Spectacles of Suffering: Self-Harm in New Woman Writing 1880-1900

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Abstract

This thesis aims to provide an examination of texts produced by and about the New Woman of the late-nineteenth century, with specific reference to the trope of self-harm. It aims to explore the connections between the fictional bodies of text in which the New Woman was represented, and the damaged bodies of women who committed self-destructive acts. It examines both the religious frameworks within which Victorian women’s fiction operated, and three specific forms of self-harm which feature across a range of textual artefacts. To this end, the thesis discusses New Woman novels, poems, and short stories as well as newspaper and magazine articles, archival materials, and popular works of art, all of which discuss or display the damaged female body. The scope of this project is limited to New Woman writing produced between 1880 and 1900, although it does consider the ways in which the New Woman built on, or challenged, discourses about self-harm which appear in materials produced during the earlier half of the nineteenth century.

This research demonstrates that New Woman writers drew on forms of self-harm such as anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation, to express their frustrations at the contradictory requirements of women endorsed by conventional religion, at a time during which attitudes towards the body were changing. It shows how the female form embodied various Victorian political and social debates, and how it was deployed as a strategic symbol, in writing which sought to disrupt women’s subordinate position within the patriarchal system. Consequently, this research contributes to the fields of psychiatric history, New Woman studies, and more generally the study of Victorian women’s writing, by examining both canonical and critically neglected texts by women alongside non-fictional materials from the period. It explores both fictional acts of self-harm, and textual strategies, which have yet to be examined in New Woman writing, and which are key to understanding her complicated place in the male-oriented publishing environment of the Fin de Siècle.
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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award

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for Catherine and Niall.
Introduction

This thesis examines the representation of acts of self-harm by women in novels, poems, and short stories by and about the New Woman of the late-nineteenth century. It situates these fictional acts as a response to the particular cultural conditions of the Fin de Siècle, in which women writers were experimenting with new modes of literary expression; they were also deploying increasingly violent images of self-damage in the face of patriarchal pressures underpinned by bourgeois religion and morality. While there is little documentary evidence to suggest that Victorian women (particularly those outside the working classes) resorted to self-harm in any other than the most extreme circumstances, I suggest that a history of self-harm as a strategy of feminine survival can be traced in a number of texts produced by the New Woman. I place critical emphasis on the work of Mark Seltzer, whose conceptualisation of a Victorian ‘wound culture’ forms the basis of my argument that the New Woman exploited fin-de-siècle concerns about the female body as an object of display and desire, opening up a rhetorical space for the damaged body as a crucial juncture between notions of the public and the private. Furthermore, I argue that in adopting newer and more experimental forms of writing, the New Woman was progressively at liberty to express the inexpressible, the unwomanly and disruptive acts of violence enacted upon the body which challenged both Victorian notions of femininity and the supremacy of masculine corporeal control. I show how these acts can be situated on a spectrum, which begins with passive-aggressive protest in the traditional or triple-decker novel, and ends with violent fantasies and spectacles of self-damage in the New Woman short story. The trajectory of self-harm in New Woman writing was largely temporal, and by implication also chronological; as New Women increasingly adopted shorter forms in which to dramatise self-destructive behaviours, these behaviours became progressively more violent. I demonstrate how New Woman writing both adheres to and rejects orthodox Christian notions of the body’s subordination to the soul, and how this dichotomy can be imagined in relation to the spatial dynamics of the texts into which damaged female figures were written by late-nineteenth century women writers.

The Critical Field

My research emerges at a moment when the British New Woman has enjoyed a decade of unprecedented interest, and collections which examine the work of many previously forgotten female writers of the Fin de Siècle are now widely available. Elaine Showalter’s
Daughters of Decadence (1993), Continuum’s Late Victorian and Early Modernist Women Writers series which began in 2002, and Angelique Richardson’s Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women 1890-1914 (2002) have increased students’ access to New Woman writing. More generally, for the past two decades, the New Woman has been a feature of academic monographs, collections of essays and conferences, and a wealth of new research has been devoted to reclaiming, critiquing and, to a certain extent, exposing New Woman writing to a wider audience as both seminal and suspect. The New Woman in Fiction and Fact, a collection of scholarly essays edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis published in 2001, brought together for the first time New Woman scholars working in such diverse areas as print culture, the theatre, queer theory, Victorian psychiatry, post-colonialism and aestheticism. Carolyn Nelson’s A New Woman Reader (2000) combines a variety of sources including short stories, articles and political writing, allowing the student of the New Woman phenomenon to read the fiction alongside crucial textual material from the period. In 2006 the Journal of Victorian Literature and Culture published an issue edited by Marion Thain and Ann Vadillo which was devoted to New Woman poetry (34:2); in the same year the journal Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies also put out an issue entitled ‘The New Women and Sexuality’ featuring contributions on Vernon Lee and George Egerton among others. In 2006 the MLA also called for papers on the topic of ‘Visualising the New Woman’ for a special session in Philadelphia. In July 2010 an international conference on ‘Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle’ took place at the University of London and the ‘British Women Writers Conference’ which calls for papers on the British New Woman, is due to take place at New York’s Binghampton University in July 2014. Although certain critics have noted the rhetoric of pessimism and self-defeatism intrinsic to much of the New Woman oeuvre, there is currently no detailed research which exposes the centrality of this defeatism across a spectrum of New Woman narrative forms.

Self-harm is one of a number of self-defeating behaviours which appears in texts produced by the New Woman, which often depict melodramatic scenes of despair or philosophical cynicism. My work focuses on motifs of self-harm in a number of works which have been

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2 For example, Anna Maria Jones’s article ‘A Track to the Water’s Edge: Learning to Suffer in Sarah Grand’s The Heavenly Twins’ notes the ‘painful labour of self-fashioning’ (2007: 27) undertaken by Grand’s heroines.
3 Other forms of self-defeating behaviour found in New Woman novels include: overwork, sexual promiscuity, unsuitable or mercenary marriages, and the deliberate provocation of domestic violence. This thesis examines three types from a range of self-harming behaviours which also includes: skin-picking, trichotillomania, self-induced abortion, and drug addiction.
already examined by New Woman scholars, as well as lesser-known texts which have been, to a certain extent, critically neglected. It emphasises the importance of self-harming behaviours such as anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation, as ways of reading women’s frustration and consequent rebellion against the status quo, as well as their reproduction of self-limiting patriarchal imperatives. These imperatives formed the locus of academic discourse on the New Woman during the 1990s, as scholarly works identified her as an important and polarising figure in fiction by and about women. This research also connected the New Woman to the emergent modernism of the Fin de Siècle. Feminist critics of the 1970s and 1980s such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Elaine Showalter, reclaimed fin-de-siècle women’s writing as the next phase in a continuum which included the mid-Victorian novel. However, these early critics failed to fully acknowledge that New Woman writing contributed more to a modernist aesthetic than that of its predecessors, and departed stylistically in ways which disrupted notions of linearity in the development of the ‘feminist’ text (Ardis 1990: 6-7). The work of Ann Ardis, Lyn Pykett, and Jane Eldridge Miller re-introduced the New Woman into academic debates about the nineteenth-century Woman Question, reclaiming these writers as the missing link between the latent feminism of mid-century women’s fiction, and the political activism of the early-twentieth century.

One of the most problematic concerns of any study of the New Woman is this rather slippery collective term, since it was variously applied to a plethora of female types who campaigned for gender equality, yet who rarely shared political viewpoints or agreed on key issues. The British New Woman was not, as Sally Ledger has shown, a stable identity or easily definable stock character, but a composite of conflicting, contradictory, and discursively constructed ideas about women’s rights at a time of social and political uproar (1997: 1-2). As literary critics like Ledger have established, supposedly ‘New’ women failed to agree on almost all aspects of the nineteenth-century campaign for women’s rights and freedoms. The infamous New Woman novelist Sarah Grand for example, was scathing of gender double standards and regarded women’s education as paramount, yet

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4 I use the term ‘feminist’ here, as throughout, with an awareness of its anachronistic deployment since it is a twentieth-century terminology not in currency during the Victorian period.
6 See Ledger (2007) and more recent work by Ann Heilmann (2004) and Angelique Richardson (2008) for discussion of the failure of New Women to agree on key issues.
held very traditional views on the sanctity of marriage and motherhood. Her novels and political writings reveal her to be a staunch social purist, whose faith in the potential for good in marriage remained unwavering despite her critique of ill-advised or genetically unsuitable unions. Conversely, her contemporary Mona Caird viewed marital and maternal obligations as forms of bondage from which women needed to free themselves before they could gain equality with men. Despite this, Caird’s fiction often represented female sexual liberation as morally questionable, and her heroines are usually punished severely for desiring men to whom they are not married, despite the unhappiness of their own legal unions. The writings of George Egerton and Victoria Cross campaigned for women’s sexual and maternal freedoms, representing the horrible consequences of enforced marriage and motherhood. While both writers dramatise relationships in which marriage is secondary to motherhood and sexual fulfilment, these relationships tend to conform to normative heterosexual structures which in some ways reversed, yet ultimately reinforced traditional gender dictates.

The works of previously forgotten writers such as these have been made increasingly available through collections such as Showalter’s and Nelson’s as well as those published as part of the Late Victorian and Early Modernist Writers series. These include: Sally Ledger’s edited collection of Egerton’s Keynotes and Discords, Elisabeth Jay’s edition of the allegories of Olive Schreiner entitled Dreams, and Dreams Visions and Realities, a selection of New Woman short stories edited by Stephanie Forward, all published in 2003. Collections by New Woman writers whose work had largely gone out of print – such as Ella Hepworth Dixon and Victoria Cross – can now be ordered through the British Library’s print to order service, making them easier to access than they have been for decades. Additionally, scholarly and biographical works and academic readers on key New Woman figures are now widely available and include: Cherry Clayton’s Olive Schreiner

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7 See Grand’s essay on ‘The Modern Girl’ published in the North American Review in 1894, in which she outlines the need for education for young girls in order to defend themselves against unworthy men. Yet, in the same essay, Grand suggests that marriage is not itself a problem, and that the blame is on the parents (specifically the mother) of young girls (reproduced in Forward and Heilmann 2000).

8 See Grand’s novel The Heavenly Twins (1893), in which two young women approach the selection of a husband very differently. Edith Beale chooses unwisely and is infected with syphilis, while Evadne Frayling refuses to consummate her marriage to her potentially syphilitic husband.

9 See Caird’s essay ‘A Defence of the “Wild Women”’(1892) in which she compares motherhood to military service (Caird 2010: 73) and her 1888 article in the Westminster Review in which she calls marriage a ‘vexatious failure’ (Caird, 1888: 86).

10 Both Viola Sedley in Caird’s The Wing of Azrael (1889) and Hadria Fullerton in The Daughters of Danaus (1894) are tempted to initiate sexual relationships with men other than their husbands. Both heroines ultimately choose to remain faithful. Hadria discovers her lover’s prior sexual misconduct and puts an end to their relationship, and Viola commits suicide before she can run away with Harry Lancaster.
(1997), Teresa Mangum’s *Married Middlebrow and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman* (1998), Stephanie Forward and Ann Heilmann’s *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand* (2000), Carolyn Burdett’s *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism* (2001), and more recently Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman’s collection of essays on the poet Amy Levy entitled *Amy Levy: Critical Essays* (2010). Academic monographs and articles have also taken the New Woman as their subject matter, and explore both the well-known and more marginal figures operating within this particular literary tradition. Two of the key issues much examined by critics of New Woman writing have been marriage and motherhood, Victorian social dictates about which women writers often found themselves disagreeing with each other. Mangum and Burdett examine the ways in which these issues are depicted in the work of Grand and Schreiner in their respective books, as does Sally Ledger in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), which examines a range of texts produced by and about New Women. Articles by Deborah Epstein Nord (1990) and Lyssa Randolph (2010) also examine the ways in which ‘New’ women rejected marriage and/or motherhood and chose to operate within female social communities at the turn of the century. Articles by Stephanie Forward (1999), Emma Liggins (2000), Nicole Fleur (2001), Daniel Brown (2011), and Lauren Simek (2012) discuss the twin duties of marriage and maternity in New Woman fiction and political writing with reference to fin-de-siècle culture. The New Woman’s interest in eugenics has been explored by Teresa Mangum’s aforementioned monograph on Sarah Grand and Angelique Richardson’s 2003 book *Love and Eugenics in the Late-Nineteenth Century*. While the former focuses on Grand’s conservatism on matters of motherhood, the latter more broadly examines New Woman cultural production in relation to prevalent scientific debates about the female body and its reproductive responsibilities. Similarly, articles by Dana Seitler (2003) and Solveig Robinson (2010), and recently Wendy Hayden’s book *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (2013) show how eugenic thought both informed and countermanded female demands for political autonomy. Richardson’s study of the work of such diverse writers as Grand, Caird, and Egerton demonstrates the extent to which middle-class, nationalist, and eugenic discourses permeate the New Woman oeuvre, in ways which are at times self-limiting given their various political aims. Despite this, neither Richardson, nor the other critics I have mentioned, directly connect this to a wider discourse of self-harm which reflects the processes of feminine self-limitation at play in the New Woman’s eugenic mandate. Although certain writers, whose work I examine, have been identified as disseminating
eugenic theories, I aim to show that this was only one type within a much broader range of self-defeating discourses operating in these texts.

New Woman scholars have explored the ways in which late-Victorian women’s writing both reflected and undermined the masculine literary tradition. Ann Heilmann’s *New Woman Strategies* (2004) seeks to emphasise the New Woman’s destabilisation of male forms of culture, her creation of new spaces for expression in which masculine discourse is both parodied and re-inscribed. Heilmann explores how three canonical New Woman writers rewrite hegemonic mythological taxonomies, highlighting the subversive nature of their feminist message. Critics have shown how a broad range of textual artefacts produced by the New Woman challenged forms of culture controlled by and oriented towards masculine dominance. As well as Heilmann’s work on canonical New Woman novels, articles by Elizabeth Macleod Wallis (2002), Linda K. Hughes (2004), Alexandra Carter (2010), Elke D’Hoker (2011), and Clare Gill (2012), highlight the New Woman’s re-inscription of masculine ideologies in such diverse vehicles as the modernist novel, short stories, theatre, dance and short story collections. As well as her complex identity, her subversive yet often counter-productive deployment of masculine forms of expression, and her troubling subscription to capitalist, eugenic and nationalist ideals, the New Woman writer has also been identified by contemporary critics as highly masochistic.¹¹ The figure of the New Woman was connected by the Victorian popular press to the pessimistic decadent writers of the late-nineteenth century who were interested in moral and sexual ‘perversions’ such as masochism, as well as eroticised and self-abnegating religious practices (Ledger 1997: 94-97). This largely unsolicited association tied the New Woman implicitly to the aesthetic cynicism of a number of male writers with whom she shared few literary or political similarities.¹² As John Kucich notes ‘[l]ate-Victorian culture was

¹¹ Masochism is the psychological condition by which pleasure (sexual or otherwise) is derived from the receipt of pain and/or humiliation. The term was first coined by the nineteenth-century sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, following the publication of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s novel *Venus in Furs* (1870) which features a masochistic relationship. Freud theorised masochistic behaviours during his discussion of the Fort/Da complex in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920) as intrinsic to what he identified as a ‘death drive’ in humans. Although Freud and Krafft-Ebing did not publish their respective work on Masochism until the early-twentieth century, Sacher-Masoch’s text would have been available to the educated class from which most New Woman writers originated.

¹² The decadents of the late-century were particularly interested in the cultural and religious practices of Hellenism and also Catholicism. The work of such writers as Walter Pater, Algernon Charles Swinburne and Oscar Wilde demonstrate this interest. For example, Swinburne’s poetry features the imagery of Catholic practices of self-flagellation, and Wilde converted to Catholicism at his death in 1900. There are some examples of male writers who represented ‘advanced’ female characters in similarly pessimistic fashion – See Thomas Hardy’s Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* (1895) and Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895).
saturated with masochistic phenomena’, and ‘self-destructive New Woman heroines’ (2002: 79) were part of a wider cultural-philosophical manifestation of nihilism and anarchism at play in the closing years of the century. According to Kucich, whose research examines the work of Olive Schreiner, the New Woman operated a ‘rigid code of sexual self-denial, […] a programmatic defeatism, which transformed disappointment with women’s social prospects into gestures of saintly martyrdom; and an idealisation of self-sacrifice’ (2002: 80). Although Kucich argues convincingly that Schreiner’s work exhibits a preoccupation with masochistic fantasy, his chapter is part of a wider study of masochism in the literature of Western imperialism, and does not examine New Woman writing in particular. His work on Schreiner does not discuss in great depth the forms of self-abuse deployed in her narrative, but rather the psychodynamics of masochism at play in her treatment of both the female characters and the colonial other. There is currently a dearth of critical work on the various tropes of self-destruction operating within literature by and about the New Woman.

A number of studies devoted to investigating female madness in general – and hysteria in particular – examine the extreme lengths to which nineteenth-century psychiatric patients resorted to gain some control over their own bodies. These studies are however largely restricted to the body of the lunatic or working-class woman, and certainly not the educated middle-class women about whom and from whose perspective the New Woman wrote. Furthermore, existing research into female madness in the nineteenth century does not consider the emergence of self-harm as a motif in the literature of the period, but as a violent behaviour displayed by women who were incarcerated and thus inassimilable into wider society. Both Gilbert and Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) and Elaine Showalter’s The Female Malady (1985) examine the representation of female madness in Victorian literature, yet neither explore in any detail the specific forms of self-harm deployed by the ‘mad woman’. Charlotte Rich’s book Transcending the New Woman: Multiethnic Narratives in the Progressive Era (2009) notes that New Woman novels often

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13 Oliver Schreiner (1855-1920) was a South African writer of short stories, allegories, and novels. She is credited with producing the first New Woman novel, since her heroine in The Story of an African Farm (1883) refuses to marry and enters into a ‘free union’ with a man after having run away from her home.


15 See Small (1996), Foucault (2001), and also articles by Lynn Voskuil (2001), Sharon Marcus (2005), and Joanna Bourke (2008), all of which examine representations of female madness in fiction and/or psychiatric rhetoric.

16 For example, while Gilbert and Gubar discuss Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847), it is her ghostly presence as a double for the pure English heroine, and not her self-damage, which is central to their discussion.
resolve the conflict between femininity and feminist agitation through suicide (2009: 88-90), and the death by suicide of both New Woman writers and their female characters is noted in passing in several of the articles and monographs I have mentioned already. Sarah Chaney’s as yet unpublished postgraduate thesis on self-mutilation in fictional and scientific writing about nineteenth-century psychiatry, does much to foreground the practice as an emerging discourse in fin-de-siècle culture.\(^\text{17}\) Her articles examine the representation of self-mutilative acts in the clinical work of alienists such as James Adams, and the literary work of Nathaniel Hawthorne amongst others.\(^\text{18}\) Chaney’s work emphasises the influence of nineteenth-century literature on clinical research into self-mutilation, but considers only the manifestations of this particularly violent form of self-harm, in novels largely written by men.\(^\text{19}\) My work departs from Chaney’s in that it seeks to examine the fictionalisation of different forms of self-harm as both thematic motifs and strategies for survival, as well as the textual production of the damaged body as a narrative body. To my knowledge, there has yet to be any published research which undertakes to connect the damaged bodies of fictional New Women to the socio-political conditions in which late-Victorian women writers were publishing. Neither does there appear to have been any sustained critical interest in the various ways in which these bodies are represented, displayed and narrated, or the New Woman’s movement away from traditional forms of text which failed to express adequately or contain the wounded female body. My work seeks to interrogate the use of self-harm as a motif in texts which represent women’s struggle against the limitations of their gender, at a time when those limitations were becoming subject to negotiation. I situate the New Woman’s engagement with the imagery and rhetoric of self-harm as a strategic effort to expose and erode the boundaries between public and private, at the precise moment that these boundaries were at their weakest. This moment, what I – borrowing from Mark Seltzer – will refer to as Victorian wound culture, allowed a space for bodies, and bodies of narrative, to express that which had formerly been kept silent. Hence, the practice of damaging the female body as a response to its sublimation, as an object to be watched, explored, and most of all, controlled, can be traced in the New Woman fiction of the late-nineteenth century, as a complex strategy of narrative and psychic survival.

\(^{17}\) Chaney is currently completing her PhD thesis – entitled *Self-Mutilation and Psychiatry: Impulse, Identity and the Unconscious in British Explanations of Self-Inflicted Injury c. 1864 -1914* – at UCL.

\(^{18}\) Alienists were nineteenth-century asylum psychiatrists. The term is no longer used to describe psychiatrists, but is still applied to describe mental health professionals involved in the criminal court system, who evaluate the competency of criminals to stand trial.

\(^{19}\) See Chaney’s article (2001a), in which she briefly refers to Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*. 
**Victorian Wound Culture**

The British New Woman appeared as both a fictional figure and writer of women’s fiction at a time when notions of the body as a private and God-ordained vessel were in a state of collapse. Late-century advances in medical knowledge ‘breached Christian certitudes as they undermined the naturalness of pain and put in its place a bodily function that could be removed’ (Bending 2000: 52). Where the early-nineteenth century body (particularly the female body) had been largely designated personal and kept behind closed doors, as the century progressed, the body in all its pains and pleasures became the focus of debates both scientific and social. Set against the backdrop of industrialisation and an ever expanding demographic, discourses on the damaged body were inextricably bound to the conditions of modernity within which the New Woman writer emerged, and which she, however reluctantly, came to represent. Thus self-harm operated as part of a broader political context, in which the body and the social body became rhetorically elided at the Fin de Siècle. By the late-nineteenth century, women were fully established in the workplace and their bodies became assimilated into the capitalist model of labour, production, and commodity culture. Although this represented a change in the way in which the female body was perceived and experienced – from a domestic and maternal body, to a labouring and public body – this change was not particularly radical. It merely reflected women’s status as commodities before the advent of industrialisation, as objects to be admired, owned and ultimately consumed. In *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture* (1998) Mark Seltzer identifies late-nineteenth-century machine culture as the turning point at which notions of the body began to change in response to technological advancement and mass production. He explains that:

> [p]aradoxically enough, public corporeal violence has come to provide one of the most powerful ways of keeping visible the possibility of the shared social spaces of the public sphere itself […] public violence has come to provide one of the most powerful registers of the generali[s]ed intimacies with technology (technologies of reproduction, information, and mediation) in machine culture […] These are, at the least, some ways in which mass spectacle and mass violence have come to indicate each other in machine culture: the private and natural body has, in unprecedented

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20 As the urban space expanded, utterly dwarfing the agrarian, so too did the Victorians’ reliance on new technologies which resulted in an increasingly mechanised state (Williams 1975: 2). New forms of mass transport not only made travel from and into the cities possible, mobilising a growing workforce, but also expanded the reach of women’s participation in projects outside their homes. Working-class women, who had traditionally been required to defend the domestic space and who had been denied access to the public domains of work and education, suddenly took on a pivotal role in a new machine culture, working in the factories and retail premises which were being built to manufacture and then distribute commodities (Sussman 2009: 3).
ways, become publically relevant […] as spectacle or representation – and, most insistently, as spectacle or representation of crisis, disaster, or atrocity […] The commutability of word counts and body counts provides one register of the way in which the life process and the technological process have come to indicate each other in machine culture (1998: 35-40).

For Seltzer, late-nineteenth-century modernity represents a moment of crisis during which notions of the private body and the public space as separate – are brought into direct conflict and ultimately begin to break down. The site of this breakdown is what Seltzer calls a ‘wound culture’ (1998: 21), a social system in which desirable, desiring, and damaged bodies, their pleasures and pains, are displayed, critiqued, and consumed in public and en masse.21 These pathologised bodies are the citizens of wound culture, the ‘living dead subject[s]’ (1998: 90) who occupy what Seltzer terms the ‘pathological public sphere’ (1998: 31). They represent a destabilising force, yet are simultaneously exploited by the gaze of hegemonic organising structures. At the dawn of the twentieth century, and the birth of both New Journalism and the pathological public sphere, body counts and word counts represent for Seltzer the ‘logic of simulation – conflating bodies with writing, […] an excessive literalisation […] in the materialisation of writing itself’ (1998: 46). If the very act of writing, according to Seltzer, is bound up with the increasing violence of the pathological public sphere, then the New Woman writer enters fin-de-siècle culture at an opportune moment when the opening up and display of the female body might be deployed as a subversive textual stratagem. If the atrocity exhibition ‘indicates something more than a taste for senseless violence’ and functions as ‘a way of imagining the relations of private bodies and private persons to public spaces’ (Seltzer 1998: 21) then New Woman fiction can be read as an artefact of wound culture which attempts to rewrite separate sphere ideology altogether. Her writing is both symptomatic of late-nineteenth century wound culture and critical of the exploitation of women’s bodies which it deploys. I will argue that New Woman writing is both indebted to, and limited by, the pathological public sphere, a paradox which can be traced in the self-destructive tendencies of female characters whose bodily pains are displayed in literary exhibitions of brutality. In Chapter One and indeed throughout all the texts I discuss in this thesis, these pains are imagined as religious tortures; in Chapter Two they are a response to women’s exclusion from

21 The visual ‘consumption’ of bodies was also significantly advanced by the advent of photography from 1800, and its increasing use in print media during the Fin de Siècle.
knowledge and culture; in chapters three and four, pain and display are inextricable processes which are embodied by women whose bodies are all too public.

Victorian modernisation, technology and mass production signalled the possibility of contact between human and machine, contact which was made manifest at the Fin de Siècle by the modern railway system.\(^2\) As well as the contact between private bodies in a public space, the railway also heralded the birth of the traumatic mass-spectacle in Victorian machine culture. Some of the earliest accounts of what twenty-first-century medicine and psychiatry now recognised as ‘Post Traumatic Stress Disorder’ originate from the several major railway accidents which were reported after the Railways Regulation Act of 1871 (Harrington 1999).\(^3\) Train wrecks were also implicitly connected to capitalism and industrial greed, a connection which caused the columnist of an 1860 edition of the *London Morning Post* to claim ‘we must prepare, I say, to bear the frightful mutilation or sudden death of our friends, and all owing to that great British “mistake”, as it has been well called – the excessive love of money-making, or getting the last penny out of our investments’ (1860: 3). A number of popular Victorian novels featured train accidents or deployed the train as a means of treachery or escape. For example, it is using a train that Lucy Audley deceives her husband Michael in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862); Émile Zola’s *La Bête Humaine* (1890) features the deliberate wrecking of a train by a woman scorned, and in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), the villain of the story disappears amongst the wreckage of a railway accident, his body never found.\(^4\) ‘Feminist’ writers also found inspiration in the potential collisions of the modern transport system, as the American authors Kate Chopin and George Fleming respectively demonstrate in ‘The Story of an Hour’ (1894) and ‘By Accident’ (1898) which both feature traumatic collisions.\(^5\) Furthermore, the image of the train wreck had been transformed into entertainment, by both the melodrama of the Victorian stage and its literary counterpart,

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\(^2\) See Daly (2004) for a thorough exploration of the train as a symbol in Victorian narrative.

\(^3\) See the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2003: 27) for the most recent definition of PTSD in contemporary psychology.

\(^4\) The image of the train wreck became an important traumatic signifier in the Victorian literary and cultural consciousness, particularly after the famous author Charles Dickens was involved in a collision at Staplehurst in 1865, which greatly impacted on his health and left its own psychological marks. See Mee (2010) for an account of Dickens’s railway accident and consequent health problems.

\(^5\) In Chopin’s short story Mrs Mallard enjoys only one hour of happiness and freedom, after the news that her marriage has been dissolved by her husband’s death, only to find that he has in fact survived the fatal rail accident which he has been reported to have died in. Similarly, Chopin’s countrywoman George Fleming, depicts a woman who reveals her adulterous love for another man to her husband as she lays dying after a collision in her carriage in ‘By Accident’. Although Chopin and Fleming were both American women writers, their work was also published in Britain and was influential in the greater debate surrounding women’s rights at the Fin de Siècle.
the sensation novel (Daly 2004: 10-19). During the late-nineteenth century, the major debates surrounding the compensation of victims of industrial accidents concerned the importance of bodily, rather than psychological wounds. The Victorian legal system failed to recognise symptoms of psychological damage and ‘any psychological impact, had to be proven to have been stamped on the body to reach the legal threshold’ (Luckhurst 2008: 28). Images of trauma had become synonymous with new technologies, as industrial accidents provided evidence of the dangers faced by an expanding and poorly paid workforce, and the evolving machinery of war left behind an increasing number of casualties’.26 From the Greek word meaning ‘wound’, the term ‘trauma’ referred to a bodily injury made by an external agent between its use in seventeenth-century medical parlance until this classification was expanded towards the end of the nineteenth century ( Luckhurst 2008: 2). Contemporary research in the field of trauma studies defines trauma in terms which reflect the interplay between its physical and psychical manifestations. During the 1980s the most widely used manual for the diagnosis of mental illnesses in Europe and America – the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSMIII) – asserted that the necessary and sufficient conditions for diagnosing trauma must include ‘an event outside the range of human experience’ (1987: 250).27 The database of stressors which might be considered ‘outside of the range of human experience’ increased exponentially in the years following the publication of the third edition of the DSM (Luckhurst 2008: 59-76). As the twentieth century progressed, events that could be considered traumatic began to develop past the limits of ‘abnormal’ human experience, to include statistically common occurrences such as sexual harassment and even incest or rape (Brown 1995: 2). Indeed, recent changes to the DSM in its fifth edition, reflect a shift in thinking about trauma; it no longer refers to events outside of human experience, and the triggers for traumatic stress disorders include ‘exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation’ (2013: 271) resulting from one or more of the following scenarios, in which the individual:

• directly experiences the traumatic event;
• witnesses the traumatic event in person;

26 See Bronstein (2008) for an exhaustive account of industrial accidents in Victorian Britain. Pick (1993) refers to the introduction of mechanised guns during the nineteenth century as the ‘deranged machinery of war’ (205), detailing the destructive potential of new machine guns used by the British and American military from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Also see Gannon (2003) for discussion of mechanised guns in British and American fiction of the nineteenth century.

27 The DSM forms part of the process for the classification of mental disorders around the world and in particular in European and American clinical contexts.
• learns that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend (with the actual or threatened death being either violent or accidental); or
• experiences first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event (not through media, pictures, television or movies unless work-related) (2013: 271)

Although the *DSM* represents twenty-first-century diagnostic criteria for psychological illnesses, it reflects and develops a conceptual framework of trauma which came into being during the late-nineteenth century. This framework formed the basis for the treatment of soldiers with ‘shell shock’ as a result of their participation in the First World War, and was deployed by Sigmund Freud amongst others. In his 1919 paper on the topic of war neuroses Freud claimed that ‘the conflict is between the soldier’s old peaceful ego and his new warlike one, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego realises what danger it runs of losing its life owing to the rashness of its newly formed, parasitic double’ (2001d: 209). Freud’s notion of the parasitic double, both a part of, and apart from the traumatised subject, essential to the internal mechanisms of the psyche, yet equally its exterior manifestation, will form an important part of my discussion of bodily focussed repetitive self-harm in the final chapter of this thesis. Freud recognised the importance of repression as a feature of the disorder suffered by shell-shocked soldiers; a constant aversion to, and relentless return of, the moment of traumatic experience in the form of dreams, hallucinations, and traumatic memories (2001c: 202). The twenty-first-century clinical perspective exemplified by the *DSM* represents a widening of the boundaries within which human experience might be defined as traumatic, set out by clinicians like Freud who were involved in treating mental illness during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In her collection of essays on the subject, Cathy Caruth defines the effect of traumatic experience as:

> A response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with a numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (1995: 4).

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28 See Leys (2000) for discussion of Freud’s role in researching hysteria and trauma as it manifested in those who had served in the military.

29 See ‘My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses’ (1909) in which Freud lists the ‘severe [and] hysteriform’ (2001c: 278) symptoms of traumatic neurosis. Freud struggled to reconcile his theorisation of traumatic neurosis, with his earlier work on neurosis which was unrelated to war.
While the *DSM* requires the experience of trauma to be first-hand or repeated, and any threat to be of a violent or sexual nature, Caruth’s definition of the symptoms which define a traumatic response are much broader. Understanding that any occurrence which is ‘overwhelming’ might produce a traumatised response, she establishes a theoretical structure within which women’s experience of gender inequality might be read as traumatic. As Laura Brown notes, the experience of being a woman in a world in which fear of sexual harassment, rape, discrimination, and unequal pay reflect masculine ideologies, is itself a form of psychic trauma (1995: 105). The authoritative power structures of twenty-first-century white, middle-class, and male dominance arguably operated more forcefully during the period in which the New Woman emerged as a literary phenomenon. Like Caruth and Brown, my research conceptualises experiences of trauma using a much wider framework than that of nineteenth – or even twenty-first– century definitions, reading women’s self-harming behaviour in New Woman fiction as a response to overwhelming patriarchal pressures. I contend that the wound culture of late-nineteenth century industrial society and its proliferation in print media, produced a space in which the traumatised female psyche could be expressed through images and stories which featured the damaged female body. Bodies which had been controlled, isolated and kept private, and which were now made sensationally public, came to symbolise damaged female subjectivity in the wound culture of late-century (political) fiction by women. These bodies are configured in New Woman writing through tropes such as anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation; they are figured as both inescapably subject to male oppression, and concurrently as the authors of their own doom. Other forms of self-harm do appear in late-Victorian women’s writing, for example: drug addiction, body-focussed behaviours such as trichotillomania, or dangerous pseudo-surgical acts of self-performed abortion.\(^\text{30}\) This thesis considers the forms of self-harm which are most often fictionalised in New Woman writing, and those which constitute a strategy for female survival through frequent repetition over a sustained period of time.\(^\text{31}\) While self-harm was a particular concern in New Woman writing, it was neither the first nor the most sensational or violent

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\(^\text{30}\) Trichotillomania refers to the deliberate and obsessive compulsive (although often not conscious) pulling of hair from the body.

\(^\text{31}\) While I have found imagery relating to both drug addiction and trichotillomania in New Woman writing, there are not enough examples of these forms of self-harm through which to form a cohesive sense of how New Woman writers were deploying them as tropes. Images of self-performed abortion were comparatively rare in New Woman writing, although (as later discussion of Egerton’s ‘A Psychological Moment’ demonstrates) they were not unheard of. I do not consider self-performed abortion alongside anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation since my research is concerned with behaviours which were repetitive and frequently enacted strategies for daily as well as long term survival.
representation of trauma, wounding, or female bodily display at the Fin de Siècle, but developed out of cultural responses to a far more explosive and public set of crimes.

The entrance of the traumatised or wounded body into Victorian consciousness was compounded by highly-publicised cases of bodily mutilation, many of which originated from the lurid reporting of colonial conflicts abroad. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, for example, reports of the British Army’s presence in Afghanistan in 1880 that ‘[no] Englishman can be taken prisoner […]; he is lucky if he escapes torture before death or mutilation after it’ (1880: 1). The huge losses of British life in conflicts across the world were reported in regional and national newspapers, which listed the dead and wounded and gave descriptions of the battles in which they had given their lives or limbs. Reports of horrific violence lined the columns of Victorian news publications in a way which had been impossible before the invention of photography and the New Journalism of the period. Accounts of self-harm as a means by which to avoid military service were common, and began to be reported with increasing frequency. So too did descriptions of domestic disputes and crimes of passion, in which bodily traumas were described with gruesome precision. On the 25th August 1888, just days before the first confirmed victim of ‘Jack the Ripper’ would be found, London’s *Penny Illustrated Paper* reported a ‘shocking case of murder and attempted suicide’ (1888: 126). In an East End slum, a sixty year old man had murdered his wife with a hammer while she slept, before attempting to slit his own throat (1888: 126). In both fiction and the media, the working-class body became the topic of middle-class debate, through a re-casting of colonial discourses of savagery onto the bodies of the English poor, who inhabited the slums of what William Booth famously termed ‘Darkest England’ (Booth 2000: 45). These discourses were further encouraged by ‘slumming’ in which middle-class Victorians flocked to the capital’s most deprived and violent areas for the purpose of (often rather questionable) philanthropic investigation, and reported on the damaged bodies of the poor (Koven 2004). However, the most sensational

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32 The Battle of Alma (1854) was the first conflict of the Crimean War, and lists of the dead and wounded were published in local newspapers from Portsmouth, Sheffield, Newcastle, Edinburgh, York, Manchester, Oxford and Huddersfield, as well as London. See *The Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser* (October 2, 1854) and *The Morning Chronicle* of the same date for examples.

33 See *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle* (1887: 3) for an example self-mutilation in which a man cut off his own hand to avoid military service.

34 News reports such as this inspired popular works of Naturalism in the literary marketplace, in which details of the violent working-class struggle for existence found expression in the novels of writers such as Émile Zola, George Gissing and Arthur Morrison For example, Zola’s *Les Rougon-Macquart* series traces the social, sexual and criminal degeneration of one family. Also see: George Gissing’s *The Unclassed* (1884) and *The Netherworld* (1889), and Arthur Morisson’s *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and *A Child of the Jago* (1896).
and culturally significant of the accounts of wounded bodies which inundated the Victorian print market, was that of the Ripper murders. During the Autumn of 1888, at least five prostitutes were murdered and mutilated in the Whitechapel district of London by a single serial killer dubbed ‘Jack the Ripper’ by the press. These mutilated corpses constituted an increasingly violent spectacle of private female (sexual) bodies in the public space, a display which Seltzer claims set off a ‘public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and open persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound’ (1998: 1). The public staging of the mutilated victims brought a solidification of the fascination with the torn and wounded body as a crucial site of intersection between the abundant scientific and cultural discourses of the Fin de Siècle. The popularity of the Newgate Novels and Gallows Confessions of the early-nineteenth-century, demonstrate the extent to which the narratives of violence which accompanied the rapid expansion of Victorian cities, were bound up with notions of the public body and private readership. In the case of many eighteenth and early-nineteenth century confessions, the skin of the criminal was removed following his or her execution and used to bind the finished literary product, an act which, according to Steven Connors, came to function as ‘graphical ventriloquism’ (2004: 43). As with the media’s dissection of the Ripper victims, whose ruined bodies represented a threat to Victorian morality, the bodies of executed criminals were authenticated, made to bear witness to the violence they had once enacted on the wider social body. Thus violence, narrative, and the damaged body came to constitute a reticular relationship which guaranteed publishing success in Victorian wound culture. In the case of the Ripper victims, their bodies were made to speak; they formed tableaux which represented Victorian fears about the corruptions of the body, female sexuality, and seriality. Serial violence, as Seltzer has argued, was intrinsic to the success of serial publication, and never had the wounded body been more integral to the consumerism of mass-market periodicals than in 1888. As Alexandra Warwick has noted, the figure of the

35 A total of eleven murders are thought to be linked to one serial killer, although historians can only agree that five ‘canonical’ victims were killed by the same person. These were Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly. See Warwick (2007b: xiv) for detail.

36 Gallows confessions were testimonials and biographical accounts of criminality published during the 1820s until the 1840s, and were often sold at executions. Similarly Newgate novels were a form of sensation fiction which dramatised and often glamorised criminality. They usually depicted the capture, imprisonment or hanging of a protagonist or prominent character. Henry Fielding and Edward Bulwer-Lytton were two of the most popular authors of Newgate Novels during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively.

37 The victims of the ripper were photographed at each autopsy, and the photographs were published in a number of medical texts during the 1890s. While police photographs did not make it into the press at the time of the murders, a number of drawings depicting the scenes of the crimes did appear. See Odell (2006) for examples.
serial killer ‘is invented [...] in the century that could be described as having invented seriality itself’ (2007a: 71). In her work on nineteenth-century sexual transgression, Judith Walkowitz argues that the eviscerated bodies of the Ripper victims:

triggered off a set of psycho-sexual and political fears that resounded, in different ways, across the social spectrum. Body fragments testified to the monstrous nature of the crime, of the criminal, and of the social environment. If, traditionally, the “classical” body has signified the “health” of the larger social body – of a classed, homogenous, regulated social order – then the mounting array of “grotesque”, mutilated corpses in this case represented the exact inverse: a visceral analogue to the epistemological incoherence and political disorientation threatening the body politic (1992: 198).

Whilst the identity of The Ripper became the focus of wide-ranging and multitudinous discourses: social, political, medical, legal, and journalistic, the mutilated bodies of the five confirmed victims became obscured by their very visibility within these discourses. While the female body was a central concern in the journalistic reporting of the Whitechapel murders, it was also occluded by the focus on gothic masculinity which informed the hunt for ‘Jack’ (Smith 2004: 69). Like Walkowitz, Seltzer examines the figure of the serial killer, positing that the post-Ripper cultural climate formed the locus of a host of new anxieties surrounding the Victorian body. 38 He argues that the ‘occupation’ of serial killer, emerged as a viable identity due to the intersection between private and public desire inherent in the spectacle of violence created by the murders (1998: 1). Seltzer further asserts that: “‘senseless’ murder is where our most basic sense of the body and society, identity and desire, violence and intimacy, are secured, or brought to crisis’ (1998: 2). However, this process is not merely a consequence of class and gender miscegenation, as Walkowitz argues, nor does it reflect purely political ‘disorientation’, but also the threat to the body of mechanisation: the shock of contact between human and machine. The repetitive machinations of mass production, the processes by which machines endlessly produced commodities for consumption, are reflected in the repetitive violence of both serial publication and serial killing. Late-Victorian technological advances facilitated the invention of increasingly mechanised mass printing, with the majority of presses using little human labour by the end of the century. 39 Thus serial publications were produced using techniques which relegated the body to a subordinate position within machine

38 A serial killer is typically defined as an individual who has killed 3 or more people over a period of more than a month, with a ‘cooling off’ period between the murders, and whose motivation for killing is usually based on psychological gratification. See Renzetti et al (2013) for further definition and discussion in relation to gender.

culture, and which reflected the reproducibility of bodies of text and the duplicability and thus disposability of human beings. For Seltzer the serial killer embodies the tensions between traditional forms of seeing and understanding the body and violence, and the modernity which brought these bodies and that violence to an expanding public audience through mass publication. His work posits that the turn of the century heralded a major change in the way in which trauma was culturally symbolised and manifested, arguing that the wound:

is by now no longer the mark, the stigmata, of the sacred or heroic: it is the icon, or stigma, of the everyday openness of every body. This is a culture catered on trauma [...] a culture of the atrocity exhibition, in which people wear their damage like badges of identity, or fashion accessories (1998: 2).

If as Seltzer suggests, the wound is itself emblematic of an increasingly traumatised industrial population with a growing appetite for the violence of traumatic spectacle, then literary accounts of bodily damage might reflect the very aetiology of wound culture. In the late-nineteenth century, not only does the damaged body become subject to public exhibition, but so too do fictional accounts of self-wounding. Roger Luckhurst envisions trauma as a social mechanism which ‘violently opens passageways’ (2008: 3) between such previously well-defined spheres as the physical and psychological. He reiterates Seltzer’s assertion that the site of the wound attests to a collapse in the distinction between public and private, observing that ‘trauma is a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication [it] violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete’ (2008: 3). This thesis is, at its core, concerned with the relationship between the inside and the outside, the internal, private, psychological world and its relationship to the external world of the public, of the body. It is my contention that the ‘strange communication’ – the moment of symbolic transformation of the wound from sacred signifier to exhibition of traumatised identity – which allows the serial killer to emerge, also opens up a discursive space for its converse. The self-harmer, who, like the serial killer has usually experienced childhood trauma, turns their aggression not on others, but on themselves, asserting control of their own identity and body through actions of self-damage as self-preservation. Unlike serial killing – a largely masculine ‘occupation’ – self-harming is a distinctly feminine practice. I argue that New Woman writing engaged with the imagery of self-harm as a means by which to publicise the traumatised female

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40 Although data suggests that some self-harmers do not reported childhood neglect or abuse, the majority of those who harm themselves share psychological and developmental similarities with those who commit serial murders (Vronsky 2004).
psyche. In doing so, the fictional exhibition of the wounded, torn and damaged female body allowed the New Woman as both fictional character and feminist writer, to wear her damage like a badge of identity, threatening the status quo of the patriarchal system by affecting a breakdown of the distinction between the public and private spheres upon which it relied. Furthermore, I assert that the dramatisation of self-harm in the New Woman text represents a complex and self-destructive response to the particular conditions of its production. Thus, in depicting the imagery and rhetoric of self-damage, the New Woman writer arguably participates in a dangerous practice of self-harm through the very publication of her work.

The Damaged Body as Text

As the locus of desire in narrative throughout the Western philosophical tradition, the body was expected to signify in legal and fiduciary contexts as well as the fictional texts produced and consumed by a Victorian society increasingly drawn in by the spectacle of trauma. As Roland Barthes has convincingly argued, the body is itself text; a complex palimpsest of narrative symbols and meanings inscribed by the individual’s experience within their culture, which simultaneously teaches individuals how to read themselves and others. For Barthes ‘the goal of literary work […] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text’ (1990: 4); he posits that the experience of reading is itself a process by which narrative is produced, and that the reader is thus his/herself a text. Thus it is in reading one’s self and one’s culture, the body can be made to produce endless textual signs.41 According to Michel Foucault, the body is an artefact of culture determined and constructed by a variety of organising forces which seek to position it in relation to self-regulating boundaries of normativity. Critical of these forces, he singles out both the institutions which came to prominence during the Victorian period, and the observational tactics deployed and internalised by a society seeking to control deviation from the mainstream.42 Extending the claims of Barthes and Foucault, Judith Butler views the body as entirely the product of cultural construction, as a collection of performative gestures which reinforce – or place the subject in opposition to – normative identity. Thus ‘acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications, manufactured and sustained

41 Barthes posits the body as a site of convergence between meaning and the symbolic field, as the ‘sole object’ from which our ideological structures ‘derive […] unity’ (1990: 24).
through corporeal signs and other discursive means’ (2006: 185). Unlike Butler, who is largely unwilling to acknowledge the body’s biological as opposed to linguistic semantic possibilities, Peter Brooks views the body as a combination of both cultural and organic signs linked to the desire to know implicit in the act of reading. For Brooks ‘epistemophilia’ (1992: 96); the desire to know and therefore possess the body through scopophilic observational strategies, underpins the Western narrative tradition and places woman at the centre of this drive. In Reading for the Plot (1992) Brooks notes of the heroes of the novel that they ‘may regularly be conceived as “desiring machines” whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire’ (1992: 39). Meanwhile their female counterparts reflect ‘the formation of an inner drive toward the self-assertion of selfhood in resistance to overt and violating male plots of ambition, a counter-dynamic which […] is only superficially passive’ (39). Through signification, the body is made to communicate both the desiring plots of masculine ambition and women’s resistance to them. These master plots, rely on the fact that:

identity, and its recognition, depend[...] on the body having been marked with a special sign, which looks suspiciously like a linguistic signifier. The sign imprints the body, making it part of the signifying process. Signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative – a body entered into writing (1993: 3).

Like Barthes, Foucault, and Butler, Brooks attests to the decipherability of the body as a system of codes which need to be read, as an object of modern culture, as a body of text. However, as Brooks argues in Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative (1993), this body is represented in the eighteenth –and nineteenth– century novel as a female body to be watched, explored, and known. In this way the narrative bodies in which damaged bodies were represented, exploited, contained, or displayed reflected the organising structures of dominant discourses which largely positioned women as objects of desire and men as entitled to the epistemic perspective. As Brooks goes on to explain:

[t]hat which is to be looked at, denuded, unveiled, has been repeatedly personified as female […] Sight, knowledge truth, and woman’s body: such a nexus intertwines central and highly charged attitudes and gestures of our culture. Man as knowing subject postulates woman’s body as the object to be known, by way of an act of inspection which claims to reveal the truth— or else makes that object into the ultimate enigma. Seeing woman as other is necessary to truth about the self (1993: 96-97).
The act of inspection is deployed by both the male ‘desiring machines’ (Brooks 1992: 39) who subject female characters to bodily as well as psychological scrutiny, and by the reader of the novel, who must view the female body through the lens of phallocentric desire. This process of seeking the truth – the secret at the heart of the text, reinforces masculine power through a process either of knowing, or of othering, by which that which cannot be known, controlled or understood is exoticised and made abject. As critics like Susan Lanser have recently shown, the history of Western literature is at once a history of narrative form, and of the body as subject to the heteronormative project of dominant Christian culture. Lanser argues that the form of a narrative must be considered as content itself, in that it reflects (particularly in the case of the traditional novel) both the attempt at, and complete failure of, the assertion of authoritative heterosexual discourse (2009: 497-499). I would argue that the New Woman writer of the Fin de Siècle deployed narrative form as content, making her bodies of text speak in some way for the bodies of the women whose self-harm they fictionalise. In the traditional New Woman novel, submissive forms of self-damage indicate the acceptance of masculine modes of narration even if these novels attempt to assert a specifically female literary tradition. Yet, in the poems and short stories of the 1890s, form comes to represent the erasure of passive-aggressive and predominantly silent protest, and facilitates the emergence of violent acts which subvert traditionally ‘feminine’ responses to trauma. The form chosen by New Woman writers is imbued, however unconsciously, with meanings relating to issues of gender, sexuality and female self-expression. However, as I will show throughout this thesis, the New Woman’s engagement with self-harm as both subject matter and literary process, simultaneously challenges and inscribes notions of feminine inferiority. New Woman writers subverted traditional modes of expression, by publishing short stories, poems and essays, but also opted to write traditional triple-decker novels like those of their predecessors and contemporaries. As New Woman writers sought new and more psychologically driven modes of literary representation, they were increasingly able to depict the spectacle of the damaged female body under patriarchy through ambiguity and metaphor, in ways which would have been more difficult in other modes. Where the popular novel tended to be plot driven, developing its characters slowly and at length, the short story offered a snapshot contained within a much smaller number of pages, which was often indistinct and open to interpretation precisely due to its length. The dominant realist mode of the novel necessitated lengthy description in order to satisfy readers of its authenticity or claim to truthful representation. It required resolutions which reflected orthodox standards of
morality, in which deviance from the accepted norm was punished and removed from the narrative, and compliance rewarded with the chance of assimilation within the hegemonic order. However, nineteenth-century poems and short stories at times operated in a much less constrained fashion, in which without the narrative space to resolve social anxieties, the reader could be asked to question rather than merely accept the established boundaries of normativity. New Woman literary production progressively turned to less conventional forms of writing as a way of dramatising the marginalisation of those who failed to conform to increasingly outdated yet culturally pervasive social expectations. In doing so, texts written by and about New Woman figures attempted to resist women’s categorisation as merely ‘to be looked at, denuded, [or] unveiled’, subverting the expectations of femininity outlined and legitimised by orthodox social and religious codes. However, I also show that in experimenting with tropes of self-harm such as anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation, largely through or in opposition to a framework of orthodox Christianity, these writers displayed women’s bodily damage at the hands of patriarchy in spectacular fashion. In this way New Woman writing about self-harm worked to eroticise the female body, inviting rather than deterring the epistemophilic gaze and the masculine novelistic drive. The practices of self-harm undertaken by the heroines of New Woman fiction, represent a central conflict which these writers, at least in part, set out to disavow. This conflict, between forging a new tradition of their own, and relying upon the restrictive forms and frameworks of a predominantly male literary canon, is embodied in the self-nullifying practices of characters who bravely deny the roles forced upon them by men, yet exemplify the lack of options available to women with the courage to do so.

**The New Woman in Wound Culture**

Despite an escalation of interest in the wounded body during the late-Victorian period, such interest tapped into much earlier mid-century scientific discourses surrounding the management of bodies, and in particular the unruly female body. Michel Foucault notes that Victorian medicine participated in the:

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43 I make this point with an awareness that nineteenth-century women’s short stories were not always devoid of a moral or didactic message, neither were they always ‘unconventional’. The short stories of the early-nineteenth century, for example, often mirrored religious tracts in their development of a single (usually Christian) moral theme or lesson, and were unambiguous in their deployment of this message. For discussion of early-nineteenth century short stories by women see Killick (2008).
hysteri[s]ation of women’s bodies: a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analysed – qualified and disqualified – as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of pathology intrinsic to it; whereby, finally, it was placed into organic communication with the social body (1990: 140).

By the end of the century, the wounded female body was no longer a figure confined to medical and scientific debate. Rather, it became both an erotic spectacle and an exhibited specimen, destined to be socially, culturally, and politically dissected by discourses produced and maintained by Victorian institutional powers (Foucault: 1990: 18). Female sexuality had been transformed from a taboo subject in the early part of the century, to one which was debated by the medical and scientific communities, as well as the press and writers of fiction, with increasing regularity as the century proceeded. As Elaine Showalter notes in The Female Malady, ‘hysteria’ became the blanket term applied to an array of symptoms related to female sexuality and the demand for gender equality.44 The Victorian female body became a site of medical exploration, observation, and penetration, with new and often invasive procedures prescribed for the treatment of anything from the onset of puberty, sexual desire, and even menopause (Showalter 1993: 74–75). During the mid-century the most drastic (although comparably rare) of such treatments was the cliteroectomy, performed by several practitioners but most frequently by Dr. Isaac Baker Brown between 1859 and 1866.45 This brutal procedure attempted to control the minds of women who refused to conform to society’s expectations of what Lyn Pykett terms the ‘proper feminine’ (2006: 9), by surgically removing parts of the female sexual organ.46 Responsible for gynaecological medicine, doctors were increasingly at liberty to exercise male will over the female (sexual) body, and although by the end of the nineteenth century the treatment of female patients had become less invasive, it continued to be prescribed in terms of male observation and influence. Emphasis on watching, regulating, and even gaining access to the recesses of the female body remained a crucial part of treating ‘hysterical’ women. The rest cure advocated by Dr. Silas Weir-Mitchell was less invasive than other treatments; yet it still required compulsory bed rest, observation and occasional

44 Feminist readings of hysteria in fiction have shown how this diagnosis reflected the professional impotence of the medical men who applied it so liberally, and at the same time, was a metaphor for competing impulses of desire and rage in the form of the fictional madwoman. See Bronfen (1998) and Gilbert & Gubar (1984) for further discussion of the diagnosis and treatment of hysteria in Victorian medicine.
45 See Showalter (1993: 76) for discussion of the scope of Brown’s operations.
46 For modern feminists, the procedure has come to symbolise the penetrative practices employed by Victorian patriarchy – to assert control over unruly female bodies through the twin phallocentrism of medicine and science. See Heilmann (2002), Bronfen (1998), Showalter (1993) and Gilbert& Gubar (1984).
forced feeding, acts which gratified the masculine epistemophilic drive.\textsuperscript{47} By the Fin de Siècle, hysteria had become synonymous with the emergent New Woman figure and as the very embodiment of feminine rebelliousness and the anarchic threat to the ruling order. She was categorised as un-womanly, feeble, and hysterical, and her writing was considered the root cause of this infirmity (Showalter 1991: 40). Orthodox science and ‘respectable’ bourgeois publications were quick to publicise the perceived link between women’s literary output, and their inability to reproduce, or to live long and healthy lives. Limited-energy conservation theory was based on Spenserian notions which drew on the First Law of physics. Victorian scientists asserted that the body could only expend finite quantities of energy.\textsuperscript{48} Therefore women –possessed of smaller amounts due to their correspondingly small bodies– needed to devote their meagre reserves of energy to childbirth and motherhood. Women who pursued education were perceived to be unnatural; their expenditure of intellectual energies was seen to detrimentally affect their ability to perform their most sacred duties. The deaths of New Woman writers such as Constance Naden and Amy Levy (both in 1889) did nothing to dispel this characterisation, especially since Levy had dramatically committed suicide by carbon monoxide inhalation (New 1993: 1). Lyssa Randolph has shown that after her death Levy’s body was ‘read through other texts about degeneration and female weakness’ (2010: 216), a process exemplified by Max Nordau’s \textit{Degeneration} (1895).\textsuperscript{49} Nordau critiqued both New Woman and decadent writers, explaining that:

the physician, especially if he has devoted himself to the special study of nervous and mental maladies, recognises at a glance, in the \textit{fin-de-siècle} disposition, in the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry, in the life and conduct of men who write mystic, symbolic and ‘decadent’ works, and the attitude taken by their admirers in the tastes and aesthetic instincts of fashionable society, the confluence of two well-defined conditions of the disease, with which he is quite familiar, viz. Degeneration (degeneracy) and hysteria [...] (1993: 15).

\textsuperscript{47} The New Woman writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman became perhaps the most vocal critic of the rest cure following her own treatment, which is depicted in her short story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892).

\textsuperscript{48} Herbert Spencer was a Victorian polymath who wrote extensively on philosophical, biological, political and social issues. After reading Darwin’s \textit{On the Origin of Species} (1859) Spencer coined the term ‘survival of the fittest’ and his work attempted to connect biological and social concerns, advocating evolution as a universal law. See Spencer’s \textit{Psychology of the Sexes} (1873). The first law of physics states that an object is either at rest or moves at a state of constant velocity unless acted upon by an external force.

\textsuperscript{49} Levy had contributed a number of poems and short stories to Oscar Wilde’s periodical \textit{Woman’s World}, prompting him to speak of her as ‘gifted’ (New 1993: 1). Wilde’s support further compromised Levy’s reputation following his conviction for indecency in 1895. \textit{Degeneration} was a book-length diatribe on the physical effects of social phenomena at the turn of the nineteenth century, originally published in German in 1892. Nordau refers to the Fin de Siècle as the ‘Dusk of Nations’, comparing it to the fall of the Roman Empire. In particular, he accused the music of Wagner and the plays of Ibsen of being morally dangerous, blaming decadent and symbolist writers and artists for what he saw as the impeding collapse of civilisation.
In this extract, Nordau draws attention to the feminine qualities of male authors by connecting their intellectual pursuits to hysteria, a largely female illness. In doing so, he draws on already established cultural and pseudo-scientific debates surrounding the correlation between the overdeveloped brain and underdeveloped, feminine body. In the ailing bodies of the neurasthenic decadent artists, Nordau saw proof of the feminising and thus weakening forces of aestheticism. His scathing criticism of perhaps the most infamous fictional account of an aesthete in Joris-Karl Huysmans’ novel *A Rebours*, both confirms this and points to Nordau’s engagement with Victorian concerns about the potentially limited amount of energy available for human disbursement. Followers of Darwinian models of essential sex-difference, warned that the education of women produced an incalculable strain on the reproductive organs which threatened the eugenic health of the nation (Richardson 2003: 40-41). An increase in asylum admissions during the mid-nineteenth century encouraged rigorous psychological investigation of the relationship between mind and body, whilst prevalent evolutionary thought asserted the importance of the interplay between them. Scientific naturalists such as Huxley, Pearson, Galton and Darwin had attempted to ground the psyche in the natural world, connecting each symptom of mental deterioration with an equal and opposite physical cause. Exemplary of this thinking is the observation made by Grant Allen in ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’ (1889) that ‘both in England and America, the women of the cultivated classes are becoming unfit to be wives or mothers. Their sexuality […] is enfeebled or destroyed’ (2001: 218). The New Woman was lampooned as weak, selfish, hysterical, and sterile by a male-oriented popular press which attempted to represent her as a dangerous figure bent on the destruction of the traditional family. In response, a huge range of novels, short stories, essay and poems produced by women writers, asserted the health and vigour of the female intellectual, while others instead depicted the impossibility of female strength under

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50 Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) was an English biologist and fervent supporter of Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution. Karl Pearson (1857-1936) was a mathematician and statistician and proponent of Eugenics and Social Darwinism. Person also wrote the biography of Sir Francis Galton (founder of the Eugenics movement). Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) was cousin of Charles Darwin and invented the term ‘eugenics’ in 1883. Hugely influenced by his cousin’s work *On the Origin of Species*, he went on to become president of the Eugenics Education Society and editor of the *Eugenics Review*. This approach was rooted in Newton’s Third Law of physics, by which for every action of opposing force, there must be an equal and opposite reaction.

51 Grant Allen (1848-1889) was a successful scientific writer and novelist; he was sympathetic to the New Woman cause despite some conflicted ideas about the Woman Question which stemmed from his support of Darwinian concepts of sex-difference. Allen’s comments had found fictional expression in his own New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), in which his heroine attempts to raise a child alone whilst retaining her independence. Allen depicts her catastrophic failure, as her daughter grows up to despise her for raising her as illegitimate, and his heroine kills herself.
the very male-dominated system of education and economics which mocked women’s frailty. Despite their different political stances and literary strategies, a number of these writers had something in common: a desire to represent the traumatised female psyche under patriarchy through images and acts of feminine bodily self-harm. Thus the damaged female body was written into the narrative of nineteenth-century ‘feminist’ agitation—made to signify ‘the mark, the stigmata, of the sacred or heroic: […] the icon, or stigma, of the everyday openness of every body’ (Seltzer 1998: 2). However, women’s self-harm was represented in different ways; in novels which critiqued classical philosophy yet valorised conventional religion, in poems which camouflaged women’s frustrations as those of men, and in short stories which explored violent images of self-wounding, but framed them in ways which undermined the impact of their gynocentric counter-discourses.

It was not merely for medical or literary purposes that wounded bodies became part of public discourse during the shift in cultural attitudes which followed both new medical and scientific advances, and the 1888 Ripper murders. In her work on the Victorian freak show, Lillian Cranton explains that the Victorian relationship to images of physical difference was ‘complex, marked by conflicting impulses to reject, exploit [and] celebrate the odd body’ (2009: 2). As part of the popular display of ‘odd’ bodies which constituted this form of entertainment, the Victorian ‘freak’ served a distinct purpose as an exhibition which reinforced normative culture by representing the damaged body as ‘other’. Cranton draws on and develops Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival as a means by which to distract and control the working classes (1984: 10). She positions the freak show within Foucauldian parameters as both a spectacle and ideological weapon through which to reinforce normative culture and dominant religious and social beliefs (Cranton 2009: 2-3). The alterity of the odd and often damaged body allowed for a breakdown of the strict rules regarding class—because visitors from all classes occupied the same space, and gender—because naked or semi-naked female bodies could be examined. The freak show provided a space in which the female body, as well as the male, could be displayed, discussed and objectified, in which the collapse of usually well-defined boundaries, facilitated cross-class and cross-gender observation which could not be sanctioned elsewhere in society. Nadja Durbach suggests that the capacity of these bodies to conflate gender distinctions (amongst others) demonstrated a potentially subversive ‘ability to inhabit two categories at once, and
thus challenge the distinction between them’ (2010: 5-6).

The ability of the odd or damaged body to transgress the boundaries which served to fasten Victorian identity to clearly-defined traditional and largely Christian morality, presented a threat to the society which gazed upon them. One key component of this threat was the public display of the female body, a sight usually confined to the domestic and private space. Like the odd or deformed body, the New Woman figure also resisted clear definition; she often inhabited the interstitial spaces between culturally-constructed identities, resisting delineation even to this day.

Her work provided a space, not unlike the freak show, where the display of damaged female bodies allowed her to transgress the margins of gender and sexuality. New Woman writing about self-harm utilised the technique of exhibiting atrocity as an act of rebellion against normative hierarchies of masculine power, yet also in many ways – consciously or not – reproduced these very hierarchies.

