

"IMBUED WITH THE SCIENCE OF VENUS":
FEMALE FALLENNESS, SEXUAL PEDAGOGY,
AND VICTORIAN PORNOGRAPHY

BY

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For my amazing parents, James and Carol, who raised me on HBO, unhidden *Playboy* magazines, dirty jokes, honesty, and lots of love.

And for my husband, Greg, who loves me all the more precisely because of how I was raised.

ABSTRACT

As a decidedly heterogeneous genre, Victorian pornography offers a wide range of sexual narratives, including those that directly challenge both real and fictional narrative constructions of female fallenness by foregrounding female sexual education and contraception practice. However, Victorian pornography is far too often reduced to an analysis of male-driven, fetish-driven, or fantasy-driven narratives. Fastening pornography to the fantasy realm of the imaginary removes the ability to critically read variation within the genre for the real-life cultural work the explicitly tangible directives do, especially regarding the “problems of sex” as they connect to protective female sexual pedagogy as a route to avoid a sexual and social fall. As a reader, critic, and scholar of Victorian pornography, I contend that within the expansive narrative boundaries of the genre there exists a direct challenge to female fallenness, an active, purposeful “writing back” to a restrictive, sadistic narrative of scandalous pregnancy and public shame.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Imbued with the science of Venus”:
Female Fallenness, Sexual Pedagogy, and Victorian Pornography

Chapter One:

I.	Fallen Women and the Reproductive Juggernaut: Jane Austen’s <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> and the Two Elizas	8
II.	Thickening Our Sense of Female Fallenness: Omissions and Oversights in Fallen Women and Victorian Sexual Scholarship	21
III.	“Imbued with the science of Venus”: A Pornographic Imagining of Eliza the Third	52
IV.	Challenging “historical ventriloquism”: The Secret Life of the Sexually Savvy Female in Victorian Pornography	69
V.	Not What It Is But What It Does: The Cultural Work of Victorian Pornography	76

Chapter Two:

I.	“What consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure”: Victorian Sexual Discourses and Oscar Wilde’s Good Woman	84
II.	“Keep her in a lofty and pure element of thought”: Policing Women’s Reading	102
III.	Every Woman’s Book: Mrs. Edith Sperling vs. Richard Carlile	111
IV.	“What a mass of misery would be prevented by my proposal”: Neo-Malthusianism and the Legacy of Francis Place, Richard Carlile, Robert Dale Owen, and Charles Knowlton	138
V.	“It means ruin to you as a lady”: Annie Besant, Obscenity, and the Fight for Reproductive Rights	150

VI.	<i>“An édition de luxe of a wicked French novel, meant specially for the English market”</i> : The Traffic in Victorian Pornography	169
Chapter Three:		
I.	<i>Love and Safety</i> : Learning, Teaching, and Ecstasy	194
II.	<i>“Please, hand this list to some one who may use it”</i> : Discovering the Intertextual Rhetoric of Sexual Pedagogy in Victorian Pornography	210
III.	Gallery of Images: Catalogues of Victorian Pornography, Pornographic Photographs, and Contraception	234
IV.	<i>“Plainly, she was a reprobate of experience”</i> : Female Sexual Deviants in Victorian Literature and Culture	290
V.	<i>“More sinned against than sinning”</i> : Female Fallenness in <i>Ruth</i> , <i>Tess of the d’Urbervilles</i> , and <i>Esther Waters</i>	313
VI.	<i>“By and by she was initiated into all safe love-practise”</i> : Protective Sexual Pedagogy Victorian Pornography	342
	Works Cited	352
	Works Consulted: Primary Sources	362
	Works Consulted: Secondary Sources	371

Heav'n from all Creatures hides the Book of Fate,
All but the Page prescrib'd, the present State:
From Boys what Girls, from Girls what Women know,
Or who cou'd suffer being here below?
Thy Lust the Virgin dooms to bleed To-day;
Had she thy Reason would she laugh and play?
Pleas'd to the last, she likes the luscious Food,
And grasps the Prick just rais'd to shed her Blood.
Oh Blindness to the Future! kindly given,
That each may enjoy what Fucks are mark'd by Heav'n,
Who sees with equal Eye, as God of all,
The Man just mounting, and the Virgin's Fall;
Prick, Cunt and Ballocks in Convulsions hurl'd,
And now a Hymen burst, and now a World.

—from *An Essay on Woman*,
John Wilkes' and Thomas Potter's
1763 pornographic parody of
Alexander Pope's 1733-34
An Essay on Man

Fallen Women and the Reproductive Juggernaut:
Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* and the Two Elizas

In Jane Austen's 1811 novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon is called away from Barton Park by a letter, the contents of which he keeps private and vaguely but insistently passes off as related to pressing, urgent business in town. Judging by his frequent "colouring" (48) in reaction to both the letter and Mrs. Jennings' persistent questioning, Colonel Brandon is hiding something, and readers come to learn of his supposed illegitimate daughter, Miss Williams. Though Colonel Brandon will not confirm this, Mrs. Jennings rightly guesses the letter pertains to this young woman. When Marianne asks who this Miss Williams is, Mrs. Jennings—the novel's resident gossip and match-maker—replies: "What! do not you know who Miss Williams is? I am sure you must have heard of her before. She is a relation of the Colonel's, my dear; a very near relation. We will not say how near, for fear of shocking the young ladies," and, after lowering her voice, continues to Elinor, "She is his natural daughter" (50). "Natural," of course, meaning illegitimate, as Mrs. Jennings further refers to Miss Williams as Colonel Brandon's born-out-of-wedlock "love-child" (139).

Colonel Brandon's risqué back story provides some mystery for a seemingly inconsequential male figure described initially by Marianne and Margaret as "an absolute old bachelor... on the wrong side of five and thirty" (28). Indeed, John Willoughby describes Brandon as "just the kind of man... whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to" (39). Yet, this "silent and

grave" (27) man not only harbors quietly and patiently a true love for the ebullient Marianne, but he also knows intimately the scandalous, layered truth regarding Miss Williams, and, by proxy, John Willoughby. It is Colonel Brandon's measured revelation of this truth to Elinor that aids the necessary dissolving of Marianne's ardent feelings for her "perfect" soul-mate in taste and sensibility, John Willoughby, for Willoughby has seduced the young Eliza Williams and left her—without notice or forwarding address—pregnant with his child (148). The letter that calls Colonel Brandon suddenly away from Barton Park is from Eliza, alerting him—after an eight month absence—of her situation: seduced, pregnant, abandoned, and fallen.

This single fallen woman story line alone would have served the necessary narrative function in the novel. John Willoughby—as the bad suitor—needs to be exposed for what he really is: a cad. Marianne—too trusting and feeling—needs to see the truth of Willoughby's character beyond his ideal, but phony, performance. Additionally, Colonel Brandon—the good suitor and genuine gentleman—needs to be the bearer of protective news to cast him in a much more favorable light, especially considering Marianne's rigid view of him as a rheumatic old man instead of as a potential husband. However, the story of Willoughby and Eliza does not answer the question of whether or not Eliza is the child of Colonel Brandon, and though this rumor does not significantly affect his reputation (see Willoughby's earlier comment), it is a rumor that begs confirmation or denial. As such, his conversation with Elinor must extend beyond the story of "little Eliza" (147), and explain, in detail, the sad and sordid story of her conception. As Elinor finds out, Mrs. Jennings is

wrong about Miss Eliza Williams' paternity. Though Colonel Brandon's ties to Eliza's mother trace all the way back to his boyhood, Eliza is not his natural daughter.

Early in the novel, Colonel Brandon discusses Marianne's temperament with Elinor. He cautions:

"This," said he, "cannot hold; but a change, a total change of sentiments—No, no, do not desire it,—for when the romantic refinements of a young mind are obliged to give way, how frequently are they succeeded by such opinions as are but too common, and too dangerous! I speak from experience. I once knew a lady who in temper and mind greatly resembled your sister, who thought and judged like her, but who from an inforced [sic] change—from a series of unfortunate circumstances"—Here he stopped suddenly; appeared to think that he had said too much, and by his countenance gave rise to conjectures, which might not otherwise have entered Elinor's head. (43)

During his confessional tell-all to Elinor later in the novel, Brandon now has reason to divulge the details of this "series of unfortunate circumstances," and reveals that this woman who bore resemblance to Marianne was a wealthy young orphan named Eliza who came under the guardianship of Colonel Brandon's father when Brandon was a small boy. Brandon grew up alongside Eliza, loved her fervently, and they planned to run off to Scotland to marry. Unfortunately, their plans were thwarted, and, at Brandon's father's forceful behest and "'against [Eliza's] inclination'" (145), she was married off to

Brandon's older brother who did not love her and repeatedly treated her "unkindly" (146). This unkind treatment leads her to stray into the arms of a cad who impregnates her and leaves her with a child to raise on her own. Because of her adultery, the resulting divorce from Brandon's brother left her without sufficient funds, and what little she did have was "made over ... to another person" (147). When Colonel Brandon finds her after his return from a military tour in the East Indies, Eliza is in a debtor's house and is a mere shadow of her former vibrant self. As Brandon tells Elinor:

"So altered—so faded—worn down by acute suffering of every kind! hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before me, to be the remains of the lovely, blooming, healthful girl, on whom I had once doted." (147)

Eliza dies of consumption shortly after Brandon finds her, and thus, he is left to care for the "little Eliza" who is "the offspring of [the elder Eliza's] first guilty connection" (147). Colonel Brandon places little Eliza at school and then in a respectable home for young ladies, and all is well until Eliza goes on holiday to Bath with a friend. Apparently not well attended by adults and maybe too influenced by this impetuous friend, Eliza becomes acquainted with Willoughby, disappears for eight months, and contacts Brandon after she has been abandoned and is "near her delivery" (150). Considering Willoughby's "dishonorable usage" (149) of Eliza, both Elinor and Colonel Brandon believe Marianne could have been Willoughby's next conquest, and they feel certain that this news, albeit painful, will rightly shatter Marianne's affections for such a false and disreputable man. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the story of the two Elizas

serves as a double cautionary tale designed to rein in impulsive female behavior and condemn female devotion too easily given. Hence, Marianne will avoid behaving like that young woman Colonel Brandon once knew, and she will escape the downward spiral of the fallen woman. Marianne indeed avoids the dangerous path that could have been hers, and Colonel Brandon eventually wins her affection, love, and hand in marriage.

However effective this story is, there is more to be said regarding this double cautionary tale beyond its basic function in the novel. Scholars Mary Poovey and Claudia L. Johnson offer key critical insights regarding the two Elizas and their specific function in *Sense and Sensibility*. Poovey, in "Ideological Contradictions and the Consolations of Form," posits:

So careful is Austen to keep the reader on the outside of such "dangerous" material that she embeds the most passionate episodes within other, less emotionally volatile stories.... By embedding these stories in this way, Austen seeks to defuse their imaginative affect and increase their power to educate the reader: from the fates of the two Elizas we learn to be wary of Marianne's quick feelings, and from the consequences of Marianne's self-indulgent passion we learn to value Elinor's reserve. (187)

Poovey also claims Austen intentionally filters these stories of "illicit passion" through characters (like Elinor and Colonel Brandon) "whose judgment generally masters emotion" (188). Similarly, Johnson, in "*Sense and Sensibility: Opinions Too Common and Too Dangerous*," explains: "as if to defuse the sensitivity of the subject matter, Austen distances herself from the story of the

two Elizas by tucking it safely within the center of [the novel] and delegating its narration to the safe Colonel Brandon" (345). While Johnson also states "one Eliza would have sufficed as far as the immediate narrative purpose is concerned," she perceptively acknowledges that "the presence of two unfortunate heroines points to crimes beyond Willoughby's doing, and their common name opens the sinister possibility that plights such as theirs proliferate throughout the kingdom" (347). Though Johnson acknowledges the repetition of these kinds of stories, she also claims that "the most striking thing about the tales of the two Elizas is their insistent redundancy" (347). I agree that "insistent" fits, but each story, though clearly a repetition of similar events, is hardly redundant, as one *begets* the next. Redundancy suggests an unnecessary repetition, one that could be removed without consequence to meaning. Both Elizas are essential to the narrative—in particular to fully understanding Colonel Brandon's motivations and reputation—, and both women's stories *procreate* and *reproduce*, thereby continuing the lineage of fallen women narratives and the fallen woman genre in fiction. This is not dead, useless repetition; it is narrative reproduction, both literally and figuratively.

As Johnson points out, "the age of seventeen is the turning point for unprotected females" in the cases of both Elizas and Marianne (345). The first Eliza is forced into marriage at the age of seventeen. The second Eliza runs off with Willoughby at seventeen. And Marianne is romanced by Willoughby at age seventeen as well. Again, rather than redundant details, this similarity seems more about reproduction than unnecessary repetition. The first Eliza's age, gender, orphan status, and money all work against her in terms of female

agency. Though Eliza wants to run off and marry Brandon, the family patriarch has other plans that suit his monetary needs, as Eliza's "fortune was large, and [his] family estate much encumbered" (145). A murky quality enters the narrative at this point. Colonel Brandon apologizes to Elinor, explaining that he's "a very awkward narrator" (145), but even in his awkwardness he exercises knowing restraint when it comes to the apparently unsavory details of this forced marriage. Brandon merely says that Eliza "experienced great unkindness" (145) at the hands of his brother, that his brother's "pleasures were not what they ought to have been, and that from the first he treated her unkindly" (146).

What is meant by "unkindness" or "pleasures" here is unclear, and Johnson aptly observes that "miseries of an evidently unspeakable sort follow [Eliza] in her married life. Brandon is too gentlemanly to detail his brother's depravities to a young lady like Elinor" (345-46). These pleasures could be excessive drink, "deviant" or abusive sexuality, physical or emotional cruelty, or possibly all of the previous. One thing to note, however, is that whatever the unkind pleasures were, they did not result in Eliza's pregnancy. If he was treating her badly sexually, in keeping with the fallen woman narrative, Eliza's pregnancy would not signal scandal if she were carrying her husband's baby. In order to effect the scandal, she must be led astray—and be subsequently left pregnant—by another man. Colonel Brandon elegantly works to excuse Eliza's wandering away from this brutal situation, for he questions (146): "But can we wonder that with such a husband to provoke inconstancy, and without a friend to advise or restrain her... she should fall?" Based on her situation, Eliza is ripe

for the fall, and Brandon knows it. And, recalling Poovey's assessment of Austen's tactics, the educated readers know it too, for the story is supposed to telegraph the warning to both readers and key characters (i.e., Marianne), even without exposing all the perverse "unkind" details.

That the story does not end with the first Eliza's death, however, is telling. Even the wholly honorable Brandon, who provides comfort and care to the ruined Eliza and is "'with her in her last dying moments'" (147), cannot prevent the insistent, reproductive juggernaut of the fallen woman narrative. His efforts to raise the younger Eliza—providing good schooling, respectable housing and care, frequent visits—fail when she falls like her mother. As Brandon explains, Willoughby "'had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, no friends, ignorant of his address! He had left her promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her'" (148). Further, Brandon laments (150), "'such... has been the the unhappy resemblance between the fate of mother and daughter! and so imperfectly have I discharged my trust!'" In a final murky detail, all Brandon says is that he has "'removed her and her child into the country, and there she remains'" (150). He does not allude to the sex nor name of the child, but I wonder if "Eliza the third" waits out there in the country for her seventeenth year and her (inevitable?) fall to be of narrative use to the next "safe" narrator who will tactfully lay semi-bare her woeful tale as ideological watchdog and warning.

For if the third Eliza did exist, chances are, based on the reproduction of this fallen woman narrative in Austen's novel, a "safe" or other (possibly biased)

speaker would narrate her story, as neither Eliza speaks for herself. As Poovey and Johnson both note, Austen places the illicit stories in the narrative hands of appropriately reserved and measured characters. Even Marianne comes to know the most troubling information through indirect filters. Colonel Brandon tells Elinor the two-Elizas-plus-Willoughby story, and Elinor in turn tells Marianne, but readers do not witness the latter conversation. Similarly, Willoughby tells Elinor his (biased) version of the younger-Eliza-plus-himself story, and Elinor, again, tells Marianne, but readers do not see Elinor's delivery of Willoughby's "explanation" to Marianne. Readers, apparently, need not be privy to the delivery of this information to the person who requires the most direct telling; even well-informed readers are protected from too-direct wounds to Marianne.

Colonel Brandon, though the subject of some relatively genial snickering regarding his illegitimate daughter, does not suffer severe (or any?) loss of reputation based on this well-known (if erroneous) "secret." Nor does Willoughby suffer measurable loss for his corrupt and selfish behavior, as Elinor explains that "'his circumstances are unembarrassed—he suffers from no evil of that kind'" (249). If Elinor is established as the novel's moral and ethical center, then her acceptance of Brandon, despite initially knowing this love-child rumor, and her more than generous forgiveness of Willoughby, speaks to some broader, less judgmental allowances within the fallen woman narrative cast of characters: namely, that the unfortunate women are certainly wronged by this inexcusable caddish behavior, but if these cads apparently act out an "apology"

(maybe not even directly to the one wronged), they deserve some gentle concession for so doing.

Indeed, a drunken Willoughby is granted several pages of dialogue wherein he attempts to explain his ungentlemanly behavior. The wronged woman is not given a voice, but the perpetrator is granted an audience with Elinor (and, therefore, with the reader) to explicitly reveal *his own* sufferings as a result of his “connection” to Eliza. Though most of his argument and explanation reads as self-serving and asinine, Elinor, stern and direct in her responses to him (she does not assuage his guilt in all matters, especially regarding Eliza), still “forgave, pitied, [and] wished him well” (235). Though this “forgiveness,” no matter how qualified, may seem far too generous, it is surprising that Willoughby does something laudable during the explanation of his conduct. During Willoughby’s most obvious moment of self-interest, he actually achieves something the previous accounts of the two Elizas do not: he grants the younger Eliza the possibility of subjectivity and agency.

In questioning Colonel Brandon’s objectivity as narrator of young Eliza’s fall, Willoughby implores Elinor (228), “remember... from whom you received the account. Could it be an impartial one?” Allowing for the obvious irony of this statement—since he’s trying to persuade Elinor to ignore the apparent impartiality of his own account—what Willoughby does next clearly serves his interest, but he also introduces a consideration of young Eliza’s motivations and actions. Willoughby continues:

“I acknowledge that her situation and her character ought to have been respected by me. I do not mean to justify myself, but at the

same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have nothing to urge—that because she was injured she was irreproachable, and because *I* was a libertine, *she* must be a saint. If the violence of her passions, the weakness of her understanding—I do not mean, however, to defend myself. Her affection for me deserved better treatment, and I often, with great self-reproach, recal [sic] the tenderness which, for a very short time, had the power of creating any return. I wish—I heartily wish it had never been.” (228)

Smarmy though his motivations may be, Willoughby—probably unintentionally—introduces the possibility that young Eliza has her own personality, replete with wants and desires, not all of them wholesome or wise. In an odd twist, he is both her ruinous deserter *and* the only person in the novel who discusses her in a way that describes her—even moderately—beyond the bare-bones archetype of the fallen woman. I make this point not in an effort to blame or indict young Eliza herself (or, indeed, her mother), but to suggest that Austen may have constructed this passage as a nod to the stories largely untold, the stories of the two Elizas that are not given the in-depth attention of Elinor’s or Marianne’s. After all, if readers had only been given a drawing-room-conversation impression of Elinor they would never have learned of all that she held inside and at what expense. Conversely, the two Elizas are mute paper dolls, hauled out in clearly labeled paper dresses branded with a single word: fallen. Ironically, they are voiceless, non-bodied figures whose sole function is to “tell” the seduction-sex-birth story of a woman’s body. The two Elizas are

useful, reproductive bodies contrasting with the thinking and feeling of uncompromised, unfallen women like Elinor and Marianne.

Johnson offers some reasons for why the story of the two Elizas is not featured more explicitly or prominently. Johnson writes:

The depiction of illicit sexual behavior was a possibility always open to Austen. The refusal to center her fiction on problematic sexual passion distinguishes Austen from her contemporaries, conservative and progressive alike. Seduced and abandoned women are the stuff of many a prerevolutionary English novel, preeminently *Clarissa*, but they positively crowd the pages of the political novel... For Austen, however, to have foregrounded the tales of the Elizas would have entailed earmarking a progressive stance, which she evidently did not want to do. (345)

Instead, it seems that the overwhelming critical observation, advanced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in a "Girl Being Taught a Lesson," is at work within *Sense and Sensibility* (400). The paper-doll Elizas serve their cautionary-tale purpose despite the lack of detailed sexual activity or subjectivity beyond the necessary general reference to bodily function and scandal. In order to be the novel's "girl being taught a lesson," Marianne must not share the bodily fate of the "girl who fell." When Marianne observes, "'There, exactly there... on that projecting mound,—there I fell; and there I first saw Willoughby'" (243), she has the ability to speak literally about this past event. She can physically recover from a minor stumble in the grass, she can ease her broken heart with new affection for a better, more deserving man, and, in her case, she can speak thoughtfully and

knowingly about her near miss. For the voiceless two Elizas, however, it is too late to teach them lessons.

Thickening Our Sense of Female Fallenness:

Omissions and Oversights in Fallen Women and Victorian Sexual Scholarship

I outline and critique the two Elizas story not to accuse Austen of omission or insensitivity. Seduced and abandoned women were clearly the subject of many novels before and during Austen's lifetime. Well beyond Austen, too, the reproductive juggernaut that is the fallen woman narrative persisted throughout the long nineteenth century, especially in the Victorian novel. Interestingly enough, though certain novelists throughout the century afford more subjectivity and voice—or at least plot centrality—to their fallen heroines, not much significantly changes regarding the essential elements of the fallen woman archetype and narrative structure. The fallen woman is usually young, naive, sometimes orphaned, apparently ignorant or not well-informed about sexuality and biology, and is “romanced,” seduced, or assaulted by a man who in turn leaves her pregnant and alone to deal with the unrelenting social stigma of her obvious sexual fall while he suffers little or no punishment or embarrassment, like Willoughby or, to some extent, Colonel Brandon. As it is in the case of the two Elizas, the archetypal fallen woman narrative must reproduce itself in order to continue its usefulness and viability, effectively transmitting the vital warning to both readers and characters. To disrupt the fallen woman narrative is to kill its effectiveness as a stock fictional trope that readily establishes and reinforces ideological restrictions regarding female desire, female sexual and biological knowledge, justified public judgment of

women's sexual reputation, and the need for ascetic penance, reform, or even death of the fallen.

The two Elizas have numerous fallen sisters in nineteenth-century English novels, but, unlike the buried-but-essential-to-the-plot two Elizas story, fallen heroines like Ruth Hilton, Tess Durbeyfield, and Esther Waters star in novels directly named for—and focused on—they and their specific stories of falling. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894) each foreground the tale of the fallen woman, and the eponymous titles indicate the narrative weight given to the named central character. Though Ruth, Tess, and Esther retain the basic paper-doll outline of the Elizas, Gaskell, Hardy, and Moore grant more voice and three-dimensional presence to the fallen female archetype in their novels. However, even if authorial intention soundly resides in the *exposure* of the harsh, unfair treatment of the fallen, the characters these "progressive" authors create do not, or maybe cannot, challenge the expected narrative trajectory. More significantly, the three-dimensional construction of these characters and their painful experiences merely extends and intensifies the tragic and sadistic stories of the fallen by making them more melodramatic, sensational, and ultimately cruel. Fleshing out the body and mind of the fallen woman in mainstream fiction often provides only that much more physical and emotional female body to shame and punish.

Even the most politically pointed mainstream authors create fallen female characters who actually serve to reinforce the schadenfreude/sadistic quality of the fallen woman story; therefore, it seems there is no progressive challenge to

this insistent narrative. Of course, several novels throughout the century center on strong, educated, complex, and ardently passionate female characters like Elizabeth Bennet (of Jane Austen's 1813 *Pride and Prejudice*), Margaret Hale (of Elizabeth Gaskell's 1854-55 *North and South*), and Dorothea Brooke (of George Eliot's 1874 *Middlemarch*). However, as mainstream fiction and public codes of propriety dictate, even their portrayal stops short of their explicit sexuality and sexual desires. While these heroines encounter their own unique troubles while maneuvering the marriage plot, even their portrayals as empowered or outspoken females do not actively disrupt the established constraints of the fallen woman narrative or genre. These non-fallen female characters actually routinely reinforce the ideal female figure of the time, as they do not enter into the realm of dangerous sexuality or suffer sexual consequences primarily because they remain complex-but-still-good women until the danger of out-of-wedlock pregnancy has been removed by their successful, loving marriages or partnerships.

The constraints of both paths—that of the marriage plot/good woman and the fallen/bad woman—construct each other without significant challenge, leaving, of course, the good woman in the privileged position and the fallen woman degraded as the pitiful, necessary warning. Because these two narrative trajectories dominate the Victorian novel, it may seem anachronistic or unrealistic to seek within the period an alternative narrative that challenges the fallen woman archetype beyond merely presenting her privileged good-woman counterpart as ideal. Absent are female characters who come to understand their sexuality not through abusive seduction and false promises, but through

sexual education and protective information regarding birth control and human anatomy. In mainstream nineteenth-century English literature in general, and the Victorian novel in particular, to find a novel that actively challenges the juggernaut of the fallen woman narrative seems an impossible task. Current critical scholarship tends to agree. Scholars such as Deborah Logan, Amanda Anderson, Nina Auerbach, and Sally Mitchell each posit specific, compelling, and distinct arguments about the fallen woman in Victorian literature and culture, but none offers or investigates an alternative narrative possibility that actively challenges or transcends the narrative trappings of female fallenness.

Each of these scholars' goal is to carve out her own particular argumentative niche regarding previously overlooked, ignored, or unexplored aspects of the fallen woman literary genre and cultural figure. However different their ultimate arguments, these scholars nonetheless share common ground, especially in terms of the separate spheres ideology dominating the social structures and cultural imagination of the Victorian period. Echoes of, and direct references to, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's literary archetypes of the "angel in the house" and her opposite, "the madwoman in the attic," inform all of these critical approaches to the troubling figure of the sexually fallen woman who disrupts the female ideal. In fact, to situate the fallen woman in her cultural context, most critical approaches necessarily discuss significant "Woman Question" texts of the Victorian era, such as Coventry Patmore's and Sarah Stickney Ellis's—separate, but similar—concepts of the angelic female paragon of Victorian domestic bliss. This stereotype is created by a direct contrast to the problematic prostitutes and redundant women discussed, respectively, in

William Acton's *Prostitution* (1857) and W. R. Greg's "Why Are Women Redundant?" (1862). Additionally, though primarily investigating the fallen woman in literature, scholars writing about the fallen woman examine and seriously consider a constellation of texts in order to frame their arguments. In an effort to provide a more complete consideration of the cultural architecture informing Victorian fallenness, texts as varied as paintings, first-person narratives of the sexually fallen, newspaper accounts of sexual or other titillating crimes or scandals, and weekly literature and magazines populate these critical interrogations of the fallen female figure.

For example, in Deborah Logan's 1998 *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse*, her main goal is to provide a much-needed monograph dedicated exclusively to women authors and their particular construction of fallenness in their own writing. But even this precise goal must extend beyond the literary texts Logan employs. She explicitly states:

This book, then, is a study about Victorian fallen women both real and literary, about the surrounding texts and contexts that branded them criminals and outcasts, and about the cultural dynamics that sought to banish such anomalies by transporting them to real and metaphorical penal colonies. (3)

In considering texts beyond women's writing, Logan examines the "Woman Question" debates mentioned above via Acton's claims in *Prostitution* and *The Magdalen's Friend*. Referring to Acton's arguments, Logan writes:

Perhaps nowhere is the power differential between Victorian males and females more clearly seen than in the sexual double

standard, which demanded female chastity (a “moral” standard) while promoting the tradition of male sexual activity prior to marriage as necessary to men’s health (a “scientific” standard).... The idea that “good” (middle- and upper-class) women must be kept sexually pure for marriage in order to ensure legitimate issue for inheritance purposes is echoed even in such evangelical tracts as *The Magdalen’s Friend*. Despite public outcry against them, prostitutes were clearly integral to the Victorian social structure. Some clergymen even argued that prostitution was necessary and that it was not for humans to question an institution sanctioned by an apparently utilitarian God “for the greater good.” The results of this dynamic are most commonly dramatized by middle- and upper-class males’ seduction of working-class girls, whom they subsequently abandon in poverty and disgrace, usually with a bastard child to raise alone and without means (typically regarded by prostitution theorists as the first step to prostitution). In this way, ideologists claim, the purity of respectable women and the sanctity of the middle-class nuclear family are preserved, the sacrifice of lower-class girls and women being a small price to pay for ensuring the dominant culture’s perpetuation. (18-19)

Ultimately, Logan claims that women authors writing about various forms of female fallenness and indecency—prostitution, sexual slavery, alcoholism, infanticide, bigamy, and syphilis—implicitly combat and challenge institutionalized and ingrained forces such as those detailed above by the risks

they take as female writers writing beyond the boundaries of sexual and social respectability. Logan concludes her study by pointing toward end-of-the-century fiction focusing on “New Women” who desire “to exercise control over their sexuality and reproduction,” in part because “women’s quest for independence and autonomy beyond the domestic circle itself became a version of fallenness,” especially as the century progressed (190).

Similarly, Amanda Anderson, in her 1993 *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*, expands her analysis of fallenness beyond sexual transgression, and focuses on the rhetorical and metaphorical constructions of fallenness to move the argument into the realm of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and agency. Anderson explains:

In criticizing a too-exclusive concentration on fallenness as transgressive sexuality, I don’t mean to suggest that fallenness had no sexual referent or that no traces of suppressed sexual desire surround representations of fallen women; and of course one dominant fear behind the perceived contaminating power of the prostitute was the fear of the sexually transmitted disease. This book, however, self-consciously moves beyond a restrictively sexual meaning of fallenness to the cultural self-understandings of Victorians. (15)

Anderson acknowledges that the term “fallen woman” is fluid enough to contain everything from mistresses to the sexually seduced to adulteresses to unmarried, but sexually active, women, but she sharply notes that one thing remains constant amidst this fluidity: “the attenuated autonomy and fractured

identity of the fallen figure" (2). It is this attenuated autonomy that requires attention, especially regarding agency, subjectivity, and identity intersubjectively "understood as constituted in and through ongoing relations with others" (19). As Anderson concludes, this is because of the Victorian tendency to protect cherished conceptions of moral autonomy and stable identity by creating a category of feminine fallenness. Through depictions of fallenness, the many perceived threats to the self—to its coherence, freedom, and distinct recognizability—could be both exaggerated and displaced, and also eventually diminished and dismissed, ushered off the scene, as were so many fallen figures in Victorian literature. (198)

In sum, the rhetorical and metaphorical category of female fallenness becomes an anchor that holds other supposedly stable identities in place. Employing literary works by several mainstream Victorian writers like Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Anderson uses these works to investigate the rhetoric of fallenness and intersubjective gender and identity politics specific to Victorian culture.

In significant ways, Nina Auerbach's 1982 *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* also centers on identity, especially regarding the powerful mythologies surrounding both real and fictional Victorian female figures. Auerbach claims her book started as a quest to find the feminism of the age, and in so doing she discovered the need for a "freer context for understanding the complex life of woman in culture, one which welcomes any society's capacious avenues of power, as well as excoriating its particular

conventions of oppression" (2). Auerbach describes her critical approach as such:

My method is in part that of the archeologist: to reconstruct a lost world of belief through fragments and shards of popular artifacts. I want to piece together in new ways a rich composite of verbal and visual images from Victorian culture; many of these have been forgotten today, but all were compellingly popular in their time. Through this collage of texts and pictures, we can discern a myth that functioned above all as a shaping principle, not only of fictions, but of lives as well. (3)

In order to grant much-needed attention to women's complexity, the "myths of womanhood" need to be investigated through more than "the carefully wrought prescriptions of the sages" (10). Auerbach contends that critical attention must be paid to "the vibrant half-life of popular literature and art, forms which may distill the essence of a culture though they are rarely granted Culture's weighty imprimatur" (10), and she extends her investigation into the myths of mermaids, tragic fallen women, dangerous female demons, and anxieties surrounding old maids, paying significant attention to visual culture and illustrations and paintings depicting such women.

Using these images and a host of other literary and cultural texts, Auerbach insightfully remarks that the fallen woman figure troubles both Victorian and contemporary feminists. Auerbach writes:

But Victorian social reformers found her as painful a presence as do contemporary feminist critics. Then and now she seems to

enlightened minds a pitiable monster, created by the neurosis of a culture that because it feared female sexuality and aggression enshrined a respectably sadistic cautionary tale punishing them both. To redeem the fallen woman from degradation, sympathetic critics in her day and in our own have turned from the denunciations of epic and myth to the more flexible reality of history. (157)

In an effort to further wrestle with these epic and mythic representations of the fallen woman, Auerbach's archeological approach reinforces the need for this "more flexible reality of history." Auerbach continues:

We are understandably embarrassed by the phantoms of our ancestors. In this case many of our ancestors were themselves embarrassed by the inherent cruelty of this image. Feminist criticism and broad cultural studies pride themselves on having shaken off the attitudes that created the fallen woman, without examining her myth itself very closely. Yet unconscious or half-formulated cultural myths are not always the enemy of enlightened historical understanding, nor can history and statistics always exorcise them. If we examine this figure as a haunting Victorian type in whom angel, demon, and old maid converge, she may remind us that the mind's changing transmutation of social fact is the only "true history" we know. (160)

Auerbach concludes that while “Victorian womanhood is most delectable as a victim” (35), her specific, flexible, and encompassing investigation into the angel, demon, and old maid myths reveals that because these images and characters “pervade the Victorian imagination,” these “many faces of a single image” indicate women’s “special powers” resulting in the overt cultural need to restrain her dangerous possibility through such derogatory images and characterizations (186). A more precise understanding of the historical moment as fluid and transmutable allows for female complexity amidst these powerful Victorian social, cultural, literary, and visual forces.

Opening her argument with another powerful Victorian myth—the dangerous fallen woman’s ideal opposite—, Sally Mitchell, in her 1981 *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women’s Reading, 1835-1880*, explains:

... as it passed into common practice, the idea that women were naturally pure and chaste concealed an older and more negative attitude about the danger of female sexual appetite. Purity was said to be natural, but it was also so valuable that extreme precautions were needed to preserve it. Prudery kept girls pure by concealing the basic facts of human existence; they therefore did not have the knowledge necessary to make rational choices. A doctor’s advice about what to tell girls approaching matrimony is reported by C. Willett Cunningham: “Tell her nothing, my dear madam, for if they knew they would not marry.” (xii)

Using this telling anecdote as an introduction to both real and imagined sexually ignorant and/or uninitiated Victorian females, Mitchell subsequently

turns her attention specifically to reading practices by investigating concepts and depictions of chastity and prudery in almost five decades of literary and other texts informing mid-Victorian thought. In addition to critiquing mainstream literary works like Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), and Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips* (1843), Mitchell critiques several 1840s, 50s, and 70s penny weekly family magazines like the *Family Herald* and the *London Journal*. Though these family magazines were "neither cheap reading of the crime-and-passion variety nor women's magazines" (1), they definitely include several stories of trashy "sexual irregularity" (11). Mitchell highlights numerous stories that extend and complicate the fallen woman genre in their focus on class or money issues, bigamy, or various forms of "sin" like excessive pride and resultant punishments.

Mitchell points out the importance of the behavior of such written female characters, and the subsequent instruction of the female reader. She remarks that

it was through the stereotypes of fiction that the Victorian woman primarily knew her sisters. Her social contacts were for the most part limited to a few people very like herself. Fiction told her what women were like; it reflected the feelings of the age and it also educated them. (xv)

Of course, then, if both the mainstream as well as the penny weekly authors used fallen or "sexually irregular" females as their subjects, women readers were educated to read such women negatively and cautiously. And it seems the

sexually irregular female was an almost unavoidable literary subject. As

Mitchell further reveals:

Novelists who dealt realistically with contemporary life, and who were influenced by society's moral outlook, could hardly avoid writing about the unchaste woman. The sexual outlaw appears in a variety of guises: the whore, the mistress, the adulteress and the woman practically or legally divorced, as well as the seduced or fallen innocent. Both men and women used her in their novels, but they did not use her in the same ways. Whenever she appears, and for whatever overt moral purpose, her story reveals underlying sexual attitudes. (46)

Even though, as Mitchell explains, "really interesting women—women worth writing a whole book about—had sexual experience" (74), this sexual experience was not lauded or held up as exemplary. No matter how this sexual experience or activity was constructed and revealed (or concealed), the "underlying sexual attitudes" always privileged innocence over experience, and, ultimately, Mitchell claims that writers who "explored the tensions of sexual politics" may have "raised consciousness," but they "proposed no solutions" to these tensions (176). In this way, novels exclusively focused on fallen women like Ruth or Tess or Esther succeed precisely because of the character's sexual experience, but this sexual experience must reside within specific fallen woman parameters in order to reinforce the appropriate sexual attitudes of the period.

These four scholars offer important insights regarding both literary and real Victorian fallen women. Sally Mitchell's last claim could easily apply to

Austen's treatment of the two Elizas, as their story serves as a necessary "sexual tension" plot device but does not offer a solution to the institutionalized sexual double standard of the status quo that Deborah Logan details. "Sexually irregular" females like the two Elizas educate readers, especially those who more clearly identify with Marianne or Elinor in terms of behavior, and therefore reinforce the female ideal of the time. The two Elizas also provide further evidence for Nina Auerbach's "embarrassments" to feminist thought, as they are female characters mythologized in sadistic narratives that require more complex consideration. The "attenuated autonomy" of the two Elizas is especially evident when they are not even given a chance to tell their own stories, because, as Amanda Anderson further claims, the fallen woman is often "a text that is already written rather than an agent capable of dialogical interaction" (10). The two Elizas are definitely more acted upon than acting, and their stories represent the sadistic tale of seduction and reproduction that continually proliferates. In short, these four theorists offer essential critical routes to examining the two Elizas, and applying their argumentative insights to nineteenth-century literature and life is illuminating.

Yet, what is missing from this scholarship is closely linked to what Willoughby does in his defense: he voices the possibility that Eliza the younger may have acted on her own sexual desires or impulses. Briefly, Mitchell suggests—but does not thoroughly investigate—this topic when she points out that "novelists ignored the possibility that some women turned prostitute because they enjoyed sex" (53), and, beyond the prostitute, she continues this thought in more detail when she writes of *any* female figure:

The figure most conspicuously missing from the literature of these forty-five years—at whatever level, for whatever audience—is the woman who uses her body to express her love by her own choice. ... And so long as people generally believed that men had stronger sexual desires than women, sexual intercourse appeared to be something imposed by men on women. (168-69)

In addition to the supposed lack of female sexual drive, another major reason this happily sexually active female figure is absent is because the risk of pregnancy is too great (169). Significantly, the uncompromised sexual female who is educated in protective birth control practice and human biology is missing “at whatever level, for whatever audience” from the literature of the period.

Considering the wide range of texts studied by Logan, Anderson, and Auerbach, I contend they would most likely agree with Mitchell, as none of them offers a specific, direct challenge or solution to the archetypal fallen woman narrative. They consider all kinds of “other” challenges like bigamy or alcoholism or acting on stage, but these sidestep the key concerns in what I’m focusing on: the sexual fall, abandonment, and pregnancy. What is missing from these four scholars’ research and arguments, and from fallen women scholarship as a whole, is a thoughtful, in-depth investigation into an almost entirely unconsidered genre of literature flourishing throughout nineteenth-century England: pornography. As a decidedly heterogeneous genre, pornography offers a wide range of sexual narratives, including those that directly challenge female fallenness by foregrounding female sexual education

and contraception practice; however, Victorian pornography is far too often reduced to an analysis of male- or fetish-driven narratives.

Pornography is only very briefly mentioned by both Deborah Logan and Sally Mitchell, with Mitchell quickly noting that “we know now that sexual repression led to a barbarous half-hidden underlife,” and “we know about it because the moral Victorians recorded and preserved the information used by recent historians of street, brothel and pornography” (xiii). Her additional comment is only a single sentence acknowledging the whip-wielding female dominatrix figure who “dominates the pornography of the period” (85). These brief mentions of pornography, though insightful, are fleeting asides rather than full-fledged argumentative investigations. Logan, in her own review of fallen women scholarship, offers a bit more information when she critically explains:

A survey of contemporary studies of Victorian fallen women illustrates my concerns on these issues. Martin Seymour-Smith’s 1969 *Fallen Women* employs this quaint Victorian term solely for the purpose of discussing prostitutes and their clients and pimps. Far from envisioning the idea of fallenness as multidefined or circumstantial, Seymour-Smith’s brief history of prostitution takes as its representative Victorian text the pornographic memoirs of the prurient “Walter.” Similarly, Fraser Harrison’s *The Dark Angel*, published in 1977, perpetuates the madonna-harlot myth by contrasting an ostensibly seamless respectable sexuality with an unrespectable sexuality; he, too, employs “Walter” as the authoritative voice of Victorian sexual experience. As was true of

Dr. William Acton's widely read 1857 *Prostitution*, the woman's perspective is all but erased from such studies. (12)

Here Logan takes issue with (male) critical focus on a specific male-centered pornographic text—the late-1880s-early-1890s multivolume erotic behemoth, *My Secret Life*, by “Walter”—and the reliance on this text as the sole evidence of Victorian sexual experience. While Logan disagrees with Seymour-Smith's and Harrison's critical conclusions, there's a hint here as well that investigating pornography—especially this pornographic memoir—in connection to the fallen woman figure in Victorian literature and culture is misguided at best and sleazy at worst.

However, even sleaze may have immense value. James Kincaid, in the introduction to his abridgment of *My Secret Life: An Erotic Diary of Victorian London*, reveals that the text is “by far the most famous and the longest sexual autobiography written in the nineteenth century. Its eleven fat volumes contain invaluable material for social and cultural historians, literary scholars, students of manners and morals.... this astounding document... has been notorious as an energetic, entertaining narrative of one man's tireless sexual activity” (v). Tireless seems an understatement when one considers Walter's own assessment of his “sexual numbers” when only about two-thirds of the way through his almost five decades of sexual experience. Walter casually calculates:

I have probably fucked now—and I have tried carefully to ascertain it—something like twelve hundred women, and have felt the cunts of certainly three hundred others of whom I have seen a hundred and fifty naked. (519-20)

While these astonishing—and maybe unbelievable—numbers alone may not reveal anything beyond basic human contact, Kincaid offers a sharper take on the physical and emotional reality lurking in each of Walter’s numbered experiences. Kincaid states:

I have held off talking directly about the character of this “Walter,” since there is so much about him that will assault modern sensibilities, and perhaps any sensibilities. Except for the time with prostitutes, he is pretty much devoting his life to a career of sexual harassment; when he isn’t, that is, actually committing rape. There is probably no other way we can view all this, though we ought to remain aware that such terms would not be altogether meaningful then. Still, Walter clearly believes that he knows what women want and what they mean much better than they do; that he is, always and without exception, doing them a favor by fulfilling what, if they only knew it, is their own will and deep desire. His scientific curiosity, while sometimes amusing to us and perhaps even commendable, also leads him inevitably to wonder what it would be like to deflower ten-year-olds. (xi-xii)

In eleven long volumes filled with almost endless sexual encounters, some of these are bound to be more than unsavory, just as some are bound to be enlightening and “commendable.” Yet, based on Kincaid’s assessment, it is easy to understand Logan’s resistance to conclusions about fallen women being drawn from *My Secret Life*.

Compared to the decidedly female-centered arguments posited by Logan, Anderson, Auerbach, and Mitchell, the male-centric focus of both Seymour-Smith's and Harrison's texts, especially in sections dedicated to Victorian sexuality and fallen women, indicates that Walter's story is of use to them precisely because it is a narrative of male sexual experience. In the case of Martin Seymour-Smith's 1969 *Fallen Women: A Sceptical Enquiry into the Treatment of Prostitutes, Their Clients and Their Pimps, in Literature*, the title alone gives away his particular focus. But his goal is not to consider female fallenness exclusively in the Victorian period. Instead, his text is an historical investigation tracing the literary representations of the prostitute figure from biblical to contemporary times. In the chapter dedicated to the Victorians, Seymour-Smith briefly offers similar comments echoing Kincaid's darker assessment of Walter's sometimes negative and/or violent treatment of women (140), but he forthrightly states that his "emphasis, naturally, is upon Walter as client" and the particular impulses and desires that drive him "to seek the services of so many hundreds of prostitutes" (143). Walter's detailed account of his sexually eventful secret life is most valuable to Seymour-Smith as a record of a Victorian gentleman's numerous transactions with prostitutes. As such, Seymour-Smith is hardly constructing an argument designed to elucidate the Victorian fallen female figure.

Similarly, Fraser Harrison's 1977 *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality*, is less an investigation into the fallen woman figure (or literature, even), and more an overview of Victorian sexual behavior and class. In the

chapter, "Walter's Women," he explains the value of Walter's sexual record preserved in *My Secret Life*. Harrison writes of Walter:

He has bequeathed a lecher's guide to Victorian England.... Walter studied the topography with the eye of a client, a faculty which invested his reports with a sort of specialized objectivity, for he had no interest in pointing a moral or laying bare an atrocity. He wrote obsessively about an obsession. He was not hoping to please the public, he did not look forward to earning enormous royalties, nor was he... eager to impress his readers with his titanic virility; he wrote only to gratify himself. In the process, however, he provided the historian with an invaluable opportunity of eavesdropping on those scenes whose existence other autobiographers could not even admit to, and novelists could only hint at and leave to the imagination. (259)

As a social and historical document—again, if believed accurate—, Walter's autobiography has enormous value, particularly in terms of exposing the explicit sexual behavior left out of mainstream literature by virtue of decorum and decency. But, again, Harrison's interest concerns Walter's experiences as "client" instead of the many fallen or "sexually irregular" women he beds. There's overwhelming evidence supporting Logan's assessment that the female voice and perspective is largely absent from both Walter's text and these two critical works.

To offer a qualified defense of both Seymour-Smith and Harrison, it is essential to note that they take their cue from Steven Marcus and his landmark

1964 *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*. Considering Marcus devotes more than half of his detailed study to critiquing *My Secret Life*, it follows that any scholar working within the realm of Victorian sexuality must address Marcus's work, and, therefore, Walter's erotic diary. Marcus views this diary as "the authentic record of what one man perceived, felt, saw, believed, and wanted to believe" (111), but he also argues that "pornography is valuable because it reflects or expresses social history" (44). This diary may be one man's account of his sexuality, but this one man is writing within the specific Victorian framework that informs it. Marcus explains:

My Secret Life is not to be thought of as primarily a triumph of intellect—of insight shaped by discipline and method—over tabooed and refractory material. But it is something equally interesting, for it reveals to us the workings and broodings of a mind that had for an entire lifetime been possessed by a single subject or interest. It further reveals to us how that interest had shaped the mind and person which it possessed; how the mind which was possessed attempted in turn to cope with the forces which possessed it; and how, during the Victorian period, a man who tried directly to deal with the demons of sexuality lived and felt and thought. (87)

Though the authenticity of the diary is debated by other scholars—Peter Gay and Michael Mason place most of the diary's action squarely in the realm of fantasy—, Marcus grants it authenticity in part because the diary details several

accounts of Walter's "anxiety about the size of his penis" and his "periodic though infrequent experiences of impotence" (114-15). Walter's exposure of his masculine anxieties and weaknesses ensure the validity of his experiences, especially as these embarrassing inadequacies serve no real pornographic purpose; if anything, these incidents of genital failure are an impediment—or at least a delay—to the surety of sexual action. Conversely, Marcus argues that the diary exaggerates and inaccurately depicts women's sexuality. So, while the anxieties surrounding male genitalia serve as evidence of authenticity, the depiction of women as overtly sexual and libidinous smacks of hyperbole. Walter's women are mostly anonymous and easily discarded when no longer sexually useful, but along the way, according to Marcus, their representation as sexual—especially orgasmic—beings should be regarded with caution. Marcus explains that

one must be careful to distinguish what we can accept as accurate or authentic description of how women behave from a male fantasy of that behavior or from the now familiar projection of a male sexual response onto a female object.... In *My Secret Life*, three circumstances can be made out as contributing to [the error of depicting women as always and too quickly achieving orgasm]: the blurred perceptions of an observer who was also a participant; the unquestionable presence of fantasy and wish-fulfillment in his descriptions; and the projection onto women of the male conception of sexuality and the resulting disposition to regard women's responsiveness as identical with men's. (119-20)

While this may be a well-intentioned caution on Marcus's part, it is worth noting that in this analysis he simultaneously recognizes *and* negates the very character that Sally Mitchell noted as "missing" from the literature of the period: the woman or prostitute who enjoys sex or who chooses to express her desires physically. In many ways, "Walter's women" do fit the bill of Mitchell's missing figure, but Marcus fears that in presenting an overly orgasmic, perpetually libidinally-driven female, this inauthentic characterization swings too far opposite from the equally inauthentic construction of the ideal, sexless Victorian woman. There is no counterpart to this argument for the Victorian male, in part because, as Logan notes, his sexual desire is "scientifically" founded as biologically and physically necessary (19).

It is not surprising, then, when other Victorian sexual scholars like Ronald Pearsall, in his 1969 *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality*, find in pornographic texts like *My Secret Life* a piston-like repetition of the sex act, and, by extension, the accompanying gender constraints Marcus addresses. Pearsall writes: "In the stories and serials, the mechanical repetition of descriptions of the necessarily limited rota of sexual activities make for boring reading. When women are brainless toys ever capable of being brought to heat by the brandishing of a penis, and men are a set of genitals attached to a chunk of beef, then it can hardly be otherwise" (452). While Marcus may not concede Pearsall's point that the diary is boring, he cannot deny his analysis also hovers around these two general areas: the problematic characterization of the quickly and easily orgasmic female and the anxieties surrounding the male whose most important feature is his penis and its function.

Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, in her 2003 *Unauthorized Pleasures: Accounts of Victorian Erotic Experience*, also echoes Marcus in her “sympathetic interpretation of *My Secret Life* as a manual for deconstructing masculinity” (170). Rosenman, too, anchors this sympathy in Walter’s professed insecurities, explaining that the diary “displays fear, anxiety, and failure as Walter ricochets from glory to humiliation, betraying idealized images by exposing his conflicted psychology and dwelling on the inadequacies of his penis” (168-69).

However, though she rests her central thesis on the “mysteries of masculinity” (170), she also views Walter’s relationships with women as a challenge to Victorian gender ideology. Marcus saw women’s overt sexuality as an exaggeration, but Rosenman offers the opposite argument. Rosenman claims that even by the most liberal standards of the day moderately accepting

the possibility of female pleasure, Walter’s endless parade of perpetually randy, sexually experienced women is a startling one. No doubt the responsiveness of these women was a flattering ideal, enacting the fantasy of the total gratification of male needs. But at the same time that it serves male interest, it also grants women an active sexual desire. (171)

Because most (then and now) see “pornography as a blueprint for patriarchy” represented by “the iconography of sex itself: the man on top penetrating the woman with his active, thrusting organ; the woman on the bottom passively receiving the royal penis” (176), it may stand to reason that pornography is greatly overlooked in terms of fallen women scholarship. Sally Mitchell’s quest for a female character or figure who actively sought sex and felt

sexual desire simply because she enjoyed it resides in *My Secret Life*. But when this female figure is called forth this time, Rosenman does not qualify her as an exaggeration but, instead, lauds her as a revelation. What is compelling, though, is that the foregone conclusion that pornography will only yield patriarchal narratives of male sexual pleasure at the expense of mostly unspeaking and objectified female characters is a statement that could directly apply to the archetypal fallen woman genre as a whole as well.

Rosenman is right, however, to temper her approach to Walter and his women with much-needed complication and clarification. In thousands of pages covering decades of encounters, he is bound to be inconsistent in his behavior during these recorded encounters, even if readers are only privy to his sexual life, so any approach attempting to rest a monolithic, rigid argument on his actions would fail. She concludes that mingled in with “the familiar male fantasy of sexual domination lies a contradictory desire to participate in other selves and subject positions” because the diary “yearns for sexual and subjective plenitude by multiplying the possible meanings of intertwined bodies” (176). But, even this idyllic shifting subjectivity has its limitations, especially regarding class and the real-world constraints existing outside the diary. In a final, and absolutely essential point, Rosenman explains:

Walter hires the actors, directs the sexual scenarios, and determines what will and will not happen to his body—a luxury that his prostitutes and working-class male partners do not have. Walter’s sex play is ideologically significant in that it rejects Victorian sexual norms, but it is not politically subversive in the

sense of challenging, in any real or public way, the power inequities that are grounded in hierarchical norms of subjectivity. (193)

Walter is free to engage in several shifting subject positions if he chooses to do so, but he is afforded this privilege based on the comfort, stability, and safety of his status as a wealthy gentleman. His prostitutes and working-class sex partners, however, remain trapped in social architecture and public judgment. Even if Rosenman tries to rescue female sexual agency from Marcus's previous assumption of inaccurate depiction, the assertion that Walter's prostitutes have sexual agency does not make them any less persecuted by the public in terms of their "fall" from the restrictive and respectable ideal. A prostitute's honest sexual desire and orgasmic joy would not have raised her social standing in Victorian culture. Rosenman's assertion regarding sexual agency for Walter's prostitutes may have temporarily filled the gap Mitchell observed, but Rosenman's further assertion regarding class and social judgment keeps Walter's women, particularly his prostitutes, in their fallen state despite their being given more sexual subjectivity precisely because this play-acted social freedom is confined to Walter's sexual theatre.

