedy for every marital problem:

There, husbands get rid of wives, wives of husbands, in the simplest way in the world, a few affidavits, a few examinations, a great number of fees, and a decree of divorce—quite comfortable—

However accurate or inaccurate the details of the play may have been, it is rather unlikely that the Adelphi audiences would have been aware of that sort of information anyway. Most members of the Adelphi audience did not travel in company with lords and ladies. Whatever their basis for judging the play, there were only a few hisses to offset the applause when the piece was announced for repetition, though the Times reviewer attributed the success mostly to the skill of Mrs. Yates in the principal female role.15

**Broken Ties** (1872, Olympic Theatre)

Much later in the century, we have record of still another play in which a wife and mother deserts all to have

13 Madame de Merville's first husband was, of course, a lord, and since he consented to the divorce, there was more possibility of its being granted—though even as it was, it took nearly two years before de Merville was free to marry the ex-Lady Clifford. (The French derivation to which the Times review points, also might be accountable for the assumption of easy divorces.)


15 The Times (London), October 23, 1832, n.p.
a life of her own. This play, Broken Ties, translated and
adapted from the French version (La Fiammina) of M. Mario
Uchard by Palgrave Simpson, apparently made an earlier and
more daring entree into England before the 1872 date with
which we must work because The Athenaeum review refers to
the "well-known" comedy from which the play derives, and
complains that,

So anxious has been the translator, Mr.
Palgrave Simpson, to divest his piece of what­
ever might incur a risk of censure, he has got
rid of meaning, motive, and everything on which
he should depend.16

Indeed, if the advertisement in the London Times for this
production at the Olympic Theatre is accurate, we may assume
that even this adaptation already had been produced in other
parts of the United Kingdom by Mdlle. Beatrice for "upwards
of 600 Nights."17 Therefore, however divergent this version
may be, it seems that a still more divergent version must
have existed before it, and that our 1872 date is actually
rather late in the history of its production in some form
or other.

The repentant wife and mother of Broken Ties is La
Silvia, an Italian Prima Donna (Once again we note the dis­
tancing factor of a foreign birth.) who, when her nineteen
year old son was still an infant, deserted him and her

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16 The Athenaeum, No. 2329, June 15, 1872, p. 761.
17 The Times (London), June 7, 1872, p. 8.
husband in order to pursue a career on the stage. In spite of rumors to the contrary, La Silvia has been chaste all these years. At the age of thirty-six, she comes to London to perform for the first time, only to rediscover her husband and her son (who believes his mother died many years before). Her recognition by her husband causes many serious repercussions—not the least of which is the refusal of the father of her son's fiancée to allow a marriage between his daughter and the son of a stage personality, for however chaste she may be in actuality, her reputation as a woman living apart from her husband, must be considered.

La Silvia's son, meantime, is busy challenging men to duels to defend the name of his newly found mother, and La Silvia is moaning over her lost right to an honorable motherhood. Her dearest wish, suddenly, is to be called "mother" by the son she has not seen since he was an infant. She who, just minutes before has said, "The perpetual struggle for success is the sole life worth living for," now wishes only to be called "mother" and die.

In order to point up the ideal behavior for a woman, the playwright brings on a young wife and mother who once acted and sang with La Silvia, but who now is a happy

homemaker, and has given up a career on the stage for a better life. Mrs. Sherwood babbles about nurseries and first teeth, while La Silvia sits and envies her. She has no regrets, says Mrs. Sherwood: "Ah! Silvia, darling, the most triumphant recall [sic] of a delighted audience is not worth one of those sweet, dear smiles." (p. 21) Indeed, the playwright does all he can to reinforce the role of the woman in the home—at least the married woman. (It is certainly of note, however, that La Silvia, not Mrs. Sherwood, was chosen as the heroine of the play.)

In a sense, La Silvia's desertion of husband and son is seen as almost worse than if she had left them for another man:

La Silvia: There are women who have left husband, children, home, deluded by false passion for another; but Heaven knows, with me it was not so. I had but one passion—that of my art. I saw in my husband only an obstacle to my career. I dreamed only of glory—freedom—I scarce know what! But you see that I was mad, for I deserted my own child. (p. 26)

Her son must be embarrassed to look at her; she must feel shame to look at him. When the terrible consequences of her actions begin to be only too apparent to La Silvia and she hears that her son is about to fight a duel on her account, she is crushed and cannot believe her son would think she could be another man's mistress. Her husband, Lionel Warner, judgmentally responds,
Where would be the recompense of mothers, who devote their lives to the welfare of their children, if those, who desert them, could expect to reap the same harvest of honour, love, esteem? (p. 36)

La Silvia must suffer and repent. She must vow to disappear and quit the stage, the world in general, in order to make it possible that her son may still marry the girl of his dreams. This sacrifice she vows she will make in order that she may prove herself to be a mother. She will not kill herself, she says, for "where then would be the sacrifice--where the expiation?" Instead, she simply will be as dead to all. Having made this promise, La Silvia prepares to leave to fulfill it. As she goes, she tells her son that she hopes he may one day think she has expiated her crime sufficiently, and may come to call her "mother." The poor boy, of course, cannot bear such humility in her, and as she hovers near the door, he calls "Mother" to her and holds out his arms. Interestingly, La Silvia takes this acknowledgement of her by her son as indication that heaven has forgiven her: "Heaven then has pardoned me, since you take pity on me." (p. 40) And her husband seems to agree, for he responds to her weeping departure by saying, "Poor woman! Bitter, indeed, has been the expiation." Apparently, La Silvia's life alone is no longer to be a teaching device, a punishment for the purpose of rehabilitation, but rather a punishment of retribution. Heaven and her son already have forgiven her; it remains for her husband only to do so, and,
as the son joins his parents' hands and looks imploringly at them, Warner, at last, takes La Silvia in his arms and calls her "wife." The son's future father-in-law, too, recognizes La Silvia's sufficient expiation, and places his daughter in young Warner's arms. All ends happily with La Silvia leaning on Warner and saying,

Life's fatal error is atoned at last. My future bless'd by pardon for the past. 'Tis mine again, the treasure flung aside, Domestic love, true woman's dearest pride. (p. 41)

There is no question that this is distinctly unliberated material. The home and motherhood could not be more reinforced than they are in Broken Ties. So, in that sense, it simply restates the status quo position of the period. Contrary to the general rule, however, La Silvia's expiation is an easy one--no matter how much the characters may declare it to be bitter. The fact is that if La Silvia plans not to die because she wishes to make her sacrifice and thus gain expiation, then she is getting an excellent deal because her expiation is completed almost immediately. Her implication that to live on would be a greater punishment than to die certainly will not hold true if she is forgiven immediately and reinstated to the position of a "true woman." Granted, the implication is that she will give up her career, but now that she has become a "true woman," that will no longer be a punishment for her--just as it is not to her friend, Mrs. Sherwood. Although young Warner has lived for nearly
nineteen years with the consciousness of being motherless, although his father has known the grief of being deserted, La Silvia, until the period which the play covers, has not regretted her choice during all these long years—with one exception five years after her flight when she sued to be reinstated as wife and mother. Her punishment, therefore, all artificial contrivances to the contrary, has been minimal, and she may expect in the future to "reap the same harvest of honour, love, esteem" as if she had been the dutiful wife and mother all along.

The fact that Broken Ties was obviously a popular play which had been produced not only in London, but in other parts of the United Kingdom as well, says a great deal about what diverse audiences apparently were willing to accept. And the fact that critics should complain of Simpson's watering down his version to avoid possible censure says even more about what earlier versions perhaps found acceptable.

**False Daughters**

The Beggar's Petition; or, A Father's Love and a Mother's Care (October 18, 1841, City Theatre)¹⁹

The next play of note in this chapter deals with the wife and mother once again—but this time in relationship

¹⁹It must be the City of London Theatre since the City Theatre was no longer in existence by 1841 according to
to her own parents, for it is here, primarily, that she is an immoral woman. We recognize in this play several of the dilemma-type situations common to the chapter on women in dilemmas, but the primary thrust seems to be that our heroine/pseudo-villainess is so easily forgiven for her many years of trespasses.

_The Beggar's Petition_, by George Dibdin Pitt, tells the story of Jane, a mistress, then at last a wife, who cruelly betrays her parents for her own sake and that of her child. We see Jane first at the age of sixteen, then at age twenty-six, and at last at age thirty-six, and we watch her increasing cruelty to her parents until, ashamed to own their claim to her, she finally denies any relationship at all. The play appears to be making some rather strong statements about the new poor law and about ungrateful children who think their parents can manage without their help. Jane becomes a tool for making such statements.

When we first meet the sixteen year old child-woman, Jane, she is infatuated by the neighbor boy. The problem is that the neighbor boy's father is a rich count who hates her farmer father. In the midst of impending financial disaster for Jane's family caused largely by the count, Jane elopes with young Edgar. When Edgar promises to love Jane dearly and exclusively, but not to marry her, the thoroughly

_The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre_, p. 98.
humiliated father attempts to kill himself. He is stopped only by the hand of his wife to whom he reveals their plight and, in so doing, makes an interesting confession. In the Victorian age in which a woman is supposed to have nothing to do with business, he confesses to his wife, "had I trusted thee, some part of this had ne'er befallen. Deceived by seeming friends, I entered into two speculations, both of which have failed." Then he tells her also about Jane who, he says, is "by a villain ruined, yet [who] even now clings to her seducer, and riots in her shame."  

Shortly afterwards, Jane appears and makes her first wrong decision. When her parents say that they will forgive her only if she will return to them and leave the man who will not marry her, she determines that, given such an alternative, she must stay with Edgar. Clearly, we have a decision made here which is an unacceptable one in ideal Victorian eyes. Jane is not even deciding for a husband when she decides against her parents, and, therefore, the wrongness of her choice is clearcut. So long as she is a single woman, her obligation is to her father's command.

Ten years pass before we see Jane again. She is now a mistress. Interestingly, although Jane talks about her

20 George Dibdin Pitt, The Beggar's Petition; or, A Father's Love and a Mother's Care (London: John Dicks Press, LTD, n.d.), p. 6. Further references are noted in the text.
state as being dishonorable in the eyes of any wife, her servant, Polly, points out that a mistress often is treated better by her master than is a wife. Polly, herself, will be neither wife nor mistress, for "pride says one thing and profit says another." (p. 7) During the elapsed ten years, Jane has not seen her parents at all. Now, hearing that they are booksellers, she goes to their stall to offer financial help. Because she has forgotten her purse, she slips a valuable diamond ring into her mother's hand as she leaves. This ring becomes the pivot for a second dilemma for Jane; when Sir Edgar discovers that Jane has given it to her mother, he charges the old woman in the courts with robbery and requires Jane to testify against her own mother. In order to weight his side, Edgar tells Jane that he will marry her and make their son his heir if she will testify against her mother; if not, then he will throw them both out into the streets. In court, Jane is torn between Edgar and her parents again. Just as we think she is about to testify against her mother, the mother confesses in order to save her daughter from perjury, and is sentenced to six months in the house of correction. Jane accepts this sacrifice from her mother gratefully, and when her distraught father attacks Edgar, Jane's great concern is for her lover.

Though Jane does not actually accuse her mother, we cannot but see her guilty for allowing the poor woman to confess to a crime she did not commit and go to prison.
Jane could have denied the confession, but she does not have the moral courage to do even that much for her own mother. Instead, she thanks her mother and seems grateful for her confession largely because had she herself accused her mother, the punishment would have been far greater. Indeed, she more or less assumes that she would, indeed, have accused her mother had the old woman not confessed:

Jane: (To her mother.) Oh, bless you, bless you! You have saved me from horrors infinite. I had beheld in the future transportation—death! But, oh, my mother, I would have died with thee! (p. 11)

That last comment, of course, must be given little credence, considering Jane's behavior to her parents.

Ten more years pass, and life has become a total misery for the elder Brightwells. In order that they may stay together, they have refused the poorhouse (Here the new poor law comes in for some criticism.), and thus have been driven to beggary. Jane, now a wife at their great expense, is ashamed of their penury and furious that her father dared to attack Edgar in the courts ten years before. Furthermore, she is impatient with their inability to help themselves other than by begging. Although she has money enough to pay a £100 gambling debt, she cannot find it in her heart to give her starving parents enough money even to survive. "Away, beggars," she angrily tells them. "I know ye not." (p. 14)
Of course, such behavior cannot fail to have its effect. The mother soon lies dying and the daughter is gravely ill. Through a scheme designed to prick their hardened hearts, Brightwell appears before Edgar to announce Mrs. Brightwell's death. Edgar is unmoved, but Jane deliriously repents as she hears footsteps supposedly bringing her mother's coffin past their door. When the mother, pale and wan, walks into the room, they see her as a spirit, and even Edgar repents. Both are forgiven. As the play concludes, Jane turns to the audience and asks their blessing too, and her mother asks their indulgence for Jane with the words, "I plead for her, since naught did she in sin, but all in error, and none are perfect." (p. 16) If there is one among them who is perfect, she says, he may condemn, but none else. Jane is forgiven all.

It is unfortunate that no information is available as to audience response to The Beggar's Petition. Contemporary major newspapers contain no reference to it. (The patent theatre monopoly, of course, would not be over for two more years, so that is not really surprising.) As a matter of fact, major books on theatres of the period do not even mention the City of London Theatre at all. However, if we couple what The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre says about the theatre with the time period to which we refer and the somewhat unusual positions presented on several issues, we can get at least a glimpse of what the audience might
have been: It seems fair to assume that the City of London Theatre appealed to a working class audience; the fact that the Poor Law was so energetically attacked indicates that the audience members were more than likely a part of the new mass audience for the theatre—that, as a matter of fact, they may have included some of the radical Chartists to whom Michael Booth refers. (See p. 50.) Jane's father's confession that he should have listened to his wife in business matters is an even more unusual position for the Victorian period. This confession certainly is not a major part of the play, but it is, nonetheless, curious. Indeed, once again, it would seem likely that a working class audience, in which both marital partners had to share the work load equally, would empathize with such a statement much more than would an audience comprised of the upper class and/or middle class pretenders to the upper class. Still more to the point of working class sentiment, perhaps, is the opinion of the servant girl, Polly, that being a mistress is in some ways better than being a wife. Reading The Beggar's Petition, we most clearly visualize the type of crowd Henry Mayhew writes of in London Labour and the London Poor. For them, the lot of Jane and her parents would not have been at all shocking or unusual. I have few doubts but what, given a good production, the play was well accepted.
Another kind of daughter/parent situation is found in W.T. Moncrieff's *The Lear of Private Life*. The play presents a young woman in a situation not unlike that in which Adeline finds herself in *Adeline, the Victim of Seduction* (See p. 74.), but unlike the ideal Adeline, Agnes does not return to her wronged father immediately upon learning that her supposedly honorable husband wants her only as his mistress. Unlike Adeline, Agnes does not suffer death, but instead is rewarded by her lover's marrying her and her father's taking her back into his fold. For a similar, even greater, sin, Agnes suffers less severely than does Adeline whose only sin was a single act of disobedience.

Like her more ideal counterpart, Agnes has been a shining light in her father's life. The first real disagreement between parent and child has come about because the father, Fitzarden, does not trust the young man whom Agnes wishes to marry. Also like Adeline, Agnes has made many promises to her father with regards to her young man; only moments before she meets Alvanley in a midnight assignation which becomes an elopement, she promises her father faithfully (1) never to marry without his sanction and (2) never to violate her duty or endanger her honor. Having a strong heart and a weak head (like all ideal women), Agnes decides that she must meet Alvanley in order to prove to herself how strong
her resolution is, how trustworthy her word. Of course, having superior wisdom, Alvanley is able to convince Agnes that her father is being completely unreasonable and that, this being the last time that they may meet, they must elope at once. Even as she gives in, Agnes blames her woman's weakness for the sin:

Alvanley, thou hast triumphed. I yield me thine for ever. Great Heaven! that gave me all a woman's weakness, if I have erred, oh! judge me as a woman; nor blame me for the absence of that strength, which thou hast not bestowed upon me.  

Fortunately for her, only part of Agnes's request was granted. She was not long "judged as a woman" as she had prayed or she probably would have died like Adeline. But she also was not blamed in the end for the "absence of that strength" which had not been given to her, and thus she survived to live a good and happy life.

Agnes's head, indeed, must have been weak, for she already had had a child by Alvanley before she fully realized her plight, and even then it was not until she had overheard that Alvanley planned to marry another woman for her money and that her own father had gone mad as a result of her elopement, that she became at last convinced enough of Alvanley's wickedness to leave him. Adeline, we recall,  

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needed only the morning's light and the news that the marriage ceremony was a fraud to determine her to leave her seducer. Agnes, without benefit of even a fraudulent ceremony, lived with her seducer as wife with husband for a year or more.

Of course, Agnes's lot is not easy. When she flees with her child in the middle of the night, she gets lost in a snow storm and meets with an escaped lunatic who turns out to be her own father. She rushes into a house to beg help for her, she fears, dying child, only to discover that she is in the midst of a wedding for an old dear friend, and must, then, bear the shame in front of all. She undergoes the agony of discovering that her father no longer recognizes her. But the fact is that, all things considered, she is treated rather well by her old friends. Indeed, the only person who gives direct rebuke to Agnes is the father of her old childhood friend, Emily. Even he, however, soon relents and helps Agnes to cure her father of his madness. He moves from first denying Agnes access to his house on the grounds that she is an abandoned woman with an unnatural child whose vice he does not intend to encourage, to, only a page later, telling her that "there is no state, however wretched, which does not admit of hope." 22

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22 Ibid., p. 44.
While all of this is happening, Alvanley has discovered Agnes's flight and has repented his evil ways. Finding what he considers to be sure proof of her death, he is about to kill himself when he is happened upon by Emily and her husband. They assure him of the safety of Agnes and their child and help reconcile the two lovers, soon to be husband and wife, to each other. In the final scene, Fitzarden at last comes to his senses, and accepts Agnes back into his arms. Agnes, however fallen she may have been, is now accepted back into society. Her restitution has been slight in contrast to the ideal restitution of the fallen woman; her rewards are great—husband, father, child, friends. We almost could say that she has fared better by her error than she might have without it. She has, after all, managed to marry the man she really loves and, at the same time, to get her father back to dote on her.