**Theorising Female Self-Harm**

Contemporary medicine now recognises distinct psychological behaviours which constitute a broadly defined spectrum of self-harming activities in widespread use in twenty-first century psychiatric research. However, understanding and diagnosis of self-harming behaviours as separate conditions mainly unrelated to suicide, has been the result of centuries of medical and psychological advancement; knowledge which has developed most rapidly and significantly during the past three decades. The most useful and precise twenty-first century definition of self-harm comes from the Centre for Suicide Research in Oxford. It defines self-harm as:

an act with a non-fatal outcome in which an individual deliberately did one or more of the following:

- initiated a behaviour (e.g., self-cutting, jumping from a height) which they intended to cause harm to the self;
- ingested a substance in excess of the prescribed or generally recognised therapeutic dose; ingested a recreational or illicit drug (which they intended to cause harm to the self); ingested a non-ingestible substance or object (e.g., razor blade, batteries).

(Hawton et al 2002)

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32 Not all the bodies exhibited in freak shows were damaged or wounded. However, Cranton’s work makes the case for the centrality of the damaged body as a metaphor for the complicated class and gender ideologies of the period.

33 See Ledger (1997: 9-34) who explains the difficulties in assigning a single set of characteristics or political ideologies to the figure of the New Woman.
Emphasis is placed on both the intentionality of self-harming, as well as the acute and non-fatal nature of the acts described. Suicide is not considered an act of self-harm, since the goal of self-harming activities is to ultimately survive and repeat them. Twenty-first century culture is inundated with images and discourses of self-harm; from the anorexic models and celebrities who line the pages of fashion magazines, to the self-help guides which have flooded the literary marketplace in an effort to help those who starve, burn, cut, poison or otherwise deliberately injure themselves.\textsuperscript{54} While theoretical and psychological frameworks for understanding self-harm differ widely depending on the form it takes (and will be addressed separately in each of the chapters of this thesis), contemporary medicine emphasises the importance of childhood development and traumatic experience in the formation of all self-injurious behaviours. These contemporary psychological models of self-harm, do, however, tend to operate roughly within the boundaries of the Freudian Oedipal paradigm, in which ‘deviation’ (2001b: 185) in early childhood development accounts for the formation of the abnormal drives which facilitate ‘perversions’ such as self-injurious behaviour. In Freud’s theory of life and death instincts, which appears in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} (1920), the self-harmer withdraws from human connections and retreats into a narcissistic position, silently driving him or herself toward death. Freud emphasised that it is only through the activity of the life instinct that this death-like force is projected outward as destructive impulses to objects in the outside world (2001e: 7-66). Although – as in the case of anorexia – Freud’s work identifies certain integral elements of the condition years before his contemporaries, it does not account entirely for instances of behaviours which develop outside of the Oedipal phase. For example, Freud’s centralisation of the Oedipal stage in the development of self-destructive drives, does not consider earlier experiences of infantile trauma, nor the culturally-constructed or performative nature of certain cases.\textsuperscript{55} While instances of self-harm in patients who are unable to trace specific traumatic events from childhood might attest to the unreliability of this paradigm, attachment theory addresses this in part. It argues that early and infantile traumas manifest in a warped sense of maternal attachment in which ‘events from childhood […] appear to get “stuck” in the memory, and are manifested as incoherence of speech in an otherwise coherent narrative of childhood’ and an inability to express

\textsuperscript{54} For examples see: Turner (2002), Hollander (2008) and Chapman & Gratz (2009).

\textsuperscript{55} See \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} (1990) in which Judith Butler proposes her theory of gender ‘performativity’. Butler argues that identity (whether sexuality, gender or class) is entirely constructed and culturally produced according to the boundaries of normativity established by that particular culture. Identity is thus fixed through the repeated enactment of normative behaviours, and is consequently not a result of biological or genetic factors.
emotions in a healthy and measured way (Adshead 2010: 73). Twenty-first century attachment theories draw upon Donald Winnicott’s psychoanalytic model of maternal ‘holding’ (Winnicott 1989: 26), a process by which a child responds to feelings of safety, security, and care (or a lack thereof) provided by the ‘primary maternal preoccupation’ (Winnicott 1965: 303) of the infant’s mother.\(^{56}\) Maternal care, if preoccupied by trauma, disinterested, or dismissive, thus imprints upon the infant a sense of detachment from the self, a ‘failure of mentali[s]ation’ (Adshead 2010: 74); this in turn is reasserted through actions which put the self and the body into a narrative correspondence which is often violent. According to Gwen Adshead ‘deliberate self-harm is a symptom of internal distress, which has both a private and a public message’ (1997: 111), thus the body is made to signify that which has been unspoken, the failure of the self to accurately or fully narrate its psychic traumas.

For women who self-harm, frustration is turned against the self in a ‘typically female expression of anger’ (Motz 2008: 139) because:

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\text{[w]hile men tend to cope with anger by directing it outward, viewing themselves as the victims of injustice in a harsh and punitive world, women often blame themselves, and take responsibility for wrong done to them. When memories of abuse or feelings of anger threaten to overwhelm them, and destroy their conciliatory stance in relation to aggressors, they turn anger inwards […] (Motz 2008: 139).}
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Self-harming expressions of anger against a punitive world in which women’s horizons are limited and controlled by men, appears, on the surface, to be an entirely self-destructive enterprise. However, the self-harmer enacts violence on his/her own body as an act of survival rather than of suicide, a distinction which Victorian psychologists were not aware of. For Freud it represents part of the drive towards death which serves to re-affirm life. For twenty-first century clinicians, acts of self-harm display a desire to cope with overwhelming feelings of pain and anger, as acts of survival which –temporarily at least– defer the urge to die and allow the sufferer to live. Self-harm is ‘a powerful, silent language [which] communicates states of mind to others, inscribing a narrative on the body itself’ (Motz, 2009: 15) and a ‘frantic attempt to assuage overwhelming trauma that an individual cannot process’ (Kleinot 2009: 119). Self-harm is thus a paradoxical gesture, one which both damages and preserves, feeds and yet mitigates desperation, and which

\(^{56}\) Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) was a paediatrician and psychoanalyst who became influential in the field of object relations theory.
temporarily at least, gives voice to the otherwise silent protests of those living in a world in which either their gender or other markers of identity are outside of heteronormative cultural expectations. To inscribe the body, to make external the internal through acts which express traumas which cannot otherwise be voiced, is both to resist and yet ultimately succumb to Western patriarchal and Christian ideologies of the soul as separate and superior to the body. As I show throughout this thesis, the paradox of self-damage and self-preservation inherent in acts such as: anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation, are dramatised in the New Woman text of the Fin De Siècle. It is no surprise given the prevalence of self-harming amongst twenty-first century women, that the novels, poems and short stories written by women at this time represent some of the most graphic examples of these practices.

**Self-Harm in the Victorian Context**

As clinical psychologists like Motz have argued, women typically locate their sense of identity in their bodies; as the woman’s private sphere of influence, the cultural weapon with which to assert, or the blank canvas upon which to inscribe, female experience. With restricted influence outside the domestic space, the Victorian woman might arguably have turned on her own body in order to express feelings of disappointment or anger. Like the twenty-first century women whose self-harming is now the subject of psychiatric as well as sociological research, the Victorian woman was equally (and indeed more) encouraged by cultural norms to look to herself for blame and take responsibility for her inadequacies according to those norms. Victorian expectations of ideal femininity required women to embody qualities of the ‘proper feminine’ (Pykett 2006: 9), qualities which included: passivity, submission, and most importantly, silence, on matters of emotional concern. Women who failed to adhere to expectations of angelic femininity, were demonised as improper, and so self-harming strategies arguably expressed yet also concealed female anger at the limited options available to women who raged against their situation. In this thesis I argue that given the socio-historical context of women’s political disenfranchisement, Victorian women had reason to resort to self-harming behaviours as much, or even more than, their twentieth –or twenty-first century– counterparts.\(^57\)

However, little evidence of the rates of self-harming in Victorian women exists today. This

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\(^57\) Although little is known about the prevalence of Victorian self-harm, even twenty-first century records are not exhaustive. Self-harm continues to go largely unreported, and often incidences cannot be distinguished from attempts at suicide even by twenty-first century clinicians.
is largely due to the dearth of official records kept during a time in which female violence (even against the self) was a taboo and disturbing subject. Incidences of female self-harm in twenty-first century Britain are highest amongst populations of women who are incarcerated in penal or mental health facilities (Lloyd 1995: 178). According to critics like Ann Lloyd, self-harm among female prisoners is ignored by a system which views violent women as ‘doubly deviant’ (1995: xvii) owing to both their institutionalisation and their rejection of twentieth-century gender norms which continue to reflect those of the previous century. Some of the only data on Victorian self-harm comes from the mostly incomplete and inconsistent records kept by medical staff at prisons, workhouses, and asylums during the nineteenth century. In the Victorian prison system suicides by women were not as common as by men, yet were recorded as such even when attempted and failed on numerous occasions, because those who examined the survivors were unable to differentiate between self-harm and attempted suicide (Priestly 1999: 74). Victorian women prisoners were prone to acts such as food refusal or self-injury (Higgs 2007: 98) and often sustained bodily damage during the act of ‘breaking out’, a type of riotous behaviour which took the form of smashing furniture and injuring oneself in a frenzy (May 2006: 34-35). However, while it was generally and anecdotally observed that female prisoners committed these acts, logging of injuries sustained was neither thorough nor reliable. Victorian workhouse records were more detailed, owing in part to their reliance on parish funding and regulation, and they recorded the name and gender of each inmate, along with the date of admission. However, little information as to the physical condition or mental state of the patient upon admission or release is noted, and the ‘remarks’ box at the end of the admission log is the only space in which to comment about the patient’s condition (Register of Admissions to Hampstead Workhouse 1893-1896). In over three thousand samples of workhouse registers at the Hampstead workhouse between 1893 and 1896, there is not a single female occupant who warrants comment in the ‘remarks’ box. This indicates that the information was not considered important in the case of pauper and working-class bodies, or that abnormalities in the physical conditions of the inmates went ignored or did not exist. The workhouse register of deaths is not much more helpful, in that it supplies only the inmate’s name, age, parish and place of burial as well as the date of death. The cause of death is absent from these records, and they supply no further information which might suggest whether inmates were self-harming to the point of suicide.

An example of the anecdotal evidence of women ‘breaking out’ can be found in the report of the Directors of Convict Prisons taken at Milbank prison in 1853.
Workhouse infirmary records supply the most detailed accounts of the bodily condition of vulnerable patients and include: date of the log, name of patient, time when presented, address of patient, name of medical officer, name of relieving officer, disease, and termination of the case (St Pancras Workhouse Infirmary Log 1890). Common diagnoses of injuries include ‘laceration of leg’ and ‘injury to leg’ (St Pancras Workhouse Infirmary Log 1890) but are not more specific and give no indication as to whether injuries were self-inflicted. In all two thousand entries in the log at the St Pancras Workhouse Infirmary between 1889 and 1890, there is not a single reference to injuries to the wrists or arms, although there are several records of injuries to the legs. No indication is given in the register, as to the cause of the various diagnoses; in the case of one patient who had been ‘scalded’ (St Pancras Workhouse Infirmary Log 1890) it is impossible to ascertain whether or not this was of the patient’s own volition. Of the records available, there are no signs that injuries were repeated, nor of any patterns, suggesting that self-harm in workhouses was either not prevalent within the population at this time, or that incidences were not deemed significant enough to record.

Admissions to asylums from the workhouses were recorded, with the date, name and gender of patient, and a comment on whether the patient was dangerous or had particular habits. No information is given as to the physical or mental condition of the patient upon transfer to the asylum, which is in contrast to admission to private asylums. At the Royal Holloway Sanatorium at Virginia Waters in Surrey, admission logs indicate diagnosis upon admission, as well as the occupation, marriage status, and physical condition of the patient (1825-1900: 1-15). Similarly, at Bethlem Royal Hospital these records are much more detailed and include the diagnosis, and the physical and mental condition of residents upon arrival and throughout their stay (Bethlem Royal Hospital Casebooks 1860-1884). From approximately 1850, a diagnosis of ‘suicidal tendencies’ in both male and female patients is noted with increasing frequency in the register of patients for both Royal Holloway and Bethlem. Of the six hundred patients admitted to Bethlem between 1859 and 1900, twenty one women were institutionalised for suicide-related illnesses, or presented with suicidal tendencies. Of these women, all are described as a ‘gentlewoman’ or the ‘wife of’ a professional man (Register of Admissions to Bethlem Royal Hospital 1859-1881).

There appears to be no differentiation between patients admitted to these facilities for suicide attempts, and admissions for self-harming activities. In fact, in the cases of suicide

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As Sarah Chaney notes, standardised admission papers at Bethlem began to ask whether the patient was ‘disposed to suicide, or otherwise self-injury’ from approximately 1844 (2011a: 280).
attempts, the method of suicide is omitted from the record entirely. As Sarah Chaney has already shown, – the term ‘self-injury’ was used to refer to a number of acts from food-refusal to attempted suicide in nineteenth-century psychiatric contexts (2011a: 280). This meant that a variety of behaviours were categorised as self-harm when they may not have constituted a pattern of deliberate self-damage, and were instead indicative of isolated incidences of violence or disobedience. At Bethlem in 1868, Eliza Staffens suffered with ‘suicidal mania’, Eliza White with ‘delusions of burial alive’ and Eliza West, Constance Savoy, Frances Beardswell and Mary Mitchell ‘refuse[d] food’ at intervals between 1874 and 1879. In 1878 Caroline Walker ‘fell from [a] window’ and in 1880 Marion Liddel is described as having ‘bruises on arms’ and ‘cuts on elbows’ (Register of Admissions to Bethlem Royal Hospital 1859-1881). In both pauper and working class psychiatric institutions, as in the workhouses and prisons, little is recorded of self-harm among female patients or prisoners, and the only surviving records are limited to the question of whether the patient presented as ‘disposed to suicide, or otherwise self-injury’ (Bethlem Royal Hospital Casebooks 1844-1860). In the case of the working classes, this may have been due to a seeming lack of importance concerning the bodies of the poor, and in the case of private or middle-class institutions, to hesitancy on the part of medical professionals to make this behaviour a matter of public record.

Self-harming behaviours were new to Victorian psychiatric practice, and while the phenomenon emerged as a troubling facet of certain disorders in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it would be decades before adequate treatment specific to each type would follow. Nineteenth-century alienists, as Chaney argues, were particularly interested in the psychology of those who self-harmed, and developed a language (including the term ‘self-mutilation’) which drew on literary examples as well as case studies (2011: 281a). By the late-nineteenth century psychiatry had begun to concern itself with the most sensational and inexplicable of self-harming behaviours, those which most violently disrupted the tissues of the body; these included self-mutilation, skin-picking, and trichotillomania. However, as the most violent expression of self-harm, self-mutilation alone warranted entry into A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine (1892), which does not include an entry on self-harm or self-injury in general (1976: 1147-1152). Psychiatric

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60 Examples include classical literature such as Homer’s The Iliad (800-600BC), in which King Priam ‘tore at his grey locks and pulled the hair from his head’ (2003: 382) after the death of his son Hector. In Shakespeare’s King Lear (c.606), Lear’s madness is described with particular reference to self-injurious activities. In Act 3 Scene 1, during a conversation between Kent and an un-named Gentleman Lear is described as he ‘tears his white hair’ (2008: 78 line 10).
research did not directly connect self-harming behaviour to passive or less violent acts like self-starvation or addiction, and focussed rather on the sexual element particular to violent self-harm which both Richard Von Kraft Ebbing and Sigmund Freud were to identify in their respective works on masochism and sexual sadism. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) Krafft-Ebing describes masochism as ‘pleasure from reckless acts of violence at the hands of the consort […] from the most abhorrent and monstrous to the most ludicrous and absurd acts’ (1909: 53). While Kraft Ebbing makes note of the violence which attends acts of deliberate self-harm, he connects it entirely to sexuality; what he terms the ‘voluptuous sensation of coitus’ (1909: 53). In Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* he describes the passive acceptance of violence from an external agent in which ‘satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object’ (2001c: 158). Nineteenth-century asylum psychiatrists frequently encountered and recorded cases of self-injury, but failed to recognise them as potentially unrelated to suicide. As such, James Adam – the Medical Superintendent of the Crichton Royal Institution in Dumfries, and the Southern Counties Asylum – writes in 1883 that:

> although instances of attempted self-injury are not infrequent, it will be found as a rule on inquiry that the intention in their infliction is suicidal in character – whereas instances of wilful self-mutilation, for its own sake, are much more rare […] The task of investigation becomes easier, however, when we find the mutilative act the direct result of hallucination or delusion affecting the special senses. [Patients] will readily tell you that the act has been committed owing to hearing a voice from heaven commanding them to do it; or by a terror at seeing a vision […] (Adam 1883: 213).

As a senior psychiatrist and widely published author on psychiatric subjects, Adam exemplifies the authoritative late-Victorian medical discourse surrounding self-harm.\(^{61}\) Firstly, he asserts that self-injury is not infrequent, but chooses to discuss only the most spectacular form of bodily self-harm from a range of less violent or dramatic acts that his work would have brought him into contact with every day. Secondly, his discussion largely excludes deliberate self-injury as an exercise unrelated either to suicidal drives or episodes of psychosis. Although his research was rooted in the study of those incarcerated within psychiatric institutions who self-harmed in response to both mental illness and incarceration, the potential of self-harming as a form of self-preservation, seems to have entirely escaped his notice. Interestingly Adam does make reference to a female self-

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\(^{61}\) Adam was a major contributor to *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* (1892), the official reference guide to psychological disorders during the late-nineteenth century.
harmer in his article on self-injury, which cites a rare case study of a women so disturbed, that she presented to the Crichton Royal Institution intent on disfiguring herself by any means possible. He describes one Mrs B, a forty-five year old married woman and former governess who ‘had attempted self-violence by various means, and was deluded on religious subjects’ (1883: 215). Adam describes from his case books her:

greatly reduced, exhausted, and emaciated frame – a cachectic, hollow, and worn facial appearance, the right eye is wanting, the hair is grizzled and grey, and there are marked facial lines; the cause of the repeated mutilative attempts of which she has been guilty, and to which she still has a determined tendency, is hallucination of the senses, both of hearing and vision […] She hears voices commanding her to do the acts referred to […] She says she feels she is not worthy to live, because she is so diseased and wicked […] (1883: 216).

Adam’s case study is exceptional, and is one of the few examples which exists today, of a sustained investigation of self-harm in a British Victorian female patient. Significantly, the language used by Adam to frame the female lunatic, and by which she also frames herself, betrays the deeply encoded expectations of gender at play in Victorian psychiatry. She is described as having lost that which signifies her femininity; her skin, hair and body are testament to her ‘guilt[…], implying that she is culpable not only for her lunacy, but for the erasure of gendered expectations such as beauty, purity, and docility. She calls herself ‘diseased and wicked’ drawing on the rhetoric of sin and fall implicit in biblical constructions of femininity, which is unsurprising given the ‘religious’ nature of her hallucinations. Few Victorian case studies of female self-harmers such as Adam’s can be accessed today, and records suggest little about how much (if at all) self-harm was committed by those who were neither incarcerated, deluded, or suicidal. Although documents relating to rates of Victorian female alcoholism do exist, they are anecdotal at best, and represent a wider project of documenting the conditions of the poor in Victorian cities which was at play during the late-nineteenth century. Fictional texts remain the only substantial documents relating to various self-harming behaviours for which all the conditions for widespread practice were at work in the late-Victorian period. My research does not set out to prove that Victorian women were prolific self-harmers, but rather to suggest that the lack of official material relating to female self-harm, does not accurately reflect the imaginative deployment of bodily self-damage as a major thematic concern in women’s writing of the late-nineteenth century. This thesis examines the use of strategies

62 Cachexia is also known as ‘wasting syndrome’ and is signified by loss of weight, muscle atrophy, fatigue, weakness, and significant loss of appetite in someone who is not actively trying to lose weight.
of corporeal spectacle and display in late-century women’s writing; it references the female body as a communicative tool upon which the language of both protest against, and submission to, Western patriarchal and predominantly Christian ideologies is inscribed. It questions the extent to which these strategies both subvert and propitiate Victorian cultural mores, and whether through their very expression, they depart from traditional representations of bodies, and traditional bodies of text. The New Woman writer’s increasing rejection of conventional narrativisation emerges alongside her preoccupation with the increasingly violent strategies of bodily self-control deployed by her heroines.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a socio-religious framework within which to read self-harm in New Woman writing, positioning orthodox religion as a major contributing factor in both the recourse to and expression of self-harm by women. It examines three texts written by two New Women authors: *The Wing of Azrael* (1889) and *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) by Mona Caird, and *Anna Lombard* (1901) by Victoria Cross. Caird was a major player on the British literary and political scene of the Fin de Siècle, publishing extensively on contentious issues such as marriage and motherhood and inciting debate in a number of key areas. In contrast, Cross spent barely any time in Britain; she published fiction featuring New Woman characters in exotic settings or compromising situations, yet did not contribute to the public debate surrounding the Woman Question. My discussion of these three texts demonstrates the extent to which very different New Woman writers critiqued and yet internalised Christian moral dictates despite their respective tirades against religious conventions like marriage. My second, third and fourth chapters examine three forms of self-harm as they are manifested in New Woman fiction: anorexia, alcoholism, and self-mutilation, all of which share psychological and representational characteristics, yet are essentially distinct and with their own symptoms and origins. In chapter two, I discuss self-starvation in the work of Sarah Grand, who claimed responsibility for coining the phrase ‘New Woman’ during an exchange with the novelist Ouida published in the *North American Review* in 1894. I position self-starvation in Grand’s novels as a response to the Cartesian duality which is implicit in Western philosophical approaches to the body. I also show how the triple-decker novel form in

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63 Caird’s 1888 article ‘Marriage’ was published in the popular Westminster Review and called marriage a ‘vexatious failure’. London’s *Daily Telegraph* quickly responded with a series called ‘Is Marriage a Failure?’ which drew a reported 27,000 letters from around the world and continued for three months.

64 Descartes conceptualised the body as both separate from, and inferior to, the mind or soul. His *Meditations on First Philosophy* set out his argument that the essential self was to be found within the thinking mind and soul, and not the physical body. See Descartes (2008: 9-20).
which the majority of Grand’s texts were published, works to bind the bodies of its heroines to both conventional narratives, and passive-aggressive strategies of feminine resistance. To this end I examine three of Grand’s novels: *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), and *The Beth Book* (1897). In the third chapter I explore representations of alcoholism in texts written by and about the New Woman including George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893), George Egerton’s ‘Gone Under’ (1894) and Mary Angela Dickens’s ‘So as by Fire’ (1896). I show how the bodies of women who consume excessively, can be considered alongside the starving heroines of Grand’s fiction, as the frightening converse of Cartesian dualism. I argue that the female characters examined in my third chapter, drink to excess in an effort to disrupt the established dichotomy of women as either angels or demons, saints or sinners, private bodies or public figures. In the fourth and final chapter, I consider the most violent form of self-harm deployed by the New Woman writer. I discuss the use of the imagery and rhetoric of self-mutilation in ‘Felo de Se’ (1889) by Amy Levy, and four short stories by George Egerton which feature self-mutilating heroines. I propose that self-mutilation in these texts functions as an act of feminine self-preservation, and I situate the violence of opening up the body as a metaphorical opening up of public and narrative spaces by the New Woman writer. In all four chapters, I consider the relationship between New Woman cultural production, and representations of the damaged female body in art and literature written by men. I explore the New Woman’s use of self-limiting symbolism, and suggest that her subversive displays of female self-harm both disrupt and ultimately reify the masculine ideologies and gender binaries against which she protested.
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Saintly Self-Harm: The Victorian Religious Context

*The Politics of Suffering: Martyrdom, Masochism and the Male Gaze*

New Woman writing is replete with images of sacrifice, martyrdom and Masochism. Just as the pioneering mid-Victorian women writers who preceded them, fin-de-siècle ‘feminists’ often chose to imaginatively interconnect their political message with religious allegory or symbolism which privileged self-sacrifice or destructive drives as representative of saintly virtue. In her discussion of mid-century realism Jan-Melissa Schramm notes that ‘the suffering Protestant protagonists of the Victorian novel stand in a complex relation to the Christ who died for the sins of mankind: they seek to appropriate his example but they appreciate the hermeneutic complexity involved in the reading of his life’ (2012: 8). The multifaceted textual interpretations of the bible meant that Christ’s example was understood in diverse and nuanced ways during a period in which religious certainties were under threat. For example, Schramm observes that Victorian images and discourses of self-sacrifice are often articulated within narratives which negotiate the subtle distinction between the physical and vicarious forms of suffering and atonement found in differing biblical interpretations. Often these distinctions are blurred, with physical pain being the consequence of women’s fictional attempts at catharsis, their understanding and enactment of Christian sacrifice. Simultaneously, women’s denial of bodily needs (through self-harmful acts of asceticism for instance) enacted the Cartesian duality inscribed by Western and Christian ideologies – the separation and sublimation of the female body in favour of the mind or soul, a dualism which will be explored more fully in the second chapter of this thesis.

Certain critics of Victorian women’s writing have read self-sacrifice as a strategy of self-assertion, as part of a subversive dynamic of feminine power. For Julie Melnyk, the suffering heroines of nineteenth-century fiction often find themselves situated in positions of authority and influence by exercising ‘Christ-like endurance’ (2003: 144) whether it be

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65 See Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853) in which the self-effacing Lucy Snowe accepts suffering as the will of God, and Charlotte Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), in which Rachael Curtis is made to suffer for her ‘feminist’ ideals and is eventually saved by her commitment to conventional religion, marriage, and motherhood. Also see George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1872) in which the respective heroines both (albeit very differently) perform acts of religiously motivated self-sacrifice and demonstrate Eliot’s interest in the trope of repentance as a means to reconcile the individual with the community.
personally borne or experienced second-hand. However Melnyk does acknowledge that women’s spiritual superiority and increased ‘powers’ were usually limited to the domestic sphere, restricting the potential for sacrifice as an effective political manoeuvre. As this thesis will show, gestures of saintly martyrdom and feminine self-sacrifice began to be expressed more frequently in fiction at the Fin de Siècle through images of increasingly violent self-harm. As I argue in subsequent chapters, the self-destructive imagery which began to be deployed in the New Woman novel was adapted to more dramatic effect the New Woman began to adopt innovative and less restrictive types of writing throughout the 1890s. This period not only signalled a transition towards literary modernism, but also facilitated an evolution in Victorian thinking about religiously-sanctioned suffering.

According to Maureen Moran, the Victorians can be characterised as ‘a society outwardly aligned with Christian principles but increasingly reliant on science and material evidence to validate “truth”’ (2007: 1). Thus, perspectives on pain walked an imaginary line between the empiricism of the new sciences and the entirely unquantitative figure of an omnipotent and all-designing God. In her assessment of changing conceptions of pain Lucy Bending explains that ‘Christian justifications, which had been largely accepted for centuries, were widely seen to be inadequate, while physiological understanding was not yet advanced enough’ (2000: 5).

Despite great advances, doctors had yet to gain a full physiological or neurological understanding of the ways in which the body responded to pain and to the new techniques available for its abatement. Methods of pain relief extracted from opiates had been used in Western medicine in a variety of forms since the classical period. However, it was the Victorian medical establishment which oversaw the development of reliable pain relief, and its industrial capabilities which facilitated the mass production of analgesic medicines. With the widespread use of anaesthesia in surgical procedures following the isolation of cocaine as an anaesthetic during the 1850s, a greater variety of painful operations could be made bearable for those undergoing surgery (Agnew 2010: 107). By the late-nineteenth century affordable and reliable pain relief for minor ailments was a reality, with the development of analgesia in the form of Paracetamol between 1886 and 1893 (Porter 1996: 261), and Aspirin in 1889 (Jeffreys 2005: 35-36). The problems of both addiction and

66 In his 1993 article ‘A Brief History of Opiates’ Michael Brownstein cites Homer’s Odyssey(c.900BC) as the first literary reference to opiate use, giving the example in chapter four during which Helen ‘cast a drug into the wine of which they drank to lull all pain’ (Homer 2008: 40). Also see Porter and Teach (1995) and Scarborough (1995) for discussion of classical opiate use and production.
over-prescription, as well as the benefits of non-invasive or drug-free therapies had yet to be discovered by the Victorian medical establishment. Consequently, the hitherto accepted belief that pain was necessary to human experience, faced a profound challenge with little evidence of a downside to contradict it, a challenge which directly called into question Judeo-Christian ideologies concerning the value of pain.

The masculine self-sacrifice which had been required in the interests of national prosperity during both the war in the Crimea and continuing colonial projects, slowly became less convincing to the mind of the Victorian public, as the salvific qualities of death began to be reassessed. The Benthamite Utilitarianism of the early-Victorian period had operated on the assumption that the life of one might be justifiably sacrificed for the good of many. However, from the mid-nineteenth century, popular Victorian fiction was exploring how the worth of the individual could not be so easily calculated and substituted for the worth of many. Charles Dickens, for example, demonstrates the instability and impracticality of utilitarian approaches to human sacrifice in his respective novels *Hard Times* (1854) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Dickens’s personal ambivalence towards the value of self-sacrifice was equalled by public and political reactions to a variety of humanitarian crises during the mid-nineteenth century. The Irish Famine which began during the 1840s and killed over a million people, and the numerous outbreaks of cholera (both in Britain and its colonial outposts) throughout the century, galvanised thinking about suffering as an unnecessary threat to the strength and integrity of the empire. However, the human suffering in Ireland, the Colonies, and even the slums of nineteenth-century London was easy for the Victorian middle class to ignore. During a turbulent time in which doctrinally sanctioned pain was called into question as a convincing justification for physical

67 Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was a British philosopher and social reformer. He founded the concept of Utilitarianism, which was based on the principle that right and wrong be measured by the extent to which an action might incur happiness for the greatest number of people despite the potential unhappiness of a few. Bentham’s ideas greatly influenced leading liberal reformers of the Victorian period including (most profoundly) John Stuart Mill.

68 In *Hard Times* Thomas Gradgrind’s system of human classification is exposed and undermined by the singular importance of Sissy Jupe, who resists reduction to a mere calculation of functionality. In *A Tale of Two Cities* the dissolute Sydney Carton dies in the place of the more socially useful and deserving Charles Darnay, yet by this very action Carton proves his value as an individual entirely worthy of salvation. Meanwhile ‘the many’ are depicted as a destructive mass which revels in the restriction of freedom to those it finds undeserving. Dickens’s attitude towards Utilitarianism is, however, complicated by the ways in which the unnecessary sacrifice of the individual in his novels, allows the communities which they leave behind to flourish.

69 Cholera was prevalent worldwide during the nineteenth century and many British citizens died in outbreaks abroad. India was particularly badly affected at the turn of the century, with up to eight million dead between 1900 and 1920. However, London was also hit by cholera; despite the human cost, the 1854 Broad Street outbreak led to a better understanding of cholera’s transmission. See Hempel (2007) for further.
suffering, the New Woman writer frequently adopted motifs of self-flagellation and poses of religiously framed self-sacrifice in her fiction. Her return to the image of the martyred female body at a time when martyrdom itself was beginning to be seen as a sacred, yet rather outdated practice, suggests a motive more in line with subversive political agitation than a sincere attempt at allegorical didacticism.

Although belief in the importance of Christ’s sacrifice remained significant, the day to day struggle faced by Victorian women emulating his self-renunciation meant that religious dissent was slowly gaining ground. The pseudo-religious image of the domestic Angel had been introduced and legitimated by popular Victorian art and literature. It remained a ubiquitous model of femininity which was both aspired to by middle-class ladies, and denigrated by those women who perceived the impossibility of its example. New Woman writers capitalised on growing religious discord, problematising the theological frameworks which underpropped women’s self-sacrificial response to a variety of patriarchal brutalities. Derek Hughes points out in *Culture and Sacrifice* that attempts to rewrite or re-imagine historical sacrifice (biblical or otherwise) primarily demonstrate a dissatisfaction with the judicial and political mechanisms of contemporary society. Through the representation of ‘its advanced and elaborate structures [and] atavistic processes that recapitulate those of human sacrifice’ (Hughes 2007: 2) New Woman writers often draw parallels between nineteenth-century and classical or biblical acts which express social or political power dynamics. In chapters two, three and four of this thesis I explore in detail how New Woman writers represented particular self-harming behaviours. I show how each different form functions as a subversive yet flawed attack on the institutions through which patriarchal control was asserted during the Victorian period.

In itself, sacrifice can be seen to operate as a complex palimpsest of conflicting cultural meanings, often contradictory in its aims, to express a straightforwardly selfless bodily act. Arguing that sanctity and sexuality are always to a lesser or greater extent connected, Virginia Burrus reminds us that:

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70 For example, Mona Caird depicts her married heroines as sacrificial lambs in both *The Wing of Azrael* and *The Daughters of Donaus*, while Sarah Grand’s novels feature martyred heroines whose disappointments are imagined as pseudo-religious sacrifices. In Victoria Cross’s *Anna Lombard* the titular character faces vilification for her unorthodox beliefs, and Olive Schreiner’s Lyndall dies as a result of her refusal to abide by the restrictions placed on her as a woman in *The Story of an African Farm*; both women are depicted as martyrs to their non-conformist causes.
At most, ascetic eros – encoded as a yearning for God – may be seen as the residue of an imperfectly sublimated sexuality. Better yet: it is a merely metaphorical expression for a purely desexualised love. Worse still: it reflects pleasure derived from practices of self-denial rooted in pathological hatred of the body (2007: 1).

I would argue that a horror of the flesh and a pathological desire to harm it, is encoded to variable degree throughout all the New Woman writing examined in this thesis. In particular, hatred of female corporeality will be explored in my second chapter, as the subtext of the thin ideal and of New Woman ‘anorexic’ fiction, and in my third chapter as an assertion of the rights of the body to consume through alcoholism. In my final chapter, I highlight the paradoxical nature of self-mutilation, as an act which reinstates communication between the self and the outside world, which both requires and rejects the body. If as Burrus point out, an awareness of the body and its sexual desires cannot be entirely divorced from acts of Christian asceticism, self-denial, or self-sacrifice, then the deployment of religiously-motivated self-harm may be read through a variety of psychoanalytic frameworks which include Freudian masochistic fantasy, pre-Oedipal psychoanalysis, and post-Freudian theories of the gaze. Freud’s early models of masochism focussed on the role of the Oedipus complex, in which the human subject’s unsuccessfully repressed guilt led to feelings of rage towards herself (Glick & Meyers 1993: 4-5) transforming sadistic (active) aggression into a masochistic (passive) form.

Recent clinical research on masochism has attempted a departure from the Oedipal paradigm, instead concentrating on the importance of the pre-Oedipal stage in which narcissistic omnipotent fantasy competes against the trauma of abandonment and neglect by a cruelly unresponsive deity (Cooper 1993: 119-121). However, in almost all attempts to define pre-oedipal masochism, the primary relationship between dominance and submission is maintained, suggesting a level at which pre-Oedipal masochism essentially relies upon Oedipal thematics. In ‘Coldness and Cruelty’ (1989), the French philosopher and literary critic Giles Deleuze challenges Freud’s notion of masochism as sadism turned upon the self, arguing that:

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71 I use the term ‘anorexic’ cautiously here, since many of the texts I discuss feature women who would not be diagnosed as anorexic by twenty-first century diagnostic parameters.

72 Pre-Oedipal psychoanalysis focusses on the period prior to the formation of erotic drives, during which the child’s infantile attachment to, or detachment from, the mother, shapes his/her ego. Major proponents of pre-Oedipal psychoanalysis include Otto Rank and Donald Winnicott.

73 Freud expanded his theory that masochism was sadism turned upon the self, in ‘The Economic Problem of Masochism’ (1924), in which he identified three forms of masochism: epistemic, feminine and moral (Freud 2001c: 62). Post-Freudian psychoanalysis continues to question, re-assess and re-present the Freudian model of masochism, but until relatively recently few clinicians or critics had departed from the pleasure/pain dichotomy as the basis of the condition.
Masochism is characterised not by guilt feelings but by the desire to be punished, the purpose of masochism being to resolve guilt and the corresponding anxiety and to make sexual gratification possible [...] The process of turning around upon the self may be regarded as a reflexive stage, (“I punish myself”) but since masochism implies a passive stage (“I am punished, I am beaten”) we must infer the existence in masochism of a particular mechanism of projection through which an external agent is made to assume the role of the subject (1991: 104-106).

Given Deleuze’s assertion that masochism enacts a resolution of guilt through bodily punishment at the hands of a higher power (‘I am beaten’), it is not difficult to connect the masochist’s behaviour to internalised religious codes which require penance for un-Christian thoughts and actions. Considering the importance of sexual gratification as a component of masochistic self-harm, it is possible to read acts of Christian mortification and their representation, within a broadly masochistic framework. Consequently, this chapter will show that the New Woman writer’s position regarding religiously-motivated self-harm was an ambivalent one, both critical of women’s bodily suffering, yet inexorably bound to conventional discourses on the eroticised body which were misogynistic and highly exploitative. In fictionally displaying the wounded female body, the New Woman writer contributed to a culture in which the act of looking itself was a gesture of symbolic violence, which, according to Brooks, placed woman at the centre of male-oriented narrative drives (Brooks 1993: 69-70).

Post-Freudian psychoanalytic perspectives on the function of the gaze have tended to emphasise the importance of the relationship between subject and object rather than the eroticism of the scopic act. For example Jacques Lacan describes in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973) how:

[i]n the scopic relation, the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze. Its privilege [...] derives from its very structure [...] From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes the punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure (1998: 83).

Refuting notions of the gaze as fundamentally erotically-driven, Lacan theorises instead that it represents a negotiation of subject-object relations and the visual process by which the subject comes to know himself as lacking. Feminist interpretations of the penetrative

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74 See *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991: 242) in which Bourdieu accuses institutional powers of enacting various forms of symbolic violence through language.

75 A number of competing and conflicting notions of the gaze have appeared in (amongst others) Freudian, Lacanian, and Foucauldian theoretical models during the past century. Literary and historical criticism on the subject has expanded Freudian and Lacanian notions of the gaze as respectively: sexually-charged looking
male gaze in Laura Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975) and Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) have been much complicated by twenty-first-century criticism, which deconstructs the gendered binaries of a passive, watched female and an aggressive, watching male. For example, Beth Newman’s recent discussion of the function of the gaze within the visually-charged economy of the Victorian marriage market, attempts to reconcile Freudian, Lacanian and Foucauldian perspectives, arguing that:

what this conflict mirrors may in fact be different ways that desire – no simple thing reduced to Freudian drive [...] or Foucauldian mirage produced in the heat of subjectification – works on subjectivity. Desire, unlike drive, involves meaning, and therefore is always inherently social. It is what happens to drive when it attaches itself to one or more specific bodily sources (the eye being one of them) and then settles, however fleetingly, on an object that has already been invested with meaning (2004: 13).

As objects ‘invested with meaning’ female bodies (and often damaged female bodies) formed the central focus of narratives of self-sacrifice in the classical and biblical traditions, as well as in the medieval poetry which was crucial to the work of many writers and artists of the mid-to late-Victorian period. As subsequent chapters of this thesis show, New Woman writers were involved in an uneasy dialogue with Victorian artists, which often implicated them in patriarchy in confusing ways which were inconsistent with their various political messages. Often deploying the dual feminine archetypes of the Virgin Mary and Eve, Victorian visual culture drew upon deep-rooted Christian models for representing women as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ which were often borrowed from the medieval tradition. The inherently contradictory and thus unachievable standards of perfect femininity exemplified by Mary as a combination of mother, virgin and saint, symbolise women’s internalisation of patriarchal codes, an internalisation which emerges in the self-harming activities of the heroines of New Woman fiction. The centrality of the figure of the Virgin in the Marian art of Roman Catholicism in her four central incarnations as: perpetual virgin, mother of God, vessel of Immaculate Conception, and citizen of heaven, attests to the conflict between embodiment and spirituality implicit in the figure of the ideal woman. While Mariology began as a distinctly Catholic practice, worship of the

(Freud 2001b), or the introduction of a field of vision which produces awareness in the subject that he or she is incomplete or ‘other’ (Lacan 1998). Later theories on the gaze attempt to contextualise it as a disciplinary observation which underpins institutional and social control, or the masculine desire to visually appropriate the female body. See for examples: Irigaray (1985), Foucault (1990), and Brooks (1993).
The complications inherent in Mary’s example were explored by late-Victorian artists and writers who represented the figure of the Mater Dolorosa in all her contradictory glory. ‘Our Lady of Pain’ as the name translates into English, is the subject matter of a number of writers of the Victorian Decadence who did not stop at representing the conflict between Mary as at once maternal, virginal, and saintly. Drawing upon the figure of the grieving mother, the Lady of Sorrows became a symbol of masochistic self-denial, imagined as both heavenly and disembodied yet simultaneously of flesh, both desiring and pained. The European poetic tradition significantly influenced British artistic and literary production during the nineteenth century, and found its way into a wide variety of textual artefacts, including decadent art and poetry and New Woman writing. Perhaps the most prominent of the writers of the European tradition was Charles Baudelaire, whose *Fleurs du Mal* (1857), encouraged and inspired a generation of decadent artists and writers. The Madonna is, as Camille Paglia notes, an example of Baudelaire’s obsession with ‘demonic females’ (1991: 422), icons of original sin to be revered, feared and ultimately despised. Like the New Woman, the Madonna embodied the conflicting identities available to Victorian women, as well as the limitations placed upon the female body as an object to be ‘looked at, denuded [and] unveiled’ (Brooks 1993: 69) by traditional forms of seeing and writing.

In Algernon Charles Swinburne’s poem on the subject of the Mater Dolorosa entitled ‘Dolores’ (1866), the Madonna is rendered as a sinful woman: sterile, savage, and cruel. She is not the pure and virginal mother of Christ, but the sadomasochist woman who

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76 Our Lady of Pain and Our Lady of Sorrows are both translations of the Latin *Mater Dolorosa* and are used (along with: Sorrowful Mother, Mother of Sorrows, Our Lady of Piety, Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, and Our Lady of the Seven Dolours) to describe the Virgin in relation to her various sorrows. See Farmer (2011) for details of the various incarnations of the Virgin Mary.

77 Baudelaire’s poem on the subject of the Madonna entitled ‘A Une Madone’ was not included in the 1857 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but was published in 1861 in the extended version of the collection. In ‘A Une Madone’ Mary is by turns both the dominant and submissive partner in a pseudo-masochistic relationship in which her body is both wounded and worshipped, and grief is itself a source of eros. Romana Lowe has argued that the destruction of the female body is the central locus of the speaker’s desire, since he immediately speaks of the need for a sacrificial altar (1997: 53).

78 Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) was central figure in the Aesthetic and Decadent movements of the late-Victorian period and was known for having invented the roundel poetic form. He wrote several novels, and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in every year from 1903 to 1907 and again in 1909. His most famous collection of poetry *Poems and Ballads* (1866) provoked intense public criticism for its engagement with subversive themes such as: homosexuality, cannibalism, bestiality, and necrophilia. Swinburne was also known to have been an algolagniac (a person who derives sexual pleasure from pain inflicted on an erogenous area of the body).
wields ‘[…] the loves that complete and control | All the joys of the flesh, all the sorrows | That wear out the soul’ (2000: 22 lines 14-16). In the poem’s refrain ‘Our Lady of Pain!’ Swinburne turns liturgical incantation into masochistic affirmation, subverting Catholic notions of transubstantiation into sexual pleasure through the poem’s form, which resembles the structure of the intercessory in the Anglo-Catholic mass. Unlike Eucharistic consumption, in which the flesh and blood of Christ are made incarnate through audible prayer, the speaker metaphorically consumes the Madonna, drinking of the flesh and blood of the demonic woman in a scene of cannibalism and orgasmic release.\(^7\) Dolores is both a consuming and consumed woman, whose:

[…] ravenous teeth that have smitten
Through the kisses that blossom and bud,
By the lips intertwined and bitten
Till the foam has a savour of blood,
By the pulse as it rises and falters,
By the hands as they slacken and strain,
I adjure thee, respond from thine altars,
Our Lady of Pain.
(2000 : 22 lines 113-120)

In rendering his Mater Dolorosa a ‘divine whore’ (Louis 1990: 22), whose hungry mouth violently devours those who kneel before her, Swinburne effectively mocks the Catholic belief in Mary as the chaste and innocent mother of the Church, and indeed in the Church as the ‘bride’ of Christ.\(^8\) Swinburne parodies the ritualism of Catholicism through a process that Margot Louis has termed ‘Eucharistic murder’ (1990: 38). This act sees the contradictions inherent in the body of the Holy Virgin transposed into a form of sacramental violence and masochistic fantasy.

As Ruth Vanita has noted, the body of the Virgin has been discursively and culturally linked to both pain and eroticism, through her particular interest in the salvation of prostitutes and mothers of illegitimate children (1996: 34). Vanita also links Mary to the classical figure of Sappho, through analysis of nineteenth-century texts which draw on the

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\(^7\) See lines 3-32 in which the speaker imagines being fed with the body’s pleasures.

\(^8\) This belief comes from an interpretation of Christ as the bridegroom of the church which has formed part of Catholic doctrine since the middle ages. The Church as a bride is mentioned in a number of gospels including Ephesians (5:22-33), and Corinthians (2:11), in which Paul speaks of the Church in Corinth as the bride of Christ.
mythology of both figures and construct them similarly. Sappho’s poetic abilities gave her an authoritative voice at a time during which women were not granted social or political prominence, and her lifestyle and poetry promoted female homosocial and homosexual bonds (DuBois 1997). Like Mary, whose own influential voice and acts of philanthropy brought her into contact with women from a variety of backgrounds, Sappho’s work also emphasised the importance of same sex community. Just as New Women wrote themselves into the literary canon by emulating and also refuting masculine forms of writing, Sappho attempted to forge her own writerly tradition.

Hugely influenced himself by the Sappho myth, Swinburne links the body of the female saint to the pleasures and pains of self-flagellative acts, taking Baudelaire’s ‘A Une Madone’ a step further by representing the inescapable eros of religious self-harm, a subject which he would continue to explore throughout his writing career and in his personal life. Swinburne’s Poems and Ballads was accused by contemporary critics of a morbid fascination with the body (Torti 2013: 15), as representative of the ‘fleshy school of poetry’ so deplored by Robert Buchanan. Yet, Swinburne’s obsession with the body was specifically an obsession with the body as subject to both rapture and torture. It is his re-writing of, as Catherine Maxwell notes, Tennyson’s ‘proper’ female figures as ‘castrating female energies’ (2001: 182) that denotes his fascination with the seductive power of painful bodily surrender. This obsession can be traced in Swinburne’s preoccupation with medieval culture, and in particular the nineteenth-century revisions of medievalism which also permeate some of the New Woman writing explored in this thesis. Swinburne attempted to rewrite Arthurian Romance in order to confront and overturn ‘the typically Victorian idealisation of medieval times’ and represented a world ‘characterised by the agonies of disappointed love […] by the futile battle against evil, by dissimulation of all kinds and […] a hopeless tangle of moral uncertainties and

81 Sappho was a Greek lyric poet born on the island of Lesbos sometime between 630BC and 620BC. Her poetry expresses intense personal feelings and desires for those of the opposite sex as well as of her own, and she is thought to have committed suicide as a consequence of unrequited love.

82 Swinburne’s poem is very much influenced by ‘A Une Madone’ and in places it repeats or re-writes phrases from the Baudelaire (see lines 1-3 of ‘Dolores’ and lines 5-7 of ‘A Une Madone’). A number of literary critics have noted that Swinburne’s interest in self-harm (particularly masochism) is framed by Christian and Hellenic religion. See for examples: Richardson (1988: 29-32), Vincent (1997: 269-295), Maxwell (2001: 87-93, and Olverson (2009: 760-76).

83 See Buchanan’s diatribe against Swinburne’s friend and contemporary Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in his 1871 essay entitled ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’.

84 For example Swinburne’s epic poem Tristram of Lyonesse (1882) ends with a scene in which the bodies of his ill-fated hero and heroine are conjoined in a tableau of death, before being washed away by the sea (See Swinburne 2006: 18).
ambiguities’ (Harrison 1988: 135). A supporter of the pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, which often represented medieval or mythical figures who had been subject to persecution or torture, Swinburne’s use of the body, as subject to pleasures and pains, was inspired by his interest in classical and historic versions of religious self-harm.\textsuperscript{85}

The middle-English lyric poetry which inspired late-Victorian writers like Swinburne and which so often engaged with the transgressive possibilities of the gaze, is a particularly rich site for examining the ways in which the sacrificial body could subvert yet equally reinforce the limitations of male observation and dominance.\textsuperscript{86} In her exploration of Middle English lyrics of the Passion, Sarah Stanbury recognises that the role of the Virgin Mary is ‘shaped by the intersected trajectories of multiple lines of sight’, including those of the viewers within the lyrical narrative space, and those of a culture that ‘politici[es]es the act of viewing’ (1991: 1086). The gaze of the Virgin upon the wounded body of her martyred son is emphasised by lyric poetry in ways which according to Stanbury and other critics of medieval literature, both undermine the primacy of masculine observation and merge maternal compassion with eroticism.\textsuperscript{87} ‘The male body is laid out, naked – one might even say nude – limp, surrounded by women who not only grieve but stare and touch as well’ (1991: 1086); this, according to Stanbury, allows their gaze to be ‘defined by the privileges and prohibitions of [their] sex [...] legitimised by maternity and eroticised by its transgressive sexuality’ (1991: 1087). Despite what Stanbury sees as empowerment of the feminine through the Virgin’s own gaze, it is impossible to ignore the fetishisation of the Madonna in the art and culture of the Middle Ages. She is that which ‘epitomi[s]e[s] the problematic of the female body as an object of the gaze [...] given a prominent role in a narrative as she was immobili[s]ed as icon; but even so, ideology was at work to deny her agency’ (Caviness 2001: 2) refusing her a position outside the domestic world.

Similarly, the self-harming fictional women explored in this thesis constitute a spectacle of bodily damage which by its display subverts the separate sphere ideology which would deny them agency, yet their power to disrupt patriarchy is limited by their exploitation as objects of desire. This chapter, and indeed my thesis, explores the ways in which Christian iconography unwittingly participated in a subversion of the gendered gaze, culminating in

\textsuperscript{85} Examples include: Rossetti’s Joan of Arc Kissing the Sword of Deliverance (1863) and Joan of Arc (1864), Millais’ The Martyr of the Solway (c.1871), and Waterhouse’s Saint Joan (1872) and Saint Eulalia (1885). A number of different paintings of Jesus Christ were also produced by members of the brotherhood.

\textsuperscript{86} See Stewart (2003) for a thorough discussion of the potential of the female gaze to disrupt gender boundaries.

the pre-Raphaelite religious aesthetic of the nineteenth century which is often adopted by late-Victorian women writers. I examine the religious art of the Fin de Siècle because the images produced by prominent painters at this time both endowed women with power, and also restricted their influence, in much the same way that New Woman writing exploded Victorian assumptions about femininity yet simultaneously reinforced them.

**The Broken Body in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction**

For centuries, religious literature and art has examined the relationship between the broken body and those who gaze upon it. These works implicate subject, object, viewer, and reader in a complex process whereby the sacrificial body creates a site for competing impulses of compassion, desire, glorification, politicisation, and exploitation. Sarah Beckwith notes of the fluidity of Christ’s broken body that he ‘was eaten in the Eucharist. He was also looked at, identified with, imitated, violated, played with in an almost alarming variety of shifting social roles’ (1993: 4). It is clear that the roles Beckwith describes fit the specific needs of a given culture. Whilst, like the crucified Christ, women’s bodies remained a central commodity in the Victorian bodily economy, the damaged female body became temporarily marginalised in art, literature and cultural discourse until the late-nineteenth century. Throughout history the female body in art had been subject to regulatory powers which shifted in relation to socio-political factors and fluctuating religious and moral codes.88

Once an example of the post-reformation sensuality of Catholicism and the immorality it implied, by the nineteenth century painting the naked body had become one of the most fundamental artistic skills taught at the Royal Academy.89 Religious paintings of the Renaissance which featured the female nude, had been popular in Europe and had increasingly begun to influence British artists and attract British audiences during both the

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88 For example, after the mass destruction of ‘improper’ and ‘sensuous’ Catholic art during the Reformation, the Puritanism of the 1640s Civil war period finished what had been started by King Henry VIII. The nude emerged again in the painting of Renaissance which began to influence British painters as post-Reformation links with Europe began to be slowly repaired during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and attitudes towards religious paintings changed. See Graham-Dixon (2009).

89 The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768, and is based at Burlington House in London. The purpose of the academy was (and remains) to promote the visual arts through education and exhibition.
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Throughout the Victorian period censorship of paintings which showed the naked or semi-naked body remained strictly regulated for fear of offending public decency or promoting sexual indiscretion. Yet these regulations were cultural rather than legal, since laws surrounding obscenity applied only to the written word and later photographic pictures, whereas the showing of artworks was principally controlled by the museums who arranged to display them. The female nude could be shown in art through ‘certain distancing devices regarding time, place, and treatment’ (Smith 1996: 4) which legitimised the naked female form, these included strategies such as draping, amorphous gender distinction, or historical and mythical settings. Public debate concerning the propriety of displaying religious paintings, which featured torture was ongoing, and concerned the possibility that the public could become sexually aroused by images of women in pain, however sacred or devotional (Moran 2004: 475).

While images of suffering women were displayed, their religious context and educational message had to be emphasised in order to be deemed proper. Propriety could be secured by representing the transcendentalism of religiously-motivated sacrifice, as opposed to the rather more realistic physical agonies of self-immolation. Paintings frequently depicted the tortured virginal bodies of female saints, but these figures conformed to the nineteenth-century ideal of feminine passivity and submission. Women’s bodies had to be framed by nineteenth-century art in ways which, as Lynda Nead’s work on the female nude shows, sanctioned ‘the containment and regulation of the female body’ (1992: 6). The beauty and docility of female saints was accentuated by depicting their white and untainted bodies, and their expressions of meek acceptance conveyed the admirable nature of sacrifice. While Christian art aimed to emphasise the separation of spirit and body which martyrdom entailed, its iconography risked uprooting the ideological disembodiment of its female saints. The narrowly demarcated boundaries between eroticism and spiritual didacticism made permissible the display of female bodies in biblical contexts, by pre-Raphaelite painters whose message was often far from moralistic. In John William Waterhouse’s Saint Joan (1872) and later his Saint Eulalia (1885) the bare white breasts of the martyr’s body (in the case of Saint Eulalia her dead body) are displayed, yet the eroticism of this is

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90 The Pre-Raphaelites (in particular Dante Gabriel Rossetti) were heavily influenced by painters of the Italian Renaissance and eschewed the style adopted by the ‘modern’ painters who emulated the work of Raphael.

91 The Obscene Publications Act (1857) made the sale of obscene materials a statutory offence and gave the police the power to seize and destroy any such materials. See Beisel (1993) and Colligan (2006).

92 See Charles William Mitchell’s Hypatia (1885) and William Waterhouse’s St. Eulalia of the same year.
downplayed by the emblematic virginity of both women. In Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s 1882 painting *Joan of Arc*, the martyr is depicted as a rather more voluptuous figure, in a composition which does more to contradict than underscore the purity of its subject. Joan’s wild, flame coloured hair and red lips, as well as the sensuality of her pose and the opulence of the surrounding drapery, suggest an eroticism which undermines the admissibility of the painting.

As well as biblical subjects, the Pre-Raphaelites were heavily influenced by, and interested in, medieval culture; like the classical nude or the Christian martyr, historical scenes and folkloric figures offered them another representational outlet. Medieval Christian culture ‘gave ready expression to sadism and masochism by dwelling upon its tortured dead’ and made ‘appeals to its devotees to identify with the sufferings of the martyrs as if they were their own’ (Caviness 2001: 35). Thus the adoption of medieval images by Victorian artists and writers contributed to a late-nineteenth century cultural saturation with the rhetoric of martyrdom, and a more general glamorisation of self-denial. Christ’s example was epitomised by the figure of the domestic angel, and images of medieval and saintly self-sacrifice became so culturally pervasive, that they were echoed and reflected by New Woman writers despite their disapproval of masculine artistic (and particularly pre-Raphaelite) representational strategies. While critical of artistic exploitations of the female body, New Woman writers also developed modes of expression which ensured that the private female body in all its tortured glory, was eroticised and made publically consumable. As a product of Freudian drives attached specifically to bodily sources invested with social meaning, the damaged body represented a focal point around which women’s continued fight for the right to control their own bodies revolved. It eventually took its place as an object of desire and metaphorical tool in New Woman writing, in ways

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93 In Waterhouse’s 1885 image a twelve year old Eulalia lies dead on the floor of the gladiatorial arena, surrounded by drifts of the symbolic snow which is said to have been sent from God to cover her nakedness, yet her breasts remain exposed. The implicit sexuality inherent in viewing Eulalia’s exposed and tortured body – a body violated by the Roman spear after being forcibly stripped of her clothes – went unnoticed by the viewing public. So too did the necrophilia implied by the display of her beautiful corpse, largely because the white background, the blanket of snow, and the white doves, encoded her chastity and suggested how the audience ought to read the picture.

94 So too does the fact that Joan was modelled on Jane Morris, the wife of Rossetti’s Pre-Raphaelite ‘brother’ William Morris, with whom Rossetti was rumoured to have been having an extramarital relationship (De La Sizeranne (2008: 90-9).

95 Sarah Grand was the most vocal New Woman critic of (what she saw as) men’s sensuality in art and literature. She critiques masculine cultural production in ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’, and all of her Morningquest novels feature attacks on Aestheticism which she views as indicative of masculine sexual deviance. Ella Hepworth-Dixon in *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), Ménie Muriel Dowie in *Gallia* (1895) and Ella D’Arcy in ‘The Pleasure Pilgrim’ (1895) respectively lampoon the figure of the male artist and/or Aesthete figure.
which were significantly different to those adopted by women’s writing and writing about women, before the Fin de Siècle.

Unlike the gothic texts of the previous century which had displayed the female body for erotic consumption, the New Woman’s spectacle of feminine self-damage constituted a deliberately gendered and politically motivated exhibition of atrocity. The broken body had been made spectacle in eighteenth-century gothic fiction, whose melodramatic display of torture undercut the body’s potential as a political signifier (Bruhm 1994: 92-93).Kelly Hurley proposes that the nineteenth-century gothic texts which build on eighteenth-century displays of the tortured body, do so with a view towards the ‘ruination of the human subject’ (1996: 3). In doing so, they highlight the impossibility of transcending the grotesquery of human corporeality, at a time when labelling and controlling the body had become increasingly difficult for the Victorian establishment. Of the nineteenth-century gothic Hurley argues ‘one may read its obsessive staging and restaging of the spectacle of abhumaness as a paralysis […] as the human body collapses and is reshaped across an astonishing range of morphic possibilities’ (1996: 4). New Woman fiction often featured elements of Gothicism which corresponded to its melodrama and sensationalism, and which represented the horrors of women’s experience at the hands of patriarchy. The supernatural, madness, degeneracy, visions and hallucinations, the figure of the femme fatale, threatening and tyrannical male characters, and sinister doubles feature in certain of the New Woman texts which I examine. Like Horrace Walpole’s gothic novel The Castle of Otranto (1764) and Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796), New Woman texts which featured gothic elements also placed their characters in Christian settings, and engaged with religious themes.

In the religiously-framed, and often gothic-tinged, fiction produced by the New Woman, the broken bodies of self-sacrificing women are denied ‘morphic possibilities’. Rather than

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96 For example, in Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796) the tortured and naked body of Agnes de Medina is found spread out on a bed of straw in a dungeon below the convent at which she has been living as a Nun (Lewis 2008: 367). Criticism of the novel’s blasphemy and corruption was countered by Lewis’s claims that the text exposed, rather than celebrated, the hypocrisy operating within conventional religion, instructing young readers and encouraging them to be alert to the dangers of false piety (McEvoy 2008: viii). However, the beautiful yet pained and damaged body of Agnes, alongside a collection of similar tableaux of feminine violence and female violation, suggests the eroticism at the heart of The Monk, in which women’s bodies are exploited for theatrical – and by implication commercial – rather than ‘moral’ purposes.

97 For example, see Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ which features: a woman confined by her tyrannical husband, madness, visions and hallucinations, and a ghostly and supernatural double.

98 For example, Sarah Grand’s Morningquest trilogy (1888-1897) is set in a cathedral town and engages with debates surrounding Catholic conversion; it features settings such as Morningquest Cathedral and a number of smaller churches.
staging abhuman spectacles, these writers attempted (yet often failed) to emphasise the humanity of their subjects, and, paradoxically, to deny their bodiliness altogether. In self-harming, I argue that the heroines of New Woman fiction attempt to elude classification as objects to be looked at, by undermining outdated and restrictive constructions of femininity found in both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing on the damaged body. As opposed to the gothic ‘paralysis’ of which Hurley writes, New Woman writing about female martyr figures represented and indeed effected movement, between, and through the centre of, the rigid categories of public and private which defined and limited feminine experience. These pioneering writers adopted motifs of self-mortification and self-abnegation in an effort to downplay the primacy of the female body and thus to resist the proprietary male gaze. However, their own works fell into the trap of displaying and overemphasising their characters’ bodies as erotic spectacles.

The use of self-harm as a narrative trope in Victorian women’s writing is significant precisely because it is (paradoxically) both an unconventional and traditional representation of female corporeality. Texts which represent acts of martyrdom often ‘encompass the orthodox and the radical simultaneously’ (Moran 2004: 478) and in doing so enable the formation of oppositional yet coterminous readings. Since the Victorian ideal of femininity required that self-interested display was eschewed in favour of quiet, domesticated obscurity, the tendency for New Woman texts to dramatise, idealise, and hyperbolise women’s bodily suffering points to the complexity of martyrdom and religious self-sacrifice as tropes. Accordingly, the dichotomy of impropriety and permissibility, inherent in the act of viewing the wounded female body created a psychological space in which (as with martyrdom and masochism) disinterested spirituality and violent sexual desire could compete and coincide. Thus, Victorian imagery of martyrdom and religious self-harm often expressed the instability of the boundaries between the private interior world of the spirit, and the erotic spectacle of the broken body in which it resided. Towards the end of the century, as Victorian notions of the relationship between body and soul began to fluctuate and ultimately transform, the correlation between the private body and the public space became similarly altered. Texts which depicted the traumatised body through religious imagery did so by legitimising the radical, subtly eroding the boundaries between what could and could not be publically displayed.

In the introduction to this thesis I discussed Mark Seltzer’s notion of a Victorian wound culture in which ‘the private and natural body has, in unprecedented ways, become
publically relevant’ (1998: 35). Seltzer argues that ‘[m]ore specifically, the body has insistently become relevant as spectacle and representation – and, most insistently, as spectacle or representation of crisis, disaster, or atrocity’ (1998: 35). I contend that the New Woman writer’s use of religiously framed tropes of self-damage operated in ways which attempted to make the broken female body publically relevant, to exhibit as atrocity the wounded feminine psyche and to erode the margins between the public and private spheres. However, as this chapter, and those which follow, will show, this strategy was often problematised by the use of highly conventional constructions of gender, class, and sexuality which limited the New Woman’s radicalism and which in many ways abnegated (or as I argue, self-sabotaged) their own proto-feminist projects. Furthermore, in relying upon well-established moral and religious structures through which to dramatise self-harming acts, the New Woman limited her challenge to patriarchy, revealing herself to be equally culpable of internalising self-reproach as some of her unfortunate heroines.