Deborah Logan criticized Seymour-Smith's and Harrison's male-centered approaches to female fallenness and prostitution through *My Secret Life*, noting the absence of the female perspective in these critiques. However, even Marcus's and Rosenman's more thorough, complex interrogation of the male and female sexual politics of *My Secret Life*—critical analyses that extend beyond Seymour-Smith's and Harrison's limited and male-centered focus on

Walter as client—still results in narrow, or certainly narrower, possibilities for sexual female characters in Walter’s pornographic diary. Marcus and Rosenman are more sensitive and attentive to the female perspective, but even their critical legwork leaves the sexually irregular fallen woman ultimately a prostitute stuck with all the requisite public judgment. And, though the social “back-stories” of hundreds of prostitutes are not detailed in the narrative, their overt sexual “fore-stories” bespeak them. These filled-in back-stories could include any number of narratives matching those of mainstream fiction’s fallen Aunt Esther (of Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1848 *Mary Barton*) or fallen Marian Erle (of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s 1856 *Aurora Leigh*), not to mention the plaintive narratives of most of the anonymous fallen women who applied to the Foundling Hospital, narratives collected and discussed in Françoise Barret-Ducrocq’s 1991 *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*.

My Secret Life must not perpetually remain the end-all be-all of Victorian pornography. Just because Steven Marcus’s analysis of this text started a critical juggernaut all its own, continued investigation into Victorian sexual culture need not rest solely on this erotic giant. It must not stand to reason that because this pornographic text results in a still-confining analysis of overtly sexual women that this must be the conclusion regarding all, or most, other pornographic texts. As a reader, critic, and scholar of a decidedly wider collection of Victorian pornography, I contend that within the expansive narrative boundaries of the genre there exists a direct challenge to female fallenness, an active, purposeful “writing back” to a restrictive, sadistic narrative

of scandalous pregnancy and public shame. Several more female-centered pornographic texts of the period foreground explicit sexual education of a young, possibly ignorant and/or vulnerable, female who would otherwise be ripe for the fall if not for the sage sexual pedagogy passed on to her by a savvy partner—male or female—who actively works to prepare her for safe sexual intercourse *before* she engages in any sexual activity that could lead to pregnancy. In these overlooked and critically undiscussed pornographic novels and texts, the central female character receives a sexual education in basic biological or anatomical functions, but, more importantly, in how to protect both her sexual and social body from pregnancy and scandal. However, these female sexual bildungsroman pornographic texts have not been given the critical attention of *My Secret Life*, and they have not been considered by fallen women scholars like Logan, Anderson, Auerbach, and Mitchell.

Sally Mitchell claims that the writers she investigated in her critical work raised consciousness without proposing solutions, and I am inclined to claim something similar regarding these four critical approaches to Victorian fallenness. Logan, Anderson, Auerbach, and Mitchell definitely create argumentative structures that help readers critically consider fallen characters in their social, historical, and/or literary context. I, like these scholars, see an oversight that needs critical attention and an area of analysis in the genre of Victorian pornography that needs to be given more thoughtful, argumentative consideration in connection to Victorian fallen women scholarship.

While I agree with Seymour-Smith's and Harrison's *method* of approaching fallenness and sexual transgression by way of a critique of

pornography, I, like Logan, disagree with their too-narrow and too male-centered focus which concludes that Walter is solely—or best—able to capture some standard of accuracy regarding the lived sexual experience of the Victorians, especially the gentleman client of hundreds of prostitutes. In addition, jointly considering Marcus's and Rosenman's critical observations indicates that *My Secret Life*, as an expression of Victorian social history, reveals that while it is possible to *privately* play with sexual permutations and potentialities, this private subversive sexual play does not truly challenge the existing *public* moral and class boundaries fastening dominant Victorian ideology, especially those regarding female sexuality and dominant female gender roles.

In constructing their investigations, the fallen women critics Logan, Anderson, Auerbach, and Mitchell consider a constellation of texts comprised of both literary and social documents, but they do not thoroughly consider pornographic texts. When pornography is briefly mentioned, it is discounted, dismissed, or simply noted as a sub-genre of fiction. Conversely, when pornography is given center-stage by Marcus, Seymour-Smith, Harrison, and Rosenman, *My Secret Life* is hauled out as representative of the whole pornographic genre. While I do not deny the magnitude and importance of Walter's massive text, resting evidence of Victorian sexual experience on a single, albeit voluminous, erotic autobiography is as shortsighted as reducing all of Victorian literature to *Vanity Fair*, exclusively and endlessly circling all scholarship around this very important but by no means solitary text.

Marcus explains that because “conventions of censorship had a severely limiting effect on the range of the novel,” authors “had to find less direct means of communicating the sexual component in the situations they described” (109). It is obvious, then, that mainstream authors devised ways to suggest and insinuate rather than explicitly detail or reveal sexual activity or desire. At its basic level, this seems rather a neutral point, until one considers the massive cultural weight of the sexual double standard informing both the real and fictional men and women of nineteenth-century England. Too often, the “less direct means of communicating” female sexuality results in off-stage sex or seduction, ultimately leaving a pregnant and abandoned fallen woman who now faces a life of repercussion, judgment, and public shame. The male seducer in this scenario, though his sexual activity also takes place off-stage, is not publicly marked by his sexual action, and is therefore free to retain his respectability and status, eschewing any responsibility to the woman or child, even if he (falsely) promised her marriage and support. Marcus, once again lauding the value of *My Secret Life*, explains:

As simple social history, then, the facts and details of *My Secret Life* are interesting and useful, and there can be no question that we should know them. They add to and thicken our sense of the Victorian reality, and they move it further ahead in the direction toward which much modern historical research has already tended. Taken by themselves, however, the details and revelations of *My Secret Life* do not immediately or automatically

fall into new patterns of generalization. Something must be done to them before their meanings can emerge. (103)

I agree with Marcus's sentiment and method described above, but I advocate a broader consideration of the pornographic genre in order to "thicken our sense" of female fallenness in nineteenth-century literature and life. Lurking beyond the massive dark shadow of Walter's occlusive text are equally interesting and useful opportunities for historical research and meaning-making in the numerous details of other pornographic works whose facts we should also know. And, something must be done with these other pornographic works to ensure that their meaning, too, can emerge.

“Imbued with the science of Venus”:

A Pornographic Imagining of Eliza the Third

No matter how safely or discreetly narrated, the story of the two Elizas is haunted by the specter of sexual intercourse. Of course, Austen does not detail the sexual couplings of *any* of her characters, and though the two Elizas serve a specific sexual function in the novel, they, too, are granted the same tactful courtesy. Regardless, the female characters who do not have sexually suspect pasts are able to maintain their chaste bodily integrity. The two Elizas, however, have been penetrated outside of marriage, and their subsequent bastard pregnancies irrefutably prove this fact. At a bare minimum, each Eliza had sex at least one time with the father of her child, and, apparently, no contraceptive method was used, or, if it was, it proved ineffectual. Of course, the required narrative events surely overpower any other end to the sexual act, as the force of pregnancy is impossible stop in the fallen woman narrative. No discussion of either woman’s pleasure is present either; the sex act is obliquely called up to prove transgression, not female orgasm. Because the basic facts of sexual intercourse resulting in pregnancy alone transmit the necessary warning to characters and readers, explicit sexual detail or frank discussion of specific physical contact is hardly required. The actual intercourse need not be narratively shown if the shameful, damning evidence from the activity is obvious enough, and Austen unmistakably relies on this narrative strategy.

At the beginning of this chapter, I pondered the possibility that the genderless and nameless bastard offspring of Eliza Williams and John

Willoughby could be “Eliza the third,” a girl-child destined for the fall apparently built into her narrative, if not genetic, code. Because Austen does not give the child much narrative reality, this offspring exists suspended in a timeless void of possibility and potential. It is a character always waiting for its story to be written. Based on the reproductive juggernaut of the fallen woman narrative—especially as established in Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*—if this child is a third Eliza, she could very well share the fate of her mother and grandmother. But, must she? Must one fallen woman beget another? I speculate that this potential Eliza the third can rupture the narrative constraints of fallenness and find a different, less tragic story in which to star. This character can emerge from a suspended, timeless void and find herself in a more liberating and fulfilling narrative. She can end up being not an Eliza at all, but neither a Marianne. Obviously, I am dealing in ambiguity and speculation, as I cannot ask Austen to fill in what remains forever unformed, and I do not presume to rewrite Austen, either. Instead, I aim to expose another narrative trajectory for this hypothetical Eliza that could allow her to escape the fate of the fallen. To use Steven Marcus’s phrase, I intend to “thicken our sense” of fallenness by offering a pornographic imagining of Eliza the third, one that exists even beyond the imposing presence of Walter’s *My Secret Life*.

If Austen’s 1811 mainstream novel *Sense and Sensibility* serves as the opening example to my study of fallenness in the literature and life of nineteenth-century England, then the anonymously written 1899 pornographic text titled *The Horn Book: A Girl’s Guide to the Knowledge of Good and Evil* serves as an end-of-the-century contrasting resistance to the narrative trajectory

of female fallenness. To insert the timeless and formless potential Eliza the third into *The Horn Book's* alternate textual construction of female sexuality reveals a startlingly divergent narrative path for her. In this pornographic text, a markedly different female character emerges who avoids a sexual fall into shame and exile, who avoids scandalous pregnancy, who is allowed to express and enjoy her sexuality, and who challenges, as well, the sometimes cruel or unsatisfactory patriarchal constraints of "proper" marriage. The unnamed, unsexed bastard child of Eliza Williams and John Willoughby can avoid becoming Eliza the third if she is allowed to shuck off the "fallen" paper doll dress and don, instead, an entirely new identity as Maud, the heroine of *The Horn Book*.

Mary Poovey, in her 1984 *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, points out that though "Austen spent her entire life in the very heart of propriety," her novels still present a "young girl's maturation" in light of "the complex relationship between a woman's desires and the imperatives of propriety" (172). Characters like Elinor and Marianne obviously have desires, but they are only able to fulfill these desires by remaining safely within the boundaries of propriety. Austen's two Elizas pointedly provide hard evidence that a good woman's desires must always be subsumed by propriety, especially if she is to marry well. Poovey details:

The notion of the family that served Jane Austen as a model for the proper coexistence of the individual and society was essentially patriarchal, supportive of, and supported by, the allegiances and hierarchy that feminine propriety implied. Its smallest unit—the marriage—embodied for Austen the ideal union of individual

desire and social responsibility; if a woman could legitimately express herself *only* by choosing to marry and then by sustaining her marriage, Austen suggests, she *could*, through her marriage, not only satisfy her own needs but also influence society. (203)

But this analysis seems to apply only to the idealized marriages privileged in Austen's novels, for there are plenty of unhappy and cranky sets of marrieds in her work who are held up in direct contrast to the eventually ideally married heroines. These less-than-desirable marriages, Poovey explains, reveal Austen's acknowledgment of the "psychological toll exacted by patriarchal society" on women always maneuvering the relationship between their desires and propriety (203). Indeed, one of the peripheral marriages in *Sense and Sensibility* is the forced union between Colonel Brandon's mysteriously unkind older brother and the first Eliza. Outwardly, this marriage adheres to public expectations of the time, but privately, as Austen only implies, the truth of this marriage is terribly ugly, exacting such a psychological toll on the first Eliza that she is driven to stray from this socially, but not emotionally, sanctioned union. Evidently, not all fictional (or real) marriages can live up to the ideal, not even those described in pornographic texts.

The Horn Book opens with a description of the central male and female characters. The text reads:

Charlie, twenty-eight years of age, brilliantly healthy, enjoying a moderate income, which he derived from the honest labor of his father in business, had as his mistress, Maud, over whose pretty head twenty-four summers had passed. She was the wife of a

worthy fellow, whose icy temperament formed too great a contrast with that of his better half, so that it was no wonder that she should seek elsewhere that which she had no chance of finding in her husband's arms. (13)

Echoing the first Eliza's situation, Maud's husband's "icy temperament" is what leads her to stray into the arms of her lover, Charlie. Though this situation is exactly what ignites the first Eliza's departure from her forced and unhappy marriage, it also, unfortunately, brings her into contact with the cad who leaves her pregnant and broke—thus, beginning the saga. By contrast, for her sake, the lover that Maud encounters outside her marriage is not a cad with disingenuous or mercenary designs on her. On the contrary, Charlie is a well-informed, kind, attentive and resourceful lover who has their mutual sexual pleasure and safety foremost in his mind. Because of this, in her foray outside her marriage, Maud does not even stumble or trip, let alone fall in any way; and, if the character of Maud rescues the potential Eliza the third from her abysmal fate, then a character like Charlie rights the wrongs of countless male seducers-cum-deserters.

To clarify, *The Horn Book* is not, by definition, a proper novel. This *Girl's Guide to the Knowledge of Good and Evil* is a genre-defying testament to textual hybridity. It is equal parts sex manual, Socratic dialogue, biology lesson, and character-driven pornographic narrative. Whatever the genre, this text, as the subtitle indicates, centers on a "girl being taught a lesson." Here, however, this phrase functions in the exact opposite way that Eve Sedgwick observed. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne is the impulsive and too-passionate girl being

taught a socially acceptable, necessary lesson about reining in female pleasure and affection; in *The Horn Book*, Maud is a different kind of girl being taught several different kinds of lessons to very different ends.

Instead of a “blueprint for patriarchy,” this pornographic text foregrounds the equality and compatibility of its two central male and female characters. From the outset, Charlie and Maud have an egalitarian understanding of one another. As the text explains:

Charlie, free to do as he liked, was fond of the ladies, but in a tranquil fashion and brooking no delays, had met Maud at social gatherings, and she seemed fitted for his simple, albeit lecherous, tastes. She, too, had remarked Charlie, who by his discreet, polite, and ardent manner, seemed well fitted to compensate her, without fear of scandal for the insufficiency of her husband, resulting from his frigidity in the pleasures of love. (13-14)

Though it is clear that the unattached bachelor Charlie is free to do whatever he wants, he pays Maud special attention, as she is a woman obviously suited to his desires. And Maud sees in Charlie a man who will meet her unmet desires, but, most importantly, she also sees a man who will not cause her any *scandal*. Their attraction is based on mutual carnal desires, certainly, but the narrative makes clear that these carnal desires exist within a specific social framework, bound by public expectation and the need for discretion. As such, this hybrid pornographic text does not privilege pure erotic fantasy wherein any behavior—social or sexual—is possible without consequence; this is no sexual free-for-all cheaply highlighting the sexual contact between two (or more)

sexual bodies who have no real presence or function in the public world.

Charlie and Maud are sexual *and* social bodies. It is necessary to acknowledge class privilege here, as Maud and Charlie's upper-middle class status allows them certain social and economic freedoms. However, as the Eliza stories indicate, even class and money cannot protect women from the fall. Neither Maud nor the Elizas are working class, but this, in some ways, reveals that they have more to lose precisely because they are of a higher class, therefore making their fall that much more significant. The lower-class woman's fall is not often represented as dramatic nor as socially relevant or charged with public shame.

Over the course of eighteen months, Charlie and Maud engage in a series of trysts in Charlie's private room. Making quick arrangements by passing notes, the two lovers find moments to spend together without rousing the suspicions of Maud's husband. These eighteen months only further reinforce Charlie and Maud's compatibility. Their genial relationship is described as thus:

They had confidence in each other. Maud found that Charlie was not only a discreet and indefatigable lover, but also a man of firm mind, just and sensible, free of all prejudices, but respecting them for the sake of the world's opinion. Charlie recognized in Maud a good-hearted woman, not very capricious, but leaning towards the pleasures of passion in consequence of her fiery temperament, held in check, however, by a sensible brain; farseeing too, but desirous of learning. Their two souls were destined to agree. (14-15)

As far as adulterous liaisons go, Maud has found the ideal lover to satisfy the passion lacking in her dismal marriage. Charlie and Maud's confidence in each other is directly informed by their mutual respect and their desire to maintain their fulfilling relationship by protecting it from scandal. But scandal in this narrative goes beyond them merely not wanting Maud's husband to discover their affair; they also want to express themselves sexually without risking pregnancy.

The opportunity arises for Charlie and Maud to spend an entire weekend together, as Maud's husband has granted her a weekend free to visit a friend in the country. Planning instead to quickly visit this friend but spend the rest of the time with Charlie, Maud thoroughly looks forward to spending quality time with her lover. They both welcome the possibility of spending a few nights together, as opposed to a few short, stolen hours. This extended time together helps establish the conceit of the text's narrative structure. After their first coupling during this weekend-long love-fest, Maud says to Charlie:

You must confess, my dear boy, that you are a great libertine. I don't say that to reproach you, as frankly, I get all the benefit, and not being a hypocrite I state the plain truth, but you seemed imbued with the science of Venus to your fingers-ends, and I believe that there is not a single branch unknown to you. (17)

Charlie's simple retort, "I think you are right," sets off the rest of the question-and-answer structure of the narrative (17). Charlie is a man of exhaustive sexual wisdom, but his wisdom and knowledge is not like Walter's of *My Secret Life*. Walter's vision is solipsistic, specific to his experience, his own genital triumphs

and failings. Charlie, on the other hand, balances his own pleasure with the desire to please others safely and kindly. In almost superhero-worthy sentiment, Charlie declares: "I tried to inculcate my ideas to all the women who succumbed to me, gently and warily, having due respect for their feelings of coyness and shame" (18). Charlie never mentions prostitutes or prostitution, and sex here is not part of the cash-nexus, as it in *My Secret Life*. Charlie, it seems, has vowed to use his powers for good, not evil, and outside the realm of economic exchange.

Upon hearing of Charlie's respect for his female partners, Maud further sets up the narrative to follow by telling Charlie:

You know that all women are full of curiosity? I am no exception to the rule. I should like—you will laugh at me perchance, but I care not—to be treated like an innocent girl desiring to learn all that you know so well of love and love's diversions, as if you were the professor of a maiden ignorant of everything, even of the difference of sex. (19)

This obviously establishes the reason for Charlie's subsequent book-length treatise instructing Maud on all aspects of sexuality, but, when Maud continues her comments, it is evident that her performance as a naive girl may not be that much of a stretch, at least in terms of her sexual experience and understanding prior to knowing Charlie. Maud's husband was of very little help to her. She explains:

My husband has taught me very little about all this, scarcely a few words, so that it has happened that when out of doors I sometimes

cannot understand certain words whispered in worldly conversation. I hear the sounds, without knowing their meaning. This vexes me, I look foolish, and no one likes to appear silly. When I talk of this to my husband, either I make mistakes, or he pretends I do, or what is more probable still, he knows very little more than me. (19)

As a member of a larger culture—especially one that functions, at some important, albeit whispered level, in the realm of human sexuality—Maud wants to understand the language of sexuality, the taxonomy of erotic contact. Maud's comment calls up both Austen's Mrs. Jennings' comment about Colonel Brandon's "natural child," whispered as an aside to be kept from the young girls, and Sally Mitchell's anecdote about it being better to tell girls nothing before they marry—advice from a doctor, no less. Maud wants to be sexually educated, and this includes becoming conversant in the whispered language of sex and sexuality. And her husband is clearly no help to her in this regard. In a lengthy, and very telling, exposure of her husband's "icy temperament," Maud details for Charlie her husband's lack of sexual warmth or skill. She reveals:

He "does it" to me in a very slovenly sort of way. All he takes the trouble to do is to get between my thighs, put his prick, which is rather soft and thin, into my cunt, without having caressed it at all. He rides me and shakes himself up and down with only a shadow of lechery, spending with no thought of me, or wish to know whether I have done the same, so that often he leaves me in the lurch before I can "come," driving me mad with unsatisfied lust,

biting the sheets in sheer desire, and unheeding the state I am in, and which I try to calm by scratching with my fingertips my poor little clitoris on the sly, while he snores by my side. He avoids carefully all talk of pleasures of Venus, and, to cut the story short, fucks me as if he were taking a pinch of snuff, without any ardor, just as if he wanted to piss and no more. (33-34)

Austen never detailed the “unkind” treatment the first Eliza suffered at the hands of her husband, but *The Horn Book* takes the time to establish that Maud strays from her erotically-challenged husband primarily because he treats her as little more than a pisspot. To echo Colonel Brandon’s insightful question asked regarding the first Eliza, is it any wonder, then, that Maud strayed? But, of course, the incredibly significant difference here is that, unlike the first Eliza, Maud’s sexual connection outside of marriage does not result in a publicly shameful pregnancy. However, Maud’s lack of pregnancy is not merely a convenient narrative oversight, nor is it the result of some unrealistic pornographic consequence-free fantasy-world. On the contrary, Charlie is no more explicit in his instructive description of sexual desire and sexual activity than he is in his detailed illustrations of various contraceptive methods, methods he and Maud unquestionably use.

In his first “dialogue,” Charlie establishes the basic facts of male and female anatomy, paying special attention to the seats of both male and female pleasure—the clitoris warrants as much discussion as the penis—as well as the truly rudimentary basics of conception and gestation. Charlie and Maud discuss masturbation, sodomy and tribadism, and cover, in great detail and

length, sixty-three sexual intercourse postures. Charlie provides detailed abstracts for positions such as “The Saint-George,” “The Wheelbarrow Reversed,” “The Double Lazy Style Reversed,” and “The Game of Honey-pots.” He even devotes two entries to positions supposedly helpful in determining the sex of a potential offspring—positions appropriately titled, “How to Get a Boy” and “How to Get a Girl.” The dialogues usually end with Charlie and Maud putting into practice what they’ve covered. Except, both Charlie and Maud are keenly concerned with “how *not* to get a child.” Necessarily, then, Charlie devotes the second section of the book to intricately describing various contraceptive methods and non-procreative sexual activities.

He explains that all sixty-three positions can be performed anally, but he prefers vaginal, as he is a gentleman when it comes to anal sex and will not enter a woman who has not been “prepared” for it. However, he emphasizes that enjoying each position anally rather than vaginally allows women to avoid “that swelling behind the navel that rarely goes down under nine months” (119). With the same level of detail dedicated to each sexual intercourse posture, Charlie now details various non-procreative sexual activities like oral sex or reciprocal manual stimulation. *The Horn Book* concludes with Charlie and Maud’s most valuable dialogue titled, “Love and Security; Or, How to Fuck Without Danger of Fecundation.” Which is, of course, what Charlie and Maud have been doing throughout the course of their relationship.

In their final dialogue, Maud specifically requests that Charlie provide “some information and explanation concerning so called secret methods by which a woman can give herself up to the pleasure of the caresses and

embraces of the man she loves without danger of getting in the family way” (147). Charlie’s initial response amounts to a general statement of being safe instead of sorry by avoiding intercourse all together, finding pleasure instead in the non-procreative sexual activity he has described. Charlie states, “too much prudence can never do any harm, especially as the doctors with all their learning have not yet been able to tell precisely how the female is fecundated” (149). Despite not fully understanding the interior science of fertilization and conception, Charlie does accurately know that the male must avoid discharging his semen inside the woman’s vagina in order to prevent pregnancy.

Because this is an area in which even doctors are “confused,” Charlie, with his basic, accurate knowledge, contests or qualifies the six methods he explains, rightly dispelling some still-lingering late-nineteenth-century misinformation about conception and contraception. In his first example, “No Bottom-Fucking Allowed,” Charlie contests the “vulgar error” of thinking that because the “arse-hole” is too close to the “genuine aperture,” avoiding anal sex is necessary to avoid procreation (149). As he has already detailed, anal sex is one route to avoiding pregnancy. In this entry, he tacks on an additional comment about misinformation: “It has also been said that after a first discharge one may fuck as one will, second and later copulation being unable to cause pregnancy. I need hardly stop to point out the insanity of this belief” (149). Though not a doctor, Charlie’s understanding of the “science of Venus” is spot-on.

Charlie contests the additional “vulgar error” that “mutual spending” results in pregnancy. He enthusiastically remarks that simultaneous orgasms

are indeed pleasurable and worth striving for, but he's almost lawyerly in his rebuttal to the theory that "'coming' together" will create a child. Charlie says:

But it does not follow that there will be no conception without simultaneous discharge, as proved by the fact of many wives of icy temperament bearing large families without ever having really "spent," "come," or "enjoyed" in the whole course of their conjugal career. Women violated while under the influence of narcotics, or victims of rape without the slightest feeling of pleasure have also been known to bear children. (150-51)

Those who rely on faulty practices or inaccurate "scientific" theories such as these will most likely pay the price of pregnancy. Charlie counters these illogical theories by detailing more reasonable and certainly more effective contraceptive methods like "Snuffing the Candle" (withdrawal before male orgasm), "The French Letter" (condom), "The Sponge" (blocking the cervix with a vinegar-soaked sponge or an india-rubber pessary), and, finally, "The Injection" (douching the vagina with vinegar and water immediately after sex) (149-55).

However, even these more reasonable, effective methods are recommended with necessary caution, as Charlie understands that no contraceptive practice is fail-proof. Charlie tells Maud:

But all said and done this is a very uncertain and risky matter, as once the seed is sown it is well-nigh impossible to prevent the child being born, unless criminal practices are resorted to, to the imminent danger of the mother's life. How many poor girls suffer,

if they are a few days behind with their monthly derangement and what relief when the crimson flow appears! (154)

Both Charlie and Maud could be called vehemently “pro-life,” as they do not condone abortion or other fatal, intentional harm to the fetus or newborn. In fact, Charlie will “tell nothing concerning the methods in vogue to procure an abortion,” arguing, instead, that “when checks are employed to prevent conception, no harm is done” (155). Charlie would rather exercise caution, employ his contraceptive knowledge, and imbue his female partners with the science of Venus instead of engage in criminal activity by harming the child that is the result of ignorant, inaccurate, or ineffectual contraceptive practice.

At the end of this final dialogue, the text concludes with a brief script regarding the two lovers:

Here the dialogue ceases. The lovers give themselves up to lewd and libidinous voluptuous enjoyment more enjoyable than any talk, and sleep overcomes them in each other’s arms, until the moment arrives for separation and Maud starts off to the country to effect her alibi. (156)

The Horn Book does end “happily ever after” in many ways. Presuming Maud’s alibi remains unquestioned, Maud and her husband will continue with their publicly-approved marriage, and Charlie and Maud will remain discreet, passionate, and non-procreative lovers. At the end of *The Horn Book*, Maud is not abandoned. She is not treated unkindly. She is not “romanced” or “seduced.” She is not pregnant. She is not fallen, nor is she tragically broke and dying. The final scene leaves her very happy and healthy, sexually fulfilled

by a compatible lover who will do all he can to keep her reputation intact. And, if Maud and Charlie end their affair, Maud has amassed enough information to allow her the ability to protect herself in the future, even with lovers less benevolent than Charlie (obviously barring rape). In the end, the text successfully lives up to its subtitle, as Maud has been educated in the ways of “good and evil.” She experienced endless sexual good while avoiding social evil, namely because she learned that there’s no such thing as too much precaution when exploring pleasure, particularly with a considerate partner.

Poovey’s earlier comment that Austen’s novels center on a “young girl’s maturation” in light of “the complex relationship between a woman’s desires and the imperatives of propriety” is absolutely applicable to the anonymously written pornographic text, *The Horn Book* (172). Though *The Horn Book* first appeared in England almost ninety years after the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*, it is evident that the anxieties surrounding women’s desires and propriety still figure largely in the social and literary imagination decades later. However, by 1899, the restrictive, sadistic archetypal fallen woman narrative—especially as presented in Austen’s two Elizas—meets a competing, albeit pornographic, narrative wherein the sexually maturing young woman, Maud, is able to fully experience her desires within the boundaries of propriety precisely because she has a learned and kind lover who allows her to safely escape the severe “psychological toll” of her grim marriage. Though Maud’s unkind marriage bears some resemblance to that of the first Eliza, Maud, in no way, resembles the first or even the second Eliza. Maud, now “imbued with the science of Venus,” is their sexually savvy opposite, and her more socially and

sexually liberating anti-fallen woman narrative is precisely the story the unwritten Eliza the third must inhabit in order to stop the fallen woman juggernaut from reproducing again.

Challenging “historical ventriloquism”:

The Secret Life of the Sexually Savvy Female in Victorian Pornography

Though Austen’s 1811 novel *Sense and Sensibility* and the anonymous 1899 pornographic text *The Horn Book* are separated by over eighty years, I did not choose to bracket the nineteenth-century with these texts in order to prove that advancement of time alone created the social or political environment that allowed a literary character like Maud to exist. On the contrary, if nineteenth-century mainstream English fiction contains a bevy of fallen female characters scattered across the decades, each of these fallen females has a sexually savvy opposite like Maud whose divergent, more socially and sexually liberating narrative exists in pornographic texts written, circulated, reprinted, or translated *throughout* this period. Because of this, the long nineteenth century—and the Victorian period especially—is rife with pornographic texts that, I argue, purposefully challenge female fallenness as it is established in mainstream fiction.

Despite the omnipresence of Walter’s *My Secret Life* in studies of Victorian sexuality, it is telling that most people still view the phrase “Victorian pornography” as a laughable oxymoron. More than once, when explaining that my area of study is Victorian pornography, people have chuckled at my “obvious joke.” Surely, they respond, those stodgy, prudish, and painfully repressed Victorians would never have anything to do with sexually explicit material; if anything, Victorian explicitness probably involves silly, tame narratives describing ladies scandalously baring their ankles. At this point in the

conversation, however, it is usually me who is laughing, considering that those same apparently straight-laced Victorians produced and enjoyed extremely graphic pornography that rivals or, in many cases, surpasses any contemporary porn.

Still, it is hard to shake the unsexy, pejorative meaning of “Victorian” when cherry-picked, conservative, and often suspect anecdotes are held up as representative of the time period and its people. However, as is the case with a statement designed to sum up an age or encapsulate the broad social understanding of a particular era, these anecdotes, in retrospect, may simply be the enduring remnants—or total fictions borne—of rhetorical shadowboxing with perceived or amplified opponents. Next to such conservative anecdotes, hardcore Victorian pornography—especially if it foregrounds female sexual pleasure and sexual pedagogy—seems a farfetched possibility, indeed.

Number one on the list of conservative anecdotes would have to be this legendary quotation from William Acton’s 1857 *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*: “The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled by sexual feelings of any kind” (133). This single line has such massive legs that it still bears repeating in almost every study of Victorian manners, sexuality, and social life. Combine this statement with Sarah Stickney Ellis’s 1839 *The Women of England* treatise, and it is easy to see why Acton’s statement still functions as “historical fact” for many people today. Ellis’s work helped establish and solidify the “doctrine of separate spheres” for men and women, and her writing argued for the necessary and very important “moral power” that the women of England must always exercise (56). Women of

England are to be perpetually lovely and in control of their own home (private sphere), and they are to guide sweetly, virtuously, and morally their beleaguered husbands who are troubled by the outside world (public sphere). Above all women of England are to always be generous and cherish their “power of doing good” (56).

Clear echoes of Ellis’s doctrine of separate spheres reverberate in John Ruskin’s 1864 lecture “Of Queens’ Gardens.” Though Ruskin rejects the idea of one sex being “superior” to the other, he nevertheless advances very specific qualities distinctly separating men and women into two categories. Ruskin writes:

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places.... By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. (260)

In short, man is action and energy and adventure, and woman’s “sweet ordering” is best used to decorate a house, for she truly knows how to arrange a home well through her inherent domesticity. And this idealized domestic home, again, is not only the private space that women are allowed to “rule,” it is

also the safe-haven for the world-weary husband so besieged by his life in the difficult, challenging public sphere.

To sully these idealized separate spheres with pornographic images or explicit sexual possibilities—particularly regarding an active, pleasure-seeking, sexually educated female subject—is the equivalent of stripping bare the pantalooned piano leg of Victorian lore. Matthew Sweet, in his 2001 *Inventing the Victorians*, explains:

Sexuality was the principle territory upon which this body of myth and misinformation was constructed. ‘Lie back and think of England’ is a phrase often used to characterise Victorian women’s attitude to sex—despite the fact that its first recorded instance is in a private diary from 1912. That old chestnut about draped piano legs is quoted with even greater regularity. The Victorians, the orthodox view goes, were so afraid of the power of sexuality that they felt compelled to cover up the legs of their pianos; they obscured signs of the body even where they existed only by inference. It has become the perfect exemplum of their prudishness, cited with impressive regularity in both popular and scholarly writings. (xii)

Covered piano legs. Women lying back and thinking of England. Even John Ruskin’s apparent fear of his wife’s pubic hair. These, and other oft-repeated Victorian myths or tangled exaggerations, are acts of what Sweet calls “historical ventriloquism”: mouthing back to the Victorians what they never actually said or did themselves (xiii). Historical record is reduced to a very bad game of

“telephone” wherein the garbled messages that make it through years of ear-to-ear whispers are taken for truth despite misunderstanding or miscommunication. But Sweet takes on more than anecdotes; he also addresses the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres. In the chapter titled, “Whatever Happened to Patriarchy?,” Sweet succinctly investigates this question:

The power of Victorian men has been consolidated retrospectively by a parallel insistence upon the relative powerlessness of Victorian women. The nineteenth century is remembered as a time when women’s lives were more severely policed and circumscribed than in other historical epochs. Post-Victorian culture has been inexpressibly keen to dwell upon images of women housebound by stern husbands, restricted by forbidding social codes, trussed up in underwear that was a physical embodiment of their cultural position. If this was so, it begs the question why the nineteenth century was the era in which women first found their political voices, penetrated male-dominated professions, won property rights and carved out their own spheres of professional competence in high-tech jobs that were wholly unrelated to their traditional domestic and sexual roles. (177)

While Sweet does not question every aspect of contemporary understanding of the Victorian period and its people, he does thoroughly investigate numerous instances of “historical ventriloquism” that erroneously serve as shorthand for

the Victorian age, especially in comparison to the enormous social, economic, and sexual changes that took place in the nineteenth century. Investigating the “invention” of the Victorians reveals that dubious, but enduringly attractive, ventriloquized shorthand too often speaks for a history that cannot and should not be reduced so easily or carelessly. As the passage above highlights, dual, complex historical representations of the century present competing or disruptive discourses, particularly regarding women’s social and sexual roles.

Though Sweet does not address this in his book, his “Whatever Happened to Patriarchy?” question above was answered years earlier in Mary Poovey’s 1988 *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. England’s nineteenth-century corseted housewife existing alongside the emerging middle-class professional female is evidence of what Poovey calls “border cases” which threaten and/or expose “the artificiality of the binary logic that governed the Victorian symbolic economy” by marking “the limits of ideological certainty” (12). Poovey’s general argument is that specific mid-Victorian moments in medical advancement, wrangling over divorce and property laws, and the vocation of nursing, for example, each forced a tricky and contested recognition of the female outside the private sphere. Because her position in that sphere fastened the rest of the ideological structure, her removal from the home and hearth threatened the national character of England, and, therefore, also directly threatened the argumentative bedrock of viewpoints like Acton’s, Ellis’s, and Ruskin’s.

If the nineteenth century gives us, in both fact and fiction, the submissive, corseted domestic angel, then it also gives us the female temperance activist, the

female public and political rhetorician, and the female professional worker. Thus, just as there could be good, moral women who ended up using their supposed inherent domestic skills for professional, satisfying work outside the home, so, too, could there be women who, happily for them, most certainly had sexual feelings of all kinds. More importantly, however, I would also add that if the nineteenth century gives us countless shame-laden real and fictional narratives of fallen women, this historical period also provides an unexplored, overlooked set of pornographic texts presenting narrative depictions of female desire coupled with the protective sexual pedagogy necessary to avoid female fallenness. For each tragic, fallen Eliza, there is a sexually savvy, unfallen Maud.

Challenging the “historical ventriloquism” that misspeaks the “voice” of an era is done not merely to expose the dirtiest bits of Victorian culture and its people. Revealing Maud’s pornographic narrative is not meant to be a titillating, cheap striptease that exposes graphic sexual content just because this content offers the sharpest contrast to repeated, exaggerated, and/or erroneous anecdotes of Victorian prudery. Instead, juxtaposing the sharply different narrative trajectory of the Elizas with Maud’s narrative of desire and protective sexual education reveals another kind of “border case” that challenges the ideological boundaries and certainties of the Victorian period. If, as Steven Marcus contends, “pornography is valuable because it reflects or expresses social history” (44), then the secret life of many unfallen, sexually savvy females in Victorian pornography must be critically investigated as part of this social history alongside the mainstream fallen woman narratives that persist throughout the period.

Not What It Is But What It Does:

The Cultural Work of Victorian Pornography

A scholar attempting to design and advance a particular argument related to pornography must address—or otherwise posit—the definition of the term. However, in the same way the word “Victorian” carries with it decades of erroneous cultural debris through a mechanism like “historical ventriloquism,” the term “pornography” is complicated (or, rather, often oversimplified) by attempts to corral its meaning, particularly when limiting and confining it to a fixed written definition.

In Ian Frederick Moulton’s *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*, he details the initial definitions of pornography recorded during the nineteenth century. Moulton writes:

To all intents and purposes, “pornography” is a word coined in the nineteenth century; the earliest modern use of the term dates from 1850 (*OED*), and it was originally used to describe the erotic wall paintings found in the ruins of Pompeii. After its initial appearance it was appropriated by medical writers to describe works that dealt with the threat of prostitution to public hygiene and morals. (8)

Entering into a common analytical thread of questioning the objective versus subjective definition and assessment of pornography, Moulton explicitly remarks on the difficulty of establishing a working definition of pornography,

particularly one that will prove useful over time and/or across cultural or geographical borders. Moulton further specifies:

Often, pornography is taken as a transhistorical category and is used to describe a wide range of cultural material—including texts and artifacts, rituals or performances—in which, generally speaking, women are represented as objects of sexual desire or as objects of violent aggression by men. Such a wide application of the term—useful as it may be as a means of focusing attention on the ubiquity of misogyny and violence against women—weakens the effectiveness of “pornography” as a term for specific analysis. (8).

Though Moulton does not mention controversial twentieth-century anti-pornography theorists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon by name, his quote above suggests that their rather wide, but simultaneously too singular, approach to defining pornography is less than effective or productive in both historical and contemporary analysis of pornography.

In Andrea Dworkin’s provocative 1981 text, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, she centers her analysis of pornography squarely and unwaveringly in the word’s etymology. Dworkin writes:

The word *pornography*, derived from the ancient Greek *porné* and *graphos*, means “writing about whores.” *Porné* means “whore,” specifically and exclusively the lowest class of whore, which in ancient Greece was the brothel slut available to all male citizens. The *porné* was the cheapest (in the literal sense), least

regarded, least protected of all women, including slaves. She was, simply and clearly and absolutely put, a sexual slave.... The word *pornography* does not mean “writing about sex” or “depictions of the erotic” or “depictions of sexual acts” or “depictions of nude bodies” or “sexual representations” or any other such euphemism. It means the graphic depiction of women as vile whores.... Contemporary pornography strictly and literally conforms to the word’s root meaning: the graphic depiction of vile whores, or, in our language, sluts, cows (as in: sexual cattle, sexual chattel), cunts. *The word has not changed its meaning and the genre is not misnamed.* (199-200 [emphasis added])

Dworkin’s position is unshakable and unmistakable, and this, in fact, may be why her own graphic and aggressive definition is less effective or useful as a term for specific analysis. For Dworkin, the definition of pornography is certain and unchangeable, chained to its linguistic and misogynistic roots. In *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women’s Rights*, Nadine Strossen points out that Dworkin’s scholarship partner and fellow anti-pornography advocate Catharine MacKinnon also relies on a method of “characteristic oversimplification” when MacKinnon offers a succinct definition of pornography as “man’s boot on woman’s neck” (qtd. in Strossen 161-62).

Dworkin and MacKinnon advance a firm definition of pornography as explicitly linked to male violence against women (or male violence against the less powerful), but their unyielding argument and analysis when employing this narrow definition is often directly challenged by other pornography scholars

who see the genre of pornography as too complicated by variation and situation. Indeed, as a response to a fixed definition of pornography, Moulton explains that “one of the enduring fictions about pornography is that it is static—offering the same sexual material and attitudes over and over” (9). Referring to the 1857 *OED* definition that pornography is “descriptions of the life, manners, etc., of prostitutes and their patrons; hence the expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art,” Joan Hoff remarks, “it should be noted that this definition *did not distinguish between varieties of pornography*” (21 [emphasis original]). Further, scholar Dorelies Kraakman also contests a too-narrow definition of pornography. Kraakman writes:

Pornography has long been a hybrid in Western European literary history, partaking of genres as diverse as medical and paramedical advice literature, drinking songs, political pamphlets and the novel. In other words it did not always exist as a homogeneous genre, a fact well testified by the variety of terms which were used to designate writing about sex. Licentious, lewd, libertine, erotic, bawdy, galant [sic], luxurious, and last but not least philosophical, are some names given to a body of literature that served many purposes. (105)

Using Kraakman’s assessment detailed above, even the most recent *OED* entry for pornography may not suffice or prove useful in all situations, past and present: “The explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather

than aesthetic feelings; printed or visual material containing this.” Instead of focusing on the “debates over what pornography is or is not,” Moulton argues that “it might make more sense to see pornography as a way of reading rather than as a mode of representation” (11). In so doing, the struggle to find an unequivocal, monolithic definition of pornography is replaced by a more thoughtful, critical method of reading pornography for *what it does* rather than for *what it is*, precisely because “what it is” is a debatable, subjective, heterogeneous, non-static genre that changes over time and space.

In Frances Ferguson’s *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action*, she, too, addresses the problematic nature of studying a genre that seemingly cannot be defined. Referring to one of the most famous—and often quoted—legal statements ever made regarding defining pornography, Ferguson writes:

Many of our customary ways of dealing with this variety of responses involve saying that pornography is a matter of opinion. Sometimes we even register a certain amusement at the legal efforts to identify lines that pornography is said to have crossed—and quote Justice Potter Stewart’s remark that he doesn’t know what pornography is but knows it when he sees it, as if it represented an inexplicable and naive confidence in his—or anyone’s—powers of discernment. The effort of this study is to argue for the seriousness of Justice Stewart’s famous observation and to say how one can *evaluate* instances of pornography with some confidence *even when one cannot produce a particularly*

good definition of it.... Stewart, however, assumes that the difficulty with a definition of pornography is that many things that could exemplify the definition scarcely seem pornographic. He thus shifts the burden of his discussion from definitions that would enable us to pick out objects that we had never seen before to the issue of what it means to recognize something less because of what it is than because of what it does in a particular situation.

(7-8 [emphasis original])

In sum, several scholars of pornography—with the noted exception of Dworkin and MacKinnon and their adherents—advance that attempting to construct or adhere to a universal definition of pornography does a disservice to the specific cultural work of the genre during a given time and/or in a specific context. Focusing too hard on pinning down “what it is” over “what it does” removes or obscures the social and rhetorical context of the pornographic text in question. Ferguson further asserts that “pornography should not be seen as representations of context-free concepts being presented to persons who are themselves representatives of context-free categories and concepts,” and that one should not ask “what pornography lacks but what it accomplishes” (10-11). Centering critical analysis of pornography in context allows for thoughtful investigation into the specific cultural work of pornography, despite not having a fixed definition of the term.

Clearly, it follows that for the purposes of my argument, I do not attempt to define, redefine, or otherwise challenge historical or contemporary definitions of pornography. I agree with Moulton and Ferguson, in that foregrounding,

investigating, and understanding the contextualized cultural work of pornography trumps attempts to craft and rest on a precise, all-inclusive, transhistorical definition. For example, an already definition-defying sexually and biologically explicit text like *The Horn Book: A Girl's Guide to the Knowledge of Good and Evil* does not gain (the most) critical significance through the application of a precise definition of pornography or obscenity. Instead, Maud's story of scandal-free sexual fulfillment and contraceptive and reproductive instruction is all the more meaningful when her narrative of honest and direct sexual pedagogy is critically read against the wretched fallen woman narratives reproduced in woeful tales like those of Jane Austen's Elizas. Maud's (and Charlie's) narrative actively challenges the social construction and constraints of both real and fictional fallenness, and, in this way, what *The Horn Book* does is far more important than defining what exactly it is.

The Victorian pornographic novel, in particular, becomes the natural, and maybe only, "narrative site" allowing the convergence of explicit sexual content with explicit contraceptive/reproductive information. I do not want—nor will I attempt—to create a universal claim about *all* pornography or *all* of the pornographic texts circulating during the nineteenth century. Plenty of pornographic texts available or written during this time period advance suspect "science," feature unsettling levels of sexual and social violence, and depict unsavory treatment of the powerless: women, colonized peoples, children, and animals. Not all pornographic narratives are sexually instructive, freeing, or potentially liberating for women, as, like any literary genre, pornography is hardly uniform in its content, message, or narrative structure. However, this lack

of uniformity in the genre is precisely what allows my argument and analysis to exist. The expansive genre of pornography offers enough difference and variation that my analysis may focus on the Victorian pornographic novels that purposefully foreground the convergent content that actively challenges real and fictional female fallenness and fallen woman narratives. Within the flexible boundaries of the genre of Victorian pornography, I contend that intentionally designed anti-fallen woman narratives directly “write back” to and challenge the shaming, judgment, and abuse foisted upon fallen women.

If resting my analysis in what Victorian pornography does over what it is allows me to elide proposing and employing a specific definition of pornography, then establishing key features of the cultural context in which this pornography does its work is paramount. In order to understand the cultural work of Victorian pornography, one must engage in the complicated politics surrounding the construction of sexual knowledge, the politics of reading and publishing (especially of explicit or obscene materials), and the dual, intertwining threads of the fight for both sexual and reproductive freedom advanced by nineteenth-century radicals, freethinkers, birth control advocates, and pornographers.

“What consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure”:
Victorian Sexual Discourses and Oscar Wilde’s Good Woman

In his late 1970s text, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Michel Foucault’s first “serious doubt,” concerning what he calls the “repressive hypothesis,” is whether “sexual repression is truly an established historical fact” (10). As the quintessential revisionist history, the first volume of Foucault’s landmark work investigates the “regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality” and “how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure” (11). Foucault clarifies, however, that the central issue of his study is “not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex... but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said” (11). Because, after all, there has been much said about sex and sexuality, despite the supposed repression. As Foucault notes, “what is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*” (35). In order to reveal the machinery and mechanisms behind and informing the construction of this supposed repression, Foucault states that historical inquiry is required in order to “reverse the direction of our analysis” (73). Regarding the nineteenth century in particular, Foucault remarks:

This much is undeniable: the learned discourse on sex that was pronounced in the nineteenth century was imbued with age-old

delusions, but also with systematic blindness: a crucial point—a refusal concerning the very thing that was brought to light and whose formation was urgently solicited. For there can be no misunderstanding that is not based on a fundamental relation to truth. Evading this truth, barring access to it, masking it: these were so many local tactics which, as if by superimposition and through a last-minute detour, gave a paradoxical form to a fundamental petition to know. Choosing not to recognize was yet another vagary of the will to truth. (55)

Though Foucault here refers to general scientific and medical documents produced during the nineteenth century, his conclusion that these documents claimed to speak the truth of sexuality while simultaneously preventing its emergence sounds rather like the narrative mechanisms in place in fallen woman narratives. If, at its core, the fallen woman narrative fastens itself to strictly dual representations of female sexuality (i.e., not fallen vs. fallen; angel vs. madwoman; ideal domestic wife vs. prostitute), chances are that both restrictive “choices” are delineated through delusions.

More recently, in his 2004 *Histories of Sexuality*, Stephen Garton specifies that during the nineteenth century, “the ideological counterpoint to the chaste middle-class matron was the fallen woman,” and

if the desirable state of domestic femininity was ‘passionlessness’, then ‘fallen women’ were their mirror opposite, voracious, insatiable and morally corrupt. These were women who had

fallen from grace. It was important to maintain a rigid distinction between the two. (116-17)

In the spirit of this tendency toward inflexible dualism, Garton additionally explains that for the first modern historians of Victorian sexuality, this was “an age of hypocrisy. Social conventions made discussion of sex, sexuality and bodily functions taboo, but at the same time pornography and prostitution flourished... Public prudery masked a flourishing trade in vice” (101). Yet, numerous contemporary scholars and revisionist historians—those rallied by Foucault’s call for historical inquiry—have since produced thoughtful, critical analysis of “a wide range of evidence that challenges the idea of excessive repression,” and, because of this, Garton concludes that “in place of Victorianism we can see the emergence of a more complex account stressing the proliferation of sexual discourses and the clash of sexual cultures in the nineteenth century” (102). Exposing these more complex, *plural* sexual discourses of the Victorian age only further reveals the mistake of the forced, constructed “truth” of repression and restricted pleasure.

In contemporary Victorian sexual scholarship, this challenge to the repressive hypothesis is de rigueur and inescapable. A scholar approaching nineteenth-century sexual culture is expected to sift through decades of Victorian cultural debris with a fine-tuned critical awareness of power and the construction and deployment of sexual knowledge. In light of Matthew Sweet’s exposure of the tangled game of “telephone” informing oft-repeated-but-untrue-sentiments about the Victorians, what type of mind-bending, time-traveling “historical ventriloquism” is it when a sexually fallen nineteenth-century literary

character essentially voices Foucault's contemporary challenge to the repressive hypothesis, and actively chooses pleasure by rejecting and denouncing the dominant discourse of fallenness? I am not sure what type of historical ventriloquism this is, as this apparently radical sentiment is voiced by a character who directly speaks the evidence the contemporary scholar is supposed to "work" to reveal as having been both repressed and there all along. Which, as it turns out, is exactly what the character says. When a Victorian literary character so clearly advances that her own culture's current, socially accepted representation of fallenness is a construction, a fiction, I pay attention.

Oscar Wilde's successful 1892 play, *Lady Windermere's Fan: A Play About a Good Woman*, invites readers and viewers into the dualism debate with its provocative subtitle, for how can one know a good woman except by knowing a bad one? From the outset, it is clear that Lady Windermere, the young, fairly recently married wife and mother, is the idealized "angel in the house." She is beautiful, well-mannered, respectable, and devoted to her husband, child, and home. Unlike the domestic female "'passionlessness'" Garton describes, Lady Windermere passionately claims, "Windermere and I married for love," indicating theirs to be a match made of more than economic or social convenience (15; act 1). However, when a suspect and scandalous woman falls into their marriage and disrupts their idyllic home, Lady Windermere herself is forced to confront her own—and the dominant culture's—rather unfair and too-narrowly defined categories of good or bad women.

During the afternoon of her twenty-first birthday, while preparing for a dance later that evening, Lady Windermere receives a visit from Lord Darlington, a less-than-subtle playboy-type who flirts overtly with her, even as she arranges roses in her ideal home. Lord Darlington's excessive flattery and suggestive offer that they be "great friends" is met with Lady Windermere's insistent request that he be less extravagant in his fawning. She explains:

You think I am a Puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the Puritan in me. I was brought up like that. I am glad of it. My mother died when I was a mere child. I lived always with Lady Julia, my father's elder sister you know. She was stern to me, but she taught me, what the world is forgetting, the difference that there is between what is right and what is wrong. *She* allowed of no compromise. *I* allow of none. (9; act 1).

Lord Darlington, bemused by Lady Windermere's uncompromising stance on right or wrong, alludes to the "imaginary instance" of a husband suddenly becoming "the intimate friend of a woman of—well, more than doubtful character," and asks Lady Windermere whether the wife in this situation should not be allowed to "console herself" (10; act 1). Repulsed by the implication that a husband's vile behavior sanctions a wife's equally vile behavior, Lady Windermere refuses to forgive those who transgress in any way, even those women whom Lord Darlington describes as having "committed *what the world calls a fault*" (10; act 1 [emphasis added]). Lady Windermere allows for no exception, no compromise in her absolute judgment of right or wrong, good or bad.