In 1829, when *The Lear of Private Life* was done at the Cobourg, the audiences there were definitely local ones with working class backgrounds. This, perhaps, accounts for the apparent ability to handle a situation in which the heroine actually lives as a mistress for so long a time (as in *The Beggar's Petition*); apparently, there was no need to use a ruse like bigamy in order to attain the excitement of moral license. This audience was quite used to women living as mistresses. There was no necessity to be so delicate with them.
Infanticide; or, The Bohemian Mother (n.d., 23 Royal Cobourg Theatre)

A woman with a problem similar to Agnes's appears in the popular play, Infanticide. Louise, however, is a more innocent transgressor of her father's wishes. Here is the classic story of a young woman whose husband-to-be/lover has disappeared at just the wrong time, not to return until their out-of-wedlock child already has been born. As we first see Louise, six months after her shameful flight from home, she has decided to leave her child on the doorstep of a monastery and go to her father to implore forgiveness. A few days later, a dead infant is found, and since Louise's child has, meantime, disappeared, she is charged with infanticide and must stand before her own father, the Count, as accused before judge. Because the evidence is overwhelmingly against her, Louise remorsefully is condemned to death by her father, but just as the sentence is about to be -------

23 The play was first performed at the Royal Coburg Theatre, placing that production between 1818 and 1833 (probably the late 1820's or early 1830's, judging by the actors in the original cast). The Duncombe Edition of the script used in this paper came from that original production, but evidence leads us to suppose that the script also was used at a later date since a handwritten note at the beginning of the script located in the Cleveland Public Library indicates that an A. Williams was in a production of the play at London's Garrick Theatre in 1861. J.M. Maddox, Infanticide; or, The Bohemian Mother (London: J. Duncombe, n.d.), p. 28.
fulfilled, Leopold, who has returned in the middle of Louise's trial, rushes in with evidence to save her. The child is brought on, and the Count/father takes Leopold and Louise (whom he already has forgiven for the larger crime of which she is innocent) back into his love with the words, "My children--come to my arms!"

In the moment of gratitude over Louise's innocence of murder, the father forgets that Louise and Leopold are not yet married--though they are the parents of a son. Indeed, even when Louise stood a condemned murderess, her father had forgiven her in spite of the fact that he could not alter her sentence. Louise will be married, and that is all that is needed, apparently. It does not matter that the child was born out of wedlock. Louise has suffered all she will suffer for this crime against society: Her last words are, "My father!--Leopold?--now I am really happy!"²⁴ However wrong she may have been to have become pregnant without the benefit of marriage, Louise will not now suffer death or confinement, but will live happily ever after, an ideal daughter, wife, mother. An abandoned, shameful woman has been accepted into the sacred ranks of motherhood.

Both the Royal Coburg and the Garrick Theatre, at which Infanticide played in 1861, catered to local audiences and specialized in sensational melodramas. The Garrick was an

²⁴Ibid., p. 28.
especially low sort of theatre, very similar to the gaff the Royal Coburg (as the Old Vic) later became. There would have been no problem at either theatre with exploring the subject of infanticide, and no problem with the appearance of an unmarried, but sexually active, heroine. Louise's dilemma, as the daughter of a wealthy count, simply would have been accepted as the way life was among the upper classes.

Unmarried Women

Masks and Faces (November 20, 1852, Haymarket Theatre)

The last three major plays we will consider deal with unmarried women—two of whom are to become brides as the plays end. All three of these plays were extremely popular in their day and were repeated many times. Indeed, the first of these, Masks and Faces, is among those few Victorian plays remembered today. The play, by Tom Taylor and Charles Reade, was first produced in 1852 with Mrs. Stirling in the lead role of Peg Woffington. As late as 1881, the Bancrofts mounted a revival of Masks and Faces at the Haymarket, and were met with even greater success than they had experienced in their 1875 production. Squire Bancroft,

in fact, says that it drew crowded audiences for more than a hundred nights.\footnote{Disher, p. 2.}

M. Willson Disher has evidenced some surprise that, in the same year (1852) that \textit{La Dame Aux Camelias} was so vehemently rejected for production in England because of a prostitute heroine, \textit{Masks and Faces} with its "harlot heroine" was welcomed at the Haymarket.\footnote{Disher, p. 2.} Perhaps, however, what we see operating here is the old idea we have mentioned before that so long as the woman (or playwright for the woman) simply took the rights and privileges of her betters, no one objected. It was when she attempted to explain why she was doing it that she got into trouble with the British public.\footnote{Disher, p. 2.} Also, we have functioning here the fact that \textit{La Dame Aux Camelias} was completely French (and thus horrifying) and that the public had only heard about it, but had not seen it. Additionally, although many parts of \textit{Masks and Faces} clearly were to be taken quite seriously, much of the script was also comical in nature. (Comedy, of course, was granted

\footnote{Squire and Marie Wilton Bancroft, \textit{The Bancrofts Recollections of Sixty Years} (London: John Murray, 1909), p. 158.}

\footnote{A number of writers about the Victorian period suggest that such a reason functioned in causing trouble for the highly ideological suffragettes while, at the same time allowing the carefree "new girl" to pioneer areas she did not even realize she was pioneering. See especially Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, \textit{The Victorian Cycle} (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1935), p. 226.}
more freedom.) And, finally, it seems clear that the fact that *Masks and Faces* championed a favorite English actress of the prior century gave the play a bit more acceptability too. The reviewer for *The Examiner* lends credence to this interpretation when he writes of Taylor and Reade that

They follow the example of the enthusiastic bishop who, on hearing an actress of doubtful reputation sing divinely at an Oratorio, suddenly and loudly cried out, "Woman, thy sins be forgiven thee!" They do not suppress the sins of Mrs. Woffington, in the act of exhibiting what virtues as well as sorrows neighboured them; and, while they represent her with a touching sense of her own degradation, they have yet the courage to show her accepted for her virtues by the innocent and pure, and not disqualified by her vices to put conventional morality to shame.  

This review of the original production comes the closest of any to discussing the heroine's life and reputation. The others (*The Spectator*, *The Athenaeum*, and *The Illustrated London News*) all seem to accept her merely as a matter of course. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that a heroine like Peg Woffington is a bit of a surprise if one is thinking in terms of a pristine, fainting heroine, for she was decidedly not that. And, indeed, *Masks and Faces* is only the most popular drama written about Woffington. Like Nell Gwyne, about whom plays had been written for years, Woffington was a favorite in the drama long after her own lifetime.  

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29 *The Examiner*, No. 2339, November 27, 1852, p. 758.
It is particularly significant, too, that *Masks and Faces* was presented first at the Haymarket, not at one of the less prestigious, more low brow theatres, for at the Haymarket, larger numbers of the middle class may be assumed to have added to the crowds that nightly swelled the audiences to admire the "harlot heroine."

*Masks and Faces* has four females in it of any consequence, and of these, Peg Woffington is clearly the favorite. Even when Woffington is pitted against the pure, innocent wife of Ernest Vane (whom Woffington loves), she comes out on the shiny side. Mabel Vane may be as naive and innocent as Peg Woffington is not, but Mabel is also boring and not particularly bright, two characteristics of which Woffington is hardly guilty. When we first see Mabel and Woffington together, the contrast is clearly in the latter's favor. Indeed, for a while the reader almost could feel as if he or she were in the middle of a Restoration play, as Woffington, who had no idea that Vane was married, pretends, upon meeting the surprise wife unexpectedly at a party, that she is the Lady Betty Modish and that her fellow theatre friends are likewise gentlefolk. (One she names Sir John Brute, another Lord Foppington.) In the guise of the Lady Betty Modish, Woffington easily moves into her bright patter. For example, Mabel, who has been away in the country for sometime, is eager to tell Vane all the news, and Woffington encourages her with,
Pray, madam, your budget of country news: clotted cream so seldom comes to London quite fresh.

Poor Mabel does not know to take offence, and proceeds, "There you see, Ernest. First, then, Grey Gillian is turned out for a brood mare, so old George won't let me ride her." Woffington interposes, "The barbarian!" Thus encouraged, the naive Mabel continues,

Old servants are such hard masters, my lady; and my Barbary hen has laid two eggs, Ernest. Heaven knows the trouble we have had to bring her to it. And dame Best (that's his old nurse, Lady Lurewell) has had soup and pudding from the hall every day.

Mabel is the original country bumpkin. Vane is embarrassed by her rural manners and angrily hisses at her, "My dear Mabel, pray remember we are not at Willoughby."32 Another indication which we have of Mabel's completely subsidiary nature (if the script were not evidence enough) is the fact that in the Athenaeum review of the 1875 Bancroft production, mention is made of Ellen Terry's innovative work in the role, which "assigns the part an importance it has not previously received." According to the reviewer, the usual portrayal of Mabel Vane "scarcely extends beyond wearing tastefully


31 Ibid., pp. 142-143.

32 Ibid., p. 143.
the artistic dresses provided."\(^{33}\)

The basic story of *Masks and Faces* is that Peg Woffington, who thinks she finally has found an honorable man who really loves her for herself, is disillusioned to discover that that man already has a perfectly good wife of twelve months. Woffington's first impulse is to punish everyone—the wife included—for her disappointment but, at last, her better nature wins, and she exhibits her heart of gold. The story of Triplet, an unsuccessful painter, writer, and actor, and his family, is thrown in in order to better show Woffington's generous tendencies.

Before we talk about the virtues which make Woffington a worthy heroine, however, let us discuss the way in which we know her to be sullied in character as well as in reputation. To begin with, the public was aware even before the play started, that the real Peg Woffington had been David Garrick's mistress, that her life was hardly spotless. The play, itself, adds further to that understanding of her character. As the already quoted reviewer in *The Examiner* wrote, the authors "do not suppress the sins of Mrs. Woffington." Very early on, when Vane talks of his adoration of Woffington to Sir Charles Pomander, that unworthy gentleman maliciously says, "I will tell you how to add a novel charm to her. Make her blush—ask her for a list of your

\(^{33}\) *The Athenaeum*, No. 2507, November 13, 1875, p. 649.
predessors." A similarly slight but telling comment comes from Kitty Clive, Woffington's rival. When Woffington introduces herself as Lady Betty Modish, "at your service," Clive says in an aside to fellow actor Quin, "and anybody else's." (p. 142) From Peg's own lips we have the best information, however. When Woffington has just assured Mabel that she did not know about her, and Mabel, believing her, has said, "I feel you are as good as you are gifted," Woffington counters with, "Mrs. Vane, I am not—you deceive yourself." (p. 163) In that same conversation, Woffington admits to Mabel, "Mr. Vane thinks better of me than I deserve," and then talks about how "the proud ones of the world pass [her] by with averted looks." (p. 164) Planning to make Vane think her now worse than she deserves in order to send him back to his wife, Peg speculates, "to bring back the husband to his duty—what a strange office for a woman like me!"

Woffington's first response upon learning of Vane's deception, as we already have noted, is for revenge. She says, sounding as hard as her reputation would have her,

I will feed his passion to the full—tempt him—torture him—play with him as the angler plays the fish upon his hook! He shall rue the hour he trifled with a heart and brain like mine!

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34 Taylor and Reade, p. 126. Further references are noted in the text.
As for Vane's wife,

His wife! and are wives' hearts the only hearts that throb, and feel, and break? His wife must take care of herself, it is not from me that mercy can come to her. (p. 161)

Even at the play's end, we are sure that Peg Woffington will keep the diamond ring which she accepted from Sir Charles Pomander under the guise of being Mabel Vane (whom he was trying to seduce), and which Woffington pretended to be her winnings in a wager with Pomander. "I accept your ring," she tells Sir Charles, "but I shall always hate you." (p. 170)

Peg Woffington is clearly not a model for the ideal Victorian woman. Her reputation for being "all brains and no heart" as the above would seem to confirm, is the direct antithesis of the ideal. Yet, while these things about Woffington are true, there are some ameliorating facts about her, and in truth, though Woffington indeed does have an excellent head, she also has a good heart. We know, for example, that Woffington does not market her charms to the highest bidder, for she refuses Pomander's offer of "three hundred a year--horses--coach--pin-money--my heart--and the et ceteras." (p. 127) Her affections go only to him who can win her heart. Furthermore, she exhibits a genuine sense of charity toward the starving Triplet family--brought on, interestingly enough, by her remembrance of Triplet's kindness to her when she was a poor, unbefriended orange
girl. (The story has much of the sentiment of the tale of the lion and the mouse—with Woffington as the lion.) Now it is Woffington's chance to help Triplet. She sneaks money into his pockets, offers to pose for him to complete a painting he already has started of her, recommends his plays to her manager, brings food for his hungry children, and mends his jacket. (The children maintain she sews even faster than their mother.) At last, Woffington even determines to side with the injured wife, Mabel, and help return her husband to her—though her own heart is breaking. Woffington plans a careful strategy whereby Vane is convinced that she never loved him at all, but simply was trying to win a wager with Pomander (for the diamond ring mentioned earlier) that she "could bewitch a certain country gentleman's imagination, though his heart all the while belonged to its rightful owner." (p. 169)

Woffington's generous actions inspire the pure unblemished Mabel to call her "sister," and Woffington is so overwhelmed by that kindness that she tells Mabel that that one word alone repays her for her sacrifice. "You do not know what it is to me, whom the proud ones of the world pass by with averted looks," she says, "to hear that sacred name from lips as pure as yours." (p. 164) There is no doubt that in Masks and Faces we have a woman who, though not of the ideal nature, is respected by even the conventionally pure for her "heart of gold." Peg Woffington is definitely
the heroine of the play. However pure the innocent Mabel, Peg's brand of goodness clearly is favored.

Before we move on, we must take a little time to discuss the changes that were made in both the portrayal of Peg Woffington and in the script for the Bancroft production of 1875 as they relate to that heroine. One major change is mentioned in the *Athenaeum* review of the production:

> With Mrs. Stirling the triumph of goodness, which raised the actress to the capacity of complete self-abnegation, seemed due to a rich and ripe nature, and to an overflow of animal spirits. With the later exponent [Marie Wilton Bancroft], it springs from a succession of impulses. To accomplish the sacrifice costs more in the later interpretation than in the earlier. With Mrs. Bancroft, impulses, bad and good follow each other in wave-like succession. More than once she seems on the point of flinging up in disgust a role of good angel, which she is surprised to find thus thrust upon her.

A real clue to Mrs. Bancroft's handling of the character can be seen in a letter she wrote a friend justifying her unusual interpretation of the role. Peg, she says, is a hodge-podge of many impulses at once:

> She is sensitive, lovable, trusting and charitable, headstrong and impulsive, ready to act upon a vengeanceful impulse, however she might regret it afterwards; she pines for honest friendship and finds it not, and in the last act one can see how her nature is warped and nearly spoiled.

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35 *The Athenaeum*, No. 2507, November 13, 1875, p. 649.

36 Bancroft, p. 152.
Much of the contrast between the Stirling and Bancroft interpretations, of course, can be attributed to the different styles of the two actresses, but some of that contrast also must have reflected the greater ability of an 1875 audience to deal with a heroine who combines many good and evil tendencies. Under the care of the cup and saucer realist, Mrs. Bancroft, the character of Woffington was allowed to take on more realistic dimensions as the final quarter of the nineteenth century began. Adding still further to that sense of realism, and accompanying more serious handling of a delicate subject, were the textual changes for the end of the play which the Bancrofts succeeded in negotiating with Charles Reade. The laughter of Peg and the rhymed comic tag of the original play were omitted because Mrs. Bancroft just could not accept Peg’s recovering so quickly from all she had suffered. Instead, she bade a solemn farewell to Mabel and Vane, and turned to her true friend, Triplet, for comfort, crying brokenheartedly upon his breast. As Mrs. Bancroft described the scene,

The curtain should fall upon these two figures, leaving Peg in the hearts of her audience, who have followed her in her sorrows, and must, therefore, pity her. While deeply sympathising with the wife, they must love Peg for her noble conduct, and weep with her in her suffering.\\n
37Ibid., p. 153.
That last sentence is, of course, particularly significant in that it shows us graphically that by 1875 even fewer of the distancing comic devices were needed to allow Woffington to be a true heroine, however blighted her life might have been. As the play concluded, Woffington no longer had to share even the stage with the pure Mabel. To the innocent ideal Mabel, the audience was to give sympathy, but for that fallen creature, Peg Woffington, they might give their love.

Victorine; or, "I'll Sleep on It" (n.d., 38 Adelphi Theatre)

At the front of the edition of the play we will be referring to "as performed at the Theatre Royal, Adelphi" and listing the original cast, is information indicating that, while the play was taken from the French, it had been altered a good deal by English author, John Baldwin Buckstone, to "render it acceptable to an English audience." 39 There is no additional information given, but it seems quite possible

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38 The play was presented first at the Adelphi sometime between 1825 and 1842. (The dates are set by the takeover in 1825 of the Adelphi by Frederick Yates who acted in the play, and his death in 1842.) Henry Crabb Robinson referred to Victorine as "an interesting piece" when he saw it at the Adelphi on February 25, 1832. Given his theatrical experience, it seems likely that that may have been the first production. Henry Crabb Robinson, London's Theatre 1811-1866, ed. Eluned Brown (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966), p. 131.

39 John Baldwin Buckstone, Victorine; or, "I'll Sleep on It" (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, n.d.), p. iii.
that one major difference may be that the immoral behavior of Victorine which, in the altered script is merely a dream, in the original may have been an actual occurrence.