**Martyrdom, Self-Wounding, and the Erotics of Self-Abasement**

Since the days of the Roman republic, Christian martyrdom had been a strategy by which honour could be attained through bodily suffering, in a paradoxical act which redefined power at the level of the sacrificial body and the executioner. Although Christians who refused to renounce their faith and swear allegiance to Rome were tortured and killed, they could gain momentary power at the hands of their persecutors through execution. In a society which privileged heroism, the bodies of Christians offered up to torture or to the gladiatorial arena could transcend their lowly position as political or religious traitors through bravery in the face of often avoidable death (Barton 1994: 41). In the Roman tradition ‘self-destruction was the supreme form of munificence, the extremes of largesse and deprivation at once [...] the Romans rarely identified with or wanted to be seen as victims [...] and so their stories of vindication of honour are designed not to elicit pity, not to reveal a victim, but to reveal an unconquered will’ (Barton 2002: 27). The Roman gladiator or executioner, who faced the Christian martyr, did so in command of great power, yet, by their own violent renunciation of the self, the martyr could achieve a similarly honourable and powerful status by their death, both in the eyes of the republic as
well as a Christian God. By the Victorian era the martyr figure had become culturally diffused and was based on the recurring model of the martyrdoms of Jesus Christ and the medieval saints.

In a society that was rapidly developing new challenges to the notion of an omnipotent God and to the centrality of Man in the workings of the universe, Christian iconography remained surprisingly popular. One reason for the popularity of this imagery is posited by Mary Wilson Carpenter, whose research into family bibles and the commerciality of Victorian religious commodities cites women as crucial to the universality of Christian iconography. Carpenter observes that ‘the commercial religious business both exploited her and catered to her, restricted the dimensions of her identity and endowed her as a privileged customer’ (2003: xvii). Since women’s lives were limited and their personal interests were often sacrificed to the maintenance of the family and the household, their identification with Christ’s sufferings meant that Victorian housewives were voracious consumers of religious images and texts. As keepers of the domestic temple and symbols of moral superiority, middle-class women arguably contributed to the cultural ubiquity of the martyr image.

The Catholic and Orthodox Christian faiths had assimilated images of sacrifice into their respective places of worship through sculpture, tapestries, paintings, relics and architecture. However, unlike these devotional images, representations of Catholicism, and, more generally the ritualistic elements of religious custom, were sensationalised in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century fiction through metaphors of confinement, torture and sexual deviance (Moran 2007:1-3). Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto and Lewis’s The Monk as well as much later texts such as Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) exemplify the range of literary possibilities available to those willing to deploy tropes of religious.

99 For an example read the account of the martyrdom of St Perpetua who was executed along with St Felictas in Carthage around 203AD in The Passion of Saint Perpetua, Saint Felicitas and their Companions by Saturus. See R. Butler (2006) for a translation of this.
100 Victorian scientific naturalism, in particular the work of Charles Darwin (and later Herbert Spencer) on evolution and natural selection, presented a challenge to Christian concepts of man as created by God in his own image. Emerging Victorian sciences which took evolutionary concepts as their point of departure, undermined the certainty that man had been created overnight by a powerful deity, and questioned biblical accounts of Creation. For an example of popular religious art, see William Holman Hunt’s The Triumph of the Innocents (1876-1887) which shows the scene described in the Gospel of Matthew (2: 16-18) in which the Holy Family flee Bethlehem for Egypt. The painting prompted the famed critic John Ruskin to call it ‘the greatest religious picture of the century’ (Hilton 2002: 742) and was bought by the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1891 for £3519, a huge price by nineteenth-century standards (Woodson-Boulton 2012: 978-979). Ruskin’s assessment of the painting was not shared by all, and it was received with mixed reviews because its representation of two worlds (that of reality and that of heaven) was partly misunderstood by audiences. See Lennox (1893) for nineteenth-century criticism of the painting’s reception.
ritualism. The ascetic and ritualistic practices which characterised the church of Rome were a combination of both seductive spectacle and deviant oppositional force in Victorian culture, and ‘presented as fantastic but real, a metaphor for the unorthodox [...] a significant imaginary space, embracing the unfamiliar, but also challenging the Victorian status quo’ (Moran 2007: 17). Thus the figure of the martyr, both Catholic and otherwise, served as a recurrent trope in the Victorian creative imagination, as a symbol of the conflicting loyalties of state and church, self and family, moral conscience and the law. This accounts in some part for its enthusiastic adoption by decadent writers and artists, both as subject matter and metaphorical tool (Hanson 1997). Moran’s observation that both Catholic and anti-Catholic rhetoric adopted ‘emotive diction, melodramatic and morbid stories, and extravagant images of horror’ (2007: 6) during the nineteenth century, is borne out by the popularity of fiction and art which imagined the broken bodies of martyred figures. Moran posits this propaganda as an attempt by an increasingly liberal and progressive (largely Protestant) Victorian society to differentiate themselves from the restrictive confines of Papal influence, nevertheless the pervasiveness and allure of such ‘images of horror’ was furthered by popular British literature and art.

George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens all depicted martyred figures in their respective novels.\(^{101}\) Popular Victorian images included: Frederick Sandys’ The Boy Martyr (1862), Edward Burne-Jones’ St Theophilus and The Angel (1863-1867), John-Everett Millais’ The Martyr of the Solway (c.1871), Charles Mitchell’s Hypatia (1885), and William Waterhouse’s Saint Eulalia (1885), all of which took martyrdom as their subject matter.\(^{102}\) Millais had been criticised for his only nude painting The Knight Errant (1870), which depicted a female rape victim bound to a tree; he responded by painting over it with an image of the martyred Margaret Wilson in The Martyr of Soloway (Smith 1996: 156-157).\(^{103}\) By imaginatively connecting the bodies of the two women, one subject to man’s lust and the other to the persecution of man’s religion, Millais explicitly

\(^{101}\) The innocent Maggie Tulliver is physically broken and subsumed amongst the wreckage of her flooded mill after an act of God brings a metaphorical judgment upon her in Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss; Thomas Hardy’s ‘pure’ Tess Durbeyfield is executed in Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891), and Elizabeth Gaskell’s saintly Ruth has her body destroyed by illness and eventually dies sacrificing herself for others in Ruth (1853). Similarly Dickens’s Christ-like Stephen Blackpool dies from injuries sustained during his persecution in Hard Times, and the martyred Sidney Carton is executed at the Bastille in the place of Charles Darnay in A Tale of Two Cities.

\(^{102}\) Burne-Jones painted St Theophilus and the Angel between 1863 and 1867, and also painted a version in 1868.

\(^{103}\) Margaret Wilson was tied to a rock and executed by drowning in 1685 for her refusal to declare James VII as head of the Church. The original nude painting can be seen underneath the finished version using x-ray. The original is available to view online at Liverpool Museum’s website.
connected sexuality to religiously-motivated self-sacrifice. Despite the fact that images of self-sacrifice like these often represented the naked and damaged female body in postures of submission and torture, they were considered devotional and thus acceptable to the discerning public because the purity of the subject was stressed, and a historical distance was maintained.  

Victorian religious art and literature embodied tensions between the spirituality of self-sacrifice and the erotics of self-abasement. In the case of martyrdom, these tensions manifested in acts of watching, during which the damaged body (often female) became public spectacle. The nature of the public execution as mass spectacle created a sense of community which centred on a shared voyeuristic and fetishistic desire for the penetration of the body. Luce Irigary has shown in her re-assessment of both the Freudian and Lacanian gaze, that observation constitutes a substitution for the sexual act in which watching functions as ‘power over the genitals/woman/sex […] the penis eye, the phallic look’ (1985: 134). Thus, the crowd’s excitement is located not in the spiritual righteousness of the act of punishment or indeed self-renunciation, but in the vicarious corporeality of surveillance. As Seltzer asserts, this strategy becomes commonplace during the late-Victorian period as ‘the exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display of wounded bodies and wounded minds in public’ (1998: 1) increasingly appears in its literature and culture.

Erotic self-abasement manifested in a number of seemingly non-religious texts and images throughout the century. For example in My Secret Life (1888) the anonymous diarist who calls himself ‘Walter’ frequently experiments with flagellation and sexual humiliation. Similarly, in Swinburne’s posthumously published Lesbia Brandon (written

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104 For another example, see Philip H. Calderon’s St Elizabeth of Hungary’s Great Act of Renunciation (1891) in which the female martyr is depicted naked and bent to receive punishment at the hands of her confessor.

105 For example, during the martyrdom of Felicitas and Perpetua – who were executed at Carthage during the third century – the crowd demanded that ‘their eyes could share the killing as the sword entered the flesh’ (Castelli 1995: 33). The gaze of the martyr was equally important to that of the crowd, and as Carlin Barton underscores in her discussion of Saint Perpetua’s Passion, martyrdom is particularly rich in the language of observational defiance. Perpetua ‘advanced with a luminous face and calm step […] casting down the stare of the crowd with the power of her gaze’ (Mursurillo 1972: 8.2) subverting her role as object.

106 Flagellation is one of a number of ascetic religious practices adopted by Orthodox Catholics (usually priests) who attempt to emulate the sufferings of Christ. Although self-flagellation is not commonly used in twenty-first century religious custom, there are places where it is still practised. See Wynne (1988) for an account of historical instances of flagellation, and Gupta (2003) for both historical and contemporary examples. In My Secret Life Walter recounts numerous experiences in specialist flagellation brothels, in which he enjoys and actively seeks sexual gratification from quasi-religious physical punishment. Although
1864-1867) Herbert Seyton enjoys the beatings of his teachers and seeks out new ways to incur punishment. Scholars of the Victorian novel have also posited that characters willing to submit themselves to pain in order to gain in the pleasure of wealth or social standing, might also be read as masochistic (Jones 2000: 196). Throughout the nineteenth century the strict prudishness of British literary censorship drove underground any text which dealt with erotic or taboo subjects. While in France, Belgium and The Netherlands restrictions on the publication of such materials was fairly limited, the British public were not to be exposed to even mildly pornographic works at any cost. Although obscenity had no stable definition, continuous tradition, or reliable readership (Colligan 2006: 2), male literary figures of the late century formed at least one of the groups of readers who cultivated, collected and even produced ‘obscene’ materials featuring the damaged body. A Victorian bibliophile, bibliographer and collector of forbidden literature, Henry Spencer Ashbee had amassed an exhaustive collection of erotica at his property in the Gray’s Inn Square between the mid-1850s and his death in 1900 (Gibson 2001: 23). His three volumes of erotic bibliographies, which listed in exhaustive detail many of the obscene publications of the nineteenth century, paid particular attention to flagellation pornography. Ashbee’s work reveals a highly critical attitude towards Western religion, and Catholicism in particular. Accusing the Catholic faith of sexual indecency of every imaginable kind, Ashbee’s tone represents what Steven Marcus calls the ‘perfect balance of outrage and envy’ (2009: 63) in relation to the duplicity of Christian teachings, which Marcus accuses of ‘ascetically denying us the gratification of our impulses and hypocritically wallowing in a wholly sexualised existence’ (2009: 63) This double-standard, which posited religion as fundamentally erotic, is examined by a number of the erotic texts which Ashbee details in his bibliographies.

Walter’s masochistic drives find him on the receiving end of physical pain (usually from a woman) his pain is arguably self-inflicted and tends to glorify the wounded body as a site of sexual arousal.

Swinburne’s novel was unfinished when he died in 1909, and was only published in 1952.

Ashbee was rumoured to have been the author of My Secret Life. See Gibson (2001) in which Ashbee’s life and work is examined using diary entries from throughout his life, and his authorship of My Secret Life is convincingly argued.

In Ashbee’s Index Librorum Prohibitorum (1877), Centuria Librorum Absconditorum (1879), and Catena Librorum Tacendorum (1885), depictions of flagellation can be found in many of the featured texts. The ‘author’ of the volumes calls himself ‘Pisanus Fraxi’ and tells us that ‘the propensities which the English most cherish is undoubtedly flagellation’ (Gibson 2001: 44).

A number of the texts catalogued by Ashbee include pseudo-religious sacrifice and flagellation. In particular the rape and induction of women into prostitution is described using the language of Christian martyrdom (these woman are nearly always ‘converted’ from innocence to lustful desire following their initial ‘sacrifice’. See Marcus (2009: 97-205) for further discussion.
During the 1860s, Ashbee’s acquaintance Frederick Hankey also published erotic texts, and was involved in supplying sadomasochistic literature to Swinburne, Richard Monckton Milnes, and Richard Burton.\(^\text{111}\) The infamous Cannibal Club, to which all three men belonged, became a site for the exchange and production of flagellation pornography (amongst a variety of other forms) and demonstrates the extent to which the male literary world was at that time exploring images of eroticised bodily damage. Although not members themselves, the work of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood had had a profound influence on the Cannibals, in particular on Swinburne who was a close friend of both William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.\(^\text{112}\) As this chapter has already shown, Swinburne’s poetry repeatedly presents images of pain and self-harm, bodily tortures which are figured as both erotic exhibition and religious subversion. Swinburne had experienced public flogging during his time at Eton, and although this was likely to have been both traumatic and humiliating, it was nonetheless assimilated with great relish into both his prose and poetry (Lutz 2011: 120).\(^\text{113}\) Accounts of Swinburne’s personal life (including his own) demonstrate his preoccupation with the subject of flagellation, and both his personal letters and published work reveal the extent to which he was captivated by the erotic power of marking the skin.\(^\text{114}\) As part of the Cannibal Club and a high profile

\(^\text{111}\) Frederick Hankey (1822-1882) was a Greco-British supplier of erotic literature based in Paris. His preference for sadomasochistic, paedophilic, and sexually violent texts was noted by several of his contemporaries and is also explored by twentieth-century biographers and critics. See Gibson (2001), Colligan (2006), and Lutz (2012). Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885) was an English poet and politician. He was known primarily for his influence in literary circles as a patron of unknown writers, and was an early supporter of Swinburne. Richard Burton (1812-1890) was a British explorer and translator well known for his knowledge of foreign languages and cultures. Burton had translated the *Karma Sutra* into English as well as the first full version of the *Arabian Nights*, and he was highly critical of British attitudes towards sex, a subject about which he wrote openly. While Burton’s ethnographic and anthropological writings had explored what were to the Victorians highly transgressive sexual behaviours, Swinburne’s poetry had not the defence of being so ‘scientific’.

\(^\text{112}\) Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* had caused moral outcry on its release, and its publication was suspended by Swinburne’s publisher amid fears of a prosecution (Dellamora 1990: 70). His exploration of a pantheistic world without a Christian God – one of sensuality and erotic abandon, was as critically lambasted as it was intellectually acclaimed, prompting the historian W.E Lecky to remark that ‘all literary London is ringing with the genius, the blasphemies and indecencies of his last book’ (Rooksby 1997: 4). Swinburne published a number of texts on the subject of flagellation, including a series of poems entitled ‘The Flogging Block’ (1862-1881), contributions to a collection of poems and stories entitled ‘The Whippingham Papers’ (1887) and his novel *Love’s Cross Currents* (1905). In his unfinished novel *Lesbia Brandon* (published posthumously in 1952) Swinburne fictionalises his own childhood experiences of flagellation. During the scenes in which Herbert Seyton is flogged by his tutor, Swinburne’s sense of relish for corporal punishment is made clear (Swinburne 1952: 13-18), yet, as John Vincent has convincingly argued, the novel attempts to normalise flogging in a way which departs from his other texts on the subject (1997: 274).

\(^\text{113}\) Swinburne’s enjoyment of the flagellation brothels of St. John’s Wood was notorious, and added to his infamous public persona as a dissolute fin-de-siècle flaneur (Maxwell (2006: 7). See Henderson (1979), Vincent (1997), Maxwell (2006 & 2012), Levin (2010) and Lutz (2011) all of whom discuss Swinburne’s preference for flagellation.
public figure, Swinburne, and his interest in and representations of self-flagellative behaviours, fed into a sexually subversive literary climate during the late century. Emphasis on the wounded body as well as its myriad pleasures and pains surfaced in the cultural artefacts of the Fin de Siècle and were in part influenced by the heterodoxy of the underground trade in flagellation pornography. This trade was predominantly, although not exclusively, run by men for men’s consumption. In particular, flagellation pornography was limited by the same social and economic restrictions which applied to the wider commercial world, since it was rooted in the public school system attended only by wealthy young men. Therefore, a certain exclusivity prevailed in relation to the consumption of pseudo-religious and self-flagellative pornography, in that its readers possessed shared experience of the class and gender status which facilitated their gratification.

However, recent research has shown that women were (although rarely) involved in the production of pornography, and that they were just as likely as men to have bought and read it, although in different forms and by different means. Sharon Marcus for example, draws our attention to the similarities between flagellation pornography and guides to corporal punishment published in such periodicals as *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, a British favourite and a publication most widely read by middle-class women (2007: 140-142). Aside from prostitutes and brothel owners, whose professional interest in pornography would have exposed them to writings on self-flagellative sexual acts, middle-class and educated women were certainly involved in cataloguing and collecting these kinds of erotica. For example Richard Burton’s wife Isabel helped him to research, compile and publish his volumes of sexually ‘scientific’ writings, what she called his ‘devil driven’ (Nelson 2000: 18) interest in sexual customs. The daughter of a respected Catholic family, who remained devout in her faith despite her family’s disapproval of her marriage to Burton, Isabel nevertheless had access to a number of materials which would have been deemed pornographic by the average Victorian (Lovell 2000: 381). Her burning of Burton’s writings after his death in an attempt to protect his reputation, demonstrates her understanding of the obscenity laws which restricted the types of material which she had had a hand in having printed (Nelson 2000: 18-19).

The Burtons’ was not the only Victorian marriage which concealed a pornographic secret at its heart, in which the middle-class wife was, to a certain extent, exposed to an underground industry. The cartoonist Edward Linley Sambourne photographed hundreds
of nude models, and claimed an ‘inability to draw without a model’ (Nicholson 1988: 15). These women ostensibly formed the rudiments of his drawings, although a great number of his pictures demonstrate an interest far beyond anatomical precision. His collection of images included hundreds of women dressed in exotic or fetish garments, some suggestively or erotically posed. His personal supply of what he calls ‘academic nudes’ bought from Europe, include nude images of a thirteen or fourteen year old girl, and suggest his personal rather than professional interest in the naked female form. Although his letters and diaries do not explicitly show that he was disseminating or sharing his photographs, Sambourne’s busy social life and membership of both the Camera Club in Charing Cross Road and the Garrick Club, make it likely that the photographs would have been shown, if not sold, to his artistic contemporaries (Nicholson 1988: 15). Sambourne’s wife Marion regularly alludes to her husband’s activities in her diary, calling his images ‘those hateful photos’ (11 March 1887: 16). Despite her knowledge and clear disapproval of Sambourne’s enterprises, Marion lived well off the proceeds of her husband’s work, and demonstrates, alongside women like Isabel Burton, that it was possible for the Victorian middle-class housewife to come into contact with erotica.

The production and distribution of underground flagellation pornography was coterminous with the emergence of religiously-framed images of self-harm in late-century women’s fiction. This chapter situates New Woman writing about self-flagellative behaviour as a response to the climate of literary Decadence within which quasi-religious erotised bodies, obscenity – and in particular flagellation pornography – emerge as (albeit unstable) artistic and literary forms in their own right. The burgeoning success of the underground Victorian pornographic market in which flagellation pornography was popular, can be seen to contribute to the complex system of bodily (and indeed textual) signs and codes within which New Woman writing operated and to which it responded. I argue that these signs can be read in the New Woman writing about self-harm which emerged at the turn of the century, which engaged with images of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, and was framed by mainstream religious codes. Despite her radical adoption and subversion of Christian imagery, the New Woman writer of the late century tended to undermine mendacious representations of female bodily pleasure in pain. Instead, she represented a counter dynamic, in which self-damage represented the agonising consequence of female

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115 Sambourne (1844-1910) was a draughtsman and cartoonist, who most famously illustrated for *Punch* magazine between 1867 and his death in 1910. He associated with a number of famous writers and artists of the nineteenth century.
commodification and eroticisation, as opposed to the pseudo-religious sexual pleasures depicted in Victorian pornographic texts.

Religion, Sexuality, and the Feminised Christ Figure in Victorian Women’s Writing

Scenes of self-sacrifice were nothing new to nineteenth-century women’s writing, and discourses which considered and even tentatively combined religious devotion and erotic experience were already (although largely unconsciously) at play during the mid-Victorian period. Both the valorisation of sacrifice and the erotic potential of self-destruction were perhaps best represented in one of the most popular poems of the day: Christina Rossetti’s Goblin Market (1862). The tale of seduction, addiction and sisterly self-sacrifice was reputedly inspired by Rossetti’s work with prostitutes at the Magdalene Penitentiary in London’s Highgate (Lutz 2011: 58) and reveals a degree of moral ambivalence toward the corruptible and corrupted female body. The influence of Rossetti’s own strict religious upbringing is detectable throughout her work in imagery which both reflects and distorts notions of Christian suffering. Like Swinburne (with whom she enjoyed an acquaintance) Rossetti engages with the tensions and ambiguities between religion and sexuality, yet these are much less explicit within her work than in Swinburne’s. In Goblin Market sisters Lizzie and Laura are tempted by the delicious fruits proffered by goblin men, and when Laura submits to taste them she succumbs to both the pleasures of the flesh and the abandonment of domestic duty which follows. It is Lizzie who must risk her own body by venturing to obtain more narcotic fruits for her sister, and it is Lizzie’s physical dedication to Laura which eventually saves her.

Goblin Market directly engages with the erotic potential of the gaze, in that although the goblin men are ‘leering’ (2008: 107 line 93), it is Laura’s own inability to resist looking which places her in danger. Laura cannot help but ‘look’ (line 54), ‘peep’ (line 106), ‘wonder’ (line 70) and ‘rear […] her glossy head’ at the men, and her failure to resist the temptations of the masculine world results directly in her own illness and later a violent attack on Lizzie’s body. The use of the gaze highlights Goblin Market’s preoccupation with the intricacies of the Victorian bodily economy, and the value of women as commodities within it. As in later New Woman writing, Rossetti metaphorically exposes the crude commercialism of the Victorian marriage market and the bodily sacrifice

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116 Rossetti and her brothers William Michael and Dante Gabriel were raised as High Anglicans, but were all heavily influenced by the Catholicism of their father’s native Italy.
required by conventional – as well as transgressive – women, as part of its processes of exchange. In her discussion of the poem Elizabeth Helsinger notes that ‘Rossetti’s merchants are goblin men; their customers are maidens [...] Laura purchases pleasure only to discover that her own body is consumed’ (1995: 189-190). In gazing upon the odd bodies of the goblin men in a reversal of the penetrative male gaze, Laura’s position quickly shifts to the object of masculine desire as she is visually and physically consumed by the goblin men and the ‘pleasures’ they offer. Her reversal of patriarchal codes of looking and indeed desiring, cannot be tolerated within the poem or the society which it represents, and it is conventional Lizzie, who refuses to look, who must save the day. Rossetti’s poem might well function as a critique of women’s dichotomous status as both consumer and consumed, but it is also widely read as highly sensuous and erotically charged. Nevertheless it tells a simple tale of temptation, fall, and redemption through sacrifice, which closely aligns it with biblical imagery and which to a certain extent guarded against strict Victorian moral censorship. Since Rossetti – an unmarried spinster with a blameless reputation, wrote of sisterly love and salvation through Christian moral values, the troublingly homosexual and incestuous connotations of *Goblin Market* went largely unnoticed by Rossetti’s contemporaries.117 According to Deborah Lutz ‘the genius of *Goblin Market* is in making Christian self-sacrifice as lusciously delightful as the sinful fall itself’ (2001: 66) hence Rossetti’s poem represents both the saintly perfection of self-abnegation, and the eroticism and voyeurism so intrinsic to it. The potential consciousness of *Goblin Market*’s metaphorical association of notions of martyrdom with sexual pleasure, continues to be the subject of critical debate.118 However Rossetti’s work underscores the prevalence of such links in the cultural imagination of Victorian women writers, heralding a trend towards exploring the sacrificial female body in ways which struggled to bifurcate the religious from the erotic.

Women writers regularly associated their social position with the sufferings of Christian martyrs, identifying with Christ in particular as a feminised figure. As Simone de Beauvoir notes in *The Second Sex* (1949) ‘for many woman writers, all women are Christ; whether for good or ill. The image of Christ, so often negatively applied, might prove a more salutary symbol for women if they chose to identify with the aspect of power rather than

117 Lizzie saves Laura by refusing to eat when the goblin men attempt to force their fruits upon her (a scene which is highly suggestive of rape), returning to her sister and encouraging Laura to lick the juices of the fruits from her wounded body.

118 See Waldman (2008) for discussion of the erotic undertones at work in Rossetti’s poem.
martyrdom’ (2010: 316). The New Woman writer attempted to endow her self-harming heroines with power by having them replicate Christ’s example, yet ultimately this restricted the subversive potential of her writing. Victorian art and literature often struggled to make a clear distinction between the sacred and the sexual in its depictions of a suffering yet androgynous Jesus Christ. A.J.L. Buss’s essay on the figure of the androgyne in the nineteenth century recognises the cultural potency of an androgynous and feminised Christ as an erotic symbol. In describing the pessimism of late-century images which displayed ‘[...] demonality, onanism, homosexuality, sadism, and masochism’ (1967: 39), Buss makes the case for a shift in the representation of religious figures during the Victorian Decadence. His observations are certainly borne out by examples of popular Victorian painting which imagined Christ’s eroticised and androgynous body as subject to particularly feminine forms of submission. In William Holman Hunt’s painting The Light of the World (1854) Christ is shown holding a lamp and knocking at an overgrown and long-unopened door. Like Hunt’s other religious piece The Triumph of the Innocents, The Light of the World, was also praised by John Ruskin. In a letter to The Times Ruskin described it as ‘one of the very noblest works of sacred art ever produced in this or any other age’ (1854: 9) and the painting was well-received by public and critics alike. However, the history of the painting itself exemplifies its subversion of gender and sexuality, since the androgynous face of Christ was inspired by Christina Rossetti while the hair was modelled for by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s wife Elizabeth Siddal (Andres 2005: 9). As Nina Auerbach points out in Woman and the Demon, femininity haunts this painting, making femaleness ‘a hidden alter-ego’ (1982: 77) of Hunt’s Christ figure. Connecting The Light of the World to Hunt’s The Awakening Conscience (1853), Auerbach argues that the tainted woman is ‘the fallen soul at whose door Christ is knocking’ (1982: 77) and that both represent a transmutation into a ‘peculiarly Victorian typology of domestic female divinity’ (1982: 78).

Once rendered feminine, images of saintly suffering take on an erotic significance which accounts in part for the inability of writers like Christina Rossetti to clearly delineate between self-sacrifice and voyeuristic pleasure. Feminine qualities which encoded Victorian gender binaries are embodied by the martyrdom of Christ; selflessness, patience, forbearance, sacrifice, submission, and beauty were characteristics associated with women,

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119 Buss notes that writers and artists of the Fin de Siècle were also inspired by the painter Leonardo da Vinci’s highly feminised rendering of John the Baptist in St John the Baptist (1513-1516) and that they continually reproduced and re-imagined this image.
yet were repeatedly reproduced in literary and artistic images of the crucifixion. Similarly, Christ’s maternal nature was persistently stressed by scripture and nineteenth-century contemporary culture. As Simon Richter observes, the Christian tradition is excessive in its use of metaphors of Christ as a ‘lactating mother’ (2006: 46) aligning the ‘Word made flesh’ of the book of John, with a maternal transmutation between spiritual and literal nourishment from Christ’s bosom. Similarly, critics and historians such as Luce Irigaray, and more recently Amy Hollywood and Constance Furey have argued that the wounded, fragile figure of Christ can be viewed as both feminised and eroticised by the wound to his side – a metaphorical representation of female genitalia. The wound of the crucified Jesus Christ was understood by Medieval Christianity as having ‘given birth’ to the Church, and thus, as Irigaray argues in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) it mirrors the reproductive organs of the Virgin Mary. In the same way that her body was to be wounded by mankind in giving birth to Christ, Mary’s son was to be similarly wounded by patriarchy, in an act which aligns him with maternal suffering and self-sacrifice. Christ’s side, penetrated by masculine forces as signified by the phallic spear, has a long and rich representational history as having been wounded in an act of sexually-charged violence. As ‘tomb, womb, and vagina’ (Furey 2012: 336) Christ’s suffering body has come to signify the eroticism of female martyrdom and self-sacrifice in a way which can be traced in the art and literature of the Fin de Siècle, including New Woman texts which represent the wounds of feminine experience. The New Woman writer adopted the rhetoric and symbolism of religiously-motivated self-harm, Christ-like suffering, and the wounds of crucifixion, expressing their dissatisfaction with the pain that patriarchy expected them to bear, yet continuing to venerate Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of strength and goodness.

**Feminine Sacrifice in the Novels of Mona Caird & Victoria Cross**

In an often-reproduced 1889 letter to Lady Jane Wilde, the Scottish author Mona Caird expresses her thoughts on the so-called sacrificial woman who had featured in popular mid-Victorian novels, explaining that:

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120 In John (:4) the scripture reads ‘And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth’ (King James Version).
121 Irigaray argues that Christ is feminised in this way in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, however, she retracted her ideas on Christ’s wound as female genitalia in her later work. See Hollywood (2004) for an examination of the sexual symbolism of wounds of crucifixion.
I do not share your admiration for the woman that is ‘sacrificial’ [...] The ‘inspiration of humanity’ she still may be, and in my opinion is much more likely to be, when she ceases to be afraid, ceases to worship morals, ceases to see the ‘divine’ only where she has hitherto been taught to see it in submission, sacrifice, ‘duty’ (so-called) and general self-destruction (Caird 1987: 556).

Directly attacking the heroines of earlier Victorian novels, whose self-destructive acts were rhapsodised by writers who sought to make an example of their virtues, Caird makes the case for the futility of self-sacrifice. Caird argued publically for the abolishment of traditional forms of marriage as well as what she saw as socially-enforced motherhood, thus in her novel *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird’s heroine describes the image of a young mother as a ‘symbol of [...] abasement’ (1894: 248). Caird specifically blames the conflation of Christian notions of divine surrender with the bodily duties which were required by marriage and motherhood, for the misery endured by her characters. However, despite the sensationalism of her much-publicised personal views, Caird’s dependence on the imagery of martyrdom and religiously-framed self-sacrifice in her fictional works is at best, dubious, and at worst deeply hypocritical. In two of her best known novels, Caird interrogates both the Utilitarianism which framed early-nineteenth century thinking about self-sacrifice, as well as the internalisation of Christian ideals adopted even by women who tried desperately to resist assimilation into loveless marriages. In both cases her heroines are forced to adopt self-harming strategies; one woman commits suicide, and the other must sacrifice her mental and physical wellbeing in order to survive.

In *The Wing of Azrael*, Caird explores the potential for disaster brought about by self-enforced bourgeois moral and religious codes. These codes are shown to be at odds with female intellectual development and personal fulfilment; they overrule the heroine’s instincts and ruin her life. The novel centres on the unhappy marriage of Viola Sedley, to the cruel Phillip Dendraith. Despite being in love with her childhood friend Harry Lancaster, Viola is pressured into marrying the wealthy Dendraith in order to secure her family’s financial future, despite her growing dislike of his cruel and controlling nature. Eventually Viola murders her husband and the text strongly implies her death by suicide; she disappears against the backdrop of dark cliffs and a raging sea, following an aborted attempt to escape with Harry. As in many New Woman novels, the feeble mother of the ill-

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122 Caird’s 1898 novel *The Pathway of the Gods* features a New Woman heroine called Anna Carrington, who laments the sacrifice of her sister to an unhappy marriage in a clear critique of bourgeois religion, despite ending up deeply unhappy because of her own attempt to avoid a similar fate.
fated protagonist is blamed for perpetuating and reinforcing the standard of wifely submission against which the heroine rages. In the case of Mrs Sedley these ideals are located in Christian teaching, and reflect the self-sacrificial characteristics of her marriage to Viola’s father. Of their marriage we are told that:

Mrs Sedley with her still, dutiful ways and religious principles had irritated [her husband] from the first day of her meek reign [...] Mr Sedley, by nature, was blustering and self-indulgent [...] His wife’s tendencies, on the other hand, were ascetic. Her conscience never let her rest until she had made things as unpleasant for herself as circumstances would permit, and by long practice in the art, she had now achieved a ghastly power of self-suppression (Caird 2010: 8).

Mrs Sedley is described later as possessing ‘unfailing submissiveness’ and ‘meek and saint-like endurance’ who, by her ‘perpetual self-effacement’, encourages her husband’s wrath, accepting it as ‘another Heaven-sent trial to be borne without murmuring’ (2010: 9). Through Mrs Sedley’s monastic life of saintly submission, Caird illustrates the senselessness of women’s religiously-motivated self-denial. Positing it as a form of self-harm whereby submissiveness in fact affects a worsening of marital discord, Caird critiques the poor example Mrs Sedley sets for her young daughter. As the text goes on to show, Viola is taught by her mother’s behaviour to interiorise notions of meekness and submission, to perform a ‘subordination of the self’ (2010: 10) resulting in self-criticism for her inability to adhere wholeheartedly to Christian tenets of virtuous forbearance.

As a child Viola is deeply religious – and, like many of the New Woman heroines which this thesis examines, punishes herself for acts which fall short of a Christ-like standard of goodness. We are told that Viola:

passed through a phase of fervent religious feeling, during which she rivalled in devotion and self-mortification many a canonised saint. Her mother had some trouble in keeping her from doing herself bodily harm, for in her new-born zeal she preferred tasks that gave her pain, and never thought it possible to be well employed unless the occupation was severely distasteful (2010: 66).

In marrying Dendraith, Viola takes her self-harming tendencies to their logical conclusion, in a relationship which exactly reproduces the dynamic of her parent’s domestic misery.

123 See Sarah Grand’s The Heavenly Twins in which the submissive mothers Mrs Frayling and Mrs Beale are partly responsible for the respective fates of their unhappy daughters. Also see Grand’s The Beth Book, in which Beth’s mother Mrs Caldwell similarly submits to the will of her husband and later her brother, and ignores her husband’s philandering.
However, unlike Mrs Sedley, Viola cannot so easily justify her ill treatment at the hands of her husband, and comes to question the value of Christian suffering and the necessity of her own pain. Constantly oppressed by the internal conflict between religious and social expectations and her own desires and needs, Viola’s only hope of salvation is her love for Harry, and the influence of his friend – the infamous Sibella Lincoln. A New Woman of the most obvious type: educated, financially independent, and the only character able to stand up to Dendraith, – Sibella encourages Viola to follow in her footsteps. While Sibella has defied custom by repudiating her adulterous husband to pursue a life of independence and fulfilment, Viola inwardly rages against the sacrifices required of her by marriage, yet outwardly submits to Phillip and to social expectations. Face to face with the ‘wicked’ Mrs Lincoln, Viola finds herself calmed by her presence and stirred by her words, yet ultimately remains unconvinced by the new-woman thinking which she espouses. Drawing on the imagery of Christian orthodoxy, Mrs Lincoln distorts and undermines the principles to which Viola desperately tries to adhere, explaining that:

We have both been taught, as we imagined, to worship God. I fear that we have really been taught to worship the devil! We are trained to submission, to accept things as they are, to serve God by resignation –yes, even the resignation of our human dignity– whereat the devil laughs in his sleeve, and carries off the fruits of miserable lives to add to the riches of his kingdom [...] And so are the virtues and the martyrdoms of good women in vain (2010: 228-230).

As her oracular name suggests, Sibella uncannily foretells Viola’s grim fate since she senses the depth of religious feeling which makes it almost impossible for Viola to act in any way which contravenes her beliefs. Unlike Sibella, Viola cannot accept that the teaching of the Church and the adherence to its creed by generations of women, can be so entirely wrong. Instead she spends the entirety of the narrative attempting to survive her unhappiness by aligning her troubles with the saints and martyrs of Christian mysticism, implementing the principles of submission taught to her by her mother. Viola never manages to fully reconcile her religious teaching with her desire for personal happiness, and the plot solves this conflict by having her die at the end. Ultimately, Caird shows how self-sacrifice is not only pointless, but unhelpful to each new generation of women taught to do the same as the previous. However, despite her suggestion that women must break

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124 Sibella is suggestive of Sybil, the Greek word meaning ‘prophetess’. Although Sibella guesses that Viola will be unable to refute her duty as a wife and run away with Harry, she also foretells a time in which women will contradict religious doctrines and will not be forced into marriage or to make the choice between marriage and happiness.
the cycle of internalised self-criticism, Caird likewise represents the futility of any attempt to do so. Although comparatively free, Mrs Lincoln is a social pariah, unwelcome and disapproved of by both men and women; yet the dutiful Viola has to die rather than escape that which Mrs Lincoln is already free of. Significantly, Caird suggests no strategy for combining religious feeling with feminine empowerment, suggesting that the two notions will always remain diametrically opposed no matter how women might try to reconcile them.

The irreconcilability of duty and self-fulfilment in Christian marriage is also explored in Caird’s most well-known and controversial novel *The Daughters of Danaus*. Appropriately named after the Greek myth of the fifty sisters forced to carry water through sieves for eternity as punishment for their rebellion, the text is concerned with the similarly futile experience of trapped female genius. As in *The Wing of Azrael*, Caird fictionalises the sacrificial woman, in a critique of Christian morality as the locus of patriarchal control over the female body. As Ann Heilmann has shown, Caird’s novels attempt to re-write Western mythologies ‘in order to dismantle the foundation stories which defined women as objects of exchange [...], willing martyrs [...], and bodies for slaughter’ (2004: 158). By aligning these classical mythologies with nineteenth-century Christian moral directives, Caird puts religiously-motivated self-sacrifice at the centre of her critique of nineteenth-century society. Featuring two New Woman heroines, the text closely examines the relationship between individualism and free will, and the incompatible claims of family and society, as well as the damage that conflict between the two can cause. Algitha Fullerton is a fairly successful example of the New Woman; strong willed and independent she leaves her wealthy family home and refuses to marry, preferring to work amongst the London poor than be dependent on her father or any future husband. Algitha is eventually rewarded for her brave yet socially transgressive actions, with a happy marriage and professional fulfilment. Her younger sister Hadria, is the embryonic New Woman: robust, adventurous, politically aware, intellectual and talented, and her poor opinion of marriage and its constriction of female potential establishes her very quickly as a heroine of ‘advanced’ ideas. However, contrived-against by the social system and contrary to her

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125 In Greek mythology Danaüs had 50 daughters who were to marry the 50 sons of his twin brother. All but one of the fifty daughters murdered their husbands, and for their crime they were condemned in Hades to the eternal task of filling a sieve with water. The only extant text in which the story features is the play *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus (c.470BC). See Walter (1987) for an English translation.
126 Caird’s choice of name for her central heroine is significant. Caird draws on Hadrian, the name of the emperor responsible for building the wall which marked the limit of the Roman Empire. Since Caird was
own best judgment, Hadria is coerced into marrying and beginning a family, thus slowly eradicating her talent under the weight of household concerns and maternal obligation.\textsuperscript{127}

In a critique of the Emersonian optimism that is naively proffered by her brother Ernest, Hadria argues that women’s ability to overcome restrictions placed on the development of their genius has yet to be tested, since any deviation from tradition signals the destruction of these powers.\textsuperscript{128} She explains that ‘difficulties need not be really obstructive to the best development of a character or a power, nor a smooth path always favourable. Obstacles may be of a kind to stimulate one person and to annihilate another’ (Caird 1894: 6). However, proceeding to paraphrase the closing lines of George Eliot’s \textit{Middlemarch}, Hadria expresses the futility of the lives of women whose talents and individuality of character have been surrendered as a result of such obstacles. She explains that ‘pale hypotheses, nameless peradventures – lie in forgotten churchyards – unthought of, unthanked, untrumpeted, and all their tragedy is lost in the everlasting silence’ (1894: 8).\textsuperscript{129} Despite Caird’s clear criticism of Eliot’s sacrificial heroine Dorothea Brooke, Hadria Fullerton is to meet a similar fate herself. Manipulated into marrying unhappily, Hadria contravenes social expectations and leaves her husband and children for a satisfying and creative life in Paris, but is forced by her sense of familial duty to return to him when her parents are left destitute and her mother develops a nervous illness. Forced into a life she despises, Hadria increasingly imagines her various emotional and psychological sufferings as forms of martyrdom.

Both sisters deploy the language of religious sacrifice in conflicting ways, demonstrating the opposing experiences and viewpoints of a healthy and independent, fully realised New Woman, and contrastingly a morbid, self-destructive sacrificial woman made ‘Old’ despite

\textsuperscript{127} Ernest draws upon Ralph Waldo Emerson’s comments in the ‘Fate’ section of his essay collection \textit{The Conduct of Life} (1860 - revised 1876) and Hadria quotes directly from it. Emerson argues that circumstance can be overcome by the strength and soul of the individual, a statement which Hadria refutes in the case of most women who have as yet been unable to test this theory. See Emerson (2009: 494) for the original essay.

\textsuperscript{128} The closing sentences of George Eliot’s \textit{Middlemarch} praise the goodness of Dorothea Brooke, whose talent and potential are never fully realised because she sacrifices them to custom. Eliot closes the novel by explaining that ‘her full nature […] spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived a faithfully hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs’ (Eliot 2008: 688). Caird paraphrases the final line in a critique of Eliot’s politics of female renunciation.
her best efforts. Both Algitha’s assertive step towards financial and familial emancipation, and Hadria’s failed attempts at self-determination are figured within the rhetoric of Christian mortification despite Caird’s clear critique of Christianity as a hypocritical and counter-productive social force. The acknowledgment of the necessity of female sacrifice is expressed by Algitha at the outset of the text, who explains that ‘[i]f one is unjustly restrained […] it is perfectly right to brave the infliction of pain that people feel only because they unfairly object to one’s liberty of action’ (1894: 9). However, Algitha’s comments refer not to the endurance of one’s own pain in the pursuit of noble aims, but the pain of others which naturally occurs as a by-product of deviance from social norms. While Algitha is to reconcile herself to the pain she causes her parents by her unconventional step, Hadria is positioned to repeatedly suffer self-inflicted pains as the remaining daughter upon whom the Fullertons place their hopes for a conventional life.

From the outset, Hadria envisions the pain of others in strict relation to her own body, in an image of corporeal interconnectedness which draws on the discourse of vivisection, through which several New Woman writers expressed their political disenfranchisement. Of women’s inability to develop professional or artistic lives outside of the boundaries of marriage and motherhood Hadria explains that:

she has to tear through so many living ties that restrain her freedom […] to have to buy the mere right to one’s liberty by cutting through prejudices that are twined with the very heart-strings of those one loves! Ah that particular obstacle has held many a woman helpless and suffering, like some wretched insect pinned alive to a board throughout a miserable lifetime (9-10).

In describing woman’s inability to emotionally disconnect themselves from the double bind of domestic and public duties, Hadria imagines social tradition as a bodily system which relies upon connections of flesh and blood. In attempting to free oneself from this system, a woman must metaphorically cut through those sinews; she must wound herself as well as the bodies of all those who make up the wider organism of the family and the body politic. The alternative is to suffer by a different, yet potentially more destructive means, as the victim of torture who is ‘pinned alive’ by tradition. The reference to an insect tortured

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130 Caird was a very active anti-vivisection campaigner, and wrote an extended essay on the issue entitled ‘Beyond the Pale: An Appeal on Behalf of the Victims of Vivisection’ (1897). Fellow New Woman writers like Sarah Grand and Vernon Lee were also active in campaigns against vivisection, and included negative portrayals of vivisectionists in their fictional works – see Grand’s The Beth Book (1897) in which the morally and sexually profligate Daniel Maclure enjoys inflicting pain on animals. Maclure is a doctor at a Lock Hospital, and his torture of animals is a metaphor for his detention and inspection of prostitutes in his work.
alive and pinned to a rack, is both etymological and distinctly Christian. While suggestive of scientific advancement through dissection and study, Caird devalues any intellectual or biological gains made through vivisectional processes. Instead Caird evokes violent images of martyrdom from the Middle Ages during which Christians were forced to renounce their beliefs or die slowly and painfully in their name, often being pinned to a cross using nails like the crucified Jesus Christ.\footnote{Examples include; Saint Aemilianus who was flayed alive, Saint Benjamin who was tortured by the insertion of sharp objects into his body and Vigilius of Trent, who was stoned to death, all of whom died during the 5th century AD. The Romans routinely crucified Christians by pinning them with nails. Other than Jesus Christ, a number of non-Roman citizens who were also Christian were crucified in this way. See Foxe (2009) for a Victorian account of martyred Christians.} Offering the example of Mrs Fullerton, whose intellectual potential has been subdued by her own marriage, Caird demonstrates the effects of this type of slow physical torture. Mrs Fullerton’s wasted gifts have no outlet, and consequently her mental and physical health decline, culminating in a terminal illness towards the end of the novel. In centralising the wounded and tortured body as a way of reading nineteenth-century female sacrifice, Caird establishes a subtext of martyrdom at the outset of her novel which pervades throughout.

Before her removal to Paris and eventual unwilling return, Hadria refuses to be made to commit any act of self-renunciation or self-harm, remaining steadfast in her convictions and choosing to bear any pain inflicted upon her, explaining that:

> They must take the trouble to provide the instruments of death from without; they must lay siege and starve me; they must attack in soldierly fashion; I will not save them the exertion by developing the means of destruction from within. There I stand at bay. They shall knock down the citadel of my mind and will, stone by stone (152).

Again, Hadria expresses her determination to assert her individuality and free will, through the rhetoric of saint-like perseverance and bodily sacrifice. Although she acknowledges that she may be defeated by the weight of centuries of tradition, she is (at this stage in the novel) unwilling to sacrifice herself without a fight. Describing the passivity of women in their acceptance of masculine rule, Hadria uses similar language, describing how the submissive woman:

> goes to the stake smiling. She swears the flames are comfortably warm, no more [...] She smiles encouragement to the other chained figures, at the other stakes. Her reward? The sense of exalted worth, of humility; the belief that she has been
sublimely virtuous [...] She has done her duty, and sent half a dozen souls to hell! (213).

The quote recalls the image of another female martyr, one who had reached the status of canonised saint and folk heroine by the nineteenth century, and who was beatified in the twentieth century. Joan of Arc was put on trial for charges of ‘insubordination and heterodoxy’ (Warner 2013: 5) following her leadership of the French army to a number of victories and her capture by pro-English forces. Fresh interest in her execution for heresy by burning at the stake was awoken during the nineteenth century when transcripts of the trial of Joan of Arc were released to the French public. The transcripts revealed that Joan was not only exceptional in her position as a female leader and military strategist, but she was also highly intelligent and capable of confounding her male inquisitors with her clever responses.

Like the Catholic saint Joan, Caird’s Hadria is an exceptional young woman, and despite her critique of women’s submission she clearly identifies with the subversive components of martyrdom. The death of Joan of Arc is satirically re-imagined by Hadria, who while drawing a parallel between herself and other female martyrs, recognises the long-term futility of female inactivity and submission to masculine law. Ironically, society is saved the exertion of destroying Hadria, because when she is forced to return home she lays siege to and starves herself, harming herself from within through guilt and self-incrimination. It is Hadria who (metaphorically) joins the martyred women at the stake, and damns the souls of others, by her renunciation of her happiness for the ‘betterment’ of family and society. Eventually Hadria ‘commenc[es] the attack on herself’ (1894: 259) following the announcement of her mother’s illness and her father’s financial ruin, and imagines this attack in religiously-determined language. She describes ‘the injury from without, and then the self-injury, its direct offspring; unnecessary yet inevitable’ (1894: 264), and Caird draws on Greek mythology when her narrator explains that:

It was as inevitable as that the doom of Orestes should follow the original crime of the house of Atreus. Hadria’s whole thought and strength were now centred on the effort to bring about that propitiation, in her own person. She prepared the altar and sharpened the knife. In that subtle and ironical fashion, her fate was steadily at work (1894: 264).

Documents from the trial were made public in 1840 in a translated version by Jules Quicherat (see Heimann 2005). The first English translation was in 1932, although it is likely that Caird would have been aware of the contents long before this.
Aligning her heroine’s suffering with a classical myth of matricide and familial blood sacrifice, Caird situates Hadria’s act of self-renunciation as owing in part to her sense of responsibility for her mother’s inevitable death. Her sacrifice is rendered as an act of martyrdom in the pose of Orestes’s sister Iphigenia, who is murdered by her father in the interests of the wider family, their health and prosperity. Like Iphigenia’s, Hadria’s body is sacrificed for her family’s wellbeing as she nurses her mother, committing all her energy and time to the sickroom and severely neglecting both her musical talent and her health. Hadria’s body becomes ‘worn and white, and dreadfully thin’ (1894: 275) as her mother’s health begins to rally after months of tireless nursing.

Faced with a lifetime of such sacrifice Hadria imagines that ‘cutting one’s throat would be the only way out’ (1894: 299) yet she does not do so. Rather, she continues to critique female martyrdom despite her own continual recourse to acts of self-sacrifice, explaining that ‘self-sacrifice in a woman, is always her easiest course. It is the nearest approach to luxury that society allows her [...] A woman will endure martyrdom with the expression of a seraph – an extremely aggravating seraph’ (1894: 340). Caird’s use of irony is clear here, in that Hadria’s own actions of martyrdom align her with the women for whom she has no sympathy, those who smile and gain favour by their own self-denial. Hadria’s disapproval is centred upon the public nature of women’s self-sacrificial activities, the display of their wounded bodies and wounded psyches as part of the economy of nineteenth-century bodily exchange. This economy, the display of broken bodies ‘like badges of identity or fashion accessories’ (Seltzer 1998: 2), however distasteful to Caird’s heroine, is one in which Caird herself participates through her writing. Heilmann has argued that Caird’s use of mythological rewriting works to downplay patriarchal strategies to ‘dampen insurgent spirits by hyperbolising the ghastly punishments meted out to the revolting daughter’ (2004: 158). However, in many ways it is the spectacular overemphasis of women’s self-punitive responses to nineteenth-century phallocentricism on which Caird’s message depends. Her martyred heroines are indeed needlessly sacrificed, their bodies broken by the demands of family life, yet even Caird’s happier female characters also fail to escape

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133In Homer’s *Iliad* (800-600BC) Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia for favourable winds during his long voyage to Troy and is later murdered by his wife Clytemnester in an act of retribution. Agamemnon’s son Orestes returns to murder his mother and her new lover seven years later and is forced to face punishment for his violation of family piety in various later versions of the myth (see Aeschylus and Euripides for examples) some of which cite a snake bite as the cause of his death.
these seemingly tortuous social imperatives. In displaying the bodies of self-sacrificial women in these narratives of religiously-framed self-harm, Caird attacks the system which requires these strategies, yet also promulgates the spectacularisation of the damaged body as a cultural and economic commodity. Caird’s strategic exploitation of late-century wound culture, of the ‘excitations in the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors’ (Seltzer 1998: 253) which underpins her stories of feminine self-abnegation, implicates her not only in the very system which she sets out to condemn, but also minimises the didactic impact of her texts.

More sensational, even than Caird’s novels of feminine self-sacrifice, is Victoria Cross’s novella Anna Lombard (1901). A shockingly seditious text, it was received by the indignant reading public as both sensational and morally objectionable, and is the only one of Cross’s many novels to remain in print today. However, Cross published more than twenty novellas and several volumes of short stories across a four decade long career. Her early works, including a satirical response to Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did entitled The Woman Who Didn’t (1895), reveal Cross as a major contributor to both the New Woman and Decadent oeuvres, despite her lack of connection to or participation within either of these groups. Gail Cunningham notes in her introduction to the most recent edition of Anna Lombard that remarkably little is known about her personal life, since she distanced herself from late-Victorian literary circles as well as public politics (2006: vii). Cross spent most of her life abroad, and despite being educated in England, travelled extensively in Europe and lived primarily in what was then British India.

India provides the exotic setting for Anna Lombard, a text which, like her short story ‘Theodora: A Fragment’ (which was published in Henry Harland’s The Yellow Book in 1895) explores the erotic potential of relationships which blur the boundaries between class, race, gender and sexuality. Appearing in the final year of the reign of Queen

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134 Hadria in fact adopts a young orphan girl later in the text, taking her to Paris as part of her new life of freedom. The novel makes a clear distinction between motherhood which is chosen and the enforced motherhood which is obligatory within Christian marriage.

135 Cross’s real name was Anna Sophie Cory (1868-1952). Her pseudonym can be read as a play on the Victoria Cross medal, the highest award given for acts of British (masculine) military valour. See Charlotte Mitchell’s 2002 bibliography for the most recent biographical information to have been found on Cross.

136 In ‘Theodora’ the male narrator is drawn to Theodora’s sexual ambiguity, and this highly appealing androgyny leads to questions about the narrator’s sexuality. The setting amongst Eastern artefacts links this desire to non-white, non-British sexual exoticism. The story is reprinted in Elaine Showalter’s Daughters of Decadence (1993). In 1903, Cross turned the story into a novel entitled Six Chapters of a Man’s Life in which Theodora travels to Egypt with the male narrator and they live as a ‘homosexual’ couple until they are discovered and Theodora is maimed and eventually kills herself.
Victoria, to a certain extent the themes explored in *Anna Lombard* represent the unsteady movement towards secularism and modernity at a time when attitudes towards class, gender and sexuality were in a state of flux. The novel follows the romantic aspirations of Gerald Ethridge, a British Assistant Commissioner in India, who falls in love with the eponymous heroine, only to be sent away to a remote corner of the country plagued by cholera before getting the chance to admit his feelings to her. Despite her love for Gerald, who has seemingly deserted her, Anna embarks on an interracial relationship with an Indian servant working in her father’s house. When Gerald unexpectedly returns and proposes to Anna, she informs him of the intense sexual and emotional bond she has formed with Gaida Khan, and he selflessly agrees to become engaged to her until she is strong enough to end her other relationship. Eventually, Gaida dies during an outbreak of cholera, despite Gerald’s efforts to nurse him, and when Anna finds she is pregnant with Gaida’s child, Gerald agrees to marry her to cover up her indiscretion. The text culminates in infanticide, when Anna smothers her mixed race child, since her love for it threatens to alienate the man to whom she owes so much.

In *Anna Lombard*, Cross undertakes to address a number of shockingly ‘modern’ social issues, making the argument for a new type of masculinity to respond to the emerging New femininity at the Fin de Siècle. Anna is strong, intellectual, sexually liberated, and unfettered by conventions of race and class, or by traditional moral scruples. Conversely, Gerald is patient, kind and disinterested, passive and submissive, loyal and devoted – an angel in the house and the personification of the Victorian domestic ideal. Characterised as a Christ-like figure, Gerald represents a highly feminised version of masculinity, whose traditionally ‘womanly’ qualities allow him to assume the self-flagellative role usually reserved for the typical mid-Victorian heroine, turning New Woman novelistic convention on its head. In this text it is not the socially transgressive, suffering New Woman heroine who must bear the trials and sacrifices forced upon her by convention, but instead the painfully traditional male narrator, whose sufferings are imagined in the language of Christian sacrifice and religious self-flagellation in a novel that is otherwise entirely secular in its themes. At the outset of the text Gerald responds to a friend’s lamentation on British women’s poor physicality when he asks ‘[a]nd what about the girls? Are the men made to suit them?’ (Cross 2006: 5). The comment encapsulates Cross’s challenge to

\[137\] Other than the references to martyrdom and self-sacrifice, very little mention is made of traditional Christian morality in *Anna Lombard*. In fact the text repeatedly returns to images from the classical Greek tradition in which a variety of Gods are made responsible for earthly events. See pages 32-33 and 70-71.
what was seen as a crisis in nineteenth-century masculinity catalysed by the evolution of the New Woman. Cross’s work unashamedly subverts gender stereotypes, and attempts to imagine what will be required of the New Man at the impending dawn of modernity and political change. However, despite her reversal of the gender dichotomies which reinforced Victorian moral and religious values, Cross’s feminisation of Gerald relies entirely upon the same inflexible and wholly reductive binaries. In her use of the imagery of religious self-harm, Cross sacrifices the body of the male-narrator-as-female-martyr, but in doing so commits to traditional and well-established discourses on the need for feminine self-sacrifice simultaneously blurring the boundaries between martyrdom and masochistic pleasure.

We are told by Ethridge himself that he is ‘usually considered good looking, [his] features were straight and perfectly regular, the skin pale and clear, the eyes large’ (2006: 12). Although Anna expresses her admiration for Gerald’s ‘beautiful face and those beautiful eyebrows’ (2006: 55) he does not supply much further description of himself beyond these strikingly feminine characteristics and his height of six feet. Gerald is conspicuously disembodied, a man whose sexual desires are sublimated to his emotional need to belong to the woman he loves. When Anna offers Gerald her ‘soul and heart and brain’, he rejects them as ‘hardly enough for me (2006: 54) – yet these are all Gerald is to have of Anna, because she continues to be sexually satisfied elsewhere. Contrastingly, the exotic body of Gaida is central to the narrative. His sheer physicality is overwhelming to Anna who describes his ‘wonderful neck’ (2006: 56) and to Gerald who envisions him as ‘a king’(2006: 64). Gaida’s raw, physical masculinity unnerves Gerald, who feels insubstantial by comparison since Gaida ‘was of great height, and his form evidently, from his motions, as perfect as the perfect face’ understanding that ‘[a] woman whose eyes had been once opened [to his body] would never be free’ (2006: 64). While the narrator of Cross’s text devotes several paragraphs to describing the native’s body, about his own he is largely silent. Gaida is ‘almost superhuman’ with ‘perfectly straight features’, is ‘statuesquely beautiful’ and a ‘marvel of humanity’ (2006: 65) while Gerald’s rather asexual masculinity is subject to a narrative fissure. In failing to narrativise Gerald’s body and focussing only on his facial features, Cross feminises Gerald from the outset of the novel, creating a stark contrast between the eroticised and forbidden body of the native and the sexual ineffectiveness of the pale English gentleman hero. Of Anna we are told much more. According to Gerald she is a woman entirely incongruous with the century in which
she lives, and her divergence in thought and her bravery of action are closely aligned with ancient acts of heroism. Upon hearing her name for the first time Gerald explains that ‘it sounds somehow to me medieval, a middle-age sort of name’ (2006: 6) and later he expands by claiming that:

her character and mind belonged rather to a more stirring time, when personal courage was at a premium [...] she said things and expressed opinions that gave me a faint, peculiar sense of her extreme independence and of something wonderfully strong in her character – something large, larger than the nature of most women, something also extremely courageous, that called for a heroic age to find its natural exercise. Amongst the other things I had studied, the history of the Middle Ages had always possessed a great fascination for me, and now I was suddenly drawn again towards it by the girl I loved, and by the peculiar timbre of her nature that seemed familiar to me and came to me as an echo from the past (2006: 41).

Identifying in Anna the courage of conviction demonstrated by the martyrs of the Middle Ages, Gerald idealises her as similarly brave and virtuous. Like Caird, Cross represents her heroine as a Joan of Arc figure, an unruly woman condemned for her refusal to adhere to strict gender codes. Not only is Anna viewed as a suffering martyr, but as the epitome of chivalric virtues aspired to by the knights of Arthurian legend. The language Cross uses in relation to her heroine is grandiose: her independence is ‘extreme’, she is ‘wonderfully strong’, ‘courageous’, and ‘heroic’ and while these might seem to be qualities associated with classical masculine heroism, Gerald finds them sexually alluring. Reversing the traditional roles played in courtly romance, Anna represents the knight who in adherence to the rules of courtly love often finds himself in love with more than one person. Meanwhile Gerald assumes the part of an obedient and honourable romance heroine ready to stand by his lover and face any challenge despite her wavering commitment to him.138 Any comparison with a martyr such as Joan of Arc is unconvincing and short-lived in Cross’s text, because unlike the inviolate body of the chaste heroine of French legend, Anna’s body is ‘corrupted’ by her desire for Gaida, and she gives birth to an illegitimate child.139 When Anna is cast by Gerald as Catherine Sforza in a game of tableaux vivantes, the text signals that she is not to be read as a typical female martyr at all.140 Since Sforza’s murder of

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138 The rules of courtly love are described in Andreas Capellanus’s ‘De Amore’ (c. 1184-1186). See Walsh (1982) for a current translation of the original Latin.
139 The body of Joan of Arc is repeatedly conflated with the virginal body of Mary mother of Christ, by both contemporary and medieval art and literature as well as by the rehabilitation hearings (1450-1456) during which Joan was absolved of heresy and praised as a national hero.
140 Catherine Sforza of Forli (1463-1509) was an Italian countess famous for her various acts of retribution against those involved in the plot to overthrow her husband and claim her lands. Her torture and murder of those involved, as well as the murder of the wives and children of the conspirators mark her out as a
numerous men, women, and children was motivated by the secular concerns of protecting her property and land, Cross’s rendering of Anna in the semblance of Sforza connotes a similar lack of orthodox Christian morality in her heroine. Gerald’s choice of *tableau vivant* indicates his unconscious acknowledgment of Anna’s potential for moral ambiguity, and her success in the role further hints at her impending social and sexual misconduct. While Anna is thus depicted less as a martyr figure and more as a dangerous woman, Gerald become increasingly feminised by his Christ-like sufferings during which he assumes the role of a martyred heroine much more convincingly than Cross’s central female character.

When Anna confesses her relationship with Gaida, Gerald is ‘wounded, sore and cut to the quick’ yet his voice ‘was tender instead of stern’ (2006: 54), and when Anna repents of her actions yet refuses to stop them, Gerald describes how ‘the touch of her hands seemed to burn into my flesh’ (2006: 55). Despite the physical pain Anna causes Gerald, he immediately commits to endure it, offering his body up to sacrifice in a variety of self-flagellative postures which ensure his emotional survival ‘whatever [his] pain and suffering and ultimate reward’ (2006: 59). Although Gerald imagines his sacrifice as Christian martyrdom and expects the resultant spiritual reward, his submission is also decidedly erotic in that it highlights the presence of highly masochistic drives. Having decided to endure the pains (imagined and otherwise) of Anna’s continuing relationship with Gaida, Gerald reasons that:

> I knew not one pang of mine, not the smallest sacrifice would pass unnoticed and unweighed, or fail to bring me more than five times its value in gratitude and love. What hardship is there in serving such a mistress? To me none. There are instances recorded, or at least supposed to exist, when men have poured out a life-long devotion at the feet of some senseless idol that cared little for them, nothing for their suffering, and laughed at their love. Such self-abnegation seems to me degradation, and can only exist where the worshipper is as worthless as the idol. But for Anna I would give up my life as cheerfully as men in all ages have died for their gods, while and because they believed in them (2006: 59).

In this passage Cross conflates Christian notions of earthly, bodily sacrifice for spiritual, emotional compensation, with the desire inherent in a relationship of submission to a female object of masculine desire. The use of terminology such as ‘serving’ and ‘mistress’ implies Cross’s recognition of the masochistic drives at play here, even if only on Gerald’s particularly vengeful and dangerous woman. She is a significant female figure in that unlike her various contemporaries, she was motivated entirely by the secular concerns of her property and prosperity, and not by matters of religion.
part. A reading of the relationship between Anna, Gerald and Gaida as masochistic is supported by an earlier scene in which Gerald is invited by Anna to watch her interactions with Gaida from behind a screen. Gerald describes how:

a figure came into the room [...] I sat motionless, hardly breathing, in my chair in the shadow. This, then, was Gaida Khan [...] It is difficult in the slow, cold words that follow each other on paper to convey any idea of the glory of beauty that the hand of God has set upon this race. The face was of the Greek type in the absolute oval of its contour, and the perfectly straight features, the high nose, [...] the short curling upper lip, and the full rounded chin [...] I sat paralysed and gazing at him, feeling crushed and without hope (2006: 65).