Her moral foundation trembles, however, when another afternoon visitor, the Duchess of Berwick, reveals that Lord Darlington's "imaginary instance" is not hypothetical, but is, in fact, the true situation involving Lady Windermere's husband, Lord Windermere, and, as the Duchess describes her, "that horrid woman," Mrs. Erlynne (13; act 1). The Duchess, a shameless, upper-class gossip, smugly continues to defame Mrs. Erlynne: "She dresses so well, too, which makes it much worse, sets such a dreadful example.... It is quite scandalous, for she is inadmissible into society. Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit" (13; act 1). The Duchess's supposed certainty of Lord Windermere's improper relationship with Mrs. Erlynne leads Lady Windermere, when free of the day's visitors, to break into her husband's desk drawer only to find a private bank book listing generous monetary payments to Mrs. Erlynne.

Upon hearing his wife's accusations supported by evidence of numerous payments to this "horrid woman," Lord Windermere vehemently scolds his wife—telling her she had "no right to do such a thing" as go through his desk drawers (16; act 1)—, and he insists that her "honour is untouched" by the unusual and unconventional relationship he has with Mrs. Erlynne. In fact, Lord Windermere is slightly more in-line with Lord Darlington's assessment that one should lessen one's strict criticism of those whose faults may be publicly judged too harshly. Lord Windermere details:

Mrs. Erlynne was once honoured, loved, respected. She was well born, she had position—she lost everything—threw it away, if you like. That makes it all the more bitter. Misfortunes one can

endure—they come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one's own faults—ah!—there is the sting of life. It was twenty years ago, too. She was little more than a girl then. She had been a wife for even less time than you have. (17-18; act 1)

As per Lady Windermere's established and rigid moral code on good or bad behavior, she will hear nothing of Lord Windermere's pleas for her to help "save" Mrs. Erlynne by getting her back into society via the kind graces of a good, respectable woman like herself. She refuses to help her husband, and by proxy, help this vile, scandalous woman. Act one ends with Lord Windermere lamenting, *"My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her"* (20; act 1). The shame, of course, refers to the fact that Mrs. Erlynne is Lady Windermere's mother; a mother who twenty years earlier did not die, but who abandoned her own husband and infant daughter for a lover who then tragically abandoned her. Lady Windermere idolizes and idealizes her long-dead mother; therefore, Lord Windermere has no choice but to meet Mrs. Erlynne's blackmailing demands for fear she will reveal her true identity to Lady Windermere, emotionally and socially destroying her as a result.

At this point in the play, it would seem that the "good woman" of the subtitle is Lady Windermere, with Mrs. Erlynne serving as her "bad woman" foil. Yet, even Mrs. Erlynne's seemingly mercenary actions—actions even she owns up to when she says, "I saw my chance, it is true, and took it" (53; act 4)—cannot be judged as wholly bad in light of the rest of her decidedly self-sacrificing and benevolent behavior, especially toward Lady Windermere, who

herself engages in behavior that is not entirely good. When Mrs. Erlynne discovers that Lady Windermere—who mistakenly believes Lord Windermere unfaithful—has written her husband a letter detailing her leaving him for Lord Darlington, Mrs. Erlynne reacts almost violently:

No, no! It would be impossible! Life doesn't repeat its tragedies like that! Oh, why does this horrible fancy come across me? Why do I remember now the one moment of my life I most wish to forget? Does life repeat its tragedies? Oh, how terrible! The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! and how bitterly I have been punished for it!... The daughter must not be like the mother—that would be terrible. How can I save her? How can I save my child? A moment may ruin a life. Who knows that better than I? (33-34; act 2)

Were she a truly bad woman, she would take Lord Windermere's money, enjoy her re-entry to society (provided by the Windermeres), and exploit her sexual capital to land an upper-class husband who could secure her socially and economically comfortable position, possibly for the rest of her life. Yet, though she is clearly considered a fallen woman, she is not a bad one, at least in that she does not want to see her daughter make the same tragic mistake she foolishly did. Mrs. Erlynne is a fallen woman character who actively works to halt the reproductive juggernaut of the fallen woman narrative, mainly because she is given a voice. She is not the mute paper doll whose story is told "for" her.

Mrs. Erlynne catches Lady Windermere in Lord Darlington's rooms just minutes before he arrives, and she tries desperately to use these few frantic

moments with her daughter to persuade her to return home immediately, for, as Mrs. Erlynne tells her, “You are on the brink of ruin, you are on the brink of a hideous precipice” (37; act 3). Faced with Lady Windermere’s unyielding resistance, Mrs. Erlynne details the unfair but real public judgment and shame she will most-likely face as a fallen woman. Speaking from the knowledge of her own painful experience, Mrs. Erlynne explains to Lady Windermere:

You don’t know what may be in store for you, unless you leave this house at once. You don’t know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, to have to creep in by hideous byways, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one’s face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. You don’t know what it is. (39; act 3)

Twenty years ago, Mrs. Erlynne made a bad choice, and though the unforgiving world called it a fault, judged, and shamed her for it, she is not a bad woman. Not, at least, in the eyes of the now saved-from-ruinous-scandal Lady Windermere, who escapes undetected from Lord Darlington’s rooms before anyone finds out. Mrs. Erlynne further sacrifices herself, and her newly-earned return to society, by serving as a distraction while her daughter returns home to her husband and child.

Lady Windermere also returns home with an entirely new worldview. Her once uncompromising right or wrong, good or bad absolutes have

dissolved into a more thoughtful, complex mixture of each other. She tells her husband:

I don't think now that people can be divided into the good and the bad, as though they were two separate races or creations. What are called good women may have terrible things in them, mad moods of recklessness, assertion, jealousy, sin. Bad women, as they are termed, may have in them sorrow, repentance, pity, sacrifice. And I don't think Mrs. Erlynne a bad woman—I know she's not. (49-50; act 4)

However, despite the sincerity of his wife's earnest epiphany on the goodness of Mrs. Erlynne, Lord Windermere has drastically sharpened his criticism of her, based on her being found in Lord Darlington's rooms the previous evening. Where he once saw in Mrs. Erlynne a woman "more sinned against than sinning" (49; act 4), he ultimately sees in her, and calls her to her face, "a worthless, vicious woman," providing direct evidence for the scorn Mrs. Erlynne warned her daughter would be part of her life as a fallen woman (52; act 4). Lord Windermere sharply and expertly delivers the ridicule the fallen supposedly deserve, as his job, apparently, is to be the guardian of the rigid dual categories of good or bad women.

One would think this aggressive ridicule would "put her in her place" and keep her in her fallen, shameful state. But, there's a shift, a disruption, a *correction* to the expected fallen woman narrative, as Mrs. Erlynne both reveals and resists the social construction of fallenness. She speaks her own story against the dominant sexual power-knowledge regime in an effort to be in

control of her everyday pleasure. Lord Windermere, fearing Mrs. Erlynne still plans on revealing her true identity to Lady Windermere, demands to know her reasons for a final visit the morning after Lady Windermere's birthday dance.

Mrs. Erlynne explains:

Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible—they made me suffer—they made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless—I want to live childless still. (53-54; act 4)

Clearly alluding to the tropes of melodramatic narratives detailing the tragic and pathetic reunions of long-lost mothers and orphaned daughters, Mrs. Erlynne rejects this behavior with more than a touch of disdain for its saccharine disingenuousness. She enjoys her childless life, and though she fiercely protected the marriage and reputation of her daughter, she does not want to burden her heart with such maternal tenderness or worry. She tells Lord Windermere, "I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me" (54; act 4). She is not heartless, but her declaration allows for her affections and emotions to be chosen and directed by her own volition, not dictated by social construction, dominant public prudery, or morality. Mrs. Erlynne's less-than-maternal sentiment is also harshly judged by Lord Windermere, who responds to her by saying, "You fill me with horror—with absolute horror" (54;

act 4). The woman—even a fallen one—who rejects her maternal duty and disavows emotional “instinct” is horrifying.

But Mrs. Erlynne is not finished defending herself against Lord Windermere’s harsh judgment. In a very telling retort, she explains:

I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire to a convent, or become a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur; in real life we don’t do such things.... No—what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date. (54; act 4)

Here is a fallen fictional character, herself voicing a clear rejection of the socially constructed expected behavior of the fallen, particularly as it is designed and reinforced in novels. Again, these melodramatic and ascetic narrative ends to the fallen woman’s life do not exclusively reflect the behaviors of all of those who live real lives outside these texts. Mrs. Erlynne defiantly chooses pleasure over repentance.

Indeed, even Mrs. Erlynne’s fictional end is one of triumph, not tragedy. Despite Lord Windermere’s continued negative critique of her, Mrs. Erlynne, in many ways, “wins” in the end of the play. She overcomes her momentary scandal of being found in Lord Darlington’s rooms, and convinces her semi-daft fiancé that there was nothing unseemly going on. She retains her re-entry into society, she will marry Lord Augustus and live on the continent, and she will be able to preserve her chosen status as a childless woman, as Lady Windermere never discovers the truth of her identity. In the final line of the play,

Lady Windermere proclaims that Lord Augustus is “marrying a very good woman!” (59; act 4), leaving readers and viewers with a possibly altered, or at least more complicated, reading of Wilde’s deliberately provocative subtitle, *A Play About a Good Woman* (and, revealing that even in 1892, these categories needed more knowing, complex analysis).

Almost directly calling up Michel Foucault’s call to “reverse the direction of our analysis” through historical inquiry (73), Mrs. Erlynne’s sexually fallen character’s self-aware critique of the discourse of sexuality—particularly the discourse that shapes and informs the excoriating public judgment of the fallen—indicates that not only is she aware of the “regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains” this discourse (Foucault 11), but she is also critical of the mechanisms and cultural machinery that perpetuate misunderstanding and misinformation at the expense or occlusion of the truth. And, in particular, a truth as it relates to the socially prescribed and expected (forced?) repentance of the fallen: the understood ascetic final end to the fallen woman who must live a life devoid of pleasure, either in self-sacrificing service to others or in death. Again, as Mrs. Erlynne says, “what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date” (54; act 4). In her own “fundamental petition to know” and her own “will to truth” (Foucault 55), Mrs. Erlynne dismantles the inflexible dual categories of “chaste middle-class matron” or “fallen woman” (Garton 116) by speaking and representing one of many more complex and complicated sexual discourses not bound by unrealistic restrictions or delusions. As a character, she embodies the very theory she espouses, as she successfully disrupts the expected fallen woman

narrative trajectory, but she also saves her own daughter from reproducing this faulty narrative.

To harken back to my opening example of the two (maybe three?) Elizas of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, it is worth noting that Mrs. Erlynne and Lady Windermere are both named Margaret, as Lady Windermere was named for her mother. Of course, when this fact is revealed in the play, Lady Windermere simply sees it as a lovely coincidence, as she never suspects Mrs. Erlynne is her mother. While Austen's first fallen Eliza begets a second (and maybe third?), Wilde's first fallen Margaret does everything in her power to stop her daughter's fall, and, simultaneously, to offer her own harsh critique of the overly constructed, false, and too-often reproduced tragic narrative of the fallen.

However, I have a very specific theory as to why Mrs. Erlynne is able to overcome the expected fallen woman pitfalls, and how she is able to let her own pleasure guide her unrepentant, childless life. When Mrs. Erlynne essentially crashes Lady Windermere's respectable birthday dance, her entrance causes quite a stir, in part because party attendees like the Duchess of Berwick already see Mrs. Erlynne as a wickedly attractive woman of suspect reputation. Mr. Dumby, himself attending the party with his married lover, Lady Plymdale, tries to deny knowing Mrs. Erlynne, despite his having called on her multiple times at her residence. When Lady Plymdale asks Mr. Dumby, "Who is that well-dressed woman talking to Windermere?" he replies, "Haven't got the slightest idea! Looks like an *édition de luxe* of a wicked French novel, meant specially for the English market" (26; act 2). In this single, but terribly important line, Mr. Dumby likens Mrs. Erlynne to the sexiest edition of a pornographic novel. And,

more significantly, Wilde introduces pornography into the narrative directly. In my previous hypothetical reading of the possible “Eliza the third,” I posit and design the connection of this unnamed, unsexed character to a more freeing pornographic narrative; the leap I make from Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* to the pornographic text *The Horn Book* is my own. Here, however, Mr. Dumby explicitly identifies Mrs. Erlynne as the pornographic novel’s signifier. She is the representation of that specific content.

Interestingly, there is no response from Lady Plymdale to the Mrs. Erlynne = pornographic novel signification, which could imply that she clearly knows what Mr. Dumby means by this reference, and that she is in no way shocked by a mention of pornography. As I stated earlier, there is more than an implied relationship going on between Lady Plymdale and Mr. Dumby, and she herself believes that infidelity is the key to a successful marriage. When Lady Plymdale demands that Mr. Dumby have lunch with Mrs. Erlynne, and he asks why, Lady Plymdale replies:

Because I want you to take my husband with you. He has been so attentive lately, that he has become a perfect nuisance. Now, this woman is just the thing for him. He’ll dance attendance upon her as long as she lets him, and won’t bother me. I assure you, women of that kind are most useful. They form the basis of other people’s marriages. (27; act 2)

Forget the odd fact that Lady Plymdale encourages a friendship between her husband and her lover, and focus instead on how she sees women of Mrs. Erlynne’s kind as specifically useful to marriages. Though cloaked in

suggestion and innuendo, Lady Plymdale's assessment is that Mrs. Erlynne is a non-threatening, non-scandalous, and perfectly alluring sexual partner for her too-attentive husband. To extend this analysis a bit more, I contend that Lady Plymdale's own encouragement of this extra-marital relationship for her husband could read as evidence for her lack of worry over an unintended, scandalous pregnancy. And, indeed, Lady Plymdale herself engages in extracurricular sexual activities outside her marriage, and there is no mention of her own worries about conceiving.

Why is Lady Plymdale not worried about the requisite sexual consequences, for herself or for Mrs. Erlynne? I advance that Mr. Dumby's single, descriptive reference equating Mrs. Erlynne with a pornographic novel is more than a cheeky aside. Yes, it might offer readers and viewers short-hand insight into Mr. Dumby's—and his social circle's—pornographic reading habits. But, more importantly, the description links Mrs. Erlynne to sexual knowledge and discourses that most likely inform her sexual skills, of course, but that also may indicate her invaluable and necessary "schooling" gained by the protective sexual pedagogy present in many pornographic novels of the time (e.g., *The Horn Book*). Obviously, she had a child while she was married, but even she indicates that for the past twenty years, she has lived childless and plans to continue to do so, despite multiple allusions to her many dalliances. The Duchess of Berwick refers to the numerous "pasts" of Mrs. Erlynne, and when Lord Augustus positively notes that "Mrs. Erlynne has a future before her," Mr. Dumby knowingly retorts, "Mrs. Erlynne has a past before her" (42; act 3).

Because Mrs. Erlynne has a past before her, she is, and must be, highly attuned to the social architecture that attempts to define her as fallen if she is to have any chance at living a life guided by her own pleasure. She finds it repugnant that to be believably repentant she must “go to a bad dressmaker,” and she denounces the fallen woman’s requisite maudlin, melodramatic, or maternal expression of feeling because it “doesn’t go with modern dress” (54; act 4). She refuses repentance, and chooses pleasure, and she ensures her continued childless, safe pleasure through her learned and clever ways. She is clearly physically desirable, but her most attractive and essential quality is her cleverness. Lord Windermere describes Mrs. Erlynne as “the most dangerous woman” he knows (50; act 4), and if he will not concede that she is a good woman, he will grant that she is a “very clever” one (59; act 4). Her cleverness is dangerous, particularly to a man who so vehemently wants to label, expose, and ensure her badness. Yet, her cleverness is precisely what allows her to escape his categorizing.

Mrs. Erlynne herself knows how necessary cleverness is to survive as a fallen woman. When telling Lady Windermere that she would never be able to withstand the pain and suffering of the fallen, Mrs. Erlynne explains to her:

You—why, you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven’t got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage. You couldn’t stand dishonour. (40; act 3)

As Mrs. Erlynne perceptively expresses, Lady Windermere is neither smart nor brave enough to work for the real protective knowledge she would need to

survive her fall. Lady Windermere *would* become the tragic fallen figure of silly modern novel lore because she does not possess the skills needed to resist and rectify the power structures of fallenness. Unlike Mrs. Erlynne, Lady Windermere has no “fundamental petition to know,” no “will to truth” (Foucault 55). She lacks wit and gumption, maybe precisely because this is the first and only time she has ever been confronted with truly dangerous options that threaten her goodness or that force her to intimately address the bad or the fallen.

Obviously, Lady Windermere’s significant epiphany complicates her once rigid categories of good or bad, right or wrong, but, ultimately, this shift does little to challenge her own position as a good woman. Mrs. Erlynne is the one who most benefits from this altered worldview. In truth, Lady Windermere ends up still safely situated in her ideal home as its resident angelic wife and mother. Her status, reputation, and even relationship with her husband is intact, even if, internally, her moral and mental landscape has stretched to accommodate more than her previous standards would allow. Mrs. Erlynne might have worked hard to regain purchase on the good woman pedestal, but Lady Windermere has set up a beautiful, ideal house there forever.

“Keep her in a lofty and pure element of thought”:

Policing Women’s Reading

Mrs. Erlynne introduces the politics of reading when she argues that, “in real life,” fallen women “don’t do such things” as are melodramatically portrayed in “silly modern novels” (54; act 4). Oscar Wilde’s 1892 play, *Lady Windermere’s Fan: A Play About a Good Woman*, demands critical analysis of the categories of good or bad women, but it also invites a critical analysis of what constitutes good or bad reading. If Wilde’s play reveals specific nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding reinforcing and policing good or bad (women’s) behavior, then it also indicates the companion anxiety concerning the way or ways proper reading informs—or should inform—appropriate behavior.

In John Ruskin’s 1879 *Letters and Advice to Young Girls and Young Ladies*, he begins his “Letter on Women’s Work” with this statement:

A young lady writing to me the other day to ask what I really wanted girls to do, I answered as follows, requesting her to copy the answer, that it might serve once for all. I print it accordingly, as:

Women’s work is,—

- I. To please people.
- II. To feed them in dainty ways.
- III. To clothe them.

IV. To keep them orderly.

V. To teach them. (41)

He subsequently details all five categories, further specifying the ways in which true good women's work is always in the service of others. She must be a "pleasant creature"; she must make it her business to learn how to cook well for others; she must learn to sew well, and with the finest material, to be useful when making "a pretty cap for a poor girl who has not taste or time to do it for herself"; she must wake early to participate in housework, for her own housemaids depend on her orderly example (41-42). However, regarding the final section, Ruskin directly addresses good women's work and reading. He instructs:

Teach—yourself first—to read with attention, and to remember with affection, what deserves both, and nothing else. Never read borrowed books. To be without books of your own is the abyss of penury. Don't endure it. And when you've to buy them, you'll think whether they're worth reading; which you had better, on all accounts. (43)

While the first four categories of women's work clearly indicate ideal female service to others, this last category demands that she become the right kind of reader for herself first before moving on to transferring only the best and worthiest components of the information read. Though the final line of this passage is already strong and demanding, one can almost hear the "or else" lingering after the directive. In short, Ruskin's advice for young girls is that they must be orderly, pleasant, skilled cooks and seamstresses who use their skills to

serve others, but, ultimately, they had better, by god, be good readers. And of the right kind of books.

In *Good Girls Make Good Wives*, Judith Rowbotham discusses the myriad aspects of middle-class girls' education, including formal classroom education, the domestic arts and sciences, and athletics. However, she clarifies:

...a girl's education had to cover many lessons that could be best learned outside the schoolroom. A good girl was, first and foremost an apprentice in the art of being a *Household Fairy* or *Home Goddess*, and she needed to be trained in the numerous arts involved in running a household that would, if life was kind, comprise her major duties in adult life. Many good girls were not academically clever, but if they were competent in their domestic duties, they were no less valued. (124)

So, while some "book learning" in mathematics or grammar, for instance, may have figured in the good girl's middle-class education, she need not thrive in such areas, as long as her domestic skills were proficient and in-line with Ruskin's advice and guidance. As Rowbotham notes, as long as "life was kind" to her, the good, if less academically clever, girl need not worry, as she would always have people to serve in her well-kept, well-run home. Additionally, despite new opportunities for good women to employ their skills and learning outside the home—as in the case of philanthropy, for example—, Rowbotham clarifies:

However, there was no intention of using education to promote a revolution in women's role in the community.... The domestic

circle remained woman's highest, holiest goal and a good liberal education fitted her to maximize the opportunities offered her within its legitimate bounds. (114)

Even those who encouraged the same or similar curriculum for both males and females "saw that curriculum achieving different ends according to sex" (Rowbotham 114).

Though Ruskin gives brief mention to the rights of women in his letters to young girls, he does draw some specific gender differences in his reading curriculum choices in the "Literature for Girls" letter. He explains:

If there were to be any difference between a girl's education and a boy's, I should say that... her range of literature should be not more, but less frivolous, calculated to add the qualities of patience and seriousness to her natural poignancy of thought and quickness of wit; and also to keep her in a lofty and pure element of thought. (17)

Ruskin thoughtfully pleads for more serious reading for females, but only so they might acquire the "patience and seriousness" they apparently lack (17). Most importantly, they also need to avoid such silliness in order to keep their thoughts virtuous, because the wrong kind of literature is destructive, in more ways than one. Ruskin writes, "the best romance becomes dangerous, if, by its excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting, and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called upon to act" (17). Dramatic as it is, Ruskin's short quote on the supposed

dangers of the “wrong kind” of literature for girls and young women only hints at the level of horrors explained by other critics.

In Catherine J. Golden’s *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction*, she explains that “the rhetorical notion of book as companion connects to issues of social propriety and refinements. Reading becomes a means to receive correct etiquette and social refinement essential to maintaining” the status quo (22-23). Again, by all means, young girls should have and read books, but only those books that serve as good companions guiding appropriate, culturally sanctioned behavior. And, if the virtuous, pure, and lofty book is itself a kind of companion, it ensures the young female reader is always in good company, and, therefore, always properly policed in her behavior. Real companions play an active role, too. As Golden explains:

Mothers also assumed an active role in reading to their children. Commentators believed that reading aloud in the domestic circle would check the dangerous thrill an adolescent girl might find reading alone or in secret.... Reading worthy literature together, the family could have virtuous ideas to discuss. Social reading in the home was also a means to introduce children to literature considered wise and good. (24)

Making good reading a public activity, and an activity linked to family discussions of virtue and propriety, presumes that too-private reading habits and practices would lead to dangerous self indulgence.

Too-frivolous, unmonitored reading risked terrifying medical peril, and Golden offers a horrifying set of physical maladies said to result from such dangerous reading. She writes:

Reading was damned because it was thought to damage a woman's nervous system and reproductive health. Medical authorities linked excessive, unsupervised reading to a host of female reproductive ailments.... A woman's biological differences—her greater sensitivity and sensibility—made her more susceptible to effects of a novel.... Reading a sensation novel or romance was believed to endanger a young woman's reproductive cycle. Romance novels with vivid love scenes and sensation fiction brimming with sexual scandal might overstimulate a girl's still dormant sexual and emotional instincts and bring on early menstruation or encourage masturbation, then considered a cause of insanity. (32)

It is important to note that the majority of the ailments described concern the apparently accelerated capability of the female reader's reproductive system or abilities, most often making her more fertile, more susceptible to pregnancy; yet, even these risqué romance or sensation novels, for all their sexual suggestion or situation, did not explicitly detail actual sexual activity, biological function, or contraception. Though this point is not emphasized by critics, I note it with interest, as these dangerous texts stop short of providing truly useful information that would prevent a sexual fall should any of these—real or fabricated—proclivities toward accelerated sexual development actually lead to sexual

intercourse. Golden continues to explain that such physical and mental alteration was thought to “raise false expectations about love and marriage and, in turn, bring about dissatisfaction with domesticity and upset the status quo” (39), and contemporary critics “worried that access to sexual knowledge promoted a false view of life and immoral ways, leading women to discontent or, worse, to ruination” (38). While dangerous reading affected the interior female body, these interior changes also encouraged an external threat to domestic harmony through female dissatisfaction and eventual ruin.

All of this critical commentary begs the question: what *should* girls or young women read? If romance novels and sensation fiction are treacherous, which books would be appropriate? Ruskin offers some very general, and ultimately vague, advice, as he describes “good novels” as those that will strengthen the health of the mind and body like fresh air to someone stuck in a closed, foul room (18). He does, however, go out of his way to clarify that too much attention should not be paid to periodicals: “The newspaper may be entirely proper at breakfast time; but assuredly it is not reading for all day” (19). Though he does not go so far as to claim that periodical reading is akin to that “frivolous” reading he advises young women to avoid, the fact that he singles this form out for specific comment (amidst vague generalities) informs the central argument of Jennifer Phegley’s monograph on women’s periodical reading, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation*.

Central to Phegley’s argument is the rescue of women’s reading of periodicals like *Macmillan’s* and *The Argosy* from that category of silly reading.

Phegley calls these texts “family literary magazines,” and she further explains that these periodicals were a “hybrid genre—appealing to women not solely through domesticity but also through literary values that the proper woman reader could use to advance the cultural status of her nation” (15). Instead of seeing Victorian middle-class women as “uncritical readers whose reading practices threatened the sanctity of the family and the cultural reputation of the nation” (2), Phegley advances that what these women readers consumed—and what they did with this knowledge—was far more culturally valuable than previously thought. Phegley explains:

Although women’s proper moral and domestic behavior was implicit in the family magazines, the spotlight was on their countrywomen’s literary taste and cultural sensibility as a means of justifying the cultural superiority of the nation. Indeed, the act of reading was promoted in such magazines as a means of nation building as readers interacted with, internalized, and embodied the national cultural values that emerged from their reading. (15)

While it is clear Phegley’s argument allows for much more specific critical reality for the broader cultural work of women’s reading practices, I contend that this theory of women’s-reading-as-nation-building still limits and links the female reader to the idealized home and hearth. Yes, this critical, literary analysis informs and strengthens the English home as a centerpiece of national identity, but it further anchors the ideal female reader in her proper sphere inside that home as a good wife, mother, daughter, and woman, and as a good reader of

the right kind of lofty and pure material destined to keep her squarely situated in her well-decorated English parlour.

Indeed, my assessment of Phegley's argument is further informed by a final excerpt from Ruskin's advice and letters, when he explains:

I would urge upon every young woman to obtain as soon as she can, by the severest economy, a restricted, serviceable, and steadily—however slowly—increasing, series of books for use through life; making her little library, of all the furniture in her room, the most studied and decorative piece; every volume having its assigned place, like a little statue in its niche. (18)

Ruskin demands that young girls be good readers of good books, but this description likening the proper library to a studied but ultimately decorative piece of furniture or a well-placed statue may be the clearest definition of the good reading and good books he only vaguely described earlier. This young woman's library may contain the required serious reading. It may contain important family literary magazines. It may contain the primrose identity of a nation. But if it includes only pure and lofty books to be read aloud by idealized countrywomen, it may actually prove to be little more than decoration. And *this* is truly dangerous.

Every Woman's Book:

Mrs. Edith Sperling vs. Richard Carlile

While I do not mean to overstate or otherwise overdramatize the “danger” of a middle-class woman’s selective, decorative library, my claim regarding the tangible social and economic dangers of limiting women’s reading is not unsupported. Terry Lovell, in *Consuming Fiction*, addresses the resistance to expanding women’s educational opportunities during the nineteenth century. Lovell asserts that

the entry of women into higher education was obstructed and resisted for decades. It entailed a restructuring of an ideology coordinated on strongly marked gender differences. The education of women was hotly debated within the terms of Victorian domestic ideology and the place of women in society.... It must also be placed within its class and ideological context.
(137-38)

Aligning the dual concerns of educating both women and working-class men, Lovell explains that exposing these previously excluded groups to “the civilizing effects of high culture” might “remove the rationale for class difference itself, the alleged ‘natural’ superiority of dominant over dominated, masters over men” (138). In this way, extending middle-class women’s education beyond their parlours might make the culture at large question the socially constructed, not natural, order. Harkening back to John Ruskin’s comments that women should be good readers first in an effort to teach only the best information to

others (item V. on his advice list is the goal of teaching others), Lovell also reveals the trouble in this system of literary transmission and women's education as women often entered into higher ranks of education as teachers. As Lovell writes:

In view of the critical part played by women in the transmission of the literary culture, it is not surprising that the negotiation of gender within that culture presents such a delicate problem. For women must be induced to play this subordinate part if the maintenance of the gender order of domination and subordination is to remain intact. (147)

Nineteenth-century educational opportunities for women certainly advanced throughout the century despite resistance, but women were still too often limited to instructional positions that relied on continued transmission of status-quo gender roles and patriarchal rules. The largest anxieties surrounding women's education concerned women using their newfound knowledge to infiltrate male-dominated professions and/or finding in their independence a comfortable or desirable alternative to marriage (Lovell 138). If the educated woman's job was to teach others (especially other girls or women), she quite possibly instructed her students in the domestic arts by giving them appropriate books or manuals designed to ensure their status as household angels rather like the character of Lady Windermere.

One such instructive, domestic manual is Mrs. Edith Sperling's 1895 *Every Woman's Book*, which opens with this patriotic declaration describing "Our English homes":

No other language has that beautiful word “home;” few nations can boast all it seems to convey. To judge a man, show me his friends; to judge a woman, show me her home. (9)

Mrs. Sperling’s rather confident title, *Every Woman’s Book*, implies that hers is *the* book for every woman—the requisite primer on all things properly female and honorably English. Every woman must have this book, for she will, undoubtedly, be judged as a woman and an Englishwoman, and this book will appropriately educate and prepare her for that judgment.

I imagine I would find Mrs. Sperling’s *Every Woman’s Book* on the fittingly decorative bookshelf of Lady Windermere’s English-rose-adorned parlour a few years after readers or theatre-goers leave the scene in 1892. I also imagine Mrs. Sperling’s *Every Woman’s Book* would be John Ruskin-approved as “good girl reading,” as its subject matter informs all five of his domestic “women’s work” categories, and the safe, unsexy content most assuredly adheres to keeping female readers in “a lofty and pure element of thought” (Ruskin 17). Mrs. Sperling’s all-encompassing guide to nation, the proper English home, womanhood, and etiquette would also be a proper companion for the female reader, even if read while alone. And it would certainly be appropriate for a mother to read this book to her daughter, in an effort to school her in the proper domestic and social etiquette she will need to know to secure her own favorable marriage and properly run her own future household. To be sure, there is nothing so lascivious in *Every Woman’s Book’s* 150-plus pages that it would damage the female nervous system, harm female reproductive health, or increase morbid thirsts for treacherous romance.

Instead, *Every Woman's Book* is a primer for gracefully mastering the domestic arts, but it is also an advertisement for domestic products. Rife with “complementary copy” (i.e., editorial content that directly reflects, mentions, or otherwise supports the advertised products and their uses), *Every Woman's Book* was published by Lever Brothers, whose products like Sunlight Soap and Lifebouy Soap are prominently advertised throughout the text. Running along the bottom of several pages are questionable scientific articles “proving” the effectiveness of Lever Brothers’ products in protection against generic disease or vague malady. The end-pages of the book include advertisements for Fennings’ Children’s Powders “for children cutting their teeth,” Fennings’ Lung Healers as “the best remedy to cure all coughs, colds, and asthmas,” and a dramatic advertisement for Fennings’ Fever Curer! that passionately implores “Do not untimely die!,” as sore throats can apparently be “cured with one dose” (157). Less dramatic advertisements for various metal polishes, smelling salts, and lice shampoo—marketed as a “boon to mothers” (4)—fill out the pages, and these numerous advertisements suggest that an alternate title for the book could very well be *Every Woman's Products*. Every woman needs these remedies and toiletries to make her home run smoothly, to raise and keep her children well, and to support and respectably represent her English nation via her beautiful home and hearth.

In addition to instructing women how to keep their home beautiful by exploring such decorative pursuits as “draping windows,” “fireplace decoration,” “enamelling,” “window gardening,” and laying a beautiful luncheon table (10-22), women are also told that paying particular attention to

their beauty is paramount to their identity and charm. According to Mrs.

Sperling:

No woman need be ugly.... We cannot alter the actual features, though we may, by a few skilful [sic] touches and judicious arrangement of the hair, make them appear different from what they really are; but hair, complexion, and teeth are all to be dealt with, and depend to a very great extent upon our treatment of them as to whether they add or detract from our charms. (23)

Pages and pages are devoted to discussing various hair colors, false hair, children's hair, and arranging hair (22-34). Additionally, pages are devoted to the teeth, the eyes, the lips, the complexion, and the ideal figure (34-49).

Lengthy and detailed glossaries explain "Christian names and their meanings," "The Language of Flowers," "The Language of Precious Stones," and a dream dictionary titled "Dreamland" plus a section called "The Telling of Fortunes" conclude the text (130-55). A final short section covers "Some Common Ailments and Their Treatment," and very briefly names remedies for "illnesses" like fainting, hysteria, and neuralgia (155-56). As noted in this final section, "there are a few common ailments so generally acknowledged as purely feminine ones, that we think 'Every Woman's Book' would not be complete did we not touch upon the means that should be employed to treat fainting fits, hysteria, and the like" (155). In actuality, no significant content is devoted to discussing the actual female body in detail, despite the text's constant reference to female health. "Health" is more generally concerned with outward

appearance, rather than with an understanding of biology or the internal workings of female (or even human) systems.

Even women's sporting activities are discussed in terms of proper attire and rules or technique, rather than in relation to the physical benefits of exercise or the overall effect on the body. In a section titled "Amusements for Women," Mrs. Sperling writes that "with such sports as hunting, shooting, and fishing this book cannot deal, and we must be content with speaking of those amusements which we like to see women enjoy" (108-09). More feminine amusement activities like lawn tennis, rowing, swimming, riding, putting on home plays, and organizing bazaar stalls are featured, instead (108-30).

It is obvious that the intended audience for *Every Woman's Book* is female, but nonetheless Mrs. Sperling reminds readers directly several times. In a lengthy section on "Correspondence," Mrs. Sperling explains proper responses to "Letters of proposal." She writes: "Our pages are not intended for male readers, so we forbear to advise young men how to make an offer in writing, only remarking that the more simple, straightforward, and manly the letter, the more we do appreciate its contents; but some girls are puzzled how to reply" (75). Examples of proposal acceptance and rejection letters follow, and the section ends with a telling warning: "We warn girl-readers to always think well before they reject a proposal from a man they like and esteem, unless there is someone else they prefer" (78). Every woman, it seems, should not be too terribly choosy, particularly if she has no back-up plan; being an "old maid" is not a choice, it is a punishment.

A large part of the book is devoted to etiquette: how to behave at the table, how to address people, and how to attend dances and balls, for example (49-69). Of note, however, is a detailed section on weddings (61-64). Mrs. Sperling explains the protocol of wedding announcements, the intricate behavior expected of both the wedding party and the guests, and the usual rituals accompanying the ceremony and departure. As an example of the complexity of the wedding rules of order, consider the level of specificity in this sample passage:

When breakfast is announced the bride and bridegroom lead the way, and seat themselves in the centre of the long table opposite the cake. The bride's father follows with the bridegroom's mother, and seats himself next to his daughter, and the bridegroom's father follows with the bride's mother and places her next to the bridegroom. In the interval before breakfast the bride's mother has signified to the different gentlemen what ladies they are to take down, and they follow in due order. (63)

Catch all that? *Every Woman's Book* contains pages of this type of itemized instruction on decorum and behavior. Yet, for all its painstaking detail, the book, and this section on weddings in particular, makes no mention of love or the wedding night or physical contact or sexuality. In fact, even the most generic definition of the honeymoon is completely elided. Mrs. Sperling writes, "When a bride reappears in society after the honeymoon, she, the first time she dines at any house, takes precedence, as a bride, of the other ladies, this continuing for three months" (64). The bride simply reappears *after* the

honeymoon, and her only concern is the precedence she takes in the homes she visits for dinner. In Mrs. Edith Sperling's *Every Woman's Book*, there is no section on "The Honeymoon" or on "The Wedding Night" or even on "Maternity and Childbirth," and it seems an omission, particularly in light of the all-encompassing title of the book itself. Add to this that Mrs. Sperling has clearly married Mr. Sperling, and, I assume, is privy to wedding night and honeymoon activities; however, she is uncharacteristically mum on these details.

To be fair, however, Mrs. Sperling does devote several pages to what is called "Self Culture." In this section, she does explain that a young girl's "education is not merely the keeping up of facts in the mind; it is far more the encouraging and developing of accurate observation, and the power of thought, without which no book-reading can ever educate" (91). Cultivating a common or critical sense first seems in order, as this will ensure sharper employment of the mind. And, in the closest the entire book comes to addressing the potential passions lurking in the female body, Mrs. Sperling thoughtfully writes:

The art of "keeping well" calls for more attention than it ordinarily receives. Every one should have some acquaintance with the laws of health. How many serious ailments are to be traced to no other cause than ignorance of the most elementary principles of healthy existence, than to the moral constitution of man. If it is necessary to know the rise and tendency of human passions and emotions, that we may curb their extravagances and direct them

to good results, it is equally necessary that we should comprehend the wondrous structure of the human body and the nature and symptoms of those manifold casualties to which it is exposed; and also obtain information regarding the means by which disease is averted and health restored. (92)

Mrs. Sperling encourages gaining knowledge of the body and understanding its passions (if only to curb them), but her own text does not supply this terribly important information. Yes, apparently Lifebouy Soap can “prevent disease,” but it is not clear exactly how this product alone—or at all—could help “curb [passionate] extravagances and direct them to good results” (92). Mrs. Sperling may not offer her own explicit instructions as to how to achieve this, but she does offer some insight in her explanation of “good women’s reading.” She writes:

The reading of good biographies of eminent persons is most instructive, and books of travel are very essential in helping us to realise what foreign countries are like. They have besides a tendency to widen the sympathies, which is in itself an excellent education. We must speak of fiction as a means to this end. The novels of Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë educate the sympathies and do away with a great deal of the narrow-mindedness which detracts so much from a fair and sound judgment. In fiction we learn to understand and feel a keen interest in classes of people we should otherwise treat with indifference or disdain. *Of course low fiction has not this merit,*

but on the contrary fills the mind with wrong notions of life, besides being inaccurate in most other respects. (93 [emphasis added])

In a rather forward-thinking assessment of the uses of good literature to educate privileged young women in the lives and ways of the non-English or of those less fortunate, Mrs. Sperling certainly understands the power of fiction or biography to give voice to a cultural or social other. However, without providing author names or titles, she excoriates “low fiction” for its “wrong notions of life” and general inaccuracies (93). If women are meant to learn to curb their passionate “extravagances and direct them to good results,” it could follow that indulging in the cheap thrills of “low fiction” would result in decidedly more dangerous medical ailments than those punctuating *Every Woman’s Book*.

Despite being a fount of domestic information and instruction, Mrs. Edith Sperling herself is a bit of a mystery. I cannot even track down her birth and death dates. In addition to *Every Woman’s Book*, she authored the 1894 book, *Home Management*, also for Lever Brothers, and she is most likely the Mrs. Edith Sperling who earned second prize in gardening at the 1885 Royal Botanic Society’s Evening Fete held in Regent’s Park (20-21 *Journal of Horticulture and Practical Gardening*). Aside from these few references, she remains known mainly through the Lever Brothers’ books she edited, authored, and, likely, endorsed. To presume she believed in the content she authored, it would follow she thought it important every woman be instructed to know that the rhododendron signifies “danger” (141), August’s precious stone is sardonyx

and “insures conjugal happiness” (144), and that “to dream you are a wife, if you are not married, signifies that you will be an old maid” (153). Important stuff. And Mrs. Edith Sperling should know the route to women’s happiness when she sees it, for under “Christian Names and their Meanings,” “Edith” from the Saxon means “happiness” (130). Presumably, happiness is what every woman wants, and she can gain it by reading *Every Woman’s Book*.

However, whether or not Mrs. Edith Sperling’s 1895 *Every Woman’s Book* could have ensured every woman’s happiness is certainly up for debate. Had he lived to 1895, political radical, author, and publisher, Richard Carlile (1790-1843) might have contested Mrs. Sperling’s instruction and ideology by offering a side-by-side reading of her work against his own 1826 *Every Woman’s Book*, which outlines a radically different route to women’s happiness by empowering them with far more than an education in the domestic arts. After all, even Mrs. Sperling would agree that the Saxon name “Richard” means “with power” (Sperling 133). If Mrs. Sperling’s *Every Woman’s Book* (1895) is one I imagine I would find on Lady Windermere’s tidy, ornamental parlour bookshelf, then Richard Carlile’s *Every Woman’s Book* (1826) would be the portable companion-handbook of the sexually savvy, “childless,” and empowered Mrs. Erlynne.

In its fourth edition, printed in 1828, the complete title of Richard Carlile’s text is *Every Woman’s Book or What is Love? containing the most important instructions for the prudent regulation of the Principle of Love and the Number of a Family*. The lengthy and descriptive title alone indicates that the content of Carlile’s instruction will differ greatly from Mrs. Sperling’s, yet Carlile also

confidently indicates that his is *the* book for every woman. Carlile's preface necessarily lays out the importance and argument of the text. He writes:

The object of the Publisher is to war with that sort of prudery which is tantamount with hypocrisy. True virtue can afford to be open in all cases; it has no secrecy, no concealments, nothing that it desires should be hidden. It is vice that lays claim to secrecy in any case. Love is one of the chief sources of human happiness, its state among mankind requires improvement, and better means of enjoying it are required to be known. The following pages have been written with that and with no other view, and the Publisher places his motives for judgment in the hands of the young, the middle-aged, the healthy, the happy, the virtuous, and the sensible part of the community of both sexes.

(81-82)

Carlile's call to open up an explicit discussion of love is virtuous, not dangerous, and he wants an audience of both males and females to be instructed in the ways of love and sexuality, rather than be kept in a state of frustration or ignorance by the secreting of such information as vice. Carlile further clarifies:

The subject of the publication is become a matter of general discussion in this country, and will form a striking feature in its history and progressive improvement. Let the chaste and modest woman be assured that nothing is here meant to offend her. Instruction upon a matter of which both men and women are by

far too ignorant for their welfare and happiness is the sole object of this publication. It may shock prejudices; but it will be approved of by reason and due deliberation. No one, more than the Publisher, admires chasteness in language and elegance in manners; but all matters of instruction require the plainest language, and all subjects may be philosophically discussed, when they are discussed with a view to the acquisition or communication of knowledge, apart from lascivious ideas. Such is the object of this publication. (82)

As a “philosophy of love,” Carlile’s treatise is meant to answer, in part, the question: what is love? This question is one he finds too often both young men and women unable to answer. Ignorance of love, and vague secrecy surrounding the topic of sexuality, will lead to troubled and unhappy relationships and marriages. Through his instruction, Carlile believes all people—especially women—will learn necessary lessons about sexuality, marriage, and contraception.

In initial versions of what would become *Every Woman’s Book*, Carlile clearly intended women be his primary audience. Carlile scholar M. L. Bush writes, “The plan to produce a sex manual specially for women was first declared in the dedication attached to *The Republican*, volume XI,” and in this dedication

addressed “To Woman” as “Man’s Equal”... Carlile professed that the essay “was written solely for your benefit and with a view to the amendment of your condition in human society.” The same

dedication announced Carlile's intention, "as early as possible", to turn the essay into a small pocket volume for women. (45-46)

Carlile's quest to publish a woman's small pocket version suggests that the text be more useful than decorative, more mobile than fixed to a parlour bookshelf. However, it is clear he did not aspire to write in the dangerous, damaging style of that "low fiction" Mrs. Sperling (and John Ruskin) so denigrated. Carlile sought not to offend sensibilities or modesty or chastity with vile or lascivious content. Instead, he aspired to talk frankly and directly about both men's and women's affection, desire, and sexuality, and to instruct both sexes in basic contraceptive practices.

Though Carlile does concede that "the young man, generally, is as ignorant of 'what is love', as the young woman," his focus at the beginning of the book is on changing young women's behavior when it comes to acting on their feelings of love. Carlile strongly asserts:

It is a barbarous custom, that forbids the maid to make an advance in love, or that confines that advance to the eye, the fingers, the gesture, the motion, the manner. It is ridiculous. Why should not the female state her passion to the male, as well as the male to the female? What impropriety can there be in it? What bad effect can it produce? Is it immodest? Why is it immodest? Is it not virtuous? Why is it not virtuous?... Young women! Assume an equality, plead your passion when you feel it, and to those to whom it may apply. (83-84)

However, Carlile does not merely advance that women exhibit this bold behavior without any instruction or guidance. Though Carlile does note that “it should be a mother’s duty to explain to her daughter, or other female charge, the question of what is love” (85), he also broadly calls on all parents to instruct their children on the topic of love:

Parents would explain its meaning, its uses and abuses, to their children, at the proper time; and all ignorance, and what is worse, all hypocrisy upon the subject, which leads to so many disasters, would be abolished. We should soon see a much finer race of human beings; a much more chaste and virtuous race, than we now see. (84)

Excessive and unrealistic restraint, Carlile concludes, leads only to “disastrous intercourse as a defiance” (84). More significantly, this leads to unhappy marriages between ignorant men and women who marry to experience sex (legitimately) and are disappointed in the incompatible life-mate they impulsively or rashly chose for the wrong reasons. In Carlile’s words:

This definition of love explains why married people are frequently unhappy and sometimes hate each other soon after marriage and became inconstant. It proves, and experience is wholly with it, that the marriage ties in this country are too many for the simple enjoyment of a passion that is not constant, but occasional, that dies with every gratification, and should neither be forced nor shackled. Mutual desire should, at every period of life, constitute the practical part or the gratification of love; which, if left quite

free, would not become more fickle in its attachments. Nature disdains an artificial tie, and the attempted shackles are insults that generate enmity. (88)

While Mrs. Sperling cautiously warned female readers against too-quickly or rashly rejecting marriage proposals (rejection may leave women old maids, a fate worse than a bad marriage, apparently), Carlile indicates that too often marriage is a route to socially-sanctioned sexual experience, and the union may be sexually and emotionally dissatisfying. Being “shackled” in such a dismal marital situation sours love, makes sexuality painful or nonexistent, and breeds unhappiness.

Carlile is right, however, to temper his message. He encourages men and women—prior to marriage—to act on their sexual desires when they find mutually interested partners, but he in no way advocates a sexual bacchanal, a free-love festival of indulgence. Men and women should be discerning and thoughtful in their choices. Carlile clarifies:

Let it not be understood that this work advocates indiscriminate intercourse, such as exists among some animals and such as has in some measure existed among savage or uncivilized races of mankind. Where there is an equal number of males and females, each should be contented with one of the other sex; but upon the principle of the following maxim: —“You shall have me to yourself, just as long as you treat me well and can really love me; when that feeling ceases, we had better part and seek new matches”. Equality between the sexes is the source of virtue. (89)

Carlile's eloquent, lovely—though unconventional—maxim reads as far ahead of its time and like nothing from Mrs. Sperling's mannered, soap-scrubbed instruction in elegance. Carlile eschews love that is (89) "too generally a maudlin, sickly sentiment founded on hypocrisy," and, instead, claims "the right consideration in a matter of love is: are our persons agreeable to each other? Can we live together and continue to love each other?" Carlile advances thoughtful questions about compatibility and respect, rather than "sickly sentiment."

Carlile, too, like Mrs. Sperling, is concerned with female "health," but he specifically discusses this issue in connection to conception and contraception. While Carlile views sexuality as a key component of maintaining both men's and women's health, his "serial monogamy" philosophy is not one he proposes without regard to the inevitable sexual and social consequences of pregnancy. He explains:

Then comes the consideration—what a dreadful thing it is that health and beauty cannot be encouraged and extended, that love cannot be enjoyed, without conception, when that conception is not desired, when it is a positive injury to the parties themselves and to society at large. This circumstance has been a great bar to health and beauty. See what a mass of evil arises from bastard children, and even where the parents are most industrious and most virtuous, from a half-starved, naked, and badly housed family, from families crowded into one room, for those whose health a house and garden is essential. All these matters are a tax

upon love, a perpetual tax upon human pleasure, upon health, a tax that turns beauty into shrivelled ugliness, defaces the noble attitude of mankind, and makes its condition worse than that of the cattle of the field. (91)

While Carlile recognizes the “animal nature” of human sexuality, he not only calls for more thoughtful relationships based on mutual affection, but also for better and more instruction in contraceptive practices in an effort to lessen the disastrous social and economic effects of unwanted or too many children.

Carlile explains, “it is better to prevent than to cure; and here prevention is most simply practicable, a means within the reach of all” (91). It is important to note that even before detailing basic contraceptive practices, Carlile highlights the most essential benefit to birth control practice and instruction. He writes:

Multitudes of men never marry, a still greater number refrain from marrying until they grow comparatively old; yet most such men are practised debauchees, and the mischief they do by the fraud and hypocrisy they produce is incalculable. This would not be so were a freer intercourse permitted and physical means adopted to prevent conceptions. *Girls would not then be seduced as they now are.... But the great good, which would result from physical preventatives, would be that alliances would be more early formed and in most cases be more lasting. Girls would not then surrender themselves to the caprice and injustice of men as they do now.* (95 [emphasis added])

Carlile's theories directly address the very situation that informs the fallen woman narrative. If girls were more frankly educated in concepts of love and contraceptive practices, more genial couplings would occur and children would (or at least potentially could) come when wanted. Fallen woman narratives rife with sexual assault, sexual ignorance, impregnation, abandonment, and public scandal could be avoided by such education and instruction. Women could own their sexuality and better control their reproductive lives, and men could be better men, instead of selfish, cruel cads and "practiced debauchees."

While Mrs. Sperling's text painstakingly details the etiquette of wedding banquet protocol, Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* outlines basic birth control practices in direct, frank language. He first describes the basic barrier method of the sponge:

The important discovery is that if, before sexual intercourse, the female introduces into her vagina a piece of sponge as large as can be pleasantly introduced, having previously attached a bobbin or bit of narrow riband to withdraw it, it will, in most cases, be found a preventative to conception that shall neither lessen the pleasure of the female nor injure her health. When convenient, the sponge should be dipped in warm water, or even in cold water rather than none, as its property and purpose is to absorb the semen of the male, and it absorbs best when so far damp as to have been dipped in water and pressed with the hand. (99)

Carlile further encourages women to employ this method by indicating that this is a common practice among women in “the more refined parts of the continent of Europe, and with those of the aristocracy of England” (99). As a rhetorical tactic, this move reads effectively, as use of the sponge is touted as both high-class and respectable. In addition, male contraceptive practices are also explained. Carlile writes:

The use of the sponge is the female’s safeguard; but there are other means by which conceptions are avoided, to be practised by the male. One is, to wear the skin, or what, in France, is called the baudruche, in England, commonly, the glove. These are sold in London at brothels, by waiters at taverns, and by some women and girls in the neighbourhood of places of public resort, such as Westminster Hall, etc. Another is, not to inseminate the female by observing a partial or complete withdrawing at the moment of seminal emission. This latter is the more certain means, and some women, particularly those of the Continent, will make it a part of the contract for intercourse, and look upon the man as a dishonest brute who does not attend to it. (100)

Positing contraceptive choices and expectations for both men and women, Carlile offers clear instruction in the practice of both condom use and withdrawal before ejaculation. More importantly, however, he notes that men who fail to withdraw—especially if this is the *agreed upon* method prior to sexual activity—are or should rightfully be judged as cads for their duplicitous

and selfish behavior. This reads exactly like advice that *should* have been followed by male seducers-cum-deserters of fallen woman narratives.

Carlile accurately concedes that at that time of his writing all of the mysteries of conception are not fully known, and that this is “imperfect knowledge” (100). However, he takes pains to explain that—at the very least—ejaculating semen into the “womb” of the woman certainly leads to pregnancy, so barrier methods like the sponge and the condom, and withdrawing before ejaculation, are relatively effective safeguards against conception (100-01). Carlile is vehement in his philosophy of conception prevention, and is adamantly against abortion or infanticide (101). Instead, he strongly advocates for the informed and educated use of contraception between loving men and women who are mutually attracted to one another and in agreement about their affections. These basic contraceptive practices and theories of love and affection should be taught and known, and Carlile tidily sums up his four main concerns near the end of his treatise:

1st. That no married couple shall have more children than they wish and can well maintain.

2nd. That no unhealthy woman shall bear children that cannot be reared, and which endangers her own life in the parturition: that ineffectual pregnancy shall never be suffered.

3rd. That there shall be no illegitimate children where they are not desired by the mother.