_Briefly, the story of Victorine is that a young embroiderer is tempted to accept favors from a handsome rich man. Two of her friends, who do not think her match with Michael, a journeyman upholsterer, is good enough for her, encourage her to accept the offer of voice lessons and an apartment from her young admirer. While she wavers, Michael arrives to insist that she marry him the next day or never. Victorine goes to sleep, angry with Michael's aggressive manner. When we see her next, a number of years have elapsed. We soon gather that she had rejected Michael and has already moved from the first handsome rich man to a duke, with whom she is living in grand style. We see her tempting men, spending money lavishly. She is never quite so low in character as is her friend, Elise, but she goes along with the things Elise does. For example, while the two young women are busy enchanting a married man whose wife is out of town, Elise compliments the man on his legs, says he has a very handsome calf, and suggests that Victorine just look at those legs! Legs, as we have mentioned already, were not an appropriate subject of discussion for the proper Victorian lady. A woman who would stand for their mentioning without at least fainting, was simply not a lady._
As the second act ends, Victorine discovers that the jealous duke, unhappy with her lack of attention, has thrown her out. Stunned, she cries, "Ruined! ruined!" (which is an interesting use of the word for a woman. "Ruined" as used in the sense of financial loss is reserved almost exclusively for the male; in the female sense of the term, Victorine has been "ruined! ruined!" for a long time.)

By Act III, Victorine has fallen very low. After running through a series of men, each one worse than the last, she is finally alone and desolate and old (fifty). She is living as a tenant in the gambling house which her last lover left to her, but which she has been forced to sell in order to live. Through a series of encounters with tempters from her former life, Victorine becomes a suspect in a case of robbery, and, in order to escape a miserable life and possible imprisonment, she drowns herself. Suddenly, we discover that the entire immoral interlude has been only a dream. Victorine is still young and beautiful and innocent. Gladly she gives herself to Michael. She will marry him that very day.

There is a sense in which the last scene of the play genuinely nullifies the significance of all that has preceded it, and yet there is another sense in which it does not: The audience has managed to have its cake and eat it too. They may very well echo with Victorine her comment of wonderful fascination as she looks at her still young face.
in the mirror, "No, nothing is changed—nothing whatever; but what a shocking little creature I have been all the night." Indeed, we may well suspect that the conclusion of the piece which reveals all to have been a dream, may have been used merely as a device to distance the unacceptable behavior from the viewer—much like the device (Seen later in Chapter VI.) of using a Lady Macbeth-like character or an historical figure like Catherine Howard. And we might well suppose that much of the audience mentally clicked off the last two pages of the anticlimax, anyway. For the bulk of the play (thirty-six out of forty-seven pages), Victorine has been able to live the promiscuous life of a harlot, going from one man to another and from bad to worse until finally she seems to have died for her sins against society as she so justly deserves. But then she is retrieved by a simple device and allowed to live an ideal life with the man she really has loved all along. Indeed, the Illustrated London News review suggests that the dream sequence revealed "the course of an entire future." If we may suppose this to be the usual interpretation, then we are on rather solid ground in supposing the revelation of the entire sequence as a dream to be an easy way out for Victorine. Apparently, without it, her character would have been weak enough to

40 Ibid., p. 52.
41 The Illustrated London News, XXVII, September 8, 1855, p. 299.
have allowed her to succumb to temptation.

The audiences for Victorine were friendly—both for its original production and for its revival in 1855. The London Times reviewer for the Adelphi revival (The Strand also revived it around that same time.) indicated that Victorine had indeed been most popular when it first came out. Said he, "it [was] not only a favourite drama, but a regular topic of the day, to which an allusion might be made in any quarter with the perfect certainty that it would be understood." As for the revival, the reviewer indicated that the play seemed to have retained a certain freshness which still excited interest. "Though it [did] not eclipse the reminiscences of the past, [it] was most satisfactorily done." Reviewers from both The Illustrated London News and The Athenaeum concur in their judgment as to the play's worth, and suggest that it would enjoy a successful rerun.

In thinking of Victorine, it is significant not only to remember that the play was first performed at the popular Adelphi and that it subsequently was performed for a number of years thereafter, but also that audiences actually saw Victorine during her years as a prostitute. Unlike most ladies who have committed a moral sin, Victorine is seen not merely after the fact, but rather during it. The dream device, not unlike the use of bigamy (See p. 47.), allows

42 The Times (London), August 31, 1855, p. 6.
the playwright to present a fallen woman in her sin, and, therefore, provides greater excitement for the spectator. The fact that the play was revived in mid-century at the Adelphi and at the Strand, clearly indicates its wide popularity.

The New Magdalen (May, 1873, Olympic Theatre)

The last play which we will consider is The New Magdalen (also a novel), by Wilkie Collins. The Times reviewer for the 1873 production indicates that Collins allegedly had written the play and the novel independent of each other, which, in his opinion, explained why the play stood so well on its own.\textsuperscript{43} The reviewer for The Illustrated London News, on the other hand, considered the argument posed in the play better adapted to the form of the novel, in which, he writes,

\begin{quote}
the subject of female frailty, and the possibility of effective repentance and reforma-
tion, may be discussed with advantage and the lesson of charity enforced by Scripture war-
rant. The citation of Gospel texts on the stage, is, on the contrary, repulsive.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

However problematic the play may have seemed to this reviewer, it had no such difficulties with the bulk of its audiences, and The New Magdalen enjoyed great popularity

\textsuperscript{43}The Times (London), May 21, 1873, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{44}The Illustrated London News, LXII, May 24, 1873, p. 495.
(It ran for 112 performances.)* even in revivals. The Examiner critic reports that on its first presentation to a "very crowded house," the author "was twice called before the curtain."* And the Athenaeum critic indicates that its revival at the Charing Cross Theatre in 1875 "was applauded to the echo by a crowded house."*

The New Magdalen is an important play in that its heroine is admittedly guilty of both sexual misbehavior and of criminal acts, and yet she is not only forgiven, but she becomes the fiancée of a well-known, young minister as the play concludes. The play is significant in another way, too: Although even in 1884 Ibsen’s A Doll's House "had to be" watered down into Breaking a Butterfly, and La Dame Aux Camelias had not until 1881 come to Britain in its original form, as early as 1873 The New Magdalen not only presented an erring woman as its obvious heroine (and a very erring woman she was too,—a former prostitute, not just a poor, seduced darling), but the playwright also included didactic passages discussing the problems of women like Mercy Merrick. The New Magdalen was a "new Magdalen" indeed.


*The Examiner, No. 3408, May 24, 1873, p. 550.

*The Athenaeum, No. 2464, January 16, 1875, p. 96.
The audience, nonetheless, according to the 1875 Athenaeum review, was not at all disturbed, since it was "caught, not by the facts of the story, but by the author's mode of presenting them."\(^{48}\) Apparently, by the eighteen seventies, even the doubtless fashionable audiences of the Olympic and the Charing Cross theatres were ready to accept a new heroine.

Like Peg Woffington in *Masks and Faces*, Mercy Merrick is pitted against another, more ideal woman, and like Woffington, Mercy wins. Mercy and her female competitor first meet near the battlefields of the Franco-German War where Mercy is serving as a nurse in an attempt to do penance to a society she has wronged, and Grace Roseberry is passing through on her way from Canada to England to meet a woman who is to be her benefactress. In this first meeting, Mercy is clearly the underdog. Although Grace is a poor, young woman with no prospect for success in life but the kindness of the old friend of her late father, she does have an unblemished character, and that Mercy Merrick envies her. "There are thousands of miserable women," says Mercy to Grace, "who would ask for no greater blessing than to change places with You." Grace presses Mercy to talk on, and Mercy at length confesses to her that she is one of

\(^{48}\)Ibid.
those women "whom Want [had] led into Sin."\textsuperscript{49} She has been in prison; she has been in a refuge. Even though Grace is pure and comports herself as any normal young lady might do under the circumstances—drawing away in horror when she hears Mercy's history, cringing with fear when the guns of the enemy get too close, she is seen as a poor second to the underdog, Mercy. Mercy manifests courage where Grace shows fear, and compassion on others where Grace thinks only of herself; when the news comes that the enemy is advancing, Grace pleads to be taken out with the portable sick soldiers, while Mercy insists that her own place be with the soldiers who must be left behind. In those last few minutes, Grace is hit in the head by a stray bullet and assumed dead.

Mercy, tempted beyond capacity, takes Grace's papers and clothing and goes to England in her place. After all that the audience has seen and heard at this point about poor Mercy's life, they most likely would cheer her on to claim the happiness which has eluded her as Mercy Merrick.

When we once again see Grace and Mercy together four months later (for Grace, miraculously, has been saved by a French surgeon), Mercy is no longer the underdog in any sense of the word. Not only has she earned the regard of Grace's benefactress, but also the love of a wealthy young

\textsuperscript{49} Wilkie Collins, \textit{The New Magdalen} (London: By the author, 1873), p. 9. Further references are noted in the text.
man who wishes to marry her. Additionally, she possesses a
great emotional advantage in that the audience is strongly
empathetic, by this time, with her desire to have at least
a chance in life. Just as Mercy has begun to relax, perhaps
for the first time in her life, Grace arrives to threaten it
all--thus, despite the technical right of her behavior, be­
coming a veritable villainess. Graces barges into Mercy's
first real happiness, demanding redress, and the audience
almost wishes she had died in France. Even when Mercy is
about to express the truth, in spite of the fact that doing
so will mean either the streets or the refuge for her again,
Grace is so unkind and so uncharitable that Mercy, at last,
is aroused to anger and refuses to acknowledge the truth.
Indeed, after that, she does not tell the truth until Grace
is being taken away to a mental asylum. When Mercy con­
fesses, Grace once again shows herself to be the lesser
woman. Looking at Lady Janet, the friend of her late
father, she says archly, "I am waiting to receive your Lady­
ship's apologies." But her ladyship only barely can manage
an apology. She will help Grace financially, but she will
never be able to give her the place in her heart which Mercy
has occupied. Grace is not at all bothered by this bit of
information: "I have no sympathy, madam," she returns
coldly, "with an attachment to an adventuress. If I recover
my place in Society, I recover all that I want." (p. 79)
In contrast to Grace, Mercy, despite all that she has done wrong, has a strong character. We see her past sins as having been forced upon her by an uncaring society, and her present crimes as a last, desperate attempt for the good life which her past sins have abrogated for her. Indeed, the case for Mercy Merrick is built very well. When Mercy tells her story to Grace out on the battlefield, she quietly says,

I sometimes ask myself if it were all my fault. I sometimes wonder if Society had no duty towards me when I was a child selling matches in the street--when I was a hardworking girl, fainting at my needle for want of food. (p. 9)

There seems to be nothing she can do which will placate society's demand for reparation, Mercy declares. Then she cites instance after instance in which, however good and faithful she had been in her work, once she was found out, she had lost her position and had had to return to the refuge.

With all the battering she has experienced, Mercy is shown to be still capable of true love. She tells Grace in the prologue to the play about Julian Gray, the young minister she had heard at the refuge and whom she had been afraid to get to know for fear she might set her heart on him. Grace expresses surprise, and Mercy counters,

I surprise you? Ah, my young lady, you don't know what rough usage a woman's heart can bear, and still beat truly! Before I saw Julian
Gray, I only knew men as objects of horror to me. (p. 11)

Even while Mercy is misrepresenting herself to Lady Janet and Horace (Mercy's fiance), well before she knows anything of Grace's recovery, Mercy's conscience is tender. Though she loves Horace, she is loathe to set a wedding date, and keeps finding excuses. She is torn between the unfairness of marrying him without acquainting him with her past, and the very real fear that if he learns the truth, he, too, will reject her. While she thinks painfully on the subject, she says to herself, "Am I worse than another woman? Another woman might have married him for his money." (p. 29) Yet, Mercy demurs at setting a date, and, at last, Horace tries to get his mother and sister to persuade Mercy to marry him soon. Mercy cannot be moved:

His mother and his sisters! It sickens me to hear of the virtues of women who have never been tempted! Has his mother known starvation? Have his sisters been left forsaken in the streets? He hardens my heart when he sets them up as patterns for me—he almost reconciles me to deceiving him. (p. 30)

Once again Collins is directly soliciting the audience's sympathy for Mercy. Once again he is making didactic comments on a social ill.

When Horace later finds that he cannot forgive Mercy, that he never will be able to marry her, he becomes less worthy in the eyes of the audience than is Mercy herself. In fact, his behavior makes him, ironically, not really
good enough for her. When Lady Janet learns the truth, she forgives Mercy and takes her in her arms; Horace cannot bring himself even to touch her hand.

Mercy Merrick's greatest show of real worth, however, comes when she at last tells the truth. While she is still pondering her decision, the Reverend Julian Gray, who has turned out, coincidentally, to be Lady Janet's nephew, advises Mercy that if such a woman confesses when she could more readily profit by being still, then she shows herself to be a noble woman:

Let her own the truth without the base fear of discovery to drive her to it. Let her sacrifice everything that she has gained by the fraud to the sacred duty of atonement. If she can do that—to her own prejudice, to her own shame, to her own loss—then her repentance has nobly revealed the noble nature that is in her; then she is a woman to be trusted, respected, beloved. (p. 58)

The use of the word "beloved" in this context is particularly significant. It was not so unusual for a fallen woman to regain some measure of trust and respect by deeds nobly done, but it was highly unusual for such a woman as Mercy Merrick to be able to expect ever to be loved. When Mercy fulfills these conditions, however, this is exactly what Julian Gray offers her—his love:

My darling, we will go away from England—we will find a home among new people in a new world. I am weary of the old world. I despise its narrow prejudices, its mean superstitions. I can be happy any where if you are with me. (p. 81)
Mercy, it seems will leave England—but not as an exile—not because she is not good enough for England—and not alone. She will leave England with her new husband because England is not good enough, not free enough, not open enough, to value her as it ought. In spite of all she has done wrong, Mercy is considered absolved of her sins because this one act of goodness on her part, coupled with years of humiliation and service, has made her pure. The critic of *The Examiner* states matters more baldly when he writes,

> Mr. Wilkie Collins has ingeniously managed to enlist the sympathies of the audience not with the victim of the fraud, but with the imposter; and the moral of "The New Magdalen" appears to be that a young woman may stray from virtue's path, and lie, and steal, and cheat, but that if she repents in the end, she is sure not only to be forgiven, but to be glorified as a saint and married to a clergyman of the Church of England.

The critic for *The Athenaeum* is even more bothered by the moral lesson of *The New Magdalen*, and insists on the old standard of behavior. He sounds very much like Hannah More, as a matter of fact:

> Mercy Merrick is a penitent woman, it is true; but a lifetime of sustained repentance is needed to make amends for the life she has led, and not one spasm of virtue, however fierce. The preference awarded her over the representative of virtue, Grace Roseberry, is dangerous from the point of true morality as apart from any mere conventional standard. It is all very well to preach that a penitent woman may be reclaimed, and may force all God fearing

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people to acknowledge the worth of her character,—it is a more serious thing to hold before the young the idea that absolute purity and highest grace are the result rather of a fall into the gutter and a subsequent ablation than a course of consistent rectitude. 51

The New Magdalen, whatever its faults may be in terms of probability of plotline and consistency of character (By this time critics were discussing these issues more, and The New Magdalen fell in for its share of criticism.), was a shining light during its time in the self-aware freedom it was able to exert on the stage. Not only was this heroine taking rights not ordinarily allowed for the fallen woman, but she also was justifying that taking in much the same way that novels had been doing for years. And, although a critic or two might complain, the audience as a whole was delighted.

In this chapter we have discussed quite a number of fallen women who, to a greater or lesser degree, deviate from the prescribed standard of either dying or being sent into exile (a convent or otherwise) in payment for their crimes. Some of these women still suffer greatly (as Madame de Merville in The Divorce); others (like La Silvia in Broken Ties), suffer hardly at all, and still others, though they may have to endure some suffering, are greatly rewarded in the end. Here we might cite Mercy Merrick.  

51 The Athenaeum, No. 2378, May 24, 1873, p. 674.
Even for the women who suffer most however, the penalties were considerably smaller than ordinarily might have been expected during an era in which a reviewer for Lost in London could write of the fallen heroine's death, "there is no flinching from the bitter end that is the true end to such stories." As we move into chapter six, we will confront women more truly evil who also do not pay so heavily as might be expected.

52 The Examiner, No. 3086, March 23, 1867, p. 184.
CHAPTER VI

WOMEN WHO ARE PATENTLY EVIL

The villainess is the divergent image most clearly distinguished from the standard image of Victorian wife and mother. There can be little question that her sins are overwhelmingly greater than the trivial mistakes which constitute the flaws of the usual "failed heroine." Granted, the truly evil women who appear during this time are relatively few, and even those generally distanced from ideal British women by their being historical characters, women of other lands, or models after famous Shakespearean villains. Nonetheless, their very appearance has significance—particularly when they are the protagonists of the plays. In all four of the major plays which we will consider in this chapter, evil women not only are featured, but even lend their names to the play titles. **Lady Audley's Secret** grows out of the contemporary popular novel by Miss Braddon. **Catherine Howard** is based on the wife of England's Henry VIII. **Jane Lomax; or, A Mother's Crime** has obvious origins (to be discussed later in this chapter) in the character of Lady Macbeth. And **Sarah the Creole or A Snake in**
the Grass (also Sarah Blangi) is, clearly, about a Creole woman.

Lady Audley's Secret (February 28, 1863, St. James's Theatre and May 25, 1863, Victoria Theatre)

Lady Audley is probably the most completely wicked of the four women we will consider. Like all genuine villains and villainesses, she begins to show regret for her acts only when the gains she had hoped for seem to be lost—a highly questionable form of "repentance." Lady Audley's secret is that she is a bigamist, and, contrary to most bigamists featured in Victorian plays, a knowing one. Despite the fact that she is already a wife, she has married the wealthy and elderly Sir Michael Audley in order to gain access to his money and position.