Witness to his extreme physical beauty, Gerald is emasculated by the godlike Gaida, in Cross’s reinterpretation of the final masochistic tableau of Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch’s Venus in Furs (1870). Written in German but widely read in European literary circles, Masoch’s sensational text features a masochistic contract between the dominant Wanda von Dunajew and her submissive lover Severin Kusiemski. In a scene of sexual humiliation, Wanda invites the apollonian Alexis Papadopolis into her bedroom, forcing Severin to watch them together and to suffer physical punishment at the hands of her corporeally superior lover. Papadopolis (referred to, like Gaida, as Greek) is very beautiful; an image of hyper-masculine perfection which the intellectually superior Severin cannot hope to emulate. He is ‘a magnificent specimen of a man’ and Severin claims that through this man he is made to ‘understand the masculine Eros’ (Von Sacher-Masoch 2006: 66). Attempting to normalise his sexual predilections, Severin explains that the Christian martyrs ‘were supersensual men who found enjoyment in suffering. They sought out the most frightful tortures […] as others seek joy’ (2006: 19). Positioning himself alongside historical martyrs, Severin identifies with their self-destructive drives, but also undermines the (masculine) Christian God, favouring instead a Goddess of antiquity in the shape of the cruel Venus. In a text which consciously flouts ‘the kind of love which is preached by Christianity’ (2006: 11) and eulogises pagan and Hellenic religious principles, the wounded narrator eventually finds his ideals sadly lacking, and his body subject to Christ-like humiliation and torture. In Anna Lombard the rather cruel act of displaying Gaida’s superior body for Gerald does not operate at the literal level of a sexually masochistic scene. However, Gerald’s obsessive pursuit of Anna, despite her sexual preference for Gaida, dramatises an emasculating power imbalance, similar to that found in Venus in Furs. The relationship, which ultimately sees a saintly and suffering Gerald physically and
emotionally wounded, imagines him as impotent and broken as Masoch’s Severin following the introduction of another man into his relationship with Wanda. Though I do not read Gerald as homosexual, the reversal of the male gaze, the subversion of the gendered binaries of watched female and watching male which mark this scene are of particular relevance when considering Gerald’s narrative feminisation.

When Gaida is struck by cholera and Anna is left to pray for his recovery, Gerald sees his opportunity to be free of his rival, yet does not take it. Instead Gerald nurses Gaida, undertaking a role conventionally reserved for women, a role which in the Christian tradition instantly maternalises him. According to Simon Richter, the acts of motherly care undertaken by Christ: the washing of feet, the nursing of the sick, work to represent him as a feminine and maternal figure in Christian art and culture, and I would argue that the same imagery is at work in Cross’s text (2006: 133). The homosocial relations between men, which ratified nineteenth-century patriarchal power, what Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick describes as ‘friendship, mentorship, admiring identification, bureaucratic subordination and heterosexual rivalry’ (1990: 186), also forced men onto sexually and socially ambiguous ground, often challenging their sense of masculinity. This potential threat to self-identification as normative and heterosexual, is what Sedgwick terms ‘homosexual panic’ (1009: 187) and can be identified in a number of nineteenth-century texts which feature a bachelor hero like Gerald Ethridge. Though Gerald’s heterosexual desire for Anna is made clear, the way that Cross’s text treats the scenes in which he gazes upon his male rival, works to suggest a sense of sexual ambiguity. This in turn undermines and confuses Gerald’s own subjectivity and increasingly signifies his role as a passive, watched object with little control over the scopic dynamics of the relationship he finds himself in. Unlike Anna, who watches both Gaida in all his masculine splendour, and Gerald watching Gaida, Gerald assumes the position of the observed, despite his own observational function.

As Gerald’s desire for Anna continues to be confounded by her inability to break with Gaida, he commits acts of increasingly violent self-harm. Gerald describes how he sits ‘with teeth set and [his] nails sunk deep into the palms of [his] hands’ in ‘terrible nights of

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141 Sedgwick uses the example of Henry James’ The Beast in the Jungle (1903) in which the bachelor John Marcher fails to recognise the desire felt for him by his female friend May Bertram, and indeed fails to desire at all. The bachelor figures that Sedgwick discusses are usually ignorant and selfish, unwilling to verbalise their feelings and thus as Sedgwick argues, closeted. In contrast Gerald Ethridge is entirely selfless, and emphatic in his assertion of his love for Anna, making him an unlikely candidate for a queer reading through Sedgwick’s ‘homosexual panic’.
desperate pain’ unable to eat because ‘the excitement in which [he] lived seemed to close [his] throat against it’ (2006: 73). Gerald’s pains begin to manifest, metaphorically and literally as the wounds of Christ, as he tells how ‘I carried a wound, a raw terrible wound in my breast’ (2006: 78) and ‘pain at my wrists and ankles’ (2006: 81) and later ‘a wound that I could not recover from, since the wound must [...] remain open and bleeding sore’ (2006: 113). He begins to suffer from nightmares in which his wrists and ankles are attacked and in which his persecutors ‘came at them with red-hot saws and I screamed and twisted and they sawed the faster!’ (2006: 81). Waking to find he has been bound to his bed in his delirium by the doctor, Gerald finds his wrists in particular are ‘livid and swollen’ (2006: 82). Gerald’s ‘stigmata’ echoes imagery from an earlier scene in the text, in which the adolescent snake charmer Lulloo presents herself wearing a crown of snakes, twirling them around her ankles and wrists. Her spectacle of ‘crucifixion’ foretells her actual death by suicide, in which she hangs herself because Gerald cannot commit to take her as his native ‘wife’, an act which further feminises Gerald since his male colleagues treat his prudery and ‘unmanliness’ with distrust. Lulloo’s suicide for love is suggestively mirrored by Gerald’s own bodily sacrifice for a woman who will refuse to marry him, as he has himself refused Luloo.

Finally, after the death of Gaida, and on his wedding night to a now pregnant Anna, Gerald reflects on the extent of his sacrifice, explaining that:

I, to whom she was as sacred now from the approach of passion as before she became my own and held my name, looked upon her and realised that in self-renunciation, self-abnegation, self-denial for another, lies the keenest, purest pleasure of humanity. This was my marriage night, and what had it brought me? No abandonment to personal pleasure, no sensual delight of any sort, no gratification of the desires or the senses [...] only self-repression and self-restraint, a total denial of physical will. Yet out of all this rose a supreme happiness [...] (2006: 115).

Cross carefully reverses the archetypal roles set out by the Victorian novelistic tradition, forcing her central male character into the guise of the patient and subservient heroine, while her female protagonist experiences masculine sexual fulfilment without the threat of social derision or exposure. Gerald’s wedding night typifies Cross’s gender reversal, leaving the expectant man unsatisfied in a bedroom scene which might have come straight from the diary of a newly married Victorian bride. Taking recourse to the imagery of religious self-harm and martyrdom Gerald frames his sacrifice as a worthy act; the self-denial of his sexuality and his physical sufferings are forms of sacred, divine, and
transcendental reward. In representing Gerald’s renunciation of physical ‘happiness’ as an affirmation of non-corporeal, spiritual elation Cross undertakes to satirise women’s strategies of Christian self-sacrifice, showing the waste and ineffectiveness of a man who adopts the same approach. However, since Gerald Ethridge is revealed to be the true ‘heroine’ of the story – his deep and unwavering love for the questionably heroic Anna his most admirable feature – it is difficult as a reader not to sympathise with his acts of self-denial. In fact it is difficult even as a twenty-first century reader not to read Cross’s strong-willed, independent, and revolutionary New Woman heroine as a disappointingly selfish and cruel character with too few good qualities by which to redeem her actions. Cross is clearly critical of Victorian restrictions placed on women’s sexual and social freedoms as well as the internalisation of religious dogma through which patterns of self-renunciation were aligned with Christ’s example. However, by at times glorifying Gerald’s selflessness, his Christ-like example of patience and forbearance, Cross’s attempt to re-write the religiously-framed script of sacrifice enforced on women falls short. While attempting to envision a reversal of gendered orthodoxies, Cross in fact implements the very same binarisms against which she appears to write – her novel is in fact all about a suffering heroine whose patience and self-denial bring her spiritual if not physical reward. In attempting to write against convention, Cross’s novel merely relies upon the tried and tested dichotomies of angel and demon, saint and sinner, Mary and Eve, found in Victorian literature and visual culture.

New Woman writers like Caird and Cross attempted to exploit the symbolism of martyrdom and suffering in fictional texts which capitalised on the didactic potential of Christian allegory. At a time when the erotics of self-abasement were prevalent in popular Christian iconography, and self-flagellative erotic texts became increasingly available, the New Woman writer challenged the idealisation of Christian self-abnegation. However, in doing so she also perpetuated a tradition in which the damaged body of the female martyr operated as a site of phallocentric spectacle and thus failed to escape the rhetorical limitations of patriarchy. In the readings which follow, I show how religious dictates are internalised by female characters seeking either to replicate Christ’s example or punish themselves for their inability to do so successfully. Rites of expiation which had for centuries been controlled by the male-dominated doctrines of Christianity, began to be exploited by women themselves at a time when the influence of traditional religion was beginning to wane but its powerful cultural ideologies prevailed. This exploitation,
however, failed to assert women’s authority over their own discourse – since, as I will show, New Woman writers both reproduced male narrative traditions, and later committed acts of literary self-sabotage in attempting to free themselves of those traditions. To a lesser or greater extent, all the texts explored in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, engage with Christian iconography and are framed by the organising structures of Christianity. The self-destructive practices of self-starvation, alcoholism, and self-mutilation are depicted by New Woman writers as reactions to the apparatus of nineteenth-century patriarchy, but are also rhetorically formulated using the very philosophies of sacrifice against which they wrote. Whether directly referencing the limitations or appeal of Christ’s example, or more covertly undermining the authority of the Church, all the novels, poems, and short stories which follow both denigrate yet replicate self-sacrifice as a dangerous yet useful strategy for feminine survival.
Getting Beyond the ‘Fleshly Veil’: Self-Starvation in the New Woman Novel

*The Starving Victorian Body*

Early and mid-Victorian women’s fiction was, to a certain extent, already confidently engaged in the use of self-destructive tropes. The most clearly identifiable of these, was the self-sacrificing, often starving heroine who featured frequently in the most popular fiction of the period. Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone, Emily Brontë’s Catherine Earnshaw, Charles Dickens’s Little Dorrit and Nell Trent, and George Eliot’s Mirah Lapidoth and Gwendolen Harleth all represent significant fictionalisations of the starving female body in mid-Victorian literature. Attitudes towards the thin body began to change during the nineteenth century, which saw the rise of a new culture of dieting which was aimed at women and largely disseminated and controlled by men. A variety of Victorian conduct manuals and periodicals were devoted to diet, and they stressed the importance of a slender waist by underscoring the cultural ubiquity of the thin woman as an asset to the middle-class household. However, while predominantly written by women, these publications were edited and printed by the men who were able to control and influence the aesthetic which valorised women who exercised the appropriate level of self-control and disinterestedness in line with patriarchal objectives.

Coventry Patmore’s ‘The Angel in the House’ (1854) was one of the most popular poems of the mid-nineteenth century and had set a standard for ideal femininity which persisted throughout the period. In it, the faultless Honoria (the titular ‘angel’) advises Jane, who is unhappily married to a man who idolises Honoria as an example of feminine perfection. Through Honoria’s flawless example, Jane learns the value of submission and duty, sublimating her own desires to those of her husband for the betterment of her family until he begins to love her back. The Victorian ideal of the self-sacrificing and ethereal angel-woman was not only reflected in popular fiction, but also in periodicals which were aimed

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142 See Haley (1978), Silver (2002) and Whelan (2009), all of whom discuss the rise of dieting culture in the period concerned. Dieting advice was largely – but not exclusively – aimed at women. See William Banting’s *Letter on Corpulence* (1863) for an example of diet advice aimed at men.

143 Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) was an English poet and critic most famous for writing ‘The Angel in the House’ which significantly influenced Victorian culture. The poem was first published in 1854, but expanded a number of times between 1854 and 1862.

144 See Patmore (1854) ‘The Wife’s Tragedy’ in the Prologue to the poem.
specifically at the middle-class housewife. Both The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine (1852-1878), and The Woman at Home (1893-1920) featured regular columns giving diet advice, as did popular books such as Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management (1861), which encouraged ladies to adhere to a plain and sparing diet. Publications with such seemingly benign titles as Sarah Stickney Ellis’s The Daughters of England (1842) and The Art of Beautifying and Improving the Face and Figure (1858), disparaged the greed, lack of control and domestic mismanagement implicit in eating large portions, and lauded the abstinence of the fasting woman (Silver 2002: 12). Conversely, as a number of critics examining Victorian media representations have shown, the overweight woman represented to the middle-class readership the moral as well as physical antithesis of the thin woman. The woman who over ate, embodied a lack of control over her appetites which in turn threatened the success of her household, her family’s social and economic prosperity, and ultimately the prosperity of the nation. The female body was ‘often depicted as a repository for ideology, the nation in miniature; thus, she must be vigilantly guarded, particularly as she is not only vulnerable, but edible’ (Cozzi 2010: 16).

Tensions between the body as a representation of Britain’s health, and the excessive and degenerate appetites which threatened its vigour, were played out across female bodies in Victorian literature. Body norms which had been relatively consistent throughout the preceding two centuries, were subject to the shifting cultural values of a century in which advances in science, medicine, psychology and print culture, made it central to debates about the wider social body. If the body, its shape, size and dimensions represented the script of nineteenth-century cultural principles, then women’s changing relationship with food reflected and was an important factor in the political, economic and social debates of the period.

145 In addition to ‘The Angel in the House’ a number of texts by Victorian authors featured the angel-woman. For example: Amelia Sedley in Thackeray’s Vanity Fair (1848), Esther Summerson in Dickens’s Bleak House (1853), and Lucy Dean and Dorothea Brooke in Elliot’s The Mill on the Floss (1860) and Middlemarch (1872) respectively.

146 Isabella Beeton (1836-1865) was married to Samuel Orchart Beeton (1830-1877) who published the Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine. Isabella’s articles were a regular addition to the magazine and were later published in book form in Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management. For examples of the discourse on diet which featured in the Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine see ‘A Letter’ (1867: 502). For examples of the content of The Woman at Home, see Beetham and Boardman (2001).

147 The dichotomy of virtuous slimness and immoral corpulence was entirely class oriented, since for the working classes the well-covered body was a sign of health and affluence, while the thin working-class body signified such evils as sickness, poverty, and even substance abuse. See the following for discussion of the moral implications of the overweight body: Christ & Jordan (1995), Braziel & Le Besco (2001), Silver (2002), Swafford (2007), and Cranton (2009).
Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century definitions of the emerging ‘disease’ of *anorexia nervosa* were developing alongside each other in a variety of Western medical contexts. Self-starvation was not a particularly Victorian phenomenon, but had been widely practised for centuries, most often in politico-religious and ascetic forms.\(^{148}\) Despite evidence of food-refusing practices within the history of most cultures, it was the nineteenth century’s evolution in medical knowledge and authority which facilitated the emergence of a definable pathology almost simultaneously in England, France and America during the 1870s (Brumberg 2000: 6). Coined by the British physician William Gull in 1873, *apepsia hysterica*, later to become *anorexia nervosa*, was defined by a set of symptoms which are still partly in use in twenty-first century diagnosis and treatment.\(^{149}\) Victorian doctors identified gender-specific symptoms which were nervous in origin and ‘implied a moral or mental aberration rooted in the nervous system’ (Brumberg 2000: 111).\(^{150}\) The diagnosis of anorectic patients was limited to women, and although Gull concedes that he has ‘occasionally seen it in males’ (Acland 1894: 306) he refers to the Victorian anorectic as ‘she’ throughout his research, gendering the disease as female.

As well as extreme emaciation, Gull observes that the anorexic patient exhibits a tendency towards hyperactivity, and is suspicious about this. Describing a patient who ‘complained of no pain, but was restless and active’ displaying ‘peeviousness of temper’ and ‘jealousy’, Gull posits that ‘it seemed hardly possible that a body so wasted could undergo the exercise which seemed agreeable’ (Acland 1894: 307). His comments suggest that although he was working to define anorexia as a disease, he considered its physical manifestations as often the result of behavioural as much as psychological or physiological problems. He further demonstrates this when he describes how young women are ‘specially [sic] obnoxious to mental perversity’ and in need of being placed under ‘moral control’ (Acland 1894: 311). Commenting on the female anorectic, Gull remarks that ‘these wilful patients are often allowed to drift their own way into a state of mental exhaustion’ (Acland 1894: 311), advocating a regime of control and regulation which

\(^{148}\) According to Vandercekyen and Van Deth the practice of self-starvation can be traced throughout the history of civilisation. They note that ‘[i]n almost all communities [...] fasting played an important role within magico-religious practice [and] did not originate from one particular civilization or religion and then spread to the rest of the world’ (1994: 4).

\(^{149}\) William Gull served as physician to Queen Victoria from 1871. Interestingly, Gull has been implicated by contemporary researchers as a possible suspect in the Whitechapel ‘Ripper’ murders discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. See Knight (1986) for discussion of Gull’s suspected involvement.

\(^{150}\) Gull was to later abandon the term *apepsia hysterica* in favour of *anorexia nervosa* in 1873, because he ultimately came to disagree with the association between hysteria and self-starvation which pervaded in medicine until the end of the century.
corresponds to his reading of wilfulness as detrimental to feminine wellbeing. Victorian diagnostic and treatment criteria, was formed around the assumption that the female body required subjection to responsible masculine control and management, and that its nonconformity represented a challenge to its own general health and vigour. Bound up with Gull’s clear criticism of female wilfulness is the notion that anorexia, is – in part, the product of women’s attempt to regulate (for better or worse) their own bodies.

For Ernest Charles Lasègue, whose research on anorexia was published in article form in the *Archives de Médicine Générale* (1873), the psychological workings of the condition were key to understanding its treatment.\(^{151}\) Lasègue viewed anorexia as a strategy by which ‘to avoid pain, which, although hypothetical, is dreaded in advance’ (Vandereycken & Van Deth 1990: 904). He noted that when anorexia appears, it does so in a young woman who ‘suffers from some emotion which she avows or conceals’ (Vandereycken & Van Deth 1990: 904). These women practised the daily disavowal of the self which was implicit in the experience of being female, and were forced to conceal the rage they felt as a consequence of that disavowal. Lasègue’s focus on the intra-familial dynamics which facilitated or helped cure anorexic episodes, shows an acute awareness of the psychological as opposed to merely gastric nature of the illness. However, as with Gull’s account, Lasègue’s observations positioned the female anorectic within a framework of bourgeois moral imperatives, noting that:

> [w]henever a moral element intervenes in a disease, as here it does without any doubt, the moral medium amidst which the patient lives exercises an influence which it would be equally regrettable to overlook or misunderstand […]. The young girl begins to be anxious from the sad appearance of those who surround her, and for the first time her self-satisfied indifference receives a shock. The moment has now arrived when the physician, if he has been careful managing the case with a prevision of the future, resumes his authority (Vandereycken & Van Deth 1990: 905).

Lasègue’s insistence on the language of morality demonstrates the extent to which his observations are loaded with conventional and limiting assumptions about female behaviour in much the same way as Gull’s. It is the self-awareness of the female anorectic patient, their recognition of their own selfish acts, and the positive influence of the worried

151 Despite Gull’s fame as the great physician and ‘discoverer’ of anorexia, the lesser known Lasègue presented a much more detailed account of his clinical contact with anorectics, as well as a greater number of cases than Gull. Gull investigated three cases of anorexia, while Lasègue references more than eight cases in his 1873 article.
family (and authoritative doctor) which – as Lasègue sees it, facilitates recovery. Lasègue’s reference to morality is rooted in his implicit approval of Christian asceticism, which privileges self-sacrifice and abhors self-interest. At no stage does Lasègue consider the family dynamic to be the root cause of the illness, nor does he extend his commentary as far as considering the wider socio-political motivations for food refusal in woman. Like Gull’s, Lasègue’s insistence that the moral management of the female body was the best means of treating anorexia, highlights the scopic drive of the male medical establishment. The epistemophilic desire to know – and through knowing possess – the female body through acts of observation which constituted and reinforced masculine diegesis, is at play in the clinical observation and narration of the damaged bodies of female anorectics. Despite their efforts to help ‘cure’ the new disease of self-starvation, both men failed to acknowledge the complex cultural factors at play in women’s resistance to their own bodies. Neither did either physician situate food-refusing acts as part of a wider framework of self-harming behaviours which were exacerbated rather than cured by male observation and control. As Laura Mulvey argues, masculine cultural discourse can be read through Freudian psychoanalysis as placing women at the centre of the castration complex, as the primary image of phallic lack, who:

stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning […] The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (2010: 57).

The determining male gaze of the Victorian medical establishment, which interpreted the story of anorexia nervosa as the moral failure of selfish or wicked women, imposed

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152 Significantly, The Victorian medical establishment failed to connect women’s food refusal to the ideology of self-sacrifice deeply rooted in the example of Christian asceticism, even if women did. Unlike the martyrs or fasting saints, the anorectic attempted to assert control over the female body, rending it away from the masculine forces which would master it. Doctors did not correlate the political motivations of religious ascetic practices, with women’s social or political demands; they saw anorexia as entirely the opposite of the Christian ideal of womanhood because it was not viewed as a sacrifice, but as a selfish act.

153 The drive for thinness which was prevalent in Victorian culture during the latter part of the century (which neither Gull nor Lasègue connect to their diagnoses or treatment methods), is mentioned by a number of nineteenth-century clinicians who published on the subject of anorexia nervosa. For example Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet both mention a determination to become thin amongst their own anorexic patients. See Vandereycken & Van Deth (1990) for further examples.
fantasies of female submission and castigation upon the body of the anorexic patient. The predominantly observational nature of the work carried out by Victorian doctors, styled the female anorectic as the embodiment of feminine ideals of weakness and passivity exemplified by Patmore’s fictional Honoria, yet also as a threat to these ideals. Thus, Gull and Lasègue fail to emerge un-tainted by the implicit eroticism of their clinical work with young women. Their emphasis on the appraisal and moral judgment of the women in their care, implicates both men in a medico-scientific system which exploited, degraded, and devalued women’s bodies as bearers of meaning, tied to their place and exempt from making meaning. This chapter examines the behaviours of heroines who attempt to transgress the boundaries of their ‘place’ in a masculine culture. The heroines of Sarah Grand’s Morningquest trilogy reject their bodies through self-starvation, attempting to make their own meaning in a world which seeks to make their bodies its semantic bearers.

**Theorising Anorexia**

Contemporary psychology now defines and diagnoses anorexia by a set of symptoms which has begun to move away from those used by both Gull and Lasègue. Both nineteenth-century physicians noted the emaciation, over-exercising, amenorrhoea, and refusal to eat, which continue to characterise some anorexic behaviour in the twenty-first century. However, changes to diagnostic criteria which appear in _DSM V_ reflect a shift in thinking both away from Victorian discourses, and from twentieth-century gendered assumptions. _DSM V_ defines anorexia as:

a) Persistent restriction of energy intake leading to significantly low body weight (in context of what is minimally expected for age, sex, developmental trajectory, and physical health).
b) Either an intense fear of gaining weight or of becoming fat, or persistent behaviour that interferes with weight gain (even though significantly low weight).
c) Disturbance in the way one's body weight or shape is experienced, undue influence of body shape and weight on self-evaluation, or persistent lack of recognition of the seriousness of the current low body weight.

(2013: 338-339)

As with the definitions of trauma discussed in my introduction, certain criteria for diagnosing anorexia, which had been included in the fourth edition of the _DSM_ (published in 2000), have now been excluded. The absence of three menarcheal cycles has been removed as a qualifier, to reflect the prevalence of anorexia in both young men and post-menopausal females. The focus on the anorectic’s ‘refusal to maintain body weight at
above a minimally normal weight’ (1994: 544-545) has been shifted in the later version of the manual. DSMV highlights rather the persistence of food restriction leading to low body weight, placing less emphasis on the accountability of the patient for their illness. Such accountability, as I have shown, was emphasised by the Victorian medical profession, which viewed anorexia as intrinsically linked to female unruliness.

The anorectic of the Victorian period was not subject to the same diagnostic frameworks as that of their contemporary counterpart, since such frameworks are formed by distinct socio-historic factors. Because of the impossibility of retrospectively applying a contemporary medical diagnosis to the literature of a period during which self-starvation was only beginning to takes its place as a pathology, I use the term anorexia rather cautiously in the chapters which follow. There is no way to know how many Victorian women may have suffered from a disease which has become widely recognised and extensively researched in our twenty-first century context. While anorexia nervosa says much about the cultural values of contemporary society, these values have been, and continue to be in a state of flux, making it a difficult and not always a useful terminology to apply. Nineteenth-century conceptions of food-refusal were in many ways different to contemporary notions. However, the frameworks which operated to restrict, control, and scrutinise the starving female body reflect those which New Woman writers sought to dismantle, and which remain in place even today, in the philosophical tradition which underlies modern Western culture. Therefore, it is useful to apply at times both the terminology of Gull and Lasègue, and also to look carefully towards twentieth-and twenty-first-century theoretical models to try to understand certain food-refusing behaviours in the readings which follow. Where I use the term anorexia in relation to nineteenth-century fictional woman, I do so with a view towards bridging the gap between the silences about women’s self-harm which marked the Victorian period, and the narratives about the damaged body in which the modern woman is by now well-versed. Many of the self-

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154 In their respective studies, neither Gull nor Lasègue mention body image, nor do they connect anorexia nervosa to the new Victorian culture of dieting, or the mass dissemination of media images and guides to weight management. The fear of gaining weight which is so central to contemporary notions of the anorexic experience, do not feature at all in the Victorian diagnostic criteria, nor the case studies cited by these two physicians.

155 The classification of a variety of complicated food-refusing behaviours as ‘eating disorders’ (such as anorexia and bulimia) is now commonplace among twenty-first century medical professionals. However, it was not widely practiced during the nineteenth century (Russell 1997). The tendency of Western and particularly European medicine to designate unruly female conduct as a product of feminine frailty, hysteria or just bad behaviour and thus immorality, meant that a large number of cases may have gone unreported by husbands, fathers and doctors unwilling to countenance ‘wilful’ acts.
harming hungry heroines of the texts examined in this chapter would not be considered anorexic by twenty-first century standards. However, I am keen to stress what I see as a link between the ideological structures which framed, and continue to frame the disease, and the nineteenth-century values which privilege the thin body which are still so culturally entrenched.

Recent studies on the growing problem of anorexia and the ‘size zero’ phenomenon have made a significant contribution to the continuing debate surrounding the relationship between the media, cultural images, and self-harm.\(^{156}\) Although self-starvation has been relentlessly researched, and has become an established (and to some extent blasé) subject for discussion, contemporary critics continue to consider anorexia within new and interesting cultural frameworks. While as recently as twenty years ago, anorexia was shown to predominantly manifest in white, middle-class females, new wider conceptualisations now dominate medical and sociological investigations.\(^{157}\) While Victorian doctors noted that anorexia did indeed manifest in adolescent males, their work failed to thoroughly investigate cases outside of the remit of their experience with middle-class women, and this investigative fissure continued well into the twentieth century.\(^{158}\) Recent research, published in both medical journals and guides for treating anorexia, attempts to redress the imbalance of this body of work, focussing on instances of eating disorders found in cultural groups outside of the usual range of heterogeneous definition as female, white, middle-class, and heterosexual.\(^{159}\) Despite decades of extensive discussion, attempts to devise a clear paradigm for the causes and treatment of anorexia surround conflicting models of the disease as bio-medically, psychologically, or culturally bound (Brumberg 2000: 26-42). Though contemporary medicine and psychiatry tend towards a multi-dimensional approach to treatment, which combines all three theoretical models, my work is concerned only with the cultural production of, and responses to, self-starvation in literature.

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\(^{156}\) See Meuret (1994) & Penny (2011) for discussion of the size zero phenomenon and the influence of media.

\(^{157}\) Becky Thomson’s *A Hunger So Wide and So Deep* (1994) attempts to address anorexia’s expanding demographic, reclaiming working-class, multi-racial and lesbian narratives previously absent from consideration. Furthermore, in their respective studies, both Morag MacSween (1993: 4-43) and Susan Bordo (2003: 52-69) address the dissemination of Western ideologies and their effect on a cultural audience much wider than merely the white and the privileged.

\(^{158}\) It is important to note that my discussion of the changing demographic of anorexia is limited to recorded cases. There may have been many undocumented cases of anorexia outside of these parameters long before recent studies have highlighted them; although there is little evidence to support this it cannot be ruled out.

As Michel Foucault has argued, the body is an artefact of culture, determined and constructed by its scientific, medical and ‘moral’ context, yet I suggest it is also not merely an ideological product tied implicitly to language as Judith Butler suggests. The damaged body, as biologically as well as culturally constructed, can thus be made to signify in a world where as Elaine Scarry has argued, there is no language for physical pain but that which the body can itself communicate (1985: 2). Through self-starvation, then, the anorectic inscribes his or her body with a web of complex discourses, mapping personal psychological experience through a process of traumatic signification in which the human form is made to speak both biologically and culturally. According to Maud Ellmann, an abundance of signifiers accumulate around the starving body, paradoxically providing somatic substance to the insubstantial, increasingly coding the body when its own lack of corporeality fails to signify (1993: 1-7). For the anorectic ‘hunger is a form of speech; and speech is necessarily a dialogue whose meanings do not end with the intentions of the speaker [whose body is] enmeshed in social codes that precede […] and outlast […] its consciousness’ (1993: 3). Curiously, the ‘disappearing act’ of self-starvation, itself so often secret and verbally undisclosed, is frequently the locus around which narrative gathers force and upon which political and social discourse is played out. For example, despite hugely differing motivations, the bodies of the hunger strikers of both the early-twentieth century women’s suffrage and twentieth-century Irish nationalist movements became sites around which narrative collected, stories became embodied, and political battle lines were drawn.

I contend that the Victorian triple-decker and traditional novels represent the artefacts par excellence of women’s starvation literature, and that the excess of words which cluster around the bodies of her heroines make the New Woman writer complicit in exploiting the damaged and starving female body as political capital. This chapter examines the use of behaviours which I will at times term anorexic, as both a thematic motif and a form of

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160 See Foucault (1990, 1995 and 2001) and Butler (1993 and 2006). Peter Brooks refutes Butler’s claims, by arguing that the body ‘often presents us with a fall from language’ and that pre-linguistic experiences which are usually derived from the sensations are the ‘building blocks in the construction of a symbolic order’ (1993: 7).

161 For the Irish, hunger is an ancient and deeply meaningful narrative trope, and a social and political strategy which cannot be fully examined within the remit of this project. Sarah Grand, whose work this chapter examines, was both preoccupied by the trope of hunger, and an Irish woman writer living in London. Although her writing suggests a critique of British colonialism through food, this is a connection which cannot be adequately addressed within the remit of my project. See Ellman (1990: 30-57), Beresford (1994), and Vernon (2009: 8-7) for discussion of the hunger in the context of Irish nationalism. See Van Wingerden (1999: 90-92), and Smith (200: 59 and 28-29) for discussion of the suffrage campaigners who went on hunger strike.
literary and political tactic by which to force a confrontation between (and thus an interruption of) the private and public spheres. I have discussed how Seltzer shows that in the wound culture which emerged out of late-Victorian modernity, ‘[o]ne discovers again and again the excitations in the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors: the exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display, of wounded bodies and wounded minds in public’ (1998: 253). By making public the private ‘story’ of women’s anorexia, I argue that the New Woman attempted to collapse the separate sphere ideology which bolstered the rigid codes of Victorian femininity against which she fought. However, in making the anorexic body central to her body of narrative, the New Woman practised a paradoxical strategy of self-effacement, disappearing and making incorporeal her heroines, and subscribing to troubling and ultimately counter-productive patriarchal doctrines in a self-sacrificial strategy not dissimilar to the hunger protest itself.

**Hunger and Femininity**

Most feminist critics have come to view eating disorders as symptomatic of our culture’s unequal gender-relations, thus the position of women as economically dependent and politically impotent can be seen to have fostered the emergence of anorexia. Morag MacSween cites the recognisably Victorian ethos of pressuring women to respond to the needs and desires of others whilst negating their own, as the primary cause of anorexia (MacSween 1993: 52-87). Drawing on Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, MacSween argues that this pressure often provokes an attempt to resolve a central conflict between femininity and individuality, in which the anorexic response becomes a ‘solution to the degraded social construction of the feminine’ (1993: 4). Joan Jacobs Brumberg further accounts for anorexia from a feminist and socialist perspective as:

> an inevitable consequence of a misogynistic society that demeans women by devaluing female experience and women’s values; by objectifying their bodies; and by discrediting vast areas of women’s past and present achievements […] our society’s exaltation of thin, weak women expresses the inner logic of capitalism and patriarchy, both characteri[s]ed by the sexual division of labour and female subordination (2000: 35).

For Brumberg social institutions limit and confine women as both slaves within a male-dominated economy, and commodities operating as part of it, and this dynamic is figuratively reproduced in women’s self-starvation. The contemporary logic of capitalist culture which reflects the ‘degraded construction of the feminine’ is a logic by no means
confined to recent history. Although anorexia has arguably reached its peak in contemporary culture through the ‘empire of images’ (Bordo 2003: xvi) in which we now live, both commodity culture and print media were being developed in industrial Europe long before the size zero phenomenon was to emerge. Susan Bordo points to the importance of normalising (particularly visual) culture in both historical and contemporary experiences of eating disorders, noting that images of slenderness ‘offer fantasies of safety, self-containment, acceptance, immunity from pain and hurt’ (2003: xxi). Like Bordo, I propose that self-destructive behaviours are a response to deeply implanted and often unacknowledged cultural imperatives, intrinsic to any society in which the hegemonic power structures reflect masculine, white and middle-class dominance.

The contextual framework of Victorian print culture differs widely from the twenty-first century media which Bordo examines. However, I would suggest that the ‘fantasies of safety, self-containment, acceptance, immunity from pain and hurt’ offered by contemporary media, has evolved out of the very system of bourgeois patriarchal ideologies which made obligatory similar fantasies for the Victorian anorectic. My reading of self-starvation in late-nineteenth-century women’s writing considers food refusal as performative in nature, as an enactment of both identity and protest within a culture of clearly-defined and inflexible gender expectations. For the late-Victorian woman writer, hunger was to become an established and highly recognisable mode of political protest only a few short years into the new century. Clearing a path for future generations of women to articulate and protest against their disenfranchisement through the trope of hunger, the New Woman novelist also literally ‘wrote the book’ on how to wear the damaged female psyche on one’s own body. Through images of thin, but politically aware heroines, writers like Sarah Grand (whose work this chapter will primarily examine)

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162 The campaign for women’s suffrage which had become both increasingly visible and strategic at the Fin de Siècle, was significantly publicised by the female hunger strikers of the early-twentieth century. Women prisoners detained on charges relating to the campaign for universal suffrage were denied the status of political prisoners and – in response, some elected to refuse food during their incarceration. The hunger strikes began in 1909, and were followed by forcible feeding which caused public outcry and furthered sympathy for the women’s plight (Wingerden 1999: 89-92). The British government ordered women to be fed against their will if they refused to eat (Smith 2001: 53). Once more the medical establishment undertook to bring unruly female bodies in line, replicating the processes of bodily invasion and regulation by which it had attempted to control the Victorian women who had campaigned for equality at the end of the previous century. A number of feminist critics have noted the similarities between forcible feeding and rape, suggesting that the actions of the all-male ‘liberal’ government work as a metaphor for acts of sexual aggression against the female body at a time when bringing it in line seemed paramount. Although the New Woman predates the hunger strikers, a number of the texts referred to in this chapter attest to the concerns of women writers with the processes of masculine control of and incursion into the female body which prefigure the forced feeding of suffragettes. These concerns are often similarly formulated through the imagery of rape, but also of cannibalism and necrophilia, imprisonment and (correspondingly) escape through starvation.
brought into existence the figure of the female hunger striker long before her arrival on the British cultural and political landscape. However, in doing so writers like Grand also set a dangerous precedent by valorising the new disease of anorexia and romanticising self-sacrifice as a political and personal form of activism.

In late-Victorian Britain, as medical research into anorexia increased, so too did a consideration of the disease in the emerging sciences of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Since medicine remained a male-dominated arena, studies of anorectics positioned the disease within long established frameworks of female mental frailty and hysteria (Showalter 1993: 74-100). In 1895 Freud wrote that ‘the famous anorexia of young girls seems to me to be melancholia where sexuality is underdeveloped’ (Masson 1985: 272). His comment about the disorder as ‘famous’ implies that Freud recognised the epidemic quality of anorexia, but viewed it (at least in part) as a performance, and its spread as not entirely unaided by the actions of attention-seeking young girls. Freud saw the refusal of food as closely linked to a denial of other bodily appetites and understood anorexia as a strategy by which to slow or stop the onset of sexual maturity in adolescent women (Freud 2001c: 106). Indeed, certain twenty-first-century understandings of anorexia continue to subscribe to Freudian theories, although with less emphasis on a specifically sexual control of the body. Freudian psychoanalysis proposes that culture ‘provokes, exacerbates, and gives distinctive form to an existing pathological condition’ (Bordo 2003: 51). However, this fails to account adequately for the disproportionately high instances of anorexia in women, and the escalation in rates of anorexia since the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the western world (Bordo 2003: 49-50). Control of the body is a fundamental tenet of self-starvation, and sufferers frequently internalise the pervasive cultural images and ideologies which encode the subordinate role required by the society which they inhabit. I argue that anorexia as it manifests in New Woman fiction, functions as a defence against a lack of control stemming from this subordinate position, enacting a resistance to the femaleness of the body and a punishment of its physical needs.

In the previous chapter I have discussed the ways in which religious frameworks required the renunciation of the flesh in order to satisfy Victorian moral understandings of feminine

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163 Although Freud’s comments (addressed in a letter to his friend Wilhelm Fliess) imply a sense of incredulity surrounding a disorder made ‘famous’ by young girls, his comments do not suggest the same level of mistrust of the anorectic, as those of Gull and Lasègue.

164 Also see Bruch (1979) and Chernin (1986) for discussion Freud’s emphasis on the sexual component of anorexia.
perfection. In their anthropological study of self-starvation Walter Vandereycken and Ron Van Deth argue that in Christian asceticism ‘bodily, earthly desires were vicious and had to be curbed in favour of the sublime, pure soul’ (1994:18). This model reflected – and continues to reflect, prevailing religious and philosophical conceptualisations which view the body and soul as separate entities. In his *Mediations on First Philosophy* (1641) René Descartes first conceives of the notion of dualism in the relationship between body and soul, explaining that:

by body I mean everything that is capable of being bounded by some shape, of existing in a definite place, of filling such space in such a way as to exclude the presence of any other body within it; of being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell, and also of being moved in various ways, not indeed by itself, but some other thing […] for to have power of moving itself, and also of perceiving by the senses or thinking, I judged could in no way belong to the nature of the body […] I am therefore, speaking precisely, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, a soul, or an intellect […] I am not that framework of limbs that is called a human body; I am not some thin air infused into these limbs, or a wind, or a fire, or a vapour, or a breath, or whatever I can picture myself as […] (2008: 19-20).

For Descartes, the soul and the body must be considered as discrete entities. Thus conceived, the body comes to represent all that is carnal and desiring, while the soul is imbued with qualities which reflect its separation from, and superiority to, the body as a repository of sin and corruption.

Leslie Heywood’s *Dedication to Hunger* (1996) theorises contemporary and historical eating disorders as the product of an unremitting dissemination of Descartes’ doctrine, what she calls the ‘anorexic logic’ (1996: 8) of the Western patriarchal tradition. For Heywood, anorectics ‘enact with their bodies the process that Western logic inscribes: they physically demonstrate its subtext, the horror of the female flesh that is often the unconscious of discourse’ (1996: 8). Heywood’s critique of Descartes deconstructs classical models of the self, in which dualism is a distinctly gendered split. Drawing upon Cartesian notions of the body as an inferior vessel, and the mind or soul as capable of transcendence from corporeal existence, she highlights how Western ideologies identify the flesh and its intrinsic desires and corruptions as female. Conversely, the realms of philosophy, knowledge and culture are designated male by virtue of their needlessness of the wants and wishes of the flesh. In the case of the anorectic, Heywood suggests, this logic is enacted upon the body in an attempt to escape the confines of corporeal being,
believing that the flesh does not adequately represent the essential ‘self’. Citing also Plato, Hegel, and Freud, Heywood critiques classical masculine philosophy, explaining that:

[i]n their relentless process of designating the soul, the mind, subjectivity, and civilisation as masculine, these “figures” have formed a tradition that some women […] internalise in an attempt to enter the magic inner circle of culture and become something other than the bodies, sexualities, loves, and flesh with which this tradition equates them (1996: 28).

Although the masculine philosophical tradition indeed designates women as fleshly and desiring, the various identities offered to them by this tradition represent a much more complex dichotomy than that of simply masculinity as knowledge and femininity as carnality. During the Victorian period, these identities particularly (although not exclusively) demonstrated the conflicted attitudes towards femininity produced by a culture which lauded the embodiment required by motherhood yet demonised female sexuality, and praised the passive ethereality of women, yet refused to acknowledge their intellectual gifts.165

According to Nina Auerbach, women have continually occupied two central categories throughout the Western literary tradition, as either angels on the one hand or demons on the other. She notes that during the Victorian period these categories expanded in response to the cultural climate of nineteenth-century bourgeois morality, to include the archetypes of the old maid and the fallen woman (1982: 63). Stressing the futility of any attempt to assess the cultural proliferation of these categories as separate, Auerbach views them rather as ‘fluid boundaries’ which place women at ‘the junction between the social and the spiritual, the humanly perishable and the transcendentally potent’ (1982: 63-64). Heywood’s notion of anorexic logic is useful in reading food-refusing behaviour in New Woman writing, only when considered alongside Auerbach’s interpretation of the angel/demon dichotomy embedded in Victorian understandings of femininity. For Heywood, modernist texts express the anorexic logic of classical masculine philosophy, the ‘point of convergence […] between the artificiality of gender constructions that mark an unstable cultural system’ (1996: 14). However, it is the late-Victorian period during which cultural systems became most unstable and which in turn produced a number of texts which demonstrate the anorexic logic of patriarchy at a moment of both diegetic experimentation

165 As I show in my introduction, this inability is accounted for by Victorian medicine, via the model of essential sex difference in which women were thought to be capable of expending finite quantities of energy. Although the existence of female genius was sometimes acknowledged, it was believed that its development would hinder women’s primary function as wives and mothers and was not encouraged.
and political and social crisis in British history.¹⁶⁶ Heywood’s theorisation of ‘convergence’ echoes Seltzer’s claim that the Fin de Siècle facilitated a clash between the public (masculine) and private (feminine) spheres which produced ‘excitations in the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors’ (1998: 253). In drawing attention to the artificiality and permeability of these boundaries; like those of the angel/demon dichotomy – I would argue that the starving heroine of Victorian fiction began to evolve rapidly during the final decades of the nineteenth century. In doing so, she began to express this instability at a time when the increasingly blurred distinction between gender roles threatened the status quo.

I am interested in the convergence between the female body and the bodies of feminist narratives which seek to centralise the starving female form within late-Victorian gender debates. Therefore, I apply Heywood’s model of anorexic logic to my chosen texts, but connect this theory explicitly to the methods by which New Woman novels narrate the thin body. I argue that the starving bodies of New Woman heroines are depicted in ways which represent and respond to conflicting notions of woman as (paradoxically) incorporeally pure and yet dangerously fleshly. I have already explored how theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Peter Brooks regard the male gaze as ‘the penis eye, the phallic look’ (Irigaray 1985: 134), a look which is epistemophilic in nature and which drives the novelistic tradition.¹⁶⁷ Brooks’s reading of the novel has curious implications if we consider the fiction of the New Woman oeuvre, and in particular the polemic novels of the 1890s which aimed to refute gender double standards and educate its female readership. This chapter

¹⁶⁶ It is almost impossible to know whether the almost epidemic levels of anorexia in women which were recorded during the twentieth-century post war era, were similar during the preceding century. The rate of anorexia in Britain doubled between 1960 and 1970, and by the late 1980s affected approximately 1,000,000 women in America (Showalter 1997: 20). Despite a lack of evidence surrounding rates of Victorian anorexia, I would suggest that the fin-de-siècle culture which paved the way for Modernism in late-Victorian Britain facilitated the rise of the condition both literally and textually.

¹⁶⁷ Epistemophilia can be seen at work in novels by both men and women in the Victorian period. For example, In Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre it is only when Rochester (having been blinded) is unable to see Jane, to voyeuristically possess her and visually evaluate her worth as a commodity, that the text allows them a marriage of equality. Jane’s happy ending can only be achieved through the dissolution of the male gaze, in a relationship where the object must become the subject of bodily observation. In Brontë’s Villette, Lucy Snowe slowly disappears in an effort to repress her feelings for a man who will never desire her sexually. In order to be seen by the various men who read her body, Lucy must subvert the Victorian system of sexual economics by becoming invisible, risking her life in a strategy which does not entirely pay off. In an opposite and yet in many ways ideologically identical turn of plot, Emily Brontë’s wild and passionate heroine Catherine Earnshaw fails to either reconcile or halt her love for two different men, and is therefore killed off in Wuthering Heights (1847). Significantly, Cathy dies of an undisclosed illness brought on by self-starvation. While Lucy and Jane are assimilated into the marriage plot of the realist novel, Cathy cannot be, and her transgression is resolved through her death. Interestingly, Wuthering Heights was formally ahead of its time and not particularly realist in its structure or use of multiple unreliable narrative voices, but it does follow realist plot conventions which require the unruly body to be assimilated or excised form society.
argues that the close relationship between narrative form and the female body is expressed, and ultimately complicated, through the fictional trope of self-starvation. New Woman anorexic fiction attempts to counteract women’s portrayal as objects of desire or bodies incapable or undeserving of access to the masculine realms of culture and knowledge. However, in challenging women’s designation as purely corporeal, yet subject still to the example of saintly disembodiment encoded in Christian ideology, it also enacts the very disappearance from existence against which its heroines fight. In attempting to deny the bodily-ness of the female body, these writers produced huge bodies of text whose narrative locus was the disappearing body itself. Within the predominantly masculine world of publication, the triple-decker novel had dominated the literary marketplace and represented the height of writerly achievement to which the New Woman novelist aspired. In both emulating their male counterparts and attempting to claim their own distinct tradition, women writers unwittingly produced enormous bodies of text which reduced the female body to a narrative absence. The New Woman novel relentlessly returns to the starving body as a site of textual meaning, dedicating pages and pages to its display. This demonstrates its curious cooperation with, and participation within, the late-nineteenth-century wound culture and the patriarchal epistemophilic project. Furthermore, it both distorts and yet ultimately reflects the masculine literary tradition, at a time when new ‘feminist’ forms were emerging to replace it.

**Victorian Anorexic Fiction & the New Woman Writer**

Women writers attempting to dramatise their powerless at the hands of patriarchy sought expression through fictional accounts of anorexic heroism and self-sacrifice in the face of illness. Indeed, as Miriam Bailin notes there is ‘scarcely a Victorian fictional narrative without its ailing protagonist, its depiction of a sojourn in the sickroom’ (1994: 5). Through food-refusal female characters could metaphorically, as well as literally, represent women’s mental and moral starvation enacting an ‘extreme manifestation of the feminine role, flaunting her martyrdom, literally turning herself into a “little” woman’ (Showalter 1993: 128). Feminist theorists have been quick to observe that Victorian notions of hunger were widely interpolated with sexuality, in a re-imagining of the temptation of Eve whose physical hunger for the apple is conflated with the bodily desires
which initiated the fall of man.\textsuperscript{168} Therefore narratives which privileged the disappearing female body, directly engaged with the rhetoric of the fall implicit in women’s hunger, and warned against the immorality of consumption as a highly irreligious act. Furthermore, decades of popular women’s fiction also characterised the feminine ideal as passive, frail and silent.\textsuperscript{169}

Within the boundaries of domestic ‘perfection’, women who faced disappointment or failed to be satisfied with their lot, found themselves unable to express outwardly feelings of anger and disillusionment. In \textit{The Madwoman in the Attic} (1979) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain that ‘any young girl, but especially a lively and imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, self-lessness as in some sense sickening’ (1984: 54). They note that through her training in domesticity ‘the girl learns anxiety about—perhaps even loathing of—her own flesh’ (1984: 54), internalising the anorexic logic of patriarchy. As the moral centre of the Victorian home, the middle-class woman was expected to conform to a stereotype of feminine spirituality, and disinterested affection in line with the examples set by the Christian martyrs and Jesus Christ explored in my first chapter. In doing so, women were ‘urged to downplay every aspect of their physicality, including (but not limited to) their sexuality’ (Silver 2002: 9) and encouraged to ‘demonstrate their incorporeality through the small appetite and correspondingly slender body’ (Silver 2002: 9). This cultural model, in which anxiety was to be resolved strictly within the margins of one’s own borders, encouraged the focussing of rage not outwards towards the public or even domestic sphere, but inwards towards the self. Thus throughout some of the best-known fiction of the period, the trope of self-starvation as either political gesture or repressive control of anxiety, can be clearly mapped. In \textit{Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body} (2002) Anna Silver explains that ‘the anorexic woman’s slender form attests to her discipline over her body and its hunger, despite the persistence of that hunger, and indicates her discomfort with or even hatred of her body and its appetites’ (2002: 3). For the mid-Victorian woman writer, then, the starving heroine ironically became the \textit{embodiment} of repressed desires, represented and yet simultaneously effaced within her story. For Gilbert & Gubar, this paradox of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{168} See Gilbert & Gubar (1984) and Michie (1987). Both texts discuss the Eve paradigm as connected with anorexia or dietary restriction in Victorian women’s writing and nineteenth-century culture.
\item \textsuperscript{169} For example, Jane Austen’s sickly Fanny Price has her patience and propriety rewarded in \textit{Mansfield Park} (1814) by a marriage to the cousin with whom she is in love. Similarly, as the picture of uncomplaining feminine forbearance, the elderly invalid Miss Williams is compensated for her disfigurement in a fire with the return of her lost fiancée at the end of Charlotte Yonge’s best-selling novel \textit{The Clever Woman of the Family} (1865).
\end{itemize}
expression and repression represented women as ‘prisoners of their own gender […]’ characters who attempt to escape, if only into nothingness, through the suicidal self-starvation of anorexia’ (1984: 86). Published eighteen years after *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Silver’s work cites numerous examples of popular fiction (notably by both Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens) in which the anorexic heroine appears. Gilbert & Gubar suggest, rather reductively, that anorexia in women’s writing represents a tried and tested symbolic protest against patriarchal restrictions and confinement (1984: 390-391). However, Silver’s work demonstrates that figurations of starvation were by no means homogenous in Victorian fiction, nor did they always represent the precise same system of cultural codes across different texts.¹⁷⁰

Mid-century writing by men and women regularly portrayed moral ascension through physical starvation in female characters, subtly delineating and reinforcing class boundaries through depictions of beautiful, inactive, middle-class (and thus ideal) feminine bodies.¹⁷¹ I would argue that this practice persisted but also developed during the late-Victorian period. The anorexic heroine continued to feature in women’s writing, but by the 1880s had evolved into a highly complex and troubling (stock) character. Unlike the majority of the wasting women in earlier novels, the starving New Woman heroine did not disintegrate in silence in an act of self-effacement which internalised and concealed enforced Victorian gender codes. Where self-starvation in earlier Victorian fiction had been a central yet largely covert trope, New Woman anorexia demonstrated a much more extreme and violent pathology of Victorian femininity.¹⁷² In this later writing, food refusal is no longer fictionalised as a solitary disorder, nor one obscured in part by narrative conventions, but is symptomatic of a more violent and disturbing range of self-destructive bodily and textual practices. The narrativisation of these practices has, according to Mark Seltzer ‘come to function as a way of imagining and situating our notions of public, social,

¹⁷⁰ In Dickens, for example, Silver points to the sentimentalisation of starvation as self-sacrifice as well as the erasure of the female body as a narrative strategy. In the work of the Brontë sisters, desires (including hunger) are actively and painfully repressed by female characters, and negatively encoded representations of the corpulent female body demonstrate their ‘qualified acceptance of the Victorian aesthetic of the ideal woman’ (Silver 2002: 82).


¹⁷² There are examples of mid-Victorian women’s fiction which include demonstrative or overt acts of food-refusal which prefigure those deployed by New Woman writers. For example, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849) the independent and strong-willed Shirley Keedlar begins to be consumed by her desire for Louis Moore, yet her behaviour in relation to food is at times aggressive and masculine. Eventually, like her friend Caroline Helstone, she becomes thin – yet unlike Caroline’s, Shirley’s ‘anorexia’ is a symptom of her impending loss of independence through marriage.
and collective identity […] as a way of imagining the relations of private bodies and private persons to public spaces’ (1998: 21). In the hotly-contested battle for access to the public space, the New Woman attempted to affect a dramatic change in the way that notions of public and private were formulated and sustained. Accordingly, she depicted hungry heroines whose bodies, as inescapably participant in the libidinal economy of patriarchy, are traumatised, dramatised and ultimately sensationalised as public spectacle. I argue that in doing so, she forced a wedge between the hitherto clearly-defined boundaries between public and private, male and female. However, she did so within a framework of anorexic logic (a term I borrow from Heywood throughout this chapter) and the conventional form of the novel, ultimately undermining her cause. In the mid-century texts which fictionalised the anorexic heroine, self-starvation represented a concealment of rage, a self-critical strategy of control which challenged but ultimately reinforced separate-sphere ideology.  

From the 1880s onward, certain woman writers began to exploit this previously concealed trope, in the sensational and often melodramatic form of the New Woman novel. Themes such as masochism and deliberate self-harm which were not as directly expressed by mid-Victorian women writers, became commonplace in the works of well-known novelists such as Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and Olive Schreiner. These novelists sensationally depicted self-sacrificing female characters whose desires for autonomy leave them physically and emotionally devastated in ways which were less semantically cryptic than their mid-Victorian predecessors. Expressed through the traditionally dense medium of a nine hundred page text, the New Woman novel attempted a tactical if not always a formal departure from the writing of both its male and female predecessors. Of this new brand of authors, the writer most engaged in the use of the anorexic trope was Grand, whose Morningquest trilogy signals a significant preoccupation with self-harm in general and self-starvation in particular.

For example Charlotte Brontë’s Lucy Snowe suffers as a consequence of her feelings for Graham Bretton in Villete, starving herself because of her inability to express her frustration at his selfishness and lack of sexual interest in her. It is only when she can converse equally with Monsieur Paul (to whom she feels able to articulate her anxieties), that she no longer needs to turn them upon her body. Similarly in Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights the masochistic Catherine Earnshaw starves herself, although this is heavily encoded within the text. Unable to voice or act upon her passion for Heathcliffe, and unable to turn her back on the world of culture offered to her by her husband Edgar Linton, she eventually descends into madness and death.
A variety of critics have noted the ways in which Grand’s novels continually reference both food and female appetite. Abigail Dennis (2007), Ann Heilmann (2004), and Heather Evans (2000 and 2001), have all written extensively on the uses of food and starvation in Grand’s later writing, showing the ways in which it highlights just one of the many seemingly oppositional ideologies at play in her work. Grand’s literary altercation with her fellow novelist Ouida, during which the term New Woman was coined, established her as a major player in the Victorian debate surrounding the Woman Question. However, despite Grand’s militant stance against sexual double standards and the insufficiency of women’s education, her attitudes towards both marriage and motherhood indicate the presence of highly conservative and seemingly counter-revolutionary subtexts within her work. Her fiction enacts a variety of traditional and often conflicting beliefs which served to reinforce, rather than to disrupt, the rigid gender codes which her writing attempted to dislocate. Angelique Richardson shows how Grand’s work engages with eugenic discourses which enforce Imperialist notions of race and class and which undermine her feminist politics (2008: 95-131). Similarly, Ann Heilmann has pointed towards the inconsistencies in Grand’s work which placed her ‘[a]lways in the centre of New Woman debates even when marginalising the radical ideas she had helped put in currency’ (2004: 13). In her essay ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’ Grand describes women as ‘healthy hungry children’ (2001: 142). Characterising the New Woman as physically robust and with a healthy appetite, Grand here summarises the attributes of her most successful fictional heroines.

Despite the various tortures from which they eventually emerge, Grand’s protagonists largely escape self-destruction (with the exception of The Heavenly Twins’ Evadne Frayling and Edith Beale), becoming both socially useful as well as healthy and hungry. Ideala returns from the East ‘Straight as an arrow, young-looking and fresh’ (Grand 2008: 187), whilst Angelica Ilverthorpe is a ‘splendid specimen of hardy, healthy, vigorous young womanhood’ (Grand 2007 II: 309), and despite her self-starvation Beth Caldwell’s huge appetite never dissipates at all. Even the heroine of Grand’s later (and unconnected) novel Babs the Impossible (1900) demonstrates a ravenous appetite for both mischief and food. Nonetheless, while Grand proclaims the importance of women’s health and the fulfilment of appetites both physical and intellectual, this is undermined by the treatment of

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174 Ouida was the pen name for Marie Louise Ramée (1839-1908). Ramée was a successful British novelist and was highly critical of the New Woman and unsupportive of female suffrage in general. See ‘The Woman Question’ (1894) in which she outlines her ideas on the role of women in society.
self-starvation in her fiction. Although some of her heroines evolve through pecuniary and mental starvation, it is Grand’s idealisation of anorexic episodes which suggests the complex and paradoxical nature of her attitude towards food, starvation, and the damaged body. Through the deployment of the Christian motifs of martyrdom and sainthood discussed in the previous chapter, Grand defends the anorexic experience by suggesting it is essential to the moral and spiritual growth of her characters. This growth, enacted across the abundant pages of both the triple-decker and traditional realist novel forms, reflects an ideology of the body which corresponds directly to the anorexic logic of patriarchy, and around which cluster an excess of signifiers. For Grand, the traditionally masculine form of the realist novel provided a body of text expansive enough to thoroughly endorse the disembodiment of her heroines, whilst drawing attention to processes of female self-effacement through a dramatisation of these same bodies. As I will show, this paradox of textual excess and bodily lack implies a dangerously self-effacing strategy at play in Grand’s novels.

I explored in my introduction the ways in which the realist mode required novelists to impose a sense of social cohesion in their novels, a plot requirement to which Grand subscribes by rehabilitating or excising the bodies of dissolute and philandering men within or from the social order. However, Grand’s adoption of the realist form meant that the bodies of women had to be assimilated into that same order, to be married off and made mothers, despite the dangers represented by these enterprises. Grand’s female bodies are subject to the same textual dictates as the male ones, making Grand’s use of the novel less revolutionary than its content might suggest. Although Ideala (the first of her Morningquest novels) was not published in the traditional triple-decker form, a close reading of this text makes possible the mapping of textual and thematic developments in Grand’s anorexic logic, as well as her use of self-starvation as a strategy which blurs the boundaries between the public and the private, the bodily and the spiritual.

Transcending the Body: Sarah Grand’s Ideala (1888)

In 1888, Frances Bellenden Clarke McFall published her first novel with her own money, following a removal to London from her marital home, hence completing her transformation into Madame Sarah Grand (Youngkin 2008: vii). Ideala, details the slow awakening of a feminist consciousness in its eponymous heroine, as a consequence of her unhappy marriage to a violent and unfaithful man. Ideala falls in love with Lorrimer, an
academic and physician specialising in mental illnesses, with whom she enjoys an (at first) entirely platonic relationship. Eventually Ideala makes the radical decision to leave her husband and face the social consequences, only to surrender to the pleas of her friend and confidante Lord Dawne, who views the relationship as an act of both moral and social suicide. As the text slowly reveals, Dawne is in fact also in love with Ideala, a love which he fails to articulate because of his deep regard for the moral sanctity of the marriage contract.

Grand’s novel, like several of her later works, is preoccupied with food, consumption, and the moral implications of both starvation and corpulence. Ideala states with disdain that men ‘are so easily managed. All you have to do is feed them and flatter them’ (Grand 2008: 16) and goes on to describe a certain portly priest whose indulgence in ‘earthly pleasures’ made one ‘suspect that he had not even yet exhausted them all himself” (2008: 26). For Ideala, the overweight body visually expresses a basic inability to control any and all appetites, and therefore transgresses the boundaries of Christian morality and Victorian polite society. In the text these appetites are closely linked to masculinity, and to masculine institutions such as the Church, which Ideala accuses of providing a refuge for gluttony and hypocrisy. By specifically highlighting the male body as a repository of sin and corruption, and the representatives of masculine authority as more concerned with earthly than spiritual pleasures, Grand directly responds to and questions the Cartesian dualism which genders knowledge and culture as male. If men who have pledged their bodies to God cannot control their appetites, questions Grand, then surely masculinity does not automatically represent the incorporeality of intellectual achievement, any more than femininity its converse?

Ideala describes the corruption of women’s purity by men in language which evokes the process of feeding, explaining that:

[t]here are moments when I think that even their reverence for the purity of women is a sham. For why do they keep us pure? Is it not to make each morsel more delicious for themselves, that sense and sentiment may be satisfied together, and their own pleasure made more complete? [...] When the history of this age is

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175 It is significant that Lorrimer is a doctor who specialises in nervous disorders, since Ideala will begin to exhibit some of the signs of anorexia nervosa first outlined by Gull and Lasègue. Like some of the men in Grand’s other Morningquest novels, Lorrimer is a physician and is thus not entirely free from implication in the very scopophilic processes of masculine control which Grand seems to critique throughout the series. Dr Galbraith and Dan Maclure in The Heavenly Twins and The Beth Book respectively, are criticised for their specialism in medical fields which focus on treating (and controlling) women.
written, moral cowardice and self-indulgence will be found to have been the most striking characteristics of the people (2008: 20).

Here Grand aligns morality with the ability to resist indulgence, both sexual and gustatory. Of particular significance is her configuration of consumption as a metaphor for the devourment of Victorian womanhood. Through the imagery of ‘morsel’ and ‘delicious’, Grand invokes the lexis of cannibalism, which corresponds to her general critique of over-eating, and positions women’s bodies as subject to men’s carnal and gluttonous desires. The introjection implied by Ideala’s comments, suggest that she views men as culpable for the self-replication of cannibalistic behaviours, and for a general weakening of morality tied implicitly to the shared (and to a certain extent historical) consumption of women. However, cannibalism will be shown to be one of Ideala’s own strategies for survival as, later in the text, her body eats away at itself as part of her effort to replicate masculine intellectualism. In this way Grand undermines her earlier criticism of the Cartesian dualism which informs Christian notions of the body, yet to which religious figures fail to adhere. Ann Heilmann has noted that Grand reclaimed the satisfaction of hunger as essential to feminist purposes and regarded a well regulated appetite as healthy. Her re-envisioning of food as a necessary tool for women’s work, served as a direct reaction to the New Woman’s reputation of ‘rapacious and unsexing appetites’ (Heilmann 2004: 34) in the periodical press. However, there were limits to what could be considered sustaining, and Grand was careful to draw a distinction between necessary consumption and what she saw as masculine Epicureanism. In this way Grand reveals her ‘qualified acceptance of the Victorian aesthetic of the ideal woman’ (Silver: 2002: 82), a creature who might live on a meagre diet whilst sustaining herself morally and spiritually, like the women of the mid-Victorian novels which predated Ideala.