4th and finally. That sexual intercourse, where useful and desired, may be made a pleasure independent of the dread of a conception that blasts the prospects and happiness of the female. (103)

In the end, Carlile calls for an end to prejudice and hypocrisy, and requests, instead, a newfound embracing, sharing, and instructing in the truth, particularly as truth is the best route to happiness. Despite the book's frank and open content, Carlile contends it is not "vile" or "misleading," but that it is a book of physical, philosophical and moral instruction, and not only deserves the appellation of every woman's book but that of being a book for every man, woman and child of the age of puberty. The sexes have never, before the publication of this book, had any fair, open and honest instruction on the subject of love, on the regulation of that passion which is of the very first importance as to the health and happiness through life.... It was high time that something useful should be presented to the public, and it is presumed that this is now done in this book, in explaining the subject of love to every woman. (104)

Carlile was terribly proud of his publication, claiming he had "no desire to be known to posterity in a higher character than of being the sole and unassisted author of *Every Woman's Book*" (qtd. in Bush 105). He seemed to have been right in claiming that it was "high time" a publication like his be made available to women, in particular. In late 1826, Carlile claimed of *Every Woman's Book* that "respectable looking women purchase it and converse

upon it, and we daily hear cases of when it has restored health and peace of mind to delicate married women,'" and he hoped that thoughtful study of the text would "'remove prejudices that grew up with its first appearance'" (qtd. in Bush 131-32). Carlile scholar M. L. Bush succinctly condenses the intention and philosophy informing *Every Woman's Book*:

Women had good reason to suspect the book's free-lovery. But Carlile's concern for their health; his awareness of their sexual desires and needs; his keenness to prevent their exploitation and abuse; his hostility to the traditional forms of family constraint (i.e. abortion and infanticide) on the grounds that they were physically harmful and mentally disturbing; his preference for a contraceptive which left the matter in their hands; his emphasis on mutual and durable sexual relationships based on partnership rather than subjection; the opportunities he deliberately sought to allow the unmarried woman the chance to participate in sexual intercourse, if she so wished—all this gave his work a poignant female appeal. (132)

In his own words, Carlile defends his work: "'With the ladies I very much desire to be popular. Not by flattering them. Not by deceiving them. But by instructing them how to increase the amount of their happiness and how so to pursue the path of nature as to avoid much pain'" (qtd. in Bush 132).

I compare the 1895 *Every Woman's Book* of Mrs. Edith "happiness" Sperling with the 1826 *Every Woman's Book* of Richard "with power" Carlile not to censure the former and praise the latter, but rather to point out that both offer

radically different routes to instructing women in their best lives, their best health, and their best happiness. Both are pedagogical texts, both are manuals for every woman, and, side-by-side, both reveal the central tension informing Michel Foucault's serious doubts regarding sexual repression as historical fact. Mrs. Sperling's book represents good-girl reading and instruction, the kind that will guide female attention toward lofty and domestic goals of the proper English home and marriage. Richard Carlile's book may seem, to some, the vile or lascivious low material destined to drag readers into a cesspool of indulgence, sin, and scandal. Yet, Carlile's philosophy is solid evidence supporting Foucault's call for historical inquiry to "reverse the direction of our analysis," particularly of the apparently straight-laced, uptight, and sexually ascetic nineteenth-century English people (*The History of Sexuality* 73).

In many ways, Mrs. Sperling's book reads as "evidence" of nineteenth-century women's ascetic sexual repression. It could very well be a text some would point to and claim as proof that the Victorian woman's desire for a well-kept home buried her bodily desires for sex, if she had any sexual desires at all. Heavily implied in its pages and pages of instruction in propriety and decoration, however, is the lurking, dangerous opposite: failure to achieve this ideal. Or, worse: falling so far as to never be able to achieve it. Though Mrs. Sperling never addresses the topic of sex or sexuality, her severe disapproval of female sexual impropriety is implied by omission. It seems she need not overtly chastise that which she would never stoop to discuss. Unfortunately, Mrs. Sperling's *Every Woman's Book*, for all its benign advice about drapes and dreams and table settings, may, in fact, be the kind of instructive texts that left

many nineteenth-century women emotionally uneducated and sexually vulnerable until it was too late.

Richard Carlile's book is evidence of what Foucault calls the "fundamental petition to know" or the "will to truth," but this book also offers further evidence of the mechanisms in place that aided in "evading this truth, barring access to it, masking it" (55). Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* was, in fact, barred and denounced as obscene by The Vice Society (the "morality police" who attempted to regulate and censor "obscene materials," without legal backing). Carlile believed that The Vice Society's suppression of obscene materials only increased sales, and that "what was required was not to ban sexual explicitness in literature and art but to produce books which would treat sex respectfully and educate the people to appreciate it as clean rather than filthy" (Bush 20). At least in part, the book sold well *because* it was labeled obscene. The book sold 5,000 copies in the first year of publication, and Bush further remarks on the reasons for the book's popularity when he notes:

In branding *Every Woman's Book* an obscene work, [opponents] promoted its sale; but before this happened it was already selling well, on account of the practical answers it supplied to a pressing need; the relevance of the issues it raised; the arresting but unsalacious way it put them across; and the generous sympathy it showed for the plight of people caught in the web of love. (139)

Women, especially, publicly spoke out in favor of the book, and against it being labeled as obscene. After Carlile had been charged with "indecentcy at a public assembly," the "courageous milliner Mrs Spence" declared: "I find his writings

have none but moral inculcations, and a good moral effect on those who read and practice his precepts”(qtd. in Bush 134). At least according to this female advocate, Carlile’s work is not of the “low” variety meant to corrupt; instead, *Every Woman’s Book* is moral and good in its principles, pedagogy, and practice.

Several women also wrote to Carlile or approached him on the street to declare their immense gratitude for his book. Bush details women’s written or public thanks extended to Carlile when he writes:

Several women wrote to thank [Carlile] for the book. One from Worcestershire and another from London declared that they were unmarried. According to Carlile, they thanked him “for the confirmation of that happiness in life which they had previously sighed for and sought in vain and the absence of which had made them miserable”. Many married women offered him thanks for the book with, or through, their husbands. He also claimed to have received thanks from many women “in the face of their husbands”. (134)

Carlile is keen to note instances of *unmarried* women thanking him, or married women publicly thanking him either *through or with their husbands*, possibly, in part, to emphasize that *his* is the book for *every* woman, happily unmarried or happily married. It probably goes without saying that there is no section in Mrs. Edith Sperling’s *Every Woman’s Book* devoted to appropriate correspondence with authors who advocate free love and protective birth control advice. Nor is there a section dedicated to properly thanking a radical free-love philosopher

and birth control advocate either through or in front of one's husband. Yet, *respectable* women wanted Carlile's *Every Woman's Book*. They needed this book. They thanked Carlile for its content and instruction. These women, not unlike Wilde's Mrs. Erlynne, resisted the dominant sexual power-knowledge regime of their time because of their own "fundamental petition to know" and "will to truth" (Foucault 55), and they welcomed the explicit—but ultimately moral—sexual pedagogy of Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* despite it being labeled obscene. While both Mrs. Edith "happiness" Sperling and Richard "with power" Carlile confidently claimed theirs as *the* book for *every* woman, these expressions of extreme gratitude to Carlile reveal that for many nineteenth-century women, their greatest "happiness" was not possible if they could not live their own sexual and emotional lives "with power."

“What a mass of misery would be prevented by my proposal”:
 Neo-Malthusianism and the Legacy of Francis Place, Richard Carlile,
 Robert Dale Owen, and Charles Knowlton

Though significant, and precise in its own way, Richard Carlile’s contribution to contentious public discourse on male and female sexuality, love, and birth control, was not necessarily entirely new. Thomas Malthus’s 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population* serves as a centerpiece and argumentative genesis for many nineteenth-century birth control advocates. However, Malthus’s “preventative checks” to population never refer to nor advocate birth control practice or specific contraceptive use. Instead, Malthus encourages moral restraint and postponement of marriage as key practices in lessening the human burden on the planet’s limited resources. In “Malthusian Mutations,” Lesley A. Hall explains that the rather more accurate term of “neo-Malthusianism” should be employed when describing the philosophy and action of those who explicitly advanced contraceptive practice in connection to the general spirit of Malthus’s original pamphlet (141). As remarkable and fascinating as Carlile’s *Every Woman’s Book* is, Carlile himself admitted his work owed a debt to the earlier neo-Malthusian work of a London tailor named Francis Place (Bush 21).

In *Francis Place (1771-1854): The Life of a Remarkable Radical*, biographer Dudley Miles explains:

Place’s *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*, published in 1822, was the first book to put the social and

economic case for contraception, and it was his persistent propaganda during the 1820s which launched the world's first birth control movement. (139)

It must be noted, however, that Place's book-length study "did not explain contraceptive methods" (Miles 146), but that his now famous, anonymous 1823 "Diabolical Hand Bills" did. As scholar and author of *"A Dirty, Filthy Book"* S. Chandrasekhar explains, "until Francis Place, a hard-working, thoughtful London tailor, became the first English advocate and propagandist of birth control, in the modern sense of the term, no one even dared to think aloud publicly that some kind of a mechanical barrier used by the female before coitus might possibly be an answer" (15). In short, Francis Place is the first neo-Malthusian on record, and his work set in motion a century-long fight to publish and disseminate socially and sexually beneficial contraceptive information for all.

Place's two (hardly diabolical) hand bills, addressed "To the Married of Both Sexes in Genteel Life" and "To the Married of Both Sexes of the Working People," were informed, in great part, by Place's belief in his friend Jeremy Bentham's theory of utilitarianism. As Anne Taylor explains:

Paradoxically, the impulse to disseminate advice which the great majority of persons found offensive came from a philosophy which was concerned with achieving the greatest good for the greatest number—utilitarianism. It was as a disciple of its leader

Jeremy Bentham that Francis Place distributed leaflets among the poor, in the 1820s, containing advice about limiting their families. (108)

In this utilitarian spirit, Place's two hand bills "contained instructions concerning the use of the sponge together with a brief justification of contraception on economic and medical grounds" (Miles 148), and he hoped that encouraging this basic barrier method of contraception would result in smaller families and "lessen the necessity of child labor... mean fewer illicit affairs and a decreased incidence of venereal disease," for all classes, but especially for the poor (Reynolds 23). While the advice Place offers in his hand bills is not extremely sophisticated, it does, in fact, present the best, easiest, and cheapest strategies to block the uterus (really: cervix) during intercourse. Reynolds explains that the vaginal sponge Place promoted "could be made of 'lint, fine wool, cotton, flax or whatever may be at hand'" (17). Chandrasekhar further details Place's hand bills:

The objective of these leaflets was to explain in simple language how a workingman and his wife could prevent conception and avoid a large family.... The method which seemed most likely to succeed in this country, since it depended on the female, consisted in 'a piece of sponge about an inch square, being placed in the vagina previous to coition, and afterwards withdrawn by means of a double twisted thread, or bobbin, attached to it.' (17)

Place's own working-class upbringing and self-education allowed him to directly witness the grim economic limitations of large families, and his concern for the poor is certainly reflected in his treatises, but he also explicitly turned his attention to how this contraceptive information could help *women* of all classes. Contrary to Malthus's suggestion of moral restraint and delayed marriages as a reasonable check to population growth, Place "appears to have been the first to have rejected delayed marriage in favour of an exclusive reliance on birth control" (Miles 152), and he sees this as having a particular benefit to women. Place writes:

... there are some first rate women as to intellect, married excellent delightful women as free from all sorts of superstition as mortals can be, and as well informed, as learned in all things as they can well be, who do not have more than two children, who have no fear of those two or either of them dying, and will therefore have no more.... Now only think of the breeding and the feeding children, as it regards the woman, and the loss and cost and the pain of losing them, and see what a mass of misery would be prevented by my proposal, and add to this the pleasure of seeing the number of children a woman might choose to have, healthy....
(qtd. in Miles 152)

And, this "mass of misery" that could be prevented is something Place personally knows. The quote above reads all the more poignantly—and tragically—considering that his wife, Elizabeth, "bore the last of her fifteen children in 1817, shortly before her 43rd birthday, and eighteen months before

her husband learnt about the contraceptive sponge" (Miles 152), and that five of those fifteen children died in infancy (Chandrasekhar 20). Place's own lower-class origins, his self-taught trade and learning, and his personal experiences with married sexuality and both childbirth and infant mortality informed his radical crusade to disseminate beneficial, safe contraceptive information to all in an effort to thwart such miseries as those brought on by too many or unwanted children, or ill-health and loss of children. In almost direct response to Malthus, Place chose advocating contraception because "preaching moral restraint would have meant urging others to do what he doubted whether he could have done himself" (Miles 145). It is ironic and sad, however, that Place himself, and his wife, did not enjoy the benefits of practicing what he came anonymously to preach. They may have been spared loss and misery.

As Dudley Miles explains, "The early history of the birth control movement is obscure, since almost all of its supporters tried to keep their involvement secret" (140), and this fact makes Richard Carlile's work that much more significant, not least because he signed his name to *Every Woman's Book*. In *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England*, Angus McLaren remarks that while he distributed his unsigned hand bills, Place "sought the support of the well-known champion of the 'pauper press', Richard Carlile. Carlile, once won over, became the first man in England to put his name to a work devoted to the subject of birth control" (52). *Every Woman's Book* was a direct response to Place's writing. Initially, Carlile wanted his work to stress pleasure over reproductive concerns, yet he knew he could not address one without frankly discussing the other (Bush 24). Knowing that Francis Place's book-length study

on population did not address contraception, Carlile decided to write his own companion piece to Place's work. M. L. Bush explains that what Carlile wanted was to establish, alongside Place's principle of population, his own principle of love. For him the priority was to liberate men and women from the official system of marriage, religion and "the tax on love" (i.e. unwanted children), so that sexual gratification happened more frequently and its benefits of health and happiness were more widely enjoyed. (24)

Much like Place, Carlile explains that his goal is to encourage sexual health, sexual safety, and emotional happiness over worry or misery. Others, beyond Place and Carlile, shared this philosophy. As Place served as an inspiration for Carlile, Carlile also served as an inspiration for additional neo-Malthusians and their writings on contraception. Bush explains the legacy connecting these men and their work:

Every Woman's Book inspired Dale Owen to compose *Moral Physiology*, which in turn inspired the American Charles Knowlton to produce *Fruits of Philosophy* (1832). This meant that, thanks to Carlile's book, three works of contraceptive advice were published, all within the space of six years. Previously, apart from Place's handbills, there had been none. (142)

However, Robert Dale Owen wrote his 1830 *Moral Physiology* to clarify and defend his own views in response to being "bitterly attacked for cautiously praising" and also being incorrectly associated with Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* (Miles 157). Scholar Anne Taylor describes Owen's work as a "thoughtful

analysis of the economic, moral, and social problems of human fertility, [that] called for men and women to be free to gratify their natural instincts without fear of consequences” (109). As Owen himself writes in *Moral Physiology*:

I have taken great pains to ascertain the opinions of the most enlightened physicians of Great Britain and France on this subject;... and they all concur in admitting, that man may have a complete control over [reproductive instinct]; and that men and women may, without injury to health, or violence to the moral feelings, and with very little diminution of the pleasure which accompanies the gratification of the instinct, refrain at will from becoming parents. (137)

After first expressing that the mysteries of conception prevent exact knowledge, Owen asserts, at the very least, that keeping sperm itself away from the uterus is an effective prevention of conception (138). However, as clinical as Owen may be in some respects, his discussion of birth control practices in connection with real-life social and sexual consequences *for men* is fascinating.

Though he briefly mentions the sponge and the *baudruche* (the condom) in a footnote, Owen advocates neither of these because of doubtful efficacy or inconvenience (141). However, he more directly explains—and promotes—the practice of complete withdrawal by the male not only as an effectual practice of the “cultivated classes” but also as a “point of honor” in the behavior of all young men who must “learn to make the necessary effort” in this practice (138). In a concerted effort to shame “gentlemen” who did not practice withdrawal, Owen writes: “You could not offer him a greater insult than to

presuppose the possibility of his forgetting himself so far as thus to put his own momentary gratification, for an instant, in competition with the wish or the well-being of any one to whom he professed regard or affection" (138-9). In other words: gentlemen, live up to your name and status, and remember that your pleasure is not more important than the well-being of your female sexual partner. In an even further, and specific, footnote, Owen explains:

A Frenchman belonging to the cultivated classes, would as soon bear to be called a coward, as to be accused of causing the pregnancy of a woman who did not desire it; and that, too, whether the matrimonial law had given him legal rights over her person or not. *Such an imputation, if substantiated, would shut him out for ever from all decent society; and most properly so. It is a perfect barbarity, and ought to be treated as such.* When we begin to look to genuine morality, instead of empty or offensive forms, these are the principles of honor we shall implant in our children's minds: and then we shall have a world of courtesy and kindness, instead of a scene of legal outrage, or hypocritical profession. (139 [emphasis added])

Much like Carlile, Owen presents significant analysis of birth control practice in light of abusive or ungentlemanly behavior against women. Thoughtful sexual education for both men and women would allow for safe sexual expression of affection, and, if judiciously practiced, could ultimately protect both parties from scandal or abuse. In a refreshing shift of focus, Owen heavily puts the threat of shame onto the boor, the cad, the sexually abusive *male* who deserves removal

from decent society should he assault or otherwise not abide by his impregnated female sexual partner. This sexual respect coupled with sexual protection, Owen says, is the honorable lesson children need to learn. It is smart, protective sexual pedagogy, and it advances, explicitly, responsible male sexual behavior and the sexual and social consequences for men who behave ungentlemanly toward women. In Owen's estimation, the sexually wronged woman is granted deserved sympathy, and her insensitive male lover deserves social judgment and misery.

Finding Robert Dale Owen's *Moral Physiology* more a "sociological and economic tract," the American doctor Charles Knowlton decided to turn a few short conception and contraception essays he had previously only loaned to patients into a book to sell to the public at large (Chandrasekhar 22). Anonymously published in 1832, *Fruits of Philosophy: The Private Companion of Young Married People* was "the first popularly written medical guide on how to prevent conception" (Chandrasekhar 23). The noted departure from Place, Carlile, and Owen is that Knowlton's work more graphically—if, by contemporary standards, erroneously—*medically* detailed male and female reproductive organs and functions. However, regardless of the level of medical detail, much like his predecessors, Knowlton bases his general contraceptive and birth control advice on keeping semen from entering the uterus (Knowlton 136-37).

Like Owen, Knowlton chiefly advocates the practice of complete withdrawal, and he is a bit more cautious in recommending the use of the boudouche (with its "very delicate skin") and the sponge as it is usually directed

(137). Withdrawing a moistened sponge after “connexion” might not prove a “sure preventative. As there are many little ridges or folds in the vagina, we cannot suppose the withdrawal of the sponge would dislodge all the semen in every instance” (137). In Knowlton’s most significant contribution to birth control practice, he proposes women employ a syringe of an anti-fecundation liquid (e.g., vinegar) which would act against the semen as a spermicide. Women could either soak their sponge in—or, post-connection, wash out their vagina with a syringe of—“a solution of sulphate of zinc, of alum, pearl-ash, or any salt that acts chemically on the semen, and at the same time produces no unfavorable effect on the female” (138). Though “injections of simple water” may also suffice when “applied with a tolerable degree of care” (139), Knowlton also suggests using a “vegetable astringent” like “an infusion of white oak bark, of red rose leaves, of nut-galls, and the like. A lump of either of the above mentioned salts, of the size of a chestnut, may be dissolved in a pint of water” (138). Knowlton acknowledges that this type of check requires more work on the woman’s part, but he views this as not objectionable because the practice costs little, does not sacrifice pleasure, and “is in the hands of the female” (138), a final point which might allude to his—mostly unstated—desire to empower women.

Despite Knowlton’s lack of an explicit social, economic, or philosophical agenda or comment, his medical tract was still deemed legally troubling several times in Knowlton’s lifetime. As Chandrasekhar details:

...the legal authorities in the notoriously puritanical state of Massachusetts were in some hurry to prevent the information in

Knowlton's book from reaching the people. Knowlton had three encounters with the law because of the book. In 1832, the year of publication, he was fined fifty dollars and costs at Taunton, Massachusetts, on the complaint of a local lawyer whose own pamphlet accused Knowlton of making the world's oldest profession easy and devoid of its "inconveniences and dangers." On December 10, 1832, on the complaint of a jealous physician at Cambridge, Massachusetts... he was sentenced... to three months hard labor in the House of Correction at Cambridge... for distributing his book. In 1834-35, at Greenfield, Massachusetts, Knowlton was again hauled into court. The prosecutions, originating in this instance with an Ashfield clergyman, resulted in a *nolle prosequi*, the jury having been unable to agree on two previous occasions. (24-5)

Important to note, however, is that Knowlton's legal run-ins and time served in a correctional facility did not halt or disrupt the sale of the book, and "it went through nine editions" in the rest of his rather quiet, uneventful lifetime (25).

Tracing the neo-Malthusian legacy originating with Francis Place's 1823 "Diabolical Hand Bills" through Carlile's 1826/28 *Every Woman's Book* through Robert Dale Owen's 1830 *Moral Physiology* through Charles Knowlton's 1832 *Fruits of Philosophy*, reveals that these birth control treatises and tracts "each of them cheap and popular, dominated the subject for the next forty years" (Bush 142). And each text, ultimately, advances Place's sentiment that a "mass of misery would be prevented by" these proposals (qtd. in Miles 152). Yet, despite

his connection to this distinguished Place-Carlile-Owen lineage of misery-reducing, freethinking radicals, sexual theorists, and contraceptive propagandists, Charles Knowlton most likely never anticipated that a quarter of a century after his 1850 death, his *Fruits of Philosophy* would gain international notoriety as *the* text at the center of England's most famous nineteenth-century obscenity trial.

“It means ruin to you as a lady”:

Annie Besant, *Obscenity, and the Fight for Reproductive Rights*

As a decidedly more descriptive medical text, Charles Knowlton’s 1832 *Fruits of Philosophy* reads less like neo-Malthusian propaganda and more like an intricate anatomy lesson coupled with a few pages of clinical, straightforward contraceptive advice. Knowlton’s mostly non-judgmental medical reporting is precisely what sets his work apart from his predecessors. However, as evidenced by the charge that *Fruits of Philosophy* could make prostitution easy by removing the dangers of conception (Chandrasekhar 24-25), it follows that nineteenth-century critics and accusers would cast judgment on medical information through the lens of pathologized sexuality—especially women’s sexuality—regardless of the text’s intent. After all, Knowlton gave *Fruits of Philosophy* the subtitle of *the Private Companion of Young Married People, not the Prostitute’s Handbook for Not Getting in the Family Way*.

Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, in their comprehensive book, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950*, offer critical insight on both birth control campaigns and sexual pathology. Porter and Hall write:

A glance at publications in the first half of the nineteenth century shows that birth-controlling voices were a tiny and precarious minority. Instead there was a growing body of tracts of a medical or pseudo-medical nature concerned to spell out the pathological aspects of sexuality. In particular, female sexual desire came

under scrutiny and suspicion;... associations were drawn between 'abnormal' or 'excessive' female sexual urges and physiological maladies or psychiatric disorders, notably 'hysteria'. ...In numerous aspects, sexuality became more suspect. (128)

As Porter and Hall note, the smaller birth-controlling voices of Francis Place, Richard Carlile, Robert Dale Owen, and Charles Knowlton were increasingly overshadowed by texts and theories pathologizing sexuality. That 1832 prostitution-promoting charge against Knowlton reads as a brief precursor to the new scientific discourse of medical or pseudo-medical misogyny typified in William Acton's 1857 studies *Prostitution* and *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*.

Frank Mort, in *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, explains that the "whole tenor of Acton's approach was to insist on the primacy of medical knowledge" (60), yet many of Acton's pseudo-medical conclusions clearly rely on reinforcing socially- or morally-informed judgments, particularly of women and women's sexuality. While Acton defined male sexuality in terms of "instinctual force" (60), women were defined

in terms of the norm of asexuality and the absence of sexual desire.... He noted approvingly that 'in a state of nature wild female animals will not allow the approach of the male except when in a state of rut'. Motherhood, marriage and domesticity were basic female instincts which Acton compared to the unnatural sexual desire of the prostitute, the nymphomaniac and the courtesan. Once more the argument was physiological;

maternity and suckling made such vital demands on a woman's organs that 'sexual desire is almost annihilated'. (61)

"Medical" definitions of natural and unnatural expressions of female sexuality coupled with mid-century concerns with sanitation, disease, immorality, and state hygiene in large part informed the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869.

Mort explains that "the acts were concerned with the regulation of the sexual and moral habits of two particular groups within the urban poor—female prostitutes and the lower ranks of the armed forces. But the tactics used to discipline these two groups were very different" (58). Each act further established rules and laws allowing incredibly invasive body-policing (i.e., forcible genital screenings and exams) of women whom authorities believed to be prostitutes (even if they were not), in an effort to curb both prostitution and the spread of venereal disease to soldiers. But the proposed regimented policing and genital screening of the male soldiers was seen as potentially demoralizing, a danger to the soldiers' self-respect (Mort 59). Instead, writes Mort,

It was women who were defined as the human agents of infection, threatening national health and security and challenging the social order by their active and autonomous sexuality. The acts introduced a more coercive form of medico-legal regulation of prostitutes, together with an intensified system of police surveillance.... A new and powerful medical ideology, crystallising

definitions of normal and deviant female sexuality was the cornerstone of this process. (59)

However, such extreme legislation on and pathologizing of women's deviant sexuality was met by a feminist demand to repeal the acts. Most interesting here is that the same pseudo-medical ideologies used to persecute women with "unnatural desires" was also used against those women fighting to repeal the acts, as medics "responded to the feminist challenge by drawing on their new sexual ideology to label the 'shrieking sisterhood' as immoral and impure for daring to speak publicly about sexuality" (Mort 63). In this analysis, feminists actively campaigning to repeal the acts were unfairly seen as on par with those women grotesquely labeled as "'miserable creatures who were mere masses of rottenness and vehicles of disease'" (qtd. in Mort 56).

Famous repeal feminists like Josephine Butler risked being labeled as members of the "shrieking sisterhood" because she claimed that the Contagious Diseases Acts "were not only an attack on the civil liberties of all women but also implicated the state in sanctioning male vice" (67). This reversal strategy of focusing on male vice might have helped get the Contagious Diseases Acts repealed in 1886, but at some cost to feminist goals. Mort explains the best components of the strategy for repeal:

Feminists campaigned to disrupt the gender-specific equation of active female sexuality with vice, filth and animality. The prostitute was not the source of contagion and moral corruption, but the upper-class male, backed by 'the medical lust of handling and dominating women'. As a political strategy it was highly effective,

successfully confronting the medical discourse which lay behind regulation. (73)

However, effective strategy aside, this focus on male sexuality had clear drawbacks. Mort continues:

Middle-class women consolidated their feminism through a moral politics which implicitly reinforced the polarised representations of male and female sexuality, albeit in a reverse form. Repealers tended to view sex not merely as male defined but as *male*, while women were promoted as the agents regulating immorality—powerful but asexual guardians of the nation's morals. (73)

Ironically, their successful repeal campaign against Acton's pseudo-medical ideology, in part, resulted in reinforcing the spirit of Acton's claims about "good" women's asexuality. Most importantly, this same strategy is also what kept many feminists from openly defending and advocating contraception use and birth control rights for women.

Despite the obvious sexual, social, and economic advantages that birth control and contraceptive knowledge could provide for women, Anne Taylor notes that many nineteenth-century female feminists and those involved in "the campaign for women's suffrage regarded the use of mechanical devices to interfere with nature not as liberating to women, but as further subjecting them to men's desires," as natural barriers like the consequences of pregnancy are needed to maintain the social order (114). Richard Soloway, in *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930*, reveals that while most feminists "had not hesitated to campaign against the sexual double standard

implicit in the hated Contagious Diseases Acts," almost all refused to publicly advocate or defend birth control or neo-Malthusian tracts detailing contraception use (134). They were willing to become part of the "shrieking sisterhood," but only when those shrieks argued for repeal of the acts, not for contraceptive rights. Echoing Anne Taylor's assessments, Soloway additionally explains:

Feminists did not object to family limitation, but they considered it an inappropriate, divisive issue that could only weaken their struggle for the vote and for greater economic and educational opportunities. Many were, however, repelled by the use of artificial devices that were viewed as salacious, probably dangerous, and, perhaps more importantly, threatened to intensify the sexual subjugation of women already victimized by men's oppressive, carnal desires. If the threat of pregnancy were removed, husbands would presumably be more insatiable than ever, reducing marriage to a degraded state of legalized prostitution. (134-35)

In an odd way, then, the most publicly outspoken nineteenth-century feminists believed that keeping wives, if not all women, in a perpetually sexually vulnerable and unprotected state was the best way to protect them from their husband's potentially uncontrollable carnal desires. Yet, this analysis only further relegates sexuality to the marriage bed, defines women as asexual beings, and limits the sex act to procreative ends and only within the family; at the same time, it fails to address female sexual desire, and the need for sexual

pedagogy in order to protect *all* women—married or unmarried—from the consequences of sexual activity. Ultimately, nineteenth-century feminist resistance to publicly promoting birth control information makes the actions of the radical freethinker, publisher, and contraceptive advocate, Annie Besant, that much more significant. Despite the great cost to herself and her family, Annie Besant notoriously took up the historic challenge of becoming “the first woman to publicly advocate birth control” (Taylor 115).

Considering Besant’s own remarks regarding her dismal and troubled marriage, it makes sense that she might be more inclined to publicly take a stand to improve sexual relationships and marriage, encourage motherhood by choice, and campaign for reproductive rights. At just 20, Annie Wood married the Reverend Frank Besant. The match was disastrous. In her own words, Besant explained: “out of sheer weakness and fear of inflicting pain I drifted into an engagement with a man I did not pretend to love” (qtd. in Chandrasekhar 31). This lack of love was further compounded by her own—and her husband’s—ignorance of sex: “My dreamy life,... kept innocent on all questions of sex, was no preparation for married existence, and left me defenceless to face a rude awakening” (qtd. in Reynolds 20). After having two children, Digby and Mabel, Besant’s troubled six-year marriage to the abusive Reverend Frank Besant ended in a legal separation (they could not divorce because no adultery was involved) (Nancy Anderson 14).

S. Chandrasekhar contends that the couple’s lack of sex education ultimately led to their divorce. Annie Besant “felt that the size of their family should be limited to two children, but her husband did not. They argued

bitterly, fought over the issue of family limitation, and finally separated” (Chandrasekhar 31). A formal separation agreement included a special custody arrangement stipulating that while Digby remained with his father, Annie Besant would “raise their three-year-old daughter, Mabel, ‘free from interference or interruption on the part of the said Frank Besant, or any person deriving or claiming authority from him’” (Nancy Anderson 14-15). Her complicated legal separation and unique custody situation, in addition to Annie Besant’s role as a “good” mother to a daughter, would figure largely in the obscenity and custody trials that followed Annie Besant’s 1877 politically pointed and decidedly public republishing of Charles Knowlton’s 1832 *Fruits of Philosophy* as a “test” of the 1857 Obscene Publications Act.

In “Lord Campbell’s Act: England’s First Obscenity Statute,” Colin Manchester explains that the “Obscene Publications Act of 1857 was an important landmark in obscenity control in England, for it represented the first serious attempt by the legislature to regulate the distribution and circulation of obscene publications. Regulation had prior to this been somewhat haphazard to say the least” (223). Socially and morally—rather than legally—powerful organizations like the Society for the Suppression of Vice (known as The Vice Society) were responsible for those haphazard applications of obscenity control prior to 1857. The Vice Society would attempt to legally ban materials or prosecute peddlers by employing the Vagrancy Act of 1824 which made it “an offence to unlawfully expose to view in a public place any obscene or indecent exhibition,” but this often proved ineffectual as “proceedings under the Vagrancy Act could only be brought where some element of public display was

involved" (Manchester 225). Realizing the official policing of obscenity and obscene materials required more precise legal language and legislation, Lord Campbell, the Lord Chief Justice helped make the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 a reality.

However, like the often problematic attempts to uniformly and fixedly define pornography, any attempt to *legally* define something as subjective and fluctuating in meaning as "obscenity" is going to raise contest. In *A History of Pornography*, H. Montgomery Hyde explains how Lord Campbell assuaged critics of the proposed bill. Hyde writes:

In introducing the measure, which empowered magistrates to order the destruction of books and prints if in their opinion their publication would amount to a 'misdemeanour proper to be prosecuted as such', Lord Campbell... attempted to disarm his critics by assuring them that the Obscene Publications Bill was not designed to cover works of acknowledged literary or artistic merit. Rather it was '*intended to apply exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in a well regulated mind*'. (169 [emphasis added])

Though the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 never offers an explicit definition of "obscenity," it clearly allowed magistrates to employ—and prosecute based on—their own subjective definition of the term. Again, this did not go uncontested, and more than ten years later, Lord Campbell's successor, Chief Justice Cockburn formulated a "test" that would serve as an addendum to the

original act. In 1868, Chief Justice Cockburn's "test" proposed a "much more restrictive interpretation than Lord Campbell had ever intended, namely the effect that the publication complained of might be expected to have upon the mind of a hypothetical schoolgirl" (Hyde 171). In his own words, Chief Justice Cockburn clarifies: "I think the test of obscenity is this, *whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall*" (qtd. in Hyde 171 [emphasis added]). As Hyde further points out, "under this test a work might be, and in practice not infrequently was, condemned by the courts on account of isolated passages taken from their context. Nor was the defence of literary or other merit permissible" (171). Clearly, the "Cockburn test" made the category of obscenity rather more subjective, in that magistrates could parse even single words or phrases from texts and deem them obscene.

After the end of her marriage, in 1874 Annie Besant began working on the *National Reformer*, a radical magazine that encouraged freethinking. It was while working on the magazine she met a fellow freethinker and atheist named Charles Bradlaugh, and the two became rather notorious orators, speaking in London and the provinces on topics like "The Political Status of Women" and "The True Basis of Morality" (Chandrasekhar 35). Despite crowd resistance or hostility, both Bradlaugh and Besant knew the value of their controversial and progressive lectures. As burgeoning neo-Malthusians, Bradlaugh and Besant turned their attentions to birth control and contraceptive rights. As Moira Reynolds details:

Highly sensitive to the differences in the British world between the “haves” and the “have nots,” they saw the misery caused by crowding, malnutrition, poor housing, and lack of opportunity and realized that knowing how to limit family size could to much to improve the lot of the poor. So they planned to test what they termed the right of publication. (25)

Their “right of publication” test involved republishing Charles Knowlton’s *Fruits of Philosophy*. However, they did not simply pull this title out of nowhere; in 1876 Knowlton’s work had been subjected to judgment under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. Reynolds traces the publication and prosecution history:

In 1876 a British bookseller named Henry Cook added illustrations to *Fruits*. Cook was sentenced to two years at hard labor under the 1857 obscene publications act. Charles Watt, a freethought publisher associated with Besant and Bradlaugh, had put out an edition of *Fruits*, and he too was prosecuted. Pleading “guilty in law,” he got off relatively easily. The terms demanded that he cease publication and destroy his supply of copies. (25)

Infuriated by the subjectivity of the law and by Watt’s plea, Bradlaugh and Besant started the Freethought Publishing Company in order to publish their own edition of Knowlton’s text.

Aside from correcting printing, spelling, and grammar, and offering specific footnotes to clarify scientific advancements, Bradlaugh and Besant did not do much else to the text. They did change the subtitle from *the Private*

Companion of Young Married People to An Essay on Population, and they added a Publisher's Preface which detailed their reasons for republishing Knowlton's text. In the preface, after detailing the prosecution of the text's recent publishers, Bradlaugh and Besant offer frank remarks on the book's content.

They write:

We do not personally endorse all that Dr. Knowlton says.... but since progress can only be made through discussion, and no discussion is possible where differing opinions are suppressed, we claim the right to publish all opinions, so that the public, enabled to see all sides of a question, may have the materials for forming a sound judgment. (qtd. in Knowlton 90)

Steadfast in their standards as passionate orators and fierce debaters, Bradlaugh and Besant used the preface and this republication to advance a call for dialogue and open discussion, particularly on a topic so often withheld from the public at large. They refer to the legacy of Robert Dale Owen and Richard Carlile, noting, particularly, that "in striving to carry on Carlile's work, we cannot expect to escape Carlile's reproach, but whether applauded or condemned we mean to carry it on, socially as well as politically and theologically" (qtd. in Knowlton 91). But, most significantly, they discuss the people the book will help, the lives that will be made better by smaller families and less economic burden, and they say

to all of these, we point the way of relief and of happiness; for the sake of these we publish what others fear to issue, and we do it, confident that if we fail the first time, we shall succeed at last, and

that the English public will not permit the authorities to stifle a discussion of the most important social question which can influence a nation's welfare. (qtd. in Knowlton 92)

True to their call for public debate and the right to publish, Bradlaugh and Besant, in no uncertain terms, brought on their own arrest and obscenity trial themselves. According to Chandrasekhar, "Bradlaugh sent a copy to the London police and informed them of the time and place when he and Besant would sell copies," and within a few days both were arrested and tried before Lord Chief Justice Cockburn in June of 1877 (36-37).

Because Bradlaugh and Besant were highly-skilled orators, debaters, and lecturers who knew well the obscenity laws they were up against, the trial, hearings, and appeals were messy and complicated, ultimately ending with both offending authors getting off on a complex technicality. In her biography of Annie Besant, Anne Taylor writes that Bradlaugh and Besant

were accused of corrupting the morals of youth, of inciting them and others to 'indecent, obscene, unnatural and immoral practices', of bringing them to a state of 'wickedness, lewdness, and debauchery' by printing and publishing a certain 'indecent, lewd, filthy, bawdy, and obscene book'. (112)

It is curious to read these accusations, in large part because each additional accusatory term provides no new, nor specific, information regarding definition or application of the term. The publishers were corrupting because they were lewd because the book was obscene because it was immoral because it was wicked. Solicitor-General, Sir Hardinge Giffard offered a bit more specific

accusation when he exclaimed, “I say that this is a dirty, filthy book, and the test of it is that no human being would allow that book on his table, *no decently educated English husband would allow even his wife to have it*” (qtd. in Chandrasekhar 39 [emphasis added]). Giffard further specified his prosecution by asking

whether a book of this sort, published to everybody would not suggest to the unmarried as well as to the married, and any persons into whose hands this book might get—the boy of 17 and the girl of the same age—that they might gratify their passions without the mischief and the inconvenience and the destruction of character which would be involved if they gratified them and conception followed. (qtd. in Taylor 115)

Giffard seems to be a bit vague, and therefore, generous, in his comment that the destruction of character might somehow apply to both the boy and the young pregnant girl in this hypothetical scenario. The threat of the “fallen boy” or “fallen man” seems a weak argument, and his position reads as far more in line with keeping females as the sex most sexually ignorant, the sex most vulnerable to falling, and the sex most shamed by the gratification of their passions.

These bitter accusations, however, did not rattle the fierce propagandist Besant, as she called obscenity law into question. Taylor explains:

Annie then dealt with the 1857 Act which she deplored as vague in its definition of obscenity. What was obscene? *Was Tristram Shandy* obscene? She threatened to read it to the court. The Act

was not meant to include medical books, she was sure. If Knowlton's work was to be convicted, publishers of medical works would find themselves out of business. The real significance of the case, Annie declared, was that if her defence succeeded, a right would be established that did not yet exist, the right to public discussion of family limitation. (116)

The Bradlaugh and Besant "defence" did succeed, but only in part, as the jury delivered a complicated verdict, stating: "We are unanimously of the opinion that the book in question is calculated to deprave public morals but at the same time we entirely exonerate the defendants from any corrupt motive in publishing it" (qtd. in Taylor 119). Though the text was still deemed obscene, Bradlaugh and Besant "refused to stop selling the book. They were each given a six-month prison term and fined. Bradlaugh, who had an excellent knowledge of law, applied for a writ of error. A few months later the Cockburn decision was reversed, due to a technicality" (Reynolds 26-27).

While Bradlaugh and Besant may have "won" their case, this reversal still left the text in murky obscenity territory; however, they continued "the sale of the book 'till all prosecution and threat of prosecution were definitely surrendered' sometime in 1879" (Chandrasekhar 41). Despite all this legal complexity, a clear triumph of the trial was that Besant's "use of plain unsentimental language was heroic. Her presentation of the case challenged one of the most formidable assumptions upholding Victorian society—that knowledge was too dangerous a thing for women to possess" (Taylor 117). But, as Besant found out in her subsequent ugly custody trial, this knowledge was also too dangerous and too

inappropriate for a good Victorian mother to potentially pass down to her daughter.

In a way, Besant did receive some warning from fellow publisher George Holyoake when he wrote to her, "if you intend to publish the Knowlton work it means ruin to you as a lady" (qtd. in Taylor 109). Though "ruin" might be both too loaded and too harsh a term, the critical investigation into Besant's political and social activities led to her losing custody of her daughter, Mabel. Nancy Fix Anderson, in her detailed article, "'Not a Fit or Proper Person': Annie Besant's Struggle for Child Custody, 1878-9," reveals that the complexities of the Bradlaugh and Besant obscenity trials were nothing compared to the legal tangles Besant endured in the fight to retain custody of her daughter. The social standards of Victorian motherhood were as much on trial as Annie Besant herself, as

mothers were valued socially only if they were 'good' mothers, good according to rigid moral standards of propriety not only in behaviour but also in opinion.... When Besant was judged 'not a fit and proper person' to have custody of her child, not because of her mothering but because of her opinions, the courts and the public ruled unequivocally that socially conformity was more important than maternal love. (13-14)

Anderson contends that while Besant "spoke passionately about her love for her daughter" and certainly exhausted all legal means to retain custody of Mabel, it is also well known that Besant welcomed "challenges to the establishment" and "martyrdom," and "would not give up the cause of free speech and birth control

for her child's sake" (17). Besant loved her daughter, but she equally loved her cause—a cause that, in her estimation, would give her daughter the sex education necessary to ensure a happy (or happier) life.

Not surprisingly, then, the most damning comment Besant made during the obscenity trial linked sexual pedagogy and her own daughter. As Anderson notes, Besant

made a comment that would later come back to haunt her; emphasizing the importance of sex education, she remarked, 'I say deliberately to you, as mother of a daughter whom I love, that I believe it will tend to her happiness in her future, as well as to her health, that she shall not have made to her that kind of mystery about sexual functions that every man and woman must know sooner or later'. (16-17)

Despite Besant (reluctantly) offering an explicit claim detailing Frank Besant's physical violence and cruelty during their marriage (claims he did not deny), the prosecution's relentless focus on the potential miseducation of Mabel by such a corrupt mother trumped all claims of Frank Besant's abuse (28).

Anderson details the most dramatically pointed questioning and argument put forth by Frank Besant's counsel. Anderson reveals:

Frank Besant's counsel dramatically asked [the judge] 'what kind of mothers they would be who would allow their daughters to associate with a young woman whose childhood had been so managed? Or what kind of fathers they would be who would sanction their sons making an offer of marriage to a young

woman so brought up?' The daughter would be left 'to associate with persons of doubtful reputation, and possibly even worse; possibly she may have to herd with the profligate and vile'. (20)

If Mabel were left in Annie Besant's care, she would be cut out of all decent society, would have no marriage prospects, and, so excluded, she would be left to fraternize only with prostitutes, if not become one herself. Based on Frank Besant's counsel, it follows that a good Victorian mother who adhered to raising her daughter within the strict social conventions of sexual *ignorance* would apparently ensure a respectable marriage for her uneducated daughter—a (disastrous) marriage like Frank and Annie Besant's. It equally follows that the bad Victorian mother providing basic sexual education for her daughter would result in her becoming a prostitute—or worse, a *writer* of such propaganda, like her terrible mother. In the final Court of Appeals trial, Anderson explains that "they refused to permit Mabel"

to run the risk of being brought up, or growing up, opposed to the opinions of society generally as to what is moral, decent, womanly, or proper, merely because her mother differs from those views and hopes that by the efforts of herself and her fellow-propagandists the world will be some day converted. If the ward were allowed to remain with the mother, it is possible, and perhaps not improbable, that she would grow up to be the writer and publisher of such works as those before us. (qtd. in Anderson 31-32)

Based on this statement, it seems that a woman *living* an immoral life is actually somehow favorable to a woman *writing* about it or promoting it. If Mabel ended up a prostitute, this would be tragic. If Mabel ended up a sex education advocate and writer of contraceptive propaganda, this would be dangerous. Despite Digby and Mabel being raised (in boarding schools, really) by their “cold and austere” father, both rejected him in their adulthood and remained devoted to their “controversial mother” (Anderson 32-33). Soon after the custody battle was lost, Annie Besant declared “she would be ‘a mother to all helpless children I could aid, and cure the pain at my own heart by soothing the pain of others’” (qtd. in Anderson 32). Ironically, one would be hard-pressed to find fault in this statement from a supposedly ruined, unfit, improper, and dangerous mother.

“An *édition de luxe* of a wicked French novel,
meant specially for the English market”:

The Traffic in Victorian Pornography

By her own admission, Annie Besant’s lack of sexual education as a girl directly added to the misery of her abusive and unsuccessful marriage. Sexual and emotional incompatibility, coupled with disagreement over family size and physical abuse, greatly contributed to the breakdown of Frank and Annie Besant’s marriage, and also personally informed Annie Besant’s public campaign for reproductive rights and sexual education for all. Again, by her own admission, her campaign was as much for the masses kept ignorant of the mysteries of sexuality as it was for her own daughter. For her, providing a thoughtful, truthful sexual education for Mabel—indeed, for all children in need—would result in future health and happiness.

Though clearly engaged in different forms of “dramatics,” Oscar Wilde’s 1892 play, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, and Annie Besant’s tangled legal dramas between 1873-1879 have much in common. Both involve publicly judged “bad women” who operate too far outside the domestic sphere and are therefore too dangerous and clever for their own—or others’—good. Both of these “bad women” are also judged, by some, to be “bad mothers” against a socially scripted Victorian expectation. Both involve “bad women” who question “good reading for women,” and counter this material with their own opinion, advocating savvy, critical reading practices and behavior. Both involve mothers who are willing to fight—and sacrifice themselves—for

romantic, sexual, and social happiness for their daughters. And both involve women directly linked with scandalous and obscene texts—texts that often contain dangerous contraception knowledge: Besant fights for the right to republish Knowlton's "dirty, filthy book" (Giffard qtd. in Chandrasekhar 39), and, according to Mr. Dumby, Mrs. Erlynne is the embodiment of a "wicked French novel" (26; act 2).

Mrs. Erlynne wants to save Lady Windermere from throwing away her loving marriage in order to run away with a cad who would most likely abandon her. Though Mrs. Erlynne actively works to keep her daughter squarely in the role of "angel in the house," she does so in an effort to keep a marriage of love and affection alive, and to stop the fallen woman narrative from reproducing itself. The fallen, but clever, Mrs. Margaret Erlynne stops the mistaken and foolish Lady Margaret Windermere before she makes the same tragic mistake she herself made twenty years ago. Likewise, Annie Besant wants her daughter, Mabel, to learn the mysteries of sexuality before marriage in order to avoid the kind of sexually and emotionally traumatic marriage she herself endured. Besant was fighting for the right to make her daughter's life better, for her daughter to be better informed prior to marriage so that she might make smarter, more loving choices with her emotions and body.

Besant ultimately "won" her obscenity trial, and despite losing her young daughter, gained the affection of both of her children as adults. However, these marginal or qualified victories in the publication and dissemination of potentially obscene materials did not mean that subsequent publications or publishers escaped legal persecution or public scrutiny. In "Malthusian

Mutations,” Lesley A. Hall clarifies: “It has never been a legal offence as such under British law to practice birth prevention or to purvey devices for that purpose, although the trade in appliances and any published discussion of the subject were severely circumscribed by laws relating more generally to obscenity” (142). Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh were not the only people willing to take a legal risk to publish sexually or medically explicit materials meant to educate those who most needed it. In 1886, a Leeds radical doctor named Henry Arthur Allbutt published *The Wife’s Handbook*, an inexpensive, thorough manual for women on the subjects of health, pregnancy, maternal welfare, and “medically advised” birth control practice.

In many ways, Allbutt’s 1886 *The Wife’s Handbook* covers all that Mrs. Edith Sperling tactfully left out of her 1895 *Every Woman’s Book*. Make no mistake, both texts are certainly meant for women who are or will soon become wives. But, whereas Mrs. Sperling details the secret language of flowers at the expense of detailing the secret language of sexuality, Allbutt’s text reads a bit more like a late-nineteenth century mash-up of Judy Blume’s *Are you There God? It’s Me, Margaret* and Heidi Murkoff and Sharon Mazel’s *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*. Allbutt’s introduction to *The Wife’s Handbook* is pointed and clear in stating his mission:

To save the lives and preserve the health of thousands of women, to rescue from death and disease children who may be born, to teach the young wife how to order her health during the most important period of her life, to remove from her mind the popular ignorance in which she may have been reared, and to enable her

to learn truths concerning her duties as a wife and mother, I have thought fit to write this little work.... "Knowledge is power." To give this important knowledge is the object of this book. If through its means, women obtain more happiness and better health at the periods of their lives when health is so essential to their comfort and well-being, I shall feel rewarded for my trouble.

(3)

Allbutt's text lives up to the promise that "knowledge is power" by detailing more than mere anatomy and biology (i.e., this is *not* Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy*). Allbutt fights sexual ignorance by empowering women and wives through thorough sexual, emotional, and health education extending beyond medical description of genitalia or brief information on birth control.

Chapter one opens with this statement:

From the first marriage-night no woman under forty-five years of age can consider herself *safe*. She may at any time conceive, and therefore it is necessary that she should know what are the signs of pregnancy. (5 [emphasis original])

This opening statement is significant. The marriage night is directly mentioned, and the implication is that on the marriage night, the woman will have intercourse. Menstruation, and its general function in relation to conception, is implied, as well, especially in connection to a woman's age at marriage and to her loss of fertility in advancing years. Even the use of *safe* suggests a double meaning: if she is a sexually-active, menstruating woman of child-bearing age, she cannot consider herself *safe* from conceiving, but lurking beneath this is the

possibility that she might find ways to subvert this *danger*. But, should she choose not to subvert this, she should understand pregnancy and the pregnant female body. And, as Allbutt believes, mothers need to play an active part in educating daughters throughout their lives, but especially before marriage and during pregnancy and childbirth.

Chapter eight is devoted, in large part, to female puberty, menstruation, and encouraging young women to make a good choice when deciding to marry. After describing menstruation in very plain language, Allbutt discusses the additional changes that accompany this time in a young woman's life: her breasts develop, her pelvis and body shape change, she grows pubic hair, and she may change emotionally without understanding why. As Allbutt explains:

Now is the time for the mother to talk to her young daughter concerning the physical change which is coming over her. She should tell her what is likely to happen, and point out how nature works to develop the female form. Good sound advice from a loving and intelligent parent at this period of her child's life will do much to prevent after mischief and danger, and may possibly be the means of saving her from much evil. Girls should be encouraged to talk to their mothers or female guardians about the little troubles which beset them at this period. How often have I known girls, kept too innocent of all that concerns themselves, terrified at the sweeping changes which take place in the system at the commencement of this first eventful period. It is both cruel

and absurd to keep a girl ignorant of the laws which control her being. (51-52)

Allbutt offers specific hygiene advice regarding the use of “sanitary towels” during the “monthly flows,” and he even advocates specific commercial products, often lauding Pears’ soap for aiding cleanliness during menstruation, especially (54). However, what is most interesting is that Allbutt does not pathologize the female body and its functions or desires. Granted, he does not advocate “self-abuse” because it could “cause nervous disease” and blunt a woman’s “finer sexual feelings,” but the diseased sexual body a young woman—and her parents—must be wary of, is that of her possible future husband (54).

After stating that “parents should always encourage their daughters to marry at a suitable age [twenty],” and that “no parent should force his daughter to marry against her will, or to ally herself for life with one whom she cannot love” (53), Allbutt strongly advises the young woman and her parents demand a bill of sexual health from her potential suitors. Allbutt explains that before a young woman gives her consent to marry a man, she should be

sure that he is free from any contagious disease which can be communicated through sexual relations. Now, I consider that it is the duty of all parents to know something about the health of the man who desires to marry. This point is quite as important—if not more so—as the knowledge of his worldly means. A young woman may be ruined in health for life, and have her innocent offspring diseased, if she is allied to a man who has disease

lurking in his system. I refer to what is called *syphilis*. I should like to see it the custom for women or their parents to demand a recent certificate of freedom from syphilis from all men proposing marriage. In this matter, false delicacy should be dropped. (56)

In Allbutt's estimation, a suitor's financial health is just as important as his sexual health, and a demand for proof of this sexual health should not be seen as a breach of decorum; it should be the custom, in order to protect women and future children from disease. It reads almost like Allbutt's own version of the Contagious Diseases Acts, except the presumed diseased body is the man's and the governing power of the woman's family gives them the right to examine both the suitor's material *and* genital goods before consenting to marriage.