Lady Audley typifies the standard Victorian heroine in that she is both young and beautiful. She has come from the lower but genteelly respectable ranks of the governess—also a trait of many of the typical heroines who at last step from penury into plenty. The difference is that Lady Audley has contrived to reach her exalted position dishonestly; even her place as a governess was acquired in order that she might be in a better position to charm her wealthy quarry. Unlike the pure heroine whose virtue leads her to a love match in which she also gains money and position, Lady Audley's only attributes are money and position.
Although Lady Audley is accepted at face value by Sir Michael, she is suspected of being something of a hypocrite in her pretended affection for the old man by others less personally involved than he. Lady Audley's step-daughter, Alicia, for example, has her own problems with Lady Audley—not the least of which is the fact that the young step-mother, although of nearly the same age as Alicia, chooses to treat her as if she was a child. Alicia, for her part, not only resents Lady Audley's lack of grace in wearing her robes of power, but also has a fairly good notion early on of her step-mother's capacity for evil. In describing Lady Audley she says,

Oh! a perfect wax doll, as regards complexion; fair as the day when in a good temper, but black as night if she can't rule anybody she likes.¹

Later, to her father, Alicia says that she is beginning to dislike Lady Audley more each day. She suspects that the outward sunbeams are there simply to "make us forget the dark depths which lie hidden beneath the surface." (pp. 249-250)

Lady Audley, herself, reveals this capacity for wickedness very early in the play. When, during the first act, her legal husband, George Talboys, confronts her, she can

think only of ways to get rid of him. Failing in her attempt at bribery, she proceeds to threaten George Talboys. She is no longer a "weak, confiding girl," she assures him. "I am a resolute woman—and where I cannot remove an obstacle I will crush it." (p. 247) She tells Talboys that if he goes to Sir Michael, she will see that he ends up in a lunatic asylum. At last, however, realizing that Talboys has too much evidence against her, she determines that her only avenue is murder. She does not pause long to reflect on the implications of this choice, and swiftly completes her mission by utilizing a female trick. Pretending to feel faint, she calls for George to dip her handkerchief in the well to cool her throbbing temples. As he stoops to do her bidding, she strikes him over the head with an iron handle which she has taken from the well, and then pushes him in, "laughing exultingly." (p. 248)

Lady Audley's laughter is soon interrupted by (1) Luke Marks, a dissolute servant, who has seen the murder and blackmails Lady Audley in return for his silence and (2) Robert Audley, Sir Michael's nephew and good friend of George Talboys, who, piecing bits of information together, has concluded that Lady Audley is really Talboy's wife, Helen, and that she has had something to do with his disappearance. "I shall find him [George Talboys]," he tells her, "either living or dead; if living, you shall meet the punishment of a bigamist; if dead, the fate of a murderess."
Lady Audley, unlike typical women who have done wrong in Victorian plays, responds, not with fear and trembling and repentance, but with an anger usually reserved for only the most dissolute of men:

"Fool! why do you wage war with me—why do you make me your enemy? Tremble, if I am; for, if we are foes, I must triumph over you. Do you hear? must—for victory yields me safety—defeat, death!" (pp. 254-255)

She then reminds Robert of the disgrace she would bring upon his family if he were to reveal his suspicions, and Robert, taken aback, agrees that if she will promise to leave the next day and never return, he will remain silent; if not, he will contact the police.

Alone again, Lady Audley reflects on her dilemma, and in a fashion now familiar, determines to keep fighting. "Shall I yield to his menaces, and leave rank, wealth, and position because he merely suspects me? No; my motto has, hitherto, been death or victory; and to that end I am fixed." (p. 255) Her first ploy is to accuse Robert of making improper advances toward her and thus to have Sir Michael order him away. Her second task is to get Luke out of the way. When she discovers that the man's wife, Phoebe, fears he will set their inn on fire while he is drunk and that, furthermore, Robert Audley is staying in the inn that night, she resolves to lock both men in their rooms and set the inn on fire. This she proceeds to do, dragging an unwilling Phoebe with her (very possibly to her death since
she has begun to suspect Lady Audley of having set the fire). Before the wicked villaness has a chance to do any more damage, however, Robert Audley, who has miraculously escaped, intervenes. Once again Lady Audley responds as villain, rushing at him with a poignard. Her defiance continues unabated until, in a matter of moments, Luke appears to accuse her with his dying breaths, Alicia arrives to say Sir Michael has died suddenly—thus freeing Robert to accuse her also, and George Talboys, who was saved by Luke and has since recovered his health, comes on to show that he is still alive. Finally, Lady Audley has met her match. She rapidly disintegrates into a raving mad woman and dies, quite inexplicably, asking for the silence and pity of those who stand about her. A forgiving George Talboys kneels over her prostrate form as the rest of the company forms a "tableau of sympathy." (p. 266)

So ends the life of the twenty-two year old villainess, Lady Audley. The crimes and sins of this woman are numerous. They started with lies and bigamy and advanced at last to murder, until by the end of the play she was thoroughly enmeshed in a tangle of sins and crimes. Yet even then, when the "typical" woman could be expected to back down, she drew a poignard and attempted to kill Robert Audley. Indeed, one might say that Lady Audley resorted to feminine techniques only when driven to them; never did she come naturally to the female tear or faintness. Always there was a scheme
involved—as for instance, the claim of faintness used as a ruse to catch George Talboys off guard so that she could push him down the well, or the "poor, silly, little female" game she at first tried (unsuccessfully) to play with Robert Audley in order to change the subject--

Lady Audley: I am one of those silly beings, Mr. Audley, who have a weakness for telling all they know and all they hear—just like the women isn't it?

Robert: I should not have thought you one of that class, my lady.

Lady Audley: Oh! but I am—ask Sir Michael. Are you fond of flowers Mr. Audley? (p. 253)

Still, this woman who was capable of so much wickedness was forgiven in the end by one husband and escaped the wrath of the other by his sudden demise. She was allowed to retreat into madness and then death. And even though she paid with her life, in death her husband knelt over her and the others whom she had deceived and hurt stood in a "tableau of sympathy" around her. All this for a woman who had never shown the least amount of genuine remorse—and even in the end "claimed" their silence and pity despite all the wrong she had done. It certainly was not Lady Audley's fault that three of her four intended murder victims (George Talboys, Robert Audley, and probably Phoebe) did not actually die, and yet she is considered free of blame in at least one case because she failed to accomplish her purpose with regard to her husband. "Thank that man [points to Luke] that you have
not my death upon your soul," says George Talboys. "You will be scorned, loathed, and despised by all," he continues, only to negate the effect of that pronouncement moments later by telling Robert, "Speak to her, Robert, and say I forgive her." (p. 266) This to a woman who has not even acknowledged her need of forgiveness and who is now totally oblivious to reality.

Lady Audley pays no greater a penalty than the usual, virtuous heroine who falls but once and who also must die, after suffering the torments of shame. Indeed, in some ways, Lady Audley probably pays a lesser penalty in that her insensitivity to others saves her a great deal of suffering. Most virtuous, though fallen, heroines must approach their deaths with regret and with minds painfully acute, whereas Lady Audley succumbs to the world of madness to cushion her death. Lady Audley, too, always has been aware that the risks she has taken might lead to her death.—"My motto has, hitherto, been death or victory; and to that end I am fixed." (p. 255) The typical fallen heroine, on the other hand, comes to a gradual awareness of her impending fate. She falls to death by default, because of weakness. Lady Audley, on the contrary, comes to death because of an evil strength which led her to gamble that she could win against the right. Clearly, the handling of Lady Audley is not a sympathetic one, but it is, in relation to the treatment of women with considerably lesser sins to their account, a more
generous one than such a woman as Lady Audley might have anticipated, and certainly not typical of the usual Victorian drama.

Audiences were as delighted with the dramatization of Lady Audley's Secret as they had been with the original novel by Miss Braddon—then in its ninth edition, according to The Times. Both the George Roberts and the C.H. Hazlewood adaptations were produced successfully at popular theatres—the St. James and the Victoria respectively. Critics from The Athenaeum, The Illustrated London News, and The Times all gave rave notices to the first production of the play at the St. James. Like the audience, they seemed to be uniformly pleased with the "bold, bad, fascinating woman" who was "the very incarnation of hardened, indomitable, handsome wickedness."

It is particularly interesting to note the cultural spectrum of audiences for Lady Audley's Secret. The St. James Theatre, after all, was a most fashionable playhouse.

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1. The Times (London), March 2, 1863, p. 6.

2. The Roberts adaptation at the St. James started on February 28, 1863 and the Hazlewood adaptation started on May 25 of that same year. Reviews indicate that the Roberts version and the Hazlewood adaptation (to which we have been referring) probably were quite similar. In the Roberts's version, however, the villainess did not die, but merely went mad, prompted by an hereditary insanity which still further excused her crimes.

3. The Times (London), March 2, 1863, p. 6.
during the 1860's, whereas the Victoria was then at one of its aesthetically lowest ebbs. The audiences for these two productions, then, must have been widely different—yet they seem to have enjoyed the same sort of play. In writing of the St. James production The Illustrated London News reports that the play met with "more than usual success." Indeed, the St. James audience on the night the Times critic attended was so enthusiastic as to prompt him to write that, "We were sometimes inclined to think that zeal overcame discretion." This from an audience which The Athenaeum reviewer referred to as "fashionable," but which, apparently, was not that different from the Victoria audience in their appreciation of the villainess, Lady Audley.

Sarah the Creole or A Snake in the Grass (October, 1852, Olympic Theatre)

If any villainess can vie with Lady Audley for wickedness it is Sarah of Sarah the Creole or A Snake in the Grass, taken from the French of M.M. St. Descourcelles and Jaimes by Morris Barnett. Like Lady Audley Sarah has little excuse for her rash acts. Like Lady Audley she gets little sympathy from the audience. The Examiner, in comparing the

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5 The Illustrated London News, XLII, March 7, 1863, p. 255.

6 The Times (London), March 2, 1863, p. 6.

7 The Athenaeum, No. 1845, March 7, 1863, p. 338.
play to the *Corsican Brothers* (since both involve "hereditary vengeance"), declares that "sympathy does not, as in the former case [*Corsican Brothers*], side with the avenger." And the London *Times* writes that Sarah "is a grand specimen of female villainy, unredeemed by the slightest virtue, or even the slightest amiable weakness."  

During the five acts of the play Sarah attempts to commit two murders and tells any number of vicious lies in order, she keeps telling herself, to have revenge on the man who killed her father. Ironically, her "father" turns out to have been merely her mother's husband and a quarrelsome military man who, because of insubordination during a desperate battle, had been court martialed and condemned to die, while the man she has been persecuting as her father's murderer turns out to be her real father, and her two intended murder victims are revealed to be her uncle and her half sister. All the while that Sarah is doing her best to cause chaos, Alice, her half sister (she thinks only her foster sister) and Colonel Dumont, her father, continue to be kind and trusting. Sarah already has been living with the Dumont family for some time, ever since her supposed father's death. She always has resented her subordinate role, which she, by the way, emphasizes by such devices as

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8 *The Examiner*, No. 2335, October 28, 1852, p. 694.
wearing black constantly and declaring in tones of pseudo self-sacrifice that Dumont can afford to dress only one girl well—and that one is Alice. She positively aches to make Alice suffer, so, while pretending to be her humble and sincere friend, she manages first to hide the fact that Colonel Dumont's brother has left them 500,000 francs (from his "death"—which she supposes she has accomplished) and then to make it seem that the man who loves Alice and whom she loves has given Alice up because she no longer has a hope of money. Sarah's next act is to reveal the fact of the coming fortune to a profligate cousin who, pretending he knows nothing of the money, offers his hand to Alice and is accepted. The degenerate creature, however, has the bad manners to reform after his marriage and become a model husband, so that Sarah must find a new way to persecute Alice. Through a series of complex lies, she manages (1) to make George (the husband) believe that Alice is having an affair with her old flame and that she, Sarah, loves George and will go anywhere with him, and (2) to make Alice believe that George loves her instead of Alice. Fortunately, the truth comes out before anything too irremediable happens, although Sarah does find a suicide note the despairing Alice had written and holds onto it for future use.

Some months later the perfect opportunity comes for Sarah. She and Alice are alone at her father's home while George is away on business. Sarah brings in Doctor Robert,
a specialist in poisoning, to do away with Alice as he already has "killed" the wealthy uncle for Sarah. Once again, however, Sarah is foiled in her evil—this time by a man (Monsieur Vaudris) who turns out to be none other than the wealthy uncle (miraculously saved). Sarah, believing Alice to be dead and her long-awaited vengeance meted out, tells Dumont plainly what she has done, then shows him the old suicide note which she intends to be her salvation. Colonel Dumont is stunned, but even so, he attempts to save Sarah. When others arrive to accuse her of murder, he declares her to be innocent and hesitantly offers the fraudulent suicide note as proof—thus forfeiting the honor of his now dead daughter for the safety of his murderess daughter.

At last, when the evidence against Sarah becomes too over-whelming, Dumont forces Sarah to her knees and tells her of her parentage. The knowledge that she has killed her own sister will be her eternal punishment, he says. Finally, Sarah shows some contrition, but even at this point she refuses to accept the full blame and names Vaudris as her accomplice. Vaudris's "poison," of course, has made Alice merely sleep. It is only when Alice appears, alive, that Sarah voluntarily falls to her knees and says, "Heaven be thanked!" Sarah's fate is to be exiled from France; she

is not, she says, worthy of the blessing of death. Her father agrees. "Years of penitence," he says, "can alone wash away the memory of your deep crimes."¹¹

Sarah's villainy throughout the play is made all the more obvious by the fact that everyone tries so hard to respect her and treat her fairly, even while she contrives their misery. Because of her father's sense of guilt, Alice often must apologize to Sarah when Sarah is really the guilty party. This pattern, established no doubt when they were children, continues even into adulthood—as when Alice, upon being told by Sarah that George loves her (with the implication that she, Sarah, returns that love), determines to remove her miserable, unwanted self by means of suicide so that Sarah may be happy. (Dumont has just admonished Alice to make every sacrifice for Sarah.) And, of course, we also have the example of Dumont compromising Alice's honor in order to save Sarah's.

Virtually nothing says a good word for Sarah throughout the entire play. Even the fact that she is attempting to gain revenge for her so-called father's death does not speak well for her since she was at most five years old when the man died and has lived as an adopted daughter for twenty years with the Dumonts. Given her age, she probably would have been around even when Alice was born. Therefore, it is

¹¹Ibid., p. 51.
difficult to credit her actions to anything so partially acceptable as genuine revenge. Rather she seems to be a willfully wicked woman. Despite the fact that the case obviously is loaded against her from the very start, however, Sarah continues even in the end to escape a severe fate. She may say all she wishes about death's being too good for her, but the years of true penitence in exile to which her father condemns her, and which alone he says will wash away the memory of her crimes, is a fate which surely is no greater than many an innocent heroine has suffered. And is she truly repentent, anyway? Will she reform and live a pure life? It is difficult to assume that of one who to this point has uttered scarcely a sincere word.

Sarah the Creole was of interest to its Olympic audience. The Athenaeum critic writes that the play "was decidedly successful...for it was admirably acted,"\(^\text{12}\) while The Spectator pronounces it "startling enough to interest the mixed multitude, and ingenious enough to satisfy the connoisseur."\(^\text{13}\) "The play is just the sort of thing," contributes The Times, "to gratify an audience, with whom the progress of a story is a great point, and the exaggerations which arise here and there rather contribute to the general

\[^{12}\text{The Athenaeum, No. 1305, October 30, 1852, p. 1185.}\]

\[^{13}\text{The Spectator, XXV, Part 2, October 30, 1852, p. 1036.}\]
pleasure than detract from it."¹⁴

Catherine Howard¹⁵

Catherine Howard presents a villainess similar to Lady Audley in that she too finds herself inconveniently bound by a first husband when it would be to her financial and social advantage to be free. She too will not stop even at her husband's death in order that she might have the man who can give her the rank she desires. The murder she attempts to commit is a sin of omission—seemingly benign beside the physical violence perpetrated by Lady Audley or even Sarah Blangi, but just as deadly in the results. Catherine merely decides not to rescue her husband, Athelwold, from the tomb in which he, pretending death to prevent his being either forced to marry Henry VIII's sister or to lose his rank and money (perhaps his life), has been placed after his so-called suicide by poison. Catherine first establishes her position with the king, then drops the key to Athelwold's tomb into a body of water—thereby, as she supposes, signalling the doom of her first husband.

¹⁴The Times (London), October 28, 1852, p. 8.

¹⁵Allardyce Nicoll indicates that a play by William E. Suter titled Catherine Howard; or, Woman's Ambition was granted a license for production at the Grecian Theatre on January 24, 1859. Additionally, Nicoll cites several other versions of Catherine Howard—one, by an unknown author, as early as 1858. The play was adapted from the French of Alexander Dumas (Paris production in 1834).
Catherine, like Lady Audley, Sarah Blangi, and many more pure heroines, is young and beautiful. An orphan, she has always lived with an aged nurse in the beautiful countryside. Like the historical Catherine Howard on whom she is patterned, she already has a husband when King Henry VIII sets eyes upon her and desires her for his wife. Also like her historical predecessor, she chooses not to tell the king of her previous marriage, despite the risk involved in concealment. Unlike the real Catherine Howard, the stage Catherine is guilty of attempted murder.

Long before Catherine is seen as a potential murderess, however, while she is still the innocent (and publically unknown) bride of Athelwold, indications appear of her desire for power and influence. Catherine, though, is less the hypocrite who is clearly aware from the play's beginning of the lengths to which she will go to achieve her goals, while pretending to an innocence she does not possess (Lady Audley and Sarah Blangi), and more the selfish child who simply has never been confronted with such strong temptations before seeing the chance to become queen. The first intimations of Catherine's weakness for power come as she expresses her boredom with country life to Dame Kennedy, her nurse. Some day, she says, she shall no longer pine, for she shall live in London and be rich and beautiful and powerful. She "shall need but to command, for none will dare to
disobey. 16

When Athelwold, the secret bridegroom, who has only just learned of the king's intention to marry Catherine and has determined to give his young wife a drug which will make her appear as dead, comes to visit her in the country, Catherine gives a further indication of her interest in rank. Because he always has been jealous of her beauty, Athelwold has not yet revealed their marriage to the world. Nor has he revealed his real identity to his young bride. Catherine's attempts to wheedle the information from Athelwold may be seen on the level of simple, ingenuous curiosity, or, more probably, as a need on her part to reinforce the premonitions of rank the jewels he has given her suggest. This first conversation with Athelwold also introduces a ballad which Catherine apparently has related to her husband many times before. The ballad tells of a beautiful vassal, Elfrida, who, despite the fact that she already is betrothed to a man named Richard, at last succumbs to the temptation to marry King Edgar. The ballad clearly foretells the very things that shortly will befall Catherine and Athelwold. It, however, does not mention the fact that Elfrida ultimately dies because of her betrayal—as

16 Alexander Dumas, Catherine Howard, adapted by W.D. Suter (London: Samuel French, Publisher, n.d.), p. 9. Further references are noted in the text.
Catherine, too, must die. In true fairy tale fashion it ends "happily ever after." And Catherine accepts that ending.