Grand further explores the subject of over-indulgence through a critique of late-nineteenth-century literary Aestheticism in which Ideala argues that:

modern literature stimulates; it doesn’t nourish [...] It excites you pleasurably, and when you see life through its medium you never suspect that the vision is distorted [...] Your false guide fails you when you need him most. He robs you, and leaves you hungry, thirsty, and alone in the wilderness (Grand 2008: 63).

Again, a clear distinction is made between the type of education which is healthy and nourishing, and that which is merely sensuous. Personifying this literature as masculine
through reference to it in the male possessive, Ideala suggests that by relying upon male-dominated forms of expression and education to be intellectually satiated, women only risk further hunger. Interestingly, however, it is the traditionally male form of lyric poetry through which Ideala first attempts to artistically express her talents in the novel, and it is a traditional literary mode in which Grand chooses to publish her first novel. Despite her criticisms of the masculine literary tradition, Grand’s text sets out to emulate the formal, if not always thematic, limitations of the novel, a form which necessitates Ideala’s absorption into the religious and moral fabric of the society which sees her body as a commodity and limits her sphere of influence.

From the beginning of *Ideala* the heroine exhibits the symptoms of long-term starvation outlined by Gull and Lasègue. Ideala starves for a complicated mixture of largely unconscious reasons; these connote her internalisation of both the Christian aesthetic of self-sacrifice and the paradigm of duality which locates her body as subordinate to her spirit. Despite its centrality in a novel that is principally concerned with liberating one woman’s body from its restriction in marriage, we are given very little detail about Ideala’s physical appearance. This is principally due to the fact that she is viewed through the eyes of Lord Dawne, whose admiration for Ideala manifests itself in his constant superimposition of feminine qualities and attributes upon her, all of which are his subjective projections. Molly Youngkin proposes that Grand’s deployment of the first person male narrator serves to complicate her potential as a proto-feminist novelist, since we can only view Ideala through the phallocentric conservatism and possessive voyeurism which informs Dawne’s narration (2008: xx-xxi). Teresa Mangum has convincingly argued that *Ideala* charts a woman’s attempt to ‘win her story away from a male narrator who would write her into the marriage plot regardless of her desires’ (1998: 89). Although not a triple-decker novel, Ideala’s narrative is structured around a triumvirate of relationships with men, her husband, Lord Dawne, and Lorrimer. All three men read Ideala differently and problematically, her husband misunderstands her unworldly nature and responds with violence; Dawne idealises a version of Ideala constructed entirely from his own fantasies, and Lorrimer, who deeply loves Ideala, fails to fully understand the moral scruples which eventually prevent their union. While the structure and narration of *Ideala* hints at Grand’s

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176 Ideala’s deliberate refusal of food, her hyperactivity, and her seemingly increased energy recall the observations about anorexic women made by Gull and Lasègue, and reflect Grand’s use of the diagnostic criteria of *anorexia nervosa* to describe her heroine’s recourse to self-harming. Although Ideala increasingly fails to maintain a healthy body weight and experiences periods of hyperactivity, she does not experience her body as fat, nor does she display a fear of gaining weight, or a distorted image of her own body.
deep disapproval of masculine narrative authority, she pessimistically depicts only the fruitlessness of Ideala’s endeavours to ‘win her story’ from the men who misread her body and its desires. A similar narrative strategy would be adopted by Grand in her novel *The Heavenly Twins*, in which the final narrator is the husband/doctor character, a doubly troubling symbol of masculine institutional power. Grand supplemented her male narrator’s contribution entitled ‘The Impressions of Doctor Galbraith’ with an ironic editorial note which satirised the doctor figure and which was highly critical of his observations. As Heilmann has shown, this addition worked to undermine the male narrator’s authoritative medical discourse, a technique which *Ideala*, written five years earlier, does not attempt (2002: 123-135).

At the beginning of *Ideala* Dawne muses that ‘I was going to catalogue her charms, but it seems indelicate to describe a woman, point by point, like a horse that is for sale’ (Grand 2008: 22). However, he goes on to perform a version of such cataloguing, more troubling than a ‘point by point’ description because it resists attributing any actual characteristics to its subject, instead creating her body through his own distorted perspective. Dawne describes how he ‘used to see her’ in ‘one particular frock […], tight-fitting and perfect, yet with no detail evident. It was like an expression of herself, that dress, so quiet to all seeming, and yet so rich in material, so complex in design (2008: 22). Dawne’s admiration of Ideala centres on his exoticisation and fetishisation of her garments, and his voyeuristic observation of the concealed body beneath. Although his comments address the shape of Ideala’s body, the reader is never given explicit detail as to what, precisely, that body looks like; in fact, like the feminised Gerald Ethridge in Cross’s *Anna Lombard*, it escapes description entirely. We are told that Ideala was ‘very absent’ (2008: 10) and ‘more like a picture than anything’ (2008: 13), emphasising her as detached, unreal, vague. Her body

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177 The *Heavenly Twins* sold 20,000 copies in its first print run in 1893, and was reprinted six times during the nineteenth century.

178 Dawne’s cataloguing of Ideala would be re-written seven years later in Ménie Muriel Dowie’s New Woman novel *Gallia*, which subverts Dawne’s process of cataloguing when it inverts the act of classification entirely. In *Gallia* it is the eponymous heroine who appraises her potential reproductive partner Mark Gurdon ‘as a dealer might notice the points in a horse’ (Dowie 1995: 2). Unlike Grand, Dowie reverses the male gaze, subverting the workings of the Victorian marriage market by exposing the position of its male characters as subject to the economy of sexual exchange in which the female is usually treated as the commodity. Dowie’s sensational portrayal of a woman who eschews romance and chooses her husband based on his suitability as a reproductive partner, places the healthy female body at the centre of the text. The contrast between the novels, demonstrates the extent to which Grand’s earlier text resists a straightforwardly ‘feminist’ reading of the female body.
represents a negative presence, only perceptible by the trace or impression it leaves on more material objects, such as her clothing. Just as she can only be described by the impression she leaves on the male narrator, Ideala’s corporeality is called into question by the text’s recurrent dynamic of bodily presence and absence. Her male narrator totally obscures the heroine’s body by his possessive gaze, and his obsessive appreciation (and acceptance) of her emaciated form.

In *Ideala*, the heroine’s first deliberate act of self-starvation comes at the point in the novel at which she also first articulates anorexic logic, showing dualism to be a crucial tenet of her personal philosophy. Ideala tells Lorrimer ‘I wish I could get behind that horrid veil of flesh that hides you from me. I want to see your soul’ (Grand 2008: 99). Ideala demonstrates an understanding and indeed a wholehearted subscription to Cartesian theories. However, her understanding of the soul as superordinate to – yet also deep and hidden within the body, depends ironically on the corporeality she so ardently rejects. While her comments highlight her acceptance of patriarchal assumptions, she later describes how in Lorrimer ‘the highest and most spiritual aspirations warred in him with the most carnal impulses’ (2008: 92). Ideala thus recognises in her male interlocutor the simultaneous impulses of body and soul, yet she fails to accept this conflict as it manifests within herself. Unlike the Victorian woman, who was derided as soulless yet expected to aspire to the sublimation of body to spirit, Ideala views the male intellectual as fully capable of embodying and negotiating this tension. After declaring her desire to see past Lorrimer’s flesh, Ideala commits her first conscious act of food-refusal; we are told that she ‘could not go through the ordeal of who should pay for lunch again. She preferred to starve. The camaraderie between them was mental enough to be manlike already, but only as long as there was no question of material outlay’ (2008: 99). Ideala’s relationship of equality with Lorrimer is shown to be fundamentally tied to her denial of fleshly needs, which, once acknowledged, would threaten her transcendence to the masculine intellectual realm. The very materiality of Ideala’s body, has to be abnegated in order for her to function as an intellectual being capable of ‘masculine’ achievement rather than as ‘that which is to be looked at, denuded, unveiled’ (Brooks 1993: 96).

While Ideala is expected to be disembodied in her role as domestic angel and aspiring intellectual, she is also accused of succumbing to her bodily needs when she decides to leave her husband for Lorrimer. Grand points to the impossibility of reconciling the two identities which Ideala endeavours to inhabit; she can be neither fully angel nor demon,
neither disembodied nor fleshly. The point in the text at which the irreconcilability of these conflicting female stereotypes becomes clear, is signified by Lorrimer’s awareness of his feelings for Ideala. The moment that Lorrimer begins to view her as a woman rather than an equal, marks Ideala’s descent into deliberate self-harming behaviour. Their relationship becomes increasingly strained by the realisation that friendship between a man and a woman who are not related, is deemed inappropriate by society on the basis of the very sexual difference Ideala denies. When they meet following this uncomfortable recognition, Ideala is described as:

[c]old and faint. The long fast and fatigue were beginning to tell upon her. She was nervous, too; the silence was oppressive, but she could not break it. She felt some inexplicable change in her relations with Lorrimer which made it impossible to speak (Grand 2008: 113).

Ideala is no longer able to converse as an equal, because her body has finally become fully subject to the societal pressures which designate it as carnal and thus potentially threatening to bourgeois and pseudo-religious notions of propriety. She is silenced by the distinction between herself as woman (fleshly and desiring) and Lorrimer as man (knowledgeable and philosophical) and must become an object, seen and not heard. Such a distinction both expects of Ideala angelic and saintly ethereality, while claiming concurrently that she is incapable of personifying such traits. Ideala’s hunger is a form of speech, a dialogue in which her body is ‘enmeshed in social codes that precede […] and outlast […] its consciousness’ (Ellman 1993: 3). As a consequence she becomes increasingly un-seen throughout the text, resisting definition as bodily through anorexic acts which both conceal and give voice to her pain.

Lorrimer chastises Ideala, telling her ‘you have had no lunch today again. You will kill yourself if you go on like that’ (Grand 2008: 113). His response to her attempts at bodily transcendence are negatively encoded through patronising language, he misunderstands her motives and views her actions as indicative of childish attention-seeking. Like Gull and Lasègue, who viewed self-starvation in part as the product of feminine disobedience, the men in Ideala’s life recognise her symptoms yet fail to understand the psychological drives upon which they are predicated. Lord Dawne comments upon Ideala’s increased hyperactivity (2008: 98) and Lorrimer accuses her of wanting to kill herself, although with enough sarcasm to insinuate that he disbelieves her sincerity (2008: 113). Ideala and Lorrimer cannot continue forever on the same terms, and understanding this Ideala leaves
his companionship; she is painfully aware of their change in relations, the effect of which she describes when ‘at last the twenty-four hours’ fasting, fatigue and mental suffering overcame her’ (2008: 115). Following the deterioration of Ideala’s merely intellectual understanding with Lorrimer, we are told how she ‘grew paler and thinner, and more nervous’ (2008: 24) that she was ‘drawn and haggard’, ‘devoured by anxiety’, and that ‘she neither ate nor slept’ (2008: 126). In attempting to resist definition as fleshly, Ideala’s self-starvation serves merely to reaffirm this classification, since it is the disappearance of her body which repeatedly provokes narrative commentary. In deploying the starving body as a recurrent thematic motif, Grand completes the process of signification of the body’s ‘passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body’ (Brooks 1993: 3) in that the inscription of the sign here depends on and produces the story of Ideala’s battle against her appetite for romantic and sexual fulfilment. The very process of denying her a body, thus marks the passage into literature of Ideala’s body as the inscription of its own story, a story about self-damage which by its publication both forces a collision between the public and private spheres, and upholds their divisory principles.

*Ideala* is a text preoccupied with travel, modernity, and the potential for dramatic collisions between the human body and the machine, discussed in the introduction to this thesis. In *Ideala* these collisions are at times literal, but they also symbolise the mechanisms of Victorian society in which the body was becoming increasingly dependent on and subject to automation. In his work on the pathological public sphere Seltzer has emphasised the centrality of mechanisation in discourses on the wounded body. Citing the example of the eroticised atrocity in Zola’s *La Bête Humaine*, in which the dead lay mangled amongst the wreckage of two crashed trains, Seltzer writes of bodily violence that:

> the coupling of bodies and machines is [...] a coupling of private and public spaces. It is not surprising, then, that these linkages are most powerfully literalised in the machinal systems of public transport that speed movement, or commuting, of bodies between these spaces; the railway system and the highway system (1998: 31).

Despite her vehement disapproval of the French naturalist school from which Zola’s text emerges, Grand’s first novel suggests a similar anxiety concerning the ‘coupling of bodies

179 Like the body damaged by self-starvation in *Ideala*, the wounded body was fictionalised in the naturalistic writings of Emile Zola, Charles Baudelaire, Alphonse Daudet, Jules Vallès, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and also the decadent writers of the British Fin de Siècle. See Seltzer (1998: 1-3) for further discussion.
and machines’ which Seltzer sees as symptomatic of nineteenth-century wound culture. As in *La Bête Humaine*, the site of much human carnage in *Ideala* is the railway station or train carriage, and – like Zola, Grand uses the imagery of the train wreck throughout. Grand makes use of this imagery to represent metaphorically the self-directed bodily traumas which express the complications and potential disasters implied by the march of modernity at a time when tradition was clinging on for survival. After being separated from Lorrimer for several months, Ideala asks Dawne ‘[h]ave you felt the fascination of the trains? [...] now and then comes one that is just a flash and a roar, and I cling to the railing for a moment until it passes, and quiver with excitement, feeling as if I might be swept away’ (Grand 2008: 122-125). Through the imagery of railway accidents Grand’s heroine articulates the self-destructive impulse which drives her food-refusal, for her body to disappear into nothingness, to be ‘swept away’ by the force of that which symbolises the phallic pinnacle of advancement and enterprise. After her husband’s mistress dies of scarlet fever in her arms, a traumatised Ideala attempts to travel by rail to see Lorrimer. She misses the last train, becomes trapped at the station, and is taken in by the porter who tells her of an accident in which workers ‘toiled fearfully amongst the wreck of trains, searching for the mangled and mutilated, the dying and the dead, while the air was filled with horrid shrieks and groans’ (2008: 111). This traumatic imagery concerns the destruction of the body, its dismemberment, mutilation, and effacement, processes by which the private body had started to become publically visible. Interestingly, whilst the story of how Ideala’s marriage is itself finally wrecked remains unarticulated, it is the story of the mutilated corpses in the wreck which excites and interests her, and with which she thrills her closest friends. Grand’s repeated use of the railway as both traumatic locus and symbolic reference, suggests an understanding of the ways in which bodily trauma is bound up with both

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180 In ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’ (1894) Grand reveals her dislike of naturalism, as referenced in Ideala’s criticism of modern literature. Grand was herself accused of literary naturalism and degeneracy. She prompted one critic for the *Saturday Review* to call *Ideala* ‘a modest essay in Naturalism, using that word in the French sense. It is the story of a nasty-minded woman’ (1888: 277).

181 See Zola (2009: 33, 77 & 314) for examples.

182 See Harrington (1999), who discusses the importance of the railway as a symbol of British colonial (masculine) power.

183 The story mirrors the deathbed scene in the previous two pages, in which Ideala sits listening to the story of her husband’s cruelty and philandering whilst the wasted body of his mistress is ravaged by fever. See Grand (2008: 108-109).

184 Dawne also describes Ideala in language which evokes images of railway accidents, asking ‘what have they done to you? You’re a perfect wreck!’ to which Ideala responds that ‘wrecks are so interesting’ (2008: 123).
modernity and intellectual progression. As Ideala seeks entrance to masculine pursuits such as education and travel, which transgress the normative boundaries of her class and gender status, she is beset by traumatic experience. It is significant that these traumas take place at, or lead to, the railway station, that her relationship with another man is enabled by the train journey which regularly bears her to him, and that the heroine is viewed as a train wreck herself; these constructs imply Grand’s understanding and exploitation of the embryonic Victorian wound culture, in which ‘private desire and public fantasy cross’ (Seltzer 1998: 1). Grand locates the train as a central metaphor for her heroine’s journey towards self-starvation and eventually self-awareness through self-sacrifice, and the wreck as the pain which must be endured in order to become fully self-determined. Such discourses evoke the Christian rhetoric of asceticism which, like classical models, privileges minds over bodies, and demonstrates the anorexic logic of Western culture, philosophy, and religion. As Luckhurst has argued, trauma breaches the borders between inside and outside, putting them into communication, it ‘violently opens passageways between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that distress or confound’ (2008: 3). I would argue that Grand’s preoccupation with the railway accident – the scene of Victorian mass-trauma, works to put into communication the once discrete categories of masculinity and femininity, public and private. Grand symbolically imagines her heroine’s wounded body as a product of a society desperate to advance, yet holding on to the gendered double standards which restrict women’s development. In symbolically aligning Ideala’s damaged body with the mass spectacle of modernity’s violent collapse, Grand’s work opens passageways between the masculine systems of culture, knowledge, economics and politics, and the feminine world in which women are denied access to these systems.185

Like the ideal of Christian self-sacrifice which fortifies Ideala’s acceptance of her traumatic ‘journey’, Dawne’s narration of her thin form also enforces religiously-framed and decidedly orthodox understandings of the body in pain. Dawne’s continued eroticisation of Ideala’s starving body is intensified by his attempt to situate her suffering

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185 I would also argue that in this way Grand’s work prefigures the breakdown of boundaries between masculinity and femininity which was caused by the First World War (1914-1918). As a consequence of mass conscription, women had to fill the roles left vacant by men. Thus, mass trauma directly influenced the disruption of gender binaries in much the same way that the image of the train crash was applied by Grand in order to express the collapse of the Victorian religious and moral codes which underscored separate sphere ideology.
within the well-established discourses of Christian martyrdom explored in my previous chapter. Upon finding her alone one evening, he describes how:

she sank down on the floor with a low moan beside a chair, and hid her face on her arm. Presently she looked up, and I saw she held something in her hand. It was a gold crucifix, and she fixed her eyes on it. The lamplight fell on her face, and I could see that it was drawn and haggard [...] was it a religious difficulty? A weary while she remained in the same attitude, gazing at the crucifix; but evidently there was no pity for her pain, and no relief (2008: 126).

Despite having declared at the beginning of the text that Ideala is an Atheist ‘in a state of don’t know’ (2008: 23) about religion, Dawne repeatedly interprets her pain as that of a struggling saint. In an act of masculine authority he dismisses Ideala’s personal views on religion, imposing his own upon her in an effort to imagine her body through Christian iconography. In this scene, he watches her from a hidden position, silently invading her privacy with his proprietary stare, and it is this act of metaphorical penetration which betrays his desire to sexually penetrate her thin body. His impressions are highly evocative, describing the face of the lamp-lit sufferer whose attention is fixed upon the crucifix, but doing so in a tone which conveys his voyeuristic arousal by her ‘drawn and haggard face’.

The detail of Ideala’s interaction with the crucifix, explicitly establishes associations between her own agony and the torture and crucifixion of Christ. Although her emotional torture is described as Christ-like by Dawne, he misreads Ideala’s critical appraisal of the crucifix as an appeal for mercy. Dawne constructs Ideala’s part in this scene as a penitent in the act of prayer, exemplifying his need to re-envision her suffering within the boundaries of conventional religious practice.

Ideala neither seeks forgiveness, nor is she at peace or subject to saintly transcendental harmony. Rather, Grand depicts Ideala’s submissive acceptance of the religious (and to some extent social) convention of prayer, as a gesture of total defeatism contrary to certain biblical depictions of serenity. Dawne’s voyeurism also complicates Grand’s use of Christian imagery, because his eroticisation revolves around competing desires for the masculine protection but also sexual appropriation of her thin body. Dawne’s act of watching replicates the historico-religious practices of men seeking epistemophilic satisfaction through observation of the starving female body. In Europe, from the sixteenth

186 Throughout The Bible as well as later secular accounts of the Christian martyrs, violent acts of martyrdom are almost always depicted as transformative and transcendental processes for the subject. St Steven is described as having ‘the face of an angel’ at his martyrdom (Acts 7: 54), in the book of Matthew the martyrs are offered ‘the crown of life’ (2:10), whilst the martyrs ‘shall be fulfilled’ (Revelation 6:11) and shown ‘great admiration’ in the book of Revelation (17:6).
century onwards food refusal had been linked to miraculous acts, and women who claimed to survive on little or no food were venerated as saints or prophets. During the medieval period ‘fasting was fundamental to the model of female holiness’ (Brumberg 2000: 43-44) and prayer became the only sustenance required by the most pious of women. During the nineteenth century, the new scientific attachment to empiricism meant that women who claimed to be nourished only by God, had to be rigorously tested. The combined patriarchal apparatus of Christianity and medicine pursued knowledge of the female body and through it the ‘truth’ of these ‘miracles’. The method devised to arrive at the truth, constituted intense and prolonged observation of the bodies of those concerned (Vandereckyen & Van Deth 1994: 47-73), an epistemophilic act like those discussed in the previous two chapters of this thesis.

In common with the fasting girls who claimed that their hunger was taken away by God, in almost all accounts of Christian martyrdom, the role of the gaze constitutes an objectification and appropriation of the body by an external audience. Similarly, Ideala’s suffering is witnessed by the desiring external audience of Dawne, who makes excuses for his inappropriate appraisal of her suffering body. After deciding to embark on an extra-marital affair with Lorrimer, Ideala is for some time at peace, both mentally and bodily. However it is Dawne who eventually persuades her to renounce her love, and in doing so he again evokes the rhetoric of martyrdom and asceticism, asking:

[...]

187 Brumberg gives the examples of saint Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) who ate only herbs, and who made herself vomit after consuming any other food (2000: 33-35). See Gutierrez (2003) for discussion of food refusal in the Early Modern period, during which self-starvation was constructed as an anti-social act of self-determination.

188 The reformation had drastically changed the value of female fasting, and during the post-medieval period cases of anorexia mirabilis (a Latin term meaning ‘miraculous anorexia’), had to be verified in order to prove that they were not the work of Satan. Verification usually took the form of enticement to food, with priests and doctors presenting an array of delicate consumables to the fasting girl in an attempt to demonstrate her weakness, and to dissociate her from any holy (or satanic) possession. See Hammond (2010) for further.

189 See Showalter (1993) and Vandereckyen & Van Deth (1994) who discuss the fasting girls in both medieval and Victorian medicine.

190 Victorian fasting girls were kept under prolonged observation, by medical and scientific men as well as priests, who sought to venerate or condemn the object on which they bestowed their various gazes. For example, see Stacey (2002) who gives a detailed account of a Victorian fasting girl who was subject to a variety of tests and observations.

191 See Vandereycken & Van Deth (1994).
nothing more. Everyone grows out of it in time, and anyone with proper self-control could conquer it (2008: 161).

Dawne describes Ideala’s feelings for Lorrimer as an infectious miasma, rendering her physical desires degenerate and poisonous. Positioning Ideala’s love as an evil force in control of her body, Dawne encourages her to surpass that body by resisting the physicality of passion and self-indulgence for the benefit of the example she might set to other women. Deploying the rhetoric of corporal transcendence, of anorexic logic, Dawne further legitimises Ideala’s self-starvation by privileging bodily self-sacrifice as a noble and thus desirable alternative to temptation. Eventually it is through this line of argument that Ideala agrees to break with Lorrimer, and is ready to embark on a successful career as a New Woman philanthropist.

At the end of the novel Dawne notes that Ideala has physically grown, yet he is still able to view her only as a collection of fetishised garments, describing how:

She wore a long robe, exquisitely draped, which was loose, but yet clung to her, and fell in rich folds about her with a grace which satisfied. I cannot describe the fashion of this robe, or the form, but I have seen one like it somewhere – it must have been in a picture, or on a statue of grand heroic woman or a saint; and it suggested something womanly and strong, but not to be defined (2008: 165).

Dawne borrows from iconography, the parameters of Ideala’s form, refusing to see her as she is, but instead as an eroticised saintly martyr whose appearance ‘satisfie[s]’ his voyeurism. Like Cross’s Gerald Ethridge, who imagines Anna Lombard as a medieval Joan of Arc figure, Dawne imposes his own fantasy of female heroism on the object of his desires. As the subject of the Western patriarchal and epistemophilic perspective, Dawne demonstrates his desire to inspect Ideala’s body and verify the ‘truth’ of her as an object of desire, or, as he is ultimately forced to do, to ‘make that object into the ultimate enigma’ (Brooks 1993: 97). Although Ideala offers an alternative to unhappy marriage, which proposes fulfilment through altruistic feminist projects, it also suggests that this can only be achieved through bodily sacrifice. Upon seeing Ideala for the first time following her travel abroad as part of such projects, Lord Dawne exclaims ‘my first impression was that she had grown!’ (2008: 165). Ideala’s self-starvation thus appears to have been cured. However she continues to subscribe to the philosophy of self-sacrifice which enabled and sustained her self-harming behaviour in the earlier sections of the novel. Her body may have temporarily recovered, but her continued desire to sacrifice her time, health, and
happiness in the service of others, betrays her recourse to forms of patriarchal logic which privilege women’s self-abnegation and abhor the self-government of the female body. While Grand asserts her heroine’s status as a champion of women’s rights and an example to all, she does so by establishing a troublingly self-destructive paradigm for the transformation from unhappily married woman to New Woman. This paradigm would be repeated to much more dramatic effect in her two subsequent novels; *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*.

**From Sickness to Sacrifice: Starvation in *The Heavenly Twins* (1894) and *The Beth Book* (1897)**

*The Heavenly Twins* was Grand’s most popular and also most politically subversive novel, largely because it dealt with issues that shocked the sensibilities of the average Victorian reader. Set amidst the campaigns for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts which were ‘predicated on the idea that the (fallen) female body pollutes society’ (Ledger 1997: 115) Grand makes the case for a reversal of such laws. Grand’s story engages with discourses of degeneration and social purity, presenting and critiquing the limited options available to women exposed to venereal disease within their marriages. Through the intertwining narratives of three female characters: Evadne Frayling, Edith Beale, and Angelica Ilverthorpe, Grand demonstrates the destructive consequences of any attempt to protect women from Victorian sexual double standards. However, as in *Ideala* her criticisms of patriarchy, and the resultant march towards self-sacrifice enforced by its laws, are complicated by her idealisation of the self-destructive and often starving woman.

While Edith is the most central of the text’s heroines (about whose tragic death from syphilis the other narrative strands interlock), it is the starving Evadne around whom the plot gathers. Just as the unfortunate Edith represents the ‘Old Woman’, Evadne is at first

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192 The first Act was passed in 1864 and the repeal of this and further Acts occurred in 1886 and 1889. The Acts legalised the detention and arrest of prostitutes who were subjected to compulsory inspection for venereal diseases in an attempt to halt their spread (Helsinger 1983:156-158). Since men were never subject to the same law, it has been viewed by critics as a clear representation of the blame placed on women for the immorality and criminality of prostitution. In Grand’s *The Beth Book*, the forceful detention of prostitutes in Lock Hospitals is dramatised when the heroine finds out her husband is the superintendent of one such establishment, and refuses to remain under his roof.

193 The names of Grand’s three heroines are symbolically significant. Edith is the name given in the Jewish tradition to the anonymous wife of Lot in the Old Testament who is turned to salt upon looking back at the destruction of Sodom. Lot commits incest with his daughters in Genesis (19:30) in order that they might conceive children. Evadne is the daughter of Poseidon in Greek mythology, who gave birth in the wilderness and left her child to fend for itself. She is also the wife of Capaneus, who threw herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, killing herself. Angelica literally means ‘of the angels’ and is ironic in the same sense as her designation ‘heavenly twin’ in the text.
Grand’s prototypical New Woman – she has educated herself in medicine and science (Grand 2007 I: 43), contradicts the misogynistic opinions of her father (2007 I:33), and engages herself in debates surrounding the Woman Question (2007 I: 221). Having just married the sexually profligate Colonel Colquhoun, Evadne discovers that he has fathered an illegitimate child with another woman and possesses a far from blameless sexual reputation. She quickly runs away and refuses to live with him, resulting in her total disownment by her parents, who fail to see Colquhoun’s indiscretions in a particularly negative light. Evadne, however, is horrified at the thought of sexual contact with a man who might be tainted by the diseases about which she has informed herself. Eventually Evadne agrees to live with her new husband, but under the condition that her body remains her own property and that the marriage continues unconsummated. Grand demonstrates the extent to which this strategy cannot work, as Evadne becomes frail and atrophied by the inertia of unfulfilled sexual passions and her own blocked maternal drives. Once a healthy young girl, Evadne (like Ideala) becomes increasingly thin as her marriage progresses, and as in Ideala, Grand once again favours the small body, simultaneously denigrating its converse in her depictions of male excess.

Evadne is described as having a ‘slender figure’ (2007 I: 99) and Grand directly contrasts this with her mother, the archetypal ‘Cow Woman’ whom she also laments in ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’. Grand’s narrator describes Mrs Frayling as ‘fair, plump, sweet, yielding, commonplace, prolific’ (2007 I: 57) and her plumpness and yielding nature correspond to her lack of control over both her body and her marital destiny, as well as her complacency regarding this lack of control. Furthermore Grand critiques the corpulent body through her scathing portrayal of morally corrupt characters such as Colquhoun and the ‘round’ (2007 I: 232) and ‘liberally fed’ (2007 I: 245) Guthrie Brimstones. Evadne tells us of Major Brimstone that ‘[h]is hands were another offence to her. They were fat and podgy, with short pointed fingers, indicative of animalism and ill-nature’ (2007 I: 248). Drawing on physiognomy – at the time a credible science – Grand reads the grotesquity of Brimstone’s body as an indicator of moral weakness. As in her previous novel, the overweight body is associated with an inability to control the most.

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195 See Nelson (2001:141-146) for a reproduction of this portion of Grand’s essay.
196 Physiognomy was a pseudo-scientific discourse which suggested character traits through a reading of physical features. See Pearl (2010) for discussion of physiognomy in relation to Victorian culture.
basic of animal drives and as the conversely pure character in this scene, the heroine’s morality is defined and communicated by her thinness.

Evadne’s husband’s habits of self-indulgence are well documented throughout the novel, and she articulates the problem with embarking on a sexual relationship with Colquhoun through the imagery of food. Explaining that ‘my taste is cultivated to so fine an extent, I require something extremely well-flavoured for the dish which is to be the piece de résistance of my life-feast’ and ‘my appetite is delicate, it requires to be tempted’ (2007 I: 109), Evadne directly connects consumption to sexuality. At the beginning of her marriage Evadne’s appetite is healthy yet not excessive, and Grand uses the lexis of food, such as ‘delicate’ and ‘tempted’ to suggest that although Evadne envisions her married life as a ‘feast’, it is one in which greed of any kind will not feature. Rather than accepting her husband’s voracious desires, Evadne’s comments suggest that she must be tempted to participate in sexual activity, enticed by the purity of the marriage union which justifies the sexual act. By the close of the text Evadne’s husband has become just as intemperate as this extract suggests he might, whilst her body is left shrivelled and weak. Colquhoun drains his wife of all vitality in an act of metaphorical cannibalism and vampirism, by which he gains in corpulence while she physically recedes. His continued debauchery leaves Evadne with no option but to resist his advances and she becomes sexually frustrated with no outlet for her desires. Evadne’s constant repression of her need for both affection and sexual contact leaves her body overexerted by restraint, and she declines in health and size. She is described as ‘shrinking in every inch of her sensitive frame’ (2007 I: 145) while her body is described as ‘not as robust as her brain’ (2007 I: 132), and later in the text we are told she is ‘fragile’ (2007 II: 268) and ‘thin […], pale and weak’ (2007 II: 296).

As in Grand’s first novel, the most pervasive observation of Evadne’s thin body emanates from the perspective of a male narrator. The final volume of the novel is narrated by Doctor Galbraith who is at first an admirer of the married Mrs Colquhoun and later becomes her second husband. Galbraith’s dual characterisation as doting husband and medical man –whose specialism is hysteria– echoes Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ published a year previously. As Heilmann has noted, Galbraith’s role as husband and doctor suggest parallels between the treatment of Evadne’s hysteria,

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197 In this way Grand’s text anticipates the same linkage made by Freud in his (pre-psychoanalytic) claim that anorexia nervosa was prompted by repressed traumatic experiences of oral sex (Freud 2001b: 115-121).
and the similar experiences of the central female character in Gilman’s text. Both the heroine of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and Grand’s Evadne are subject to the gaze of the doctor/husband, whose attempts to regulate and control their respective ‘illnesses’ require complete submission of the body to male care and observation. During her incarceration in a room whose wallpaper begins to manifest her delusions, the narrator of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ tells us of her treatment that:

I take my phosphates or phosphites – whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to ‘work’ until I am well again […]

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care of me […] (Gilman 2007a: 99-100).

The narrator’s ironic tone directs the reader towards a more sinister truth than is suggested by the words alone – that the heroine has been forced to surrender her work, her liberty and even her bodily functions to the control of patriarchal authority. That she is unable even to stir without the doctor/husband’s permission, suggests a level of enforced compliance which the reader cannot fail to see as the very opposite of the ‘careful and loving’ attention which Gilman satirically posits. Herself a patient under the Weir Mitchell ‘rest cure’ following the birth of her child, Gilman treats the obsessive observation of the female body with a level of disdain which fails to materialise in Grand’s 1894 novel. Unlike Grand, Gilman narrates the female hysteric through the character’s own perspective, detailing the mental and physical devastation of the rest cure, but also the potential for liberation through female defiance. In Gilman’s final scene the husband opens the door to the room in which his wife has locked herself, and she tells us:

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

‘I've got out at last’, said I, ‘in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!’

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time! (Gilman 2007a: 117).

Early critical interpretations of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ viewed the final paragraph of the text as denoting a suicide, reading the final lines of the text as a ghostly ‘creeping over’ the husband who has fainted upon finding his wife’s corpse. Such a reading works as a

198 See Showalter (1993) for further discussion of the rest cure.
comic reversal of the gendered dichotomy of masculine vigour and feminine frailty which was, as I discussed in my introduction, levelled at women who struggled to cope with the contradictory demands of work and femininity. However, some contemporary critics have noted that Gilman’s ambiguous dénouement suggests a metaphorical escape, in which the (albeit mad) wife finally gets ‘out at last’ (117). Considered either way, then, the heroine eventually breaks free of the room to which she has been confined, stepping over her husband’s unconscious body in a gesture of feminine rebellion and reclamation of self-assertion.

Grand’s Evadne commits no such emancipatory act, becoming increasingly restricted to the domestic sphere through both her second marriage to Doctor Galbraith, and the birth of her child. As in The Heavenly Twins, in which Evadne is prohibited from political expression by Colquhoun, the heroine of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is similarly forbidden to write. However, Gilman’s female recluse resists the prohibition of her artistic (and possibly political) expression, firstly by ignoring her orders to stop writing (2007a: 99) and secondly by choosing to sublimate this transgressive activity into the creativity which allows her to see the movements of the wallpaper (2007a: 107-117). This reading is supported by much of the critical work which has understood Gilman’s use of the wallpaper as a metaphor for writing itself. In a paper written almost thirty years ago, Paula Treichler asserts that ‘I interpret the wallpaper to be women’s writing or women’s discourse, and the woman in the wallpaper to be the representation of women that becomes possible only after women obtain their right to speak’ (1984: 64). Later critics have questioned this analysis, pointing to the potential for the wallpaper to represent male discourse in its capacity to contradict and immobilise the women who are trapped within it. Such readings account for the tearing down of the wallpaper as an attempt to rupture the boundaries of male-oriented discourse itself (Ford 1985: 311). However, both views personify the wallpaper as discourse, and thus the heroine’s encounters with/ within it as creative and expressive (if self-destructive) acts. It is this use of forbidden imagination which culminates in the heroine’s mental breakdown, but also in her eventual escape from observation and from her place of imprisonment.

200 ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ is generally understood to be a semi-autobiographical account of Gilman’s postnatal depression and treatment under the rest cure, and thus her narrator’s writing might plausibly be read as feminist or political in nature.
Like Grand’s, Gilman’s work also negotiates the paradox of women’s incorporeality, and the bodies of narrative which collect around the subject of female disembodiment in general and starvation in particular. In the case of Gilman’s short story, the wallpaper as discourse or text, both liberates and confines the female body. The body escapes its prison only when it has been transcended through the device of an ambiguous and non-conventional plot ending, an ending which represents the very antithesis of Grand’s realist devices. In *The Heavenly Twins* Grand’s Evadne comes to reject both discourse and resistance, choosing to uphold the promise she has made to her first husband to avoid public discursive activity. At the end of the text she asks Galbraith to ‘let me live on the surface of life, as most women do’ (Grand 2007 II: 384) and thus Grand points to a lack of alternatives to an epistemophilic arrangement, in which the female body remains an object of desire and a commodity, a fate which Gilman’s text refuses to accept entirely. Gilman’s short story is contemporary with Grand’s novel, yet it offers a more potentially optimistic dramatisation of hysteria and self-harm, and their liberatory prospects. The contrast between each text, in both form and message suggests a link between different bodies of narrative and their diverse strategies for fictionalising female self-damage. Gilman’s short story, as an experimental form of writing which depicts the psychological interiority of women’s experience says with fewer words what Grand’s cannot say at all. As an example of a melodramatic marriage plot, *The Heavenly Twins* fails to resist the predictable ending of the realist novel. It sees its female characters overcome unhappiness through self-sacrifice or punish themselves for self-indulgence, and resolves the problems embodied by those characters outside of the bounds of normativity through the device of a conventional marriage.

As is the heroine in Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, Grand’s Evadne is assessed by her doctor/husband through observation which invariably reads her bodily weakness as psychosomatic, as representative of hysterical frailty which must be watched and controlled. As in the clinical observations of Gull and Lasègue, the anorexic patient is given as little control as possible over her body, and is not trusted with her own recovery. Galbraith’s process of watching leads him to comment frequently on Evadne’s thin form which is ‘to the last degree of emaciation’ (Grand 2007 II: 277) while her ‘figure was fragile to a fault’ (2007 II: 258). Galbraith romanticises Evadne’s figure which is ‘slender [and] silhouetted with dark distinctness against the sloping evening sky’ (2007 II: 280) and attracts him to her. As in *Ideala*, the heroine is subject to the proprietary gaze of the male
narrator and yet in The Heavenly Twins it is not merely the starving body which incites this desire. Evadne’s relationship with food is a complex mixture of self-starvation and the deliberate self-induction of illness. At various points in the text Evadne deliberately risks infection or illness, enjoying the resultant rest and attention these illnesses provide her. Galbraith describes several episodes of sickness in which Evadne ‘bear[s] up bravely’ (2007 II: 282). It is during these periods that Evadne is described in terms which are highly complementary, and she is also at her most desirable. Galbraith notes that:

Every breath of cold air was cutting her lungs like a knife, but she looked up at me when I took her hand, and smiled. I never knew anyone so patient and uncomplaining. [...] She was always the same all through her illness, gentle, uncomplaining, grateful for every little trifle that was done for her, and tranquillity itself. My impression was that she enjoyed being ill (2007 II: 283-285).

What is striking here is not only Evadne’s clear enjoyment of her illness, but Galbraith’s idealisation of her weakness and impassivity. Positively encoded language such as ‘patient and uncomplaining’, ‘gentle’, and ‘grateful’ is used to suggest that Galbraith endorses or is at least impressed by Evadne’s angelic forbearance.

Following her unhappy marriage to Colquhoun, Evadne is able to become an angel in her own house only once she is physically ailing. She is docile, submissive and ultimately subject to the care but also the desires of the watching doctor, a position which she cannot quite achieve in her marital relationship with Colquhoun. As Bailin has argued the ‘transposition of social pathologies into bodily ailment serves to reclaim these characters in crisis by initiating them into the consoling community of the sickroom’ (1994: 5). This hints at the process by which Evadne achieves tranquillity during a bout of sickness, a sense of human connection which is possible only with her doctor. On a number of occasions Evadne expresses her physical suffering as ‘a relief’ (Grand 2007 II: 284 & 303) and she actively pursues situations in which she is likely to become ill. She volunteers as a nurse during a particularly contagious outbreak of fever at a military base, during which she restlessly nurses the dying with no concern for her own safety (2007 II: 303-304). Although Galbraith observes Evadne’s actions, and he protests about the danger in which she is placing herself, his desire is nevertheless piqued by her bravery, and he explains that:

Contemporary psychiatry would possibly diagnose Evadne as suffering from Munchausen’s Syndrome or Factious Disorder. See Feldman (2004) for a detailed definition of both.
when she found herself really suffering, she pulled herself together, and bore the trial with heroic calm [...] she never uttered a complaint; and she had the strength of mind to ignore annoyances which few people in perfect health could have borne with fortitude. Certainly her attitude then had excited sympathy, and respect as well. It was as admirable as it was unexpected (2007 II: 301).

As Evadne’s body becomes increasingly weak and subjected both to deliberate infection and self-starvation, her mental faculties, we are told, improve. In this episode she is described as having ‘strength of mind’ and ‘fortitude’, echoing earlier comments that her body is ‘not as robust as her brain’ (I: 132). By experiencing illness and physical weakness as mentally restorative, Grand again shows a tendency to deploy anorexic logic through refutation of the body as of primary importance to her heroine. It is when Evdane recovers her health that her mental suffering begins again, suggesting that her desire to transcend her corporeal form lies in her preference for the mental peace which she cannot attain while maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle. Much like Ideala, whose starvation functions as an attempt to access the realms of masculine knowledge, Evadne’s hunger and deliberate self-infection allows her to ascend to a position of spiritual content. Through illness and thinness, Evadne asserts her existence as ‘only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, a soul, or an intellect’ as opposed to the ‘framework of limbs that is called a human body’ (Descartes 2008: 20). This ethos culminates in the text, in her suicide attempt whilst pregnant; Evadne fails to recognise this as a sin, but rather as a means by which to save her unborn child from exposure to the potential corruptions of the female body. By attempting to efface her own body through death, and the body of her unborn child (whom she believes to be a girl) Evadne enacts the ultimate act of self-destruction, attempting to free herself from both the gustatory and sexual dangers of female corporeality. In Evadne’s final attempt to resist bodilyness, her private body is made public spectacle; this sensationally explodes the artificial boundary between the two spheres, but ultimately sustains the logic which designates them as both gendered and entirely separate.

It is not only Grand’s central heroine who subscribes to a type of anorexic logic in *The Heavenly Twins*, but also her other New Woman character, Angelica. Unlike Evadne, who withers and shrinks under the pressures of an unhappy marriage and unsatisfied sexual drives, Angelica is healthy, spirited and well-fed throughout the text. Angelica is ‘on a much larger scale’ (2007 I: 179), than her brother, and is ‘the taller, stronger, and
wickeder’ (2007 I: 162) of the titular twins. In *The Heavenly Twins* Grand has Angelica’s aunt Fulda express the conflict between the flesh and the soul when she ‘gazed down into [Angelica’s] face earnestly; as if she would penetrate the veil of flesh that baffled her when she tried to see clearly the soul of which Angelica occasionally gave her some glimpse’ (2007 II: 184). Lady Fulda’s comments are reminiscent of Ideala’s suggestion that she might be able to see Lorrimer’s soul behind his ‘horrid veil of flesh’ (Grand 2008: 99), and the repetition of this phrase implies Grand’s thorough entrenchment in the doctrine of Cartesian dualism. Although Fulda’s comments are treated with irony by the narrator, in that Angelica is shown to be a creature of immense feeling and ‘soul’, Grand (however satirically) deploys a system of logic which she elsewhere validates wholeheartedly. The opposite of an anorexic heroine, Angelica does however share the ‘qualified acceptance of the Victorian aesthetic of slenderness’ (Silver 2002: 82) demonstrated by her attitudes toward the ascetic body of the Tenor in the second volume of the novel.

After having asked the elderly Mr Kilroy to ‘marry me and let me do as I like’ (Grand 2007 I: 375), Angelica struggles to find an outlet for her artistic abilities, and embarks on an episode of cross-dressing in which she disguises herself as her brother Diavolo. In this disguise, she befriends a male chorister whose house she frequents late at night and whose company she enjoys as a consequence of her newly acquired status as ‘the Boy’. The tenor – whose name is later revelled to be Israfil – is described by Grand’s narrator as:

tall and striking in appearance; clean shaven, with delicate features, dark dreamy grey eyes, and a tumbled mop of golden hair, innocent of parting. He was well-dressed, but his clothes hung upon him loosely, as if he had grown thinner since they were made; his face was pale too, and pinched in appearance, and his movements were languid, giving him altogether the air of a man just recovering from a serious illness. That he was a gentleman no one would have doubted for a moment, nor would they have been surprised to hear that he was a great man (2007 II: 43).

Israfil’s feminine qualities are emphasised by this description: his features are ‘delicate’ his long hair is a golden ‘tumbled mop’, and his body is pale, weak, and lethargic. In a move which echoes Galbraith’s appraisal of Evadne’s ill body as exemplary of the ideal.

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202 In *Babs the Impossible* Grand would fictionalise the healthy New Woman type again. Her heroine Babs is strikingly similar to the young Angelica in *The Heavenly Twins*. The insatiable and vigorous Babs is regularly accused of being ‘soulless’ due to her uncontrollable appetite for both food and misbehaviour, with Grand once again conflating notions of spirituality or a lack thereof, with body type.

203 In the Islamic tradition Israfil is an archangel, who heralds the coming of the day of resurrection by blowing his trumpet from a holy rock in Jerusalem.
Victorian woman as passive, fragile, and ailing, Grand’s narrator endorses the sick and thin body, attaching to it symptoms which connote illness and greatness in equal measure. It is not merely Israfil’s beautiful face or voice which inspires the approval of all those he meets, but also his physical frailty. It is his very bodily weakness through which Grand communicates his inner strength and goodness, while his acts of self-denial reflect his ascetic tendencies.

The novel reveals that Israfil’s long illness and eventual death are exacerbated by self-starvation, which is described as a direct consequence of his saintly and charitable acts. We are told that ‘the malady had been rendered hopeless from the first by his weakness for want of food’ and that ‘he gave too much away’ (2007 II: 214). After his death, Angelica realises that Israfil has sacrificed his own food to be able to appease her ferocious nightly appetite as ‘the Boy’, and has starved himself as a result. Israfil’s thin body and languorous movements produce the effect of his having emerged triumphant from a battle within, and he is a Christ-like figure, trialled and tortured, spiritually victorious yet doomed to a self-sacrificial death. Israfil is shown to appreciate Angelica’s beauty when he sees her dressed as herself while at church, yet his lack of sexual interest in her is underscored by his appreciation of her spiritual appearance; her angelic good looks and feminine compliance. His vocation as a chorister, a form of employment well suited to a man so physically unrobust, further suggests a sense of gender ambiguity, since employment in the masculine world of work is impossible for him. Grand’s feminisation of a male character through the vocation of singing draws upon a long tradition of gender androgyny associated with male singers. The Dean of Morningquest tells Israfil ‘you are an opera singer’ (2007 II: 47) and a rumour is spread in the village that the tenor’s mother ‘had been an Opera singer’ (2007 II: 49), assertions which Israfil fails to deny. In Simon Richter’s work on the body of the eunuch in classical aesthetics, the feminised bodies of the castrati operatic singers are aligned with the crucified body of Jesus Christ. Richter notes the similarities in the cross shaped space which connotes the absence of genitalia above the buttocks of the eunuch in classical artworks, and the images of crucifixion found in medieval paintings (1992: 58).

Observing that ‘in painting or sculpture, the crucifixion and the pieta insist in their representation on the ponderous presence of the body’, (1992: 58) Richter argues that the

204 See Byrne (2010) for an analysis of the ways in which the wasting body was valorised in Victorian literary and visual culture.
205 The castrati reached their height of fame and popularity during the eighteenth century opera, although here is evidence that castrati had been involved in musical production since the classical period. See Scholz (2001).
body of the suffering Christ reflects an iconographic re-telling of ‘castration’ – of the body in pain, curiously present yet absent in ways similarly represented by the classical (and later operatic) figure of the eunuch. Thus, I would argue that Israfil’s feminisation is achieved through parallels made by Grand between his own experience and that of Christ, a Christ which the first chapter of this thesis has shown to be an ambiguously gendered figure.

Israfil’s saintly and angelic qualities correspond to his profession as a chorister in the Cathedral choir, but also to Victorian ideas about the value and beauty of the dying body. As Elisabeth Bronfen has shown, the dying body in Victorian art and fiction became a popular Romantic trope, which demonstrated the period’s pervasive and highly complex attitudes towards art, femininity, and mourning. Grand also conflates these concepts in her descriptions of the Tenor, whose face ‘was haggard and drawn by this time, and there were great black circles round his sunken eyes, but the expression of strength and sweetness had been intensified if anything, and he never looked more beautiful than then’ (2007 II: 207). Although Bronfen’s work largely examines the dying female body as object of poetic admiration and somatic appropriation, it does point to an idealisation of the same feminine traits attributed by Grand to the dying chorister. Writing of the myth of the Virgin Mary’s death, in which her body is said to have disappeared before burial, Bronfen notes that the Virgin:

functions as an epitome of timeless, of undifferentiated, immortal beauty and bliss, as an allegory for the defeat of death, and the promise of eternal life, precisely because in her mythic construction the materiality or body is missing from the start (1992: 68).

Like the androgynous Christ and the incorporeal Virgin, Israfil represents the epitome of Victorian values of self-sacrifice and self-denial. It is precisely his lack of embodiment, the separation of gender, sexuality, and flesh from his soul through which Israfil is able to do what the anorexic heroines of Grand’s fiction cannot – he transcends his human form and gains access to the spiritual world whilst alive, and in death. For Grand’s Israfil, illness, starvation and eventually death, are rendered beautiful by virtue of the femininity associated with each. Grand’s feminisation and deification of Israfil, as well as her idealisation of his food-refusing behaviour further demonstrates her approval of both the Victorian thin ideal, and the anorexic logic of Western patriarchal philosophy. Grand

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206 See Bronfen (1992) and Byrne (2010) for discussion of the Victorian obsession with the dying body.
inverts the traditional novelistic figure of the female anorectic by having her male character starve parallel to her hungry and satisfied New Woman heroine. While ostensibly promoting the healthy, hungry New Woman type, this inversion reflects poorly on Angelica, who is trained by Israfil’s death into conduct more befitting her class and gender. Although he is technically male, Israfil, like Evadne is beatified by his weak and thin form, his feminine frailty and his bravery in the face of self-sacrifice. Yet it is only through Israfil’s feminisation that this can be achieved, and while Grand had the opportunity to refute the gendered logic of self-starvation by representing a typically masculine and heterosexual male anorectic, she chooses not to. In narrating the starving male body within the limiting paradigm of womanly beauty and submission, Grand only furthers the patriarchal and epistemophilic ideologies by which Evadne must be taught to renounce intellectual and political selfhood, and by which Ideala must deny the desires of her flesh, sacrificing it instead to others.

Published four years after *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand’s *The Beth Book* is a semi-autobiographical account of a woman of genius whose abilities develop parallel to her self-starvation throughout her journey to adulthood. Beth Caldwell begins, like Angelica Ilverthorpe, as a healthy hungry child of the kind Grand wrote about in her 1894 essay. Her relationship with food is made central to the text from the outset and although this relationship is different to those explored in her two previous novels it is arguably in this text that Grand’s valorisation of the starving body reaches its climax. As Abigail Dennis has proposed in her article on *The Beth Book* ‘at its most fundamental level, the text constitutes an allegorical diegesis on the subjection of fin-de-siècle female appetites’ (2007: 19). Like Dennis I read the heroine’s management of her appetite as concomitant with Victorian notions of romantic reward for feminine self-sacrifice, but I also suggest that it is not only self-sacrifice but also the passive aggression of anorexic logic through which Beth’s ‘happy ending’ is achieved. As in her earlier novels, Grand sanctions the thin body and critiques its overweight counterpart through characters which reflect her views on consumption and masculine greed which this chapter has established. Thus Beth’s thin Aunt Victoria represents the morally-superior, self-sacrificing angel, and her obese Uncle James her spurious and corrupted equivalent. Beth is a hungry child who is ‘greedy for pudding’ (Grand 1980: 103) yet who associates food with unpleasant feelings. In the novel there are ‘many circumstances which [are] recalled by the taste of food’ yet ‘all these associations of ideas [were] disagreeable. [Beth] had not a single pleasant one in
connection with food’ (1980: 17-18). Beth grows up learning to quiet the desires of her body, as she is taught to silence her growing intellect and insatiable appetite for adventure.

Like the mothers of Grand’s Evadne Frayling, and Caird’s Viola Dendraith, Mrs Caldwell is unhappily married and projects her ideology of self-sacrifice onto her daughter, who is encouraged to painfully swallow the restrictions of femininity while simultaneously denying her own hunger. As in Grand’s other novels the Cartesian body/soul paradigm continues to be deployed, as the narrator refers to Beth’s body as a ‘case of clay’ from which her ‘pure spirit’ might be ‘released’ (1980: 283), signalling Grand’s unwavering acceptance of this ideology. The difficulty of women’s position as at once examples of angelic, domestic disinterestedness, yet incapable of circumventing their fleshly desires or biological imperatives, is embodied by Beth’s characterisation as a woman of genius. Though Beth develops into a woman of power, influence and magnetism, Grand resolves her novel by placing Beth in a normative heterosexual relationship with Alfred Brock – a man for whose love she sacrifices her body.

Like Ideala and Evadne, Beth’s starving body becomes a site of male eroticisation and exchange, when her portrait is shown to Brock by the artist Gresham Powell. Entitled ‘A Study in Starvation’ (1980: 513), the portrait is painted without Beth’s knowledge, at the most vulnerable and desperate stage of her self-denial, when she is forced to sell her hair. Powell is described as being ‘moved by her suffering and gentleness’ (1980: 514), and it is Beth’s beauty as well as her pain which inspire first his observation, and then his portrait. Like the heroine’s in Grand’s earlier novels, Beth’s thin body is subject to the proprietary male gaze, in which she becomes an object of scopic desire. The epistemophilic project, the desire to possess the female body as represented by the male gaze, is central to all three of Grand’s ‘anorexic’ novels; this indicates her understanding of its centrality in narrating the damaged body for public consumption. Grand critiques the images of her heroines as viewed through the masculine frameworks which designate them as ‘to be looked at, denuded [and] unveiled’ (Brooks 1993: 96). She suggests her disapproval of Powell’s painting of Beth, by having him appraise his subject coldly and dispassionately despite his claim of having been moved by her suffering. Powell only sees Beth’s ‘interesting face’ (1980: 13) and ‘pretty hair’ (1980: 514), yet the reader is party to her emaciated form and the self-denial which leads her to offer up a part of her body in a synecdoche of masculine consumption. The women depicted in the Pre-Raphaelite art which has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, were painted with abundant and flowing locks which
suggested their sexuality and desirability. However, Beth resists objectification as a female stereotype by cutting her hair off. In an act which is revolutionary by way of its refusal of the identities offered to women in Victorian art, yet submissive in its commitment to self-sacrifice, Beth attempts to transcend the boundaries of the artist’s portrait yet to a certain extent only strengthens its frame.

Although *The Beth Book* has a lot in common with its predecessors, there are points at which it departs from *Ideala* and *The Heavenly Twins*, both in its treatment of self-starvation and its fictionalisation of female self-sacrifice. Unlike Ideala and Evadne, Beth’s privations are not deliberate refusals of her bodiliness, but are for the benefit of those around her. Just as she has been taught by her mother to revoke her claim to the inheritance left by her Aunt so that her brother can be educated (1980: 223), Beth eats less so that her family might eat more. As a result she becomes ‘torpid from excessive self-denial’ (1980: 214) but her hunger for food is continually referenced. Unlike Ideala and Evadne whose respective hyperactivity reflects the observations made by the Victorian medical establishment about anorexic patients, Beth is rendered languorous by her starvation. Whilst nursing Brock back to health, and spending all she has on food for his treatment Beth ‘used to be so hungry sometimes that she hurried past the provision shops when she had to go out, lest she should not be able to resist the temptation to go in and buy food for herself’ (1980: 506). Beth is constantly tempted, because her need to abnegate the desires of her flesh lies not in the pursuit of masculine achievement of spiritual harmony, but in the survival of those she feels she must protect. The self-sacrifice she endures aligns Beth, more than either of Grand’s previous New Women with traditional Victorian ideals of passivity, domestication, and maternal care. Unlike Ideala or Evadne, Beth emerges from her self-starvation with the promise of sexual and emotional fulfilment in her relationship with Brock, the man for whom she has almost died of hunger. Although her body is starved, the ending of Grand’s novel – which sees Brock advancing to meet an emancipated Beth on horseback in the pose of a Romance hero, hints at the potential fulfilment of Beth’s appetites: sexual, maternal, and gustatory. Grand’s most hungry yet most self-starving heroine is rewarded for her choice to feed Brock whilst denying herself, and this betrays the complex mixture of subversion and traditionalism at the heart of the text and indeed Grand’s trilogy.

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207 See Ofek (2009), who discusses the ways in which women’s hair symbolised their sexuality in Victorian art and literature.
Beth’s movement from appetite to a denial of bodily desires, marks both her transition to adulthood, and to the role of domestic angel, a position which neither of Grand’s other ‘anorexic’ heroines manages to fulfil adequately. Ideala becomes a political activist, abandoning her hopes for motherhood, and Evadne becomes a mother, only to be atrophied by entrenchment within the domestic sphere, wasting her once-ferocious intellect and eschewing life’s pleasures.\footnote{208} The ending of The Beth Book posits that only a perfect balance between public activity and anorexic self-sacrifice can truly fulfil the New Woman heroine, reflecting both Grand’s conservatism and subscription to anorexic logic.

In all three texts which comprise the Morningquest trilogy, New Woman ‘anorexia’ is portrayed as both an unfortunate result of phallocentric ideology, and as a potentially useful strategy to transcend the limits of Victorian femininity. However, it is through the application of such a strategy that Grand’s heroines reinforce the patriarchal epistemophilic project in which women’s bodies figure as objects ‘to be looked at, denuded, unveiled’ (Brooks 1993: 96). As rewritings of the marriage plot, all three texts reinforce the importance of womanly self-sacrifice, and assimilate the heroine into a domestic world in which she is free to try and undertake the roles which are biologically ascribed to her. If as Brooks suggests, the signs made on the body signify its passage into narrative, then the stories told by these female bodies are troublingly counter-productive in the context of Grand’s ‘feminist’ aims. The sensational New Woman novel aspired to depict the fatal consequences of the separate sphere ideology and gender double-standards which underpinned Victorian society. In doing so, writers like Grand attempted a breakdown of the boundaries between public and private, through graphic depictions of starving female bodies. However, these representations were shrouded in a discourse equally damaging to women because they relied too heavily upon classical and patriarchal constructions of gender which viewed the female body as fleshly and desiring, yet also lauded it as the ultimate vessel of purity. As Seltzer has shown, the wound culture of the Fin de Siècle provided the conditions within which previously covert, private bodies entered into cultural discourse, bodies which in Grand’s work are painfully emaciated and displayed for the reading public. However, novels like Grand’s adopted masculine forms which may have shaped and ultimately limited their ability to narrate the starving body outside of the paradigm of anorexic logic or male-oriented visual economies such as medicine,

\footnote{208} It is worth noting that Evadne’s suicide is also a rejection of motherhood, since she is heavily pregnant at the time she tries to poison herself.
psychology, art and literature. In choosing to display her starving heroines through the triple-decker realist novel, Grand ironically left herself no space in which to subvert traditional ideologies which viewed the female body as an object for masculine eroticisation and consumption. The bodies of her heroines are eventually consumed by the formal limitations of realism, which require either their assimilation into the society of which they are a part, or their complete destruction. In the subsequent two chapters, I show how the traditionally masculine narrative form of lyric poetry, as well as emergent new forms of writing such as the short story, provided a new canvas upon which New Women writers could paint images of self-sacrificing bodies in ways which challenged those as represented by Grand’s novels. I also demonstrate a direct correlation between the increasingly experimental and non-traditional forms of New Woman writing which emerged between 1880 and 1900, and the progressively violent images of self-harm contained within. However, the poems and short stories which will be explored in my final two chapters, did not always represent an extreme thematic or ideological departure from novels like Grand’s, despite their formal radicalism.
Deconstructing the Drunkard’s Path: Alcoholic Bodies in New Woman Fiction

Alcoholism and Addiction Theory

As both cultural commentators and writers of fiction have noted, the twenty-first century has become addicted to addictions, to accounting for myriad human experiences through theoretical concepts of compulsion and dependence. Like the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa, these concepts evolved out of late-nineteenth-century psychological and social research. In his discussion of twenty-first century America’s pathological need to define behaviour as obsessive, Timothy Melley points out that addiction is a discourse ‘governed by a refusal to abandon the assumptions of possessive individualism [...]’. The apparent existence of multifarious, powerful addictive threats shores up and revivifies the embattled national fantasy of individual autonomy (2002: 40). What Melley shows is, that in the process of propagating ideals of individuality and self-government, Western society’s recourse to addiction as a way of explaining an increasing number of previously normative behaviours, produces a paradox. The assertion that addiction is both normal by its sheer frequency and inherently abnormal and dangerous, hints at the impossibility of any project to separate addictive acts from those which are the product of free will, resulting in the disintegration of distinctions between the two. For literary critics like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick the twenty-first century’s ‘addiction to addictions’, demonstrates that ‘the assertion of will itself has come to appear addictive’ (1994: 129) and is evidence of a modern epidemic of insufficient free will. This crisis of free will is a symptom of post-industrial life, in which the reproducibility of commodities, machines, and persons contributes to an erosion of self-determination, situating self-destructive acts as a typical response. This chapter examines how New Woman writers engaged with discourses that posited women’s bodies as commodities to be watched, and how they responded to criticisms about their demands for self-determination.

Occupying a well-established, yet transitory, space in the scientific and social debates of the past two centuries, alcoholism has now come to be viewed as paradigmatic of the postmodern condition. However, unlike shopaholism, workaholism, relationship addiction,

209 See David Foster-Wallace’s Infinite Jest (1996) for a fictional account of twentieth-century society’s addiction to addiction. Also see Anne Wilson Schaef’s When Society Becomes an Addict (1987) which discusses the pervasive culture of addiction in post-industrial society.
sexual compulsivity, and co-dependency, alcoholism has been of critical interest to the disciplines of medicine and psychology, long before the advent of consumerism or indeed modernity itself (Gately 2009: 2-3). As a discourse, the disease of addiction was widely circulated at a time of unprecedented commercial expansion in Britain and America, allowing medical and social commentators to parallel mass production and consumption with substance misuse or dependence. By drawing an ‘explicit analogy between the excesses of the addict and the everyday experience of the consumer’ (Margolis 2002: 21), addiction was made intelligible, during the late-nineteenth century, to those struggling to contain their excessive desires, and those who treated them.

As I have shown in the introduction to this thesis, machine culture represented, and indeed facilitated, the coming together of the human body with the machine, and the potential for atrocity inherent in the coupling of these previously disparate forms. For Seltzer, the relationship between modernity, consumerism and addiction in machine culture is complicated by what he views as the pathologisation of the ‘living dead subject’ (1998: 90). As the inhabitant of the pathological public sphere, the individuality and agency of the living dead subject are under constant threat by his or her own reproducibility as both consumer and commodity. Contemporary society’s attempt to theorise behaviour through addiction, is seen by Seltzer (like Melley) as a contradiction, as is any attempt to juxtapose normality and abnormality, compulsion and free will. Seltzer explains that ‘the abnormal normality of the addict, somehow more sane than the people around him, makes addiction attribution and the autonomy of insecure agency in machine culture simply two ways of saying the same thing’ (1998: 91). Seltzer complicates the relationship between addiction and consumerism explicitly as ‘forms of self-production in machine-culture tied to both compulsive repetition and compulsive sexual violence’ (1998 91); he nevertheless imagines the relationship (however violent and sexual) as one of repetitive production and economic exchange.