And why not? Allbutt encourages healthy, moderate sexual "connections" between a husband and wife, so why not make sure both bodies are emotionally and sexually healthy? A wife should be confident in the sexual health of her husband, and she should not fear her own sexual desires or experiences. Even her first time. Allbutt works to assuage the fears or physical discomforts of first-time sex. Allbutt explains:

It sometimes happens that the first sexual intercourse causes much bleeding, from the rupture of some small vessels. As a rule, this ceases soon, and it need cause no alarm. If, however, the bleeding does not abate, it will be well to soak a piece of sponge in tincture of iron, and apply it to the bleeding surface, keeping it in position till bleeding has stopped. Pressure with the fingers will generally stop all bleeding, if continued long enough. *Ruspini's*

Styptic (expensive, however) *might form part of the outfit of every bride*. It will stop any kind of bleeding. (57 [emphasis added])

The potential trauma of first-time wedding-night sex for the ignorant woman is avoided through Allbutt's advice to prepare for and even treat the absolutely *normal* bleeding that may occur. Allbutt also encourages that "during connection, both husband and wife should endeavor to be in a happy state of mind. Sexual intercourse is injurious if undertaken when suffering from depression of either mind or body" (58). In short, Allbutt encourages frank talk between mothers and daughters, frank talk between parents and potential suitors, and offers frank talk on both first and married sex.

The bulk of Allbutt's manual is dedicated to thoughtfully detailing the signs of pregnancy, discussing the importance of health during pregnancy (e.g., diet and exercise), detailing how to prepare for and endure the pain of labour (which, again, is described as perfectly natural and not terrifying), explaining what to expect from the post-partum body and sexuality (women have a right to deny their husbands sex while they recover), discussing how to breastfeed and care for an infant and growing child, and revealing that women should absolutely live up to their expected duties as wife and mother, but *never* at the expense of their own health. Allbutt's chapter seven is devoted to the topic of "how to prevent conception when advised by a doctor," and he takes great pains to indicate how and why this particular section of *The Wife's Handbook* should be used. In a footnote, Allbutt strongly states:

This chapter is not intended for reproduction without the author's permission. Like the rest of *The Wife's Handbook*, it is copyright.

It is intended to be read in the privacy of the chamber by married women or by those contemplating marriage, and it is not intended for the publicity of the streets or to satisfy the curiosity of the vicious. (51)

This note—with its overt statement of intended use and audience—serves as a preemptive strike against nebulous obscenity laws; it seems written with the 1857 Obscene Publications Act and the 1868 “Cockburn test” in mind. And maybe with good reason, as the 1877 Bradlaugh-Besant trial would have been recent enough for Allbutt to knowingly and intentionally exercise caution through careful rhetoric.

In the same way that much of the editorial content of Mrs. Edith Sperling’s *Every Woman’s Book* supported the products advertised within its pages (it was published by Lever Brothers, after all), this particular section of Allbutt’s manual offers descriptions of birth control practice alongside the names and addresses of merchants who sell contraceptive devices and at what cost. Like most neo-Malthusians, Allbutt finds abortion, procuring miscarriage, and infanticide reprehensible, and he consistently asserts that his birth control advice is exclusively for women who have been medically advised to avoid pregnancy. Some of the offered advice runs the gamut from laughable to downright scary, but Allbutt offers realistic comment on all that he details. Sitting up and coughing as a method of expelling semen from the vagina? Allbutt does not see how all the semen could be expelled, no matter how hard a woman coughed. Timing (really, mistiming, as ovulation was still completely misunderstood) sexual activity around a woman’s menstrual cycle? Allbutt finds

too much failure with this method. The taking of small doses of arsenic to lessen sexual vigor? Allbutt names this dangerous and suspect method “only to condemn it strongly” (51).

Allbutt is less supportive of the practice of withdrawal, but he does note that eminent physicians advocate it (47), and the use of the sponge or “tampon” (soaked in quinine) and the “Letter” are both acceptable, if the latter is a bit expensive (49). Allbutt is much more in favor of women washing out their vaginas with injections, syringes, and various brand name vaginal “enemas” (all of which are advertised within the text) filled with quinine and water solutions (48-49). In addition, unlike the previously discussed neo-Malthusian texts, Allbutt also details use of various types of “pessaries” or cervical caps. He writes:

The pessary is in shape something like a round dish-cover, the dome portion of which is made of thin, smooth india-rubber, which will collapse with a touch. The rim surrounding the cover portion is made of a ring of thick rubber, which can be squeezed to any shape. The hollow portion of the pessary is intended to cover the neck and mouth of the womb during intercourse, so that no semen may penetrate into the womb. (49)

He also details a particular brand of pessaries that naturally “dissolve” inside the vagina. These dissolvable pessaries are formed by a combination of some or all of the follow products: vaseline, cocoa-nut butter, and quinine. However, Allbutt specifically notes that pessaries offer particular advantage because they do “nothing to irritate either the woman’s vagina or the male organ,” and

because they can be used by the woman “without inconvenience or knowledge of the husband” (50). This comment seems particularly noteworthy, as Allbutt clearly advocates for companionate marriages but recognizes that the husband of a possibly sick wife may not agree with her use of contraception, even if medically advised. There are ways a wife can choose to protect herself without detection.

In his introduction, Allbutt hoped that the result of writing and distributing *The Wife's Handbook* was that he would “feel rewarded for [his] trouble,” and he may have felt a personal sense of reward in the thoughtful and thorough content of his manual. Professionally, however, he was persecuted for publishing the text, but not on a charge of obscenity. In the 1888 “Defence Edition” of Allbutt’s *The Wife's Handbook*, he offers a page-long appeal to the people to help him reclaim his medical standing. Allbutt writes, “my book has been pronounced by clergymen, leading physicians, philanthropists, and by many public newspapers, as highly moral and as a great boon to the working classes” (2). However, despite the text’s good reputation, Allbutt was stricken from the Medical Register, but not because the text was medically or morally unsound. It was because it was too cheap. Allbutt writes:

I had the sentence passed upon me by the Council (who voted in secret) that my name be erased from the Medical Register, and that I be “judged guilty of infamous (!) conduct in a professional respect” for having published and publicly sold “The Wife’s Handbook” *at too low a price*. Against this cruel and unjust sentence I propose to appeal in the Law Courts.... “The Wife’s

Handbook" has never been attacked in any court of law, and I deny the right of thirty-two medical gentlemen to stigmatise the book as "indecent," "immoral," "unprofessional," etc., simply because it is *so low in price*. (2 [emphasis original])

In this case, then, *The Wife's Handbook* was morally—if not legally—judged as indecent, and Allbutt was professionally punished by his medical colleagues, not because of the manual's content, but because its sixpence price made it more affordable to the working classes and the poor.

Lesley A. Hall explains that according to the General Medical Council, the low price of the text brought it "'within reach of the young of both sexes, to the detriment of public morals'" (qtd. in Hall 147). Roy Porter and Lesley Hall also note that Allbutt "might have avoided deletion from the Medical Register for the professional crime of publishing *The Wife's Handbook* at a price placing it within the reach of all except the very poorest" (Porter and Hall 151). Clearly, the concern is less about content, but more about audience and access. It was not about what *The Wife's Handbook* was, as much as *what it could do and for whom*. Thoughtful, insightful comment and advice on female emotions, puberty, sex and sexuality, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and medically advised contraceptive practice was deemed too dangerous, not to write, but to sell to the wrong class of people.

Even Annie Besant, during the *Fruits of Philosophy* obscenity trial, defended the low cost of their edition of Knowlton's text. Besant claimed, a "poor woman who had only 6 d. to spare... should be allowed to purchase with that 6 d. the knowledge which richer women can obtain for 2 sh. 6 p., 5 sh. or 6

sh. at any of the railway bookstalls" (qtd. in Chandrasekhar 38). Given Bradlaugh's and Besant's intricate knowledge of obscenity law, their defense and justification of low prices may have been a pointed reference to the more *precise* cost-related reasons motivating Lord Campbell's creation of the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. As Colin Manchester explains, prior to 1857, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Campbell, "saw the inadequacy of the existing law stemming largely from the fact that the only procedure available was a criminal prosecution against those who disseminated obscene matter, which did not necessarily stop the trade" (227). And the trade here, specifically, is pornography.

Prior to 1857, when Lord Campbell first learned of the flourishing pornography trade, he commented that "'a sale of a poison more deadly than prussic acid, strychnine or arsenic was being openly carried out in Holywell Street'" (qtd. in Pease 49), but he saw a larger problem in the *price* of this "poison." The Vice Society's attempted prosecution of an "offending" piece of literature titled *Singular Misadventure of the Right Honourable Filthy Lucre* caught Lord Campbell's attention. Manchester provides a brief synopsis of the pornographic text and Lord Campbell's reaction. The *Filthy Lucre* text

consisted of a candid description of the activities of the Rt. Hon. Filthy Lucre who, after consuming a large quantity of 'lush' (a concoction of brandy, gin, rum, whisky and capillaire) invited a servant-girl, Susan, to his room and seduced her. After reading this account, *Lord Campbell expressed his 'astonishment and horror', particularly at the low price at which it was sold, declared*

it to be a 'disgrace to the country' and proclaimed that it was 'high time that an example should be made'. (226 [emphasis added])

According to this account, it is the low price of the pornographic text that is most astonishing and horrifying; the potentially offensive—even poisonous—content present in the text is not as terrifying as its low price, affordability, and accessibility.

Years before the 1857 Obscene Publications Act was prompted by Lord Campbell's concerns about the affordability of pornography, early nineteenth-century political radicals and pornographers felt the low cost of revolutionary tracts and handbills was essential to their movement and philosophy. In Lisa Z. Sigel's *Governing Pleasure: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914*, provides key insight into 1830s and 40s radical pornographers like William Dugdale. Not unlike Francis Place, Dugdale was a freethinker and bookseller-tailor devoted to advocating both sexual and political freedom. Dugdale and his brother John connected pornography to revolution, and published affordable pornographic texts alongside political tracts (18) and "dispersed pornography across class-lines" (23). Despite persistent, if not necessarily effectual, hounding of pornographers by The Vice Society, radical pornographers like the Dugdales did fairly good business. Sigel explains:

By the 1830s, the radical pornographers had become well established and opened shops (often more than one) rather than distributing their wares through fairs, itinerant vending, or corresponding societies as they had in the 1810s and 1820s. By

one estimate in the mid-1830s, there were fifty-seven bookshops dealing in pornography across London. Pornographers clung to artisanal styles of production that utilized family members and apprentices, *women as well as men*. (21 [emphasis added])

In many ways, this family-style business (involving both men and women) was too well-paying to be undermined by The Vice Society's "amateur policing" and the "lack of a coherent legal framework for prosecuting obscenity" (Sigel 21).

Despite fines, sentences of hard labor, or imprisonment, pornographers continued to publish and sell their materials in the spirit of both political and sexual revolution through reading. William Dugdale's dedication to these dual causes was obvious, as he "was tried, convicted, and imprisoned in 1830, 1835, 1852, and 1868.... [he] died in 1868 in Clerkenwell Prison, where he had been imprisoned for obscenity under Lord Campbell's Act" (22). However, only his death slowed William Dugdale's publication and distribution activity, as at the time of his final arrest in 1868, he was "caught with 35,000 copies of indecent books and pamphlets as well as lithographic stones" (22). The traffic in filthy lucre was too lucrative to stop.

Soon after the 1857 Obscene Publications Act was established, raids on pornographic bookshops or known premises of pornographic production in Holywell and Wych Streets resulted in the legal seizure and destruction of large quantities of obscene materials (Manchester 228). However, as Manchester further details, though the act may have initially suppressed the pornography trade, it ultimately proved ineffectual. Manchester writes:

As the secretary of the Vice Society had observed in a letter to Lord Campbell when the legislation was being passed, ‘the trade is so lucrative that the dealers can well afford the risk of an occasional imprisonment’, and the conferring of additional powers on the police did not alter this fact. It simply made those in the trade more cautious as a result of the increased risk of detection and consequent loss of stock. (233)

In short, between the 1860s and the end of the century, pornographers continually created their own systems of publication and distribution marked by subterfuge and obfuscation. Starting in the 1880s, pornographers like William Lazenby and Charles Carrington became “adept at avoiding the authorities, and they matched each move by the Home Office and Scotland Yard with a countermeasure of their own” (Sigel 84). Namely, these pornographers “shifted their enterprises to Paris,” indicating that while police and legal forces may have “successfully eradicated the *production* of pornography in England... they did not eradicate pornography; pornographers just began shipping the materials from abroad to escape persecution” (Sigel 84). In addition to publishing texts “off site” on the continent, Lazenby, Carrington, and others published texts under pseudonyms, false imprints and publication dates, and intentionally confusing palimpsests of “translation” or edition. Most pornographers on the continent—notably, Charles Carrington in Paris—resorted to using various mail order catalogues and circulars in order to circumvent obscenity laws in England.

Relying on “middlemen, false monikers, and dummy companies,”
pornographers

did not post notices in public places, did not hand out notices to passersby in London, and did not advertise in working-class newspapers. Instead they handed out catalogues to tourists in the streets of Paris and mailed out catalogues to likely buyers. The pornographers used the social register and the society pages to pick these clients. (Sigel 89)

Legal authorities tried, then, to employ the Post Office (Protection) Act of 1884 which “made it illegal to send obscene or indecent materials through the mail” (Sigel 84). However, the law could not prosecute senders outside the jurisdiction (e.g., Paris), and France, Belgium, and Holland resisted England’s request for stronger obscenity prosecution abroad (Sigel 84-85). More delicate problems emerged when England’s Home Office and the Post Office attempted to confiscate packages arriving in England from the addresses of known pornographers abroad, as legal authorities unintentionally found that prominent Members of Parliament and society were avid consumers of obscene material. As Sigel states, “after accidentally catching the MP, the government closed its incipient files on users because of the power and privilege some of them wielded” (86). The Home Office was also discouraged to learn that recipients listed on mass mailing lists were beyond reproach. Sigel writes: “As the Home Office lamented, ‘The advertisements in question were addressed to adult persons in the upper ranks of Society, *some of them ladies*’” (89-90 [emphasis added]).

Clearly, this information detailing the traffic in Victorian pornography gives precise meaning to Mr. Dumby's assessment of Mrs. Erlynne in Oscar Wilde's 1892 *Lady Windermere's Fan*. When Mr. Dumby tells Lady Plymdale that Mrs. Erlynne "looks like an *édition de luxe* of a wicked French novel, meant specially for the English market" (26; act 2), he indicates that both he and Lady Plymdale are well-versed in both the content of pornographic texts and the methods and mechanisms of the publication, distribution, and sale of Victorian pornography. Lady Plymdale is neither shocked nor scandalized by Mr. Dumby's reference to pornography, and his cheeky claim that Mrs. Erlynne is the embodiment of pornography is seen as positive and beneficial by Lady Plymdale. Considering the play's subtitle—*A Play About a Good Woman*—it follows that an association with a "wicked French novel" might, in fact, make a woman good (or not necessarily make her bad). However, somewhere along the historical inquiry pathway of scholars working under—or in the spirit of—Michel Foucault's call to "reverse the direction of our analysis" in order to uncover a true (or truer) sexual history (73), pornography scholars got hung up on a rather too narrow, uncharacteristically singular and uniform reading of "wicked French novels" (and their ilk) through the lens of male desire, fantasy, and fetish.

In *Pornography and the Law: The Psychology of Erotic Realism and Pornography*, authors Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen painstakingly detail what they perceive as the dominant and dominating themes in pornography. They offer description and discussion of eleven different thematic categories: seduction, defloration, incest, the permissive-seductive parent figure, profaning

the sacred, “dirty” words in “dirty” books, supersexed males, nymphomaniac females, Negroes and Asiatics as sex symbols, homosexuality, and flagellation (5-6). In Wendell Stacy Johnson’s *Living in Sin: The Victorian Sexual Revolution*, Johnson explicitly details the routine events of the narrative while simultaneously reducing it to its apparently stereotypical parts:

In a typical Victorian pornographic tale or novel, a boy of twelve may discover sexual differences by playing with his sister, tickling her between the legs. Then he may seduce, or be seduced by, his buxom Nanny when he accidentally sees her naked buttocks (Victorians seem to have loved ample behinds) and arrange to have her handle him sexually as she tucks him in. Wild and frequent bouts in bed would invariably result. Next, at school (for boys only, of course), he may discover the pleasures of mutual masturbation, of being fellated, and at last of sodomizing younger boys. As a young man, after having been seduced by a few prostitutes and after seducing a number of housemaids, he may meet a debauched older woman and her equally debauched husband—usually titled—and become part of a sex circle that includes various aristocrats, wealthy rakes, perhaps a bishop, and a young manservant with incredible genital endowments, as well as some assorted virgins who are deflowered at their orgies. He may also become friendly with a slightly older man who lusts after young boys (according to nineteenth-century expectations, this homosexual male should have full breasts and a small penis), and

then arrange to keep a voluptuous widow occupied—in bed—
while his friend penetrates her pretty son anally. (5-6)

Johnson concludes this lengthy narrative description by noting: “This is a composite story, with elements taken from a number of actual tales; it includes the *fantasy adventures* most often represented in such writing” (6 [emphasis added]). Most of the thematic categories outlined by the Kronhausens figure into Johnson’s composite tale of the male sexual bildungsroman *fantasy* informing typical Victorian pornography. Roy Porter and Lesley Hall point out that the troubled production and publication of pornography might have affected this thematic content: “Donald Thomas has suggested that erotic writing’s exile in a pornographic ghetto of dubious legality led to ‘greater psychological and physiological unreality’ (and increasingly sadistic leitmotifs) in a genre always prone to be the ‘fairy tales of adult society’” (Porter and Hall 152).

In many ways, one might credit Richard Burton and his “Cannibal Club” of elite gentlemen for the presumption of Victorian pornography’s male-fantasy-driven sadism. As Lisa Z. Sigel notes, “from the 1860s through the 1880s, these men wrote and read much of British pornography” (51). With their pseudo-scientific anthropological justification for their fascination with “carnal exoticism,” famous Cannibal Club members like Burton and Algernon Charles Swinburne often used pornography as a playground for exercising personal fetish (50). Unlike early radical political pornographers like William Dugdale, the Cannibal Club “distinguished their pleasures from others’ and had little sympathy for artistic or social change or for those who fell afoul of the obscenity

laws" (59). In a grotesque, but telling, example of Cannibal Club mentality, Sigel details:

Richard Burton promised Frederick Hankey that he would bring back from his next mission to Dahomey, Africa, in 1863, human skin to bind Hankey's volumes by de Sade. Hankey owned other volumes bound in human skin, but Burton promised one stripped from a living woman... so it would retain its luster more readily.

(50)

Thankfully, Sigel records two instances wherein Burton writes that he was terribly sad to have failed Hankey in this request (50). I daresay it is this type of example that leads many pornography scholars and casual readers alike to conclude that the very worst real behavior of pornographers—contemplating live-skinning an African woman in order to bind a pornographic text—and the worst "adult fairy tale" thematic content of pornography—incest, pederasty, pedophilia, pain—is all it can possibly have to offer.

Yet, in these male-focused, fantasy-driven thematic categories and descriptions of dominant pornographic narrative trajectory—possibly even bound in human skin—I see little connection to Mr. Dumby's comment that Mrs. Erlynne looks like a "wicked French novel," nor why Lady Plymdale would find this appealing and beneficial. It does not necessarily follow that they would look at the clever, sexual, and childless Mrs. Erlynne and see a pornographic narrative charting a man-child's fantastic sexual experience. Sigel comes closer to a possible reading of Mrs. Erlynne in her analysis of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*. Sigel recognizes a too-often overlooked thematic category:

Imagining the nature of female sexuality became one of the primary fantasies of pornography, even while it further obscured women's own inner lives by making the script stand for the truth. However, such fictions allowed women's experience to be the subject of the narrative, rather than the object. (32)

Sigel's recognition of the female-focused narrative grants Mr. Dumby's comment more meaningful application, and her comment on the possibility for women's subjectivity in pornography is not only welcome, but, in my estimation, correct. However, I disagree with Sigel's ultimate argument that "pornography does not state the problems of sex—like disease, prostitution, and bastardy.... Instead, it elaborates the possibilities of sex. Pornography is not tied to the tangible (what people do with their bodies) but to the imaginable (what they can imagine doing)" (2). Fastening pornography to the fantasy realm of the imaginary removes the ability to critically read variation within the genre for the real-life cultural work the explicitly tangible directives do, especially regarding the "problems of sex" as they connect to protective female sexual pedagogy as a route to avoid a sexual and social fall.

Even Steven Marcus—for all his contention that "pornography is valuable because it reflects or expresses social history" (44)—sticks close to the belief that while pornography might reflect cultural anxiety or desire, it does not reflect real, lived human lives. In his famous "Pornotopia" conclusion to *The Other Victorians*, Marcus offers an elaborate comparison of literature versus pornography:

Literature is largely concerned with the relations of human beings among themselves; it represents how persons live with each other, and imagines their feelings and emotions as they change; it investigates their motives and demonstrates that these are often complex, obscure, and ambiguous. It proceeds by elaboration, the principle means of this elaboration being the imagination of situations of conflict between persons or within a single person. All of these interests are antagonistic to pornography.

Pornography is not interested in persons but in organs. Emotions are an embarrassment to it, and motives are distractions. In pornotopia conflicts do not exist; and if by chance a conflict does occur it is instantly dispelled by the waving of a magic sexual wand. (281)

In Marcus's estimation, literature captures the real-life, lived human experience that pornography never can nor will. However, Marcus does offer a single paragraph of observation and remark regarding the presence of various "sexual realities" within the pages of pornography. Yet, just as he recognizes the presence of the exact thematic category that informs *my* entire argument, he undercuts the real-life cultural work of sexual pedagogy within pornography by claiming this content is merely evidence of the male author's personal reality-check. Sexual education within the pages of pornography is not a motive to anything other than a thin, but essential, thread connecting the male author to his own sanity. Referring to contraception references in pornography, Marcus assesses:

Such a device, or maneuver, or figure is a regular occurrence in pornographic novels. Sometimes, amidst the incessant barrage of sexual activities, it will be the fact of menstruation that is brought in, and when it is brought in it almost invariably brings those activities to a temporary halt. Sometimes it is the fear of venereal disease, and sometimes it is pregnancy. Usually only one such circumstance is introduced, and just as usually that circumstance turns out to be the single instance of the recognition of reality in the novel. These instances, it seems to me, have the function of maintaining one last link with, one final toehold in, reality. It is as if the pornographic novelist were almost aware that there was some danger in cutting himself entirely loose from the earth, of precipitating himself completely into the open space of fantasy. The single link with reality, then, may serve the novelist unconsciously as a kind of control; it protects him from finally and ultimately identifying his universe of fantasy with the real world. It is his way of reassuring himself that he is in fact sane. (234-35)

Marcus resists confronting content outside his own argument, adhering to the fantasy-driven-not-people-but-organs construct of pornographic content.

Marcus adheres to this philosophy so strongly, in fact, that he manufactures a protective psychological analysis of the imagined male author. Instead of addressing the social implications of protective pedagogy in pornography, he favors the tender psychology of the male author. Instead of addressing how this *common trope* affects the *real* women who could use this sexual pedagogy to

better their lives, Marcus instead favors and psychologically protects the *imagined* male author. In Marcus's analysis, realist content briefly disrupts adult play on the fantasy playground of pornography only to assuage the author's fears of writing himself into a fantasy-only zone of sexual insanity.

I wholly disagree with Marcus's psychological theory, as it too easily excuses away the specific cultural work of sexual pedagogy within pornography. The overt presence of sexual pedagogy in pornography deserves more than a paragraph of inadequate, male-centered (and author-centered) analysis. Fantasy and fetish do not reign supreme when decidedly non-sexy, *socially* relevant issues of contraception, pregnancy, and public reputation appear in the pages of Victorian pornography.

Love and Safety:

Learning, Teaching, and Ecstasy

When I came across Claudia Nelson's article, "That Other Eden: Adult Education and Youthful Sexuality in *The Pearl*, 1879-1880," I worried I had found the source each dissertation author dreads: the scholarly text that either handily discredits or masterfully covers the dissertation argument. I felt a hot flash when reading Nelson's too-close-to-my-own assertion that "if the medical tome had pornographic possibilities, pornography often foregrounded its pedagogical function, presenting itself as designed for the conversion or enlightenment of readers" (16). However, I cooled down when I realized that her application of a similar argument differed greatly from my own (and in no way read the sexual pedagogy of pornography against female fallenness in mainstream fiction). Focusing her analysis on a particularly famous Victorian underground magazine, Nelson's specific argument is this:

The Pearl, then, may be read as a manifestation of sex education aimed principally at well-to-do adult males and depending on (and consequently exposing) contradictory cultural assumptions about what upper-class Victorian children "naturally" were. (17)

Her focus on men and the fetishized sexuality of the child yield a markedly different analysis of Victorian pornography than mine. Despite *The Pearl* being named for the clitoris, the pornographic periodical refers to "methods of getting away with naughtiness" (25), but, as Nelson notes,

it is difficult to take this periodical as preaching female sexual fulfillment... since, like the vast majority of Victorian erotica, it presumably aimed at a readership overwhelmingly male. (27)

I admit, while I find Nelson's focus on men (and the sexualized child) further evidence of reading Victorian pornography for its "typical" male- or fetish-centered narrative characteristics, I am thankful Nelson chose this critical focus. I find great critical insight in her comment on the educational possibilities present in texts like *The Pearl*: "At least where sexuality is concerned, the magazine tells its readers, both learning and teaching are sources of ecstasy" (28). Despite our similar-yet-different arguments, I strongly agree with this sentiment; however, I find *The Pearl* a less useful source to analyze in service of this sentiment.

Long before reading Nelson's article, I began my dissertation journey by reading *The Pearl*. Mass-produced reprints of select Victorian era pornographic texts are easy to find. Even the rather paltry "Erotica" section of Borders Books will contain copies of 1880s classics like Walter's *My Secret Life* (abridged), the *Romance of Lust*, and *The Pearl*. While both *My Secret Life* and *The Romance of Lust* indisputably contain many—if not all—of the thematic categories outlined by the Kronhausens (and read rather like Wendell Johnson's "typical" narrative of male sexual experience), *The Pearl* does something a bit different. In short, it functions as a prurient periodical, but its blue content is often simultaneously political, actively commenting on socially relevant issues like race and Empire, politics or political figures, and religion and the clergy. Each monthly edition of the magazine reads like a dirtier version of the contemporary

magazine *Punch* or a hyper-sexualized take on something akin to the current satirical magazine, *The Onion*. *The Pearl* contains smutty poems, rude songs, and sex-driven short stories that, at times, briefly refer to contraception, but there is less (if any) explicit *instruction* on how and why to use birth control. An amusing exchange like this exemplifies the level of *implication* often hovering around the humor:

“Pray, mama,” said Sally, “what’s the meaning of Hush?”

“My dear,” said mama, “what makes you ask such a question?”

“Because I asked Fanny what made her belly stick out so, and she answered, ‘Hush.’” (86)

“Fanny,” of course, should be read here as both a woman’s name and as a euphemism for vagina. Vaginal sex has led to Fanny’s pregnancy, but she cannot or does not want to talk about it, especially with the ignorant and inquisitive Sally. This little anecdote, too, obliquely refers to contraception:

A gentleman, who is blessed with a beautiful and lewdly disposed wife, has long been unhappy and disappointed at the results of his endeavours to become a parent. But returning home from the City, very unexpectedly, the other morning, he caught the Vicar of the parish gamahuching [performing oral sex on] his spouse.

“Ho! Ho!” he exclaimed, in a fury. “So you’re the bugger who swallows all my children.” (63)

It *could* be the case that the wife is childless (despite plenty of intercourse) because she employs an undetected pessary or sponge, but, again, this generous reading involves conjecture or prior knowledge, not evidence. Jokes,

limericks, anecdotes, and filthy word games—acrostics that spell out C-U-N-T, for example—populate *The Pearl*. *The Pearl* also contains several instances of penis personification. For every Fanny, there is a John Thomas (slang for penis). So goes “The Burial of Sir John Thomas”:

We buried him deeply at dead of night,
 The tails of our night-shirts upturning;
 With struggling raptures and fits of delight,
 The night-lights dimly burning.
 No useless French Letters enclosed his crest,
 For ne'er in such rubbish we bound him;
 But he went like a warrior taking his rest,
 With naught but his fur coat around him. (535)

No condoms for John Thomas, for they are rubbish; he prefers the natural fur coat of his pubic hair. And this *la petite mort* burial in the dead of night is unconcerned with possibly creating new life. While *The Pearl* contains references like these to contraception or pregnancy, the absence of *instruction* requires readers to do their own connective work outside the text.

However, two poems struck me during my first reading of *The Pearl*, mainly because I did not expect to read a lengthy poem about the intricate sexual politics of the Contagious Diseases Acts or a droll, crude little rhyme on Annie Besant and Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy*. Yet, these poems are featured in the pages of this pornographic *Journal of Facetive and Voluptuous Reading*. In a poem critical of the Contagious Diseases Acts' sexual double standard, “The State's New Duty: An old Ballad upon the proposed Extension of

the Contagious Diseases Acts to the Civil Population," the writer satirically poses:

Methinks 'twere only logical to extend the Act's protection,
 And not limit our paternal care to personal infection.
 Why not advance another step, extortion put down,
 And regulate the charges of women of the town? (161)

The poem is politically provocative, and is about public policies on regulating sexuality, but it reads as neither sexy nor titillating. A legal case, too, seems a terribly unsexy subject for a pornographic poem; however, just a few years after the Bradlaugh-Besant obscenity trial, *The Pearl's* March 1880 edition contained a poem titled "The Fruits of Philosophy." The poem reads:

Said good Mrs. Besant,
 To make things pleasant,
 If of children you wish to be rid,
 Just after coition,
 Prevent all fruition,
 And corpse the incipient kid.
 To do this completely,
 Securely and neatly,
 That your conscience may suffer no twinge,
 Before having connection,
 Procure an injection,
 Likewise an elastic syringe.
 Then after the "coup,"

All the ladies need to
Is jump out of bed on the spot,
Fill the squirt to the brim,
Pump it well up her quim,
And the kid trickles into the pot. (310)

Coarse language and cheeky rhyme-scheme aside, the subject and content is unmistakably tied to Charles Knowlton's birth control advice, and to Annie Besant's role in challenging obscenity laws by republishing *Fruits of Philosophy*. After my initial reading of *The Pearl*, I did not fully see that Victorian pornography had the ability to "tell its readers, both learning and teaching are sources of ecstasy" (Nelson 28), but I knew this Annie Besant-inspired pornographic poem *purposefully* combined social reality and reproductive rights. And, I also knew that this purposeful combination was exactly what I missed in mainstream fallen women fiction.

I developed an academic interest in Victorian pornography not because I had a proclivity toward filth, but because I was tired of the absence of it, particularly in mainstream fallen women novels. At their core, these novels are based on the biological facts of menstruation and ovulation, and the sexual acts of vaginal penetration and male ejaculation. In fallen woman narratives, these facts are both unnecessary to record *and* the only facts that matter; without these facts, the narrative would not exist. Fallen woman novels like Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and George Moore's *Esther Waters* (1894) are short on sexual detail but long on social judgment. As a reader, I grew weary of the sadistic "slut-shaming" of the

sexually ignorant, wronged female characters who were unrelentingly more acted upon than acting. I reacted by seeking an alternative narrative trajectory, one that granted female characters more sexual subjectivity, agency, and some measure of control over their bodies based on biological or contraceptive information. Despite all the apparent male-centeredness, it seemed that pornography would be the best place to look for this alternative narrative. However, in critical scholarship—and on the Erotica shelves at Borders Books—it was hard to escape the uniform push toward accepting Walter's *My Secret Life* as *the* pornographic narrative of the age. And, if *The Romance of Lust* reads like the bastard male cousin of Walter's *My Secret Life*, then at least *The Pearl* hinted at alternative narrative trajectories present in pornography. It was clear: strip mall bookstores would no longer suffice.

Like other scholars of Victorian pornography, I am indebted to the massive annotated bibliographies and indexes compiled by noted Victorian erotica collector (and, possibly, some contend, writer of *My Secret Life*) Henry Spencer Ashbee (1834-1900). Under the pseudonym of Pisanus Fraxi, Ashbee wrote three extensively detailed bibliographies of erotica: the 1877 *Index Librorum Prohibitum*, the 1879 *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum*, and the 1885 *Catena Librorum Tacendorum*. In his preface to the first index, Ashbee as Fraxi writes:

My objects are—truth, the extension of bibliographic studies, and the accurate description of the works noticed in the following pages.... Whatever reception this compilation may meet with at the hands of the few bibliophiles and students for whom it is

intended, I may say that the pleasure I have experienced in making it has already amply rewarded me for my labour. "The struggling for knowledge (aptly observes the Marquis of Halifax) hath a pleasure in it like that of wrestling with a fine woman." (1-2)

Additionally, the 1885 *Catena* index opens with a poem, "To The Reader," by P. F., that claims: "No book exists, however bad, / From which some good may not be had / By him who understands to read" (1). In these opening remarks to his indexes, Ashbee suggests Nelson's sentiment that learning and teaching, particularly as connected to pornography, can be a beneficial source of pleasure. The struggle for knowledge is as pleasurable as good safe sex. Each of the numerous bibliographic entries in Ashbee's indexes offer's varying levels of plot synopsis and quotations, as well as physical descriptions of the text (and illustrations or plates, for example), including, as best known, the (possible) publication history, authorship, and cost. Though Ashbee's own collection did not contain every text annotated in his indexes, upon his death, the "Ashbee Bequest of 1900" (the donation of his library to the British Museum Library) stipulated the library accept and preserve both his non-erotic *and* erotic collections; to accept the former, the library must accept the latter.

Ashbee's bequest, in large part, formed what became known as the Private Case: the somewhat-secret collection of erotic holdings at the British Museum Library. In 1981, Patrick J. Kearney, in part, took up the bibliographic work of Ashbee, by compiling *The Private Case: An Annotated Bibliography of the Private Case Erotica Collection in the British (Museum) Library*. And, continuing beyond Kearney's work, Peter Mendes's 1993 *Clandestine Erotic*

Fiction in English 1800-1930: A Bibliographic Study further details erotica collections and pornographic holdings at the British Library and beyond. Both Kearney and (especially) Mendes exhaustively attempt to provide textual fingerprints for pornographic texts written under pseudonyms, and under false imprints or publication places and dates, but even these amazing, helpful details have clear limitations. Knowing the sketchy publication provenance of a pornographic text does not fully indicate the specific content contained within each source, even if Ashbee, Kearney, and Mendes provide details like a text's table of contents or short synopses of plot or action.

For example, in Peter Mendes's bibliography, he devotes several pages to an 1885 (earliest recorded English language publication date) text most often titled *Love and Safety* or *Love with Safety* or even *Love and Lasciviousness*. The title alone speaks to my investigation of alternate narrative trajectories of protective pedagogy, yet much of Mendes's annotation is devoted to discussing how and why "identification of the author is much more conjectural business" (146). While I understand that establishing authorship might further clarify production or publication history, I will admit, I cared less at that point *who* wrote the text, as I was far more intrigued by *what* was written and *what it did*.

Clearly, a sexually provocative fallen-but-anti-fallen literary character like Oscar Wilde's Mrs. Erlynne stands out much more sharply when placed next to tragically fallen characters in mainstream novels. Mrs. Erlynne choosing pleasure over repentance, and her being labeled the embodiment of a "wicked French novel," resulted in my wanting to find her pornographic and philosophical textual equivalent. Though *Love and Safety* is not properly a

novel, it is a pornographic French text written for the English market featuring a female-driven narrative centered in the sexual education of women and girls, especially. Before I was able to get to the British Library and the Private Case, my first necessary research trip was to the library at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, where I was able to read *Love and Safety* for myself. To start, its full title is remarkably thorough in detailing its mission: *Love and Safety or Love and Lasciviousness with Safety and Secrecy by The Empress of Asturia (The Modern Sappho); Assisted by her favourite Lizette and others, To many Ladies, from Youngest to Oldest, and Dedicated by her to all Women and Girls, who long for Love of every kind, but with Secrecy and Safety.*

As this title indicates, this is a text devoted to instructing women in the protective sexual pedagogy needed to safely and secretly protect their social reputation. It is 168 pages of constant and consistent instruction in safe, pleasurable sex, and, according to Mendes's best guess, it is written by a man: "The principle (only?) candidate to date is John Stephen Farmer, the great lexicographer of slang, editor of literary texts, collector of folk and canting songs" (146). Considering Steven Marcus's earlier assessment, it would be interesting to hear his opinion on this male pornographer's *constant* reference to the social realities of contraception and safety. If brief reality-based intrusions interrupt the fantasy narrative in order to keep the male pornographer sane, what level of sanity can a male author have who devotes an entire text to this personally psychologically protective maneuver? I argue for a different

critical reading, one that reads the text through the real-world, socially relevant, cultural work it does as a pedagogical manual and a challenge to “fallenness.”

The “Preliminary Remarks” of *Love and Safety* establish the general argument and reason for the following lectures given by the lovely Empress of Asturia, who, as a

true priestess of Venus, she whould [sic] do everything to initiate all her sex into the methods by which they can indulge freely in the loosest pleasures, with perfect secrecy and safety, and without danger of any damage to their honour in any way. (2)

Her lectures, given to her friends in need, were to be “printed and disseminated among all her sex, so that they may be placed on an equality with man, and enjoy every pleasure with the same freedom and safety as is experienced by him” (3). During each lecture, the Empress tells her audience to put her theories into action, encouraging sexual pedagogy praxis on the spot (there are males in the audience, too). Under the category “On Pleasures that do not even take away the Maidenhead or Virginitiy,” Part 1 explains the pleasures of masturbation, tribadism, and gamahuching, as well as bosom, armpit, and anal fucking as ways for a female to experience pleasure while retaining virginity, hymen, and “reputation (among the prudish fools of society)” (41). The Empress concludes this part with a recognition that the maidenhead may serve as some overrated, but still important, feature good females must retain, but she indicates that keeping a hymen intact should not be a source of worry. She explains:

Ladies, every *single thing* that I have described to you, hitherto, remember, is to be indulged in with, *absolute safety* and without *even the loss of that* imaginary blessing, a maidenhead, which is certainly not worth keeping, is not even *possessed* by nineteen women out of twenty, and *is easily repaired*, or simulated on marriage. (63)

After detailing further virginity-retaining, but maidenhead-losing pleasures like the vaginal insertion of candles or dildoes, the Empress offers a lecture on “Directions for simulating virginity on the first night, and completely taking away suspicion from the husband” (90). To “make the dear man quite happy in his mind” (91), and because “there are still some idiots that believe a maid *must* bleed” (92-93), the non-virgin should try to plan her wedding night during her menstruation or tuck a small bag of “pigeon’s blood” inside her that will burst upon penetration (93). Or, a woman could keep the same small bag of blood tucked under her pillow, and when her husband withdraws at the wife’s feigned cries of ““Oh! how I’m bleeding, you hurt me!” she should burst the bag beneath her hand as she grasps her cunt (94). Ever the sage advisor, the Empress shares these tips and tricks to aid women who might need to protect their reputation in such a way; however, the Empress also wishes to lessen the importance of the maidenhead so her audience may see “how *utterly unnecessary* it is to bother about a *maidenhead*, at all. Be free, be happy, and love each other” (95). Because, it seems, the Empress believes that marriage and married sex, even on the first night, should be about the expression of love, not the checking for blood (which might not “prove” virginity, anyway).

No lecture in love and safety would be complete without a section dedicated to birth control. As the Empress says,

The Eleventh Commandment, ladies, we know is "*Thou shalt not be found out!*" and one of the truest ways of keeping that most essential precept is, never to allow your reputation to suffer by endangering it. (86)

In her "Directions for fucking with safety either after marriage or before," the Empress offers description and comment on basic methods of birth control. When she explains withdrawal, she makes sure to emphasize it is the man's duty to wait to withdraw "*till he feels his lady-love dissolving and dying away in the last throes of pleasure,*" as her orgasm must be guaranteed before his (101). She describes French Letters, and while she does not name specific shops, she does indicate that they can be bought at most chemists, and that the more expensive letters are worth the cost because "*the cheap sorts are dear at any price, as they burst and defeat the very object of their use*" (103). She explains:

As a rule letters are good; some men hate them; but some men would rather bring ruin and disgrace on fifty women, than by the sacrifice of a shade of comfort to keep them safe. (104)

The Empress favors honourable, safe, and sexually courteous men, over ruinous blackguards. She details the use of the sponge soaked in alum and the "*pessary preventative,*" which, she notes, "*can be worn without the man knowing it is there, and so aid married women to limit their families wether [sic] he likes it or not*" (106). Rightfully, the Empress cautions that using the system of "*intervals*" is less effective, especially when her advice reveals the misunderstanding of

ovulation and the menstrual cycle: “women seldom conceive *except when they are fucked between three and four days before their monthlies, during them, or six or seven days after*” (109).

The Empress much more strongly recommends the use of the syringe injection, as specifically advised by Knowlton via Bradlaugh and Besant. Here again, as in *The Pearl*, the obscenity trial and Knowlton’s text figure into pornographic literature. The Empress explains that the syringe and injection

is the creed of *The Fruits of Philosophy* [sic], and is believed in by M. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Annie Besant, a most charming little woman, and I should think, a really lovely lady to have naked in bed for a really good fuck, or for any of the many pleasures of love. (106-07)

The Empress follows this sexual editorializing about Besant with directions for using a syringe filled with a mixture of alum or sulfate and water to inject and “wash out” the vagina after intercourse. Though the Empress has, at various times throughout the narrative, stopped her lecture to read another’s narrative of sexual experience or some bawdy story, she steps aside this time to read a poem titled, “The Fruits of Philosophy Condensed.” It should look familiar.

Our sweet Mrs. Besant, to make all things pleasant
 (If of children you wish to be rid),
 Says, that, after coition, to prevent all fruition,
 You must corpse the incipient kid.
 Now, abortion, t’is clear, would imperil your dear,
 And bring YOU within grip of the law

And perchance a French letter might prove a frail

Or a man for once, fail to withdraw fetter.

So to do it completely, securely and neatly,

And thus save your conscience a twinge,

Before the connection, prepare an injection,

And buy a good female syringe.

Then after the "COUP" all the lady must do

Is to jump out of bed like a shot,

Fill the squirt to the brim, shoot it bang up her quim

And the kid trickles into the pot! (108-09)

Though more direct in its reference to avoiding abortion and preparing for possible failure of other birth control methods, this version of the poem retains the basics of Knowlton's syringe and injection advice, and clearly calls up Annie Besant's fight for the public right to gain contraceptive knowledge through access to "obscene" texts.

Love and Safety contains additional sections detailing the use of—and recipes for—aphrodisiacs, and the Empress's audience members take part in an orgy putting these aphrodisiacs, and her instruction, to use. In her farewell to her dear audience members, the Empress passionately states:

Is one sex to be free, and the other bound by silly social laws?
never! but since men have made such laws, it is for us to follow all
the methods I have shown you, these can satisfy our most burning
passions, our most lascivious ideas, alone, or with each other,

with men, whenever we can, but always in the ways which my
lecture points out, that is to have "LOVE AND SAFETY!" (115-16)

Comparing *Love and Safety* with Wendell Johnson's description of the "typical" male-driven sexual narrative, and with the Kronhausens' list of dominant thematic categories, yields a challenge too obvious to deny. Of course there may be moments in *Love and Safety* that verge on expected pornographic territory, but, overwhelmingly, this text resolutely works toward educating young girls and women in ways to protect themselves from loss of reputation due to scandalous pregnancy. *Love and Safety* is an antidote to fallenness, and it demands that young women be educated early—as children, even—in sexual pedagogy. As the Empress writes to her female audience: "Listen, and have all the pleasure, and none the pain, all the fucking, none of the family" (100). In this statement, it is easy to see that in pornography, knowledge is power, and the process of education is a source of pleasure. More importantly, however, it is hard to imagine a stronger statement, even outside of pornography, so intentionally directed against real-world female fallenness.

“Please, hand this list to some one who may use it”:

Discovering the Intertextual Rhetoric
of Sexual Pedagogy in Victorian Pornography

In Donald Thomas's *A Long Time Burning: The History of Literary Censorship in England*, he tersely reiterates the Victorian-pornography-as-adult-fairy-tale standard critique: “In Victorian pornography, particularly, no one need look very far to see, in merely physical terms, the impossibility of much of the activity described” (274). In Thomas's estimation, the unreal dominates the genre, from setting to action to stamina. In Helena Michie's *Victorian Honeymoons: Journeys to the Conjugal*, she remarks that the particular challenge in writing her “Carnal Knowledges” chapter regards “two kinds of sexual knowledge: what the Victorians knew about sex and what we know about how much they knew” (115). Noting that previous scholars relied on archival sources like diaries, accounts of social clubs, and records of founding hospitals or rescue societies, Michie also adds “medical and other ‘advice’ literature and pornography” to this list (115). However, she qualifies the latter genre by claiming “pornography, of course, follows narrative and social conventions of its own: at the same time reflecting, subverting, and creating dominant cultural narratives about sex, it is extremely hard to read as evidence of sexual practice” (115). Though her final thought is reminiscent of Thomas's assertions, Michie clarifies that while textual accounts of sexuality, especially in pornography, are complicated by an “unusual degree of imbrication in imagination and fantasy,” even fantasies or “sexual lies” reveal and maintain a

close, meaningful relationship with a real “Victorian sexual imaginary” that should not be diminished (116).

Michie’s final comment reflects the previously noted position of pornography theorist Frances Ferguson. In analyzing pornography not for what it is but what it does, Ferguson contends that “pornography should not be seen as representations of context-free concepts being presented to persons who are themselves representations of context-free categories and concepts” (74). Of course, Victorian pornography reflects the best and worst of fantastic adult sexual fairy tales, but to exclude or dismiss its connection to real sexual practice removes the context necessary to reveal and critique its explicit cultural work. Rather than attempting to confine a pornographic text to a fixed definition regarding both form and content, understanding the genre as a complex social form—or as an interconnected or intertextual set of social forms—allows for more contextually thoughtful study of pornography as a dynamic genre. In Richard Johnson’s landmark article, “What is Cultural Studies Anyway?” he writes:

The text is only a *means* in cultural study; strictly, perhaps, it is a raw material from which certain forms (e.g., narrative, ideological problematic, mode of address, subject position, etc.) may be abstracted. It may also form *part* of a larger discursive field or *combination* of forms occurring in other social spaces with some regularity. But the ultimate object of cultural studies is not, in my

view, the text, but *the social life of subjective forms* at each moment of their circulation, including their textual embodiments. (62)

Johnson's cultural studies approach complements the "not what it is but what it does" argument regarding pornography. If a pornographic text can be seen as means in cultural study—a method of cultural analysis—then its textual definition is not as important as the dynamic, contextual, and intertextual "social life" of its form or forms.

In reading *The Horn Book, Love and Safety*, and dozens of other pornographic texts at the Kinsey Institute, I saw a pattern of intertextuality emerge. The texts I read there were not exclusively dedicated to pure titillation. Instead, I found, at times, these texts contained a sophisticated interplay of references to real life political or social concerns, contraceptive issues and controversies (not to mention actual advice and discussion of devices), and to other pornography, namely to other pornographic novels and explicit photographs. There emerged an intertextual rhetoric to these texts that often forced me to read these texts beyond their margins.

At the Kinsey Institute, I was able to engage this critical method of reading pornography as a dynamic, intertextual social form. In addition to the various texts I was able to read—novels, manuals, and bibliographies—I was also granted access to thousands of visual texts via the Kinsey Institute's massive collection of pornographic photographs. The challenge in this investigation, however, was twofold, as, first, I did not fully know what I was looking for in these thousands of photographs, and, second, that the photographs at the

Kinsey Institute are catalogued by the sex act depicted, not by the year or the narrative sequence of the images (see fig. 21). By the end of my research trip, I had collected more than fifty photographs merely because I thought them interesting or curious. At that time, I was not sure how these photographs would figure into my dissertation. It was not until I was able to gain access to “The Private Case” at the British Library in London that I understood their value and connection to my project and argument.

At the British Library, I came across a generic library record titled “A collection of prospectuses and advertisements for erotica in various languages.” This library record did not immediately reveal enough information to guarantee its pertinence to my dissertation topic, but because the record was dated circa 1890, it was worth a look. Requesting this source yielded a large box containing what I had expected: bundles and bundles of non-English advertisements for 1960s and 70s blue movies like *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* and various sexploitation films featuring the famously-busty Uschi Digard. However, tucked in-between the Dutch and French advertisements for Russ Meyer’s pneumatic oeuvre were two tiny, crumbling Victorian pornography catalogues no bigger than the palm of my hand. Dated 1892 and 1897 respectively, these two pocket-size catalogues read like miniature Rosetta stones in service of my argument. Considering their vigilance in attempting to circumvent obscenity and postal laws, late nineteenth-century pornographers’ often maddening, intentionally secretive methods of production, publication, and commercial circulation are thrown into much sharper and clearer light with the turn of each catalogue page. And, as far as is known to me, I am the first to

gently pull these two gems out from under the protective buxom babes that have cushioned and hid them for years.

The cover page of the 1892 catalogue features a lyre-playing cupid surrounded by an intricately detailed blue border. Along the bottom of the cover page, the text reads: “Please, hand this list to some one who may use it” (see fig. 1). However, upon opening the catalogue, the lack of a mailing address or explicit correspondence directions indicates that the person “who may use it” must also know—outside of this document—where and to whom to mail orders. This does not read as a marketing oversight, but rather as evidence of circumventing the law by obscuring the paper- or address-trail. In the opening “Special Notice” comment, readers are assured of quality and, especially, of privacy. The notice reads:

All the prices in this list are for cash. All goods sent secure from observation, to all countries in well closed and unsuspecting envelopes (by letterpost). Our customers are requested to write their names quite distinctly and to repeat them at every new order, because all the letters will be destroyed after having been answered.... The works are printed in clear type, and for the most part on dutch handmade paper. (see fig. 2)

Assurances of quality and privacy are also reinforced by an explicit “Money-table” printed in the back of the catalogue (see fig. 3). The pounds-to-dollars exchange rate at least partially indicates the veracity of sending materials to “all countries,” and may also read as an assurance for money well spent on quality products at no risk to privacy or reputation, even, or especially, internationally.

The cover of the 1897 catalogue, titled *Catalogue of Rare Curious and Voluptuous Reading*, contains a quote from “The French Lady,” who writes: “The [sic] I invoke, God of pleasure! / Guide my pen that I may / Describe amorous scenes, and / Deeds of voluptuousness alone” (see fig 4). While I understand most pornographic texts at this time were most-likely written by men, this opening poem is curious for its “lady” author discussing her own pleasure in writing, and presumably in writing the very texts advertised for both men and women within the pages of this catalogue. Like the 1892 catalogue, the 1897 catalogue offers no direct mailing address or contact information, but it does assure all consumers of quality and international shipping. The text reads: “These works are printed in clear type, and for the most part on dutch handmade paper. They are sent to all parts of the world on receipt of cheque, postal-order or dollar notes, which must invariably accompany the order” (see fig. 5). However, it is worth noting that while the opening notices of both catalogues read similarly, just five years later, the 1897 catalogue omits the assurances of privacy and references to destroying the paper trail, possibly indicating the ineffectual policing of obscene materials near the end of the century.

Inside the 1897 catalogue, novels like *The Autobiography of a Flea*, *Confessions of Miss Coote*, and *The Amatory Adventures of a Surgeon* are briefly summarized, often indicating whether or not the text includes engravings or images, and indicating cost (see fig. 6). The listings depicted in figure 6 are typical of those in both catalogues, but the 1897 catalogue advertises the *Love and Safety, or Love and Lasciviousness with Safety and Secrecy* by reprinting the

text's *entire* table of contents. After listing the already lengthy and descriptive title plus the price of the text (see fig. 7), the subsequent pages of the catalogue allow the reader to see the full scope of the decidedly female-centered pedagogy delivered throughout this manual. Reprinting the "Xlth Commandment" of "Thou shalt not be *found out*," alongside distinct "sections" devoted to maintaining the maidenhead, protecting virginity, and avoiding pregnancy, reveals that the ideal audience for this text may, in fact, be the ideal female consumer looking at this catalogue (see fig. 8). The "On Miscellaneous Subjects" section is also detailed in the catalogue, offering clues to content that will help women simulate virginity on their wedding nights to completely take "away suspicions from the husband," as well as "directions for *fucking* with safety either *after* marriage or *before*" through a "comparison between the best methods of avoiding babies," and methods like "French letters," "the sponge," and "the syringe" are mentioned (see fig. 9). The entire lengthy advertisement overtly speaks to a female reader, or, at the very least, to the male reader interested in effectively instructing, educating, or otherwise protecting women from scandal and pregnancy.