Shortly after Catherine relates the ballad, Athelwold gives her the potion which produces in her a death-like state. After her funeral, the king comes to her in her tomb, places a royal ring upon her finger, and mourns her "death" one last time. When Catherine awakes in the tomb and Athelwold comes to her, she wishes to leave immediately, but as soon as he tells her his true identity as Duke of Northumberland, she forgets about her need to leave the tomb. Immediately she cries, "Ah! and I shall I share honours, fortune, position with you? Then you will conduct me to the court?" (p. 16) At this last question, Athelwold is compelled to tell Catherine of Henry's love for her and of his disrupted plans to marry her. Catherine is impressed that the king loves her, even more impressed that he has only just been at her side, and positively overwhelmed at the royal ring of betrothal she now finds on her finger. The tombs which had so frightened her but moments before, and which she had then momentarily forgotten in the excitement of hearing about Athelwold's title, she now finds herself drawn to by the residual presence of the king. As she leaves the tomb, Catherine's aside clearly foretells the future:
I fear, Athelwold, thy most sumptuous mansion
will never so greatly charm me as this sad
vault, brightened by the presence of the
king. (p. 19)

In the days which follow, Catherine moves to Athelwold's palace where she lives in a remote apartment, safe from the eyes of the king. Though she is now physically closer to her husband than she was for the first year of their marriage, she obviously is thinking more of the king than she is of Athelwold. She even refuses to remove the king's ring from her finger despite Athelwold's jealousy of it and his direct request that she remove it. Catherine's obsession with the idea of becoming queen, her forgetfulness of Athelwold, just as Elfrida forgot Richard, is illustrated when she overhears the scene in which Athelwold's fortune and perhaps even his life are at stake because he will not consent to marry Henry's sister. As Athelwold is sacrificing all for love of her, Catherine stands watching the angry king from the window of her apartment with no thought for Athelwold and the danger he now faces:

Go, mighty king, the more thou shalt tread
men beneath thy feet, the greater thou wilt be, the more envied will be the woman whom thou shalt place beside thee on thy throne. Should I become a widow--- (p. 26)

When Athelwold determines to appear to have committed suicide so that he can escape the king's wrath and flee the country with Catherine, his young bride sees the perfect opportunity to become queen. Athelwold is no sooner laid
to rest than Catherine Howard presents herself to the king, claiming to have been in a deep trance rather than dead when she was carried to the burial vault.

Henry: Oh, I shudder at the thought that you might have remained enclosed within that sepulchre, living--amongst the dead--and none have know that you were there.

Catherine: Oh, yes! [starting] that would have been very fearful.

Henry: To wake within a coffin, alone, and in darkness--vainly to seek for succour, and to be answered only by the dreary echoes, at last to feel approach the pangs of hunger---

Catherine: No more, no more! (in great agony, and carrying her hand to her head.) Oh, atrocious, most atrocious! (pp. 30-31)

Obviously, Catherine is thinking about Athelwold. Still, as soon as Henry has promised to marry her and make her queen, she easily gives Athelwold to his fate--however "atrocious."

No sooner has Henry said the words, "tomorrow I will publicly proclaim Catherine Howard the Queen of Henry the Eighth" than Catherine walks rapidly to a window, key in hand, and asks, "Sire, the water which flows beneath this window, is it very deep?" Upon being assured that it, indeed, is, Catherine drops the key into the water and says to herself, "I create myself queen." (p. 31)

When Athelwold appears to Catherine, yet alive (for he miraculously has escaped the tomb), Catherine is at first sure that he is a ghost. Finally, convinced that he is, indeed, real, she begs forgiveness and says she will fly
anywhere with him—to escape punishment. But Athelwold will not forgive her. He says she may have the crown she desires, but she will soon stumble against Anne Boleyn's block. He will die, if necessary, to insure that she pays for her faithlessness. Unlike Lady Audley who, at this point would have sought another means to kill her husband, Catherine seems to think that she can hide from her fate. As queen, she locks herself in her apartments, thinking to keep Athelwold out. Athelwold, however, is not convinced, apparently, that Catherine would not seek to kill him, for when he comes to her again, he points out that he, like the mythical Richard of the ballad, has put on a coat of mail beneath his clothes, "for though Richard feared not death, he greatly dreaded the loss of vengeance." (p. 38) Athelwold explains to her that death is nothing to the jealousy she has caused him to feel. He will not mind death if it brings revenge.

Athelwold cleverly betrays Catherine to Henry by staying in her chamber just long enough to make sure that he knows a man is with her, then steals out in time to save himself—leaving Catherine behind to bear the consequences.

Alone in her dungeon awaiting death, Catherine bribes the executioner to flee the city, hoping to buy extra time, but Athelwold steps forward, hooded, to take the executioner's place, and, at last, Catherine realizes that she truly is lost and confesses her guilt. Her repentance,
however, comes only when it is too late, and only when no other course is open to her. Perhaps, given the chance to be queen at such awful cost again, she would act differently, but it would not be because of a change in her moral character. Rather her reason for not disposing of Athelwold in favor of the king would be because she had discovered that the crown she so selfishly had sought did not make her happy. Henry had promised her that it would make her happy to be queen, and, on the strength of that promise, she had decided to allow Athelwold to die. With no happiness in being queen, it would not be a prudent choice since it did not fulfill her wants and needs. Since she was not at all happy, Catherine assumed that she had paid sufficiently for her sins and told Athelwold even before he betrayed her to Henry that he should rest satisfied, since he was well avenged. She expected Athelwold to pity her and let her go at that. She, who would have no pity on Athelwold when he lay locked in a tomb with every expectation of starving to death, expected pity from him because she was unhappy as queen. To the play's close and her own death she heads inexorably, conscious only of her own desires and wishes, sorry only when they are thwarted.

Never, after condemning Athelwold to his death, does Catherine repent her deed until he comes upon her and she sees her dreams of power and rank vanishing. Indeed, just moments before Athelwold appears, Catherine says to herself,
the past! the past is annihilated; the present
only is something, the future is everything.
I exist, I live! all that is occurring to me
now is real; what matters to me then, the
rest. This is the first step. (places it.)
I ascend. (does so.) I sit. (sits in throne
chair) Oh, to assure me that all this is
true, let some one approach and bow before me;
let them acknowledge my power, and salute me
as the Queen. (p. 31)

Unlike Lady Audley and Sarah Blangi on whom no audience
ever wasted a moment's regret, Catherine Howard's fate must
have met with some audience sympathy. Indeed, Erroll
Sherson indicates that the "fearsome piece" which he saw at
the Grecian brought forth much sympathetic response. The
scene between Athelwold and Catherine in the burial vault,
for example,

was received with the closest attention.
Sighs and groans were audible among the occu­
pants of the pit, and one lady next to me,
under the influence of strong emotion, muttered
under her breath: 'Ah, poor dear, poor dear!'17

It is not difficult to understand how an audience which en­
joyed having its emotions played with would respond so
empathetically to young Catherine Howard. Catherine, after
all, goes through some transition as a character during the
course of the play. She is not presented as a villainess so
much as she is as a tragic heroine with a fatal flaw so
great that it drives her to villainous acts. Contrary to

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Erroll Sherson, London's Lost Theatres of the Nine­
teenth Century (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited,
the usual villainess, Catherine is first represented as an ingenuous sweet young thing. She is the only character with whom the audience has a chance to identify; there is really no one for them to support against her. Henry VIII is hardly a prime candidate, nor is his sister, Margaret, who is genuinely in love with Athelwold—since we never even meet her. For that part, even Athelwold himself is not likely to elicit much sympathy, for he remains throughout the strong character, capable of handling his own problems. Indeed, Athelwold's merciless pursuit of Catherine, even to becoming her executioner and being seen, axe in hand after the beheading, weights emotional response against him. Catherine, from beginning to end, even in her wicked attempt at murder, remains a weak impotent force. She lacks the cunning intelligence of the usual villain/villainess. Her attempted murder of Athelwold is an act of omission, not an act of strength, nor even of great planning. She seems to keep no better tabs on the possible consequences of her crime than she does on the consequences of Elfrida's sin against her husband. She lives in a romantic world in which there are only happy endings; she simply does not trouble herself to take any responsibilities for her wrong actions. Like a small child, she sees only the goodies and reaches for them, not noticing the pit that lies open to engulf her until it is too late. There is in Catherine Howard a lack of moral responsibility so acute that, although she clearly
is guilty of attempted murder, somehow the audience cannot help but offer sympathy. They cannot quite agree with the unpitying Athelwold that "once to die is insufficient for [her] crimes--and that [she has] merited a thousand deaths." Still, there is no denying that Catherine dies with significantly more just cause than does the usual Victorian heroine whose only fault is often the love of an unworthy man or simple disobedience to her parents.

Jane Lomax; or, A Mother's Crime (February 4, 1839, Adelphi Theatre)

The last of the four major plays to be considered, Jane Lomax, by Edward Stirling, provides us with a villainess whose actions do not extend to murder, but who, nonetheless, is clearly a villainess. Her crime is forgery for the purpose of stealing the inheritance which rightfully belongs to another. In this forgery she is aided by her cowardly husband who, at her command, does the actual forgery.

As the title suggests, Jane claims (even to herself) to be stealing the money for the sake of her son whom doctors say will die if he cannot have the advantages only wealth can buy. There is ample evidence, however, that Jane desires the wealth for her own sake as well as for her son's. Whereas Mr. Lomax only once sighs for more worldly goods,

\[^{18}\] Dumas, p. 47.
Jane is a different matter. One moment she is talking altruistically about her son; the next she is gloating over the riches she sees in store. The scene in which she first determines to have her husband alter the will is a good example. As Jane moves to steal the original will from under the dying Hoffman's pillow, she spurs herself on with comments such as, "courage, courage--my boy demands the sacrifice!" Once she has the will in her hand, however, she suddenly becomes more interested in the way it may serve her own ends than in her son:

It is mine--the will is mine! The old man hugs a useless blank, and my boy is saved from poverty!--Wealth, power, grandeur--all, all is within his grasp. We may now command, where we have been commanded! Oh! it will be joyous to see the servile slaves of riches bow their proud necks to the once despised, degraded Jane Lomax! What has wrought this wondrous change? Gold--the sordid world's idol--gold!--and that now is mine--mine for ever! Ha! ha! ha!19

Again, while Jane struggles to convince her husband to commit the forgery, she declares that her sole end is for William's advantage. Only moments later, though, she refers to the money as a "glorious prize" which is within her reach.

Probably one of the most significant characteristics of Jane Lomax is her "manliness." Like Lady Macbeth, to whom Jane is compared in several contemporary reviews, she is

much bolder and much more aggressive than her husband. This fact is reinforced time and again. Early in the play Vander Sprecken compares her to Mr. Lomax:

Mrs. Lomax appears to be a being the very opposite of her hum-drums husband—a bold and determined, and, if I guess rightly, one that trifling difficulties would not easily turn from her fixed purpose. Her searching, resolute eye, bespeaks, a woman cast in no common mould. (p. 6)

Scenes between Jane and Mr. Lomax quickly show the superior strength of Jane. Lomax is terrified when Jane tells him of her plan of forgery. But Jane has thought her plan out carefully. She explains to Lomax why she feels they cannot fail. All his questions and doubts she counters with arguments of her own. Still he hesitates.

Lomax: Some devil must have tempted you! The— the consequences are too frightful—a horrible abyss is yawning at our feet—the scaffold! the scaffold!—my blood runs cold at the very thought! (Covers his face with his hands.)

Jane (Seizing his hand): Shadows have often made you tremble, while I have stood undaunted in the midst of real dangers. Are you not ashamed of yourself? Are you not afraid of your own thoughts? Do as I command! (p. 17)

Lomax begins to write, but he is frightened—first by a low peal of thunder—"Let us wait a little—I cannot write, while I am every moment liable to be struck dead in the act of" "Simpleton and coward!" berates Jane "Oh, that my hand-writing were like yours, or your heart like mine! Could I have done without you, I had never asked your assistance...." Jane must manage the whole affair. Lomax
does not know what to do with the original will, and Jane tells him to burn it, but even that he cannot do properly. He would burn it in the candle. Jane stops him, "No, no, not there—the ashes may betray us, in the fire it must be burnt...." (p. 18) The frightened Lomax says he sees a face in the window watching them. He wants to return the rightful will to its place under Hoffman's pillow and forget the whole business. Jane, taking the role usually reserved for the man, goes to the window to check for Lomax's "shadow;" satisfied that no one is there, she turns on her husband:

Jane: Look you, Joel— I am not a person to be trifled with—we have gone too far in this business to stop short—nor am I so weak and pusillanimonous, woman as I am, as to lose the glorious prize when it is within my reach. You must not, nay, you shall not, flinch from your purpose. What, still gazing timidly towards the window! Well, I will remove all your doubts and fears. (Shuts window shutters.) Now, if there were half a dozen men in the area, not one of them could catch a glimpse either of us or our proceedings! (p. 19)

So saying, Jane burns the will. By its light a man is seen peering into the room, as a crash of thunder and a wind open the shutters. Lomax is terrified and, falling at his wife's feet, clings to her dress, further reinforcing her image of strength.

Two years later, even though living in wealth and with no suspicion as to the forgery, Lomax still is terrified. "His craven mind," says Jane, is "always fearing detection."
Because of his fears, Jane, in her usual masculine role, seeks to calm him by careful contingency planning. She has arranged it so that their money can be easily accessible for flight from the country if necessary. For herself, she carries a phial of poison with her which, she says, "will snatch me from the hands of justice." (p. 20)

At a Macbeth-style dinner party which Jane has arranged in order to show off their wealth to the people they knew in their poverty, Mr. Lomax nearly reveals all in his panic at hearing that the rightful heir to Mr. Hoffman's fortune is in London. Jane succeeds in drawing him apart long enough to lecture him thoroughly. Lomax begs her not to scold him so harshly. He doesn't have her courage, he says. "It amazes me—I cannot understand it!" Jane responds in characteristic fashion—"Because you feel and think like a woman, and I like a man! Still trembling—still shrinking with alarm! Fool! dastard! lean upon me." (p. 22)

Jane does, eventually, come to a point of temporary repentance (which for her must be seen as a weakness—a non-masculine response) when the doctor tells her that, unless Providence intervenes, her son will die within a few weeks. She already has vowed to wait upon her son's needs day and night (the devoted mother), but the thought that only Providence can help now brings her to repentance. This repentance, however, must be viewed as a repentance similar to that of the earlier women in that it comes only when she
has need of God and feels that she is bankrupt in His court. "Trust in Providence," she says, "I dare not do so—outcast and sinner that I am." Still, Jane is thinking of the loss of her child almost solely as it affects herself:

To lose you thus, dear child—in all the bloom of youth and beauty—to have you snatched away just as you are rising up into manhood, which would have been the comfort, the honour, the glory of our old age!...How have I suffered since that fatal night of infamy and guilt! Beset with terrors by day, and haunted with ghastly visions at night, that scare me from my sleep! This I have born [sic] secretly and willingly, to give my boy wealth, station, and respect; and now he is to be torn from me. (pp. 26-27)

She has suffered, she says. But her crime is still "unrepented and unatoned." Her remorse now clearly is associated only with the fact that she senses that her wishes are being frustrated and that the last Power to which she conceivably could turn is no longer open to her. We might project the possibility that if she were genuinely repentant, she would confess all, despite the consequences to herself make restitution, and thus re-open the pathway to the Providence she now feels unable to ask for aid.

The night before her son's death, Jane does begin the process of revealing her crime by sending a letter to a friend of Edward Ruddock's (the rightful heir) which indicates he may learn something of value for his friend if he comes to the house. Moments after William dies, Jane begins to manifest the madness in which she ends her life. She
becomes, for the first time, the weaker partner, and her husband determines to have her put away in order to protect himself. Jane, indeed, is ready to confess. First, however, she calls her husband a villain and blames him for the deed. It is only when he sharply reminds her of her greater guilt that she agrees.

It is too true! it is too true! but I will atone—I will confess all—all! See! see! our son smiles upon me for the honest deed! Yes, I will reveal all our guilt, and join you! (Smiles and points upwards.) Speedily! speedily! (p. 31)

In her madness, Jane imagines she is giving a ball. She goes out into the cypress grove, dances, talks to imaginary friends, then, taking the phial of poison from her bosom, drinks from it and lies down in the snow by her son's grave to die, saying, "we'll sleep together!" (p. 33)

Like Lady Audley, Jane has been able to escape into the world of madness. Despite the possible interpretation that Jane has killed herself from grief over her son's death, we cannot help but recall that she, herself, said she carried the poison so that "should aught conspire against us, this phial of poison will snatch me from the hands of justice." Not only did Jane manage to "snatch herself from the hands of justice" in this world, but she also confessed just in time to force her poor husband to face the hands of justice alone, and apparently escaped judgement in the world to come by making that confession:
CAPTAIN BLUFF, RUDDOCK, FOOTMAN, and two
Policemen enter U.E.L. They pause on seeing
the groupe in the foreground.

Jane: (Slowly raising her head.) J-o-e-1,
I--I am going to our boy! promise, before
I die, that you will restore the--the prop­
erty--we so wickedly obtained! you will re­
store it to Ruddock, J-o-e-1?--it is my last
request!

[BLUFF and RUDDOCK exchange signs.

Lomax: I will, I will.