As part of a social system of ‘compulsive repetition and compulsive sexual violence’ (1998: 91), alcoholism featured as one of a collection of self-damaging practices in New Woman writing, at a critical juncture during which notions of selfhood, free will, and self-

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210 Sedgwick gives shopaholism, workaholism, relationship addiction, and sexual compulsivity as examples of addictions in *Tendencies* (1993). The consumption of alcohol can be traced to a number of ancient civilisations (see Gately 2009 and Mann et al 2000) as well as pre-Modern European cultures (see Gammon 2008).

211 See Levine’s discussion of alcoholism and consumerism in his article ‘The Discovery of Addiction’ (1978).
determination were in flux. The social and religious uncertainties of the Fin de Siècle, created an opening for the female alcoholic body to emerge as a cultural signifier, since medical and political understandings of the body were equally unstable. Despite this, and unlike anorexia, which the twentieth-century media highlights as dangerous or life-threatening, alcohol abuse occupies an unsteady, and at times contradictory, space on the spectrum of behaviours with which this thesis is concerned, in that it is to a certain extent a culturally acceptable form of self-harm.212

According to DSMV, alcohol abuse meets the criteria for ‘substance use disorder’ which is defined as ‘a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress’ (2013: 487-488). This distress is characterised by: tolerance, withdrawal, the need to consume larger amounts over increasingly shorter periods, excessive time spent in obtaining the substance, a reduction of social activities in favour of consuming the substance, and continued use despite the exacerbation of persistent physical or psychological problems (2013: 487-488). Like the clinical definition of anorexia nervosa discussed in the previous chapter, the DSM criteria relating to alcoholism have recently been changed. Previous guidelines emphasised the disruption to the patient’s family life, caused by ‘substance abuse’ (1994: 176) and the legal and medical impact of the disorder.213 DSMIV (1994) defined alcoholism ‘in terms of its impact on an individual and on related systems such as work performance and loss of work […] the medical cost of treating alcohol abuse […], of alcohol related violence and family deterioration’ (Hedblom 2007: 26). Such a perspective accounted for alcohol abuse by its effects rather than its psychological causes; it saw alcoholism as a disease which disrupts the capitalist mechanisms of twentieth-century life and which pressures the systems put in place to maintain economic stability. This perspective worked on the assumption that the authority of these institutions was irreproachable, an authority which the New Woman writer

212 In western contexts the consumption (and over consumption) of alcohol functions variously as: a rite of passage, a celebration, and an understandable response to grief or trauma. Clinicians continue to disagree on where precisely the parameters of alcohol abuse can be set, especially since factors particular to certain societies or social groups make delineating these boundaries almost impossible. See Wilson (2005) for discussion of differences in culturally acceptable drinking behaviours dependent on time, place, class, ethnicity and nation.

213 As a category cited in the DSMIV (1994) ‘substance misuse’ has been subsumed alongside ‘substance dependency’ under the new heading ‘substance use disorder’ in DSMV (2013). The DSMIV specifically mentions ‘failure to fulfil major role obligations at work, school, or home e.g. repeated absences or poor work performance related to substance use; substance-related absences, suspensions, or expulsions from school; neglect of children or household (1994: 181-183). These criteria have been removed from both the DSMIV-TR (2000) and the DSMV (2013).
challenged, and which twenty-first-century psychiatry has acknowledged to have been problematic.\footnote{DSMV (2013) downplays the social effects of alcoholism, focussing more on the patient’s unsuccessful attempts to recover, and the psychological problems which attend and are exacerbated by substance dependency. Similarly, the shift in the definition of anorexia nervosa in DSMV downplays the active or wilful components of the disorder (the ‘refusal’ to maintain body weight) which Victorian doctors emphasised and which remain in the Text Revision (2000) of DSMIV. The change in the criteria with regard to alcoholism minimises the emphasis placed on the disruption caused to society by the alcoholic, and instead focusses on causes rather than effects. These shifts reflect a change in the culture of psychiatric medicine (in which the patient has been blamed for their disorder and its consequent effects) which increasingly seeks to position mental health problems as conditions which are exacerbated by social factors largely beyond the patient’s control.}

Because of its cultural acceptability, alcoholism is rarely conceived of as self-harm outside of the clinical environment. However, according to Maggie Turp, the contemporary characterisation of self-harm is ‘too narrow in its scope’, and ‘self-harming tendencies find expression in many different ways, ranging from the highly dramatic, to the virtually invisible’ (2002: 9). Similarly, a number of cultural critics have recognised that alcoholism operates as part of a range of self-harming activities which are often also adopted by those who injure themselves in more visual or painful ways.\footnote{See also Favazza (2001) on culturally sanctioned self-harm and Sutton (2007) on the use of self-harm as a coping strategy in clinical psychotherapy. Also see Aldridge et al (2007) for discussion of the ways in which alcohol forms a part of the experience of youth in Britain, in which other more violent acts also feature.}

Indeed, current National Health Service advice lists ‘deliberate misuse of alcohol’ (NHS Choices: Your Health, Your Choices) along with anorexia, poisoning, and cutting or burning the skin, as examples of self-harming behaviours. This perspective pathologises excessive drinking as a form of self-inflicted harm, by which the subject is compelled towards self-destruction through practices which respond to corresponding psychological trauma.\footnote{Viewing alcoholism as part of a broad spectrum of self-injurious practices has its limitations if we consider where this definition might end. For example, enjoying rich food and participating in little exercise may be unhealthy, but since these activities are widespread and culturally-sanctioned, as a society we might not necessarily consider them as examples of self-harm.}

For the purpose of this chapter it is useful to consider excessive drinking as a pathology; it can be read as a practice deployed by the ‘living dead subject’ in an attempt to assert free will, or to escape the repetitive mundanity of machine culture in which the body forms a cog in the wider capitalist and patriarchal machine. I take as my point of departure the notion that alcoholism might be read as a form of self-harm, and that acts of alcoholic self-harm are tied implicitly to the social and economic arrangements of Victorian machine culture. In light of women’s traumatic experience as subordinate to the mechanisms of late-Victorian economic and social systems, I consider that New Woman writing about alcoholism aims, at the surface level, to represent the self-destructive drives of female experience under...
patriarchy. These drives are represented by male and female writers alike, as the product of the male-oriented economic and social arrangements of the nineteenth century. However, I show that New Woman writing dealt with the figure of the female alcoholic very differently from the texts in which she had featured previously. In the texts by the New Woman which this chapter examines, the iconography and organising structures of Christianity already examined in my first chapter, emerge as both a central cause, and symbolic locus of, women’s alcoholism. I examine the fictionalisation of female alcoholism at a point in history when old conceptions of madness and excess began to give way to new theories of disease and addiction, and experimental literatures began to compete with more traditional forms of writing. I explore the ways in which these uneasy transitions are highlighted and complicated by representations of alcoholism which are linked to pseudo-religious ideologies and images, and I directly link alcohol abuse to a subversive ‘feminist’ dialectic of the body in New Woman fiction. I also suggest that the differences in the treatment of the female alcoholic by the Victorian novel and the New Woman short story, highlight the growing potential for representing violent female self-harm in the short story of the Fin de Siècle. In doing so, I position the female alcoholic as a problematic emblem of modernity, feminist agitation, and wound culture, a figure through which conflicting notions of the body and the self are played out.

**Alcoholism in Victorian Britain**

Unlike drug use, which was increasingly criminalised throughout the nineteenth century in Britain, alcohol and the spaces in which it was consumed, were subject to forms of governance and regulation which separated them from later-emerging narratives of addiction (Harrison: 1994). Alcohol was relatively inexpensive and since clean water was at a premium, it was widely consumed as a more sanitary alternative amongst the poorer classes. Outbreaks of cholera had made water supplies unsafe in a number of Victorian cities and among the poor it became widely accepted that alcohol could prevent (if not cure) the disease (Gilbert 2008: 51). The result was that it was common for most working-class Victorians to consume lower concentrations of alcohol (in beer for instance) on a regular basis.\(^{217}\) Since the concept of alcoholism as a disease would not be fully formulated

\(^{217}\) A clear distinction between acceptable types of alcohol like beer, and more concentrated and therefore dangerous spirits, had been emblamatised by the popular British artist William Hogarth in the previous century. In his 1751 print entitled *Gin Lane*, Hogarth depicts scenes of drunkenness, starvation, usury, and child neglect among the poor. Conversely, his *Beer Street* print of the same year connotes the prosperity and
until the early-twentieth century, excessive drinking was subject to ethical rather than clinical debate, as part of a wider discourse about the perceived moral failings of a Victorian society increasingly estranged from conventional religion.\textsuperscript{218} Indeed, alcohol itself would not be classified as a drug in Britain until the mid-twentieth century, and its socio-economic impact was largely downplayed by the mid-Victorian establishment.\textsuperscript{219} Towards the end of the nineteenth century, developments in medicine and the sciences of psychology and neurology paved the way for new theories of addiction which continue to underpin twenty-first-century understandings of alcohol abuse and treatment.\textsuperscript{220} Indeed, the Fin de Siècle witnessed wide-reaching socio-cultural developments which shifted the way in which alcoholism was perceived and the way in which the alcoholic (and in particular the female alcoholic) was figured as both a social problem and a fictional construct. In his work on class in late-Victorian Britain, Kevin Swafford reminds us that ‘in almost all of the major realist representations of the working class in the nineteenth century, there is at least one working-class character that is “sodden with drink” [… ]’ (2007: 57). Fictional representations of alcoholism responded to deep class anxieties which discursively imagined the poor as at once both pitiable and disgusting; as worthy of sympathy but ultimately as ‘other’ in relation to the middle-class readership for whom the texts were intended. Whether dulling the pangs of hunger or escaping the twin realities of grinding poverty and hard labour, the body of the working-class alcoholic featured prominently in a variety of popular novels throughout the century, eliciting at times both compassion and revulsion.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{218} Alcoholism began to be formulated as a disease following the failure of American prohibition (1920-1933) and the establishment of Alcoholics Anonymous in the late 1930s. Prohibition had attempted to ban the consumption of alcohol but produced little change in rates of alcoholism. It was not until the 1950s that the World Health Organization recognised the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal as evidence that alcohol was an addictive substance. See Edwards (1990) for further discussion.

\textsuperscript{219} Similarly, the recreational use of opium was also downplayed by Victorian authorities. The sale or prescription of opium for non-medical use was prohibited in Britain during the nineteenth century, and was further limited by the Rolleston Act of 1926, which passed control of opium prescription from pharmacists to doctors. The Victorian medical establishment tended to view over-dependency on opium as a medical problem to be treated with sympathy, rather than as an indulgence of the wealthy. See Thomas De Quincey’s \textit{Confessions of an English Opium Eater} (1821), which features an autobiographical account of De Quincey’s experiences of opium ‘addiction’ and which was severely criticised for its glamorisation of opium use.

\textsuperscript{220} See Stiles (2007) for discussion of Victorian neurology in relation to discourses of addiction.

\textsuperscript{221} John Barton in Gaskell’s \textit{Mary Barton} (1848) Mr Dolls in Dickens’ \textit{Our Mutual Friend} (1865), and Mr Dagley and Mr Raffles in George Eliot’s \textit{Middlemarch} (1872) are depicted as ‘sodden with drink’ at various moments in these novels.
The expansion of the Victorian middle class, as well as the overpopulation of urban centres and the pursuant poverty and criminality which accompanied it, led to the predominant perception of drunkenness as a social evil tied specifically to class. In ‘The Bitter Cry of Outcast London’ (1883) Andrew Mearns laments that ‘the misery and sin caused by drink in these districts have often been told, but the horrors can never be set forth either by pen or artist’s pencil’ (2002: 30).\(^{222}\) Mearns directly equates excessive alcohol consumption with a range of equally horrific activities, whose very articulation would offend his reader. In demonstrating the depths of wretchedness and sin into which the drinkers, brothel-keepers, prostitutes, and child-workers of the slums had slipped, Mearns and others like him drew attention to the susceptibility of the poor body to self-destructive practices such as heavy drinking.\(^{223}\) It was not that aristocrats and the upwardly mobile did not get drunk, but that their intoxication could be kept private behind the closed doors of the home or the theatre, the restaurant or the gentleman’s club. The public nature of working-class intoxication, made it the focus of both middle-class disapprobation \textit{and} philanthropy; movements for both temperance and teetotalism became popular strategies for attempting to elevate the condition of the poor.\(^{224}\) Deploying an Arnoldian rhetoric which sought the rehabilitation of the working classes through exposure to middle-class culture and morality, temperance ultimately attempted to govern the manners and behaviour of the unruly poor.\(^{225}\) Christianity was a central component of the temperance agenda, and its

\(^{222}\) Mearns considers alcoholism under a sub-heading entitled ‘Immorality’ along with the related problems of: a lack of legal marriage, incest, and prostitution. Though designed to elicit sympathy by shocking his middle-class readership, commentary like Mearns’s explicitly associates alcoholism with the visceral and visual problem of the inherently corrupt poor.

\(^{223}\) Also see William Booth’s ‘In Darkest England and the Way Out’ (1890) which deploys a similar strategy to demonise the poor as corruptible and fallen, but does so through a specifically colonial rhetoric of otherness.

\(^{224}\) Although teetotalism was predominantly popular during the 1830s and 1840s, its ties to working-class political movements such as Chartism, demonstrate its significance as a way of framing the working class body at a time of rapid urban expansion and socio-economic disenfranchisement. Offering alternatives to the public house, which included socialist meetings, lectures and ‘rational recreation’, temperance and teetotalism provided a strategy by which the working man might better his lot. Through limiting, and eventually abstaining from alcoholic consumption the drunkard could regain his place and his voice in society by re-focussing his energies and finances on the both his family and on political activism (Zieger 2002: 10).

\(^{225}\) Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was a British poet and cultural critic. His \textit{Culture and Anarchy} (published 1867-1868 in the \textit{Cornhill Magazine}) advocated high culture as a means to eliminate class boundaries. He argued that culture ‘seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light’ (Arnold 2009: 5). Temperance worked on the understanding that anyone who consumed excessive quantities of alcohol would be subject to degradation of health and morality, and failed to recognise that certain individuals were more susceptible to these problems than others (Mann et al 2000: 10). With strong links to American Evangelicalism in its early conception, British and Anglican versions of temperance were linked to other societies for the prevention of vice amongst the poor which were religious in nature.
importance was underscored by both the prominence of its religious leaders, and the use of hymns and Christian tracts in the promotion of its ideas.\textsuperscript{226}

In a recent article, Rob Breton has described how the Chartist promotion of abstinence ‘minimi[s]es or marginali[s]es the problem of drink so as to emphasise broader social evils, questioning the social usefulness of blaming alcohol for working class misery’ (2013: 140). Hence Chartist tales of temperance and teetotalism offered a challenge to the formulaic ‘Drunkard’s Path’ in which increasing dependence on alcohol lead in linear fashion to moral and physical degeneration and eventually death. Breton shows how these narratives focussed instead on the possibilities of recovery outside of the bourgeois certainties of decline and death which were reinforced by scientific naturalism.\textsuperscript{227} Unlike temperance, which advocated the use of alcohol in moderation and privileged middle-class social etiquette, teetotalism positioned alcohol as entirely damaging. Although socialist in its conception, teetotalism in particular became unavoidably part of the wider project of delineating and enforcing class hierarchies which helped to alienate and other the working class body as fundamentally corruptible and susceptible to deviance. Neither temperance nor teetotalism would survive past the late-nineteenth century, owing in part to the wealth of socialist critique which viewed their agendas as hypocritically enforced upon the poor by those most to blame for their intolerable conditions. In ‘The Condition of the Working Class in England’ (1844) Engels explains this process as the ‘social murder’ of the working class, who are:

\begin{quote}
    deprived of all enjoyments except that of sexual indulgence and drunkenness, are worked every day to the point of complete exhaustion of their mental and physical energies, and are thus constantly spurred on to the maddest excess in the only two enjoyments at their command (2009: 109).
\end{quote}

In its search for recognition and for bodily experience; in order to assert its own sense of worth and existence, Engels argues that the poor body is forced to consume to excess. Like the New Woman anorectic, who refused to be defined by her body, the alcoholic body also represented a challenge (albeit a very different one) to patriarchal order.

\textsuperscript{226} The American prohibitionist movement was backed by a number of Christian denominations, and the Temperance Movement in Britain mirrored this; with Anglican, Quaker, Unitarian, and (much later) Catholic support. See Nicholls (2009) and Harrison (1994: 225-226) both of whom discuss the religious roots of the temperance movement and the other societies for ‘reforming’ the poor which were backed by Christian churches. Temperance drew on biblical references to the immorality of excessive drinking, see: Corinthians (6: 9-10) and (5:11), Ephesians (5: 18-20), Proverbs (31:4) and (23: 20-21), Isaiah (5:11) and (28: 1-29) for examples; there are numerous others throughout the Bible. Also see Nott (1831) for a Christian plea for temperance in which alcoholism is equated with original sin.

\textsuperscript{227} Naturalism asserted the hereditism and thus the certainty of the alcoholic’s decline and death.
The excessive corporeality of the drunken working-class body was frequently fictionalised in the slum narratives of the late-nineteenth century. These texts are a particularly rich site for examination of attitudes towards gender, class and alcoholism; they exhibited paternalistic rejections of the paradigm of alcohol as social deviance, as well as naturalist depictions which tended to demonise the poor. Arthur Morrison’s 1897 novel *A Child of the Jago* narrativises Victorian strategies of regulation and control through the Benthamite panoptic observation of the poor in his fictional slum.228 In the Jago, abstinence from or even moderation in drinking is treated with the upmost suspicion, a fact confirmed by the narrator’s comments on his protagonist’s mother who ‘was an alien who had not entirely fallen in with Jago ways; she had soon grown sluttish and dirty, but she was never drunk [...]’ (2009: 22). In the Jago, cleanliness is discouraged, while drinking is held as a basic standard by which shared experience (largely misery and depravity) is maintained; thus a woman who does not drink represents a threat to the reciprocal fabric of such a community. Unlike even the working classes, who to a certain extent reflected and internalised bourgeois moral codes, the slum-dwellers of nineteenth-century fiction often inverted such codes by celebrating notions of degeneration and moral collapse.229

In *A Child of the Jago* and slum novels such as George Gissing’s *The Netherworld* (1889), alcoholism is depicted as a transmissible family trait, a predetermined and inescapable tendency bestowed upon the children of degenerates.230 The late-Victorian belief that alcoholism was a hereditary affliction meant that it became a staple example for degeneration theorists, of the way in which national vigour had been infiltrated by weakness. For example, in Émile Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877) both the heroine Gervaise and her husband Coupeau drink heavily and are increasingly unable to maintain their

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228 While critical of the prison-like structures through which the Jago and its inmates are constantly watched, Morrison suggests that the blame for the alcohol-fuelled violence of the Jago should be laid upon the individuals who comprise its near-totally dehumanised population. See Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975) for discussion of the panopticon as a method of observational control.

229 For example, in Gissing’s *The Netherworld* (1889) a social etiquette of viciousness and barbarism makes the ferocious Clem Peckover a fearsome woman whom ‘civilisation could bring no charge against’ (2008: 6). Clem’s scheming and violence make her one of the novel’s most successful (if eventually thwarted) characters, since she is largely feared and respected within her community. Gissing’s narrator notes of the slum that ‘Shooter's Gardens was the only kind of home that most of them knew or desired. The majority preferred it […] here was independence, that is to say, the liberty to be as vile as they pleased (2008: 74). As in Morrison’s Jago, the inhabitants of Shooter’s Gardens reverse the laws of orthodox morality, competing for space and place through acts of depravity and violence.

230 In *The Netherworld* Mrs Candy is a heavy drinker, and her husband is a violent bully. The sad fate of their daughter Pennyloaf is represented as the consequence of her poor parentage. Pennyloaf marries Bob Hewitt, who also drinks heavily and withholds money for food and medical care to enable him to drink to excess. In *A Child of the Jago* two families compete for superiority in the slum. The Rann and Leary families represent generations of violence and revenge, and often participate in drunken clashes on the streets.
(rather low) social standing or physical wellbeing. Their bodies are consumed by the filth of the Parisian slums, just as they incessantly and repetitively consume, and their daughter Anna grows up to become a heavy drinker and a prostitute.\textsuperscript{231} The novel exemplified nineteenth-century fiction’s engagement with pseudo-scientific theories about degeneracy and its transmission, as well as the culpability of both men and women for the taint of alcoholism where it appears as a lower-class vice.

Unlike the men and women of Zola’s novel, Morrison’s Jago or Gissing’s Netherworld, the middle-class drunkard was not so frequently or uncomplicatedly represented.\textsuperscript{232} Where narratives of middle-class or aristocratic alcoholism did appear, they were often heavily codified or ambiguously represented. Thomas L. Reed argues that the ‘transforming draught’ (2006: 38) which metamorphoses the respectable Jekyll into the murderous Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson’s \textit{Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde} (1886), is, at both the literal and figurative level, an addictive substance, suggesting that middle-class alcoholism was hidden within metaphor and ambiguity in Victorian fiction.\textsuperscript{233} The suggestion that the middle classes could be vulnerable to the alcoholic degeneracy of their working-class counterparts, challenged paternalistic and hierarchical notions that the poor could be influenced by the inherent morality of their social superiors.\textsuperscript{234} For example, the drinking, drug addiction and sexual degradation of the beautiful Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde’s 1890 novel \textit{The Picture of Dorian Gray} remains largely unconfirmed to all but the reader because of Dorian’s aristocratic grace and excellent manners.\textsuperscript{235} Dorian’s contemporaries hear ‘the most evil things against him’ (2008: 108), yet the text fails to articulate these

\begin{para}
\textsuperscript{231} Zola’s ‘Rougon Macquart’ series (in which \textit{L’Assommoir} featured) was controversial yet also widely read in Britain: \textit{L’Assommoir} had been ‘repeatedly denounced in the British press as immoral since 1877’ (King 1978: 168) and had been almost universally condemned as a typically ‘French’ novel with few redemptive qualities (Byrd 2006). It had been Zola’s greatest commercial success to date, selling over 100,000 copies in France by 1884 and making him extremely wealthy (J. Nelson 2007: 8). The book was translated into English in 1884 and removed from publication in 1888 until after 1895, when it was printed again and sold immensely well. See King (1978), for a variety of sales figures relating to the text.

\textsuperscript{232} See George Gissing’s \textit{The Netherworld} (1889) and Somerset Maugham’s \textit{Liza of Lambeth} (1897).

\textsuperscript{233} It is not as a professional doctor that Jekyll can assault and murder, but as the ugly, coarse and distinctly lower-class Mr Hyde. Reed sees Jekyll’s transformation into Hyde, not (as other critics have suggested) as a pre-figuring of multiple personality disorder, but as the experience of addiction and its consequent fragmentation of the self. See Hacking (1998) and Rose (1996), both of whom discuss Stevenson’s novel in the context of MPD.

\textsuperscript{234} Reed specifically compares Victorian songs about and illustrations of alcoholism to those found in the novel form, arguing that ‘the lurid sins of the tavern translated less successfully into the subtleties of high culture’ (2006: 64). He posits that it would have been impossible for Stevenson to directly depict Jekyll’s alcoholism.

\textsuperscript{235} Wilde’s novel was first published in 1890. An edited version in which certain ‘scandalous’ passages had been omitted, appeared in 1891.
\end{para}
evils fully. The main clue as to Dorian’s misuse of assorted substances is his painting, which betrays the ‘hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead’, the ‘course bloated hands’ and ‘misshapen body and failing limbs’ (2008: 109) of an addict. By the end of the nineteenth century alcoholism and addiction amongst the upper and middle classes continued to be represented in indistinct, indefinite or metaphorical ways, but, as in the case of Wilde’s novel, also in ways which challenged prevailing notions of degeneration as physically decipherable and thus merely an affliction of the poor, ugly, uneducated or overworked. The readings of New Woman fiction which this chapter offers, demonstrate the extent to which women writers confronted prevalent scientific theories about the female body and its hereditary and degenerative afflictions, as well as the religious ideologies which defined and constructed it. They also reveal a direct challenge to the Cartesian dualism which had, for centuries, been a staple tenet of Christianity, and which the heroines discussed in my previous chapter both undermine and reinforce. Unlike the ‘anorexic’ heroines of the New Woman novel who practise the art of self-elision, the female alcoholic instead asserts her corporeality through excessive consumption. This chapter will show how the drunken heroine of New Woman fiction demands to have her voice heard through acts of bodily display which challenge the strict gender dictates that governed separate sphere ideology. I also show how the texts which displayed the female drunk body as subject to self-harming impulses, failed to recognise that they operated within an epistemophilic tradition which limited the liberatory potential for self-harm as a resistive strategy.

**The Victorian Woman Drinker**

The inability to control one’s consumption of alcohol, was characterised by Victorian medical science using a variety of complex and unstable terms, which were largely drawn from research by clinicians working in various medical and psychiatric establishments in Europe. In France, Phillipe Pinel, Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, and Jean-Martin Charcot had respectively attempted to frame alcoholism using a number of theoretical models, all of which stemmed from the basic assumption that the alcoholic suffered from a

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236 The reader is told towards the end of the novel that Dorian frequents ‘the sordid room of the little ill-famed tavern’ (2008: 109) as well as a variety of opium dens and brothels (2008: 158-161), yet Wilde’s narrator gives no detail of what takes place at these locations.

237 So too do references to Dorian’s ‘hunger that grew more ravenous as he fed them’ (2008: 109), the ‘curious stories’ circulating about his involvement in ‘brawling with sailors in a low den’ (2008: 120) and the allusion to his mother’s portrait, in which she has ‘wine-dashed lips’ and wears a ‘bacchante dress’ (2008: 122).
form of mania. Mania described a mind disturbed by ‘mental exaltation, [...] excitation, hyperactivity, [and] symptoms such as visions and delusions’ (Clouston 1887: 138-160).

Unlike the popular Victorian diagnosis of melancholia which referred to patients who were merely depressed, mania was concomitant with lunacy, and was applied to those unable to control their impulses, to account for a range of psychological disorders which are now recognised as distinct illnesses. Although the term alcoholism could be found in medical dictionaries during the mid-century, Victorian definitions tended to focus on the long-term effects of heavy drinking on the body, rather than the cause of the disorder (Valverde 1998: 43). The clinical terminology used to describe alcoholic mania included; monomania, lunacy, dipsomania, oinomania and moral insanity (Valverde, 1998: 43), all of which were deployed in relation to alcohol abusers in complicated and contradictory ways. Such classifications were based on the essential belief that the inability to control one’s desires constituted a malady of the will which was the fundamental effect of alcoholism, and that this resulted from a form of psychological deviance which was hereditary in origin.

Nordau’s Degeneration critiqued the New Woman, because it viewed her intellectual development as dangerous to her physical strength, yet it also deployed the imagery of drunkenness in its wider critique of degeneracy. Explaining that ‘things as they are totter and plunge, as they are suffered to reel and fall, because man is weary’ (1993: 5-6) Nordau uses the language of intoxication. Nordau’s choice of lexis is significant in its ambiguity, and the suggestion of tottering, plunging, reeling, and falling appears to frame his later commentary on the ‘fin-de-siècle disposition’ (1993: 15). Nordau writes of alcoholism that:

[a] race that is regularly addicted, even without excess, to narcotics and stimulants in any form (such as fermented alcoholic drinks, opium, hashish, arsenic) [...]
begets degenerate descendants who, if they remain exposed to the same influences, rapidly descend to the lowest degree of degeneracy, to idiocy, to dwarfishness (1993: 34).

Nordau’s understanding of substance misuse as a formative factor in, and product of, emerging modernity, anticipates twentieth-century medicine and psychiatry, as well as literary critics like Seltzer who see the repetitive pathology of addiction as a product of Victorian machine culture. However, Nordau’s focus on the genetic inheritance of alcoholism as a feature of a more widespread weakening of the nation, severely limited his understanding of the more complicated social issues surrounding addiction which contemporary medicine now recognises.

Limiting theories of genetic inheritance were not only applied to the body of the drinker, but to any body which failed to conform to traditional Victorian social expectations or moral dictates. This was particularly true of women, whose multifarious deviances from normative patterns of behaviour became discursively intertwined regardless of their connection or lack thereof. Nineteenth-century attitudes towards the female alcoholic can be seen as the ultimate example of the ‘anorexic logic’ (Heywood 1996: 8) of Victorian middle-class social and religious values. Unlike the Victorian anorectic of the previous chapter, whose small size attested to her lack of autonomous needs and ability to maintain control over her body, the drunken woman represented the opposite. If the anorexic was, according to Heywood, enacting ‘the process that Western logic inscribes [...] the horror of the female flesh that is often the unconscious of discourse’ (1996: 8), then the alcoholic body represented the physical manifestation of that horror, the breakdown of womanly virtue and all consumptive restriction. This breakdown was rendered both socially and morally unacceptable, by way of traditional religion which (as my previous chapter has shown) discouraged the kind of desires which were typified by the fall of man through Eve’s consumption of fruit in the Garden of Eden. All the texts explored in this chapter represent the female alcoholic as inherently linked to the ideologies, organising structures, and imagery of Christianity. I have already explored the Christian act of Eucharistic consumption – which represents the sharing and absorption of Christ’s body and blood into one’s own. In this chapter I argue that this is replicated by the acts of female alcoholics attempting to internalise His self-sacrificial example. In their excessive drinking, these women recreate yet invert the sacramental process whereby the sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood for mankind is remembered through the symbolic assimilation of that sacrifice.
into the body of the worshipper through bread and wine. In their acts of bodily consumption, women subjected to the demands of Victorian religious and moral laws symbolically reproduce the Eucharist in their internalisation of patriarchal codes. However, they also challenge notions of Christian bodily self-sacrifice as exemplified by Christ, asserting their right to embodiment at a time when the female body was required to be desexualised, incorporeal, and undesiring.

As the supposed keepers of the domestic ideal and carriers of a future generation of strong and healthy Englishmen, alcoholic women were viewed by Victorian society as doubly transgressive. The working-class housewife who drank was seen to neglect her family; her self-directed desires needed to be subdued in order for the system of patriarchy to prevail. Indeed, the middle-class woman whose boredom of decorous life or whose unfulfilled ambitions drove her to drink, failed to set the happy example required by her husband and master. Women of all classes who drank committed the grave sin of having independent needs, since the fulfilment of these needs might herald demands for further freedoms which could threaten the stability of the status quo. Like the prevalence of the pseudo-religious domestic angel as an icon, and the anorexic logic which required women’s disembodiment, discourses surrounding female alcoholism privileged bodily containment. Victorian ideals of female passivity, submission, and docility could not be reconciled with the figure of the drunk woman, who represented every charge levelled at women who failed to live up to the requirements of feminine perfection. Her self-indulgence and neglect of familial duties made her a demon rather than an angel in her own house regardless of her class or social position, unlike men, whose alcoholism could be excused equally by gentlemanly over-indulgence or the demands of excessive physical work. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 specified alcoholism along with drug use and adultery as grounds for divorcing a wife, although, in reality it was only upper-middle class husbands who could afford to do so (Helsinger 1983: 21-38). The drunken woman was insufferable to a society which could overlook men’s weaknesses and excesses but not those of their female counterparts. To a certain extent the New Woman symbolised this double standard, in that her demands for the same educational and social opportunities enjoyed by men,

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242 In the Catholic tradition the process of transubstantiation allows the bread and wine to ‘become’ the body and blood of Christ, while most other denominations believe that the bread and wine merely represent Christ’s body and blood. In Catholicism this process is represented as one of the mysteries of the faith, a communion with the spirit of Christ and a process of becoming one with Him.
made her appear too masculine, and the supposed physical frailty brought on by the development of her mind, made her appear far too feminine.

Like the New Woman intellectual, the drunken wife represented a threat to masculinity and to capitalism. She could ‘substantially handicap her sober husband’s efforts to rise; she would waste his money, exhaust him emotionally, and fail to make the kind of home that he needed’ (C. Nelson 2007: 16); she would therefore be of no use to the working-class or middle-class household. In fact, generally unwomanly conduct was discursively linked to men’s drunkenness, by commentators who hoped to enforce an ideal of female passivity and womanly self-discipline which was steeped in Christian ideology. In Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes (1867) the social commentator Thomas Wright remarks that:

[d]runkenness is in many cases, doubtless, the result of innate depravity, and a confirmed drunkard is rarely to be reclaimed by home comforts, which to his degraded mind offer no charm; but at the same time there can be no doubt in the mind of any person who is acquainted with the manners and habits of the working classes, that thousands of working men are driven by lazy, slovenly, mismanaging wives, to courses which ultimately result in their becoming drunkards amid disreputable members of society (1867 VIII: 190).

In presenting a poorly regulated household as an underlying factor in the working-class man’s descent into depravity, Wright justifies men’s alcoholism as a natural response to female mismanagement, demonstrating how middle-class values of feminine order were being rhetorically applied to working-class contexts. In his 1888 lecture entitled Life in One Room the Glasgow medical examiner James B. Russell cites overcrowding as a particular concern, noting that ‘every year the deaths of from 60 to 70 children under five years of age are classified by the Registrar-General as due to accident or negligence [and] half of that number are overlain by drunken mothers [...] or poisoned with whisky’ (1888: 15). The death of children at the hands of drunken fathers is not mentioned by Russell, and his omission exemplifies Victorian expectations that women should nurture and safeguard children, whilst exonerating men from parental accountability. The fact that women of the poorer classes could neglect and endanger their children through alcoholic consumption, is made monstrous even by Russell’s comparatively detached account of the phenomena. His critique engages with an already well-established rhetoric of the twin horrors of poverty and female drunkenness at work in mid-century accounts of a similar nature. For example, in an anonymously-penned 1851 exposé, a ‘Medical Gentleman’ recounts that:
hoesless and shivering in the raw damp of a chilly November night, might have been seen a few Saturdays ago, a woman, with one child in her arms and two little ones tugging at her gown – drunk, almost unable to stand – who, a few minutes before entering the dram-shop, had pawned her shawl for fourpence, in order to get a glass of the accursed liquor, the love of which had reduced her to the appalling condition in which we saw her. She was a bloated and besotted looking wretch. Her dress consisted of only a few rags, and her red skeleton-like legs were bare to the thigh [...] her bosom was nearly bare [...] (1851: 43).

Although the author’s commentary appears sympathetic, it is not without a degree of criticism. Describing the woman as a ‘wretch’, and as ‘bloated’, the man considers her as a symbol of female vice, criminality, and degradation. While her drunkenness disgusts him and is suggested by her bloated body and inability to stand up, the voyeurism inherent in his consideration of the drunk female body is made explicit by his attention to the detail of her bare thigh and barely-covered bosom. The Medical Gentleman’s act of ‘sympathetic’ observation is ultimately complicated by the eroticism of his stare, a stare which is bound up with both disgust of and desire for the corrupted female body as it represents both sensuality and degradation. Like the suffering female martyrs, or the anorexic bodies in the New Woman novels discussed in the first two chapters of this thesis, the female alcoholic body was subject to a masculine field of vision which situated it as an object of narrative desire. However, unlike the virginal and devout saints, and the thin bodies of ethereal, child-like, and desexualised anorexic heroines, it is the corporeality of the female drunk – her inability to defer or negate her bodily-ness – which makes her the ‘ultimate enigma’ (Brooks 1993: 70), an ‘other’ who, as Lacan proposes, serves to affirm masculine subjectivity. This chapter examines representations of female drunkenness in the naturalist novel, as well as the ways in which alcoholism functions as a subversive trope in the New Woman short story. However, it also demonstrates the limitations of this subversion, by exploring the strategies by which the New Woman writer placed the damaged female body at the centre of gender debates, while simultaneously exploiting it for political and literary purposes as much as the novelistic tradition which had preceded it.

The inability of the Victorian woman to regulate her alcoholic consumption, was discursively equated with her powerlessness to control other bodily drives, and the figure of the female alcoholic was culturally interposed with that of the prostitute or fallen woman. The term ‘fallen’ was applied variously to the prostitute, the adulteress, and the seductress, and was more generally deployed as an epithet for any women who, like the New Woman, failed to comply with strict regulations governing female morality and
social behaviour. Amanda Anderson observes that the instability of the expressions which were applied to women of ‘compromised’ character are testament to the ‘cultural anxieties about the very possibility of deliberative moral action’ (1993: 2). Anderson’s point makes sense of the use of the same terminology to describe female drinkers. If the fallen woman occupied a liminal space between linguistic uncertainty and moral ambiguity as a symbol of the loss of will and self-regulating identity, then it follows that fallenness itself had more to do with the Victorian establishment’s loss of control over women than with a state of specifically sexual criminality. The tendency to equate alcoholism with sexual licentiousness and prostitution is not surprising given that political, legal, philanthropic, and social responses to both ‘social evils’ retained near-parallel trajectories throughout the nineteenth century. Like alcoholism, prostitution inspired debates and laws which dichotomised it as a terrible sin committed by the sexually deviant, and as an enforced response to poverty by victims of social neglect; a ‘disease’ of the female will. In his 1850 essay on prostitution W.R. Greg observed that the prostitute is ‘almost never rescued; escape themselves they cannot [...] the prostitute may not pause – may NOT recover’ (1850: 454-455). However, twelve years later in London Labour and the London Poor (1862), Henry Mayhew recognised the existence of the ‘happy prostitute’ who is ‘either the thoroughly hardened, clever infidel [...] who in the end seldom fails to marry well; or the quiet woman who is kept by the man she loves, and who she feels is fond of her’ (1985: 489). Both Greg and Mayhew go on to suggest that the fallen woman poses a threat to other women, in that her inescapable degradation (in the case of Greg) and her hardened cleverness (in the case of Mayhew) might taint the purity of others.

Tellingly, according to Anderson the term ‘fallen’ was used in relation to alcoholics who were ‘delinquent lower-class women’ (1993: 2), and this is evidenced by a number of nineteenth-century journalistic and fictional artefacts. As well as a symptom of bodily

243 A number of critics have noted the myriad types of femininity accounted for by the term ‘fallen’ in Victorian art and literature. See Auerbach (1980) and (1982), Watt (1984), Walkowitz (1992), Anderson (1993), and Logan (1998).

244 William Rathbone Greg (1809-1881) was an English essayist educated at Edinburgh University, who was influential in Victorian debates surrounding social issues. He was well-known for his philanthropic work as well as a number of essays on philosophical and political questions.

245 Henry Mayhew (1812-1887) was an English playwright, journalist, essayist and reformer who co-founded the satirical magazine Punch in 84 and contributed to the pioneering Illustrated London News in 1842. His investigation of the conditions of the London poor were collected and published as a book series entitled London Labour and the London Poor (1851) which is seen to be his most significant work. Mayhew’s work influenced both Christian Socialists and Radicals and is widely regarded to have influenced the work of Charles Dickens. Despite the apparent sensitivity of Mayhew’s comments about prostitution, and his resistance to the limiting paradigm of woman’s intractable fall, like Greg’s, Mayhew’s assessment positions the prostitute as powerless and wholly unable to master her sexual desires, or to be reinstated into society.
corruption caused by a life of crime and vice, alcohol was also a crucial tool in the recruitment of young women as prostitutes. In his exposé of child procurement and prostitution ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, W.T. Stead refers repeatedly to the use of alcohol as part of a routine of seduction practised by various brothel-keepers and procurers of children. Stead describes the process by which teenage girls are ‘snared, trapped and outraged’ (1885: 15) by men who ‘give [them] plenty to eat and drink—especially drink’ and make their victims ‘dazed with the drink’ (1885: 19) before delivering them to the highest bidder. The typical seduction of an innocent is described by one of Stead’s sources as a process by which she is:

tempted to drink, and by degrees she is enlightened as to the nature of the house. It is a dreadful awakening. What is she to do? [...] If she asks to leave she is told she must serve out her term, and then every effort is redoubled to seduce her. If possible she is made drunk, and then when she wakes she discovers her ruin has been accomplished (1885: 42).

Stead’s controversial report reveals that alcohol played a significant role in the seduction and recruitment of young women and often children, whose initial sexual ruin would launch a career in prostitution. While investigative journalists and social reformers played their part in depicting the female alcoholic as morally deviant and bodily corrupt, both male and female novelists exploited her as a plot device or symbol; this was particularly the case in the social problem novels of the mid-nineteenth century. In Deborah Logan’s work on Victorian fallenness, the connection between sobriety and propriety is key to understanding the ways in which delinquent women were ostracised and blamed, regardless of their actual crimes. In her discussion of the female drunk, Logan

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246 William Thomas Stead (1849-1912) was an English writer and editor who pioneered the investigative reporting which made possible the New (tabloid) journalism of the late-Victorian period. He was the editor of *Pall Mall Gazette* until his death on board the RMS Titanic in 1912. Despite its shocking representation of the Victorian market for the seduction, kidnap and rape of female children, ‘The Maiden Tribute’ was widely read and highly culturally transmissible. It heralded new journalistic advancements and influenced British law surrounding the age of sexual consent, but also culturally associated the figure of the alcoholic with that of the sexually tarnished female body. Following his investigation Stead was brought before a court on charges of abduction and assault against Eliza Armstrong, the 3 year old girl whom Stead had ‘bought’ from her alcoholic mother for a price of three pounds. Despite the fact that Stead had not harmed the girl, his investigative methods were deemed unlawful and he was sentenced to three months imprisonment.

247 Stead’s sources describes how female occupants of London brothels both sell and consume alcohol for the ‘good of the house’ (1885: 23) and are rarely sober (1885: 43-44) in their efforts to make their customers ‘consume enough liquor to make it pay’ (1885: 23). As well as being a symptom of sexual fall, alcohol is blamed for the corruption of young women both by strangers who prey on their ignorance, and on their own alcoholic parents. Stead describes how ‘drunken parents often sell their children to brothel keepers’ (1885: 19) and how the prime targets for seduction are ‘daughters of drunken parents’ (1885: 25) who are ‘poor, dissolute, and indifferent to everything but drink’ (1885: 33).

248 The moral outcry caused by Stead’s report directly influenced the implementation of The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which raised the age of sexual consent for women from thirteen to sixteen years.
confirms that ‘scholarship of women’s responses to cultural powerlessness reveals their tendency to internalise oppression through such addictive and suicidal behaviours’ (1998: 144) as alcoholism.

In Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharp consumes excessive quantities of alcohol as she falls from social grace following her banishment to the continent. We are told how Becky ‘rouged regularly now: and – and her maid got cognac for her besides that which was charged in the hotel bill’ (Thackeray 2008: 817), and while in Brussels she is seen regularly ‘gambling and drinking’ (2008: 821). Becky’s drinking is exemplary of her insatiable desire both to consume and to market herself for consumption; she drinks champagne at balls and parties in order to make herself amenable to her male escorts, but also drinks excessively behind the closed doors of her squalid lodgings. In common with the Victorian literary and journalistic sources in which alcohol consumption is aligned with prostitution, Thackeray’s novel suggests that Becky’s drinking is representative of sexual as well as merely social deviance, as is her use of rouge and the disarray of her boudoir, in which an empty bottle is found rolling beneath the bedcovers (2008: 832).

Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* represents a more explicit condemnation of the female drunk, when it introduces Mrs Blackpool as ‘something’, an ‘it’ (Dickens 2006: 67), rather than a woman; a ‘disabled, drunken creature’ (2006: 68) entirely dehumanised by her alcoholism. Dickens uses emotive and animalistic language in his attempts to narrate the body of the female alcoholic who, – unlike his ethereal, thin, and angelic heroines – is hideously corporeal. The narrator describes how Mrs Blackpool appears:

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249 Thackeray conflates the use of cosmetics with female deception by representing Becky’s use of rouge (which immediately implies sensuality by its red colour) as a vulgar and unacceptably dishonest practice. Women’s use of cosmetics was viewed by the Victorian mainstream as troubling, particularly in light of its application by actresses; members of a profession closely aligned at best with loose morals, and, at worst with prostitution (See Peiss 1996: 315). The obscuring of feminine imperfections (although relatively commonplace) was seen as an attempt to misrepresent oneself, particularly in the already competitive environment of the Victorian marriage market. Thackeray exposes what Lawrence Talairach-Vielmas calls the ‘underworld of feminine construction’ (2013: 147), in which the Victorian Lady deployed the same artificial practices as the prostitute or the actress, in order to gain masculine favour. Also see Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, in which Arabella Donne’s application of cosmetics and use of false hair are aligned with her coarseness and lack of morality.

250 Mrs Blackpool’s bestial physicality appears to recall and respond to Charlotte Bronte’s prototypical madwoman Bertha Mason, in *Jane Eyre* in which it is revealed that Bertha’s mother was ‘both a madwoman and a drunkard!’ (2008a: 292). Bertha is also referred to as ‘it’, her face is covered by hair ‘wild as a mane’, and the reader is told that she ‘growled like some strange wild animal’ (Brontë 2008: 293).

251 Nell Trent in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), Amy Dorritt in *Little Dorrit* (1857) and Lucy Mannette in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) exemplify Dickens’s fictionalisation of ethereal and childlike heroines.
with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying
to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with
the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but
so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing to even
see her (Dickens 2006: 68).

Paying particular attention to the filth which both encases and is diffused by Mrs
Blackpool, Dickens renders her alcoholic body an emblem of degradation, and the collapse
of all womanly and domestic faculties. She is unable to stand or hold herself up; to clean
herself or her surroundings – much less affect the neatness of hair and dress required by
Victorian social mores – and as such, she is figured as a demon who haunts the domestic
space of which society expects her to be the angel. Mrs Blackpool is foul, infamous and
shameful, a disgusting creature and not a woman to be pitied; her gender is called into
question by her inability to affect feminine behaviours such as grace, neatness, cleanliness
or beauty. Like Becky Sharpe, Mrs Blackpool’s drinking is associated with sexual
licentiousness, and her sexual fall is understood by her disappearance onto ‘the streets’
(2006: 72), her choice to leave her husband and ‘disgrace herself [sic] everyways, bitter
and bad’ (2006: 72), and the inability of Mr Blackpool to account for her whereabouts
during her periods of absence.

Just six years before the publication of Hard Times Elizabeth Gaskell had also
experimented with the female alcoholic as a narrative construct which symbolised
concerns both about women’s position and social justice in general. However, unlike
Thackeray and Dickens, Gaskell’s treatment of the female alcoholic and prostitute was
highly sympathetic. Like the New Woman writers examined in this thesis, Gaskell
attempted to account, socially and politically, for the various evils which forced women
into self-destructive activities that put them at physical and psychological risk. In her 1848
social problem novel Mary Barton, Mary’s alcoholic Aunt Esther returns to meet with her
niece, to transmit her own cautionary tale of seduction, desertion and prostitution.
Ravaged by alcohol and poverty, Esther’s tale anticipates those described by Stead’s

252 The reader is told that Mrs Blackpool periodically disappears from and reappears in her marital home,
returning drunk after long periods during which it is implied that she is working as a prostitute (2006: 72-73).
253 Mrs Blackpool’s involvement in prostitution to fund her drinking and supplement her husband’s payments
to her is never fully articulated in the novel; however, the reader is led to assume that this is a possibility,
given the narrator’s allegation of Mrs Blackpool’s ‘moral infamy’ (2006: 68).
254 Esther has been seduced by an army officer, who later disowns her and their child. She is forced into
prostitution to earn money to support the sick child, who eventually dies. As a reaction to her grief, Esther
descends further into drunkenness and poverty on the typical Victorian Drunkard’s Path. Esther he attempts
to warn Mary against making a similar mistake when she witnesses her flirtation with the wealthy Henry
Carson.
sources in ‘The Maiden Tribute’; she has been tempted, seduced, ruined, and forced to continue in a life of prostitution and heavy drinking. Gaskell represents Esther, her repentance, and her attempts to save Mary from her own fate with great compassion. However, Esther dies at the end of Mary Barton; her body is supposedly sickened by hunger, disease and alcohol; it is thus inassimilable into a novel which requires Esther’s punishment in order to satisfy its realist aims. Gaskell presents a social critique of the mechanisms of patriarchy which allow women to be corrupted and made morally irredeemable, yet her adherence to the realist form fails to allow a narrative redemption for Esther. In her own discussion of Esther, Deborah Logan argues that Gaskell ‘allows the drunken-prostitute stereotype to prevail by not explaining a fact of which she was clearly aware: [...] alcoholism, like prostitution, among the poor and working classes was generally more a matter of economics than of sensuous self-indulgence of inherent moral depravity’ (1998: 13). In failing to re-instate Esther into the Barton family or the wider social world, Gaskell demonstrates the extent to which the female body, corrupted by sexual and/or consumptionary desires, remained an infectious, dangerous, and therefore intolerable entity in the majority of Victorian fictional works.

George Eliot fictionalises the woman drinker in ‘Janet’s Repentance’ (1857), which features an alcoholic wife who drinks to escape the physical brutalities of her marriage, and who is neither sexually ruined nor irretrievably shamed in the eyes of her peers. Janet Dempster’s drinking is predominantly met with pity because her equally drunk but exceptionally vicious husband treats her so appallingly. When, following a particularly violent episode she is forced out of her marital home into the cold, Janet is welcomed by the women of her community with tenderness and understanding. Her use of the short story format meant that Eliot could not develop her plot in the level of detail permitted and required by the novel, and her references to Janet’s alcoholism are resultantly brief and vague. Unlike the inhuman Mrs Blackpool or the sexually irredeemable Esther, Janet’s alcoholism is not overt, demonstrative or public. Her drinking is frequently alluded to by her neighbours and even confessed to her priest, yet it is never described with the sort of grotesque physical detail which both Dickens and Gaskell commit to in their respective works. Janet’s alcoholic body is not dirty, sexually compromised or publicly readable. Unlike Becky, Mrs Blackpool, or Esther, Janet is represented as unsullied, for her ability to

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255 Esther is arrested following an altercation with Barton, for being ‘tipsy’ (2008: 122), she then takes her ‘poor diseased mind’ (2008: 228) to a gin shop where she reposes in ‘stupor’ (2008: 229) before setting out to find her niece.
affect bourgeois behavioural norms fails to be wholly compromised by her addiction. In proposing a redemptive trajectory for the female alcoholic (Janet gives up drinking and her husband later dies leaving her free) Eliot allows a social reintegration which can only succeed by virtue of her heroine’s middle-class status, and her adherence to codes which seek to confine and regulate her body within the domestic sphere. Janet must first confess her sin, then repent and find salvation through a Christian faith which designates her body as a symbol of fleshly corruption exemplified by the fall of mankind. The text does not allow redemption for all women who fail to adhere to these codes, since it also details the parallel ‘fall’ of Mr Tryan’s former lover Lucy. After engaging in a sexual relationship with her, Tryan breaks off his engagement to Lucy who eventually turns to prostitution in order to survive. She is later found dead ‘with paint on her cheeks’ (Eliot 2009: 259) – killed off by a plot which offers redemption only to women whose class status, sexual purity, and domestic assimilation allow them the potential for salvation. Janet can be reconnected because despite her transgression of the normative boundaries of feminine desires, she brings under control the threat that her desires pose to the resilience of those boundaries. It is her internalised middle-class orthodoxy which allows Janet to prevail, and in particular her confession and absolution by a representative of Christian religion. As I have shown in the first chapter of this thesis, New Woman fiction continued to deploy the ideologies and frameworks of orthodox religion despite attempting to disrupt a social order which was deeply rooted in Christianity. In this chapter I suggest how New Woman short stories about female alcoholism reflect and respond to ‘Janet’s Repentance’ in ways which challenge the hegemonic structures within which Janet aspires to bodily containment. Yet ultimately, these ‘new’ stories of female alcoholism generate fresh ideological and structural boundaries and restrictions of their own. Although the mid-Victorian novelistic tradition offered a range of narrative equivalence between the body of the female alcoholic and the sexually, socially or maternally unfit body, it was not only these ‘compromised’ bodies which were so connected. The body of any woman who transgressed the Victorian ideology of separate spheres was subject to fictional and discursive alignment with notions of falleness, disease, and sterility.

256 Although physically frail and often unsteady on her feet, Janet possesses the idealised feminine attributes of beauty, grace, and pride, and she is capable of inspiring compassion despite widespread knowledge of both her marital failure and heavy drinking.

257 Mr Tryan offers forgiveness for Janet’s sins, yet he is punished in the text for his tainted and immoral past with a slow and painful death. Tryan’s punishment highlights Eliot’s subscription to Christian doctrines of penance and sacrifice as well as to the realist mode.
Alcoholism, the New Woman, and the Odd Woman

Cultural commentators explicitly connected the growing number of cases of alcoholism in Britain to women’s increased freedoms, at the turn of the nineteenth century. In Life and Labour of the People in London (1886-1903), Charles Booth denounces the ‘emancipation’ of woman, as the primary cause for a general increase in excessive drinking. Booth alleges that the blame is ‘to be laid mainly to the account of the female sex [as] one of the unexpected results of the emancipation of women’ (Booth 2014) explaining that:

[o]n the one hand she has become more independent of man, industrially and financially, and on the other more of a comrade than before, and in neither capacity does she feel any shame at entering a public house [...] Women are far more sociable in this matter. “One drunken woman in a street will set all the women drinking” [...] (Booth 2014).

Booth posits women’s drinking as a contagion which, like prostitution, is capable of infecting other women. His comments demonstrate the extent to which despite women’s experience of new social freedoms at the Fin de Siècle, the discourse of shame still permeated perceptions of their bodily desires; their potential for polluting others with those desires, and their interactions with men. Booth specifically singles out ‘the factory girl’, the ‘prostitute’, the ‘laundry woman’, and the ‘married woman who drinks because her husband drinks’ (2014) as examples of the types of women who abuse alcohol. His discussion makes clear that alcoholism continued to be perceived as a distinctly lower-class problem largely unconnected with the educated middle-class women of his own milieu. Despite a tendency to ignore the potential for wealthy and educated women to become victims of the ‘disease’ of alcoholism, anxieties about female drunkenness and anxieties about the New Woman writer, were expressed through similar rhetorical formulae at the Fin de Siècle. Though the middle-class woman was not widely recognised as capable of alcoholism, her fictional counterpart was entirely susceptible to the demons of drink in writing by and about the New Woman. Like the woman drinker the New Woman was accused of neglecting her duties and her family, of attacking and infecting the sacredness and primacy of the home, and of eschewing her responsibilities to reproduce healthy English children trained in the traditions of patriarchy. However, the late century

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258 Charles Booth (1840-1916) was an English philanthropist and social researcher who sought to document working-class life in nineteenth-century London. His work directly influenced governmental policy in aiding the poor, and he was part-responsible for the introduction of Old Age Pensions and free school meals for poor children in the twentieth century. Booth is also famous for his series of maps, which chart the economic topography of Victorian London, demonstrating varying levels of poverty dependent on location.
saw a huge surplus of women (estimated at 400,000 in the census of 1851 and growing every year thereafter), who were unmarried and financially unsupported, and who simply could not adhere to these expectations.259 Despite difficult conditions for many women who faced uncertain futures without the means to earn their living, the figure of the New Woman, who demanded both the education and legislation necessary for survival, was much maligned by a patriarchal society which treated with incredulity her claims to intellectual equality.260 Victorian fiction explored the contradictory expectations of bourgeois religious and moral codes which designated women as born to embody the characteristics of both the saintly martyrs and the Virgin mother of Christ; this was expected of them despite a lack of opportunity to inhabit these positions. Charlotte Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) and later George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893) respectively represented the problem of surplus women, demonstrating the hypocrisy of a society which demanded domesticity but could not offer it consistently to all.261 As my introduction has shown, women who rejected the roles ascribed to them by biology, morality and religion, were criticised and pitied by both the medico-scientific establishment and the general public.262 Elaine Showalter has noted that the New Woman’s claim to previously male-oriented pursuits such as work and education were figured in the

259 The surplus was calculated at 104 females for every 100 males (C. Nelson 2007: 5) and was largely due to the loss of men to Victorian conflicts abroad, and to the mass emigration required by the expansion of the Empire into new territories. While working-class women had the opportunity to support themselves, Odd women were an essentially middle-class problem, since their training and education made them unfit for the sorts of professions to which women were beginning to be admitted. Middle-class women were only given access to a basic education which focussed on preparing them for marriage. Skills such as housekeeping, reading and music were emphasised, while academic or practical skills were not encouraged. Many poorer middle-class women undertook work as governesses, teaching similar subjects to female children in return for board and a small salary. See Burstyn (1980) and Hamilton (2007) for discussion of Victorian women’s access to education.

260 The New Woman was particularly maligned by the print media for being mannish because of her claim to intellectual equality. She was frequently depicted so in the illustrated magazine *Punch*, which lampooned the figure in cartoon during the 1890s. See Shapiro (1991) for examination of the cartoon representations of the New Woman.

261 In Yonge’s novel the social reformer and women’s rights campaigner Rachel Curtis (the ‘clever woman’ of the title) accepts her fate as an Odd woman, only to be eventually taught, through humiliation and sacrifice, to desire marriage and motherhood. Yonge has been condemned by feminist critics for her representation of the hardships facing women who attempted to deviate from middle-class expectations, and her eagerness to solve problems by eventually marrying off her heroines. See Wheatley (1996) & Fiamengo (2000) both of whom discuss the dearth of feminist recovery of Yonge’s work.

262 In *Love and Eugenics in the Late-Nineteenth Century* Angelique Richardson notes that prevalent medical thinking ‘offered an emphatic warning that girls were reaching breaking point on account of intellectual work’ (2008: 40). Biologically-determined views on the detrimental effect of women’s intellectual activity on their ability to perform their more decorous functions, were proffered by an number of leading British scientists. For example, in 1874 the neurologist Henry Maudsley argued (contrary to his own previous assumptions about the dangers of female passivity), that women were entirely unsuited for traditionally masculine roles in the workplace or for intellectual learning because of biological sex difference. See Maudsley’s original argument in ‘The Physiology and Pathology of Mind’ (1867) and then his later 1874 article in the *Fortnightly Review* entitled ‘Sex in Mind and Education’.
language of ‘insurrection and apocalypse’ and that women were warned that ‘such ambitions would lead to sickness, freakishness, sterility and racial degeneration’ (1991: 39) in much the same ways as alcoholism. Just as the Victorian prostitute, whose capacity for breeding was purportedly sacrificed to her financial and sexual desires, or the alcoholic whose reproductive potential and maternal aptitude were limited by her excessive consumptions, the New Woman was figured as deliberately and threateningly infertile. Her refusal to make the generation and maintenance of children her central goals, meant that the New Woman also countermanded Christian instruction about the role of women as teachers, care givers, and spiritual guides for both their husbands and any potential offspring. While the childless or unmarried woman was pitied, she was also encouraged to fulfil her biological and religiously-determined destiny by extending her maternal qualities to the wider community.\(^{263}\) The New Woman’s perceived self-interest and her refusal to adopt the passive roles ascribed to women by a society instructed by Christianity, made her innately threatening. Unlike the Odd woman, who garnered sympathy for her life of repression and financial insecurity and was commiserated with for her unsolicited state of childlessness, the New Woman was like the alcoholic woman, utterly transgressive and useless to a society which privileged obedience and self-sacrifice.

**The Narrative Striptease: Alcoholism in George Gissing’s The Odd Women**

Published in 1893 George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* was both concerned with the education and training of Odd women, and sympathetic towards the female alcoholic as a victim of the surplus. Gissing was ostensibly a supporter of the New Woman, and his own unsuccessful experience of marriage to the alcoholic former prostitute Nell Harrison, may inform his reading of female alcoholism, which is far more sympathetic than those of some of his contemporaries.\(^{264}\) Gissing’s grim depiction of the middle-class Madden sisters, left penniless and thrown upon the charity of friends after the death of their father, contrasts with the more romanticised poverty of a number of heroines in the New Woman novels which had been published previously. Unlike Grand’s Evadne Frayling, Edith Beale and Angelica Ilverthorpe, or Caird’s Viola Sedley and Hadria Fullerton, Gissing’s Madden sisters live neither in relative luxury nor genteel poverty, but are genuinely destitute. In the

\(^{263}\) One of the few morally acceptable positions in which childless and/or unmarried woman found themselves was that of the governess, which while not the ideal role, at least encouraged women in the duties of childrearing, educating and nursing. See Hughes (2001) for more on the role of the Victorian governess.

\(^{264}\) See Huguet and James (2013) for discussion of Gissing’s involvement with the Woman Question, and Liggins (2006) and Nelson (2007), both of whom expand on Gissing’s relationship with Nell Harrison and her battle with alcoholism.
case of the eldest sister, Virginia, this destitution is emphasised by her decision to forgo food and other comforts rather than be without the alcohol which she secretly consumes. At the outset of the novel, Virginia’s alcoholic self-harm is ambiguously presented; her visit to a bar at Charing Cross station is narrated at the surface level as a merely opportunistic episode of drinking. However, Virginia’s knowledge of the bar’s location is intimated by the ease with which she locates it. Furthermore, the restorative effect of alcohol on symptoms which resemble those of alcoholic withdrawal, suggests that Virginia’s drinking is not a new experience. Upon entering the bar Gissing’s narrator notes of Virginia that ‘beads of perspiration were on her face, which had turned to a ghostly pallor [...] colour flowed to her cheeks […] She hastily wiped her lips, and walked away with firm step’ (Gissing 2008b: 23). Virginia Madden thus embarks on the traditional downward trajectory of the Drunkard’s Path, which begins with occasional drinking and will end in moral and physical disgrace.

At the start of her life in London, near the beginning of the novel, Virginia is shown to have reached the stage of addiction at which she is no longer compelled to abstain by the middle-class impropriety implied by entering a public house. Virginia’s ‘dangerous indulgence’ (2008b: 28) is dangerous partly because her financial limitations require her to sacrifice more wholesome consumptions like food, leading her to commit acts of physical self-neglect by her continued drinking. Perhaps more perilous though, is the grave social danger implied by Virginia’s alcoholism, since it represents a fall from womanly grace and thus marriagability or masculine pity. When an intoxicated Virginia is found by her sister Monica’s husband Mr Widdowson, the unacceptability of female alcoholism is more clearly expressed as:

Widdowson was for a moment in perplexity. If the evidence of his eyes could be trusted, Miss Madden’s indisposition pointed to a cause so strange that it seemed incredible [...] [his] pity was mingled with disgust [...] He would have thought it utterly impossible for Miss Madden to disgrace herself in this vulgar way, and the appalling discovery affected his view of Monica (2008b: 266-267).

As an unmarried Odd woman she might inspire pity, but Virginia’s consumptions make her body appear compromised in a way which suggests a lack of womanly purity and the saint-like endurance required by the nineteenth-century feminine ideal. To the male spectator, it seems almost impossible that a middle-class woman of reduced circumstances yet genteel birth, could succumb to the selfish and ungodly desires of the flesh and could sacrifice notions of bourgeois respectability in order to satisfy these desires. Widdowson is
disgusted and appalled by the vulgarity of the female drunk, whose body exhibits the signs of her addiction in a way which is recognisable here for the first time in the novel. Like the anonymous Medical Gentleman, whose pity and disgust at the alcoholic woman are mingled with arousal, Widdowson’s gaze is directly connected to his own sexual desires. Confronted with the evidence of Virginia’s alcoholism, Widdowson’s immediate response is to read her ‘degradation’ (2008b: 268) as hereditary, fearing that his wife Monica could be similarly tainted. This degradation is at once moral and implicitly sexual, since Widdowson imagines Virginia’s self-disgrace in the language of biblical fall as a bodily ‘temptation’ (2008b: 267).