The 1897 catalogue advertises sex manuals like *Love and Safety*, as well as bawdy periodicals like *The Pearl* and *The Pearl Christmas Annual for 1881*, and the latter advertisement indicates that the annual includes "6 splendid large coloured plates" (see fig. 10). While it is common to see plates, engravings, or illustrations advertised as included, the 1897 catalogue also offers a specific section devoted to advertising separately-sold illustrations meant to accompany "French works" (see fig. 11). Presumably, if consumers wanted precisely

designed visual accompaniment to their literary sexual materials, they could order images that “narrate” the action described in the text. One could order the 10 plates that accompany *Fanny Hill*, for example, or the 6 plates informing the narrative of *Marguerite’s pocket-book* (see fig. 12). The visual form of the sexual illustration is actively combined with the written text describing sexual action, and the two together are meant to intertextually inform each other.

The 1892 catalogue employs a similar marketing strategy, but this earlier catalogue indicates further intertextual combinations and connections. The 1892 catalogue contains several entries announcing the “Latest Novelties” like the “Great novelty” *Confidential letter between two friends* and the “nice tit bits” of *Bessie and Dorothy* which “must be read by every one” (see fig. 13). Somehow, I think Mrs. Edith Sperling, author of the 1895 domestic manual *Every Woman’s Book*, might disagree with the assertion that the “nice tit bits” of *Bessie and Dorothy* make for mandatory reading, especially for women. However, Richard Carlile, author of the decidedly different 1826 *Every Woman’s Book*, might be more amenable to this assertion and to “nice tit bits” in general. Indeed, the posthumous 1892 reprinting of his own *Every Woman’s Book*—under an 1838 revised title and under Carlile’s former pseudonym of Dr. Waters—is advertised in this catalogue. The advertisement reads:

The Philosophy of the Sexes, or every Woman’s Book, a treatise on love in its Various Forms, Phases and Results, including Practical Hints, how to enjoy Life and Pleasure without any harm to either sex; by Dr. Waters. 1826. More practical [sic] than Fruits of Philosophy. (see fig. 14)

Some fifteen years after the Bradlaugh-Besant trial for republishing Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy*, advertisers pit this reprint of Carlile's work against a birth control manual inspired, in part, by Carlile. Calling up real-world, socially relevant, and interconnected concerns of publication rights and birth control rights, the intertextual content of the 1892 catalogue both constructs and reveals its readers as interested in indulging their sexual desires and fantasies, but also as interested in actively protecting their own reproductive and reading rights.

Concerned citizens and consumers of pornography, at least via this catalogue, can also purchase Henry Vizetelly's 1888 *Extracts* treatise on the slippery slope of obscenity law and the censoring of English literary classics. In *Extracts*, Vizetelly selects key passages from the work of noted authors like Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Lord Byron to reveal that each author would be censored under the same law being used to prosecute him for obscene libel for republishing the works of Émile Zola. As Donald Thomas explains, even though Lord Campbell claimed the 1857 Obscene Publications Act excluded great works from prosecution, "publishers who might regard themselves as being the disseminators of serious literature were dragged willy-nilly into the twilight zone by the operation of the law" (269). Vizetelly eventually pled guilty under duress, withdrew the books from circulation, and was fined (268). In a preemptive move, Vizetelly thought the publication of his *Extracts* would quash a trial and conviction. It did not, but his publication still represented a fight against obscenity charges, especially regarding useful, meaningful literature and cultural texts. According to the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography, consumers could, for one pound, purchase:

Vizetelly's Defence: Extracts chiefly from English classics showing that the legal suppression of Zola's novels would logically involve the boodlerizing [sic] of some of the greatest works in English literature. (see fig. 15)

Clearly, the consumer both constructed by and revealed in this commercial and rhetorical document could have disparate and complex sexual interests, but some of these interests could overlap with real-world concerns of censorship and birth control rights.

The 1892 catalogue does offer plenty of content for those interested in the "adult fairy tales" of extreme flagellation (see fig. 16), of the sexualized child depicted in engravings described as "Little girls and English lords. Choice! Surprising! Voluptuous!!!," and in "Aquarelles" (transparent watercolors) depicting debauched priests and nuns in images titled "Moral Education given by a Priest" and "Play of love in a convent" (see fig. 17). The 1892 catalogue also includes a section devoted to "Joke Articles," which are further described as "little amusing erotical bagatelles, Coloured albums, viz, moving images" (see fig. 18). These offerings read like cheeky sex-store gag gifts. For example, an advertisement for "Surprising Breeches" describes the item as a

Purse or tobaccopocket in the form of a pair of trousers. Open it and you will find what every man has in his breeches. The object is made of yellow leather and of a very fine shape. (see fig. 18)

Advertisements for this trivial sexual ephemera reveal a jovial or humorous side to the Victorian sexual imaginary, yet this sexual jocularity exists alongside

serious arguments concerning social justice, contraceptive rights, and obscenity law.

For the most part, the two catalogues are similar enough despite their five-year publication difference. However, the 1892 catalogue advertises something the 1897 catalogue does not: photographs. In a lengthy section titled "Photos from Nature," photos of various sizes depicting all manner of content are advertised for sale, with hand-coloring adding to the price. The copy reads:

All these Photos are from life and the *best* of the kind which exist. The Photos are also to be had *coloured* most artistically imaginable by an eminent Parisian painter at the double price marked for photos of the ordinary kind. (see figs. 19 and 20)

To reiterate, the cataloguing system for photographs at the Kinsey Institute is rather challenging, as the photos are categorized by the sex act depicted, not by the year or the narrative sequence (see fig. 21). I left the Kinsey Institute with more than fifty photographs presumably dating from the late 1880s to the late 1890s. Considering my topic, I tried to look for evidence of birth control in the photographs (which proved very difficult), but also for any representations of non-procreative sex acts or "narratives" acted out in a series. I also simply wanted a cross-section of different late-Victorian sexual images, including depiction of interracial sex, homosexuality, and general sexual experimentation.

When I turned to the "Photos from Nature" section of the 1892 catalogue, I knew I had found advertisements for photographs quite like those I had somewhat randomly culled from the Kinsey Institute. Of course, I cannot

claim with certainty that these photographs are the very ones advertised, but what I found comes terribly close. A distinct thread of critical social commentary running throughout the pornographic monthly periodical *The Pearl* regards anxiety over Empire and the sexualized body of “the other.” Under its “latest novelties” in photographs, the 1892 catalogue advertises a collection of photos depicting interracial sex, and these photos speak to this anxiety. The copy reads:

Soul-stirring amusements of a white woman, with a brute African nigger in 25 sensational and bewitching attitudes of a never fading charm. (see fig 22)

Clearly indicating a sexual and social taboo (and a fascination with this taboo), the advertisement simultaneously negates the humanity of the African male, while sensationalizing his sexuality. Interracial sex is not a cataloguing category at the Kinsey Institute, so I collected a small sample of images as I found them under other categories (see figs. 23 and 24). These images, of course, depict an African male with a white woman, but I also found images of African (or Indian) women with white men (see fig. 25). This fascination with sexual and social taboos extends to homosexuality and images of men with men, as well. An advertisement for “The Pederasts” announces “15 cabinets showing the love scenes between two young men highly recommended” (see fig. 27), and figure 28 is an example of one of many like this in the Kinsey Institute collection.

Just beneath the advertisement for the interracial “soul-stirring amusements,” photos titled “Fin de Siècle Pleasures” are advertised and described as a “new series composed of 75 subjects, most curious varieties of

the pleasures of love, superb original works from nature, *not to be equalled* [sic]" (see fig. 22). Obviously, finding the exact photos sold in connection to this more general advertisement might not be possible, but I found plenty of photographs that do depict the "pleasures of love." I was drawn to photographs that expressly depicted women as happy sexual subjects. Figure 26 is a favorite in the group of photos I collected, precisely because the woman looks decidedly delighted in the "pleasures of love" she is receiving from a man who looks to be pleasing, not abusing, her. This image does not read as the "pornographic narrative as blueprint for patriarchy," or as the rape or abuse of women by men.

Nowhere was this point clearer than in the advertisement for "The Details of a Wedding-Night." The advertisement's copy indicates that these "highly interesting details" of a wedding night, depicted in twenty photographs, are "not to be confused with the other one [set] which has been edited many years" (see fig. 29). While looking through different boxes of photographs at the Kinsey Institute, I began to notice separate photographs of the same "characters" or figures in the same setting or costume, but each photograph depicted a different sexual act (hence, their being catalogued in different boxes). Two "wedding-night narrative" series emerged from these different boxes, and I collected as many in each series as the Kinsey Institute held in their collection. I have eighteen photographs from what I call the "leopard couch" series (see figs. 30 through 36), and I have thirteen photographs from what I call the "flowered couch" series (see figs. 37 through 42). Again, I cannot prove that these exact photographs are those advertised or referred to in the 1892 catalogue

advertisement, but these two separate “wedding-night narrative” sets fit the description—and, roughly, the dates—quite well.

Considering the highly fetishized fantasy-world focus often expected in Victorian pornography, the choice to depict the details of a wedding night reads as significant. In one sense, the wedding night is a perfect narrative setting, as it is a night designed for sexual activity, especially for the sexual initiation of the new—presumably virgin—wife. In another sense, this narrative choice seems like a real-world intrusion on the pornographic landscape of taboo and tireless pleasurable fucking, flagellation, pederasty, pedophilia, and fetish. The wedding night is a night of socially-sanctioned, legitimate intercourse between a husband and wife, and calling up social customs and rules surrounding marriage seems an unsexy subject for pornographic photographs. During this time period, marriage custom and etiquette are more often discussed in the painstakingly detailed manner of Mrs. Edith Sperling in her 1895 *Every Woman's Book*. Mrs. Sperling omits any reference to wedding night (or other) sexuality or honeymoon activity, choosing instead to thoroughly detail place settings and proper wedding correspondence.

These two sets of wedding night photos stood out to me precisely because the legitimate wedding night is what fallen female characters in mainstream fiction lack. Fallen fictional characters would not suffer public scandal were they married to their seducers. If wedding-night or honeymoon sex produces a child, no public scandal follows. However, I also read these photographs against real Victorian women's comments about sexual ignorance, especially before marriage. Annie Besant claimed that being “kept innocent on

all questions of sex, was no preparation for married existence," and that this left her "defenceless to face a rude awakening" (qtd. in Reynolds 20). Hera Cook, in *The Long Sexual Revolution*, remarks on noted "disastrous" pairings like the famously bad marriage between Effie Gray and John Ruskin. Cook quotes Effie Gray: "I had never been told the duties of married persons to each other and knew little or nothing about their relations in the closest union on earth" (97). Cook further explains that "By the last quarter of the century such ignorance of physical sexuality and reproductive processes was said to be frequently devastating for young women" (97-98).

For me, then, this 1892 catalogue advertisement for "The Details of a Wedding-Night," and these two narrative photo sets depicting wedding night activities, read most significantly in terms of the possible female consumer and audience. Certainly, these explicit nuptial photos could represent a "gentleman's fantasy," but given the detailed table of contents provided for the sex manual *Love and Safety* and the advertisement for Carlile's *Every Woman's Book*, it could follow that these photographs actively work to assuage female fears of the wedding night and/or actively reveal that one need not be a virgin to enjoy all the "pleasures of love" on the evening of socially-sanctioned sexual activity.

Hera Cook continues her analysis of female sexual ignorance by noting that during the last quarter of the century, a "rising chorus of blame was directed toward mothers of all classes who, it was claimed, had failed to teach their daughters about sexuality" (98). Annie Besant clearly stated that her fight for reproductive rights was directly linked to the education of her daughter, and

Henry Arthur Allbutt argued, in his 1886 *The Wife's Handbook*, that mothers must talk with their daughters about sexuality and sexual health, for “it is both cruel and absurd to keep a girl ignorant of the laws which control her being” (52). According to both Besant and Allbutt, young girls should not only understand their own changing bodies and developing sexuality, they should also understand the basics of birth control. However, in the absence of this maternal education, it would seem, then, that various explicit or “obscene” texts must take on this educational role.

As I noted earlier, while looking through the Kinsey Institute photographs, it was difficult to find images depicting contraceptive practice. However, one of the “flowered couch” wedding night photographs does depict something curious (see fig. 42). The quality and sharpness of the photograph prevents certainty in my assertion, but, in this image, the groom holds something in his left hand and looks to have a substance on his right index finger. The bride’s vagina is exposed, and it looks like the groom is going to apply this substance to her vagina. There are several possible readings of this. Given that this is supposed to depict wedding-night sex, the groom could be holding a small round container of cold-cream, and this could be the substance he is applying to her vagina as a first-time sex lubricant. However, it could also be some form of pessary—either a preservative or cap or one of the dissolvable “cocoa-nut butter” variety Allbutt describes—he is preparing to insert as the bride covers her eyes and smiles. In either reading of this scene, however, there is a level of sexual courtesy that seems unexpected in pornography. If he is merely “readying” her for sexual activity (or soothing her after or during sexual

activity), this speaks to assuaging female fears of penetration and the sexual unknown. And, if he is, in fact, inserting a contraceptive device, he is actively protecting her from pregnancy so that she may, worry-free, enjoy all the other “pleasures of love” depicted in the rest of the series.

Although this particular photograph may be uncertain in its depiction of contraception, the 1892 catalogue, in no uncertain terms, advertises various contraceptive and pleasure devices for both men and women. Under a general category of “Finest Parisian India-Rubber Goods” (see fig. 43), the catalogue describes and prices a variety of protective or pleasure devices: “India-Rubber-Preservatives for Gentlemen,” “Ladies’ Preservatives,” “Venusring,” “Venus Finger,” and “Dildoes in India-Rubber” (see fig. 43). The advertising copy for the “India-Rubber-Preservatives for Gentlemen” indicates that these condoms can be used “without any danger of bursting,” and that the “elastic and simple” “Ladies’ Preservatives” can “be used several times” (see fig. 43). The “Venusring” is advertised as having the ability to increase the “lenght [sic] and intensity of pleasure for both women and men,” and the dildoes advertised come in both male and female parts (see fig. 43).

Based on these advertisements and products, the consumer base reads as comprised of both men and women, but the subsequent, and lengthy, advertisement for the “Ballotte de femmes” reads as decidedly aimed toward a female consumer. The copy reads:

Ballotte de femmes. A celebrated ladies doctor has succeeded after many years of careful study in constructing this *Ballotte de femmes* as a perfectly sure preventative against the occurrence of

pregnancy. This appliance is by far superior to any other in existence. The appliance is in every case to be thoroughly relied upon, at [sic] it is scientifically constructed. All medical authorities agree that their employment is free from risk. The mode of application is most simple and easily carried out by a lady. After the ball has been filled by means of the accompanying funnel with 9 parts of water and 1 part of vinegar, it ts [sic] fixed on the end of the handle. The ball is then pushed well into the vagina and the handle is withdrawn with a slight rotary movement. By rubbing a little olive oil on the ball, the process is rendered easier. Five minutes after the affair the ball is withdrawn by means of the attached silk ribbon. (see figs. 44 and 45)

The item costs one pound, and the “whole apparatus” comes in an “elegant case,” apparently befitting the same lady who would find the entire apparatus extremely easy to use (see fig. 45). The advertisement's copy assures women that this doctor-approved device will protect against pregnancy and “risk,” and the basic directions indicate how to use this device. Household products like vinegar and olive oil assist the device, and the “ball” is easily removed by pulling on “the attached silk ribbon” (see fig. 45). Ultimately, the “Ballotte de femmes” is a sponge or ball soaked in water and vinegar—and assisted by olive oil—that is inserted into the vagina to block the cervix during intercourse. The “handle” aids in insertion, and the attached ribbon aids in removal, and this medically-approved, effective contraceptive device is most assuredly advertised to and for the female consumer.

During my research process, I was fortunate to find that late-nineteenth century birth control information and devices—like those advertised in the 1892 catalogue—are on display at the Science Museum of London. Again, while these items on display may not perfectly match those advertised, they are of the period and do represent devices employed and sold during this time. Sponges and “tampons” with ribbons (and sometimes attached buttons) are on display next to condoms from the time period, and various types of syringes or “injections” are displayed below advertisements for specific brands of syringes and below a copy of Henry Arthur Allbutt’s controversial 1886 manual, *The Wife’s Handbook* (see fig. 46). Additional sponges or “balls” with attached silk cords are displayed next to helpful household items like vinegar and olive oil, as well as next to various “Letters” (i.e., condoms in folded envelopes) (see fig. 47). The museum also displays various pessaries, cervical or “Dutch” caps, and diaphragms, alongside rudimentary spermicides like quinine (see figs. 48, 49, and 50). Obviously, items like these could easily have been purchased through the 1892 catalogue, but customers could buy so much more. In a single order from this catalogue, both male and female consumers could have purchased pornographic novels, sex education manuals, birth control tracts, treatises on publication rights and obscenity law, sexually explicit illustrations and photographs, and contraceptive devices. As commercial and rhetorical documents, these catalogues function as “gold mine” finds, as their intentionally intertextual design reinforces the social and cultural uses of pornography. Fantasy-world sexual titillation is evident, of course, but this content is coupled with real-world concerns and the prevention of unwanted pregnancy.

When I started my research process at the Kinsey Institute, I began by reading any and every nineteenth-century British pornographic text I could find that contained a woman's name in the title. From the outset of my project, I knew I sought an alternative to *Ruth* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Esther Waters*, so I figured reading pornographic novels with titles like *Yvonne* or *Pauline* or *Susan Aked* might provide, if not liberating, at least *different* narratives of female sexual experience. These novels yielded far more liberating narratives of sexual education, instruction, and protection, and each read like a direct response to mainstream fiction's fallen woman narrative trajectory. These pornographic novels read as though they were directly "writing back" to a narrative trope of female fallenness, as they offered an alternative, pornographic sexual bildungsroman devoted to female sexual experience and protective pedagogy.

Tucked into the 1897 *Catalogue of Rare Curious and Voluptuous Reading*, was a folded single-sheet advertisement detailing works "Just Out" for sale (see fig. 51). Among the dozen or so advertisements were two that stood out to me: an advertisement for *Yvonne of [sic] The Adventures and Intrigues of a French Governess with her Pupils* by Mary Suckit, and an advertisement for *Pauline the Prima Donna or Memoirs of an Opera Singer* (see figs. 52 and 53). To see these novels advertised side-by-side indicates not only were these narratives of female sexual experience possibly popular, they may have occupied their own sub-genre within the variations of Victorian pornography. Both the 1897 and 1892 catalogues advertise *Susan Aked or Innocence Awakened, Ignorance Dispelled*, but unlike the basic notices for *Yvonne* and

Pauline, the almost identical synopses offered in detail in both catalogues actively express the anti-fallen woman narrative driving Susan's story of learning and experience. From the 1892 catalogue, the advertisement reads:

Susan Aked or Innocence awakened, Ignorance Dispelled—a simple tale and instructive story.... Susan Aked, an innocent country girl of good family is suddenly bereft of her Parents. In order to console her, her guardin [sic] invites a cousin of hers Lucia, to stay with her. Lucia, a London girl, young and pretty, but utterly depraved arrives, and undertakes the task of educating Susan. —She finds in her an apt pupil. By means of caresses, of *every kind*, of pictures of a lascivious nature, and of the narration of her own experiences, she soon succeeds in undermining Susan's virtue. This done she takes Susan to her own house and has her deflowered by Charlie Althair, also a cousin, who has already had Lucia's virginity. The book is well written, in an easy flowing style. The best parts are certainly those in which Lucia pours her experiences into the bashful ear of her cousin Susan.

Honi soit qui mal y pense. (see fig. 56)

The final line of the advertisement loosely translates from the French as “shamed be he who thinks evil of it,” and the 1897 catalogue turns this statement into a sexual pun (quim = slang for vagina) by changing the spacing of the letters:

“*Hony soit QUIM al y pense*” (see fig. 55). Sexual puns aside, even the synopsis speaks to breaking the pattern of the fallen woman. In mainstream fallen women fiction, innocent young girls left suddenly bereft of parents—or certainly

under poor adult guidance—usually makes them ripe for the sexual fall and scandalous pregnancy. In this pornographic novel, however, Susan is “saved” by the guidance and education of her savvy cousin, Lucia, and safely deflowered by yet another cousin, Charlie, but only *after* she is sexually schooled. Susan learns by listening to Lucia’s own sexual history and experiences, by safely experimenting with Lucia, and by looking at pornography. As the advertisement copy indicates, in addition to learning through caresses “of every kind,” Susan is also instructed through “pictures of a lascivious nature” (see fig. 56). Indeed, calling up the French tag-line, it would be a shame to think evil of the good pornography can do, especially in terms of education and pedagogy.

The pornographic genre often reinforces its meta instructive use by depicting or referring to other pornography within its own boundaries. Within the pages of *Susan Aked*—a pornographic novel—Susan is instructed in the ways of sexuality through her own reading of pornographic texts and images. At the Kinsey Institute, this, too, was a pattern I saw, and I collected several photos depicting the use of other pornography. One photograph features a reclining nude male, masturbating to what appears to be either a text or photograph (see fig. 57). Though the image quality is compromised, it is clear the pictured sexually-aroused male is looking at some type of text while masturbating, and it would seem fair to conclude that the content of this text is pornographic or sexually stimulating enough to prompt masturbation. Another series I found depicted two young women wearing black and white striped tights. In the photograph, two women masturbate while looking at a

pornographic etching that itself depicts a bedroom scene between a man and woman (see fig. 58). In the scene-within-a-scene, the etching features a man fondling a woman's vagina—possibly penetrating her with his fingers—much like the young women are prompted to do themselves. The narrative series continues with an additional photo featuring one of the young women experimenting with safe (from conception, any way) penetration by using the bedpost as a dildo (see fig. 59). Additional photographs clearly portray the connection between reading pornography and safe sexual experimentation (see fig. 60). In this photograph, a young woman looks pleased as she masturbates with a dildo while reading a book (see fig. 60). Again, it is reasonable to conclude that the text she is reading is sexually explicit, and, though I cannot be certain of the text's content, it could be a text dedicated to the sexual education of a young woman like Susan Aked or Yvonne or Pauline.

Functioning as miniature Rosetta stones in service of my argument, the 1892 and 1897 catalogues of Victorian pornography reveal the intertwining and intertextual concerns of the pornographic genre and its male *and* female consumers. Though Claudia Nelson is speaking about the magazine *The Pearl*, her sentiment that Victorian pornography tells its readers “both learning and teaching are sources of ecstasy” is evident in my page-by-page analysis of these two catalogues (28). And, as Henry Spencer Ashbee's/Pisanus Fraxi's “To the Reader” poem claims: “No book exists, however bad, / From which some good may not be had / By him who understands to read” (*Catena* 1-2), but I would add “or her” to Ashbee's final line. Great good is gained by thoughtfully and critically reading the sexual pedagogy—especially as it is directed at women—

present in Victorian pornography. The 1892 catalogue notes on its front cover, “Please, hand this list to some one who may use it” (see fig. 1). Though I can never know the hand-to-hand provenance of this 1892 catalogue, I do know that in the British Library 115 years later, it was, in fact, handed to some one who had great use for it.



Figure 1. "Please, hand this list to some one who may use it." The 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

All the prices in this list are for cash.

All goods sent secure from observation, to all countries in well closed and unsuspecting envelopes (by letterpost).

Our customers are requested to write their names quite distinctly and to repeat them at every new order, because all the letters will be destroyed after having been answered.

Remittances should be made in Postal Orders, Banknotes, or Cheques.

(NO stamps).

Patterns sent willingly, but only against previous deposit.

The works are printed in clear type, and for the most part on dutch handmade paper.

Figure 2. "Special Notice." First page of the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

. 6
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Money-table.

£	1.0.0	=	5	dollars
£	1.5.0	=	6.25	"
£	0.10.0	=	2.50	"
£	0.7.6	=	1.85	"
£	0.6.0	=	1.50	"
£	0 2 6	=	0.65	"
£	0.1.0	=	0.25	"
£	0.1.6	=	0.38	"

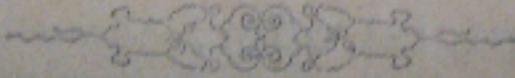




Figure 3. "Money-table." Back page of the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

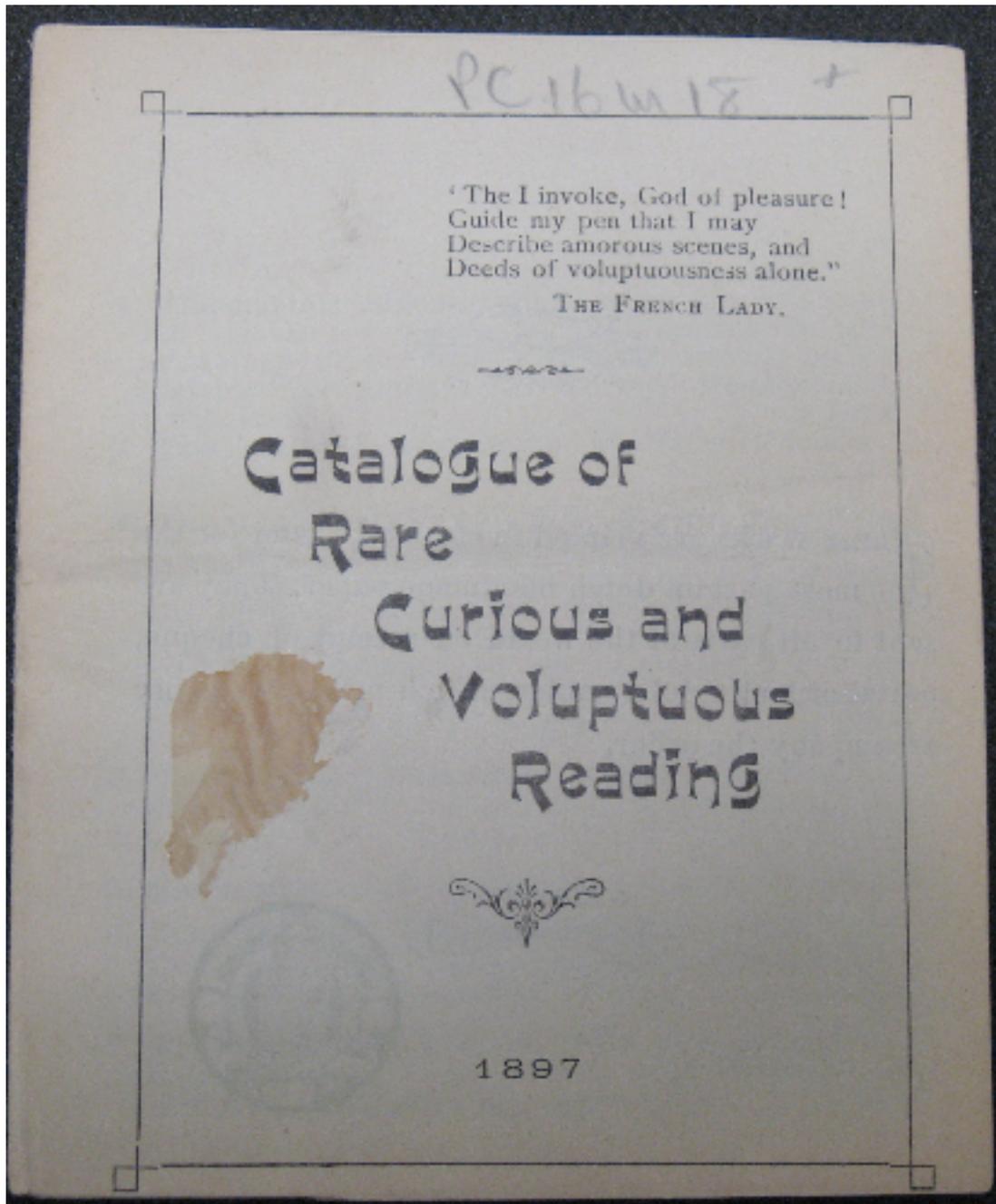


Figure 4. *Catalogue of Rare Curious and Voluptuous Reading*. The 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

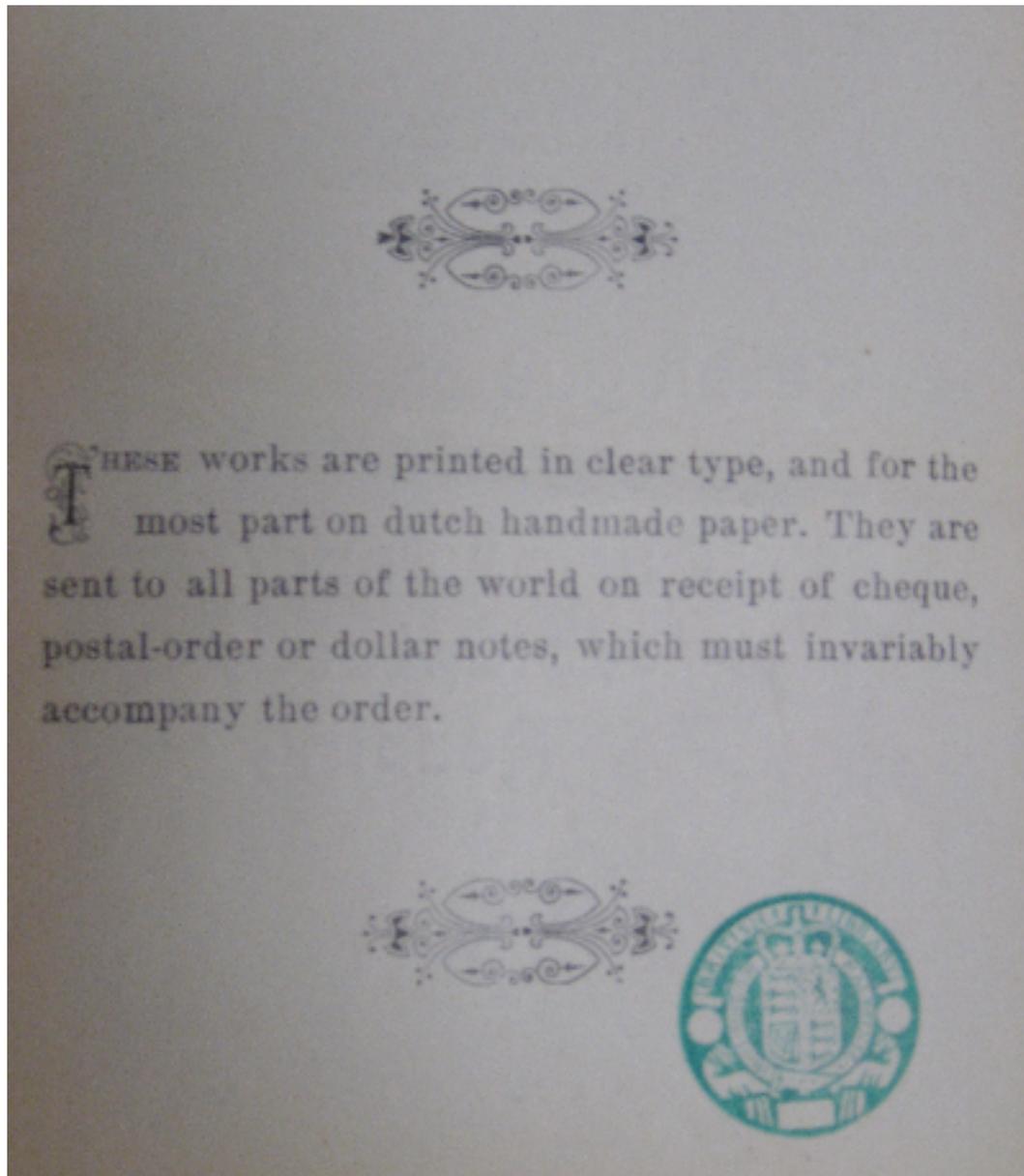


Figure 5. Quality of product and ordering information on the first page of the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

1. **The amatory adventures of a surgeon**; who availed himself of his confidential position to take advantage of the innocence or pruriency of his patients. New and genuine reprint. Moscow, 1893. 1 vol. in-12 £ 1-0-0
2. **The amatory adventures of Tilly Touchitt**; 1 vol. £ 1-0-0
3. **The autobiography of a flea**; told in a Hop, Skip, and Jump and Recounting all his Experiences of the Human, and Superhuman Kind both Male and Female, with his Curious Connections, Blakbitings, and Tickling Touches; the whole scratched and arranged for the Delectation of the Delicate, and for the information of the inquisitive, etc. etc. With 12. engravings £ 3-0-0
4. **Confessions of Miss Coote**; a most voluptuous and refined collection of ten letters respecting her experiences as a flagellant. 2 vol. 12°. £ 2-0-0
5. **Confessions of Mme Vestris**; 1 vol. £ 2-0-0
6. **Count Alexis**. Being the voluptuous and merry adventures of a Bachelor. London, Printed for a few friends. 1 vol. 12° well printed £ 1-10-0
7. **The Countess of Lesbos**; or the new Gamiani. By E. D. author of "*My amours with Victoria*"; 12° on Toned Paper with six engravings £ 1-10-0

Figure 6. Advertisements for texts in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

in one vol. 12^{mo} on hand
16^{bis}. Love and safety; or, Love and Lasciviousness
with Safety and Secrecy, a lecture, delivered with
practical illustrations, by the Empress of Asturia
(The Modern Sappho); assisted by her favourite
Lizette and others £ 2 0-0

Figure 7. Close up of an advertisement for *Love and safety; or, Love and Lasciviousness with Safety and Secrecy*, in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

— 6 —

This work, which is entirely practical, is written by a new author, and is without doubt a most clever and masterly production.

Privately Printed Brussels, 1893.

“ Out of the nettle *danger* to pluck to the flower *safety* ”

Poem by Thingumy.

Though shalt not be *fount out*,

XIth Commandment, Old Test., rev. ver.

“ *Copulation without population.* ”

Household Words.

PART I

On Pleasures that do not even take away the Maidenhead or Virginity

Section I. — Solitary Pleasures: Frigging explained.

Section II. — Amusements with other girls and Women, i.e. Tribadism, explanation of it, klitorizing, etc., gamabuching explained and illustrated.

Section III. — Amusements with men, frigging, bossom fue king and armpits, gamabuching, the back entrance, etc. and bizarre amusements.

PART II

On Pleasures that take away Maidenhead or, Virginity,
(which is shown how to be restored, or simulated, in Part. III.) But
which involve no danger whatever of getting in the
Family way or pregnancy.

Section I. — Solitary pleasures with candles, dildoes (which are explained and illustrated), etc.

Section II. — Amusements with girls or women with dildoes; their various kinds, and other instruments.

Sections III. — Amusements with men, absolutely safe, of various kinds.

Figure 8. The full table of contents for *Love and safety*, printed in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

— 7 —

PART III

On Miscellaneous Subjects

Sections I. — Directions for simulating virginity on the first night, and completely taking away suspicion from the husband.

Section II. — Directions for *fucking* with safety either *after* marriage or *before*, and a comparison between the best methods of avoiding babies, i.e. 1. *Withdrawal*, 2. *French letters*, 3. *The sponge*, 4. *The syringe*, 5. *Intervals*.

Sections III. — Lastly, on the use of *Aphrodisiacs*. Final orgie and *L'Envoi*.

Appendices on *Aphrodisiacs*, with recipes, and list of books.

17. **Lovely nights**, 1 vol. £ 1-10-0

18. **Love's tell tale : The sailor's Yarn** a delicious adventures in the Bay of Naples, bijou edition. 6 coloured plates. £ 1-0-0

19. **Lady Gay Spanker's Tales of Fun and Flagellation**, etc. Printed for Subscribers only. London 1896 £ 2 0 0

20. **Memoirs of the Celebrated Fanny Hill**; or, life of a Woman of Pleasure. Reprinted from the original edition. This celebrated work has had numerous imitators, but no rivals, and it may fairly be said that, for beauty of description, it stands, without and equal, with 10 beautiful engravings £ 3 0 0

The mysteries of Venus, a nuptial interlude, a preceptor for Ladies and Gentlemen on their wedding Eve. 1 vol. £ 0-6 0

22. **The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova**, written by himself, now for the first time translated into English from the original and rare French Edition of Brockhaus. 1826. — 12 vol. crown 8°. of 430 pages each £ 15-15-0

A series of adventures wilder and more fantastic than the wildest of romances, written down with the exactitude of a business diary; a view

Figure 9. The final section of the table of contents of *Love and safety*, printed in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

The aristocratic author of this realistic work, easily recognisable by his fortune, manly beauty and numerous gallant adventures, is in command of a gunboat. He is wrecked on the coast of Morocco and penetrates secretly into the Seraglio of Abdallah Pacha. He remains there one night, but these short twelve hours suffice for our splendid hero, who puts the whole lovely female squad through their bridle and teaches them the use of the mowser. Each lascivious lady is of a different nationality and they in turn gratify the lusty rake with the narrative of the most remarkable voluptuous event of their lives.

28. Nunnery Tales; or Cruising under False colours
— a tale of Love and Lust. New and genuine reprint from the rare and original text. London, 1866.
3 volumes crown 8° — 1888 with 20 beautiful engravings £ 4-0 0

Vivid and exciting narrative of convent life, this work is full of character and contains the most extraordinary revelations of the prostitution of the nuns who relate their libidinous experiences of monastic lust and varied salacious exploits before and after taking the veil. Every stretch or voluptuous imagination is here fully described.

29. Opus Sadicum, a philosophical Romance (Justine or the Misfortunes of virtue by the Marquis de Sade), for the first time translated from original (Holland, 1791), with an engraved Frontispice. — Athens. 1889. 1 vol. 8°, dutch paper. £ 3 0 0

There is in this strange amalgamation, this chaos of tenebrous imaginations and criminal follies, a curious subject of study for the scholar and the Philosopher.

30. The Pearl; a Magazine of Facetiae and voluptuous Reading. 3 vol. in-8°. £ 12-0-0

It is without exception the grandest and best erotic work ever published in the English Language.

31. The Pearl christmas annual for 1881, containing New Year's Day, the Sequel to Swivia, Vanessa, and other Tales, etc. Demy 8 vo., 6 splendid large coloured plates. £ 2-0-0

32. The Pleasures of cruelty, being a sequel to the reading of Justine and Juliette. 3 parts in one vol. rare. £ 3-10-0

Figure 10. Advertisements for *The Pearl* and *The Pearl christmas annual for 1881* (with "6 splendid large coloured plates") in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

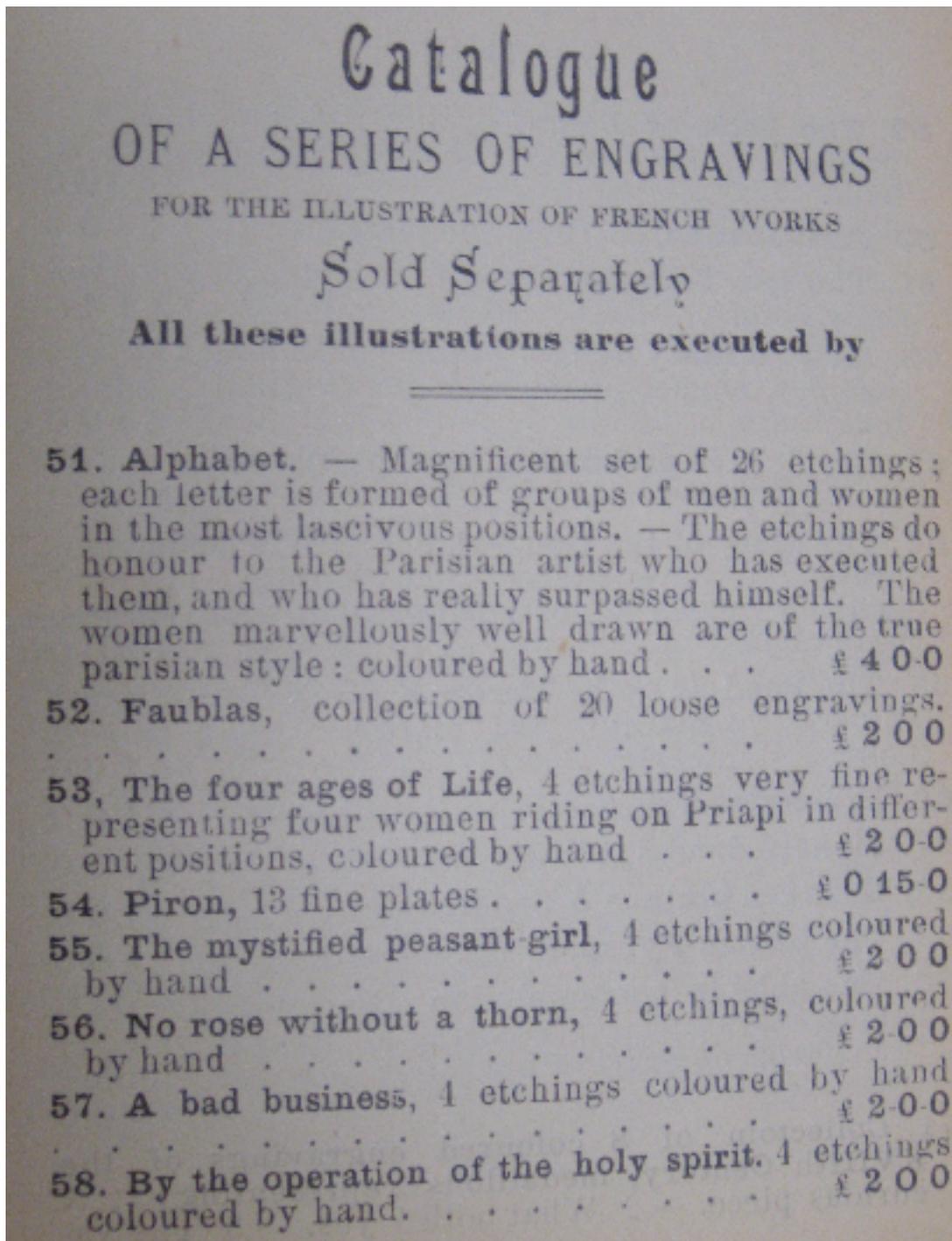


Figure 11. "Catalogue of a Series of Engravings." Images, illustrations, and engravings advertised in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

— 15 —

poreuse going to-bed. — 4° The little blind man. —
 5° Monster! You deserve it. — 6° A double insult.—
 7° Indulgence rewarded. — 8° The dropped stitch.
 Very fine impressions from the originals which are
 now lost £ 3-1-0

72. My amours with Victoire, 6 plates	£ 1 0 0
73. Autobiography of a flea, 12 plates	£ 2-0-0
74. Evilyne, 12 plates	£ 2 0-9
75. The convent in rut, 12 plates	£ 2-10-0
76. The Callipyges, 11 plates	£ 2-0-0
77. My Love Stages, 10 plates	£ 2-0-0
78. The russian princess, 9 plates	£ 1-0-0
79. The Russian danseuse, 15 plates	£ 2 0 0
80. Fanny Hill, 10 plates	£ 2-0-0
81. Nunnery tales, 24 plates	£ 21-0 0
82. The two sisters, 6 plates	£ 2-10-0
83. Secrets of the post, 10 plates	£ 2 1-0
84. The cornemuse's inn, 6 plates	£ 1-0-0
85. Marguerite's pocket-book, 6 plates	£ 1-0 0
86. Gentleman and girls, 6 plates	£ 1 0 0
87. Memoirs of an english procuress, 6 pl.	£ 1-0-0
88. Smutty stories, 6 plates	£ 1-0 0
89. Gamiani, 6 plates	£ 1-0 0
90. Violette's romance, 6 plates	£ 1 0 0
91. The romance of my alcove, 6 plates	£ 1 0-0
92. Spring in the country, 6 plates	£ 1-0-0
93. The exploits of a young gallant, 6 pl.	£ 1-0-0
94. The virtue of sister Agnès, 6 plates	£ 1-0-0

Figure 12. Plates for sale to accompany specific pornographic titles. Advertised in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

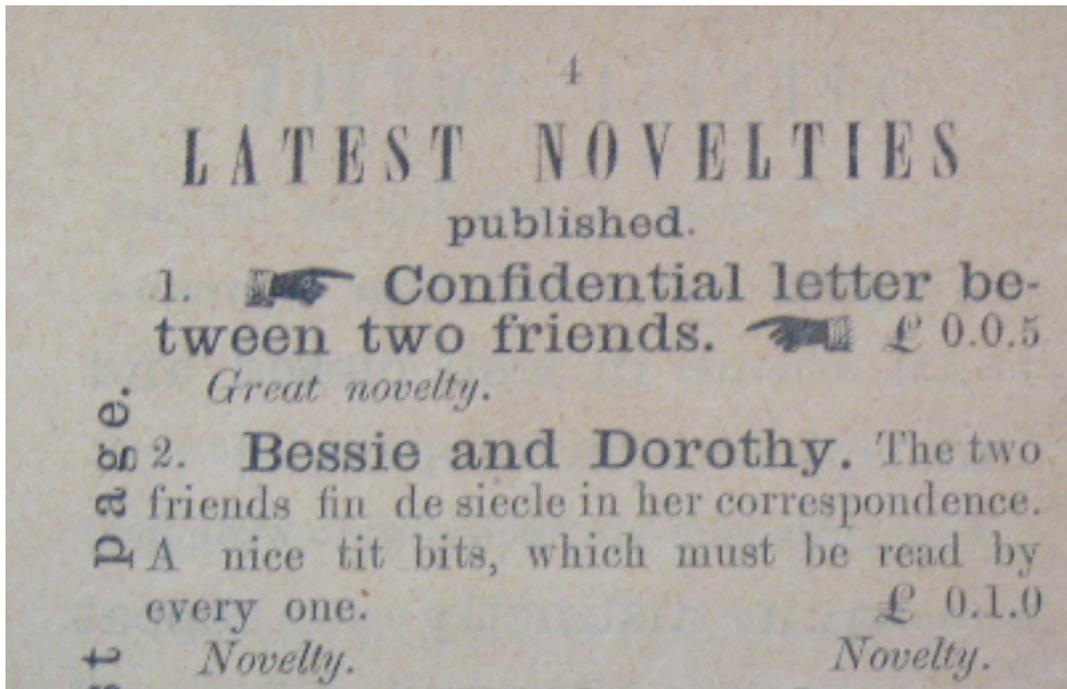


Figure 13. "Latest Novelties" advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

27. **The Phylosophy of the Sexes,**
 or every Woman's Book, a treatise on love
 in its Various Forms, Phases and Results,
 including Practical Hints, how to enjoy Life
 and Pleasure without any harm to either
 sex; by Dr. Waters. 1826. More pratical
 than Fruits of Philosophy. £ 0.3.0

45. **Vizetelly's Defence:** Extracts
 chiefly from English classics showing that
 the legal suppression of Zola's novels would
 logically involve the boodlerizing of some
 of the greatest works in English literature.
 London 1888. 1 vot. 4^o boards £1.0.0

Figures 14 and 15. Advertisement (top) for Richard Carlile's 1892 reprinting of *Every Woman's Book* as *The Phylosophy of the Sexes* under the reprint author of Dr. Waters. Noted as "more pratical [sic] than Fruits of Philosophy." And advertisement (bottom) for "Vizetelly's Defence." Both advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

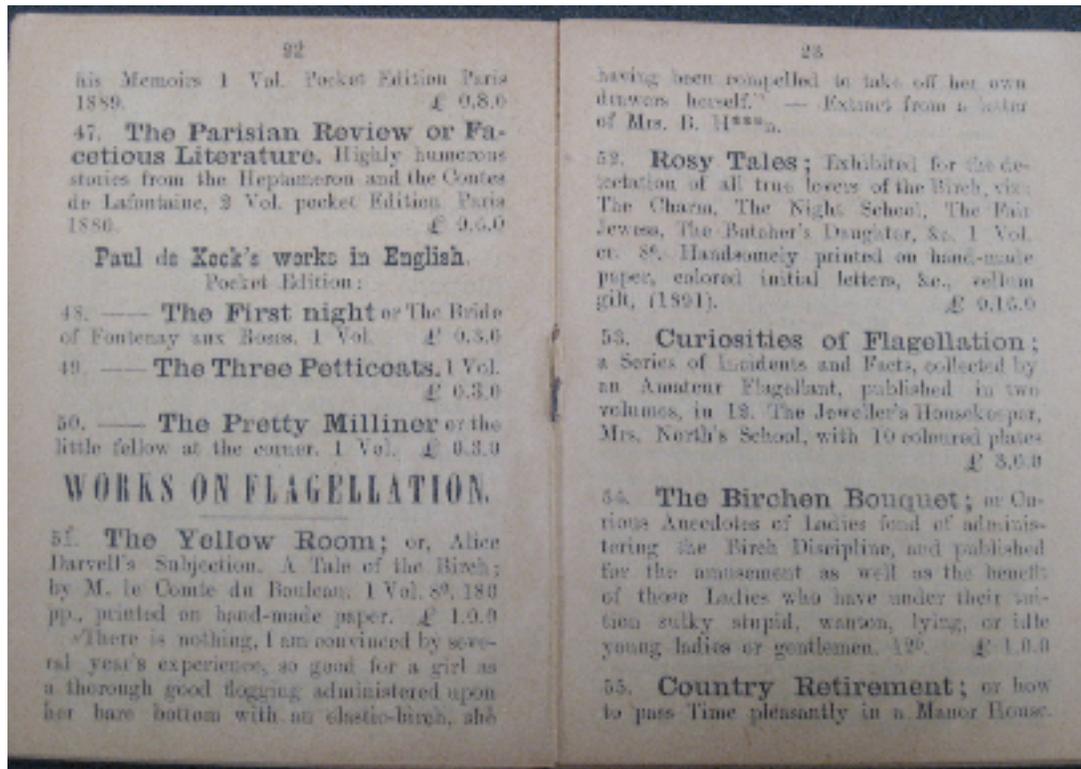


Figure 16. Advertisements for niche and fetish markets in pornography. In the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

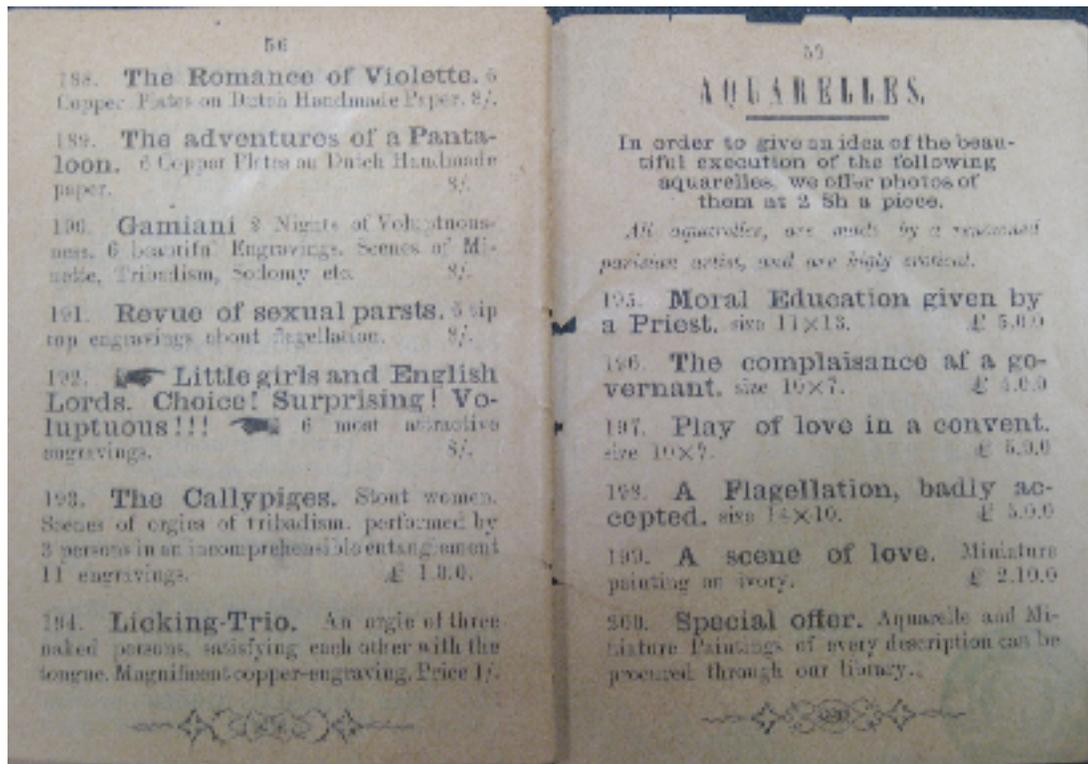


Figure 17. The 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography includes advertisements for both engravings and “Aquarelles” (transparent watercolors). (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