Jane: I shall die happier with that heavy
load removed! I--I'm coming, love! Yes, yes,
in a moment! William is calling me--do you
not see him?--there he stands! He's robed in
clouds! Farewell! Bless you, J-o-e-1!
B-l-e-s-s-

[She falls dead in C. of stage--Lomax kneels
down, and bends over her. BLUFF and RUDDOCK
advance towards them L. BLUFF motions to
policemen, who advance one step forward as
the curtain falls on the picture. (p. 34)

Jane seems to have fared rather well for a villainess. A
Victorian heroine who had sinned only slightly and who,
moreover, manifested all the feminine graces besides, could
not hope for more than to die and go to heaven. It is, how­
ever, interesting to note that Jane, who actually is con­
siderably less guilty than Catherine Howard in that she is
merely a forger while Catherine is an attempted murderess,
seems, somehow, more deserving of her fate than does
Catherine. We may well suppose that the linkage of Jane
to Lady Macbeth, coupled with her more aggressive, more con­
cscious plotting makes her seem more villainous than the
woman who actually commits the greater crime but who seems
less capable of action.

There is an interesting comic story in Jane Lomax which runs somewhat parallel to the story of Jane and which shows another strongly dominant woman who finally is put in her place. She, unlike Jane who professedly gives up everything for her child, has concern for no one but herself. When, for example, she and her husband are out for a walk and it begins to rain, she is more concerned for her bonnet and her parasol than she is for her children:

Mrs. Spratt: What are we to do, Simon? Oh, my poor bonnet; it cost fifteen shillings, without the blond whiskers and flowers!

Simon Spratt: The children will be washed away!

Mrs. Spratt: Simon, Simon! my parasol--run after it! I shall be ruined--oh! oh! (Cries.) It cost twelve-and-sixpence, and is lined with pink silk! Run after it, I say!

Simon: But the children---

Mrs. Spratt: Drat the children, they cost nothing! (pp. 24-25)

Immediately after this scene comes the scene in which Jane realizes that, despite what her wishes for her child have cost her, she still is to lose him. One woman's children may have cost her nothing, but Jane's single child has been most costly.

The story of the Spratts is used both as a type of comic relief and as a basis for comparison and contrast
(as above illustrated). For example, in the scene immediately preceding the one in which Jane steps into the weaker role beside her husband, Mrs. Spratt is forced to give over the reins to Simon because he has caught her worthless dancing master/lover in his wine closet. In both cases the man is able, at last, to get the upper hand. Jane, however, despite her madness, is not debilitated enough to be incapable of positive action in her own ultimate behalf. Indeed, the contrast between her and Mrs. Spratt gives Jane a kind of nobility as the play ends, and the fact that she is capable of snatching herself from the hands of justice, while handing her husband into them—at the same time assuring herself a place in heaven and sympathy from her audience, indicates that Jane Lomax is most surely a divergent Victorian image. She is able to be the complete villainess throughout and still merit our forgiveness, even our sympathy, because hers, after all, is a "mother's crime."

The Athenaeum reviewer says nothing about audience response to Jane Lomax but just indicates that "the story is despoiled of its interest by the dramatist's want of skill."20 The Times reviewer, however, regards the play as deserving of praise and states that Stirling has created "a very excellent and proper piece for the stage."

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20The Athenaeum, No. 589, February 9, 1839, p. 118.
Furthermore, as regards the audience, he writes that "the house was crammed with company, and the piece was given out for re-representation amidst the cheers of all present." An Adelphi audience, as we have seen so apparently before, liked its melodrama wild and stirring. Whatever the Athenaeum reviewer may have thought about playwright Stirling's lack of skill seems not to have been a problem to them, nor, for that part, to the Times reviewer either.

In addition to the four villainesses we have discussed in this chapter there also are such evil women in other plays from the period. Tantalizing contemporary reviews indicate a number of popular villainesses—including those in The Red Vial (1858), Jessie Ashton; or, London by Day and Night (1863), and La Barrone (1871). Allardyce Nicoll additionally cites a number of plays in his handlist which clearly point to still more of these "unnatural women."

That Victorian audiences often relished watching the evil woman on stage should come as no surprise when we recall that, in addition to its more widely known puritanical traits, the Victorian era also exhibited a great interest in the exotic and horrifying. What could cater more to such tastes in a period in which women were supposedly pure and innocent than the villainess with her stony heart and evil deeds?

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21 The Times (London), February 5, 1839, p. 4.
CHAPTER VII

WOMEN WHO PLAY TRADITIONAL MALE ROLES--
SOMETIMES TO MEN WHO PLAY TRADITIONAL
FEMALE ROLES

In the very first chapter dealing with divergent images (Chapter IV) I suggest that "perhaps our best approach would be to look less at the heroines themselves and more at the heroines within the situations in which their playwrights put them." (See page 83.) One of my reasons for making such a suggestion is that the characters in most mid-Victorian plays are more completely dependent upon the "game plan" into which their playwright thrusts them than they are, themselves, capable of developing a situation out of their own characters. They are pawns to the playwright's needs--filling roles which will help him accomplish his ultimate end. Once we are able to see even the divergent heroine as a mere role player, we realize that the roles, themselves, thus take on increased significance. The consequence of recognizing this greater importance of the character in the role is that we then see the easier possibility of juggling characters, regardless of sex, from one
role to another.

In this chapter we will discuss not only the "fetching males" familiar to the theatre long before the Victorian era and women who are in charge of affairs usually reserved for men, but we also will look at five different men who are placed into roles in the plotline of their plays which cause them to behave as ideal women and/or fallen ideal women so circumstanced. The women in their lives will be seen taking roles which diverge from the usual image, but I will focus primarily on the reversal situation itself. My reason for doing so is because I regard the roles played by these men to be themselves of utmost importance in mid-Victorian dramatic literature. I find it extremely significant that plays which present these popular ideal images seem to have succeeded even when men happen to be occupying the usual female roles. I would conjecture, therefore, that, as with so many other popular superficialities, devices, and spectacles, it was primarily the role to which the Victorian audience was attached. I further would speculate that audiences apparently were not particular that that role always be played by a female. As we see men playing the roles usually reserved only for ideal and fallen ideal women—while their wives often step into some divergent category (Good for Evil—Clara falls but is easily forgiven, Agnes de Vere—Agnes becomes a murderess, The Sin and the Sorrow—Anita is an ideal sullied by a dilemma situation. Louise
de Lignerolles—Louise exhibits many strong masculine traits, and Retribution—Clarisse would have fallen but for the conscience of her seducer.), our understanding for the possibility of divergence from one role to another is reinforced. The mere fact that men were able to play the very roles which have been so firmly identified with the Victorian heroine ought in itself to show the flexibility to which we have been pointing throughout this study.

Women as "Fetching Males"

The Daughter of the Regiment (1844, Drury Lane Theatre)

As we have mentioned elsewhere in our study, there were large numbers of comic plays written during the Victorian era in which a female character assumed a "fetching" masculine role. Such a character is seen in Joseph Stirling Coyne's The Trumpeter's Daughter (c. 1844), a one-act farce about Madelon, a young woman who has been reared in the military since infancy. Madelon smokes cigars, uses a foil to defend herself from unwanted kisses, and in other ways reflects the lifestyle of the military man. In addition to the comical version of this character, however, there also were more serious approaches to her. For example, a Madelaine very similar to Coyne's Madelon is seen in Edward Fitzball's two act drama, The Daughter of the Regiment. Indeed, we may well surmise that Coyne and Fitzball developed their plays from the same French source: Both heroines have
been orphaned early and have been reared by the rank and file of military men. Both, in the end, will marry and, no doubt, be tamed. Though Madelaine is from the beginning somewhat tamer than Madelon, even she hardly represents the typical ideal. When Suplice, Madelaine's adoptive father, talks about her "splendid education," he indicates that she beats the drum "like an angel,"

surpasses us all in the broadsword exercise, and can hit a given mark with a bullet from a horse-pistol, with an aim that would make the Empress herself proud of such a daughter.\footnote{Edward Fitzball, The Daughter of the Regiment (Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co., n.d.), p. 7.}

Clearly Madelaine's education is a long way from the accomplishments of the ideal woman.

After Madelaine has been forced to leave the military and go to live with her newly found marchioness aunt, she retains a disconcerting number of her former traits. Though she has her weaker, more womanly moments of tears and near fainting, Madelaine still is perfectly capable of playing the drums with her old spirit. She continues to sing old military tunes and is not the least bit docile as regards her aunt's wishes. The old woman quickly arranges a match with a captain (who turns out to be Madelaine's old lover made good) because it seems to her a good match "for a young person of [Madelaine's] still military propensities."\footnote{Ibid., p. 17.}
the play is about to end, Madelaine, in a moment of exuberance, gets involved in a session of pretend warfare. To her drumbeat, Andreas (her future husband) improvises a banner with the Marchioness's firescreen while Suplice decapitates a couple of statues. Indeed, even though marriage will no doubt subdue Madelaine somewhat, it is interesting to note that her husband is to be the new captain of her old twenty-first regiment. We can assume that she will continue her old lifestyle at least in some measure.

Capitola; or The Masked Mother, and the Hidden Hand (1860, City of London Theatre)

Plays which presented the heroine in a masculine mold obviously were popular, for an 1854 review of a revival of *The Daughter of the Regiment* indicates that it was a well liked type in England.3 And other examples of the woman in the fetching masculine role are quite evident—as, for instance, in Colin Henry Hazlewood's *Capitola; or, The Masked Mother, and the Hidden Hand*. *Capitola*, as a matter of fact, seems to be making some rather strong women's rights statements as well as presenting this popular variation on the ideal woman: Like the two preceding heroines, Capitola eventually is discovered to be a wealthy heiress, but when we first meet her, she is in reduced circumstances and is

3 *The Athenæum*, No. 1392, July 1, 1854, p. 821.
trying to find her own way in the world in a most unorthodox manner. Early in her poverty she had discovered, she said, that as a girl she could find no way of earning money; people merely had laughed at her and told her that a girl could not do whatever sort of work she proposed to do. At last, in desperation, she had exchanged her feminine garments for boys's clothes, and as a "boy," she had managed to live fairly well selling papers and running errands.

It is in the role of a boy that Capitola at last is found by her wealthy uncle (the major) who, though he succeeds in getting Capitola to change back into the clothing of her own sex, never quite takes the "boy" out of her heart. For example, Capitola tells her housekeeper/guard that if she does not let her out of the house she'll "give [her] one in the breadbasket." Indeed, Capitola is proud of her non-ideal image. When Herbert, the man who is to marry her, says worriedly to her, "But you're so different from any other woman," Capitola responds "triumphantly,"

I know I am; I glory in it. I'm an original. I like being an original! Other young ladies in a storm would have called for their smelling bottle, but I--I call for my horse! away we go over the fields, take the first hedge or five-barred gate we come to--I give him his head, he clears it at a bound....

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*C.H. Hazlewood, Capitola; or, The Masked Mother, and the Hidden Hand (London: Samuel French, Publisher, n.d.), p. 19. Further references are noted in the text.*
Capitola loves an icy shower at six in the morning. She delights in being scolded by her uncle. She says it strengthens her nerves "like a galvanic battery." (p. 20) But she is not the one to sit by and wait for her uncle to attack. When, for example, she anticipates that he will scold her for being out until midnight, she begins scolding him the minute he arrives at the house after an hour and a half of searching for her. He ought to be ashamed to be out so late at his age, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. When Capitola discovers a young woman who is being villainously victimized by Colonel Gardner, she courageously rescues her—even to the point of engaging in a physical struggle with the colonel.

Capitola admires Black Donald, an outlaw over whom other women shudder, "because there's something daring and devilish about him, like myself." (p. 22) When she meets him, however, she is disappointed in his looks, so she decides to capture him and collect the £100 reward for bringing him in. "Do you mean to come quietly," she asks, "or must I use force." (p. 23) Later, when Capitola and Black Donald come face to face again in her bedroom where Black Donald has waited to kill her for the £6,000 Colonel Gardner has offered so that he can claim her inheritance, Capitola convinces him that she had wanted him to carry her off on the earlier occasion. Flattered, Black Donald announces that he'll spend the night with Capitola. "in five
minutes," he promises, "we'll go to bed." (p. 31) Capitola, of course, is as frightened as any virtuous heroine, but she is no weak trembling creature. Pushed by circumstances, she at length determines to kill Black Donald by releasing a mechanism which will send him through a trap door into a water-filled pit below. Reflective of the ideal woman, however, she first attempts to get Black Donald to repent of his evil ways, and when she fails in this attempt, she herself asks pardon for him as she presses the spring mechanism.

It is evident that Capitola does not kill easily. As she contemplates the deed, she legitimizes her unfeminine act by telling herself that "it's your life or mine; and self-preservation is the first law of nature." (p. 33) This "first law of nature," interestingly, seldom is invoked to justify homicide in the many plays which present the feminine ideal. But in this case the law of self preservation takes precedence over even the most compelling laws governing womanly behavior. After Black Donald has fallen through the trap door, though, Capitola has the graceful weakness to faint—if only for a moment. Soon, however, she bounces back to her former self, and as the play concludes, tells the just arrived Herbert that it's no thanks to him that she's safe; he's just like all the men—never around when he's needed. She has saved herself.

As in the earlier mentioned plays, there is hope at the end of Capitola that her marriage to Herbert will cure her
of her madcap ways. And so once again we confront the notion of taming a feisty woman by getting her safely married. The British public, however, greatly enjoyed watching the antics of the as yet unreformed Capitola.

**Women in Charge**

In addition to women in fetching male roles, we also find women who fall into more serious, though often less obvious, male roles—often in contrast to men who play out the parts usually reserved for women. In the rest of this chapter we will see men fulfilling the moral ideal of the virtuous woman, as well as women playing the assertive partners in their relationships. Both of these deviations from the usual understanding of the ideal are important to notice if we are to see that the relationship between the sexes was not always of the same inflexible nature. First we will look at two plays in which women in charge are the heroines: *A Woman of Business* and *Aurora Floyd*, and then we will look at plays which perhaps more obviously show the sexual reversal.

**A Woman of Business** (1864, Adelphi Theatre)

Benjamin Webster's *A Woman of Business* presents a woman whose understanding of the business world is far from typical of the ideal woman, but who, nonetheless, is treated with much greater respect for her "masculine" abilities than are
similar characters in many comedies of the period. Indeed, although the play is labeled a comedietta, the heroine clearly is not a laughable figure, nor certainly a woman considered to be in any way needing to change her personality. Indeed, from beginning to end she is viewed as an admirable character, and it is only the villainous characters who in any way attempt to impugn her right to run the family business. Perhaps Annie Hall's (the heroine's) own words early in the play can best describe the general impression left by her character: When questioned about how she happens to be familiar with a certain point of business, she responds, "Oh, we women know a great deal more than is generally imagined." Later when her husband indicates that perhaps she really ought to be in the drawing room, and not in the office, she dismisses his worries with,

> A business woman is no loss to society, whilst the want of something to do has made many a place vacant which would otherwise have been honorably filled. There is no idea of you men relative to our sex; and you have an enormous number of silly ones, goodness knows, so injurious to us, as that of stupidly supposing that every woman should sit all day long with her hands in her lap. (p. 10)

Indeed, except on rare occasions, Mr. Hall is quite pleased to have his wife in charge. Talking to himself about the state of his life, he decides that, though some men would

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not like to have their wives in charge of their business, he is quite happy. "I'm glad I'm cast in a different mould," he says. "I'm satisfied, and I'm not ashamed to own it." (p. 11)

That Annie Hall is not to be seen as the butt of laughter is infinitely clear in that she is usually the one who directs the laughter at others—the others being (1) Mr. Hall's conniving country boor of a cousin, Simon, who gets Hall drunk in an attempt to convince him that he should take over his own business (and thereby be the sole one to decide that his ward should marry Simon), (2) Mr. Small-piece, a not very bright young man who thinks he can get Mrs. Hall to run away with him, (3) Wylie, a charlatan who would have made off with £10,000 of Mr. Hall's good money in a fraudulent scheme had not Mrs. Hall skillfully avoided it, and (4) Mr. Hall himself in the scene in which he, inebriated, demands that Mrs. Hall relegate herself to the drawing room while he takes over his "rightful" place in the ruling of home and business. Humor grows from Mrs. Hall's superior knowledge; around her, pretentious figures seem ludicrous in contrast to her controlled, ready wit and efficiency. For example, when Mr. Hall decides to take over, she calmly sits by and refuses to give even the advice he so badly needs—confident that everything will be fine because she already has made arrangements that will keep things safe in spite of her husband's bungling. Indeed,
it is amusing to watch her play-acting the role of the dutiful, frivolous, irresponsible little woman in the last few minutes of the play. It is not difficult to suppose that Webster meant the contrast to favor not only Annie Hall but the woman of business in general.

Mrs. Hall's determination all along has been to earn enough money to purchase back the country estate which poor managers (males) had lost the family and which Mr. Hall dearly loves. Therefore, she sits blithely by as Mr. Hall writes a check for £10,000 to a swindler (whom she has investigated via a detective) because she already has withdrawn all the money in the bank to purchase back the beloved estate.

Frequent ploys in Victorian dramas which present capable business women are to let them make a fatal error which a man at length must resolve, to make them see for themselves that it is the man who has sole right to be the decision maker, and/or to cause the woman to be presented as a graceless, unattractive boor who henpecks her husband incessantly. None of these things is true of Annie Hall. In fact, Webster goes out of his way to make sure that she is seen as blameless in all respects: She makes no mistakes in judgment. She acknowledges that her husband is a man "who chose rather to be led than to lead." (p. 22) She is not even slightly tempted by the young man who plays her court. And she clearly is considered a beauty who dances with grace
and elegance.

As the play ends, Annie is definitely in charge. When Mr. Hall wonders why the swindler, Wylie, left so abruptly, Annie reveals his treachery and remarks that the two of them (Wylie and Hall) "would have made a capital illustration of the wolf and the lamb" had it not been for her. Mr. Hall readily concurs and remarks, "You are a wonderful woman, and a match for any wolf that ever wandered about a sheepfold."

(p. 38) Annie Hall has brought everything to its appropriate conclusion. Apparently contemporary audiences believed so, for A Woman of Business "was decidedly successful" according to the September 3, 1864 Athenaeum review. Benjamin Webster, both as actor/manager and as playwright, obviously knew his Adelphi audience.