Despite its predominantly compassionate characterisation of the female alcoholic, Gissing’s novel interrogates Virginia’s inability to affect bourgeois notions of feminine disinterestedness and physical abstinence, suggesting that her alcoholism is unacceptable only because of its visuality and its public decipherability. Virginia represents a walking symbol of Victorian wound culture, however, since this symbolic wound is hidden from view, Virginia’s body is unacceptable only if she steps outside of the domestic space. As the locus of narrative desire in this text, the female body is slowly revealed to be the site of self-harming drives, in a narrative strip tease which sees Gissing incrementally reveal Virginia’s alcoholic body. As that which is to be ‘denuded [and] unveiled’ (Brooks 1993: 96), Virginia’s secret is the corporeal secret at the heart of the narrative, which the reader must decode through a series of signs and symbols. However, Gissing at first avoids narrating the body of the female alcoholic in definite terms, preferring to suggest by subtle references – alluding to, rather than clearly depicting Virginia’s self-harmful addiction. As Emma Liggins argues, the author’s attempt to avoid the hyper-sensuality and vivid detail of literary naturalism may account for this representational strategy (2006: x-xi). Gissing’s depictions of the working-class female body (often that of the prostitute) solicited automatic comparison with those featured in Zola’s earlier work, but ‘readers tended to credit Gissing with more restraint’ (Liggins 2006: 3) than Zola, whose attention to detailed bodily functions and corruptions was considered excessive by most British readers.

265 Although Widdowson is depicted throughout the text as entirely to blame for his foolish marriage, and criticised for the despotism to which he resorts, he nevertheless remains a victim of the patriarchal tradition which determines his misguided misogyny. His views on hereditary degeneracy are not narrated with irony suggesting Gissing’s genuine engagement with scientific naturalism.

266 See Harsh (1992) and Henkle (1992) for discussion of Gissing’s complicated relationship with Naturalism.
Virginia’s addiction is an ‘indisposition’ of ‘so strange a cause’ (Gissing 2008b: 267), a ‘secret vice’ (2008b: 327) and one of life’s ‘temptations’ (2008b: 267), and its lack of narrative embodiment exemplifies what Deirdre David describes as Gissing’s ‘flat, unembroidered, and almost clinical style’ (1984: 122). As Virginia’s body increasingly reflects the damage she inflicts upon it by heavy drinking, it becomes subject to more detailed description. The narrator describes how a ‘disagreeable redness tinged [Virginia’s] eyelids’ and her mouth ‘was growing coarse and lax, the under lip hanging a little’ (2008b: 318-319). Despite focussing on Virginia’s deflated and unattractive face, Gissing’s narrator deploys the language of manners rather than that of the visceral. In contrast to the quasi-religious figure of the self-sacrificing domestic angel, Virginia’s poor manners and coarse expression betray her fall from feminine grace, although Gissing restores this grace at the end of the text when her alcoholism finally comes under control after she is institutionalised. Gissing’s almost affectionate treatment of Virginia’s struggle with alcohol exemplifies one of the many ambiguities at the heart of his text, and its complicated attitude towards women’s position in nineteenth-century society. Gissing’s deployment of naturalist conventions is illustrated by his inability to suggest a wholly viable or successful course for any of the women with whom his novel is concerned; it also suggests a level of ambivalence with regard to the Woman Question. In its rendering of the female alcoholic, Gissing’s text deploys sympathy for a woman driven to alcohol by both her poverty and her inability to prove useful to a society which privileges youth and beauty. Conversely, as the New Woman character, Rhoda Nunn’s act of ‘self-harm’ (the ascetic refusal of her romantic desires and repressed sexuality) is treated with less compassion, since unlike the womanly (if useless) Virginia Madden, Rhoda is frighteningly masculine and self-sufficient.

Gissing’s complicated attitude towards female political expression is signified by his barely veiled critique of Rhoda’s unfeminine physicality and invulnerability. While the alcoholic Virginia ‘had been comely […] her countenance still had a grace, a sweetness’ (2008b: 14), of the comparatively beautiful Rhoda the narrator muses that ‘[w]hether or not she could be called a comely woman, might have furnished matter for male discussion’ and adds that ‘[a]t first view the countenance seemed masculine, its expression somewhat

267 Monica dies from complications during child birth, Virginia is institutionalised, Alice’s project for opening a school is subsumed by maternal duties, Mary Barfoot’s love for her cousin remains unexpressed, and Rhoda Nunn’s opportunity for romantic love is replaced by a future in which marriage and work cannot be reconciled.
aggressive, —eyes shrewdly observant and lips consciously impregnable’ (2008b: 5). By the end of the novel the alcoholic holds the hope of re-absorption into a female community whose domestic attentions provide some potential for recovery, while the suggestion is that Rhoda’s subversive political position will ensure her a fate far less comfortable and satisfied. Rhoda is punished with a lonely and rather bleak end, because of her failure to enact femininity competently and her insistence on entering the public, masculine spheres of work and politics. Unlike Virginia, whose social transgressions and unwomanly behaviours are largely hidden from view both in the text and by the text, Rhoda’s demands for identity and autonomy make her an object of vulgar public display. As one of the text’s most vehement supporters of machine culture; the repetitive work carried out on the mass typewriters of the workplace she supervises, Rhoda’s activities typify the wound culture of late-century modernity. Unable to detach herself from the new means of participation in the public world, the negotiation of tensions between public and private; the ‘relations of private bodies and private persons to public spaces’ (1998: 21) with which Gissing’s text is concerned, are played out on Rhoda’s conflicted body. Deliberately wearing her psychological damage like a ‘badge[...] of identity’ (Seltzer 1998: 2), Rhoda’s consideration of –then resistance to– marriage and domestication, establishes her irreconcilability with a system which requires her suppression within a purely domestic space.

Rhoda comes to represent the dangers of the machine culture which allows her traversal of the margins between masculinity and femininity, and so the female threat to the boundaries which underpin patriarchy. Gissing’s text represents female alcoholic self-harm as a womanly response to social and economic pressures, whilst the woman who transgresses the domestic sphere, as a reaction to the same conditions, is subject to far less generosity. While sensitive to the problems faced by Odd women, and critical of the organising structures which bring misery on its characters, The Odd Women also normalises excessive drinking by women. Simultaneously, it critiques the self-interested New Woman, suggesting that participation in the public sphere is far less desirable for women than strategies of quiet, private self-harm. Gissing’s critique therefore reverses the strategies of display which are deployed by New Woman writers, in that the body of his self-harming heroine is encouraged to self-conceal. This concealment is rendered possible by a novel which, despite its naturalist aims, fails to fully narrate the damaged female body. The Odd Women demonstrates its formal limitations by both making the female body the secret to
be known and mastered, and by rehabilitating the woman who adheres to society’s codes and punishing the woman who does not. Contrastingy, the New Woman short stories which feature the alcoholic self-harmer subvert patriarchal strategies of containment, asserting women’s right to embodiment in a complex and ultimately fruitless attempt to challenge the epistemophilic gaze of the male-oriented novelistic tradition.

**Fallen and Childless: The Female Drunk in George Egerton’s Short Stories**

At the vanguard of proto-modernist literary experimentation, George Egerton was arguably the New Woman writer most concerned with representing the female body, its drives and its desires as part of her highly experimental fiction. Born Mary Chavelita Dunne in 1859, Egerton adopted the masculine moniker George; she took the male pseudonym in the tradition of the mid-Victorian women writers who had preceded her, whose work her own reproduced, expanded, and dismantled.\(^{268}\) Egerton’s work reveals a deep concern with the ways in which the female body operated as a Victorian cultural topos, and the potential for both liberation and condemnation in the sexual freedoms and social taboos about which she wrote. However, she was highly critical of the New Woman figure, and disagreed entirely with the demand for women’s suffrage, championing sexual rather than civil freedoms for women and in particular women’s right to ‘free unions’ with men.\(^{269}\) In 1893 Egerton’s first collection of short stories entitled *Keynotes* was published by John Lane of the Bodley Head publishing house. Marketed as being within the decadent school, with a subtly provocative cover-illustration by the self-confessed aesthete Aubrey Beardsley, the collection garnered as much commercial success as it did mainstream criticism. Her second volume *Discords*, published the same year, was accused of ‘hysterical frankness’ (1894: 16) in the *Athenaeum* and was suggestive of the ‘unpleasant side […] of the modern woman’ (1894: 68) according to W.T. Stead.\(^{270}\) Egerton’s work dealt with female sexuality, and depicted independent and provocative female protagonists who made

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\(^{268}\) Egerton was born in Australia to a Welsh mother and Irish father, and raised as a Catholic. She spent her childhood living variously in: Australia, New Zealand and Chile, and her teenage years in Ireland. Egerton controversially eloped to Norway in 1887 with Henry Higgins, the married husband of a family friend, who she married bigamously in 1888. She was heavily influenced by Scandinavian writing and became the first translator of the Norwegian author Knut Hamsun. She later married the Canadian novelist Egerton Clairmonte and then the dramatic agent Reginald Golding Bright. She died in 1945 having disappeared from the literary scene entirely.

\(^{269}\) See Showalter (1999: 22) for discussion of Egerton’s lack of interest in ‘feminism’.

\(^{270}\) The *Athenaeum* was a literary magazine published in London between 1828 and 1891. Stead was actually (comparatively) supportive of the New Woman throughout his career, but disagreed with Egerton’s focus on sexuality and found some of her stories distasteful.
decisions which contravened Victorian moral, religious and social norms. Her stories were experimental, and formally much closer to the modernist texts of the twentieth century than the Victorian staple of the realist mode. Rather than a traditional plot and characters, many of her stories instead present a psychological interior, a snapshot of female sexual and intellectual development set in a restrictive masculine society. This device allowed Egerton to present politically seditious material, through literary techniques such as vague and ambiguous language, and elusive metaphors of containment, escape, death and survival. Egerton’s stories could depict violent images of female self-harm, which would have been impossible to broach in the novel form, and her refusal to conclude her stories with a resolution which reinforced nineteenth-century moral and religious values made them vulnerable to attack from the Victorian mainstream, particularly after the Wilde trial of 1895. Unlike writers like Sarah Grand, who had advocated a higher standard of sexual purity in her fiction, Egerton’s interest in female sexual liberation had no such claim to moral didacticism. Additionally, her exploration of the internal landscapes of the female psyche and her representations of damaged and eroticised female bodies, made her writing particularly ripe for accusations of immorality.

Egerton’s stories are preoccupied with self-damaging acts, and alcoholism and self-mutilation feature frequently as part of the experience of femininity. This chapter is concerned with the fictionalisation of alcoholism in Discords, however I revisit Egerton’s writing in the subsequent chapter of this thesis with reference to her use of self-mutilation as a recurrent trope. Egerton’s use of the trope of female drunkenness represents a subversive critique of Victorian patriarchy and display of the damaged body, and her increasingly violent imagery demonstrates her strategic use of the short story form. In deploying alcoholism on the spectrum of progressively damaging practices her heroines are required to enact, Egerton makes the damaged body the narrative centre of her texts. Despite the brevity required by the short story, her use of it to communicate women’s

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271 This fact, as well as Lane’s attempt to ‘discursively entangle’ her heroines with the Beardsleyesque woman who was ‘morally dubious, perhaps lascivious, sexually ambiguous, languid and thin’ (Ledger 2006: xi) caused Keynotes to become immediately aligned with the Decadent and Aesthetic movements of the Fin de Siècle as well as the New Woman ‘genre’. It was Oscar Wilde’s connections to both movements and to The Yellow Book which would prove devastating to Egerton’s publishing career, following his conviction for gross indecency in 1895. Egerton was unable to fully comply with John Lane’s request that she dissolve the content of her fiction to suit the reactionary cultural environment of the post-trial period and as such her second collection Symphonies (1897) was far less successful (De Vere White 1958: 41-42). See Mckenna (2011) and Sloan (2003) for more on the impact of Wilde’s trial on the late-nineteenth century literary marketplace. Also, see Ledger (2003), Standlee (2010), and Patterson (2013), all of whom comment of the influence of Wilde on Egerton’s work both before and after the trial.
recourse to self-harm demonstrates that the bodies of damaged women and the bodies of narrative which contained them, were elements in a relationship, in which (paradoxically), the shorter form allowed the New Woman narrative space to express what nine hundred pages could not. I have discussed how a surplus of signifiers accumulates around the anorexic body despite its narrative disembodiment; interestingly, the lack of textual profusion in Egerton’s stories allows the female body to take centre stage in a way which could not have been directly described. As Susan Lanser has shown, narrative form must be considered as content itself, in its reflection of dominant discourse (2009: 497-499) and the impossibility of this discourse to assert social hegemony. In this way Egerton’s text challenges the literary tradition which had made woman the ultimate object of desire in narrative, the subject of the epistemophilic impulse.

Egerton’s engagement with the figure of the female alcoholic in *Discords* begins in her aptly titled short story ‘Gone Under’, which recounts a brief friendship between a young, unmarried girl and a fallen woman aboard a New York steamer boat bound for England. Like Gaskell’s Esther and Eliot’s Lucy, Egerton’s female antagonist, Edith, has been sexually ruined by a wealthy man who has promised her marriage, but by the close of the story she is both an alcoholic and a prostitute. As the story opens we encounter Edith in the position of mistress to the already-married man who has seduced her before sending her abroad to give birth to his illegitimate child. She is forced to return to him in England after being told that her child has been still-born, and her affair with her lover’s cousin is discovered. Alone and desperate, Edith is subject to the disapproval of almost all on board the steamer, and ‘Gone Under’ functions as both a critique of the Victorian medical system (Edith alleges her baby has been murdered to avoid scandal) as well as of the damage done by women to their own sex, as an outcome of Victorian moral double-standards. Unlike Gissing’s Virginia Madden, whose addiction must be slowly decoded throughout his novel,

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272 ‘Gone Under’ suggests both the boat on which the action of the plot takes place, and the downward trajectory of the Drunkard’s Path with which the story is concerned.

273 As in Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* the name Edith is significant. It is suggestive of Grand’s Edith Beale, a saintly woman destroyed by her husband’s syphilis. In the Old Testament and the Quran, Edith is the wife of Lot, who flees Sodom before its destruction with her husband. Lot is said to have committed incest with his own daughters after Edith dies looking back at Sodom, however this is refuted in Islamic teachings. The name suggests sexuality, both by Edith’s act of transgressive looking, and her husband’s incest. It also implies tragedy, because in the Old Testament Edith’s death is caused by her naivety and inability to leave behind her worldly concerns.

274 In this way Egerton’s text directly challenges Eliot’s ‘Janet’s Repentance’ in which the female alcoholic is supported by a female community which sympathises with her addiction. Egerton seems to suggest that this outcome is highly unlikely, since women tend to internalise the strict moral codes which limit their own freedoms and apply them rigorously to those who fail to do the same.
‘Gone Under’ immediately highlights Edith’s alcoholism through a system of easily readable bodily codes. These same codes also indicate Edith’s sensuality, because her body is both damaged by self-harming impulses and erotically charged; she wears an inappropriately ornamental red dress, ‘her lips are crimson’ and although she is described as young, ‘there are fine lines about her eyes’ which are ‘circled with heavy indigo stains’ (Egerton 2006: 102). The redness of her lips and dress, and the darkness of the circles around her eyes attest to Edith’s sexuality; they suggest late nights and little sleep in her role as a mistress. However, equally decipherable are the bodily effects of sustained alcohol abuse, which can be read in those same fine lines and dark circles, and later in Edith’s displays of emotional extravagance.

Edith’s position as a middle-class ‘kept’ woman, is designated by her appearance in newly-bought yet unsuitably showy garments, which connote a financial investment in her appearance quite different to the taste and simplicity required in the dressing of a wife. Similarly, Edith’s physical features contribute to her readability as sexually compromised, and like Grand, Egerton relies on her reader’s knowledge of, and investment in, the logic of physiognomy. We are told of Edith’s beauty, that ‘the mouth cannot lie – the pout of wine red lips, the soft receding chin, and the strange indefinable expression that lurks about them rather fits a priestess of passion’ (2006: 104). These words are uttered by Egerton’s protagonist, who befriends Edith yet fails to see her outside of Victorian physiognomic or cultural stereotypes. The girl imagines Edith as a priestess, orienting her passionate nature towards a pagan – and by implication sensual – rather than Christian conception of religion. Despite Edith’s beauty the girl is both ‘attracted to her, and yet repelled’ (2006: 102); she is made uncomfortable by Edith’s difference yet fascinated by her as an object of masculine desire and feminine disapproval. Performing an act of masculine epistemophilic observation, the girl imagines Edith within well-established Victorian paradigms as both an angel and a whore, unable to embody a space in between the beauty she outwardly reflects and the sexual ruin against which she inwardly rages. The girl is unable to disassociate Edith from the images of angelic and fallen women; from the biblical and classical figures found in popular art and literature. The girl notices of Edith that her ‘head and forehead and drooping white lids have the delicacy of a Madonna by Ary Scheffer’ (2006: 104) visualising Edith as a Madonna figure, a symbolic combination of both chastity and sexual
compromise like those explored in the first chapter of this thesis. Drawing on one of Scheffer’s most famous paintings *The Heavenly and Earthly Love* (1850), the girl pictures Edith as both stereotypes of femininity. The painting features two central female figures, the Blessed Virgin and a female nude painted in the classical style. While the fully-clothed, pale, and ethereal Virgin looks down from a position of authority with her finger instructively posed, the flushed face of the nude who is semi-cloaked in red drapery, looks away. The red of the painting’s draping recalls Edith’s ornamental red dress, and suggests the sensuality and worldliness of both women. Later Egerton’s narrator exclaims that ‘I would paint her as Helen’ (2006: 104), reading Edith’s body within an established classical archetype of beautiful yet sexually transgressive femininity.

By referencing Scheffer’s painting and Helen of Troy, Egerton’s protagonist highlights the competing feminine identities at play in a reading of the drunken female body. Like the Mater Dolorosa figure in the poems of Baudelaire and Swinburne, Edith combines both facets of the Victorian angel/whore dichotomy, in which the female body is designated corporeal and thus tainted, yet expected to transcend its fleshliness. Just as the medieval martyrs depicted in pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the masochistic Madonna of decadent poetry, Edith is represented as both self-abnegating and sensual. However, unlike the heroines of Grand’s novels who try to transcend their bodies, or the martyrs whose bodies were subordinate to the concerns of their souls, Edith’s acts of alcoholic self-harm work to assert her body’s corporeality. Edith’s alcoholism represents an attempt to avow her right to exist, and is also a manifestation of fury against the system that has denied her body the womanly rights of marriage and maternity. ‘Gone Under’ was accused by one reviewer for the *Athenaeum* of being a ‘revolting study of drink and lust and murder’ which ‘should never have been printed’ (1895: 375). While Edith’s recourse to alcohol works as a strategy by which to resist her purely decorative existence, she does not revel in her excessive drinking as the *Athenaeum*’s critic seems to suggest. This becomes apparent in text when Edith is discovered by the girl lying down and:

moaning in the lower berth; the bed-clothes had fallen into a confused heap upon the floor, and she was uncovered, shivering with cold, her hair streaming out like amber drift-weed at every lurch; a trickle of blood ran from one of her white wrists. A diminutive pair of boots, an empty champagne bottle, fragments of glass and

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275 Ary Scheffer (1795-1858) was a painter, illustrator and engraver of Dutch and German extraction who studied in Paris under Guérin. Sheffer often painted literary and religious subjects, he also painted a number of portraits including one of Charles Dickens in 1855.
china, and an upturned tray slid noisily to and fro on the floor; an unopened bottle is propped with towels in the basin (Egerton 2006: 103).

The signs of Edith’s heavy drinking are self-evident; the empty champagne bottle, the second bottle lying in wait, and the disorder of the room all indicate that Edith is drunk and intending to continue drinking. However, it is her bodily display which works to most clearly represent the female alcoholic as a pitiable yet highly eroticised figure, subject to self-harming drives both by her (unsuccessful) attempt at suicide, and her dishevelled figure disarrayed amongst the debris of a binge. Edith’s body is positioned by Egerton’s narrator in such a way that it can be easily read as both tragic and erotic, as a spectacle worthy of pity but also of objectification as an objet d’art. In this way it replicates both the drunken body of the woman observed by the anonymous Medical Gentleman, and the body of Virginia Madden whose intoxication is seen by Mr Widdowsen in Gissing’s The Odd Women.

The scene of Edith’s bodily display recreates the ‘fall’ of certain tragic heroines of nineteenth-century art and literature. In particular, it re-imagines the death of Ophelia in Shakespeare’s Hamlet (1603) from John Everett Millais’ oil on canvas entitled Ophelia (1852). In Millais’ image, Ophelia is partly submerged in water, her mass of auburn hair mirroring the surrounding reeds and bracken in both colour and texture. Millais pays particular attention to the dying figure, her arms parted in a supplicant gesture as she takes her final breath; she is represented as neither dead nor alive. Ophelia’s final inhalation is depicted as subtly orgasmic, and presents an eroticised rendering of her last moments of life, which is particularly suggestive of necrophilia since Shakespeare’s play sees Ophelia drowned off stage. Ophelia’s death is suggestively suicidal, the product of a drive

276 In Shakespeare’s play Ophelia is engaged to marry Prince Hamlet, but, after he breaks off their engagement and kills her father, Ophelia’s is driven mad by grief and eventually dies by falling into a brook and drowning. Her death is widely read as a suicide but described in the play as accidental.

277 Ophelia’s final scenes in Hamlet reveal that she has been singing bawdy songs about the loss of her virginity, and her madness is suggested to be the result of her love for her father and her romantic infatuation with Hamlet (Shakespeare 2008). Although Ophelia is not necessarily a fallen woman by nineteenth-century standards, her death is closely connected to her excessive passion and unmanageable desires. Thus, Ophelia comes to be represented as sexually compromised in a number of pre-Raphaelite works which similarly depict her in a boat or in the water with reed-like hair, and in a state of physical collapse. These include Arthur Hughes 1871 painting entitled Ophelia (And he Will not Come Again), and John William Waterhouse’s series of paintings of the same subject in 1889, 1894 and 1910. The 1889 and 1894 versions of Waterhouse’s Ophelia are markedly similar; the central figure is depicted in a white dress, with abundant red hair and in passive (albeit different) poses in both. The 1910 painting is markedly different, in that the figure is much more foregrounded and wears a colourful blue and red dress. Rather than awaiting her death, this version of Ophelia is depicted stepping out into the water with a sense of intention. Interestingly, all three emphasise the natural imagery of the scene in which Ophelia’s death takes place. Waterhouse also painted three different versions of Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ in 1888, 1894 and 1916.
towards self-annihilation caused by her madness, itself a highly feminised response to trauma. Similarly Egerton’s Edith is described as in a state of disorder in which she is also only semi-conscious, the result of self-harm, caused by her excessive drinking and in response to the traumatic memory of her child’s death. Edith’s wet, shivering and partially naked body, like that of Millais’ Ophelia, contributes to an aesthetic which reads female sexuality through bodily codes which value neatness, order and restraint; they also eroticise, yet ultimately devalue, bodies which do not adhere to these codes. As Sophia Andres points out, Egerton was not alone in her use of the pre-Raphaelite subject as inspiration for her fallen woman characters, since Pre-Raphaelitism ‘became an integral part of most Victorian novels, conveying contemporary anxieties over various socio-political issues’ (2005: xv). However, Egerton’s aesthetic and political divergences from the novels of her mid-Victorian predecessors seem oddly in conflict with her retention of limiting nineteenth-century artistic conventions to depict her self-harming heroines.

Curious about Edith’s drinking, the girl in ‘Gone Under’ asks ‘Why do you? It shows so plainly, and people notice it, and it spoils you – you are so beautiful, it’s such a pity!’ (2006: 106). Here, the young girl’s comments convey sympathy for the alcoholic fallen woman, but this sympathy is framed by a veiled yet deeply ingrained Victorian idealisation of beauty which is problematic in a story which critiques this ideal. Egerton undermines the nineteenth-century belief in physiognomy, by exposing the naiveté of a narrator who cannot understand how the drunken woman could be at once both beautiful and bodily corrupt. However, while exposing the limitations of the codes by which the Victorian body is read, Egerton continually deploys these codes in her display and use of the damaged female body as a metaphorical tool. The narrator’s question about the effect of drinking on Edith’s beauty is rearranged and re-deployed a few paragraphs later as the words of her married lover. We are told that upon learning of Edith’s pregnancy her lover ‘said it would spoil me’ (2006: 107). The comment suggests Egerton’s criticism of a society in which the potential reconciliation of the fallen woman by way of maternity, cannot be allowed since it might undermine her aesthetic and bodily functions as a sexual commodity. It is telling that that the same phrase is used by both the sympathetic female narrator and the man whose cruelty and abandonment have been the cause of his victim’s drinking; the repetition demonstrates the extent to which Egerton’s text exposes both male unscrupulousness and the embeddedness of patriarchal notions which privilege traditional expectations of feminine beauty and behaviour. Egerton also suggests that the inability to
enact the role of mother is the source of Edith’s alcoholism, since she tells the girl ‘the child haunted me! I drank to kill it’ (2006: 109) explicitly aligning maternal traumas with self-harm.

Towards the end of the text Edith is seen working as a prostitute, having adhered to the Drunkard’s Path and the Victorian seduction narrative respectively. Upon recognising Edith ‘a stifled cry of horror burst through the girl’s lips. What a wreck! What a face! What a mask of the tragedy of passion, and sin, and the anguish of despair! Phthisis and drink have run riot together; have wasted her frame, hollowed her cheeks, puffed her eyelids, dried the dreadful purple lips and soddened the soul within’ (2006: 113). Egerton portrays Edith’s journey from genteel vice to prostitution, depicting the damaged alcoholic body of her fallen female character as central to her critique of bourgeois morality and patriarchal laws which force women into self-destructive behaviours. However, she also defines her antagonist through a system of signs which encode the corporeal with aesthetic properties in line with the limiting and male-oriented discourses found in Victorian art, literature and culture; she simultaneously suggests that natural motherhood is a vital vocation for the Victorian woman just as in Eliot’s ‘Janet’s Repentance’ and Gissing’s The Odd Women.

In perhaps the most controversial story within the Discords collection, Egerton tells the tale of a drunken wife and mother, whose episodes of intoxication are witnessed by both male construction workers on the street outside her house and the New Woman lodger living inside it. In ‘Wedlock’ Egerton’s alcoholic heroine is Mrs Jones, a lower-middle class mother of an illegitimate child, who is married to a cruel husband whose three children she must care for while neglecting her own. In the first section Mrs Jones is subject to the judgment of two men, one of whom shouts and jeers at her as she drunkenly attempts to open her front door. The workmen watch Mrs Jones ‘fumble[ ] stupidly’ while she is heard ‘mumbling intelligibly’ (Egerton 2006: 116), and they are transfixed by the grotesque yet fascinating spectacle of her drunken body. Indeed, though often drunk Mrs Jones is not physically unattractive, and Egerton uses the same phrase to describe Mrs Jones, as she had used in relation to Edith in ‘Gone Under’. Mrs Jones is ‘attractive and repellent’ (2006: 120), and beautiful ‘in a singular way’ (2006: 120). The text describes the female alcoholic in terms of both her physical beauty and bodily disorder as:

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278 Mr Jones has convinced Mrs Jones to marry him, by promising to support her illegitimate child Susie. However, after they are married Susie is sent to live with an Aunt, and Mrs Jones is forced to care for Mr Jones’s three children instead. Susie becomes ill, and Mr Jones withholds the news of her illness from her mother until it is too late and she dies before Mrs Jones can reach her.
Significantly, Egerton’s description of Mrs Jones reveals something of her class status. Mrs Jones is not working class like the inhuman Mrs Blackpool of Dickens’s *Hard Times* or the fallen Esther in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*; nor has she fallen from a position of wealth or gentility like Thackeray’s Becky Sharpe, Eliot’s Janet Dempster or Gissing’s Virginia Madden. Despite the jibes of the workmen Mrs Jones lives in ‘a genteel suburb’ (2006: 115) and her dress reveals finery which is ill-kempt yet indicative of lower middle-class status. Egerton constructs her alcoholic as neither a bored middle-class Odd woman, nor a fallen or socially compromised working-girl or slum-dweller.

Mrs Jones’s alcoholism is defined in terms of her inability to maintain the orderliness required by middle-class social and moral standards. Her face and hair are dirty and her bonnet is askew, her dress is torn so that her petticoat is displayed, suggesting a sense of sexual availability, which – along with her intoxication, allows the workmen to feel justified in the vocality of their criticisms. Egerton selects the middle-class body as the site of self-damage in her text, disrupting notions that alcoholism was a working-class problem, and attempting to re-write the narrative of the Drunkard’s Path with which ‘Gone Under’ had been framed. Later in the story, a second workman offers a more sympathetic perspective. Blaming ‘eredity, wot comes down from parents to children’, the man makes the case that ‘she canrn’t [sic] ’elp it no more nor the colour of ’er ’air’ (2006: 117). However, theories of inheritance are downplayed by the narrative, which, once having moved inside the house, begins to reveal the complexity of Mrs Jones’s self-destructive impulses. She tells her female lodger, I never knew a woman drink for the love of it [...] there’s almost always a cause’ (2006: 120): the story then goes on to position that cause as a symptom of women’s unequal relationships with men. Tricked into marrying a man who had promised to undertake the care of her daughter, Mrs Jones finds herself instead trapped in a brutal marriage to a violent husband who keeps her from exercising her maternal instincts. Eventually Susie dies before her mother can come to her, and the story ends when Mrs Jones murders her husband’s three children in retaliation. In a prefiguration of
Thomas Hardy’s climactic scene of child murder in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Egerton has her female character murder the children for whom she feels she cannot continue to care. Unlike the innocent Father Time, who kills his siblings and himself because they are ‘too menny [sic]’ (Hardy 2009: 298), Egerton’s child-killer is monstrous because a Christian society has determined that it is her biological duty to care for children. Despite this, Mrs Jones is treated sympathetically, and her murderous act represented as understandable given her grief and mistreatment by both her husband and his children. Hardy’s New Woman character Sue is ‘punished’ for her refusal to marry Jude with the annihilation of her illegitimate family. Similarly, Egerton’s ‘New Woman’ – Mrs Jones’s lodger – is also punished in the text, for her lack of motherly interest in Mrs Jones’s plight. The lodger is childless and unsympathetic, and her sterility is reflected by her inability to generate literary work. Contrastingly, Egerton’s Mrs Jones commits infanticide, because the most basic of womanly duties, that of raising her child, is denied to her.

Egerton suggests that childlessness and enforced motherhood are equally unnatural and dangerous roles to be occupied by women. In doing so, she proposes that until marriage and motherhood become free and biologically – rather than socially-determined professions, tragedy is likely to ensue. However, Egerton’s greatest criticism is reserved for those in observational positions within the narrative, who, as in the case of the Medical Gentleman or Gissing’s Mr Widdowson, attempt to read the body of the female alcoholic through the lens of bourgeois moral and religious convention. Mrs Jones’s alcoholic body is also observed by her female lodger, a woman writer whose detached appraisal is negatively encoded by the text. Upon finding her landlady drunk and beaten, the New Woman character ‘supports her into the bedroom and on to the unmade bed […] A look of weary disgust crosses her face as she sees the litter on the table’ (2006: 118), demonstrating the extent to which her critique originates in the same Victorian values of order and neatness which require the confinement and control of women’s bodies. After a

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279 It is worth noting that Father Time is, like Susie, a step-child. Egerton, like Hardy’s, deploys the figure of the step-child as a symbol of marital discord or of marriages which have failed. Unlike Sue Bridehead, a number of Egerton’s heroines live in free unions with men which are far more successful than conventional marriages. Egerton reverses Hardy’s use of the step-child as a symbol of the failure of a free union.

280 Egerton draws on the myth of Clytemnestra in much the same way as Caird in *The Daughter of Danuas*. While Caird constructs Hadria Fullerton as Iphigenia, Egerton casts Mrs Jones as Iphigenia’s mother Clytemnestra, who murdered Agamemnon in retaliation for her daughter’s murder in Homer’s *Odyssey*.

281 The New Woman neighbour is shown to be lonely and overworked, and her only child (her work), is ungenerative and unfinishable. The text seems to suggest that her lack of nurturing or maternal abilities make her production of literature untenable.
violent altercation during which Mr Jones assaults his wife and throws her onto the street, their lodger appraises Mrs Jones’s damaged body. The New Woman observes that:

she has on a clean pink cotton gown and her hair is nicely done and her skin looks very pink and white; but her eyes are swollen, and there is a bruise on the one temple and a bad scratch on her cheek [...] The other woman observes her closely as she does most things – as material. It is not that her sympathies are less keen since she took to writing, but that the habit of analysis is always uppermost (2006: 120).

In her act of watching, the woman writer deconstructs Mrs Jones’s body, taking stock of her injuries as well as her more attractive physical characteristics. Like the male writers and characters mentioned by this chapter, who describe the female alcoholic with pity and disgust, Egerton’s New Woman lodger interfuses her criticism with desire. Rather than recognising the pathos in the juxtaposition of Mrs Jones’s beauty with the physical disfigurement caused by her alcoholism, she assesses her as merely ‘material’. In doing so the woman writer commodifies and objectifies Mrs Jones, subjecting her to a gaze which undermines her humanity and positions her as an object. Like the young girl in ‘Gone Under’, the male narrators of Sarah Grand’s fiction, and the male medico-scientific establishment, the woman writer performs the masculine scopic function in Egerton’s ‘Wedlock’. She is a problematic figure in a narrative which criticises looking, yet communicates its disapproval by displaying the damaged female body as an exhibition of atrocity for its readership.

Egerton’s strategy of corporeal spectacle exploited the late-century wound culture, in which looking at the body and its assorted violations, challenged the ideology restricting women’s participation in the public sphere. The damaged alcoholic body is never allowed to survive in Egerton’s stories, which, despite their focus on psychological interiority rather than descriptive detail, represent what Seltzer has described as ‘the commutability of word counts and body counts’ (1998: 40); the opening of the private body in public, as a site of social (and narrative) debate. The late-nineteenth-century process of writing is bound up with anxieties about modernity and corporeality in machine culture; these anxieties are embodied in ‘Wedlock’ by the woman writer, whose attempts at cultural production are interspaced with, challenged by, and aroused by, the exhibition of the drunken and broken body of her landlady. From the perspective of both the male and female observer, sympathy for the drunken woman is limited since although she is clearly subject to the restrictive tyranny of marriage, she is also unsuccessful in her attempts at both domesticity and motherhood. Egerton’s dramatisation of the analytical, and
judgmental, woman writer suggests her own ambivalence towards the emergent feminism of the late-nineteenth century. Her depiction of the damaging effect of enforced motherhood expounds Egerton’s views on women’s right to marital and maternal freedoms, although not the entire catalogue of women’s demands for equality. However, in ‘Wedlock’ Egerton once again argues that ‘true’ motherhood and honest maternal feeling (exemplified by Mrs Jones and the absent Susie) must be encouraged, or the consequences might be both self-destructive and homicidal. It is Mrs Jones’s inability to channel properly her maternal skills which seals her fate, and the woman writer’s childlessness which makes her powerless to sympathise fully with Mrs Jones. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) Elaine Showalter argues that Egerton’s central female characters fail to direct their repressed rage at men, instead affecting an ‘avoidance of these central confrontations’ (2007a: 214) by attacking weaker characters. I would suggest that the central confrontations in these stories, are those fought between the heroines and themselves; their rage is inwardly focused in acts of alcoholic self-harm which help to sustain their (albeit limited) survival in a society which requires them to swallow their pain.

**Mary Angela Dickens and the Drunken Female Parishioner**

Mary Angela Dickens was most well known in her lifetime, firstly as the eldest granddaughter of the author Charles Dickens, and latterly as an author of children’s fiction.282 However, in addition to her children’s collections, Dickens published a number of novels and essays, and her short stories appeared in *All The Year Round* (the periodical inherited by her father from her grandfather), as well as in other serial publications throughout the late-nineteenth century.283 Like George Egerton, Dickens was not publically involved in the gender debates of the late-nineteenth century, and despite writing about women’s issues in a number of her texts, appears not to have concerned herself with the female political agitation of her day. There are no publications which indicate that Dickens campaigned in any way for women’s rights, nor does her biographical work about her memories of her grandfather hint at any such interests.284 Although Dickens’s writing appears in a number of twentieth-century collections of women’s short stories, her novels remain largely out of print, and little attention has been paid to the ways in which her work engages with nineteenth-century gender debates. Perhaps this is in part due to her lineage,

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282 Mary Angela Dickens (1862-1948) was the daughter of Charles Dickens Junior and Elisabeth Matilda Moule Dickens and was named after her Aunt Mary Dickens.

283 Dickens published in *The Strand Magazine* in February 1897 (13:73) and in July 1897 (14:79).

284 See ‘A Child's Memories of Gad's Hill’ (1897a).
and in part because her novels betray a tendency towards sentimentalism which is at odds with the aesthetic of the better-known New Woman novels. It is in her short stories that serious criticisms of bourgeois masculine ideologies begin to appear, and her stories about women reveal a decidedly ‘feminist’ subtext at odds with her public persona and the Dickensian traditionalism of most of her novels. In writing about the female body, Dickens traverses a space between tradition and revolt which aligns her work with the New Woman writers of her day, despite what appear to be genuine reservations about women’s political freedoms. Dickens’s literary output slowed considerably after the turn of the century and it appears that she stopped writing altogether after the publication of her final novel *Sanctuary* in 1916. Consequently, her texts offer a significant snapshot of fin-de-siècle concerns about the female body from a writer who was unavoidably part of the old order of Victorian values, and paradoxically part of the challenge to it.

In her 1896 collection *Some Women’s Ways*, Dickens depicts a cross section of female types, from the shameless flirt in ‘Kitty’s Victim’ to the beautiful yet lonely society woman in ‘Another Freak’, and the domineering New Woman in ‘An Unprincipled Woman’. However, all of Dickens’s women are shown to be subject to bodily regulation in line with phallocentric imperatives, despite their often unruly behaviour or combative tendencies. Where these women do defy convention or subvert notions of bourgeois Christian morality, they are left unhappy and alone, and their respective problems are resolved only by marriage or the assertion of moral superiority at great personal cost. These plot resolutions are framed by nineteenth-century religious dictates, which viewed marriage or self-abnegation as the only two possible routes to happiness for women. The female drunk appears in the final story of *Some Women’s Ways* entitled ‘So as by Fire’, in which a new Vicar arrives in the quiet village of Abbot’s Cordon. Upon his arrival the Reverend Maurice Drury immediately finds himself involved in rehabilitating the drunken school mistress, Mrs Neale. While the Vicar’s support and attention fortifies Mrs Neale,

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285 Dickens’s heroines are often forced to take drastic actions in response to dire situations: – fraud, bankruptcy, and suicide in *A Valiant Ignorance* (1894) and secrets, madness and murder in *Against the Tide* (1898) are just two examples of the great number of sensationalist plot features found in Dickens’s novels. Although the writing of New Woman novelists such as Grand, Caird, and Schreiner came under fire for their melodramatic re-writings of the conventional marriage plot, their respective works have never been accused of sentimentalism. Unlike Mary Angela Dickens, the New Woman novelists used melodrama to assert their political views about: contagious diseases, education, women’s work, free unions and maternity.

286 The name of Dickens’s character suggests her predicament, given that she is forced metaphorically to kneel as a penitent sinner and ask forgiveness of God for her drinking. The name is ironic given that it is Mrs Neale who emerges from her ordeal with moral fortitude, and her confessor who kneels before her begging her to love him.
helping her to live a sober and useful life in the village, Drury begins to fall in love with his lost sheep, despite his engagement to another woman. From his first encounter with Mrs Neale, Drury is attracted to her suffering body for reasons both physical and, at least ostensibly, spiritual. A beautiful martyr to narrow social codes, Mrs Neale destroys herself with alcohol because of her tragic past. Her husband’s fraud, conviction and consequent suicide as well as her loneliness, and the absence of compassion from her neighbours, drives Mrs Neale to drink excessively.  

While disgusting to the villagers of Abbot’s Cordon, Mrs Neale is beatified by Drury who imagines her as a suffering saint, angelic, dignified yet deeply tormented by spiritual unrest. Drury tells his landlady ‘I have never seen a face which gave me stronger feeling that behind it was a soul needing help’ (Dickens 1896b: 289). Yet despite his efforts to help Mrs Neal, it is Drury’s own soul which hangs in the balance. While Abbot’s Cordon looks upon Mrs Neale as a sinner, it is precisely the sadness and fallenness of her face and form which Drury finds sexually appealing. He describes her as ‘a tall woman, very pale, and with striking eyes’ (1896b: 289) and as ‘tall and finely proportioned’ (1896b: 295), as rather statuesque despite her constant intoxication. Drury notices that:

> [s]he had a beautiful head admirably set upon her shoulders. Her features had evidently once been very handsome; and marred as they were by the expression of bitterness and defiance which lurked in every line, there was still an almost painful beauty about them (1896b: 295).

Like Virginia Madden, Mrs Neale is described in the language of manners rather than corruption as admirable and ‘handsome’. Increasingly unable to disentangle his priestly duties from his sexual desire for the beautiful yet ‘fallen’ female drunk, Drury’s eyes are ‘vaguely troubled’ (1896b: 294) yet repeatedly drawn to the scenes of her bodily struggles. As the spectator to a sacrifice, Drury’s need to observe the suffering of his female parishioner is, (like Galbraith’s secret observations in Grand’s Ideala) deeply problematic. As the narrator is quick to point out ‘the ease which had come to him with Mrs Neale was not his priestly ease [...] in her presence, he evince[d] no access of priestly dignity or patronage’ (1896b: 304-305) and the only assistance he can offer her is a sexual union through marriage. Drury’s concern for the body of the female alcoholic takes the form of scopophilic indulgence; his desire for her is distinctly that of masculine spectatorship and

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287 Dickens takes up the story of fraud, bankruptcy and suicide which she first wrote about in A Valiant Ignorance, both of her heroines have husbands who have killed themselves because of their fraudulent dealings.
paternalistic control. When he cannot cure her of her alcoholism and is faced with his uncontrollable feelings, Drury proposes marriage to Mrs Neale in order to better observe and control her from the authoritative masculine position of a husband. Drury’s attempts to regulate and rehabilitate the female drunk are tied inherently to his need to master her disorderly body in line with bourgeois codes of Christian respectability and womanly submission. When Mrs Neale relapses, coming to choir practice drunk and dishevelled, her fall from feminine grace is articulated as bodily corruption and disease, and the narrator describes how:

from head to foot she was weighed down by the degrading physical consequences of her fall. But, infinitely more degrading, crushing her to the earth, there was upon her the cloud of shame; shame which spoke in every line of her figure, in every line of her hard, sullen face, and in the set, defiant stare of her eyes (1896b: 314).

The language Dickens uses to communicate the degradation of alcoholism contrasts with the earlier description of Mrs Neale as ‘handsome’: it is the language of physical degeneration, infection, and bodily distortion. Mrs Neale’s saintliness is disputed here because her inebriety has brought her down to earth from the position of dignity and beauty she occupies as a repentant sinner attempting to abstain. Like Ideala’s irreligious love for Lorrimer in Grand’s novel Ideala – which is situated by the male narrator as infectious vapour, Mrs Neale’s shame is a miasmic cloud which encapsulates her body and symbolises her fall. Yet, despite its mist-like properties, Mrs Neale’s shame is simultaneously heavy and crushing. Her defiance, which is mentioned on a number of occasions, is characteristic of the story’s central tenet: that Mrs Neale is a martyr to the weakness of men and of society, and as such will not be saved by either. The image of her as fallen (through Drury’s descriptions) implies a sense of sexual compromise which Dickens makes clear has not taken place. As a Victorian woman drinker, Mrs Neale’s consumptive desires are rhetorically aligned with prostitution by Dickens’s male narrator. Drury’s narration of Mrs Neale’s defiance imaginatively entangles her with Victorian artworks depicting two of the most famous of all fallen (and biblical) women: Eve and Mary Magdalene. Mrs Neale’s shame, sensuality, and defiant stare recall Frederick Sandy’s 1862 painting Mary Magdalene, in which the central female figure looks over her shoulder, her eyes dropped, yet her face insolent in its expression. Magdalene is also depicted in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s drawing Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee (1858) in both her ‘carnal loveliness’ (Waldman 2008: 152) and bodily allure as a
fallen yet desirable woman, who remains capable of heavenly ascendance. Later, Magdalene is conflated with Eve in Rossetti’s painting *Mary Magdalene* (1877), in which the beautiful fallen woman holds a spherical object in her hand, replicating the fall of Eve who was tempted by her desire for the apple in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3: 1-24). The fallen woman is painted as sensuous and desiring, with a vacant look of challenge in *Mary Magdalene*. Dickens has her narrator frame the female drunk using archetypal stereotypes of feminine fall found in popular Victorian art, in much the same way as Egerton’s female narrator in ‘Gone Under’. While Egerton attempts to undermine women’s reliance on general male-oriented modes of interpretation, Dickens posits these interpretations as particularly the product of masculine religious discourse.

When Dickens’s female sinner refuses Drury’s proposal it is because she understands that it is only within herself that she can find the strength to survive. While Mrs Neale tells Drury ‘you have saved—one woman’ (Dickens 1896b: 340), the reader is left in no doubt that it is Mrs Neale who has saved herself; from alcoholism, from an unhappy marriage to a weak man, and from ruining the life of another woman in the process. What Dickens suggests, is that the female drunk represents the body of women who fail to adhere to the expectations of gendered Christian tradition, and that it is only the innate female strength of these women which will restore them to the society which demands their sacrifice. Though Drury attempts to help Mrs Neale, it is from a position of masculine desire and observation which problematises his efforts, and reveals that masculine intervention is implicitly tied to the need to master and control. Significantly, unlike Virginia Madden or Egerton’s heroines, Mrs Neale masters herself, refusing to be defined by the patriarchal structures which require her shame and submission, and finding her place in society. In many ways, Dickens’s character has much in common with the re-integrated female alcoholic of ‘Janet’s Repentance’, however Dickens goes much further than Eliot by challenging the masculine epistemophilic drive and allowing her self-harming heroine to

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288 Although Rossetti’s painting shows Mary Magdalene turning away from the world of the body as represented by of the mass of humanity in the background of the picture, the accompanying poem suggests a degree of ambiguity in relation to her sexuality. While Magdalene turns her head towards Christ, the poem suggests that her worship is just as erotic of that of any earthly lover. See Bullen (1998: 74-76) for discussion of the eroticism at work in the painting.

289 Rossetti had already deployed this imagery in his 1874 painting *Proserpine*, in which the female figure holds a pomegranate, suggesting her sexual ruin through the same symbol of feminine fall; she looks out form the foreground with an impudent expression, challenging the viewer’s perception of the Greek (and Christian) mythology. In both Roman and Greek mythology Proserpine (or Persephone in the Greek) is abducted, raped and taken to live in the underworld by Hades, she is representative of the woman who is sexually ruined despite her innocence.
restore her own body within normative boundaries of femininity. This self-restoration, subversive as it is in one sense, still sees Dickens’s alcoholic adhering to bourgeois moral and religious expectations as she aspires to the patriarchal and hegemonic ordering of her disruptive body.

In the texts produced by and about the New Woman which fictionalise the female alcoholic, a variety of strategies emerge with regard to representing damaged female bodies. In Gissing’s novel the New Woman is subject to criticism because of her demand to be admitted to the public space, and her attempts to widen women’s access to the male-oriented economic world. At the same time the appropriately feminine domestic woman is sympathetically rendered as an unfortunate casualty of the Victorian marriage market, and her alcoholism is forgiven whilst it can be kept behind closed doors. Though the alcoholic body in Gissing is subject to a slow process of narrative revelation, it is never made a spectacle of atrocity like the bodies of woman drinkers in the short stories of Gissing’s New Woman contemporaries. I would argue that this is because the novel format could not permit detailed description of these bodies without shocking its readers, and because it required clear and coherent resolutions to its plot. George Egerton’s female alcoholics are displayed publically, their bodies observed by characters within the narrative and displayed by the narrative for the reader. Egerton’s strategy of exhibiting the broken bodies of her heroines addresses what Gissing’s novel does not – the eroticisation of the female body by the very masculine field of vision which leaves them with no option but to self-destruct.

While the alcoholic body in The Odd Women is unattractive and repeatedly hidden by a narrative which requires it to be kept private, the very public body of the female drunk in Egerton is curiously both attractive and repulsive, grotesque yet also sexually alluring. However, in drawing attention to the twin evils of the masculine epistemophilic impulse and female self-damage, Egerton herself participates in wound culture, presenting ‘spectacles of public sex and public violence’ (Seltzer 1998: 31), critiquing yet resorting to a display of female bodies which corresponds to limiting dichotomies of femininity embedded in Christian ideology. Mary Angela Dickens’s story dramatises the female alcoholic as a figure of feminine self-assertion who drinks to escape the cruelties of a male-oriented society. Nevertheless, Mrs Neale’s attempt to restore her broken body to the

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290 Janet is only able to restore herself to a position of respect in society with the help of: a sympathetic female community, the forgiveness of her priest, and the death of her cruel husband. Mrs Neale has none of these resources to draw on, but manages to prevail.
hegemonic order of patriarchy, suggests that acts of alcoholic self-harm are (while highly subversive) too risky a strategy for successful female rebellion. In writing her heroine back into the society which has rejected and condemned her unruly body, Dickens, like Egerton, commits an act of feminist self-sabotage, giving Mrs Neale no alternative but to re-join a restrictive society which judges, regulates and confines her body.

All three writers represent alcoholism as a form of escape from the horrifying realities of a limiting world in which financial, societal, and religious pressures force women into self-destructive acts. However, in the short stories of Egerton and Dickens the body of the female drunk is eroticised in ways which elide the borders between public and private spaces, disclosing an ‘erotics at the crossing point of private fantasy and public space’ (Seltzer 1998: 31). In doing so, both writers effect a disruption of the boundaries which excluded women from the public domain, whilst simultaneously offering them no viable means of protest other than their own self-harm. In adopting the short story form, Egerton and Dickens achieve what Gissing cannot: the detailed display of the damaged female body under patriarchy. Although the novel format offered Gissing an abundance of pages by which to explore the alcoholic body, as in the novels of Sarah Grand that body curiously escapes textual embodiment. However, in the structurally unconstrained mode of the short story, these bodies are painfully embodied; the physical manifestations of feminine trauma are made textually present despite the limited space of the artefacts in which they appear. This paradox will be explored further by my final chapter, which examines the most violent manifestation of self-harm in New Woman writing between 1880 and 1900; self-mutilation in the short story form.
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**Damaging the Body Politic: Self-Mutilation as Spectacle**

Unlike the tropes of anorexia and alcoholism which manifested in the triple-decker novels of the mid-Victorian period and the New Woman novels and short stories of the Fin de Siècle, deliberately self-injurious acts were a less easily recognisable thematic concern. As New Woman writing increasingly departed from publication in masculine favoured forms, and pursued shorter narrative structures, so too it began to adopt more violent imagery. In this chapter I posit a clear link between the escalating use of self-mutilation as a theme, and the adoption of newer types of New Woman expression such as poetry and short stories. I also explore the continued deployment of classical Western philosophies which underpinned the anorexic logic and Christian aesthetic of New Woman writing discussed in the previous three chapters. I suggest that the same logic of bodily denial which reifies both the anorexic experience and the alcoholic response to trauma, can also be traced through the increasing resistance to larger bodies of text which marked the New Woman’s growing presence in the hitherto male-dominated publication environment of the Fin De Siècle. Unlike the passive-aggressive and self-destructive acts of anorexia and alcoholism, self-mutilation constituted a means by which to rip apart both the fictional female body, and the bodies of narrative within which it had been traditionally represented. If, as Brooks asserts, the experience of reading is bound up with the desire to know and possess the body, if narrative marks the beginning, middle and end of this process of desire, then the New Woman’s rejection of traditional forms subverted this practice. As Seltzer has shown, the wound culture of the post-Ripper literary market, created a space in which new representations of the torn and damaged female body could emerge. The ‘public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and open persons’ (Seltzer 1998: 1) upon which Victorian wound culture came to be formed, provided the New Woman with an opportunity to express the previously inexpressible. However, I will show that in deploying of the imagery of self-mutilation, New Woman writers often committed acts of literary self-sabotage, enacting dangerous and self-mutilative strategies on both the bodies of their heroines and their own bodies of narrative.

**Victorian Self-Mutilation**

As a distinct pathological condition, self-mutilation received very little medical or psychotherapeutic attention during the early part of the nineteenth century. Although the
first case study was published in Britain in 1846, it was not until 1920 that Freud’s work on life and death instincts in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* provided a coherent framework within which to read such behaviour. As I show in the introduction to this thesis, Alienists working with asylum case studies had begun to document cases of self-injury such as: scratching, skin-picking, biting, hair-pulling and swallowing foreign bodies, but there is no substantive data to suggest that female Victorian self-harmers deliberately cut themselves (Chaney 2001a: 280-281) or that these behaviours manifested outside the boundaries of institutions like the Victorian prison or asylum. In the 1892 edition of *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, self-mutilation warrants a five-page entry in which origins, causes and symptoms are given. The dictionary states that:

[m]any, perhaps most of those self-inflicted tortures have at times had their origin in unduly exaggerated religious fervour, enthusiasm, or fanaticism […] we have in the monastic flagellations of the Christian church instances of self-torture as an expiation for sin […] All the states of mind leading to self-mutilation, self-torture, &c., hitherto considered, are compatible with reputed sanity, although they are to insanity near akin, and generally indicate more or less mental derangement […] In the present day it is found that although instances of self-injury are not unfrequent [sic], probably the intention of those inflicting them is more commonly suicidal in character (Tuke 1976: 1147-1148).

This entry on self-mutilation was penned by James Adam, whose broader work on self-harm in asylum psychiatry I have discussed in this thesis. As Adam views it, self-mutilation is intrinsic to Christian religion, and owes much of its nineteenth-century pathology to the fanaticism once practised as part of religious rituals in all cultures. As my first chapter argues, Western philosophy and Christian practices of asceticism denigrated the body as the corrupt vessel in which the soul resided. Therefore, in conceptualising self-mutilation as a historically religious practice, Adam maintains that acts which cause bodily pain are steeped in Christian tradition and thus acceptable, and are yet simultaneously indicative of insanity. Adam’s definition exemplifies nineteenth-century psychiatric assumptions about self-mutilation, and more generally about self-harm; namely that it was overwhelmingly a symptom of suicide. Where Adam concedes that ‘wilful self-mutilation’ (Tuke 1976: 1148) does occur, he connects it to psychiatric illnesses which induce symptoms such as ‘hallucination’ or ‘delusion’ (1976: 1149). As I have noted in my

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291 A grieving widow was described as having practised self-enucleation, removing her own eyes in an act of self-mutilation. The case was reported in 1846 by Bergman (cited in Favazza & Conterio 1989).

292 There appears to be no differentiation between suicide attempts and self-harming episodes within asylum records during this period. Royal Holloway (private) Sanatorium and Bethlem (public) asylum admissions records held at the Wellcome Library, and Colney Hatch (public) Asylum records held at London Metropolitan Archives, attest to this lack of distinction.
introduction, the medical profession continued to view self-harm as a type of suicide until well into the twentieth century, failing to acknowledge its potential as a psychological survival strategy; at the same time New Woman writers were fictionalising it as such. The connection to suicide was supported by sensational cases of female self-mutilation which were reported to be the consequence of both suicidal insanity and sexual deviance.

Extreme or violent cases were exceptionally rare, but where they did occur, women’s self-mutilation was immediately diagnosed as hysterical, and it was often connected to other sexual perversions. In the case of Helen Miller – a kleptomaniac incarcerated in New York’s Sing Sing prison between 1875 and 1877, the self-mutilator, we are told ‘enjoyed the attention of doctors and experienced sexual pleasure from having her wounds probed’ (Channing 1878: 389). Like Krafft-Ebing and Freud, psychiatrists who witnessed self-harming acts, failed to dissociate them from eroticism and sexual display, especially where women were concerned. As I have shown, literary and journalistic accounts are some of the most significant and varied representations of the practice of self-harm documented at the Fin de Siècle, particularly those which detail violent acts of bodily self-wounding. However, these representations generally serve to complicate rather than to enlighten our understanding of the psychological and medical phenomena which would be properly diagnosed and treated almost a century later. In 1880 the national newspapers reported that a man’s corpse had been found horribly mutilated in London’s East River, setting in motion a lengthy murder inquiry which would end with the revelation that he had committed the act himself (The York Herald 1882: 2). Similarly, in 1882, the case of Isaac Brooks – who suffered from paranoid delusions, caught the attention of the public when the release of his alleged attackers was reported in The Lancet medical journal and then The Times newspaper in subsequent weeks. Brooks had claimed to have had his genital region severely mutilated during an attack by two men, in which he had been left almost completely castrated. Following Brooks’s death-bed confession that he had in fact committed the act himself, the release of his ‘attackers’ became national news, and served

293 Armando Favazza (2011: 158) and Marilee Strong (2000: 29-33) refer to a number of violent cases of self-mutilation which took place during the nineteenth century in their respective studies. However, few of these occurred in Britain, and cases were publicised internationally in medical journals and not in the mainstream press. For example, the case of Helen Miller was not national news in Britain, but was published in the American Journal of Psychiatry which would have been available to British physicians and psychiatrists. ‘Kleptomania’ is a form of addictive and obsessive-compulsive behaviour; sufferers feel compelled to steal items of little or no value, with no apparent motivation and often without realising that they have done so.
to strengthen public interest in the seemingly inexplicable practice of self-mutilation (Warrington 1882: 81-82).294

In A Bright Red Scream (1998), Marilee Strong describes how in the same year that the Brooks case made headlines, a married labourer cut off his testicle after sleeping with a prostitute, and in 1897 a Russian peasant ripped off his own scrotum and handed it to his mother declaring ‘Take that, I don’t want it anymore’ (2000: 30). Examples of self-mutilation like these were shocking, and along with accounts of self-injury to avoid military service, provided a sensational tabloid backdrop to the everyday battles which self-mutilators may have actually faced. Self-mutilation was an important facet of Victorian entertainment, which, to a certain extent both spectacularised and normalised the wounded body as a subject of middle-class observation (Tromp 2008). The sword-swallowers and human pincushions of the Victorian freak show were examples of popular displays of self-wounding for entertainment, who elicited little more than temporary and transient interest from the public (Cranton 2009: 12-14). Across nineteenth-century Europe and America, cases were being reported of teenage girls who inserted sharp objects into their skin seemingly without pain (Gould & Pyle 1956: 517). Unlike the fasting saints of the medieval period, or the human oddities of the freak show, these self-mutilators were pathologised as hysterical, like the infamous Helen Miller (Favazza 2011: 158). While the majority of the human pincushions exhibited at freak shows were men (Bending 2000: 190 & 208), psychiatric cases of young girls putting needles into their skin were common enough for European doctors to name these patients ‘needle girls’ (Gould & Pyle 1956: 517). Owing to their gender, physicians saw the actions of these self-mutilators as symptoms of feminine madness, or compulsive or sexual disorders such kleptomania or masochism, because medicine had yet to produce a distinct psychological framework within which to imagine them.

Despite the media furore created by the case of Isaac Brooks and others like it, and despite the fact that the public display of, and debate surrounding, the deformed or wounded body was a well-established facet of nineteenth-century entertainment, self-mutilation largely evaded official record.295 It was not until the twentieth century that research into self-

294 See Chaney (2011a and 2011b) for detailed discussion of Brooks’s case and its various appearances in newspapers and medical journals throughout 1882.

295 For example, Vincent van Gough removed his own ear during a psychotic episode in 1888, handing it to a female companion and asking her to ‘keep this object carefully’ (Le Forum Republican 1888). His actions
mutilation began to disentangle the practice from suicide, hysteria and religious fanaticism, associations exemplified by Adam’s entry into *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* and case studies such as those of Brooks and Miller.

**Theorising Self-Mutilation**

All theoretical models of self-mutilation including those proposed by nineteenth-century figures such as Freud, emphasise the role of traumatic memory, in the ‘dramatic repetition’ (Turp 2002: 89) of childhood anxieties or abuse. Twenty-first century psychiatric research has demonstrated a direct correlation between self-mutilation, and histories of abuse or neglect, or failures of parental relationships during childhood. Unable to express the pain caused by psychological trauma, violently attacking the body symbolises an attempt to communicate traumas which cannot be spoken, mastering physical pain when emotional suffering cannot be controlled. A number of neurologists have suggested that the act of self-mutilation triggers the release of hormones which work to counteract pain, anxiety, agitation or depression (Swales 2014). Studies show that those who self-harm may have neurological pathways which differ from ‘normal’ individuals, and that by deliberately self-wounding an individual can force the body to release these endorphins (Favazza & Simeon 2001: 18). In this way the self-mutilator can become the architect of their own pain, regulating themselves when all else appears or feels out of control, using a similar (if more violent) approach to the anorectic. Despite the existence of characteristics common to all diagnosed sufferers, the practice of self-mutilation is not easy to categorise, nor are acts of self-wounding physically or psychologically consistent. Those who self-wound use a variety of means by which to harm their bodies, many of which constitute a response to the specific conditions of their traumatic experience(s). For example, in cases in which a child has been raped or sexually molested, as an adolescent or adult the victim has been found to favour the wounding of their genitals (Levenkron 2006: 331-35). Similarly, children who have suffered violence often reproduce the emotional and/or physical effects of such abuse by cutting, burning or beating the part of their body which has sustained the most pain or which has come to symbolise that abuse, and genital self-mutilation is also prevalent in

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wider publicised in both France (where the mutilation had taken place) and internationally. See Powers-Erickson (1998: 06) for discussion of newspaper accounts of Van Gough’s self-mutilation.

Favazza’s 1998 study found that childhood abuse was reported by 62% of respondents, sexual abuse by almost 50% and 33% had lost a family member to death. Although not all self-harming is the product of childhood abuse or neglect, virtually all recorded cases indicate a stressor which involves a breakdown of ‘normal’ family relationships (2011: 236).
cases of those who feel their sexual urges to be in some way deviant (Simeon & Hollander 2001: 53-54).

As well as differences in the types of wounds inflicted and their location on the body, the psychopathology of self-mutilation differs depending on developmental factors. Non-dissociative self-mutilation is usually the consequence of a reversal of dependence during a child’s formative years. The child is required to suppress negative emotions for fear of parental alienation, and is left with no option but to project intolerable rage onto the surface of their skin (Levenkron 2006: 48). Dissociative self-mutilation is different, in that the sufferer becomes entirely disconnected from their parent(s), others, and even themselves. The result of this detachment is a form of mental disintegration which requires a distraction in the form of blood and/or pain, and functions as a tool by which to self-soothe (Levenkron 2006: 48). However, consistent in all acts of self-mutilation, is the importance of the skin as a metaphorical surface and biological communicative tool. The ‘success’ of the act of self-mutilation depends upon the complicated purpose of the skin which both connects us to the world and is a private and internal organ of the body. Just as the body functions as both a biological and cultural signifier, the skin ‘cannot be taken for granted as merely organic matter, nor as a passive surface onto which social meaning is straightforwardly inscribed’ (Cavanagh et al 2103: 2). The skin bears numerous, complex pressures from both within and without, and also ‘separates us from and connects us to others and to objects in the world’ (Cavanagh et al 2013: 2-3). As Armando FavaZZa notes ‘we normally live within our skins’ unless something interferes with this process, resulting in an ‘inability to perceive where the body ends and the outside world begins’ (1996: 148).