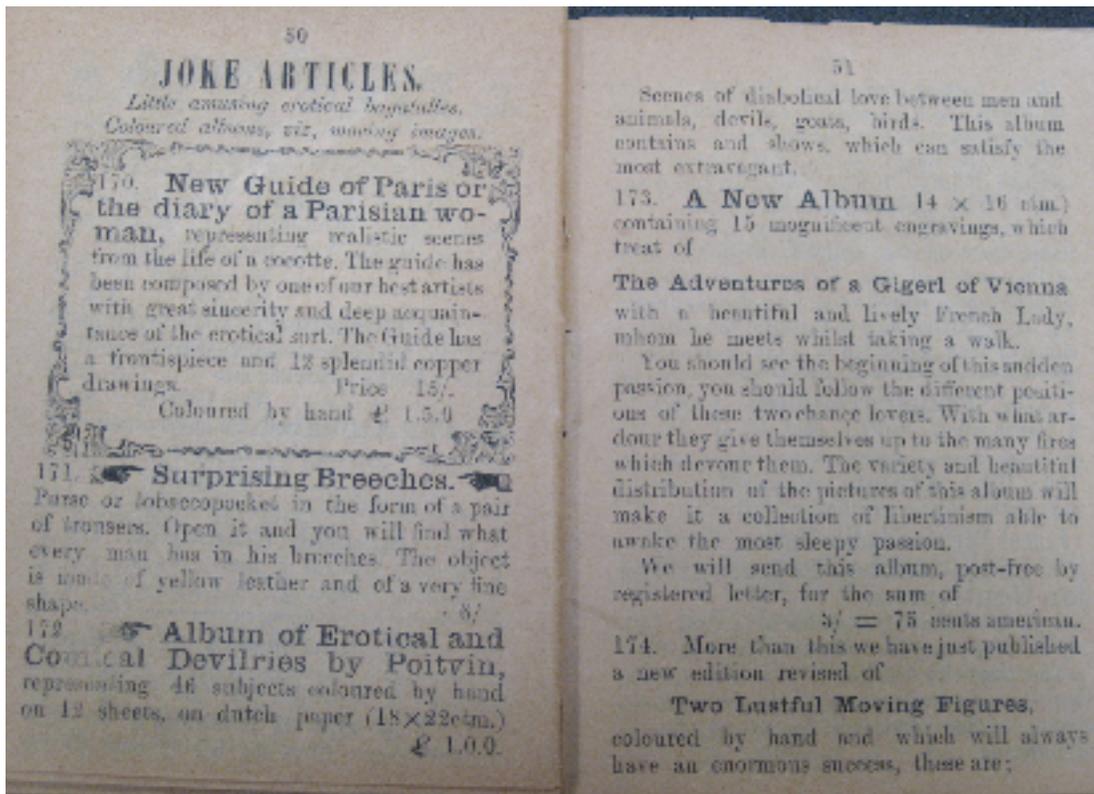
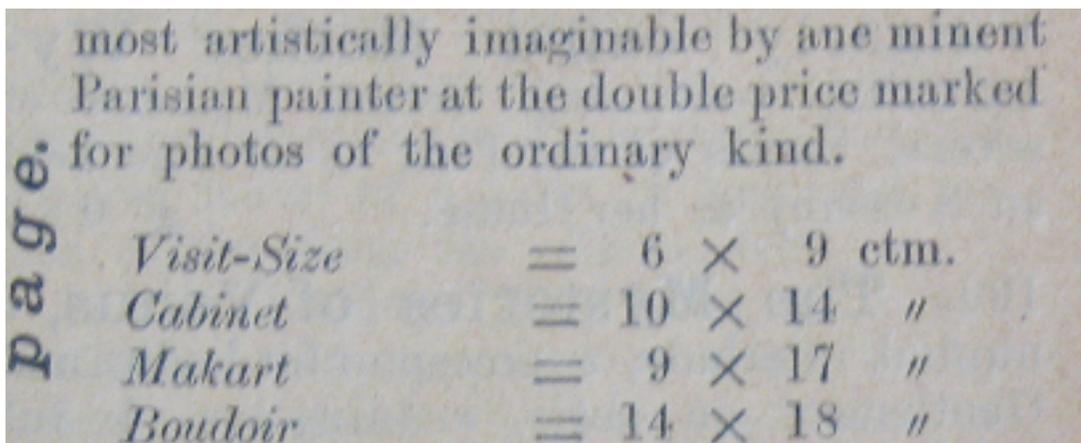
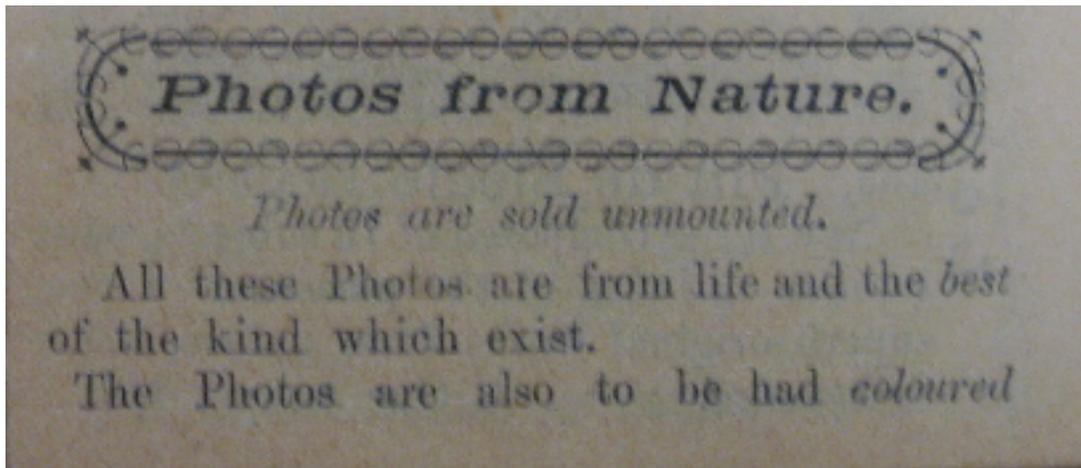
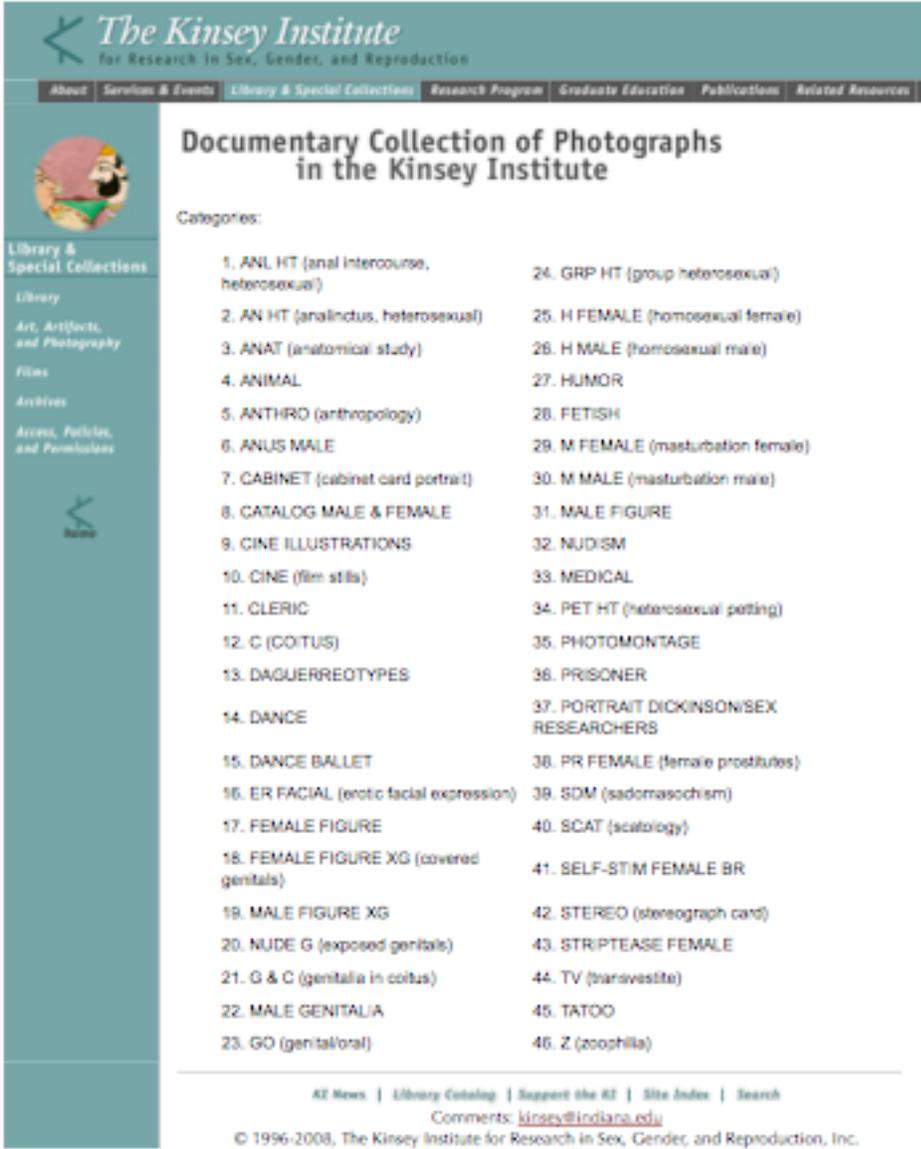


Figure 18. "Joke Articles" advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



Figures 19 and 20. Advertisements (top and bottom) for "Photos from Nature" in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



The Kinsey Institute
for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction

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Library & Special Collections
Library
Art, Artifacts, and Photography
Files
Archives
Access, Policies, and Permissions

Documentary Collection of Photographs in the Kinsey Institute

Categories:

1. ANL HT (anal intercourse, heterosexual)	24. GRP HT (group heterosexual)
2. AN HT (analinctus, heterosexual)	25. H FEMALE (homosexual female)
3. ANAT (anatomical study)	26. H MALE (homosexual male)
4. ANIMAL	27. HUMOR
5. ANTHRO (anthropology)	28. FETISH
6. ANUS MALE	29. M FEMALE (masturbation female)
7. CABINET (cabinet card portrait)	30. M MALE (masturbation male)
8. CATALOG MALE & FEMALE	31. MALE FIGURE
9. CINE ILLUSTRATIONS	32. NUDISM
10. CINE (film stills)	33. MEDICAL
11. CLERIC	34. PET HT (heterosexual petting)
12. C (COITUS)	35. PHOTOMONTAGE
13. DAGUERREOTYPES	36. PRISONER
14. DANCE	37. PORTRAIT DICKINSON/SEX RESEARCHERS
15. DANCE BALLET	38. PR FEMALE (female prostitutes)
16. ER FACIAL (erotic facial expression)	39. SDM (sodomasochism)
17. FEMALE FIGURE	40. SCAT (scatology)
18. FEMALE FIGURE XG (covered genitals)	41. SELF-STIM FEMALE BR
19. MALE FIGURE XG	42. STEREO (stereograph card)
20. NUDE G (exposed genitals)	43. STRIPTease FEMALE
21. G & C (genitalia in coitus)	44. TV (transvestite)
22. MALE GENITALIA	45. TATOO
23. GO (genital/oral)	46. Z (zoophilia)

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Figure 21. "Documentary Collection of Photographs in the Kinsey Institute." Photographs are catalogued and categorized by the sexual act or imagery depicted. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

Look at the last

▶ Latest Novelties. ▶

104. ▶ **Soul-stirring amusements of a white woman, with a brute African nigger** in 25 sensational and bewitching attitudes of a never fading charm.

The whole collection cab-size
 £ 2.0.0 = doll. 19.—
 a piece 2/6 = 62 cents.

105. **Fin de Siècle Pleasures.**
 New series composed of 75 subjects, most curious varieties of the pleasures of love, superb original works from nature, *not to be equalled.* One sample 2/6.

Figure 22. The 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography advertises specific photographs depicting sexual and social taboos, alongside advertisements for general photographs of “the pleasures of love.” (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



Figures 23 and 24 ("Bijoux 118" on the following page). Interracial sex scenes, like those advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.





Figure 25. Interracial sex scene, like those advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 26. Joyful image of female sexuality—depicting a non-procreative sexual act—demonstrating one of the various “pleasures of love” advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

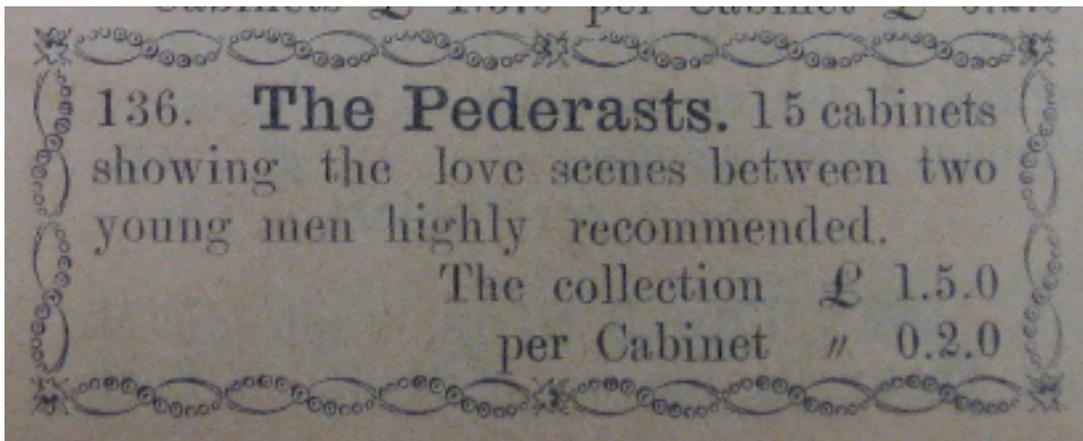


Figure 27. Advertisement for photographs depicting “love scenes between two young men” in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



Figure 28. Male homosexual sex scene, like those advertised in the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

108.  **The Details of a
Wedding-Night.**  Highly
interesting details 20 Cabinets £ 1.5.0
per Cabinet // 0.2.0

The collection in visitsize 10/
Not to be confounded with the other
one which has been edited many years.

109.  **The two friends.** New
collection. Representing tribadism sce-
nes between two beautiful ladies quite
naked. 15 Cabinets £ 1.0.0
per " " 0.2.0

Novelty. *Novelty.*

Figure 29. Advertisement for "The Details of a Wedding-Night," specifically noted as "not to be confounded with the other which has been edited many years." In the 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



Figure 30. From the "Leopard Rug" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 31. From the "Leopard Rug" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 32. From the "Leopard Rug" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 33. From the "Leopard Rug" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 34. From the "Leopard Rug" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 35. From the "Leopard Rug" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 36. From the “Leopard Rug” wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 37. From the “Flowered Couch” wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 38. From the "Flowered Couch" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 39. From the “Flowered Couch” wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 40. From the "Flowered Couch" wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 41. From the “Flowered Couch” wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 42. From the “Flowered Couch” wedding-night series. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

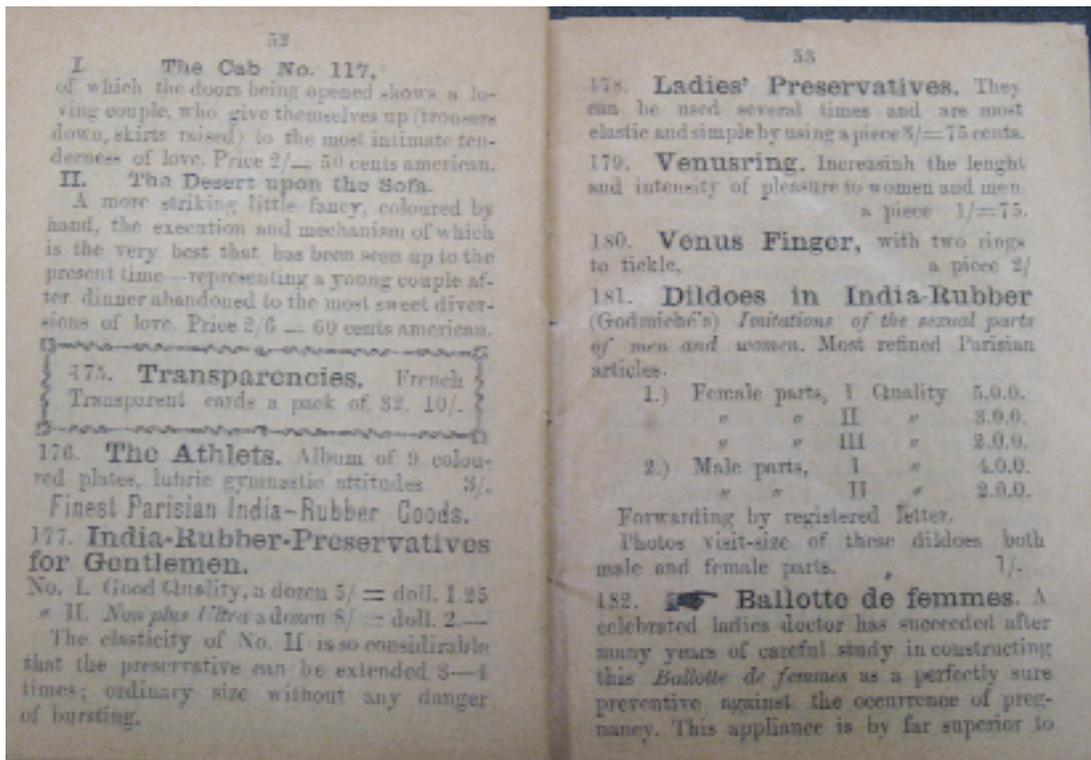


Figure 43. The 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography advertises dildoes and "Venus rings," as well as birth control or contraceptive devices for both men and women. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

182.  **Ballotte de femmes.** A celebrated ladies doctor has succeeded after many years of careful study in constructing this *Ballotte de femmes* as a perfectly sure preventive against the occurrence of pregnancy. This appliance is by far superior to

Figure 44. The advertisement for the contraceptive device, the “Ballotte de femmes,” reads as decidedly aimed toward a female consumer. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

any other already in existence. The appliance is in every case to be thoroughly relied upon, as it is scientifically constructed. All medical authorities agree that their employment is absolutely free from risk.

The mode of application is most simple and easily carried out by any lady.

After the ball has been filled by means of the accompanying funnel with 9 parts of water and 1 part of vinegar, it is fixed on the end of the handle. The ball is then pushed well into the vagina and the handle is then withdrawn with a slight rotatory movement.

By rubbing a little olive oil on the ball, the process is rendered easier.

Five minutes after the affair the ball is withdrawn by means of the attached silk ribbon.

Price for the whole apparatus in elegant case
£ 1.0.0

Figure 45. The advertisement (continued) for the contraceptive device, the "Ballotte de femmes," reads as decidedly aimed toward a female consumer. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

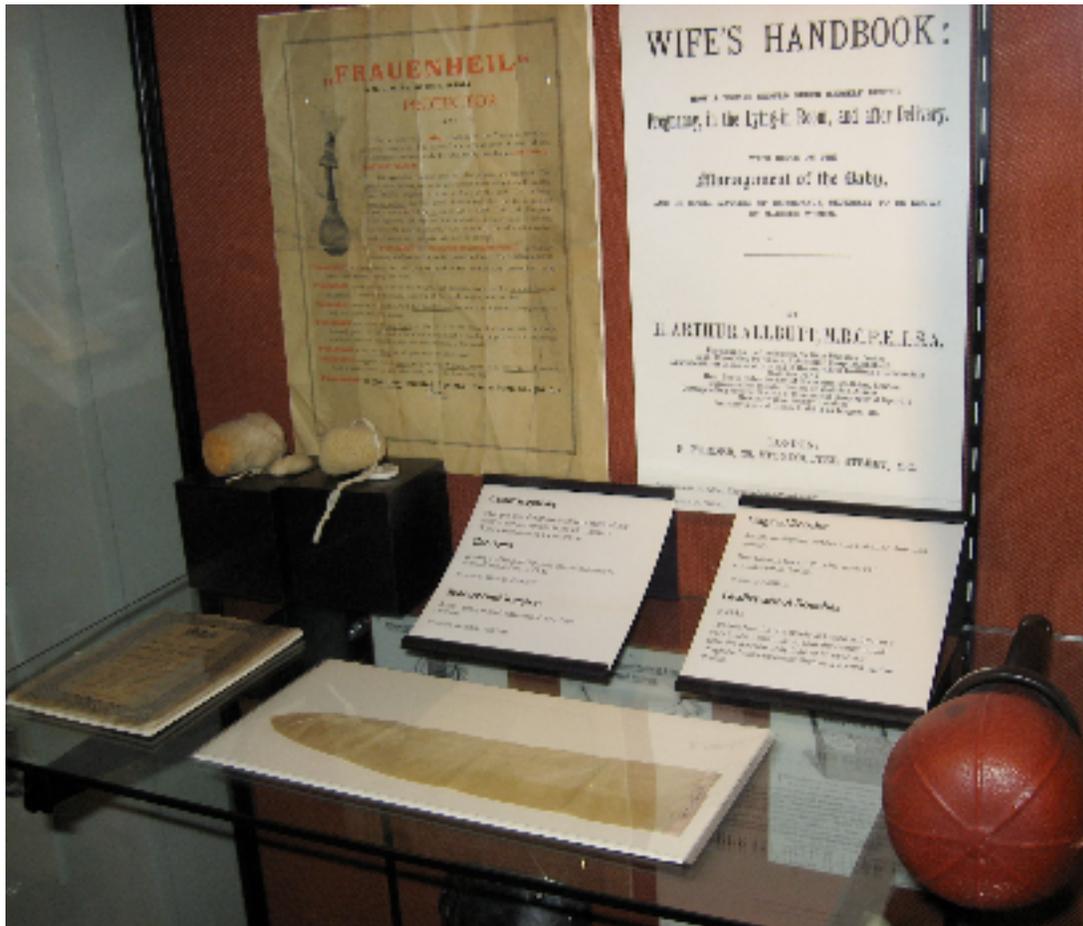


Figure 46. Contraceptive devices like sponges, tampons, condoms, and syringes displayed beneath advertisements for such devices and Henry Arthur Allbutt's controversial 1886 manual, *The Wife's Handbook*. The Science Museum of London.



Figure 47. Additional displays of condoms, various sponges (or “ballotte de femmes”), and useful household contraceptive aids like olive oil and vinegar. The Science Museum of London.



Figure 48. Cervical caps or pessaries on display. The Science Museum of London.



Figure 49. Spermicides like quinine on display. The Science Museum of London.



Figure 50. Diaphragms or “Dutch Caps” on display. The Science Museum of London.

141

YVONNE

OF
THE ADVENTURES AND INTRIGUES
OF A
FRENCH GOVERNESS WITH HER PUPILS
A REAL TALE
translated from french
BY
MARY SUCKIT

146 pages. Only 125 copies printed. Few copies
left. £ 2.10.0

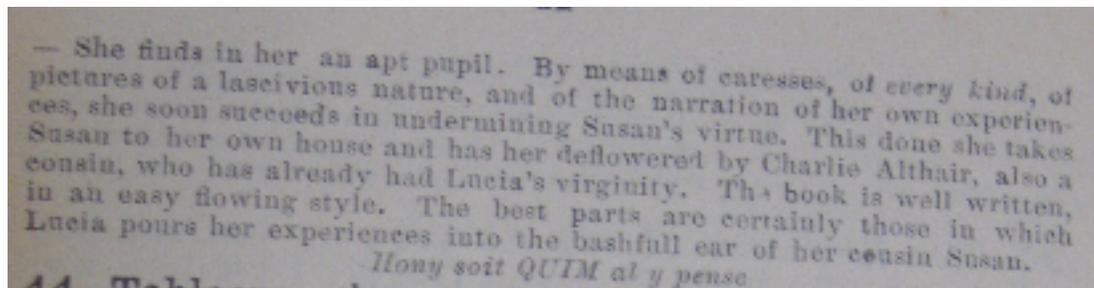
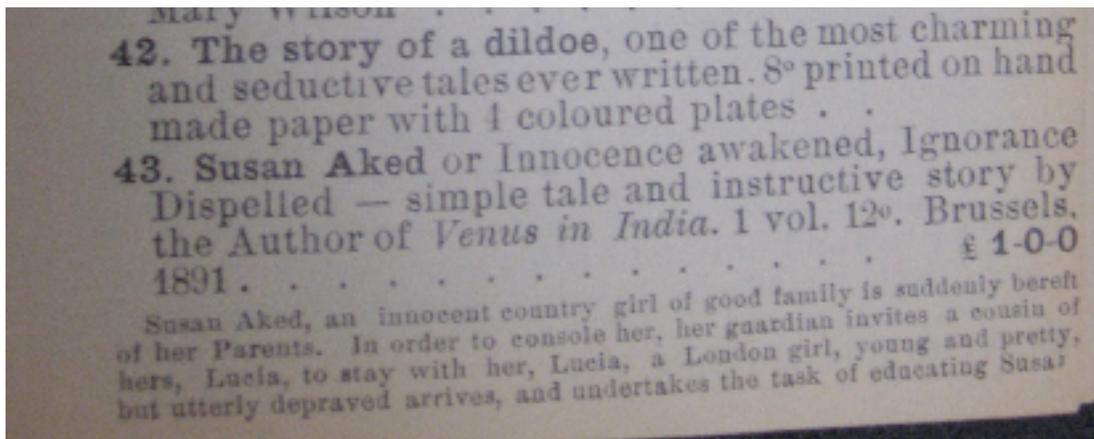
142

PAULINE

THE
PRIMA DONNA
OR
MEMOIRS
OF
AN OPERA SINGER

Limited to 100 copies. £ 2.12.6

Figures 52 and 53. Advertisement (top) for the female sexual bildungsroman, *Yvonne*. Advertisement (bottom) for another narrative of female sexual formation, *Pauline*. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



Figures 54 and 55. An advertisement in the 1897 catalogue of Victorian pornography for the novel *Susan Aked or Innocence Awakened, Ignorance Dispelled* (top), complete with (continued on bottom) thoughtful and thorough synopsis of the suddenly orphaned Susan's necessary sexual education. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.

12. **Susan Aked** or Innocence awakened, Ignorance Dispelled — a simple tale and instructive story by the Author of *Venus in India*. 1 Vol. 12^o. Brussels 1861.

£ 2.0.0

Susan Aked, an innocent country girl of good family is suddenly bereft of her Parents. In order to console her, her guardian invites a cousin of hers Lucia, to stay with her. Lucia, a London girl, young and pretty, but utterly depraved arrives, and undertakes the task of educating Susan. — She finds in her an apt pupil. By means of caresses, of *every kind*, of pictures of a lascivious nature, and of the narration of her own experiences, she soon succeeds in undermining Susan's virtue. This done she takes Susan to her own house and has her deflowered by Charlie Althair, also a cousin, who has already had Lucia's virginity. The book is well written, in an easy flowing style. The best parts are certainly those in which Lucia pours her experiences into the bashful ear of her cousin Susan

Honi soit qui mal y pense.

Figure 56. The earlier 1892 catalogue of Victorian pornography also advertises the female sexual education novel, *Susan Aked*. (c) British Library Board P.C.16.m.18.



Figure 57. The meta-pornographic image: pornography in use within pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 58. The meta-pornographic image: pornography in use within pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 59. The meta-pornographic image: pornography in use within pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.



Figure 60. The meta-pornographic image: pornography in use within pornography. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.

“Plainly, she was a reprobate of experience”:

Female Sexual Deviants in Victorian Literature and Culture

In Thomas Hardy’s 1895 novel, *Jude*, Arabella Donn, “a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less” (33), strikes Jude Fawley with a pig’s penis as he walks past her. As a first encounter, this ominous “phallic slap” from Arabella carries with it serious consequences for Jude. Hardy writes:

On a sudden something smacked him sharply in the ear, and he became aware that a soft cold substance had been flung at him, and had fallen at his feet. A glance told him what it was—a piece of flesh, the characteristic part of a barrow-pig. (32-33)

In an interesting twist, it takes Jude getting hit in the head by a penis to really see “woman” for the first time. After he learns Arabella’s name, he ponders her, almost against his will. Hardy writes:

... Jude had never looked at a woman to consider her as such, but had vaguely regarded the sex as being outside his life and purposes. He gazed from her eyes to her mouth, thence to her bosom, and to her full round naked arms, wet, mottled with the chill of the water, and firm as marble. (35)

Despite his newly-formed ability to view women differently (or at all), he quickly understands the “nature of this girl” in thinking “it had been no vestal who chose *that* missile for opening her attack on him” (36). Advised by one of her crass female friends, Arabella is told that because Jude is a virgin, “he’s to be

had by any woman who can get him to care for her a bit, if she likes to set herself to catch him the right way'" (36). And Arabella does catch Jude.

Despite his tending "towards the embrace of a woman for whom he had no respect," Jude "descended so low as to keep company with Arabella," a woman described as "winning her game" (39). Arabella's friends coach her well in the ways of catching Jude in her game, and assure Arabella—through indirect suggestion and innuendo—that the best way to get a husband is through sexual manipulation. After she succeeds in seducing Jude, Arabella claims pregnancy. Hardy writes:

‘I haven't told you yet!’ and she looked into his face with streaming eyes.

‘What?’ he asked, turning pale. ‘Not ...?’

‘Yes! And what shall I do if you desert me?’

‘O Arabella—how can you say that, my dear! You *know* I wouldn't desert you!’... ‘Certainly we'll marry: we must!’ (48)

Arabella wins her game—despite her not being “worth a great deal as a specimen of woman kind”—because Jude is an “honest young man” who feels he must marry Arabella “in reparation of the wrong he had done his innocent sweetheart” (48). Of course, Arabella is far from innocent; in fact, she is actively duplicitous. When she sees one of her conspiratorial female friends after the wedding, and her friend inquires regarding her due date, Arabella tells her the pregnancy was all a sham, and that Jude will be glad to hear there is no baby. All that matters to Arabella is that “married is married” (50). Jude, however, is devastated by the levels of falseness he finds in his new bride: her false hair, her

barmaid past, and her “mistake” in thinking herself pregnant. Arabella flippantly tells Jude: “Women fancy wrong things sometimes” (51). These “wrong things” bring Jude no end of trouble throughout the rest of the novel.

Readers are meant to dislike Arabella Donn. Her intentional deception of Jude is sexually unsavory and emotionally cruel. Jude is not completely innocent, of course; though naive, *he* took a risk by having sex with Arabella. However, readers are supposed to “side” with Jude against Arabella and her scheming marriage plans. Coached and goaded on by her crudely-drawn female friends, Arabella did not act alone, but she does act from a position of female sexual knowledge, of female sexual knowingness. She takes control of the narrative of the sexual fall and turns it into *her* “successful” marriage story at the same time creating *Jude’s* fall. The consequences of Arabella’s sexual entrapment of Jude reverberate dismally throughout the rest of the novel. As a female character who exhibits and actively uses sexual knowledge, Arabella represents the worst of this knowledge, as she uses it in a duplicitous, deviant manner to her own selfish end, and at the expense of Jude’s dreams.

Arabella Donn’s literary sister in sexual duplicity could very well be the character of Amy Drake in George Gissing’s 1893 novel, *The Odd Women*. In the novel, well-off bachelor Everard Barfoot knows that his relatives might think him a “blackguard” because of a previous scandalous “affair,” but he has a specific defense against this labeling of his reputation. Speaking with his friend, Thomas Micklethwaite, Everard indicates: “I have a good mind to tell you the true story; I didn’t care to at the time. I accepted the charge of blackguardism; it didn’t matter much” (106). As a man of money and good reputation, Everard

could afford to have this nonchalant attitude. He shares with Micklethwaite the story of his relationship with Amy Drake, and, while he rather comfortably recognizes his own level of blame, he paints Amy Drake as actively shameless and depraved (which seems worse than his own brief indiscretion).

While staying in Upchurch with well-to-do philanthropic friends, the Goodalls, Everard meets Amy, who is “one of the girls in process of spiritualization” (107). As Everard explains:

“In the ordinary course of things I shouldn’t have met her, but she served in a shop where I went two or three times to get a newspaper; we talked a little—with absolute propriety on my part, I assure you—and she knew that I was a friend of the Goodalls. The girl had no parents, and she was on the point of going to London to live with a married sister.” (107)

In his own telling, Everard assures Micklethwaite of his propriety, but the added detail of Amy’s orphan status might indicate a girl in need of much spiritual or other guidance, possibly even more than the good Goodalls could provide. Everard and Amy Drake meet on the train to London, and Everard’s account is telling:

“Amy put herself in my way, so that I was obliged to begin talking with her. This behaviour rather surprised me. I wondered what Mrs. Goodall would think of it. But perhaps it was a sign of innocent freedom in the intercourse of men and women. At all events, Amy managed to get me into the same carriage with herself, and on the way to London we were alone. You foresee

the end of it. At Paddington Station the girl and I went off together, and she didn't get to her sister's till the evening." (107)

Clearly, this narrative is told through the lens of Everard and his defense, but Amy Drake may have acted aggressively in putting herself in Everard's way intentionally. Everard concedes the subjectivity of his narrative, but he also offers a more precise reading of Amy Drake and her level of "innocence."

Everard explains:

"Of course I take it for granted that you believe my account of the matter. Miss Drake was by no means the spiritual young person that Mrs. Goodall thought her, or hoped to make her; plainly, she was a reprobate of experience. This, you will say, doesn't alter the fact that I also behaved like a reprobate. No; from the moralists point of view I was to blame." (107)

However, his admission of blame is not given to prove her complete innocence.

He continues his story:

"Amy was not only a reprobate, but a rascal. She betrayed me to the people at Upchurch, and, I am quite sure, meant from the first to do so. Imagine the outcry. I had committed a monstrous crime—had led astray an innocent maiden, had outraged hospitality—and so on. Of course I must marry the girl forthwith. But of course I was determined to do no such thing.... I let the storm break upon me. I had been a fool, to be sure, and couldn't help myself. No one would have believed my plea—no one

would have allowed that the truth was an excuse. I was abused on all hands." (108)

Everard contends aggressive, intentional sexual agency on Amy Drake's part, but he also contends that no one would believe his claims that this "innocent maiden" actually "abused" *him*. Micklethwaite agrees that "every one knows there are detestable women to be found," and asks what became of Amy Drake. Everard answers, "I made her a small allowance for a year and a half. Then her child died, and the allowance ceased. I know nothing more of her. Probably she has inveigled some one into marriage'" (108).

Everard earlier states that he has "'been the victim of this groundless veneration for females'" (106), and, while it is hard to deny that his economic comfort, social privilege, and gender afford him power, it is not impossible to see that Amy Drake may have had her own design—her own game—in mind when she encountered Everard on that train to London. Unlike Arabella Donn, Amy Drake never gets to speak for herself, and this skews Everard's narrative, but, nevertheless, Amy Drake is not drawn as a likable character. That she may have been a spiritually or morally bankrupt young woman with (ultimately unsuccessful) devious sexual designs on a wealthy man is not presented as a positive use of female sexuality or female sexual knowledge. Indeed, in most mainstream Victorian fiction, female characters who intentionally or purposefully use sexuality or sexual knowledge, particularly in contrast to the expected stereotype of female innocence and ignorance, are not depicted in a favorable, positive, or sympathetic light. These are devious, unlikable women.

What is compelling, however, is that even female characters *meant* to be positive representations of the late-nineteenth century's changing sexual standards are often equally negatively judged and harshly punished for challenging the status quo. Alongside *Jude* and *The Odd Women*, various "New Woman" novels attempted to present a different type of female character more representative of the late-1880s and 1890s modern woman. In *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, Gail Cunningham highlights key paradigm shifts in womanhood during the end of the century. Cunningham explains the New Woman:

She could now elect to put her energies into professional rather than matrimonial achievement, and could justify her decision by pointing out that marriage, as conventionally defined, was a state little better than slavery. She could make her own choice about having children, either with or without the authority of a marriage license, and she could demand complete freedom from either parental or legal control in selecting her sexual partner.... she could opt for bachelor motherhood, or a career, or even, on a trivial level, short hair, comfortable clothes and a cigarette. Any of these, provided it was accompanied by stern pronouncements on its liberating effect, would be enough to label its perpetrator a New Woman. (10-11)

Her trivial and serious choices greatly expanded, the real-life New Woman actively challenged years of confinement and control. However, not all

fictional representations of this New Woman survive the challenge. As

Cunningham notes:

Heroines who refused to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued the feminist cause, became commonplace in the works of both major and minor writers and were firmly identified by readers and reviewers as New Women. (3)

Cunningham most importantly notes that a key component of the New Woman's "challenging and dangerous" thinking regarded female sexuality and a new sexual frankness in discussion and experience (2). Again, despite social and sexual advancement, fictional depictions of New Women still had trouble shaking free older narrative tropes and trappings adhering to restrictive standards of female behavior.

In Olive Schreiner's 1883 *The Story of an African Farm*, the progressive female character Lyndall offers several direct, strong statements voicing the New Woman paradigm shift. Lyndall claims: "I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot; and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies.... There are other women glad of such work'" (184). Clearly, Lyndall wants more than marriage and motherhood, but she finds the opportunities of female education even cannot provide enough of an alternative to these restrictive, maternal expectations; in fact, in Lyndall's estimation and experience, female education works to confine, not liberate, women and girls. Lyndall explains, "I have discovered that of all cursed places under the sun, where the

hungriest soul can hardly pick up a few grains of knowledge, a girls' boarding-school is the worst'" (185). She eloquently continues her critique:

"They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are. They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate. They are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question, 'Into how little space a human soul can be crushed?' I have seen some souls so compressed that they would have fitted into a small thimble, and found room to move there—wide room." (185-86)

Women's education is limiting, not expansive, and schools such as Lyndall describes encourage women to become little more than weak imbeciles.

Lyndall does not want to reduce the importance of wives and mothers, but she sees that a more rigorous fostering of intellect and broader cultural experience will only further strengthen women's contributions to humanity. Lyndall passionately voices her philosophy:

"But the woman who does woman's work needs a many-sided, multiform culture; the heights and depths of human life must not be beyond the reach of her vision; she must have knowledge of men and things in many states, a wide catholicity of sympathy, the strength that springs from knowledge, and the magnanimity which springs from strength. We bear the world, and we make it. The souls of little children are marvellously delicate and tender things, and keep for ever the shadow that first falls on them, and that is the mother's or at best a woman's. There was never a great

man who had not a great mother—it is hardly an exaggeration.

The first six years of our life make us; all that is added later is veneer; and yet some say, if a woman can cook a dinner or dress herself well she has culture enough." (193)

Lyndall advocates for emotionally and intellectually strong mothers, noting that kitchen skills and sartorial choices cannot be enough to "bear" the world.

Based on Lyndall's critical arguments revealing her intellectual depth, one would expect Schreiner to develop this New Woman character into the best representation of all that Lyndall ardently describes to others in the novel. Readers may expect to see her put this theory into action. They may want to see Lyndall become the woman free from a man's boot, free from children (or at least making an active choice where reproduction is concerned), or maybe raising a child (with a man, husband or not) in this new way she sees as far more beneficial to the human race. Yet, she does not become this character. Instead, the rest of Lyndall's story bears more resemblance to the classic fallen woman story line as opposed to the New Woman trajectory toward social and sexual independence. Lyndall toys with the affections of Gregory Rose—a good man who truly loves her—in order to make her "tall, blue-eyed Englishman" lover jealous (265). Lyndall is pregnant with her lover's child, and, while she refuses to marry him, she agrees to go away with him, thinking him to be the kind of man she truly wants but can never marry, as she "cannot be tied" to a man (239).

The implication is that while traveling together, Lyndall's man—referred to only as "the stranger"—has deserted her, as Lyndall shows up "alone to the

hotel in a waggon [sic], with only a coloured leader and driver" (269). From here, the narrative takes a tragic turn: "Eight days after a little baby had been born.... The baby was buried there. A tiny thing, only lived two hours, and the mother herself almost went with it" (269). Of course, Lyndall's vehement choice to remain unmarried is her own, but it's clear she felt her "stranger" would stand by her, regardless. After Gregory tracks her down (and disguises himself as a female nurse to attend her), the dying Lyndall poignantly speaks of her dead child and her disappointing stranger:

'It was so small,' she said; 'it lived such a little while—only three hours. They laid it close by me, but I never saw it; I could feel it by me.' She waited; 'Its feet were so cold; I took them in my hand to make them warm, and my hand closed right over them they were so little.' There was an uneven trembling in the voice. 'It crept close to me; it wanted to drink, it wanted to be warm.' She hardened herself—'I did not love it; its father was not my prince; I did not care for it; but it was so little.' (278)

Brought to her own death by a man she thought would be worthy of her unconventional love, and weakened by the devastating childbirth and death of their baby, Lyndall dies calling herself a "'weak, selfish, erring woman'" (279). This seems hardly a fitting end for—nor a fitting final comment from—a fictional New Woman who wants better, more liberating life choices for women. Lyndall, for all her progressive thinking and her unconventional desires, ends up as essentially a fallen, single, dead mother of a dead bastard child. It does not seem substantial enough to claim that her tragic end is powerful or

progressive merely because she chose it for herself. The narrative expectation of punishing any kind of female sexual deviance reads as unstoppable, even in the face of Lyndall's urfeminist philosophies and beliefs.

If Arabella Donn's devious literary sister is Amy Drake, then Lyndall's equally doomed sister in literary New Womanhood is Herminia Barton of Grant Allen's 1895 quintessential New Woman novel, *The Woman Who Did*.

Herminia, too, felt the limitations of women's education, and she left Girton before completing her studies. Her barrister soulmate, Alan Merrick, assesses that Herminia "wouldn't let [her] schooling interfere with [her] education" (60), and he was immediately struck upon meeting her by her glance and "its perfect air of untrammelled liberty" (56). The symbiotic, egalitarian relationship between Herminia and Alan represents the idealized New Woman male-female relationship arrangement: no marriage, separate lodgings, and children if they come. Allen writes of Herminia's thoughts on joining with Alan:

She would give her children, should any come, the unique and glorious birthright of being the only human beings ever born into this world as the deliberate result of a free union, contracted on philosophical and ethical principles. (90)

For Herminia, a free union is the only arrangement that will square with her politics, and, though Alan agrees with her views, he does urge Herminia to go to Italy with him during her confinement. Alan recognizes the troubling public scrutiny Herminia would face in London; Herminia goes to Italy out of love for Alan, not to avoid confronting the public with her out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

Before leaving for Italy, however, Alan is rejected by his titled, renowned physician father, Sir Anthony Merrick. His father never sees Alan alive again, as Alan contracts typhoid fever and dies before his amended will (favoring Herminia) is verified and before Herminia gives birth. Alan's father makes sure Herminia receives nothing from Alan's estate, and Herminia bears a daughter named Dolores Barton, for "in sorrow she had borne it; its true name was Dolores" (120). The child's name is fitting and ominous. Dolores was to be the "child who was to reform the world" (129), but in time Herminia doubted this assessment. Allen writes:

Herminia had reason to be dissatisfied with her daughter's development. Day by day she watched for signs of the expected apostolate. Was Dolores pressing forward to the mark for the prize of her high calling? Her mother half doubted it. Slowly and regretfully, as the growing girl approached the years when she might be expected to think for herself, Herminia began to perceive that the child of so many hopes, of so many aspirations, the child predestined to regenerate humanity, was thinking for herself—in a retrograde direction. (143)

The severity of this retrograde direction is what makes Dolores's commonplace thinking more than simply disappointing for Herminia. After demanding to know more about her dead father, Dolores learns of her illegitimacy and of being "robbed" of her aristocratic birthright. Allen captures Dolly's thoughts:

Dolly stood still and gasped. Hot horror flooded her burning cheeks. Illegitimate! illegitimate! Dishonoured from her birth!...

Born in shame and disgrace! And then, to think what she might have been, but for her mother's madness! The grand-daughter of two such great men in their way as the Dean of Dunwich and Sir Anthony Merrick! (157-58)

As the child meant to regenerate humanity, Dolores should have praised her strong mother who all alone struggled to raise her, rather than praising Sir Anthony Merrick who cruelly rejected Herminia and her child. Instead, Dolores feels particularly angered by her mother's actions because she fears her illegitimacy will compromise her engagement to a well-off, Oxford-educated, respectable gentleman, Walter Brydges. Dolores runs to her newly-discovered grandfather "to implore [his] protection" (160), and to try to salvage her reputation and her engagement. Though Sir Anthony Merrick rejected Dolores as a baby, he welcomes her now. Allen writes:

She was to come there at once as his adopted daughter; was to take and use the name of Merrick; was to see nothing more of that wicked woman, her mother; and was to be married in due time from Sir Anthony's house, and under Sir Anthony's auspices, to Walter Brydges. (162)

One would think Dolly's permanent name and address change would be enough to punish the "wicked" Herminia for choosing "bachelor motherhood," but Dolly also adds that she will not marry Walter while Herminia still lives. In their final meeting, Dolly tells her mother (163), "For, of course, while *you* live, I couldn't think of marrying him. I couldn't think of burdening an honest man with such a mother-in-law as you are!" That night, Herminia Barton commits

suicide by drinking poisonous prussic acid. The final line of the novel reads: “Herminia Barton’s stainless soul had ceased to exist for ever” (165). In the suicide note written to Dolores, Herminia explains to her daughter: “I thought you would grow up to feel as I did; I thought you would thank me for leading you to see such things as the blind world is incapable of seeing. There I made a mistake; and sorely I am punished for it” (164).

In the spirit of all that the New Woman represents, one would think Grant Allen would design the end of the novel differently. Ideally, Dolores would be proud of her mother’s choices, of her mother’s accomplishments as a single woman raising a strong daughter, and of her dedication to independence and meaningful work as a female journalist. Dolores would represent the regeneration of humanity in her dedication to egalitarianism and free unions, and her life and choices would only improve on those made by her free-thinking, intelligent parents. Instead, Dolores’s extremely retrograde behavior reinforces patriarchal power, reverts to old-guard systems of marriage and ceremony, and rejects any inkling of feminist thought or action. And Herminia, for all her steadfast New Woman ideology, tragically and melodramatically kills herself to ensure her daughter’s retrograde dreams come true.

Though Allen ultimately emphasizes Herminia’s “stainless soul,” the self-destruction of this quintessential New Woman character suggests that even the changing political and social landscape could not completely alter the pattern of punishing women’s sexually “deviant” behavior in mainstream fiction. Even the apparently ultimate fictional representation of New Womanhood could not survive her fictional representation as a New Woman, as Herminia

melodramatically commits suicide quite like an “Old Woman” would. Indeed, none of these four unconventional, sexually “deviant” female characters lives her best life—or reads as the best character—as a result of her sexual choices and behavior, whatever her reasons for this behavior. Each character is punished for her progressive sexuality or use of sexual knowledge in that she is forever trapped in a more retrograde narrative end. Sexual entrapment and false pregnancies. Real pregnancies and dead children. Ashamed children and suicidal mothers. These narrative features read as reminders that in the Victorian period fallenness and punishment for female sexual transgression were hard to overcome or resist, in fiction *and* in real life.

Even the numerous and highly compelling women’s stories collected during the nineteenth century at London’s Foundling Hospital reveal an insistent, similar narrative pattern. In Françoise Barret-Ducrocq’s *Love in the Time of Victoria*, he reproduces several narrative excerpts from fallen women seeking assistance at the hospital. Women often claimed that sexual violence, assault, or rape led to their out-of-wedlock pregnancy. One woman describes her rape by a barman. She explains:

... [he] came to my bed room at one o’clock in the morning in a drunken state and effected his purpose. My mistress was in the country. My master was below. I cried but was not heard... the morning after the occurrence he excused himself by saying he had had a drop too much. (qtd. in Barret-Ducrocq 47)

Women also often claimed that the “father” promised marriage. As one woman notes:

I met Father for the first time at Mr. Q., where Father lodged, whilst on a visit in the evening. Father came afterwards to my father's. A courtship ensued and he promised me marriage (this was known to my father and mother). (qtd. in Barret-Ducrocq 87)

Other women presumed that the father's attentions implied an unspoken promise to marry. As one woman explains, "He continuously said that he would never leave me. I believed he meant marriage," and yet another remarks, "In Oct. 1861, he seduced me—saying that if anything happened he would marry me" (qtd. in Barret-Ducrocq 101). Further, women also claimed that, when confronted, the father denied paternity: "When 3 months gone with child, I told him, but he did not believe it. Subsequently he said it was not his and told my Father so," and a letter from a male valet provides a sample denial when he writes, "I cannot think how or by who you came in the family way being quite sure it was not by me" (qtd. in Barret-Ducrocq 128). Each narrative excerpt reads like an excerpt from the pages of Victorian mainstream fallen women fiction. Innocent women plead ignorance or point to male promises—implied or given—of marriage. Women are sexually assaulted, and this violation has lasting and shameful effects for impregnated women, while male seducers claim too much drink or deny paternity entirely. And, ultimately, it is women who must address and discuss their fall, as they are burdened with far more than just the child that "proves" their sexual "deviancy." They are burdened with accepting the prescribed public narrative of fallenness.

Barret-Ducrocq clarifies that these narratives were collected "in a society which believed in the principle of sexual inequality, which made constant

allowance for the strength of sexual desire in men while questioning its very existence in women" (47). As such, the Foundling Hospital imposed strict requirements on women seeking assistance; the burden of proof was on the women. Barret-Ducrocq details:

The internal rules of the establishment required an unmarried mother wishing to place her child permanently, or for a limited period, to conform to certain criteria. She had to be able to show that her good faith had been betrayed, that she had given way to carnal passion only after a promise of marriage or against her will; that she therefore had no other children; and that her conduct had always been irreproachable in every other respect. She must also be without any sort of material aid. Finally, the child had to be under one year old. (40-41)

While Barret-Ducrocq concedes the narratives these possibly duplicitous and desperate women provided may contain a "whole mass of deliberate and involuntary distortions" (41), he also asserts that the administration "made systematic and exhaustive inquiries" into each woman's story in order to verify that she and her child met the required criteria (42).

However, not all scholars are quite as generous as Barret-Ducrocq in their assessment of the veracity of these narratives. In *Victorian Honeymoons*, Helena Michie offers a succinct critique of the Foundling Hospital's fallen woman narratives. Michie writes:

While some of the women's sexual experience must surely have taken this particular shape, the requirements of the hospital would

produce narratives that concurred with those requirements.

Inspectors from the Foundling Hospital would do their best to ferret out the “truth” of the matter, but the very existence of this dominant narrative would influence both inspectors and the women who came to the hospital for help. (n. 115)

Barret-Ducrocq, despite his generous reading of these narratives, actually reinforces Michie’s critical reading of the construction of these women’s stories when he writes: “Case after case, year after year, couple after couple, the Foundling Hospital committee tried to grasp the truth of a sexual and love experience *that was always the same, always a repetition of the last case*, but somehow original each time” (42 [emphasis added]). His final claim of narrative originality collapses under his previous contradictory claims of sameness and repetition in each woman’s story.

Ginger S. Frost, in *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class, and Gender in Victorian England*, thoroughly investigates and analyzes Victorian breach-of-promise legal cases. Frost finds evidence of men and women’s “mutual desire for intimacy” (100), also noting that though women in these legal cases “were certainly victims of fraud, they were not passive sexual partners” (103). However, because premarital sex involved sexual bargaining between unequal parties, Frost writes that most breach-of-promise cases came into being because of out-of-wedlock pregnancy (102-03). Upon their pregnancy, women were left by men who had either directly or implicitly promised marriage. Like the fallen woman Foundling Hospital narratives, court documents revealed the favoring of

the classic fallen woman narrative over the story of female sexual agency or desire. Frost explains:

Women who enjoyed sex and pursued it found juries largely unsympathetic to their claims for compensation. Indeed, the sources are mostly silent on this matter, since female plaintiffs tried to hide any sexual agency, fearing—correctly—that their cases would fail if they appeared assertive.... Any woman who had been openly sexually aggressive or who had some sexual experience did not receive the usual kindly response from the court. (108)

Ironically, in order to win her case, a sexually wronged and abandoned woman had to aggressively present her own passivity to the court; she had to fight to be seen as a victim. Frost explains that there were just two outcomes:

Though many of the courtships show a canny use of sexuality by women and indeed some enthusiasm, most men in the courtrooms could not fathom such ambiguity. To them, either the woman was a victim of male aggression and deserving, or she was sexually active and undeserving. (115)

In finding that most cases “show no extremes of sexual behavior,” Frost explains that “women walked a fine line between their desires and their prudence, making their sexual feelings necessarily ambiguous” (106). Despite this, however, her legally recorded narrative of fallenness insistently asserted her passivity.

No matter the true cause of her pregnancy—her pleasure, his desire, her deviousness, his seduction, his attack, his broken promises, her New Woman

ideology—the recorded, official cause must fit within the fallen woman narrative structure in order for her story to gain acceptable social meaning and earn her proper assistance, repentance, legal reward, or public punishment. However, this means she can only be helped if she casts herself as an innocent sexual victim led astray by an abandoning cad. As Michie rightfully notes, of course this *could* have been the true lived experience of some women; however, it is equally true that many of these women were required to write their sexual history in the style of the dominant fallen woman narrative simply because it was the only way they could publicly address—and get social or legal help for—their current state of unwed motherhood. To admit to sexual desire outside this framework of innocence and shame would have made her a “reprobate of experience” unworthy of sympathy or help. The dominant and dominating narrative of female fallenness and sexual victimization trumps women’s often more complex, ambiguous sexual truth.