Aurora Floyd; or, The Dark Deed in the Wood (April 21, 1863, Royal Britannia Theatre)

6 The Athenaeum, No. 1923, September 3, 1864, p. 315.

7 Aurora Floyd, by Colin Henry Hazlewood, was first presented on April 21, 1863 according to the Samuel French edition of the play. However, other versions of the novel by Miss Braddon obviously had appeared before that date since the March 21 edition of The Illustrated London News and the March 28 edition of The Athenaeum indicate that a second version written by Benjamin Webster was then appearing at the Adelphi. The March 21 edition of The Athenaeum also reviews a version by Mr. Cheltnam at the Princess which may have been the first dramatized version. The April 21 date, then, of the edition with which we are working, must refer only to the Hazlewood version of the popular theme. In discussing the play, we will refer to the reviews knowing that
**Aurora Floyd**, like *A Woman of Business*, presents a heroine who is competent in the business world and whose husband, moreover, is "not only fond, but proud of being hen-pecked by a wife who possesses the business habits in which he is deficient." The problems that Aurora gets into with regards to being ignorantly guilty of bigamy and thus the victim of blackmail, are not of great consequence to us here. What really matters is who Aurora Floyd is and how her world relates to her. Aurora is a strong-minded woman who (1) manages John's (her husband's) life for him. Example: John asks Aurora's advice on something and she responds, "If you like, John; you have my full permission." (2) bosses the servants around abruptly. Example: Wilson begins to make a suggestion to John, and Aurora interrupts, "Go and think in the servant's hall or the kitchen. We pay you to wait on us, not advise us." and (3) on one occasion they speak of somewhat different versions—but assuming that there would not have been great differences among them since they all are based on the same novel and since none of the major reviewers even took the time to write about the Hazlewood version (presumably the third). The reviews seem to indicate that the Webster version was quite similar to the Hazlewood version except that the Webster version fleshed out what the other two versions only related—and thus became very long.

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even whips a servant with her riding whip for having kicked her favorite dog when he got in his way. (This, by the way, was done on the stage in at least the Webster and the Hazlewood versions.)

Such behavior, as might be expected, nets Aurora a number of enemies. It is interesting to note, however, that her husband thinks nothing but good of her; only the villainous characters really attempt to pay her back for her behavior, and there is no indication that Aurora's actions are considered unacceptable by the playwright. Among Aurora's enemies is a villainess, Aurora's lady's companion, a woman who is in a reduced social position as a result of her father's mismanagement of his money, and who resents Aurora's proud spirit and, therefore, does all she can to implicate her in her first husband's murder. Other enemies include (1) Matt Harrison, a robber who blackmails Aurora over the fact that she once was married to a no-gooder, (2) James Conyers, Aurora's no-gooder first husband, who blackmails her for a large amount of money to keep his existence unknown, and (3) Steve Hargrave, a slow-witted poacher who kills Conyers in order to get the money and then attempts to frame Aurora for the crime.

When Aurora meets Conyers in order to pay him the blackmail money, it is clear that she has thought about killing him, for she mentions it twice. Later she is accused of his murder and even her devoted second husband
believes her guilty. The capable Aurora thus becomes a victim. In these circumstances she evidences more traditionally female behavior—fainting, crying, growing ill. But she still is the Aurora she always was, and therefore is capable of taking action; she does not wait to be arrested for murder but sets out on her own, fully determined to kill herself before she will be subjected to a murder charge. In her flight, she happens upon the real murderer, Steve Hargrave, about to stab her husband, John. And although Steve has been able to throw John to the ground, he is unable to rid himself of Aurora when she engages in physical combat with him. Aurora seizes his uplifted arm with the knife in it and drags him clear of John. It is only with superhuman effort that he finally gets free of her.

As the play ends, it is John who must ask forgiveness of Aurora, and Aurora, from her position of authority, says grandly to him,

Forgive! Ah, dear John, we have all, in this world, too much need of forgiveness to withhold it from the truly penitent.

Aurora Floyd most assuredly does not fit the image of the standard, ideal female for the period—despite the fact that she is just as clearly the heroine of this piece. To begin with, without her father's permission she has been married at a very young age to a man who has turned out to

11Ibid., p. 36.
be a criminal. A "crime" which has cost other heroines their lives. Furthermore, however ignorant she might have been of her first husband's continued existence, she has married again without informing her second husband of her past. Once again a "crime" of serious consequences. She has lied to her husband and to others in order to keep her secret. She has bossed her husband around. She has spoken harshly to servants, and even whipped them. She has physically assaulted a vicious murderer. Aurora Floyd is haughty, intelligent, courageous, and strong--none of which traits is ascribable to the ideal Victorian lady. Yet the play's popularity is unquestioned. If the simple fact that there were at least three different versions playing in London almost simultaneously were not enough evidence, the words of the critics certainly would settle the point. The Athenaeum reviewer for the Cheltnam version indicates that "the curtain fell to a great demonstration" and says that "the houses have since been well attended."\(^ {12}\) The only thing that seems to trouble this critic is that "Aurora is neither thoroughly good, nor thoroughly bad."\(^ {13}\) That, apparently, did not disturb the well-bred audience at the Princess's. Meanwhile, at the less elite Adelphi, "the

\(^ {12}\)The Athenaeum, No. 1847, March 21, 1863, p. 402.  
\(^ {13}\)Ibid., p. 401.
curtain fell to unanimous approbation.\textsuperscript{14} Webster's version was considered by both \textit{The Athenaeum} and \textit{The Illustrated London News} to be a fine example of the "colossal dramas known as Adelphi pieces, with the striking effects to which Adelphi audiences have long been accustomed."\textsuperscript{15} Apparently, the play had built up enough momentum so that a third version at the Royal Britannia could be supported also nearly a month after the Princess's opening night.

Both the Britannia and the Adelphi, of course, were well known for their spectacular melodramas, so it is not surprising that \textit{Aurora Floyd} would have prospered at those houses. The Princess, however, though Kean was no longer there, still was a somewhat more sedate house. One explanation as to how the same story line could have pleased all the audiences is that the Princess's version was somewhat tamer than the other two. Indeed, the \textit{Athenaeum} reviewer would seem to indicate that Webster's version, at least, actually shows certain things happening which the Cheltnam version perhaps only relates (For instance, the horsewhipping of the servant which appears in both the Webster and the Hazlewood adaptations.)\textsuperscript{16} Another explanation, though,

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{The Illustrated London News}, XLII, March 21, 1863, p. 299.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{The Athenaeum}, No. 1848, March 28, 1863, p. 432.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}
could be that the more refined Princess audience, having read *Aurora Floyd* in its original novel form, granted the play greater latitude because of their earlier adjustment to the incidents already so well known to them.

**Reversal Situations**

In addition to the fetching masculine women and the business women of the plays just discussed, we also have other plays in which women and men effectively reverse roles—even in terms of moral culpability and punishment. The plays we will discuss include *Good for Evil; or, A Wife's Trial*, *Agnes de Vere; or, The Wife's Revenge*, *The Sin and the Sorrow*, *Louise de Lignerolles*, and *Retribution*.

*Good for Evil; or, A Wife's Trial* (March 2, 1852, Surrey Theatre and November 30, 1859, Princess Theatre)

*Good for Evil* is the story of an almost profligate wife who is saved from falling only by the wisdom of her husband. We have here a reversal situation in that it is the man whose moral character saves his wife and in that he is so patient and forgiving—characteristics usually attributed to the ideal woman.

When Mr. Claremont discovers that his wife, Clara,

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17 The play was adapted from the French of Emile Augier and produced in England under various titles. It was first called *The Barrister* at the Surrey, later, *Home Truths* at the Princess.
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loves another man, he accepts the news calmly. Trusting her, he says,

I do not think my honor has been blemished. My wife may have love, but she has also virtue. I respect her for the struggle she has made, and hold her in my heart for a brave woman, who merits not so much my censure as my esteem. 18

As a matter of fact, it may be his own fault, he says, that Clara no longer loves him. So saying, Claremont decides that he will so overwhelm the guilty pair with his trust and friendship that they will be shamed into giving up their love affair. This he proceeds to do. He encourages their friendship; he allows them time alone together (though not much); he obtains an excellent secretaryship for Maitland, the man in question. At last, when Maitland admits that he cannot accept the generous offer because he plans to run away with another man's wife, Claremont pulls together all his fortitude and talks Dutch uncle to him—as if he had no idea who the married woman might be. He even suggests, in the end, that his wife complete the advice to Maitland since "women are more eloquent than men are," and leaves them alone together. Of course, neither of the guilty pair can complete their plans. Maitland leaves, and Clara falls at her husband's feet in repentance, admitting her part in the

18 Emile Augier, Good for Evil; or, A Wife's Trial (London: Samuel French, Publisher, n.d.), p. 15.
affair. Claremont, however, will not accept her abject posture. "Have I really the right to be thy stern and haughty judge?" he asks her. He, too, is guilty, he says; he took her for granted; he drifted away from her and failed to offer her the attention and the respect which would have held her true. Each, he says, needs pardon of the other. He is not being merciful as she suggests, but only just.

*Good for Evil* offers a picture of a much more equal relationship between husband and wife than the one seen in many of the plays mentioned in the chapter on the ideal woman, or, for that part, than even some of those dealt with in the chapter on women who pay less heavily for their moral sins than is considered customary. In Augier's play there is a real attempt to place the blame equally. What only has been hinted at in other plays is made amply apparent in *Good for Evil*. The model husband is set up as one who is long-suffering and forgiving, as one who is not quick to point the finger of blame at only his wife. At last, it is the man who is admonished to be the paragon of virtue so that his falling wife will mend her ways before it is too late. He is not to be a god stooping low to offer mercy, but a fellow creature reaching across from his own bonds of error to extend justice.

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19 Ibid., p. 23.
That Good for Evil was well accepted by the public can be assumed by the fact that it appeared at several different houses in London. Indeed, the Illustrated London News review of The Barrister suggests that the basic story had been dramatized often before that 1852 date. Additionally, the London Times reviewer for Home Truths indicates that the play was quite a success even then, in 1859, nearly eight years after its first appearance in England as The Barrister. "The applause," he writes, "was hearty and unanimous at the conclusion." Moreover, it is particularly significant at mid-century, when the puritanical elements of the middle class were beginning to make themselves felt with greater strength, that the same play was presented successfully at both the lower class Surrey and the middle and upper class Princess.

Agnes de Vere; or The Wife's Revenge (November 10, 1834, Adelphi Theatre)

Agnes de Vere, by John Baldwin Buckstone, was first performed at the Adelphi in 1834, was revived there in 1836, and once again nearly thirty years later in 1862. The

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20 The Illustrated London News, XX, March 6, 1852, p. 198.

21 The Times (London), December 1, 1859, p. 7.

22 Another name is Agnes de Vere; or, The Broken Heart.
script is very much within the Adelphi tradition, and it is no accident that the play was done there so frequently. Agnes de Vere, like so many other plays of the period, features a young woman who has disobeyed her father by marrying a man without parental permission—a man who, like James Conyers in Aurora Floyd, turns out to be a villain. Agnes, however, is not so fortunate as Aurora was, for, though she does not die as a direct result of her disobedience, and, indeed, has four happy years with her husband, she does at length die of a broken heart. Her disobedience is not of major interest here, however. What we wish to address ourselves to is the fact that Agnes commits acts which ordinarily are reserved for the villain or villainess. She shoots at and wounds her husband's lover, then poisons her husband and would have poisoned the wounded lover but for a fluke. Yet, despite all this, she is without doubt the heroine of the piece. Indeed, despite her crimes, it is her husband who is seen to be the villain.

When Agnes, the frail delicate heroine, first learns that her husband is having an affair with another woman, it seems impossible that she shortly will become a murderess. The only thing that lends a clue at all is the fact that her mother was an Italian whose passions, "like all Italians," were great. Reflecting on her anger, Agnes realizes for the first time that she may be capable of shedding blood. "I feel that I could now deal death without remorse—without
fear\textsuperscript{23} she tells herself. But she begs that her dead mother will not condemn her if she loses control, for, she says, it is her Italian blood which will be the cause of it all. (It is interesting that here, as in the chapter on the villainess, we see an attempt to escape the possibility of contemporary British women acting in such a way. Agnes and her actions are purposely distanced by the fatal Italian blood.)

Taking a clue from the love letter which has revealed her husband's indiscretion, Agnes appears at a masked ball disguised like her husband's lover in a pink domino and laurel. In the disguise, she hears from her husband's own lips that he merely respects her, while he loves the other woman. Having heard all this, she resolves to kill herself, and taking a loaded gun from the room in which she sits, she prepares to do so. Her actions are interrupted first by thoughts of her little girl, and then by her husband's return with the real lover. She hides, gun in hand, and when she sees the two of them about to kiss, she becomes so enraged that she shoots, wounding the woman. Immediately she flees the ball and returns home, only to be confronted the next day in her own house with the lover, whom the husband brings with him and introduces as his cousin. At this point

she is so angered that she has lost her senses. When her husband asks that she make them something to eat, her resentments mount even higher. She prepares hot chocolate laced with poison and calmly watches as her husband drinks it. The lover, who had had no idea that de Vere was a married man and is, therefore, innocent, is saved from death only in that she offers a drink from her cup to Agnes's small daughter, and Agnes dashes the cup from her hand. De Vere dies, and Agnes follows soon thereafter of a broken heart.

The major significance here, as we already have mentioned, is that Agnes is clearly the heroine despite her actions, and that her husband, primarily because of a moral sin, is condemned to die. We have no great evidence against de Vere; except that he gains money from gambling, his only crime is an illicit love affair. Thus we see once again a kind of reversal. Agnes does not die because of a more or less minor offense as her husband does. She has killed one person and twice attempted to kill another, yet she dies in comparative ease on stage with her child and her friends around her, and with the sympathy of the audience, of a broken heart. Indeed, she equates her death to that of her father who also died of a broken heart. The assumption seems to be that her death comes not so much because of her actions as because of the actions of others. Agnes's husband, to the contrary, dies a less pleasant death off stage,
of poison; he is given no sympathy. Neither his wife nor the woman he loved is with him. It is as if, for the sin of infidelity, he merited death more than she did for the crime of murder.

Despite what seems to be an unusual reversal situation, Agnes de Vere was accepted very well by its Adelphi audiences. The Athenaeum reviewer for the 1834 production indicated that he did not entirely approve of all the violence: "'Something too much of this,' we said; but the rest of the audience did not say so; and, to be candid, we do not believe they even thought so." The London Times reviewer wrote that "the house was crowded in all parts, and the piece was announced for repetition amidst loud and repeated acclamations of assent." Reviews for the 1862 production do not indicate how the audience responded, although The Athenaeum does say that Miss Avonia Jones would appear in the role of Agnes for several more nights. (It is, by the way, interesting to note that, according to The Athenaeum, by 1862 Agnes dies, not of a broken heart, but as a result of poison which she has drunk before giving it to her husband.)

\[24\] The Athenaeum, No. 368, November 15, 1834, p. 844.
\[25\] The Times (London), November 11, 1834, n.p.
\[26\] The Athenaeum, No. 1835, December 27, 1862, p. 851.
The Sin and the Sorrow (September 17, 1866, Grecian Theatre)

The Sin and the Sorrow which already has been discussed in the chapter on the woman who must choose between her role as a woman and her role as a human being, also has some significance as a play which displays a reversal of sexual roles. Harland, the reader will recall, is, or seems to be, guilty of bigamy. Much like Aurora Floyd, Harland becomes the victim of blackmailers. He, however, is somewhat more culpable in that, even though he is told (falsely) one hour before his marriage to Anita that his first wife still lives, he goes through with the ceremony. Much like women in parallel circumstances, Harland, nonetheless, has been sexually pure, for he had discovered on his wedding day that his first wife was really the mistress of another and had been married off to him in order to hide the indiscretion of the other man. He, therefore, had left his pregnant wife immediately and had never seen her again. Interestingly, it seems that his virginity is of nearly as great an importance to Anita as would be any woman's to her husband. Before she has heard that he never lived with his first wife, Anita says to herself, "I cannot but shudder when I remember that he has slumbered in another's arms—that another's lips have rained down kisses upon his own!" Harland's sexual innocence, and perhaps even naïveté, are emphasized further by the fact that he fell in love with and proposed to his first wife in a single, first interview. Harland, in fact, in
discussing the incident, refers to himself as a "simple un­
knowing man."27

When Harland returns to Anita, after having absented
himself for half a year, he reveals that the reason he went
was in order to get another copy of their marriage certifi­
cate so that he could restore her good name—despite the
fact that doing so would send him to prison as a bigamist.
Such a sacrificial act is nearly always the role of a woman,
and yet Harland adds further to the illusion by also saying
to Anita,

No, no, don't touch me. I am not worthy to be
touched by such as you....Let there be some­
thing between us--something that may remind me
that I may never again fling my arms around
your neck, or imprint a kiss on your brow.28

This exact speech could transfer easily into large numbers
of plays about women who have erred. Seldom is a man so
humbled. Harland even asks Anita not to look at him while
he confesses, and, as he draws near to the end of the con­
fession, he suddenly blurts out, in language still of a
female cast,

Don't look at me--don't look at me! Let not
those who were never tempted judge those who
once have sinned! I ask your prayer, though
I dare not accept your pardon.29

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27 Henry Leslie, The Sin and the Sorrow (London: Thomas
28 Ibid., p. 32.
29 Ibid., p. 34.
Of course, everything turns out fine for Harland and he is revealed to be an upstanding man who made only a single error. It is, though, interesting that it is of as much importance to him as it might have been to any woman to discover the date of his first wife's death. Once it has been established that she actually died three years before Harland and Anita married, he once more is seen to be an honorable man.