In Diane D’Amico’s article, “‘Equal Before God’: Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of Highgate Penitentiary,” she points out:

In 1876, when arguing for a classification system, one advocate for reform made clear that there were different types of fallen women: “A girl who, in an unguarded moment, has gone astray through her affections, or one who has been a victim of deceit or violence—a girl who has never lived an immoral life... we throw... with the vilest and most degraded of her sex.” Clearly, a woman did not have to be the “vilest of her sex” to be considered fallen.

She need only have had sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

(69)

The truly fallen, totally profligate women were housed in Highgate Penitentiary alongside “good girls” gone briefly astray, in part, because “whether she had fallen once or many times would make little difference, since sexual experience outside of marriage, even if occurring only once, was believed by many to transform the woman into a ‘horrible’ specter” (69). As evidenced by the fallen woman narrative excerpts above, at institutions like the Foundling Hospital and Highgate Penitentiary, a woman’s entrance into the institution depended on her performance of a public “sexual confession” of her sins. As author Beth Kalikoff explains:

Clearly informed by the discourse of both criminal and Christian confession, the Victorian sexual confession resonates as the moment when the fallen woman is simultaneously penitent and criminal, caught between divine forgiveness and human punishment.... Victorian institutions demanded a full and preferably public account of a woman’s fall in order to mete out punishment and chasten the tempted. (100)

Calling on Bernd Weisbrod’s research on the London Foundling Hospital’s “questionnaire” for unwed mothers, Kalikoff notes that “petitioners were asked to reveal not only how often intercourse took place but in what rooms” (102). In an effort to both test and humiliate her, the institution could demand such intricate details of her “sexual confession,” for “in exchange for her personal secrets, she was given a new start” (102-03).

Directly connecting fictional and real-life performance, Kalikoff insightfully argues:

The applicant's confession was also a climactic scene in the theater of penitence produced by the London Foundling Hospital. The fallen woman was the drama's central figure, suggesting a conflation of two familiar characters of popular melodrama, the vulnerable heroine/victim and guilty sinner. (103)

Clearly, I could not agree more with Kalikoff's reading of this "theater of penitence": the forced sexual confessions of real women read like the painful stories confessed on the fictional pages of fallen women novels. However, Kalikoff's further elaboration on this point gives me pause. She continues to explain that "the theater of penitence was a sanctioned form of voyeurism, its confession a faint but disturbing echo of those so common in the rhetoric of first-person Victorian pornography" (103), and, in a final reiteration of this point, Kalikoff asserts that the public confession of a fallen woman's private sexual act evokes the pornographic "Victorian erotics of punishment" (110-11). While I understand Kalikoff connecting the forced public sexual confessions of fallen women with the often sadistic, lurid narratives in pornography, I find this narrow consideration of just *one* of the genre's themes rather limiting. A more critically thoughtful, broader consideration of Victorian pornography reveals its explicit cultural work in resisting casting all sexual women as vile or deviant, in actively encouraging protective female sexual education, and in purposefully *preventing* female fallenness.

“More sinned against than sinning”:

Female Fallenness in *Ruth*, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and *Esther Waters*

Regarding Elizabeth Gaskell’s tragic fallen heroine Ruth, Charlotte Brontë pointedly asks (xix): “Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?” Considering that even intelligent, outspoken, and purposefully sexually unconventional female characters like Lyndall and Herminia Barton cannot survive their alternative sexual narratives, the not-yet-sixteen-year-old “beautiful ignoramus” orphaned and seduced Ruth Hilton never had a chance at a triumphant end (75). Indeed, Ruth is so good, so innocent that she is destined to fall; her beauty is too tempting, her mind too weak, her age too young. She is an ideal target for seduction and, ultimately, destruction. In Gaskell’s 1853 novel *Ruth*, the eponymous heroine literally dies of typhus fever, but she truly dies because of actions never described in the novel. Readers shut up the book weeping over Ruth’s death because of all that remains unwritten in the white space between chapters four and five of the novel. Ruth’s sexual seduction and impregnation occur in this white space, so readers are not privy to her sexual experiences, whatever they may have been. We do not know if she felt joy or pleasure or pain or confusion; the only thing we can know for certain is that sexual intercourse occurred and Ruth became pregnant. These narrative facts are simultaneously unnecessary to record and the only narrative facts that matter; the rest of the novel depends on this white space. Though Ruth’s sexual experiences were not detailed for readers, at the time of publication the novel was described as “not a book for young people, unless

read with somebody older” (ix). Apparently, someone older was supposed to fill-in the blanks for those unable to read the unwritten.

Orphaned at the age of twelve—on the eve of puberty—, Ruth is eventually apprenticed as a seamstress in Mrs. Mason’s house, where, at night, she cries in her sleep for her dead mother. At fifteen years of age, Ruth’s lack of guidance and education are revealed in her naive manner. When another young seamstress comments that Ruth is pretty, Ruth replies, “Yes! I know I am pretty” (12). This exhibition of presumptuous vanity prompts a telling exchange:

“Did you hear Ruth Hilton say she knew she was pretty?”
whispered one girl to another, so loudly that Ruth caught the words.

“I could not help knowing,” answered she, simply, “for many people have told me so.” (12)

It is hard to fault Ruth’s logical response, but her thought process points to her “simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child” rather than to cleverness or wit (33). The loss of her parents, especially her mother, reverberates in Ruth’s ignorance. Gaskell writes:

She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the* subject of a woman’s life—if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words—which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognized and

realized its existence. Ruth was innocent and snow-pure. She had heard of falling in love, but did not know the signs and symptoms thereof; nor, indeed, had she troubled her head much about them. (44)

So, when the twenty-three year-old gentleman, Henry Bellingham, meets the snow-pure Ruth while she works as a seamstress at a dance, she clearly does not understand the possible sexually destructive designs he has on her. He is bewitched by her innocence and beauty, and he eventually persuades her to visit her much-missed hometown with him "as a brother" (42). During this visit, an old family friend, Thomas, can see through Henry's façade of "brotherly" affection for Ruth. Gaskell explains that Thomas "longed to give [Ruth] a warning of the danger that he thought she was in, and yet he did not know how" (50), and he exclaims aloud, "I'm afraid she's treading in perilous places" (51). She is, as the text ominously indicates: "Ruth went on her way, all unconscious of the dark phantoms of the future that were gathering around her" (51). Almost immediately after this foreboding gathering of dark phantoms, Ruth runs into Mrs. Mason, who sees her with Bellingham and recognizes him as a former client. Even before Ruth actually falls, Mrs. Mason judges her as such: "'Don't attempt to show your face at my house again after this conduct. I saw you, and your spark too. I'll have no slurs on the character of my apprentices. Don't say a word. I saw enough'" (54-55). What Mrs. Mason "sees" is more important than the complex truth of Ruth's situation with Henry.

Fired from her apprenticeship, Ruth is even more vulnerable than before, and Henry takes full advantage of her distress. He soothes Ruth with talk of her

coming with him to London: "My darling, I cannot leave you here without a home.... You must come with me, love, and trust me" (56). Gaskell pointedly writes:

Still, she did not speak. Remember how young, and innocent, and motherless she was! It seemed to her as if it would be happiness enough to be with him; and as for the future, he would arrange and decide for that. (56)

Henry's passive-aggressive haranguing of the motherless Ruth is relentless (57): "Will you not come with me? Do you not love me enough to trust me? Oh, Ruth' (reproachfully), 'can you not trust me?'" Henry persists:

"Say, yes—say it ever so low, but give me the delight of hearing it. Ruth, say yes."

Low and soft, with much hesitation, came the "Yes"; the fatal word of which she so little imagined the infinite consequences. The thought of being with him was all and everything. (58)

Ruth's fatal "yes" leads to the white space between chapters four and five, and the "being with him" readers are allowed to see regards Henry finding Ruth a "stupid" partner for cards (66). The omission of her sexual initiation indicates that the possibly less-stupid sexual partnering is not as consequential as the public judgment Ruth soon learns will henceforth mark her character.

Ruth may be "stupid" in some ways, but she is gaining newfound knowledge in the treatment of the fallen, even before she learns of her pregnancy. At the inn where Henry and Ruth stay in Wales, Ruth leans down to

kiss a baby, and the baby's older brother "hit Ruth a great blow on the face" (71). After getting scolded by his nurse, the child exclaims, "'She's not a lady! She's a bad naughty girl—mamma said so, she did; and she shan't kiss our baby'" (71). The nurse, embarrassed by the child's scene, tries to apologize, but Ruth understands the public judgment that she will now face, regardless of the truth of her circumstances. Gaskell writes that Ruth stood "white and still, with a new idea running through her mind.... She could not put into words the sense she was just beginning to entertain of the estimation in which she was henceforward to be held" (72-73). Despite her initial innocence and lack of guidance, she will be publicly shamed and judged as sexually deviant or suspect.

No one exhibits this judgment more than Mrs. Bellingham, Henry's protective mother, who comes to Wales upon Henry contracting "a brain fever" (78). She finds him in ill health, and with Ruth; it is clear which fact of the previous two she finds more distressing. As Mrs. Bellingham's only child, Henry could do no wrong; she ignored rumors about his serious offenses in college (32). There to protect her ailing son, Mrs. Bellingham offers a sharp reading of Ruth when she first meets her. Gaskell details:

But her quick, proud mind understood it all in an instant. This was the girl, then, whose profligacy had led her son astray; had raised up barriers in the way of her favourite scheme of his marriage with Miss Duncombe; nay, this was the real cause of his illness, his mortal danger at this present time, and of her bitter, keen anxiety. (85)

Briefly, Henry defends Ruth against his mother's attacks, but exhausted by having to fight her, he quickly gives in to his mother's wishes. Henry says, "Ruth has not been so much to blame as you imagine, that I must say; but I do not wish to see her again, if you can tell me how to arrange it otherwise, without behaving unhandsomely" (90). Henry finds his situation with Ruth an "annoyance" and a source of his "uneasiness," and his mother is only too happy to get rid of a girl who led her son "wrong with her artifices" (90-91). In Mrs. Bellingham's view, Ruth is rather like the characters of Arabella Donn and Amy Drake: scheming, conniving, sexually crafty women who intentionally try to trap men worth catching. Clearly, this does not describe Ruth. She is neither clever nor smart enough to entrap Henry Bellingham, and this, too, makes her easy to abandon.

However, Ruth's abandonment is decidedly less horrible precisely because she almost immediately receives help from a Dissenting minister, Thurstan Benson, who meets her in Wales. Having seen Ruth before, and guessing at her situation with Henry, Thurstan recognizes Ruth when he finds her most likely attempting to drown herself after Henry has left her. At this point, neither she nor Thurstan suspect she is pregnant, but her respectability is questionable because of her well-known relationship with Henry. With the help of his sister, Faith, Thurstan decides to help this unfortunate girl, even after they discover that she is pregnant. Faith is hesitant, as they may have privately known Ruth's "error" before, but pregnancy is a public "disgrace" worn "like a badge of shame" (119). However, Ruth, upon learning she is to have a baby, thanks God and promises (118), "Oh! I will be so good!" Ruth finds that "the

strange, new, delicious prospect of becoming a mother seemed to give her some mysterious source of strength" (126). Ruth's inherently good demeanor—despite this unavoidable evidence of sin—convinces Thurstan and Faith to pass her off as a recently widowed distant relative. The Bensons give her a new name, a respectable identity, a place to have and raise her son, economic support, and assistance in securing work as a governess. Ruth is clearly unlucky in romance, but she is extremely lucky in her situation with the kind, understanding, and supportive Bensons.

Yet, for all her supposed good fortune, Ruth constantly calls herself "bad" and doubts her role in raising her own son and being a fit governess for children. Ruth notes, "I may be pretty, but I know I am not good" (187). She may, for much of the novel, avoid the shameful public gaze while posing as the widow Mrs. Denbigh, but she certainly judges herself harshly in light of her sexual indiscretion with Henry. This feeling is only further heightened when, by chance, Henry Bellingham comes back into her life. If he finds the former Ruth Hilton is now a respectable widow and governess named Mrs. Denbigh, then she finds the former Henry Bellingham is now a politician named Mr. Donne. His named changed because of a property inheritance, but each of them quickly recognizes the other. When Ruth resists his attempts at private or discreet conversation, he chastises her: "'You are unforgiving,' said he. 'I only ask you to hear me. I have a right to be heard, Ruth! I won't believe you are so much changed, as not to listen to me when I entreat'" (284).

Despite her continued resistance to talk with him about their past, Henry learns of their son, Leonard, and when Ruth refuses to discuss her son with

Henry, he calls Ruth a “revengeful little creature” (296). Yet, shortly after this, still captivated by Ruth’s beauty, he professes his love for her and his intentions to provide for both her and Leonard. In Ruth’s strongest and fiercest moment, she reveals:

“Listen to me!” said Ruth, now that the idea of what he proposed had entered her mind. “When I said that I was happy with you long ago, I was choked with shame as I said it. And yet it may be a vain, false excuse that I make for myself. I was very young; I did not know how such a life was against God’s pure and holy will—at least, not as I know it now; and I tell you truth—all the days of my years since I have gone about with a stain on my hidden soul—a stain which made me loathe myself, and envy those who stood spotless and undefiled; which made me shrink from my child—from Mr Benson, from his sister, from the innocent girls whom I teach—nay, even I have cowered away from God Himself; and what I did wrong then, I did blindly to what I should do now if I listened to you.” (299)

Henry asks Ruth to marry him, but, again, she resists him and claims she does not love him, if once she did. Pointing to his life of relative comfort and thoughtless ease, she explains:

“We are very far apart. The time that has pressed down on my life like brands of hot iron, and scarred me for ever, has been nothing to you. You have talked of it with no sound of moaning in your voice—no shadow over brightness of your face; it has left no

sense of sin on your conscience, while me it haunts and haunts;
and yet I might plead that I was an ignorant child—only I will not
plead anything, for God knows all.” (302-03)

In Ruth’s estimation, Henry has not been plagued by guilt and shame and sin, externally or internally. When, through gossip, Ruth’s story of unwed motherhood (Henry is not implicated as the father) becomes well-known to her current community, her first concern is Leonard and his reputation, not the public announcement of Mr. Henry Donne as the ruinous father. Ruth wishes to continue to bear the weight of the scandal, and spare her son Leonard any and all pain: “Let the shame fall on me! I have deserved it, but he—he is so innocent and good” (340). Ruth tells Leonard, “When I was very young, I did very wrong... in a way people never forget, never forgive. You will hear me called the hardest names that ever can be thrown at women” (343). Her employer, Mr. Bradshaw, hurls the worst at her, and forces her to lose her post as governess for his children. According to Mr. Bradshaw, Ruth’s destiny, as a “fallen and depraved” woman, is determined, for “the world has decided how such women are to be treated” (350-51). Her private “stain” exposed, Ruth must now face harsh public judgment.

Like the fictional female characters of “silly modern novels” Oscar Wilde’s Mrs. Erlynne so clearly calls disingenuous, Ruth becomes a self-sacrificing martyr: first, as a sick nurse, tending to “the roughest boys of the roughest populace of the town” (391), and, then, as a “matron to the fever-ward” after an outbreak of typhus fever hits the region (425). Her selfless nursing of the sick allows Leonard to hold his head high in a community who

comes to respect the fallen, depraved Ruth through her beneficent deeds. In some of Gaskell's most dramatic prose, she explains: "it was she who had gone voluntarily, and, with no thought of greed or gain, right into the very jaws of the fierce disease" (430). But, Ruth does not merely die a tragic death by catching typhus herself; she catches the fatal fever from Henry, whom she learns is ill and whom she fights to nurse back to health. Rushing to the ill Mr. Donne's side, Ruth authoritatively and effectively calms his fevered behavior, charms him, and hushes his "mad talk" (443). She saves her seducer, her abandoner, only to die herself, as he infects her with his disease.

Charlotte Brontë's question asking why Ruth had to die seems to need further clarification: "Why did Ruth have to die by sacrificing herself to save the man who caused her fall?" I weep in the end of the novel not merely because Ruth dies, but because she dies in the service of saving the life of a cad. In the ultimate example of fallen woman martyrdom, the innocent and wronged Ruth believes herself to be so bad, so sinful that she deserves to die in order to save the man who caused her ruin, and to ensure the good reputation of her son. The more the town respects her sacrifice, the more they respect Leonard. In the end, Thurstan Benson—who figures out Henry is Leonard's abandoning father—rejects and attempts to shame the recovering Henry Bellingham/Mr. Donne for thinking he can merely offer money to cover the expense of Ruth's death and account for his "youthful folly" (453). Henry's final thoughts reveal his character best, as he reacts to Thurstan's rejection of his money: "An ill-bred, puritanical old fellow! He may have the boy, I am sure, for aught I care. I have done my duty, and will get out of this abominable place as soon as I can. I

wish my last remembrance of my beautiful Ruth was not mixed up with all these people” (454). In his final comments, Henry insults Thurstan, the only man who truly stood by and supported Ruth; he casually tosses away his son, Leonard; calls the town and its people abominable; and rejects those who ultimately embraced the fallen, beautiful, and selfless Ruth.

Decades later, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* author Thomas Hardy may offer some further insight to his own fallen character Tess, but also on female fallenness and the unrelenting, “fated” narrative ends expected for the fallen in general. In the end of Hardy’s novel, the fallen Tess is hanged for the murder of her seducer, Alec d’Urberville. Unlike Henry Bellingham, Alec is “punished” by death through Tess’s vengeance, but Tess, then, must be publicly destroyed in the name of justice. She dies as a sinful, violent criminal; Alec dies as a passive victim. In an 1892 interview, just after the 1891 publication of the novel, the interviewer sounds rather like Charlotte Brontë when he asks Hardy why he gave *Tess* “so sad an ending” (388). Hardy replies at length:

“For the simple reason... that I could not help myself. I hate the optimistic grin which ends a story happily, merely to suit conventional ideas. It raises a far greater horror in me than the honest sadness that comes after tragedy. Many people wrote to me begging to end it well. One old gentleman of eighty implored me to reconcile Tess and Angel. But I could not. They would never have lived happily. Angel was too far fastidious and particular. He would inevitably have thrown her fall in her face. But indeed I had little or nothing to do with it. When I got to the

middle of the story the characters took their fates into their own hands, and I literally had no power.... Besides... don't you see that by her violent death poor Tess makes some reparation for her sins, and so justice is satisfied. I can assure you many of my feminine readers feel that very strongly.'" (388)

Like the "dark phantoms of the future" that gathered ominously around Ruth (51), the tragic end of the fallen Tess is fated instead of controlled, even by the author of the novel. Hardy may hate manufactured happy endings designed to serve convention, but he relinquishes all authorial agency when writing (or merely recording?) a fallen woman narrative. Though much is made of Hardy's provocative subtitle, *A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented*, his stated lack of power in determining and presenting Tess's "purity" should give readers pause. By naming Tess's inevitable end as out of his control—and preferred by his female readers, especially—, Hardy reveals the unstoppable juggernaut of the fallen woman narrative, no matter the subtitle.

Like Ruth, Tess is a beautiful young girl, and "her bouncing handsome womanliness" (8) might make her appear a bit older than her actual age. Tess's clothing "imparted to her developing figure an amplitude which belied her age, and might cause her to be estimated as a woman when she was not more than a child" (35). Her age is not properly given at the outset of the narrative, but, based on future references to her age (post-fall), she has to be about sixteen or seventeen when the novel begins. Unlike Ruth, however, Tess does have some formal education, as she "passed the sixth standard in the National school" (12), and, despite still having the benefit of her mother's guidance, Tess more than

once mentions her mother's child-like level of intelligence. In a curiously poignant comment about her mother's reproductive history, Hardy writes that Tess "felt quite a Malthusian towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them. Her mother's intelligence was that of a happy child" (26). This short passage connects a lack of intelligence and education with Joan Durbeyfield's rampant reproduction. When Tess feels inordinately guilty about causing the death of the family horse, Prince, she feels she has no choice but to follow her mother's advice to appeal to their d'Urberville "relatives," who, unbeknownst to Tess's family, have purchased the name, and are not blood relatives at all. Joan Durbeyfield sees a marriage opportunity for Tess in appealing to these relatives, but Tess sees the situation in other terms. Hardy writes:

She had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise. Being mentally older than her mother she did not regard Mrs Durbeyfield's matrimonial hopes for her in a serious aspect for a moment. The light-minded woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth. (35)

At the home of these "relatives," Tess encounters Alec d'Urberville, who sees that his "coz" (cousin) had "a luxuriance of aspect, a fulness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was" (30). Tess accepts a job taking care of the birds at the d'Urberville estate in Trantridge, in part because she feels she has no choice but to work to provide for her family, as she intensely blames herself as the "murderess" of the family's horse. Despite

her resistance to Alec's advances, Tess is worn down by his pursuit. Though Hardy offers more than the white space Gaskell provides, his description of the "seduction" is still suggestion instead of detail. After Alec intentionally leads Tess astray while driving her home late one night, Alec either rapes or seduces a vulnerable Tess, who may feel she has no other option but to relent, regardless of the level of Alec's force. The narrator asks, "where was Tess's guardian angel?" as she is unprotected from Alec's desires (57). The "sex scene" Hardy offers is as follows:

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time.... As Tess's own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: "It was to be." There lay the pity of it. An immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm. (57-58)

Whether it is due to the lack of a guardian angel, retribution for her ancestors' past assaults, or unstoppable fate, her sexual encounters with Alec not only reaffirm her distaste for him, but also impregnate her. Alec leaves her before this fact is confirmed, but he indicates that "if certain circumstances should arise" he will provide whatever she requires (60).

Forever one to blame herself, however, Tess finds more fault in her own behavior, and less in Alec's. After returning home to her parents, Tess's mother chastises her for not getting Alec to marry her. But Tess thinks:

He marry *her*! On matrimony he had never once said a word. And what if he had? How a convulsive snatching at social salvation might have impelled her to answer him she could not say. But her poor foolish mother little knew her present feelings towards this man. Perhaps it was unusual in the circumstances, unlucky, unaccountable; but there it was; and this, as she had said, was what made her detest herself. She had never wholly cared for him, she did not at all care for him now. She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away. (64)

In a rare moment of casting blame elsewhere, Tess does harshly critique the gaps in her education, and extends the blame for this gap to her mother. Tess's

mother scolds (64), “You ought to have been more careful, if you didn’t mean to get him to make you his wife!” But Tess fervently replies:

“O mother, my mother!” cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. “How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o’ learning in that way, and you did not help me.” (64)

In Tess’s reading of her situation, she sees that novels—given to her by her mother—might have helped her understand how and why to protect herself against the dangers of “men-folk.” Had she gained this specialized knowledge through reading, she may have avoided succumbing blindly to Alec’s advances. Tess finds fault in her mother for pushing her toward marriage without explicitly offering the knowledge she needed to protect herself from falling.

While pregnant, and soon after her sickly baby boy is born, Tess does what she can to assuage her guilt and blame, and she works to make herself seem happy. Indeed, Hardy even implies Tess understands that the social construction of fallenness should not overdetermine her misery. Hardy writes:

If she tried to be cheerful, to dismiss all care, to take pleasure in the daylight, the flowers, the baby, she could only be this idea to them—“Ah, she bears it very well.” Moreover, alone in a desert

island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly. If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her great despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein. Most of her misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (71)

After Tess herself baptizes the child named Sorrow, he dies. Hardy explains, “so passed away Sorrow the Undesired—that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature who respects not the social law” (75), and, with the passing of her child, “almost at a leap Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman” (77).

As this new complex woman with a hidden, troubling past, Tess struggles with her engagement to Angel Clare, a good man who loves Tess deeply and knows nothing of her sexual fall and dead child. Tess’s mother urges her to tell nothing of her history to Angel: “on no account do you say a word of your bygone Trouble to him” (150). Yet, Tess worries that her story will be found out, and she will look as if she has deceived Angel. She writes him a note explaining all, but as it is slipped under a door, the note remains unfound under Angel’s rug. So close to the wedding, Tess cannot bring herself to give Angel the note, so she finds it under the rug and destroys it. On her wedding night—the night she should enjoy with her legitimate husband—Angel confesses to her that he has had a previous dalliance with a woman. Tess,

feeling Angel's confession makes them alike, also tells him her story. Angel is shocked by what he hears, and when Tess asks if he can forgive her, he replies:

"O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person: now you are another. My God—how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque—prestidigitation as that!" (179)

Before Angel's eyes, Tess has magically transformed into another kind of woman entirely. When Tess protests, "Angel, Angel: I was a child—a child when it happened! I knew nothing of men," he replies, "You were more sinned against than sinning, that I admit" (182). Still, Angel cannot bear to be with this transformed version of Tess, and he travels to Brazil, while Tess returns to her family. They agree not to contact each other until he comes for her.

While Tess waits for Angel, however, she encounters the newly-reformed Alec d'Urberville, who is shocked to learn of Tess's past "Trouble." Hardy writes:

"Tess... yours was the very worst case I ever was concerned in. I had no idea of what had resulted till you told me. Scamp that I was, to foul that innocent life. The whole blame was mine; the whole unconventional business of our time at Trantridge.... what a blind young thing you were as to possibilities! I say in all earnestness that it is a shame for parents to bring up their girls in such dangerous ignorance of the gins and nets that the wicked may set for them." (247)

As in the case of Henry Bellingham, Alec d'Urberville also lived his life without any knowledge of the fall he caused to the young woman who bore his son.

Ironically, Alec comments on the need for parents to educate young girls in the duplicitous ways of seducers; he now laments the “dangerous ignorance” that allowed him to ruin Tess’s life. Yet, this supposedly reformed Alec also actively convinces Tess that her legitimate husband, Angel, will never come back for her, and that Tess should join with Alec instead. Tess writes an impassioned letter to Angel, desperately requesting he come home. She receives no reply, and this further convinces her that Alec is right.

When Angel does, in fact, come home to Tess, he finds her posing as Alec’s wife in a resort town. He recognizes he has judged her too harshly, but Tess laments that it is “too late!” over and over again (298). Feeling duped again by Alec, Tess confronts him and says, “you had used your cruel persuasion upon me.... you did not stop using it—no—you did not stop!...and you said my husband would never come back—never; and you taunted me, and said what a simpleton I was to expect him” (300). In her fury, Tess stabs and kills Alec, for he is the one who kept her from “the one man on earth who had loved her purely, and who had believed in her as pure” (304). After the murder, Angel and Tess spend a few days on the lam, but Tess’s freedom ends after a significant final night of sleep on the altar stone at Stonehenge. Like a fated sacrifice, Tess’s altar slumber reads as an ominous foreshadowing of her execution. At her death, Hardy writes, “the President of the Immortals... had ended his sport with Tess” (314). The final line reinforces Hardy’s assertion that Tess’s narrative trajectory of fatal fallenness is out of his, or any mortal’s, control.

Set against the world of horse racing and betting, George Moore’s 1894 fallen woman novel *Esther Waters* is a novel about risk and ruin for both men

and women. Upon gaining work as a cook at the racing-dependant estate, Woodview, the twenty-year-old Esther thinks:

She had heard of racecourses as shameful places where men were led to their ruin, and betting she had always understood to be sinful, but in this house no one seemed to think of anything else. It was no place for a Christian girl. (21)

For men, however, this racing world of ruin is based on chance and odds in betting, and several grand fortunes are made and lost and made again throughout the narrative. Esther, on the other hand, often alludes to some mysterious prescribed fate that has already determined her life. At one point, Esther claims “she had no luck” (225), and while in a stupor during her confinement, she thinks the nurses are involved in “a conspiracy against her life” (124). Further, sounding a bit like Hardy, Esther “sighed, and felt once again that her will was overborne by a force which she could not control or understand” (237).

If she feels she cannot control her story, she certainly knows her tale of woe well enough to see it repeated in the lives of those around her. While out walking, Esther observes that “she could pick out the servant-girls. Their stories were her story. Each and all had been deserted; and perhaps each had a child to support” (177). Just after the birth of her son, Jackie, Esther sees young lovers on the train, and she longs to warn them: “the lovers that sat with their arms about each other on every seat were of Esther’s own class. She would have liked to have called them round her and told them her miserable story, so that

they might profit by her experience" (119). When her seducer-cum-deserter comes back into her life and wants to marry her, they share this exchange:

'You deserted me.'

'Why go back on that old story?'

'It ain't an old story, it's the story of my life, and I haven't come to the end of it yet.' (235)

Of course, the fallen woman story is an old one—one even Esther sees repeated in the lives of other women just like her—but, in this moment, she owns it as the story of *her* life. In so doing, she offers some hope that despite her lack of luck or control over her circumstances, she may come to a better end than the martyred, diseased Ruth and the executed murderess Tess.

Esther is young, religious, and while not unattractive, she, unlike Ruth and Tess, is not described as a lavish and arresting beauty. Moore describes her, instead, as "firmly built with short, strong arms and a plump neck that carried a well-turned head with dignity. Her well-formed nostrils redeemed her somewhat thick, fleshy nose, and it was a pleasure to see her grave, almost sullen, face light up with sunny humour; for when she laughed a line of almond-shaped teeth showed between red lips" (1). She holds a basic, religious philosophy as her guiding one: "the simplest human sentiments were abiding principles in Esther—love of God, and love of God in the home" (33). She sees smoking and drinking as "wicked and dangerous" (33), and she is extremely sensitive to any insult to her religious beliefs (21). In short, she enters her position at Woodview, this house of racing and potential ruin, as a good, religious girl.

At the train station, before she even gets to Woodview, Esther meets her future seducer, William Latch. His mother is the head cook at Woodview, and Esther will work for her, learning to cook for the Barfield family. William sees the bundles of books Esther carries with her, and asks if she is fond of reading, but she avoids the question, "for she could not read" (5). Esther's fellow houseworkers quickly guess that despite all her books, she cannot read, and "suffocated with shame," Esther retreats to her room to look at her bundle of books (22). Moore writes: "And she turned them over, wondering what were the mysteries that this print held from her" (22). Readers are informed almost immediately that the reason Esther cannot read is because of her lecherous stepfather. Esther's own father died when she was ten, and, after her mother remarried, "the cradle was never empty" (23). Echoes of Tess's situation reverberate here, as Esther becomes a kind of second mother to the many children her mother continues to bear. Moore describes:

But her great care was for her poor mother, who had lost her health, whose blood was impoverished by constant child-bearing, and mother and daughter were often seen in the evenings, one with a baby at her breast, the other with an eighteen months' old child in her arms. Esther did not dare leave her mother; and to protect her against her stepfather she gave up school, and this was why she had never learnt how to read. (24)

When Esther is seventeen, her stepfather forces her into service in various lodging-houses. Shortly thereafter, he tells her to "'Go to hell for all I care. Do you 'ear me? Get out!" (26), and the text further explains that "Esther did not

move—words, then blows. Her escape from her stepfather seemed a miracle” (26). As a young girl, Esther’s education is interrupted by the rampant sexuality of her stepfather—the same violent stepfather who abuses her and forces her into a life of service. When the mistress of Woodview, Mrs. Barfield, learns of Esther’s illiteracy, she attempts to teach her how to read, “but Esther did not make much progress,” in part because her education is once again interrupted by the sexual intrusion of a man (31). This time, though, it is Esther, not her mother, who becomes pregnant.

Moore offers readers far more than Gaskell’s “white space sex” and Hardy’s allusions to medieval rapists, but even this description of Esther’s first sexual encounter requires filling in the blanks. William and Esther have been walking out together over several nights, but on the night of a party celebrating an eventful derby, Esther lets herself drink and dance a bit too much. Moore writes:

... they often lay together talking of love and marriage, till one evening, putting his pipe aside, William threw his arm round her, whispering that she was his wife. The words were delicious in her fainting ears. She could not put him away, nor could she struggle with him, though she knew that her fate depended upon her resistance, and swooning away she awakened in pain, powerless to free herself. (73)

The word “wife” is the delicious, seductive term that allows her to give in to his advances—advances that result in Esther’s first-time-intercourse sexual pain. Though William promises to marry her as soon as he has either earned or won

enough money, the religious Esther wants William first to repent his “sin” of having sex with her before she will agree to marry him, money or no money (76-77). He does not repent, and instead turns his affections and attentions to another woman he proposes to marry. Esther, “seeing blood,” rushes at him with a knife, but Mrs. Latch stops her before she can do William any harm (81). Unlike Tess, Esther tries but does not succeed in stabbing and killing her seducer.

William deserts her, leaves Woodview, and marries another woman. Upon discovering her pregnancy, Esther thinks of her immutable destiny:

The truth was borne in upon her; she foresaw the drama that awaited her, from which nothing could free her, which she would have to live through hour by hour. And it seemed so dreadful that she thought her brain must give way. She would have to leave Woodview. Oh, the shame of confession! (85)

And confess she must, and does. She tells her mistress, Mrs. Barfield, that she “should have starved or gone and drowned herself” (88). When Mrs. Barfield asks whether this pregnancy was her fault, Esther confesses: “It is always a woman’s fault, ma’am. But he should not have deserted me as he did—that’s the only thing I reproach him with; the rest was my fault—I shouldn’t have touched that second glass of ale.... He told me he loved me, and would make me his wife—that’s how it was” (89). Mrs. Barfield, believing that Esther truly does feel her sin, writes her a good character reference so that she may find decent employment after the baby is born.

Forced to return to her family home, Esther finds her weary mother pregnant again, and her judgmental stepfather as cruel as ever. When Esther confesses her loss of position and her pregnancy, her stepfather says, “The goody-goody sort are the worst. So she ‘as got ‘erself into trouble! Well, she’ll ‘ave to get ‘erself out of it.... We want no bastards ‘ere” (106-07). The only way he will allow Esther to stay is if she pays for her lodging, and this begins the intricate economic calculations that dominate Esther’s future narrative. Having left Woodview with just twelve pounds to her name, Esther protects fiercely the money she has, for she knows what she will need to support herself and her child once he is born. However, Esther’s economic struggle is often of the “one step forward, two steps back” variety, as she is constantly placed in increasingly difficult, unwinnable economic situations.

After Esther’s son is born, Esther’s sister Jenny visits her in the hospital only to tell her that their mother and her baby have both died. The stepfather and the other children are emigrating to Australia, but Jenny, as she is not a “blood child” of the stepfather, needs two pounds to pay for her own passage. Esther, against her best judgment and numerous protestations, gives Jenny the money, only because the hospital matron promises to get Esther good-paying work as a wet-nurse. However, Esther’s foray into the world of wet-nursing proves financially disastrous, and the placing of her own son out to wet-nurse with a vile and duplicitous woman almost proves fatal to young Jackie. Esther struggles through seventeen-hour days of washing, scrubbing, and cooking for low wages, only to have employers eventually find out about her unwed motherhood, and let her go because “there are plenty of good girls who want a

situation as much as she. I don't see why we should harbour loose women when there are so many deserving cases" (171). Esther even resorts to the workhouse. Of course Ruth works as a governess, and Tess certainly labours as a dairymaid and farm worker, but Esther's economic struggles as a fallen woman are both more intricately detailed and of more consequence to the raising of her son. Ruth's Leonard is always comfortably provided for, and Tess's Sorrow dies as an infant. Esther painstakingly budgets her limited funds in the service of providing the bare minimum for Jackie, with little to no consideration for her own needs or desires. When Esther finally finds a good situation that meets her economic needs, her employer, the single woman and writer Miss Rice, hears her history and remarks, "A very sad story—just such a story as happens every day. But you have been punished, you have indeed" (184).

Esther often states that a woman's fall is her own fault, but even she agrees she has been extensively punished for her sin. When she meets a preacher, Fred Parsons, he asks her to marry him, but he wants to know if she has repented for her past sin. Esther replies, "I should think I had, and been punished, too, enough for a dozen children" (190). However, before she has a chance to marry Fred, William Latch shows up, separated from his unfaithful wife and surprised to learn that he and Esther have a son. Feeling that overwhelming sense of destiny, Esther again laments: "Never had she felt more certain that misfortune was inherent in her life, and remembering all the trouble she had had, she wondered how she had come out of it alive; and now, just as things seemed like settling, everything was going to be upset again" (201).

Esther is irritated greatly by William's return, not only because it disrupts her marriage plans, but because of William's nonchalant attitude about all that Esther has had to endure. When William casually puts his arm around Esther's waist, and says things like, "If only you'd let bygones be bygones" (215), her building fury is evident. This fury is further compounded when William promises he will get a divorce from his unfaithful wife, but, upon being unable to prove his wife's infidelity in court, he then asks Esther to take up with him so that *his* infidelity will allow for the divorce. William also lavishes presents on Jackie—presents that Esther could never afford to give him. Frustrated by the love Jackie shows a toy boat given to him by his father, Esther reaches her breaking point, and lashes out at William. Moore writes:

Then jerking out her words, throwing them at him as if they were half-bricks, she told him the story of the last eight years.... 'And when I came out of the workhouse I travelled London in search of sixteen pounds a year wages, which was the least I could do with, and when I didn't find them I sat here and ate dry bread.... I haven't said nothing about the shame and sneers I had to put up with—you'd understand nothing about that—and there was more than one situation I was thrown out of when they found out I had a child. For they didn't like loose women in their houses; I had them very words said about me. And while I was going through all that you was living in riches with a lady in foreign parts; and now when she could put up with you no longer, and you're kicked out, you come to me and ask for your share of the child.

Share of the child! What share is yours, I'd like to know?... In your mean, underhand way you come here on the sly to see if you can't steal the love of the child from me.' (228-29)

Despite her justified outburst, she sees her future with William as part of her unavoidable destiny. William gets his divorce, marries Esther, helps raise and educate Jackie, and, for seven years William and Esther run a successful pub. However, William's involvement in illegal gambling leads to the loss of the pub, their small fortune, and William's health. Yet, even after all this, in Esther's estimation, "William had proved a kind husband" (344), and he equally lauds her as "the best wife a man ever had" (345), a label Esther denies.

William dies of consumption, leaving Esther and Jackie broke and homeless. They are forced to live "in a slum" while Esther looks for work charring (377-78), and while living there, what remaining possessions they have are stolen, including the books Esther always kept with her, unread. Esther's last resort is to return to Mrs. Barfield, still living at the now barren and run-down Woodview. Having lost her fortune through the fickle sport and chance of horse racing, Mrs. Barfield welcomes Esther back, and gives her a modest job as a general house servant. In actuality, however, Esther and Mrs. Barfield read more like old friends and companions, and Mrs. Barfield helps Esther provide for Jackie until he enlists in the military. The narrative ends in the very place it began, but both Woodview and Esther are greatly changed. Moore writes:

A tall soldier came through the gate. He wore a long red cloak, and a small cap jauntily set on the side of his close-clipped head.

Esther uttered a little exclamation, and ran to meet him. He took his mother in his arms, kissed her, and they walked towards Mrs. Barfield together. All was forgotten in the happiness of the moment—the long fight for his life, and the possibility that any moment might declare him to be mere food for powder and shot. She was only conscious that she had accomplished her woman's work—she had brought him up to man's estate; and that was her sufficient reward. (394)

Esther is, in some ways, triumphant in that she survives the fallen woman narrative, despite her feeling immutably doomed by some already written narrative. Ruth dies. Tess dies. There is no reviewer or interviewer questioning, "Why did Esther have to die?" Yet, Esther's suffering is no less painful than Ruth's or Tess's; in fact, Esther's may be more dismal in that the level of frank detail Moore provides explicitly—and realistically or at least less melodramatically—delineates her years of distress, hardship, and judgment. Even though the fallen Esther succeeded in raising a strong, handsome son, the suggestion that Jackie might end up a dead, fallen body among many casualties of war casts a morbid, poignant shadow over his bright homecoming.

“By and by she was initiated into all safe love-practise”:
Protective Sexual Pedagogy in Victorian Pornography

While each fallen woman’s story offers subtle variation on a similar theme, the characters of Ruth Hilton, Tess Durbeyfield, and Esther Waters have much in common. Each woman lacks the education—and the protective mother or mentor—she needs in order to (possibly) prevent her fall. Gaskell’s text indicates to readers that Ruth’s mother died before she could discuss “*the subject*” of a woman’s life (44), and Gaskell also points out how “motherless” Ruth is precisely at the moment Ruth makes her most devastating life choice (56). Tess has had some proper education, but even this schooling was not enough to protect her; but, she thinks that being well-read in *novels* could have given her insight to a narrative she now must live out herself. In one of Tess’s few moments of even marginally assigning blame to anyone else for her fall, she indicts her mother for not providing novels for her to read in order that she might have learned to “fend hands against” the tricks of “men-folk” (64). Esther has no education and cannot read, and she carries around her mother’s books only to look at them and wonder “what were the mysteries that this print held from her” (22). Esther, only after her own fall, comes to know intricately the narrative of fallenness; she may not know how to read it on paper, but she learns to read the (same) story written clearly on the faces of the fallen women she encounters in her life.

Steven Marcus claims that “Literature is largely concerned with the relations of human beings,” and that “Pornography is not interested in persons

but in organs" (191). Considering Marcus's comments in light of female fallenness as represented in mainstream Victorian "Literature" gives me significant critical pause. As I note in the opening example of Jane Austen's two—possibly three—fallen Elizas, these characters are voiceless, non-bodied paper dolls who, ironically, exist solely to tell the seduction-sex-birth (and subsequently shameful) story of a woman's body. These characters are useful to the literary narrative of the novel *only* as sexual and reproductive organs, and readers need not learn terribly much more about them, as the Elizas must be reduced to their organs in order to gain the appropriate meaning within the literary narrative. In this way, the Elizas are not wholly individual "persons" as much as they represent a succession of female generative organs. As the eponymous central tragic heroines of their own novels, Ruth, Tess, and Esther are granted more voice and personality than the Elizas, but, as their subsequent narratives of fallenness and shame depend on the facts of sexual intercourse and pregnancy, these additional character dimensions read as light padding surrounding the most important part of their character: their female generative organs. In these three mainstream Victorian novels, Ruth, Tess, and Esther may be "persons," but above all the narrative is interested in—and depends on—their sexual and reproductive organs. Their shameful sexual fall demands it, as does the mainstream literary narrative.

Of course, in a mid-nineteenth century British novel like *Ruth*, direct reference to sexual and reproductive organs is absent. Evidence of the sexual events that occur in the white space between chapters four and five show up only in Ruth's subsequent constant blushing, and, clearly, in the birth of her

son. Before Leonard is born, however, the novel often contains passages like this: "But, at the mention of her child, Ruth started and turned ruby-red; as she always did when allusion was made to it" (130). Presumably, it is her knowing and telling blush that gives away Ruth's "organ story" without explicitly detailing it. And, ultimately, Ruth's organ story is what most likely informs the foreboding description of the novel as "'not a book for young people, unless read with somebody older'" (ix), implying the need for adult translation or reading supervision for those ill-prepared to encounter the discourse of fallenness. This further implies the novel strives for, but maybe falters in delivering, a didactic warning, as it rests its argument in suggestion rather than in more explicit concepts of prevention and protection.

Tess believes novels could have educated her against fallenness, but would Tess have been able to avoid her situation had she read *Ruth*? Esther wonders about the narrative mysteries kept hidden from her in the books she is unable to read, but, likewise, would Esther have been able to avoid her situation had she read *Ruth*? I am not so sure. In reading what Amanda Anderson calls the "attenuated autonomy" (42) of the fallen woman, Tess and Esther would have found that *Ruth* discourages female agency, discourages Ruth's "personhood" in favor of her shameful "organ story." Even Gaskell's social problem novel, supposedly dedicated to exposing injustice and the unfair judgment of the fallen woman, furthers female sexual ignorance as it reduces the issue of female sexual desire and experience to white space and silence, giving voice instead to the lasting consequences of succumbing to that never-revealed, but forever-defining organ-specific desire or sexual offense. To

prevent their fall, Tess and Esther need more than novels long on the social judgment of women's organs and short on the actual sexual detail required to protect them from falling and give them a chance at being "persons." Like the character of Maud in *The Horn Book: A Girl's Guide to the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, Tess, Esther, and Ruth need to be educated in the discourse of the sexually savvy female. They need to be imbued with the science of Venus.

Instead of Gaskell's *Ruth*, Tess and Esther (and Ruth herself) need the 1898 pornographic novel titled *Yvonne: or, The Adventures and Intrigues of a French Governess with her Pupils* written by the aptly named "Mary Suckit." Following the conventions of anonymous (and usually male) authorship of pornographic texts, Miss Marie, the 40 year old governess, is "Mary Suckit" the author of this diary of erotic history detailing her adventures and intrigues with her male lover, Mr. Grosvit, a married 30-something doctor and botanist, and her new teenaged pupil, Yvonne. The multi-genre *The Horn Book* this is not: *Yvonne* is most certainly a one-handed novel. But this is not to say that it is *only* titillating and exclusively erotic; much like Maud and Charlie's dialogues, Yvonne's story is a pornographic narrative as much about sexual expression as it is about accurate biological information and birth control advice. It is a pornographic novel that concerns itself with organs, yes, but the explicit sexual pedagogy provided to its eponymous heroine allows her to (potentially) escape being exclusively reduced to her sexual and reproductive organs by succumbing to the seemingly unstoppable, fated fallen woman narrative.

Yvonne is orphaned, save an elderly uninterested grandfather, so she requires a governess and tutors to guide and educate her. Yvonne is a bit

petulant and vain, she loathes traditional schooling but loves dressing her hair with bows, she has grand imaginings of her future husband (because she thinks this is her only option for love), and she has a burgeoning sexual appetite that she doesn't fully understand. The text reads:

When left to herself she thought of nothing but this husband "imaginaire." She seemed to feel his kisses on her lips, and hear him whisper loving words in her ear. She devoured secretly all sorts of novels and comedies and learned by heart the most exciting parts. Her whole body yearned for love; her imagination increased her passions; and she felt the blood throbbing in her aching head and limbs as if the veins would burst. (6)

She masturbates, but she is not quite sure what she is doing, nor is she sure what her orgasms really are. Though Yvonne's age is not properly stated in the text, the author clearly establishes that she has been menstruating for at least two years (6-7). The candor in revealing this fact alone is remarkable; the Victorian misunderstanding of menstruation is rivaled only by its lack of reference in mainstream fiction, particularly in fallen women novels. In fact, Elaine and English Showalter claim that "unlike sexual activities, menstruation has no literary reflection, true or false," and, if it is mentioned in pornography, it either brings the sexual action to a halt or has little relevant impact (38-41). Yet, in *this* pornographic adventure, Yvonne's menstruation is an important fact and must be established, as it signals the possible need for birth control instruction. Without this instruction, she is ripe for the mainstream fiction fall, as she is the menstruating, sexually curious but somewhat ignorant young girl who longs to

understand her body and desires. But, instead of a cruel seducer-cum-deserter who will take advantage of her by posing as the “husband ‘imaginaire’” of her masturbatory dreams, her new teachers Miss Marie and Mr. Grosvit offer by contrast less confining, more sexually liberating narrative possibilities for Yvonne.

Since Marie and her lover, Mr. Grosvit, want to continue their affair, this will be made easier if they involve their student. But Marie and Grosvit don't want to simply pounce on Yvonne; they choose to introduce her to sexual expression in a less invasive way. Anonymously, Miss Marie sends Yvonne a package containing a series of sexually explicit photographs and an accompanying book of lectures detailing the sexual adventures of an older male with younger females. At first, Yvonne is thoroughly embarrassed by what she sees and reads, hiding the package and throwing the photos down on the ground in shame, clearly indicating that the “novels and comedies” that earlier aided in her onanistic fantasies were *not* explicit texts. The text reads:

The first thing that fell into her hand was the photographic picture of a man and a woman, taken at the very moment he is going to fuck her. (17)

Despite her initial embarrassment, Yvonne closely inspects these photographs, and finds that they “represented almost all the same young man and woman in different strange attitudes” (17). In other words, Marie and Grosvit have sent Yvonne a pornographic photographic narrative told over a series of photos. Yvonne's shame subsides and she comes to enjoy all of these secret materials, using both the fiction and photographs to explore the geography of her own

body and read and envision the basics of sexual acts. At one point, she is even proud that she knows *more* than the novice female in the pornographic lecture she is reading, and she is overjoyed to learn that “to be caressed by a man it was not necessary to get married” (20-21). Her singular “husband ‘imaginaire’” evaporates and is replaced by a host of erotic possibilities.

However, these erotic possibilities are to be realized only with necessary caution, as Marie and Grosvit are thoroughly dedicated to teaching Yvonne. “By and by she was initiated into safe love-practise” (72), and while Yvonne is still a virgin, Marie and Yvonne have this very detailed, instructive conversation about sexual and reproductive organs. Marie says:

—As it is not convenient, that little girls should know anything about all this before they are in condition to combine practise with theory, we tell them that the babies are found in the cabbage.

—Yes, interposed Yvonne, but that is not true. The babies are made in the womb of their mother.

—Yes. But do you know of what they are made?

Yvonne shook her head slowly, she knew perhaps, but was not quite sure.

—They are made of two different matters one which issues from the father and another issuing from the mother. The masculine substance is formed in the testicles, as the physicians call them; there are two of them and they are hidden in a bag of skin, called the scrotum. All these are scientific names which I think it is useful you should know; women, being fond of their lovers give all these

things a multitude of pet-names, some of which, I shall teach you by and by. It is the ball, which you see on this picture. Above it is the penis, which has qualifications for different purposes. To begin with, it is from there the water pours out, when men piddle, and secondly, it is destined to be put into the woman to discharge the impregnating matter in her womb.

—Yes, I know, said Yvonne, nodding.

—You know! But who told you so, my dear?

—Oh, it was all in the book, you know.

—Which book?

—The book I received with the pictures. But oh, go on, darling miss Mary, I did not understand one half of it, and I must know all.

(53-54)

Marie continues:

—The woman's sexual organs belong for the most part to the interior parts of her body, as they are destined to receive the man's liquid and to contain the growing baby for about nine month's of its existence; they are very different from the man.... This is the clitoris, the starting point for woman's sensual rapture. (55)

In a more than century-old, yet bizarrely post-modern moment, Yvonne, in a pornographic novel named for the sexually initiated and educated heroine herself, explains that she learned about sexual reproduction and sexual function by reading a pornographic novel. Echoing the foreboding description of *Ruth*, Yvonne, as a young person, comes to better understand the potentially

“scandalous” information she read with the help of someone older who is willing to explain that babies do not, in fact, come from the cabbage patch, that there are necessary biological consequences to sexual activity, and that there is no reason all of this information cannot be used to protect and defend oneself while fully and safely exploring desire. And, presumably, even if Yvonne were momentarily dazzled by a cad, her sexual instruction would at least offer some protection from pregnancy and therefore public disgrace. Granted, this knowledge may not always protect her emotionally, but *Yvonne* is a decidedly more explicit and sexually uplifting anti-fallen woman novel. As a story of a young woman’s sexual education and protection from scandal, *Yvonne* is the inversion of *Ruth*, of *Tess*, of *Esther Waters*. If Tess needed to read a novel that would teach her “what to fend hands against,” *Yvonne* could be it. If Esther wondered what mysteries books kept hidden from her, *Yvonne* could have at least exposed some basic sexual pedagogy that could have helped her resist William or avoid pregnancy. *Yvonne* is a pornographic novel concerned with organs, of course, but this concern, this overt interest in sexuality and reproduction, results in protecting Yvonne so that she might safely become a sexual but not fallen woman.

Risking an obvious pun, the ending of the *Yvonne* is rather anticlimactic precisely because it does not end. After a series of intimate and safe menage a trois arrangements, the narrative winds down with both Grosvit and Mary recounting their own past initiations and passionate feats while the three give their bodies a much-needed rest. Interestingly, Yvonne does not experience any male penetration in the novel. After properly schooling Yvonne, Marie

recites her own story of sexual learning, explaining that “when I was quite young, I had a good friend, who exposed all this to me and who taught me, how I could enjoy my life in all safety” (63).

Yvonne learns much from both Miss Marie and Mr. Grosvit, and she participates in all manner of safe sexual experiences, except the one that could have caused her the most social damage without Marie and Grosvit’s instruction. Yvonne has learned much about her body, her sexuality, and her reproductive capabilities, and she learns this through the help of sexually savvy older mentors and by reading pornography. A final note in the novel states that the description of their future adventures will be saved for another volume—possibly a volume wherein Yvonne is the learned mentor sharing her knowledge with a young woman in need of sexual education. Much like Maud’s story, Yvonne’s story is a beginning, not an ending. The novel does not end with her death, it does not punish her for her sexuality or the crime against her sexuality, it does not make her a melodramatic martyr, and it does not end with her bastard child making good after years of emotional and physical sacrifice on her part. Instead, Yvonne’s story is about sexual education, about critically and thoughtfully reading pornography, and about passing on direct, honest education to young women who are vulnerable, innocent, and in need of protection against fallenness.

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