Louise de Lignerolles (1838, Adelphi Theatre)

Louise de Lignerolles presents another reversal situation in which the erstwhile man's conclusion is less desirable—because his character also is less pure. Indeed, he, like many an erring heroine, must die—while his female partner in adultery goes mad. The play was adapted from the French by a woman novelist, Miss Pardoe, and has, interestingly, a subtitle calling it "A Lesson for Husbands." Since the play came out in 1838, only three or four years after Isabelle; or, A Woman's Life (See p. 73.) in which a lesson is given to the wives at the conclusion of the piece—suggesting that they be forebearing and patient, however erring their husbands may be, we might suppose that such a play (and there were others like it) might have provided an impetus for Miss Pardoe to adapt a play on infidelity as a lesson for husbands.
When Louise de Lignerolles came out in 1838 at, predictably, the Adelphi, the London Times said that it met with "great and deserved success." The Spectator review of a revival in 1853, however, suggests that "shortly after its first production at the Francais, fifteen years ago [1838], it suffered an euthanasia." This, of course, could be merely a comment on the differences in productions or in the audiences at the Francais and the Adelphi. The critic for The Athenaeum points in the direction of the audiences when he writes, "The subject is revolting...'the lesson for the husbands,' professedly to be inculcated, is of a very questionable kind; but the Adelphi audiences are not fastidious." Despite the sentiments of the Spectator reviewer, however, that "it was not worth the trouble of resuscitation," someone apparently wanted to see the play, for it was produced at the Adelphi and at the Francais in 1838, at the Francais again in 1852 and again the following year, in which the review was written.

The story of Louise de Lignerolles is that of a double adultery--but with a new twist. In contrast to most plays of the period on adultery, it is the man who must die in the

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30 The Times (London), November 6, 1838, p. 5.
end. Furthermore, it is clear that he is not an out and out villain. His death is the direct result of his moral indiscretion. As he dies of wounds inflicted in a duel he goaded the wronged husband into fighting, Henry de Lignerolles says to his equally wronged wife, in tones quite similar to contemporary female expressions of regret, "Oh, Louise, pardon me; it was the only expiation I could offer you--my life. Do not curse me when--my child--my poor Cecile--"

Briefly, the story of Louise de Lignerolles is this: Louise and her husband, Henri, have been happily married for more than six years when Henri meets and falls in love with a beautiful countess and ex-salon singer who lives very near their estate. Louise accidentally learns of their affair and confronts them with her evidence. At first Henri is angry and defies her, but at last both he and the countess repent before her humane treatment and vow never to see each other again. For ten months they keep their vow; then by chance they meet and resume their affair. Henri, torn by remorse, is just on the point of breaking it off again when the count discovers the guilty secret, and the adulterer is pushed into hiding Countess Cecile in his chateau. Count De Givry comes to the chateau with soldiers to search the premises, but Louise helps the countess to escape in order

Prosper Denaux and Ernest Legouve, Louise de Lignerolles (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.), p. 33. Further references are noted in the text.
to save her husband's honor. The count then decides to take
the matter to court and have Henri jailed. He refuses, he
says, to fight with Henri; that would be granting him and
the countess an honor they do not deserve. At last, how­
ever, when he learns that his guilty wife has gone mad, he
agrees to the duel in which Henri is killed.

Louise de Lignerolles is very much the ideal heroine,
and yet there are ways in which she varies from that usual
image. Though she is as patient, longsuffering, and pure as
any heroine, she is made of stronger stuff than most. In­
deed, some of her virtues are of a stereotypically masculine
nature. For example, Louise has qualities of leadership.
When, early in the play before any other grievances are
brought to light, she learns that her neighbor, the Prince,
is attempting to cut through her land in pursuit of a stag,
she firmly denies access and orders her servants to seize as
many of the hunting dogs as they can, and to block the road
in order to stop the hunting party. "What a woman!" (p. 5)
exclaims one of the frustrated hunters. When the prince,
pretending to be a mere representative of himself, appears
before her and asks for a treaty, Louise answers, "Ah! then
we are treating--power with power--very well." (p. 6) She
then proceeds to name two demands which the prince must
fulfill and, when he demurs, she reasons with him so well
that he at last consents. Henri and Lagrange, Louise's
father, are proud of her deeds. Henri calls her his "fair
warrior" and says, reminiscent of many female voices, "Oh! my heart is full! How proud I am of being your husband!" (p. 7)

Louise also shows her strength in the way in which she handles her knowledge of the adulterous affair. Instead of fainting and pining away, she confronts the situation with courage and with humanity. She protects the guilty pair from disclosure, then arranges to meet them at their chosen rendezvous where she convincingly pleads her own case until both repent. Though Henri at first attempts to bully her into subjection by accusing her of setting a snare at her own mother's grave and thereby profaning the place ("Let the shame lie with you!" (p. 18) he says.), Louise is stronger than that, and her righteous anger prevails. Louise is clearly the leader.

Even while Louise is dutifully preserving her husband's honor by allowing the countess to escape her irate husband, she is showing her strength; a weaker woman would not have been capable of so efficiently handling the incident. Lagrange, knowing what she has done, says that there should be some consolation in the fact that he, at least, knows that she did not shrink before her terrible duty. "Louise," he says, "you have acted rightly, and I am proud to be your father." (p. 27)

Louise, furthermore, decides to leave Henri, despite the law, despite the popularly accepted notion that she
always must remain with him, despite his threats to take their child. She tells Henri that he has lost his right to command her. She does not believe him anymore. She will not listen, but will brave his orders.

Henri de Lignerolles, for his part, has a character as weak as Louise's is strong. Both times that Louise catches him in adultery he attempts to bully her out of her position of rightness before he finally admits that he is in the wrong. The mere fact that he can ask her to help his lover escape and then, without any overt evidence that she has done so, proceed through the house with the woman's husband to show that she is not there, indicates something about his sense of Louise's inner strength and his own reliance on her to solve the problems he has created.

That the male lover ought to be the one to suffer most severely from the crime, for a change, is evident both in the "lesson for the husbands" expressed by De Givry and in Louise's passionate statement to Henri. De Givry is quite determined to put Henri in prison. "Husbands," he tells Henri, "have been objects of ridicule long enough;"

it is the turn of the gentlemen, the lovers! It is at length, the task of a man of spirit, to chastise and disgrace you. A process! mark me, a process which will unpoetise your amours; the question is only "to bell the cat," well, I will tie on the bell--others will follow me. (p. 24)

And Louise, when pushed to it, at last tells Henri,
instead of my idol, what have I found? one of those vulgar men who justify their disorders by saying: "I am thus"--and by seeking excuses for their faults in the maxims of a corrupt and base world. (Henri starts.) Yes, base!

Then, as De Givry has defended the deceived husband, Louise defends the deceived wife, and talks of the double standard which would not allow her the freedom he chooses to take.

If an unfortunate woman, from weakness, from despair sometimes, yields to a culpable passion--shame and just contempt pursue her; but if a husband introduce his mistress to his own house, if his violation of his marriage vow, brings the very officers of justice beneath the conjugal roof--that is nothing! If his wife--his honest wife--feels herself profaned in her whole being, it is nothing!--our soul is crushed, our heart bleeds, but we are wives--we suffer, we die, and it is nothing! (p. 29)

Before we move on to another play, a word must be said of Cecile, Henri's partner in adultery. Interestingly, her fate is not the focus of the play's conclusion. In fact, far from it, she has disappeared from the scene six pages before the play concludes. We learn of her only indirectly, and then she is named as a victim alongside Louise. Henri is clearly the guilty party; he is the one who must suffer. He is the one who must die. As the play ends, he lies fatally wounded at the feet of Louise--humbled in much the same manner as so many similarly guilty women in other plays of the period. Henri dies not because he is villainous in any respect, but simply because he has been weak enough to commit a moral indiscretion.
Retribution (May 12, 1856, Olympic Theatre)\textsuperscript{35}

Retribution again tells the tale of adultery, and once again it is the guilty man who must die. The play did not receive universal plaudits. The Examiner said that it had "to a certain extent only [been] thankfully received," but, nevertheless, predicted that because of the good acting it would have a successful run.\textsuperscript{36} The London Times referred to the play as having a "somewhat remarkable character" and then proceeded to discuss the equivocal audience response. In spite of the fact that at the end of the third act the male and female leads were called before the curtain, when the play ended, there were, amid the applause, "several sounds of disapprobation." Nonetheless, the piece was announced for repetition, and the author called for by the audience. The Times reviewer speculates that either certain members of the audience were unhappy because the duel in the last act looked too much like the one in the Corsican Brothers or else because "when the excitement of the third act passed away, the more fastidious among the audience began to feel uneasy in the very peculiar atmosphere that

\textsuperscript{35}The story for Retribution comes from a French novel by M. Charles de Bernard and was dramatized, one source says, by Tom Taylor, another source claims by so many people that some called it contribution. The Examiner, No. 2520, May 17, 1856, p. 310.

\textsuperscript{36}The Examiner, No. 2520, May 17, 1856, p. 310.
enveloped the whole affair." The general sentiment in all the reviews is that the play's success relied more on its excellent production than on the moral tone of the script itself. (We have discussed before the fact that Victorian audiences apparently could ignore the moral character of a play so long as the production of the script was exciting enough.)

Not only do we have an immoral male who pays for his sins with his life in Retribution, but we also see an ideal woman (his wife) who, except for the conscience of the man who had planned to seduce her, would have fallen.

A couple of years before the play begins, Oscar de Beaupre had had an affair with a married woman who had died of a broken heart when she heard he had married. Her husband, Rudolph de Mornac, vows to pay him back in kind, and so, in disguise as the Italian Count Priuli, he becomes de Beaupre's friend and confident—all the while planning to seduce his wife behind his back, then laugh at and eventually kill him. It is not difficult for Priuli to amass evidence as to de Beaupre's unfaithfulness in order to more swiftly send Clarisse de Beaupre running into his arms, for that gentleman is not silent about his amours with married women. Clarisse resists Priuli's attentions valiantly, but

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37 The Times (London), May 14, 1856, p. 12.
finally one night when he is in her boudoir to give her additional proofs of her husband's infidelity, she relents. Her unfaithful husband has just marched out of the house—pretending to leave her for good for the insult she has given him in mentioning his illicit passions. Alone with Priuli, Clarisse finds herself irresistibly drawn to him. When he begs for the miniature of her that her husband has just returned, she gives it to him—though not without some worry as to her reputation. And, though she one minute commands him to leave, the next instant "she holds out her arms to him" and says simply, "My fate--my life are in your hands!"\textsuperscript{38} Priuli, too, buttresses the notion that, but for his own weakness, Clarisse would have fallen. When it really comes down to it, Priuli cannot treat Clarisse as Oscar de Beaupre has treated Priuli's late wife. (Clarisse, then, nearly belongs in the chapter which discusses women who have committed a moral sin but who are forgiven. It is not her "fault" that the sin did not actually occur. To Priuli must go the credit for that.)

The main theme of the play, however, is the fact that Oscar de Beaupre must pay for his immoral acts with his life and the fact that, once again, we have a disgruntled husband who believes that a duel is not adequate punishment for the

crime. De Beaupre is decidedly more villainous than is Henri de Lignerolles, but even he has moments of comparative goodness—as in his vain attempts to avoid a duel with Priuli's younger brother and in his efforts to help the young man in his last moments of life.

There is a sense in which the playwright undermines Priuli's vengeance. At the end of the play, as de Beaupre and Victor de Mornac (Priuli's brother) lie dead, Count Priuli takes the blame upon his own head, and says that this retribution he has usurped from heaven. Punishment, indeed, should have come to de Beaupre, but not from his hands. Despite this disavowal of a right to revenge on the part of Priuli, the fact remains evident that de Beaupre did, indeed, deserve his punishment, and, by whatever hand, he has died because of his sins against morality. De Beaupre is, after all, ultimately responsible (1) for his wife's misery, (2) for Priuli's agony and his change from a carefree happy fellow to a dark, taciturn man who uses opium, (3) for Priuli's wife's death, (4) for Victor de Mornac's death, and (5) for the fall of at least one other woman (a Madame Morisset). All of these catastrophes have come about because of de Beaupre's unbridled passion, however. Therefore, we indeed see an example of a reversal situation in which, once again, the man (like so many otherwise ideal women) must suffer death because of a sexual sin. The double standard of sexual morality shows signs of being eroded,
for, although the role of the fallen one who must suffer still persists, it sometimes is played by a flawed male rather than always by a woman.

As for the woman of the period, we begin to see in this chapter that though the ideal heroine of the Victorian era may have fainted and been ineffectual, may have suffered beyond her just due for small flaws in her character, yet co-existing with her was also the strong woman who often exhibited even greater intelligence and courage and strength than the men who surrounded her. Though the stereotype of the weak fainting heroine is most frequently the case, it is not the only image which Victorian dramatic literature offered--nor the only image which Victorian audiences applauded. Indeed, it is significant to note that even when the stereotype of the ideal but fallen creature or the warm-hearted, though less intellectually endowed character appears on the Victorian stage, that that role is not necessarily filled by a woman. Victorian audiences, it would seem, enjoyed variety not only in the sensation scenes they flocked to the theatre to see but occasionally also in the sex of the characters who portrayed the stereotyped roles of the contemporary drama.
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

In this study I have shown a number of examples of women elevated to the role of heroine who, even in the "prudish" Victorian era, diverged from the commonly accepted ideal of womankind. As a way of buttressing the probability of divergent female characters, perhaps even more frequent and more divergent than our present study would indicate, I have attempted to show a varied and even amoral audience to which the presentation of a female more real than ideal would not have posed a threat. I even have suggested that the drama, as well as the novel, may have prepared the seed-bed out of which the emancipated heroines of the late nineteenth century issued. And though I have not pretended that mid-Victorian drama was dealing with substantive issues in a serious way, I have noted that perhaps like the "new girl" who has been credited with doing more than the suffragette to gain woman the vote, the non-thought-provoking theatre did at least as much in its own "taking" way as did the more didactic novel to promote the independent woman.
Chapter IV presents women who, pushed to the wall, choose to behave in ways not generally acceptable for the ideal woman. These women, more than the other divergent heroines, represent the ideal. We have no doubt but that they have been and will return to being totally circumspect Victorian women except for this one moment of obligatory divergence. Their significance lies in the fact that, however narrow the Victorian era may have been, numerous such heroines, as in any period, respond to dilemmas by rightly choosing the long-range human value rather than any artificially imposed cultural standard. And, indeed, in a way the Victorian drama may be more "human" in this way than even the Restoration drama in that, while a Victorian heroine may make such a choice against cultural standards and still remain an admirable figure, the Restoration heroine who makes a similar distinction between culturally imposed values and human values is more likely to be labeled a bumpkin—or certainly to lose her status as a first order wit. What an irony that the bawdy Restoration drama should, in fact, be more limiting to behavior which grows out of the human spirit than even the so-called rigid drama of the Victorian era.

Chapter V has special importance in that it presents women who, in committing sexual sins, have transgressed the ethical codes of the period in a way which didactic literature and much fiction would suggest never could be forgiven,
but who, nonetheless, suffer less severely than the norm and ultimately are exonerated. Mrs. Hannah More notwithstanding, these fallen heroines return to respectability in this life. They do not have to wait for death to translate them into saints as with the fallen ideals of Chapter III, Adeline and Nelly. Indeed, by 1873, one who had fallen to the lowest estate, Mercy Merrick, not only was forgiven and returned to respectability, but apparently received the smile of God in that she was offered the hand of one of His chosen ministers in marriage.

The patently evil women of Chapter VI with one exception, Sarah the Creole, all die for their sins. Their sins, however, are grievous ones—extending even to crimes which would have been punishable by the law as well as by the Hannah Mores of the period. Furthermore, although they meet their just punishment in the end like their male counterparts, these villainesses all are granted ultimate forgiveness. They all maintain the central position in the plays usually granted to the heroine, and frequently extenuating circumstances, like Jane Lomax's concern for her son, Catherine Howard's naivété, Lady Audley's predisposition to madness, and Sarah's vengeance for the death of her supposed father are offered to make the criminals seem more worthy of being central characters. Granted, their significance is somewhat muted by the fact that they all are distanced from the current British woman by being modeled after (1) a
famous Shakespearean character, Lady Macbeth (Jane Lomax), (2) an historical figure (Catherine Howard), (3) a character from an already popular novel (Lady Audley), and (4) a woman with the blood of a foreigner (Sarah the Creole), but, nonetheless, they are presented successfully to British audiences.

The woman who exhibits distinctly masculine traits—sometimes in contrast to the male who plays the usual female role (as seen in Chapter VII) gains much of her significance from the fact that while such women usually are assumed to get their comeuppance eventually, our strong women, on the contrary, appear to possess their greater freedom, power, and intelligence by right. In this chapter we even see men who, for sexual misbehavior, must suffer the fate which usually is reserved for fallen women. This is, of course, a genuine blow (however conscious or unconscious) at the prevailing double standard.

There is no question as to the fact that even such divergent women as I have presented in this paper often are guarded from total emancipation by their voluntary return to the ideal model, by such distancing devices as those mentioned above, by the eventuality that the persons they supposedly murdered turn out not to be really dead or the bigamy they thought they had committed is disproved. These divergent heroines, however, still present a total picture of greater breadth than customarily has been supposed. They
indicate a need for further study into the role of women in Victorian dramatic literature. There is, of course, still plenty of work to be done with plays produced at established theatres of the day, but it will be interesting also to see what can be unearthed at the non-sanctioned lower class theatres. Doubtless, still other examples of perhaps more divergent heroines will appear when the dramatic literature of contemporary radical theatres is carefully scrutinized. In saying this, I do not suggest that the Chartists of mid-Victorian days were avowed feminists set on making comments about the need for female emancipation (although some measure of that is possible), but rather I assume that greater freedom of thought might have resulted in inadvertent reflections of a life closer to the reality with which such generally lower class people then lived—including a more accurate picture of the real British woman. Clues as to the possibility of still greater divergence from the traditional model of Victorian dramatic womanhood appear in a quick overview of Allardyce Nicoll's handlist of plays for the period. Titles of plays especially from outlying theatres and by anonymous authors indicate exciting possibilities for the avid researcher. Contemporary newspaper reviews also point to additional plays with heroines cast in molds of their own making.

No period is ever truly monochromatic. Without proper research, we must no more assume Victorian dramatic heroines
to be of a single disposition merely because a particular ideal so frequently is laid before our sight than we should in the past have assumed that all theatre necessarily disappeared during the mysterious dark ages simply because so many rules prohibiting drama grew out of the contemporary church. Whenever later generations see a large thumb pressed firmly over any part of the theatre, they must learn to look for the inevitable overflow. If this present study has accomplished anything, I hope that it has moved the thumb far enough to encourage a closer look.
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