As I have already noted, Freud had posited that trauma facilitated the creation of a ‘parasitic double’ (2001c: 209), at once both part of and apart from the individual, integral to the internal workings of the psyche but equally its external projection. Freud’s recognition of an inability to distinguish between oneself, and the external projection of the psyche, anticipated twenty-first century understandings of the self-mutilator’s inability to ‘perceive where the body ends and the outside world begins’. Those who are unable to distinguish between the borders of the self and the skin, experience a process called depersonalisation in which they cannot fully recognise the limits of their bodies. Depersonalisation is an anomaly of the mechanism by which an individual usually processes self-awareness. It is characterised by the feeling of watching oneself act, yet having no control over those actions, often due to high levels of stress. Sufferers describe
feeling that the world has become vague, dreamlike, or lacking in significance (DSMV 2013: 291-293). Like the anorexic logic of the mind/body dualism which legitimises much of Western philosophy, the experience of depersonalisation privileges the mind over the body and can result in an attempt to defer psychological trauma through destruction of the flesh. In the case of self-mutilation, the skin functions as a membrane through which the ego and the body remain connected, and thus must be attacked. However, the process is cyclical and unending, precisely because cutting the skin only temporarily blurs the boundaries between the body and the outer world. Favazza explains that:

At first glance this act may seem paradoxical since skin cutting might be thought to open the portal through which the inner self and outer world might flow into each other. In fact, a very different process occurs. The cutting causes blood to appear and stimulates nerve endings in the skin. When this occurs cutters first are able to verify that they are alive, and then are able to focus attention on their skin border and to perceive the limit of their bodies (1996: 148).

In attempting to address the disconnection of the skin and the self through self-wounding, the dissociative self-mutilator opens up the body, putting inside and outside into communication in a limited fashion which eventually merely reinstates the skin/self border.

In his 1989 work The Skin Ego Didier Anzieu discusses non-dissociative self-harm, theorising that the disordered relationship between the skin and the psyche as the result of disrupted infantile development. Anzieu draws a parallel between the function of the skin which supports the skeleton and musculature of the human body, to the function of the ‘Skin Ego’ which maintains the psyche, explaining that during infancy:

The biological function is performed by what Winnicott calls ‘holding’, i.e. by the way the mother supports the baby’s body. The psychical function develops through the interiorisation of this maternal holding […] In extreme cases, inflicting a real envelope of suffering on oneself can be an attempt to restore the skin’s containing function not performed by the mother or those in one’s early environment (1989: 98-201).

Drawing on the work of Ashley Montague, who proposes that ‘the nervous system is […] a buried part of the skin, and the skin may be regarded as an exposed portion of the nervous system’ (Strong 2000: 17), Anzieu posits the relationship between the skin and the psyche as an integral form of communication. Furthermore, Anzieu suggests that deficient

297 Depersonalization Disorder refers to episodes of chronic depersonalisation. It is classified by DSMV as a dissociative disorder (2023: 291-298).
298 Ashley Montague was a renowned British-American anthropologist, whose research concerned the intimate link between the brain and the skin, both of which are grown from the same embryonic cell layer
physical contact during the pre-Oedipal phase can result in a desire to re-assert lost communication between the psyche and the dermis through acts of bodily violence. Claiming that self-mutilation constitutes a disruption of the boundaries between ‘inner and outer surfaces’ (1989: 201), what Winnicott calls the ‘continuity of being’ (Anzieu 1989: 201), Anzieu conceives of the self-mutilator as the author of their own suffering (s)he is communicant with the maternally neglected ‘self’ through inscription on the bodily surface. Like Luckhurst’s definition of trauma as a ‘piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication’ self-mutilation also ‘violently opens passageways’ (2008: 3), between the body and the psyche. The flesh then becomes a textual body through which the ‘story’ of infant trauma must be narrated, so that it can come to signify, to become a ‘badge[…] of identity’ (Seltzer 1998: 2). Rather than representing the self, the mutilated body becomes a vessel through which unfulfilled maternal care is avenged, assuaged, and thus entered into narrative to be held to account. This assumption makes sense in light of theories of self-harm (as in the case of Freud’s work on anorexia) which view attacking the female body as the denial of sexuality stemming from an inability to identify with the maternal body. Estella Welldon argues that adolescent girls who self-harm are ‘expressing tremendous dissatisfaction, not only with themselves, but also with their mothers, who provided them with the bodies they are now fighting’ (1992: 40). Considered in conjunction with Anzieu’s ‘Skin Ego’, female self-mutilation might then be read as an attack on the body as a site of unsatisfactory maternal but also sexual identification, a resistance to the female-ness of the body, a female-ness inherited from the seemingly inadequate maternal body. Unlike the anorectic’s desire to entirely transcend or deny the body and its feminine appetites, the self-mutilator (like the alcoholic) requires their body to ensure that communication between the inner and outer self can be violently enacted. Self-mutilation, like anorexia, is about controlling the body; its health and stability are not the primary goals of those who choose to self-inflict pain. Rather, suffering is a strategy by which to cope with trauma: to enter it into meaning through a system of signs and codes which make the body bear witness to that trauma.

Anzieu’s work was published on the cusp of a Renaissance of research into self-mutilation. In 1994, Lois Arnold compiled a ground-breaking report from data collected by the Bristol Crisis Service for Young Women, which investigated experiences of self-mutilation and its
called the ectoderm. See Montague (1986) and Kaplan (2007: 74) for further on the specific function of the ectoderm in self-mutilation.
treatment (Arnold 1994). The report became crucial to psychotherapeutic understandings of the condition, and has contributed to a widening comprehension of the practice amongst medical professionals. Following the Bristol Report, Armando Favazza conducted the largest ever survey of self-mutilators before co-authoring a study in 1998 with Karen Conterio, founder of the (then) only in-patient treatment programme for those who self-harmed.\footnote{Conte}{Conte} Despite the increase in research produced on self-mutilation during the 1990s, sufferers remained stigmatised by doctors and psychiatrists who felt ill-equipped to deal with seemingly incomprehensible behaviour. Now, after decades of stigma and misdiagnosis, contemporary psychology has begun to interrogate rigorously this once-taboo subject, and collections of case-studies and self-help guides abound.\footnote{Twenty-one}{Twenty-one} Twenty-first-century psychotherapeutic work has also served to strengthen Anzieu’s conceptualisation of self-mutilation as the flesh put into violent if temporary communication with the psyche, as Fiona Gardner explains:

attacking the body is essentially a paradoxical gesture in that the apparently destructive act reflects a desire to continue to live and get on with life. Cutting can function as a way of cutting off from pain by providing a distraction (2001: 25).

Gardner’s comment corrects one of the central and ontologically Victorian misconceptions surrounding self-mutilation and indeed self-harm, that it is suicidal in nature. Rather, Gardner describes how self-mutilation works as a complex coping behaviour which, however maladaptive, represents for sufferers the difference between survival and total self-annihilation.\footnote{Gardner}{Gardner} Like self-harm more generally, self-mutilation is, statistically speaking, a female condition. The vast majority of diagnosed cases confirm this (Levenkron 2006: 21) and the ratio of self-mutilators to healthy patients is thought to be approximately one in two hundred and fifty adolescent women (Arnold 1994: 1). Like anorexia, the distinctly (although not exclusively) feminine pathology of self-mutilation

\footnote{Conte}{Conte} Conte’s programme was called ‘SAFE’ (Self Abuse Finally Ends) and was based just outside Chicago. It is currently known as ‘SAFE Alternatives’ and functions as both an in-patient programme with a number of facilities, and a web-based advisory service for self-harmers. Favazza’s initial study collected a sample of five hundred surveys from undergraduate students taking a psychology course, and found that one in eight students had intentionally cut themselves at some point. Favazza’s Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry (1987) remains one of the only detailed cultural studies of self-mutilation available today; the most recent reprint of Bodies Under Siege was in 2011 and Favazza changed his title to reflect twenty-first century developments in thinking about self-harm, to Bodies under Siege: Self-Mutilation, Nonsuicidal Self-Injury, and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry.


\footnote{Gardner}{Gardner} This theory was first proposed by Karl Menninger in Man Against Himself (1938) but it failed to gain universal currency until the 1960s and to some extent the misconception about self-harm as suicide still prevails in contemporary culture.
can be situated as a response to the subordinate position that women have historically occupied in relation to men. Like their Victorian counterparts who were denied a political voice, contemporary self-mutilators find themselves unable to identify, express or release emotions as others do. In her work on self-mutilation, Tracey Alderman identifies the three ‘normal’ modes of expressing pain as ‘crying, yelling or screaming’ (1997: 31). This focus on the verbal component of a healthy response to traumatic experience is significant, as it suggests that acts of self-inflicted violence attempt in some way to communicate what cannot be articulated in normal discourse.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, Victorian women were expected to repress feelings of anxiety in line with a model of feminine forbearance typified by the examples of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Victorian women were required to silence their cries, yells and screams for everything from personal and economic autonomy to political enfranchisement. At a time when women were agitating to have their voices heard, self-mutilation represents an important metaphor for tensions between attempts to communicate dissatisfaction, and the internalised social expectations which required the repression of feminine desires. As this thesis has already shown, the enactment of traumatic memory onto the surface of the body, is to a certain extent fictionalised throughout the New Woman oeuvre. However, depictions of self-mutilation and the psychological structures within which it operates, are not explicitly expressed within traditional forms of writing, the publication of which was determined by the male-owned and male-run printing industry of the period. New Woman writers were beginning to dramatise these concerns, but failed to fully articulate them within the literary formats which had hitherto been available to them and instead sought new ways to narrate women’s wounded bodies and traumatised psyches. Many of the fictional self-harmers examined in this thesis demonstrate an inability to perceive the boundaries between their bodies and the cultures which write them into limiting discourses. In a Victorian society which reads itself through the human form as a synecdoche for its body politic, attacking the body functions as a rebellion against the powers which punish deviance from expected religious and moral norms. Self-mutilation is a way of opening up the skin in order to merge its internal and external functions; to elide the boundaries which keep inner and outer discrete to enact metaphorically what Seltzer terms the ‘everyday openness of every body’ (1998: 2); the flaws in the cohesive fabric of a sexually and economically repressive culture. I show in this chapter how New Woman writing was beginning to associate the internal colonisation of religious and moral self-
criticism, with both dissociative and non-dissociative forms of self-mutilation. In doing so, I not only demonstrate how New Woman writers inhabited the new literary spaces at the margins of heteronormative culture, but also how these spaces were unconsciously occupied by troublingly orthodox counter dynamics of defeatism and display.

*The Rhetoric of Dissociation in the New Woman Novel and the Poetry of Amy Levy*

As the second chapter of this thesis has shown, the New Woman novel deployed specifically passive-aggressive tropes of feminine resistance to patriarchy, such as self-starvation and deliberate self-infection. While these tropes were less covert than similar imagery found in mid-Victorian women’s writing, they negotiated a tension between the display of female self-damage and its nature as a concealed and private narrative. This chapter examines self-mutilation in the short story form, which makes the wounded female body its political and erotic locus. I argue that the limited narrative space of the poem and the short story allowed the New Woman to articulate metaphorically self-harming impulses, and I acknowledge the literary debt owed by writers like George Egerton to her New Woman novelist contemporaries. While self-mutilation does not appear as a trope in the New Woman novel, discourses which highlight the dissociative strategies by which the heroines of the self-mutilation short story are driven, first appear in this earlier writing.

Dissociative processes of distraction from pain appear at a number of points in Grand’s *Morningquest* trilogy. Ideala’s acts of social self-harm are described as a ‘safety valve by means of which she regained her composure’ (Grand 2008: 41), while Evadne Frayling enjoys illness as a distraction from her marital discord (Grand 2007); of Beth Caldwell we are told that ‘the trouble of her mind ceased when the physical pain became acute, and therefore she welcomed it as a pleasant distraction’ (Grand 1980: 8). Similarly, Grand’s contemporary Mona Caird situates Hadria Fullerton’s sufferings in *The Daughters of Danuas* as her inability to dissociate herself from the family unit as ‘the incessant rising and quelling of her impulse and her courage – like the ebb and flow of the tides – represented a vast amount of force not merely wasted, but expended in producing wear and tear upon the system’ (1894: 78). However, later in Caird’s novel, Hadria disconnects from those around her, distracting herself from her emotional pain with self-defeating acts of obedience. Caird writes that a ‘superficial apathy was creeping over [Hadria], below which burnt a slow fire of pain. But the greater the apathy, which expressed itself outwardly in a
sort of cheerful readiness to take things as they came, the more delighted everyone seemed to be with the repentant sinner’ (1894: 335). In adopting a coping mechanism through which to diffuse her rage, Caird’s heroine enacts a paradoxical gesture of self-harm and self-care in which emotional trauma is masked by a painfully-achieved outward serenity. Although this is not an explicit dramatisation of the psychology of self-mutilation, it suggests a consideration of the mechanisms through which female survival might be asserted, through self-destructive and dissociative practices. Formally, descriptions of self-mutilation, however deeply encoded would have been almost impossible in the novel, however poetry could offer a less concrete discourse on self-harm, which required no resolutions or particular moral viewpoint. It is to New Woman poetry that I now turn, in order to demonstrate how the imagery of the mutilated body found its way into a traditionally masculine mode, and laid the groundwork for the short stories which would graphically represent this particular self-harming behaviour.

During the 1880s Amy Levy, an Anglo-Jewish writer living in London, published a variety of poems, short stories, novels and essays which confronted issues of gender, class and race from the perspective of a writer at the margins of all these categories. Educated for two years at Newnham College, Levy was the first Jewish woman to attend Cambridge University (Hetherington 2010: 1) at a time when middle-class Christianity reigned supreme. However, her work was frequently perceived as anti-Semitic, and her portrayal of what critics have dubbed ‘Jewish self-hatred’ (Beckman 1999: 186) served to alienate her from her own community. Levy associated with a variety of marginal groups within the metropolis and in doing so demonstrated how ‘the world of high culture was increasingly infiltrated by the feminists, sexual dissidents, Jewish people and freethinkers […]’ (Bristow 2000: 80). Much of her work suggests contact with some of the most radical thinkers of her day, but until recently little had been known about Levy’s relationship with the literary circles which read, discussed and even published her writing. As a consequence of her private papers and letters being recently released for scholarly examination, Levy’s association with key figures in the political and literary landscape of the late-1880s can now be traced. She enjoyed friendships with New Woman writers such as Olive Schreiner and Vernon Lee, and social activists including Clementina and Constance Black, and

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303 This phrase was first coined by the contemporary theorist Sander Gilman in Jewish Self-Hatred: The Hidden Language of the Jews (1986). Levy’s 1888 novel Reuben Sachs represented the ruthless ambition and materialism of the middle-class Anglo-Jewish community, but also lampooned many of the anti-Semitic assumptions of the Victorian period.
Eleanor Marx.¹⁰⁴ These friendships suggest the presence of certain strong political views which have been shown by contemporary scholars to be completely unfounded.¹⁰⁵ Although Levy’s work draws on feminist themes, particularly with regard to women’s education, she avoided any formal association with the various political groups to which many of her friends belonged.

Levy has been recently resurrected by critics variously as the first modern Jewish poetess, an innovative urban novelist, a militant feminist essayist, and a conflicted lesbian writer.¹⁰⁶ However, it is her poetry that most clearly betrays Levy’s ‘feminist’ aesthetic, and positions her as a writer of interest to New Woman scholars today. Levy published her first collection of poetry entitled Xantippe and Other Verse in 1881. The title poem—a revisionist project which attempted to give a voice to the hitherto silenced wife of Socrates, demonstrated her concern with the difficulties encountered by intellectual women of her own period. In 1888 Levy contributed two short stories to Oscar Wilde’s journal Woman’s World, and Wilde continued to publish her work, even posthumously in 1890 (New 1993: 1).³⁰⁷ Although ‘Xantippe’ solicited a certain degree of success and began Levy’s career as a poet, it is her poem ‘Felo de Se’, which signifies her first engagement with the subject which would dominate her writing over the next eight years until her own suicide in 1889.³⁰⁸ Levy’s poetry resounds with the pessimism which was characteristic of the final decades of the nineteenth century and was ‘yet so uniquely personal a voice in her own work’ (New 1993: 7). Her use of the verse form allowed Levy to dramatise taboo subjects such as suicide and self-harm, as poetic, romantic, and abstract concepts. By adopting recognisable Romantic imagery of lost love and suicidal tragedy, Levy’s verse became

³⁰⁴ Vernon Lee (1856-1935) whose real name was Violet Paget, was a British novelist and essayist. Her work on Aestheticism was influenced significantly by Walter Pater. Lee had a large literary output, but is best known today for her supernatural short stories and her association with literary figures such as Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Clementina Black (1853-1922) was an English trade unionist, reformer and suffragist, one of the first British women to support the rights of unskilled women employed in sweatshops. Her output as a novelist was overshadowed by her important studies of working conditions and her defence of a legal minimum wage for women. Her sister Constance Black (1861-1946) was a socialist and British translator of Russian literature, who introduced many important texts to the British market. The daughter of Karl Marx, Eleanor Marx Aveling (1855-1898) was a literary translator and socialist activist, she committed suicide by poisoning in 898.


³⁰⁷ Levy’s stories ‘Cohen of Trinity’ and ‘Wise in Her Generation’ both appeared in Wilde’s journal. The first appeared in 1889 and the second after her death in 1890.

³⁰⁸ Latin term meaning ‘self-murder’. It translates literally as ‘felony on the self.’ Felo de Se was the name of the British law which could be used to prosecute those who attempted suicide during the nineteenth century, and (technically) until suicide was decriminalised as part of the Suicide Act of 1961.
more palatable to a general public which would otherwise have disapproved overwhelmingly of such inappropriate subject matter in poetry written by a woman. As bastions of the Victorian moral order, the middle-class female readership was not to be exposed to subversive literary fare at any cost. As with Grand’s use of the triple-decker novel, Levy’s appropriation of the traditionally male form of lyric poetry aimed to establish a feminist discourse within a historically masculine narrative form. Like Grand, Levy’s use of this particular male literary tradition, to a certain degree, worked to subvert the notion of female inferiority and exclusion implicit in its conventions. However, in much the same way as Grand’s novels, Levy’s poems were limited in what they were able to say, or prepared to say about female self-harm. In Levy’s case her concerns were expressed through the limiting persona of the male poet-speaker, just as Grand had frequently deployed a male narrator to both challenge and support patriarchal systems of female bodily appropriation. Levy’s poetry was, however, able to deploy the imagery of self-mutilation, building on the rhetoric of dissociation implied in the work of contemporaries like Grand and Caird.309

Levy regularly adopted the role of the melancholic male poet through which to voice her verse, a figure with whom the Victorian public had been enamoured since Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850) and since the general popularity of the Romantics. The expression of suicidal impulses through the narrative voice of what Linda Hunt Beckman has termed Levy’s ‘hungry poet’ persona (2000: 59), serves to complicate Victorian poetic canons. On the one hand, the public would have been comfortable and familiar with the romanticised figure of the suicidal poet. On the other hand, however, the use of the suicidal ‘minor’ poet as a means to question the paternalistic limitations placed upon (women) writers demonstrates a subversion of traditional Romanticism.310 Such traditions determined that masculine writing was an extension of personal genius, and could reflect the bitterness and pessimism of existence, whilst for female writers this was viewed as inherently disturbing and contrary to both feminine and maternal instincts. Literary critics have suggested that Levy’s decision to voice her own deep unhappiness through a male

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309 Levy died in 1889, the year after Grand published her first novel *Ideala* and Mona Caird’s infamous essay ‘Marriage’ had become a national discussion point. Although the majority of Levy’s work was published before Grand’s and Caird’s, it is likely she would have been aware of them as literary figures involved in the debate over women’s right to increased freedoms.

310 Several of Levy’s poems concern the struggling ‘minor’ poet figure. These include ‘A Minor Poet’ (1884) and ‘London Poets’ (1889), the latter having been published posthumously in a collection of levy’s poetry entitled *A London Plane Tree*. 
persona, subverted the gendered archetypes of traditional poetry. However it has also been noted that Levy’s strategy also complicates feminist readings of her ‘hungry poet’ poems since her inability to fictionalise the struggling female poet, suggests a sense of futility concerning women’s attempt to enter into the poetic canon (Bristow 2000: 91). Levy’s choice of subject matter in ‘Felo de Se’ reflects not only suicidal impulses, but the desire to self-wound. This is evident in the poem’s rather conspicuous dedication; ‘Felo de Se’ is written ‘With Apologies to Mr. Swinburne’ (Levy 1993: 366), a self-conscious reference to her parody of the poet’s distinctive style. Levy had been a huge fan of Swinburne since her early teenage years, citing him amongst her favourite poets in her childhood ‘Confessions Book’, and having Judith, the heroine of her novel Reuben Sachs (1888) read his poetry with absorbing interest (Levy 1993: 268-269). ‘Felo de Se’ cleverly reproduces the alliterative verse which Swinburne himself had parodied in his own ‘Nephelidia’ of 1880. Through the poetic technique of assonance, Levy creates a melancholic tone and imagery much like that of Swinburne’s earlier poem. An example of this repetition occurs in line three: ‘I was weary of women and war and the sea and the wind’s wild breath’ (1993: 336). ‘Felo De Se’ also features certain linguistic similarities to Swinburne’s poem ‘Anactoria’ (1866) which is dedicated to Sappho, and in particular the opening stanzas share several words and phrases. Swinburne (2000: 47) writes:

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
(Lines 1-6)

While Levy’s narrator (1993: 366) states that he:

[…] was wan and weary with life; my sick soul yearned for death;
I was weary of women and war and the sea and the wind’s wild breath;
I cull’ed sweet poppies and crush’d them, the blood ran rich and red: –
And I cast it in crystal chalice and drank of it till I was dead.
(Lines 4-7)

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311 See Olverson (2010) for an example of this criticism.
312 Levy wrote in a diary entitled ‘Confessions Book’ in which she listed her favourite poets. See Beckman (1999) for further examples.
313 In ‘Anactoria’ the speaker is Sappho, who directly addresses her unfaithful female lover.
Levy reproduces Swinburne’s AABB rhyme scheme, and her regular rhythm, long lines, and light punctuation imitate Swinburne’s enjambment to the same weary, emphatic effect. Like Swinburne, Levy rhymes ‘death’ with ‘breath’ and also deploys the imagery of blood and specifically blood-letting, like Anactoria whose ‘veins abound’, to describe the emotional pain of her suicidal poet. Furthermore, Sappho’s intense erotic jealousy of Anactoria manifests itself in the association of highly sensual but also painful imagery in Swinburne’s poem. Swinburne eroticises metaphorical acts of blinding, burning and cutting at the hands of Anactoria as behaviours which merely strengthen Sappho’s desire. While Levy’s male poet takes no sexual pleasure in his suffering, her adoption of Swinburnian imagery suggests a similar interest in pain which is to a certain extent self-administered. However, it is not only her assumption of Swinburne’s style that makes this dedicatory offering so interesting to the study of self-harm in Levy’s poetry.

Swinburne’s work included highly subversive thematic tropes which suggested a preoccupation with sadomasochism, cannibalism and the wounded or desirable yet dead body.\textsuperscript{314} The sensuous imagery in the decadent poetry which Buchannan lambasted as exemplary of ‘the fleshly school’ (1871: 1) can be found in abundance in Swinburne’s work, and his own personal interest in flagellation has already been noted in this thesis. Levy chose to dedicate her poem to Swinburne, as well as to parody his style, and this suggests an affinity with both his poetic technique and his subject matter. Although Swinburne’s flagellation fantasies (what he called his ‘delicate torment’) usually involved a sadistic dominant partner, they signify an interest in self-harm, even if administered by another’s hand for erotic purposes.\textsuperscript{315} Levy’s work does not directly refer to self-mutilation; similarly, whilst Swinburne’s work strongly implies the erotics of self-abasement, it falls short of explicit depiction. However, Levy’s poem ‘Felo de Se’ demonstrates significant engagement with the imagery of both self-harm and bodily mutilation, and the cyclical nature of her speaker’s suicidal drives suggests the rhetoric, if not the act., of non-dissociative self-mutilation. The first few lines of ‘Felo de Se’ suggest a male perspective through the comment on the tiresomeness of women, as well as the distinctly masculine occupation of war. In ‘A Minor Poet’ (1884) Levy would adopt a similar style of narration, in which the male speaker attempts suicide, finally succeeding on his third effort. Her speaker announces that ‘The world’s a rock, and I will beat no more |
A breast of flesh and blood against a rock’ (373: lines 71-72). The metaphor of beating the head on a rock suggests the speaker’s refusal to enact psychic pain on his body as a coping mechanism; he would thus prefer to end his life than prolong it with futile acts. Conversely, on a number of occasions in ‘Felo de Se’ Levy’s speaker attempts to survive in the wake of traumatic experience; he imagines his torments through the imagery of bodily mutilation and suicide. Levy’s speaker tells us:

I cull’d sweet poppies and crush’d them, the blood ran rich and red:-
And I cast it in crystal chalice and drank of it til I was dead.
And the mould of the man was mute, pulseless in ev’ry part,
The long limbs lay on the sand with an eagle eating the heart.
(366: lines 6-9)

Here the reference to the bloody liquid of crushed poppies works on two levels. The dark red colour of the poppies signifies dripping blood but also sleep and death, because of the use of poppies in the production of opium during the nineteenth century. It is likely that Levy’s readers would have been aware of the origins of opium and the dangers of its use. De Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1821) had to a certain extent glamorised drug addiction during the early part of the century.316 However, as I have mentioned in chapter three, the popular fiction of the late century had begun to represent opium as synonymous with degeneration and criminality, and as such it became the drug of choice for characters with little morality or respectability.317 Self-medication was widespread amongst Victorians of all classes, and the debate surrounding the pharmaceutical use of opium was influenced by the increasing number of opiate suicides during the latter half of the century (Berridge 1978: 444). Suicide by overdose or poisoning was a trope which Levy used more than once in her work, further signifying the centrality of this imagery to her conception of the artistic self-destruction which drives her male poet characters.318 In her use of the colour red, Levy suggests a symbolic identification of the blood red of poppies with death by suicide, and significantly the death draught is administered via a chalice, a vessel usually containing the red-coloured wine of the Christian sacrament of Communion. Levy’s poet drinks ‘his’ poison from the traditional

316 Thomas Penson De Quincey (1785-1859) was an English essayist whose most famous work was Confessions of an English Opium Eater, an autobiographical account of his drug addiction and the effect it had on his life.

317 See Charles Dickens’s The Mystery of Edwin Drood (which was published throughout 1870 but unfinished at the time of Dickens’s death in the same year), The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890/1891) by Oscar Wilde and the ‘Sherlock Holmes’ series (1887-1915) by Arthur Conan Doyle.

318 The speaker of ‘A Minor Poet’ attempts suicide by poisoning three times. Significantly, it would be by noxious gas poisoning that Levy would choose to die when she committed suicide in 1899.
Christian vessel with which the Eucharist is performed; this indicates an explicit reference to organised religion. On one level, the chalice is the container of the blood of Christ through (Catholic) understandings of transubstantiation, and can be understood as a further reference to blood. The content of the chalice brings death, and therefore its symbolic use may function as a general critique of patriarchal religious structures. Alternatively, the chalice might be read as a reference to the Holy Grail, and the poet’s resultant death as mirroring the death (and eternal life) of Jesus Christ following Christ’s use of the grail cup at the Last Supper. 319 To read the chalice in ‘Felo de Se’ as the Holy Grail is also to recognise Levy’s understanding of the impossibility of female chivalric quest within a male-produced and male-oriented culture.320 However, the notion that Levy’s work attempts to address the limitations of the nineteenth-century publication environment through her own quest for authorship, is in part destabilised by her continued use of the device of male narration and the traditional form of lyric poetry.

As in Swinburne’s ‘Anactoria’, Levy makes reference to the circulatory system in ‘Felo de Se’, drawing attention to the letting of blood and the bloodlessness of the dead soldier and figuring it as a desirable state. Levy proceeds to comment on the comparatively unfavourable position of the suicidal poet-speaker for whom ‘the Gods have decreed no rest’ (Levy 1993: 366 line 11), hinting at the peace which might be achieved through suicide. Levy’s constant reference to the hands is significant in that it foregrounds this body part within her discussion of self-harm. She writes:

Could wail with the wailing wind; strike sharply the hands in despair,
Could shriek with shrieking blast, grow frenzied and tear the hair;
Could fight fierce fights with foe, or clutch at a human hand;
And weary could lie on the soft sweet saffron sand…
I have neither a voice nor hands, nor any friend nor a foe;
I am I – just a pulse of pain – I am I, that is all I know.
(1993: 367 lines 24-29)

The striking of the hands ‘sharply’ implies the use of a knife or other sharp instrument, and thus the reference is highly suggestive of the act of self-mutilation. Furthermore the description of trichotillomania; the tearing of hair from one’s own head, again directly

319 The Holy Grail is the vessel believed to have been used to administer the Eucharist during the Last Supper of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. See Matthew (26:17-30), Mark (14:12-26), Luke 22:7-39 and John (3: 7-26) as well as Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians (11:23-26) for references to the grail.
320 The Holy Grail features in Arthurian Romance as an object which symbolised the power and beneficence of God. In most versions of Grail legends, the chivalric hero must prove himself worthy to be in its presence, often through a quest or challenge. See Chrétien de Troyes’ Perceval le Conte du Graal (c.1180-1190).
depicts another form of self-harm in which the body is damaged by the hands of the poet. The repetition of references to the hands is significant here, and despite the lack of official data on self-mutilation in the period in which Levy wrote, she offers up for wounding the part of the body most favoured by contemporary self-mutilators (Turp 2002: 13). However, the hands in this passage have a dual function, a site of violence and potential salvation. The speaker describes how he could ‘fight fierce fights with a foe, or clutch at a human hand’ depicting both the aggressive as well as conciliatory function of the hands. Finally the speaker reveals that neither option is available to him as he has ‘neither a voice nor hands’, and rather than live or die by his hands must fight against his drive towards death.

Pain is central to Levy’s poem but what is significant is that pain functions within what contemporary readers might identify as a cycle of non-dissociative self-harming drives. Levy’s refrain ‘I am held in the Circle of Being and Caught in the Circle of Pain’ (1993: 366 line 3) evokes the sense of entrapment by emotional trauma described by patients experiencing the compulsion towards self-mutilation in contemporary medicine, by which ‘cutting can function as a way of cutting off from pain by providing a distraction’ (Gardner 2001: 25). Levy’s protagonist suggests a number of painful self-harming behaviours which might provide such distraction, but eventually rejects them all and continues to live in emotional pain. So too is death by suicide rejected to an extent when the speaker states: ‘Bitter indeed is Life, and bitter of Life the breath | But give me life and its ways and its men, if this be Death’ (1993: 366 lines 14 &15). Again, the rejection of death in favour of distraction from emotional pain via physical pain, exemplifies Levy’s engagement with the rhetoric of self-mutilation, in which self-harm functions as a survival strategy rather than a death-drive. Levy’s explicit use of the imagery of suicide and mutilation appears somewhat radical in light of the expectations of Victorian women writers to adhere to the strict moral, religious and social values governing the publication of poetry. However, Levy adopts a male persona to voice such disturbing themes, whilst aligning suicidal impulses with an established and easily recognisable narrative of the traumatised male poet or returning soldier. In 1881, Levy was not able to articulate fully the inner landscape of the drive towards self-destruction, to which she would fall prey in 1889. It was not until women writers began to adopt new types of writing, and to reject male-oriented literary production, that the body of the female self-mutilator would be staged boldly in print. One such example of the dramatisation of self-mutilated female bodies, is the work of George
Egerton, whose short stories heralded a new and controversial expression of the traumatised female psyche in wound culture.

**Bruising, Biting and Cutting: George Egerton’s Self-Mutilating Mistresses**

In a 2001 article, Nicole Fluhr cites George Egerton’s now much-quoted comment that:

> I reali[s]ed that in literature everything had been better done by a man than woman could hope to emulate. There was only one small plot left for her to tell: the *terra incognita* of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as a man liked to imagine her (Gawsworth 1932: 58).

Fluhr views Egerton’s words as both an expression of ‘exploratory glee’ (2001: 244) and an explicit avocation of the revisionist opportunity open to woman writers, to refuse representation within already-established masculine archetypes. Egerton’s use of the new and innovative form of the short story, provided a space in which the tensions between the ‘inner and outer surfaces’ (Anzieu 1989: 201) of the psyche and the body, the private and the public, could be explored. However, as my previous chapter began to show, Egerton’s own work features representations of self-destructive behaviour which highlight how her project of depicting woman ‘not as a man liked to imagine her’ appears to have been self-sabotaged. Despite her revolutionary use of psychological interiors and images of violence, I suggest that Egerton participates in the mutilation of her own body of work, through representations of the wounded female body precisely ‘as man liked to imagine her’. Egerton’s short stories are awash with traumatic imagery. Writing long before Freud’s work during the twentieth century with victims of shell-shock, and the development of any persuasive psychiatric guidelines by which to read symptoms of self-mutilation, *Keynotes* and *Discords* anticipates both.\(^{321}\) Egerton’s concern with what were to become key symptoms in (much later) psychiatric diagnoses of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, indicates her preoccupation with the bodily manifestations of trauma long before the medical establishment could agree on what they actually were. Her stories feature: hallucinations, flashbacks, blackouts, and traumatic collisions; what Seltzer calls ‘the milling around the point of impact’ (1998: 1), the moment at which trauma occurs or is re-enacted and transposed onto the body.

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321 Freud was forced to re think his previous model of the psyche because he could not account for the symptoms of traumatic neurosis he observed in returning soldiers, following the end of the First World War in 1918. He formulated the principle of ‘speculative compulsion’ in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and returned to psychoanalytic frameworks of trauma in his later work on Judaism in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). See Freud (2001d & 2001e).
For example, in ‘Virgin Soil’ (1894) an unhappily-married daughter returns home to punish the worldly mother who has allowed her child to become a victim of marital ignorance. The painful meeting between the women, in which the daughter delivers the news of her separation from the husband her mother has chosen for her, is described ‘as if a bomb had gone off’ (2006: 130). Egerton compares the shock of the news with the imagery of an explosion – an event capable of causing physical wounds but one which is also firmly entrenched in the history of trauma. Twenty-first century readers of Egerton’s story might be tempted to associate the image of bombing with the shell-shock which prompted Freud’s work on traumatic neurosis following the First World War, but in 1894 Egerton had no such knowledge. Thus her use of this imagery indicates her general interest in and understanding of war as a source of symbolic reference, and anticipates the sensations of disorientation and confusion reported by Freud’s patients. Her use of the bomb, as a metaphor for explosive and traumatic types of knowing, is used to convey a sense of women’s shared psychological trauma at the hands of the masculine order. In describing the scene in terms of the aftermath of a bombing, Egerton does not provide the dialogue or description required by other literary formats; she can, instead, imply the trauma of the meeting between the women figuratively. In ‘Wedlock’, Mrs Jones’s murder of her stepchildren and her own suicide are obscured by a narrative aporia; a textual wound which Cathy Caruth characterises as a ‘numbing’ (1995: 4) of memory, signifying an event too disturbing for articulation. Egerton’s narrator thus describes how:

[u]pstairs in a back room in the silent house a pale strip of moonlight flickers over a dark streak on the floor, that trickles slowly from the pool at the bedside out under the door, making a second ghastly pool on the top of the stairs – a thick sorghum red […] Downstairs the woman sits in her chair with her arms hanging down. Her hands are crimson as if she had dipped them in dye (2006: 126).

The aftermath; the silent house, the pooling blood on the floor and the woman’s bloodstained hands, become the only means by which the event can be processed and narrated, suggesting what Luckhurst calls ‘the total absence of recall of the significant event’ (2008: 1). Egerton’s narrative of infanticide departs from the male novelistic tradition because it does not avoid fictionalising the figure of the parent-murderer. For example, Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* uses the child character of Father Time to kill off Jude’s children, allowing Hardy to represent this traumatic event in a way which renders the murderer less culpable (Ledger 1997: 185). In ‘Wedlock’, Egerton makes it clear that Mrs Jones is responsible for infanticide, but by deploying a detached and dream-like narration, Egerton resists
describing the traumatic event itself. The macabre imagery in ‘Wedlock’ is perhaps Egerton’s most graphic depiction of the consequences of women’s various traumas at the hands of men, however, it is in her short story ‘A Psychological Moment’ that Egerton undertakes to express the susceptibility of the female body to patriarchal wounding, through shockingly overt references to self-mutilation.

‘A Psychological Moment at Three Periods’ from *Discords* (1894) features a single female protagonist whose development is traced across childhood, adolescence and adulthood through a series of ‘moments’. The heroine’s name is Isabel, she is highly intelligent and possesses intense personal magnetism, but she is blackmailed into becoming mistress to a married man as a consequence of certain ambiguous ‘papers’ with which he threatens her. The papers are possibly evidence of debts owed by Isabel’s family, since we are told that she recognises ‘the name of the receiver’ and ‘the signature’ (Egerton 2006: 79) on them, and her actions appear to be to protect those she loves. Parallel to the stages at which the reader encounters Isabel, are the geographical locations that she variously inhabits: as a child and a girl in Ireland and The Netherlands, as prey to an unscrupulous man in London, and as a kept woman in Paris. As a child in Ireland Isabel begins a pseudo-masochistic dialogue of self-criticism, in which she both forgoes pleasure and punishes herself for transgression. After mesmerising her school friends with a collection of cleverly constructed lies, she decides to repent of her sin by confessing to them, despite the inevitability of their reproofs. Isabel ‘has promised she would punish herself’ yet she is dissatisfied when her confession elicits no more than a few words of criticism from her compatriots and she is instead left with ‘a sick sense of shame’ (2006: 69-70). When Isabel decides to confess to the one remaining girl on the playground, she describes this final act as an attempt to ‘drain the chalice to the dregs’ (2006: 70), constructing her act as religious in nature. Disappointed by the response to her revelation, Isabel reflects that ‘grinding her forehead into rough bark would be a relief’ and she also ‘bites her tongue in self-abasement’ (2006: 69).

Egerton references religion in ‘A Psychological Moment’ through both the location of Isabel’s first act of self-harm (in Catholic Ireland), and her repeated citations of physical

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322 As in a number of the novels and stories already mentioned in this thesis, fraud features as a central plot device in New Woman writing, suggesting the metaphorical frauds and double standards experienced by women as part of their interactions with men in a patriarchal society. Egerton draws on Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) in which the heroine is punished by her husband for committing a fraud to protect him.
pain as a form of penitential activity. Throughout *Keynotes and Discords*, Christianity is treated with suspicion, and is satirised to convey deep criticism of the restrictive power exerted over women by patriarchal institutions. When enjoying the pleasures of a book, Isabel figures her delight as a sin, and overwrites her desire for education in the language of Catholic penance. She tells herself to:

[s]hut the book now – now, just when the exciting part begins. No, you may not read to the end of the page – no, not even a line more. If you want to be brave, if you want to be strong, sacrifice; sacrifice, mortify yourself. If you don’t want to! No, you are weak, you cannot do that, not even that small thing, for God (2006: 67).

Egerton’s frequent references to mortification position her heroine within the broader nineteenth-century Christian framework of self-renunciation, as well as what Kucich calls the ‘masochistic phenomena’ (2002: 79) operating in New Woman writing at the Fin de Siècle. As other chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, while the New Woman writer often adopted masochistic imagery, it was often as part of a literary assault against sexual double-standards by social purity writers, or by proto-feminists who sought maternal and marital freedoms. I have already noted that Egerton was not a social purist or a supporter of institutions like marriage, and her insistence on of the naturalness of motherhood as a vocation was at best disappointingly orthodox. While Grand’s use of martyrdom as a way to imagine women’s self-denial was at times deployed to critique the masculine scopic drive, in my reading her valorisation of self-sacrifice was largely in earnest. In contrast, Egerton’s use of Christian imagery is, from the outset, entirely insincere and at times contemptuous.

Egerton’s ‘A Psychological Moment’ subverts the process of mortification by depicting a child’s interpretation of penance, and applying it to the pursuit of education through literary experience. The tragic-comic effect of the child’s punishment for transgressing the

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323 Penance is from the Latin word *poena* meaning punishment. One of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, it is also a non-sacramental process of confession and reconciliation within other Christian denominations. Catholics usually perform penance in the form of confession, at which they are absolved of sin dependant on having completed a course of prayer suggested by their confessor. Traditionally, physical pain functions as a penitential activity and usually involves fasting or self-flagellation, although today this is extremely rare even in monastic practice. For more on Catholic penance in both Victorian and contemporary literature and culture see: Hanson (1997) and O’Mally (2006).

324 The mortification of the flesh is an institutional expiatory act of penance for the atonement of sins and achievement of sanctity. The practice is most notably performed by the Roman Catholic Church and their penitential saints. Common forms of mortification include flagellation, in imitation of Jesus Christ’s suffering and death by crucifixion. References to mortification feature in the New Testament in Paul’s Letters to the Romans (8:13) and Colossians (3:5).
boundaries of her sphere, is manifested in her gratuitous self-sacrifice, and works as a critique of the system which raises women from infancy into a dialogue of relentlessly internalised condemnation. This same system posits woman as ‘that which is to be looked at, denuded [and] unveiled’ (Brooks 1993: 97) and therefore Isabel’s attempt to exert her scrutiny upon the masculine world represents a reversal of the gaze which must be punished. Having her self-mutilating child-heroine castigate herself for attempting to invert masculine scopic economies, hints that self-mutilation is a response to limiting constructions of femininity. This is confirmed in the text when Isabel is found in the reading rooms of the British Library just before she is to be punished again; she becomes a mistress against her own will, an object to be looked at, denuded, unveiled, and once known, thrown away.

As Isabel moves away from the Catholic Ireland of her childhood, she begins to question the religion, which has, until this point, provided the structure within which her self-destructive drives are enacted. Images of penance and mortification are further developed in the second ‘period’ of the story, in which Isabel experiences an awakening to the futility of her existence. We are told how, upon witnessing the deformed figure of a fairground worker who is forced to operate the rides, Isabel rejects God asking Him ‘is that what I am to find in the world to come – some idiot turning a wheel for the world to dance – ?’ (2006: 75). Isabel’s unsympathetic identification of the deformed boy as an ‘idiot’ does not go unpunished. Isabel’s comments function as a prophetic signposting of her own life to come, in which she too will be victimised by the relentless pressures of a patriarchal economy in general and the whim of one despotic man in particular. She screams at God:

Oh poor thing! That poor thing! You needn’t have made him; God I tell you, you needn’t have made him! […] She bruises her poor little clenched fist against the gnarled roots as she emphasises her words, and shakes it up at the silent sky […] (2006: 75).

Egerton’s heroine not only questions God in this extract, but the exploitation of the human body as subject to unstoppable economic and social forces which are justified and perpetuated by conventional religion and morality. Like the fairground worker, whose body is tied to a post and whose arms are forced to continually turn the ride, Isabel’s own body will be similarly subsumed into an economy which values only the (decorative and sexual) energies her body can expend. This extract depicts a moment of feminine defiance; however though ostensibly directing her rage against God, Isabel in fact turns it upon
herself, by injuring her own body. It is significant that, as Isabel pounds her fists against the tree, she emphasises her words, suggesting a process of expression which she is denied in her position as an adolescent and a woman. Isabel chooses to beat her fist against a tree, just as she chooses to imagine grinding her head into the bark of a tree in the first ‘period’. This demonstrates an escalation from imagining self-wounding to enacting it. The metaphor of the tree, with its deeply entrenched roots, is suggestive of Victorian moral and social conventions, and hints at the object of Isabel’s anger as much as does the reference to God.

Working within a distinctly Christian framework of self-flagellation, Egerton subverts the process of mortification by directing not penance, but anger towards the personification of patriarchal religious oppression (God), marking a distinct change in the direction of her self-harm from martyrdom to self-mutilation. The futility of Isabel’s position is emphasised, not only by the damage done to her own body, but by the frustrated and ineffective gesture of shaking her injured fist at the sky. In the final part of the story, her impulse towards self-harm becomes more pronounced, as upon finding that she is to be forced into the position of mistress, Isabel considers suicide, wondering:

[i]f she could only steal away to some quiet wood and lie down and die! let the brown leaves, with their deep stains, blood stains cover her gently and hide her forever! Surely it would not be hard to die? She has often felt her heart beat, she knows exactly where it is, a good long hat pin would reach it (2006: 80).

Isabel not only contemplates suicide, regarded as a distinctly subversive and unwomanly act which contravened Christian and criminal law, but she aligns a bloody death by stabbing with the imagery of comfort and release. The description of bloody leaves as a gentle shroud suggests a sense of peace, through which Isabel might free herself from the confines of her position as both sexual slave and fallen woman. Significantly, Isabel’s weapon of choice is a hat pin, an implement inherently domestic and decorative, but also suggestively medical. It is interesting that Egerton endows her heroine with such an instrument; a long metallic object capable of poking, prodding or piercing. In doing so she refers to contemporary fin-de-siècle debates, surrounding what Foucault calls the ‘hysterici[s]ation’ (1990: 140) of women’s bodies; the processes by which the female body was pathologised and entered into medical discourse as an object to be observed and investigated. Egerton’s staging of this process, the medicalisation and penetration of the

325 Suicide was (and continues to be) considered as a sin in the Christian religion because the body is considered to be the property of God.
female body, further signals her attempt to subvert the epistemophilic agenda; the desire to read, know and master the female body which constitutes the unconscious drive of the Victorian novelistic tradition. However, in doing so, her heroine’s wounds are entered into narrative as signs, by which her body thus becomes part of the same epistemophilic project it hopes to disrupt. Isabel’s consideration of a hat pin as her self-harming *modus operandi* implies femininity through ornamentation, whilst the use of it to puncture the heart is suggestive of an abortive act. Such an act is symbolic of the protagonist’s enforced concubinage, and the potentially disastrous consequences of illegitimate motherhood which Egerton depicts elsewhere in *Keynotes and Discords*. In entertaining the idea of a hat pin as a suicide weapon, Isabel proposes a strategy by which to ‘wear’ her damage as a ‘fashion accessory’ (Seltzer 1998: 2). In considering suicide by hat pin, Egerton’s Isabel emphasises the irony of female bodily spectacle, which threatens a disruption of male dominance over her body and plays directly into the hands of those who would seek to make her a commodity. Isabel proposes to release herself from bondage via death, by taking an instrument symbolic of the eroticised domesticity into which she has been forced, and using it for the purpose of self-mutilation and self-display. By giving her heroine a hypothetical weapon symbolic of male phallic power, Egerton attacks Victorian patriarchy whilst, at the same time, allowing her character to succumb to its pressures.

Significantly, whilst Egerton examines the potential for sensationalism inherent in displaying the wounded female body, acts of display are almost entirely absent from recorded accounts of self-mutilation as a both a historic and contemporary condition. The only display of wounded female bodies considered permissible by Victorian moral standards was within the boundaries of medical examination or the freak show. Modern case studies suggest that the experience of most self-mutilators is characterised by concealment of self-wounding rather than its display. Egerton’s work thus adopts the spectacle of self-wounding as a broad thematic motif rather than a medical condition with which she had had contact. As I have already noted, substantive data on levels of self-mutilation in Victorian Britain do not exist. This is possibly due to widespread misdiagnosis or general ignorance of the condition outside of very specialist health or private mental health facilities. Although twentieth century records are readily available, few cases of repeated self-mutilation include the display of wounds as a feature of the condition. The few that do, occur in cases where the patient self-mutilates as a symptom of psychosis or other severe mental health problems unrelated to self-mutilation, or the mutilation forms part of culturally-sanction behaviour such as tattooing or body modification. See Hewitt (1997: 58) for discussion of examples of self-mutilators who flaunt their wounds.
Isobel does not kill herself, but goes on to survive her ordeal. Later in the text, as she considers her position as a fallen woman and sexual slave, Isabel ‘meets her teeth in her arm, it is a sort of relief to counteract the agony of her soul by a pang of physical pain’ (Egerton 2006: 82). This excerpt represents Egerton’s most explicit engagement with the trope of self-mutilation. Considered alongside contemporary psychoanalytic models, it is possible to view Isabel’s attempt to manage extreme psychological disturbance through physical pain, as the re-casting of mental anxiety onto the surface of her body by non-dissociate self-mutilation. Within Anzieu’s paradigm of The Skin Ego Isabel’s actions can be read as a form of direct communication between the psyche and the dermis, which has been denied during the pre-Oedipal phase. By dramatising the paradoxical gesture of self-harm and self-care adopted by her heroine as a strategic response to anxiety, Egerton displays the wounded female body as both tragic spectacle and site of heroic survival. Furthermore, by so dramatically depicting self-mutilation, Egerton’s work orchestrates a distortion of what Anzieu has called the ‘inner and outer surfaces’ of the female psyche, and demarcates what Favazza recognises as a temporary space between where the body ends and the outside world begins (1996: 148). In doing so, I would argue that like the Ripper murders before it, Egerton’s work serves to address and de-stabilise ‘our most basic sense of the body and society, identity and desire, violence and intimacy’ (Seltzer 1998: 2) by bringing such issues to crisis through publication. The understanding of the body as indicative of the wider social body, and of desire and violence as compartmentalised and private entities, is undermined by Egerton’s literary display of female self-mutilation in ‘A Psychological Moment’.

Egerton further references self-mutilation in the subsequent story from Discords, which is also the shortest in the collection at only a few pages in length. ‘Her Share’ narrates the circumstances of a chance meeting between a young girl of the ‘old’ type, who has just become engaged, and an older woman of a decidedly ‘newer’ character. The older woman returns to the scene of her sexual awakening as a Vicar’s daughter in a quiet country village, where she meets the young girl who is happily anticipating her own impending marriage. The older woman describes to her interlocutor, a passionate but entirely unfulfilled cross-class infatuation with a foreign tradesman working at the Vicarage during her youth. As she will go on to do in ‘Gone Under’, Egerton utilises a plot strategy

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327 Isabel’s mother is never mentioned, and although Isabel certainly has a family, the text does not indicate that this includes a strong maternal relationship of any kind.
whereby a young and naïve woman is educated in life’s cruelty by a more experienced female counterpart. Possessed of a bicycle, with frequent references to her ‘work’ and an interest in German and Scandinavian literature (2006: 96), the older character is depicted as an advanced New Woman type. The older woman imparts her story of thwarted desire and a wasted life, describing how upon re-visiting painful memories ‘I set my teeth in my arm to relieve the pain it gave me’ (2006: 100). The narrator’s remark is incongruous in the rest of the story, and is the only example of violent imagery in a narrative which ostensibly critiques a multigenerational cycle of culturally-enforced sexual repression. This particular reference to self-mutilation appears merely pages after the similarly-worded incidence from ‘A Psychological Moment’ when Isabel ‘meets her teeth in her arm’ to produce a ‘sort of relief’ (2006: 82). In ‘Her Share’ the word ‘meets’ is replaced by ‘set’ but both examples invoke the image through near-identical phrasing; a woman bringing her arm to her mouth and sinking her teeth into her own flesh. This repetition, within pages of its first use exemplifies the significant preoccupation with self-mutilation which recurs throughout Discords. Egerton was to use this image again in her 1898 novel The Wheel of God in which her heroine ‘had bitten her wrist till her teeth drew blood’ (1898: 36), demonstrating her continued fixation on the imagery of self-mutilation through biting, years after her notorious collection of stories had originally appeared.328

The act of biting human flesh and drawing blood had featured in a number of texts long before either Discords or Bram Stoker’s definitive vampire novel Dracula. The publication of John Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’(1819) had heralded the birth of a new form of gothic fiction which continues to enjoy popularity in contemporary culture.329 The vampire myth had been a staple of traditional folklore in a variety of cultures, originating in Asia, before finding fictional expression in Eastern European fairy tales, culminating in its cult status in the British fiction of the late-nineteenth century and beyond.330 Polidori was the first to develop the figure of the aristocratic vampire intent on corrupting innocent female victims,

328*The Wheel of God* replicates ‘A Psychological Moment’ in its tripartite structure, which allows Egerton to depict her heroine at three points in her life. However, it is stylistically very different to the stories in Keynotes and Discords. Egerton’s novel deploys certain features of her earlier short stories (for example narrative gaps and fragmentary narration) but these are minimal and unsuccessful because the format of the novel requires the plot and character development which her stories did not.

329 Stephenie Meyer’s ‘Twilight’ series (2005-2008) has sold over 120 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 38 languages. In 1818, Lord Byron and his personal physician and travelling companion John Polidori, Percy Bysshe Shelley and the 18 year old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin spent a summer in Geneva during which a competition to write the best horror story was proposed. Both Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’ and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) were products of this competition, although Polidori’s text was attributed to Byron upon its publication in *Blackwells Monthly.*

which we now recognise as typical of the genre.\textsuperscript{331} The quest to corrupt female virtue which characterised Polidori’s vampire Lord Ruthven (all of whose victims are female), is complicated by subsequent literary representations of the vampire figure, most notably by Sheridan Le Fanu’s titular ‘lesbian’ vampire in ‘Carmilla’ (1872) and Stoker’s child-eating Lucy Westenra in \textit{Dracula}. In these texts, the vampire represents the female body in a ‘distorted and monstrous form’ (Williamson 2005: 11) in order to demonstrate the dichotomy of fear and fetishisation at play in attempting to read that body. Lucy Westenra’s transformation from a pure and chaste girl into a ‘voluptuous’ and ‘wanton’ (Stoker 2011: 225-226) nocturnal predator, is, as Gail Griffin points out the ‘worst nightmare and dearest fantasy of the Victorian male’ (1988: 143). Not only is Lucy depicted as a sexually aggressive vamp and – as certain critics have noted, a version of the New Woman, but she represents the monstrous in her subversion of maternal expectations.\textsuperscript{332} Vampire narratives had, and would continue to, explore female sexuality and engage with the figure of the femme fatale, while at the same time consigning female characters to the function of mere sustenance for men – and indeed, ‘un-womanly’ women.

The trope of vampirism was widely adopted by women writers at the turn of the century; particularly following the publication of \textit{Dracula} in 1897, but it emerged in political writing rather than fiction. On both sides of the Atlantic, women’s writing began to theorise female economic dependency by reworking the vampire trope to emblematise female ‘parasitism’. In her 1898 essay ‘Women and Economics’ Charlotte Perkins Gilman accused modern woman of being man’s ‘parasite mate’ (2007b: 70), expressing dissatisfaction at middle-class women who were comfortably dependant on their husbands and fathers. Gilman rendered women as guilty of perpetuating a system of economic vampirism in which female independence remained impossible. Similarly and more strikingly, Vernon Lee used the language of parasitic feeding in her 1901 introduction to the Italian translation of Gilman’s essay. In it she writes that ‘man plays the part of the animal [...] and the woman the part of the parasitic creature who lives inside that animal’s tissues’ (2009: 265). Egerton’s 1894 short stories appeared before both Gilman and Lee’s characterisations of women as parasitical or vampiric. However, I would suggest that fin-de-siècle debates surrounding the issue of female economic dependence are important in

\textsuperscript{331} Polidori’s vampire Lord Ruthven is a parody of Byron, who employed the author as his personal physician and travelling companion during his 86 travels in Europe. Polidori’s writing style also imitated that of Byron, which led to his being incorrectly credited with authorship of the story.

\textsuperscript{332} Both Elaine Showalter (1991) and Sally Ledger (1997) include Lucy Westenra as an example of the ‘oversexed’ New Woman.
reading Egerton’s use of biting as self-wounding in both ‘Her Share’ and ‘A Psychological Moment’. Biting the flesh might be read as a fictional resistance to masculine forms of female representation as evidenced by the vampire fiction of the nineteenth century, which was largely written in the novel format and which positioned women’s bodies as their narrative locus. These texts, which saw the sexually liberated woman depicted as a horrifying ‘other’, both erotic spectacle and New Woman threat, are thus subverted by the fictionalisation of a woman whose vampiric desires are enacted on her own body in an act of self-reliance. Central to both of Egerton’s stories of self-biting, is the process of biting itself, as opposed to the production or consumption of blood. Egerton’s self-biters enact violence, yet profit by distraction from pain, rather than the erotic or transformative product of that pain. In vampire fiction the typical victim experiences loss of blood, or finds that their energy is gradually drained from their body by an external force. However, the self-mutilators feel no such sense of lifelessness; life is in fact briefly affirmed by communication between the inner and outer boundaries of the body through a reassertion of the ‘Skin Ego’. Egerton adopts a recognisably gothic trope of biting into human flesh, and yet de-sexualises and demystifies the act. By making her biters responsible for control of their own pain, Egerton rewrites the bodies of gothic narrative which stereotyped women and punished sexual transgression with total bodily destruction. At the same time she consigns the bodies of her heroines to a fate which is in many ways as horrifying as vampiric consumption, because it is self-inflicted.

The trope of self-mutilation reappears in the same collection and notably in ‘Gone Under’, the third successive story in Discords already discussed in relation to alcoholism in chapter three. Egerton’s heroine Edith is haunted by traumatic experience, expressing her psychological pain through severe bouts of alcoholism and suicidal thoughts. She describes how her lover reacts with anger to her pregnancy, using language which suggests traumatic impact in much the same way as does the imagery of the bomb in ‘Wedlock’. ‘It was if he struck me sharply in the face’ (Egerton 2006: 107) Edith explains, telling the young girl to whom she relays her story that ‘I had no occupation, and the child haunted me! I drank to kill it!’ (2006: 109). Thus Edith frames her physical reaction to trauma as a form of dissociative self-harm; harming her body as a means of distraction from the hallucinatory visions which characterise her experience of post-traumatic stress.333 Edith’s inability to

333 I apply the term ‘Post Traumatic Stress’ here retrospectively, since PTSD did not enter medical parlance until the second half of the twentieth century. See DSMV (2013: 271) for definition.
form a bond with her dead child, suggests a reversal of the Skin Ego in that the mother, rather than the child, is compelled to attack her skin in order to re-enforce a lost maternal connection. When Edith goes on to damage her body by cutting her wrists, the young girl describes how ‘she was uncovered, shivering with cold […] a trickle of blood ran from one of her white wrists’ (2006: 103). Egerton’s narrator describes Edith’s cutting as minor; it is a trickle of blood rather than a gush, a cry for help but not a serious attempt at suicide, an act of which Edith is ‘afraid’ (2006: 109). In fact, Edith discusses suicide repeatedly throughout the story; she describes wanting to ‘kill myself straight away’ (2006: 109) after a sexual transgression and also threatens to throw herself overboard (2006: 111). However, these threats are considered childish by the narrator, who reads Edith’s discussion of suicide as mere attention-seeking, in line with her impractical dress and immature manner of speech. Edith’s act of self-mutilation functions as an example of Egerton’s direct engagement with the rhetoric of bodily rebellion and submission, in that her tragic heroine repeatedly defies social expectations, whilst succumbing to what Maggie Turp has called ‘dramatic repetition’ of trauma through self-harm. In fighting her position as a sexually compromised commodity, Edith resists by displaying her body as what Seltzer calls an ‘icon, or stigma, of the everyday openness of every body’ in which she wears her ‘damage like [a] badge[...] of identity, or fashion accessor[y]’ (1998: 2). In doing so Edith’s wounds become somatically significant, as a text to be read and known, in this case by the women who renounce her and the men who discard her.

In both ‘A Psychological Moment’ and ‘Gone Under’, Egerton maintains a complex and ultimately dubious ambivalence towards the wounded female body as spectacle. Despite her implicit criticism of patriarchal constructions of femininity and resistance to traditional masculine forms of writing the body, Egerton’s short stories often display a recidivism into the very representations she critiques. In the self-mutilation scene from ‘A Psychological Moment’ Isabel imagines lying down amongst the brown leaves to die, and makes specific references to the reds and browns of her blood, and the leaves which might envelop her corpse. This evokes images from pre-Raphaelite art, and, as in ‘Gone Under’ draws specifically upon the figure of the female corpse in Millais’ painting of Ophelia. As I have already discussed, Millais’ central image of a submerged female body surrounded by dense brown foliage, emphasises the effect of Ophelia’s auburn hair flowing like weeds in the water. Millais’ picture inspired later representations of Ophelia, including Alexandre Cabanel’s 1883 painting and William Waterhouse’s 1894 version both of which feature
strict attention to the detail of the female figure’s natural surroundings either in, or at the edge of, water thick with vegetation. Sexually compromised, Egerton’s Isabel also desires to be hidden forever by the brown leaves which are to be stained with her own blood. When she finally bites into her arm, she describes a distinctly rustic scene reminiscent of all three paintings. Egerton stages Isobel’s self-wounding in the pastoral mode as the:

mild evening breeze, the monotonous note of the sea, the shiver of leaf, scent of night-plants, all seem to accentuate her misery [...] And the leaves just rustle, rustle and the sea croons on, and the great blue canopy stretches away impenetrably (2006: 82).

The use of idyllic pastoral imagery, and references to the red and browns of the scene, are highly evocative of pre-Raphaelite renderings of Ophelia all of which pay particular attention to the movement of the foliage which surrounds her. In ‘Gone Under’ the alcoholic self-harmer Edith is found almost-submerged; cold, wet and with ‘her hair streaming out like amber drift weed’ (2006: 103). The physicality of Egerton’s protagonists also evokes other tragic heroines, of whom Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ (1833) is one example. The eponymous Lady of Tennyson’s epic poem dares to venture beyond the boundaries of the domestic sphere to which she has been confined. After leaving the tower in which she has been imprisoned, she is punished for transgressing patriarchal order by drifting down-river to her eventual death. Although not precisely ‘fallen’ women, both Ophelia and The Lady of Shalott are the victims of their own desires, which fall outside of the strict moral boundaries within which the Victorians sought to confine femininity.

In art, Tennyson’s heroine has been depicted similarly to Shakespeare’s Ophelia. Arthur Hughes, who painted several versions of Ophelia, depicts the Lady of Shalott, in his 1873 canvas, lying helplessly in a boat with her long auburn hair drifting behind her, half-immersed in the water. Her face is white, and she is disembodied below the waist by her floating white skirts, which appear to vanish at the end of the boat into smoke-like whirls. In the background, ruddy-faced men and women in colourful Puritan costume stand back aghast, creating a bodily and spiritual contrast to the ghostly, ethereal and otherworldly figure in the boat. The voyeurs are unwilling to offer aid but instead gaze intently upon the

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334 Waterhouse also painted Ophelia in 1889, a version which has already been noted by this thesis. In the painting, Ophelia is depicting lying down in dense foliage with her hair and clothing dishevelled. In this image, the body of water is featured in the far distance rather than in the central image, but the rural scene is similar to Waterhouse’s painting of 1894.
spectacle, suggesting a scopophilic objectification of femininity which is characteristic of pre-Raphaelite art and demonstrates its epistemophilic impulse. Similarly, John William Waterhouse’s 1888 painting of the same subject shows the Lady sitting upright with a look of expectation, in a boat which drifts through brown reeds, her long amber hair billowing in the breeze. In both Millais’ Ophelia and the paintings inspired by Tennyson’s poem, the heroine is infantilised and eroticised. Her pallid complexion and helplessness as a woman alone and adrift, work to denote childlike innocence and purity. Her unkempt red hair flowing without containment suggests wantonness and desire, and the irrepressibility of female sexuality ‘invested with an over-determination of sexual meaning’ (Ofek 2009: 3). The submersion, or partial submersion of these women, is also intrinsically bound to Victorian literary and artistic stereotypes of the drowned woman as sexually compromised.  

Egerton’s tendency to objectify transgressive femininity has been noted by Nicole Fluhr, who argues that the narrator in ‘Gone Under’ ‘sees the woman as an object of analysis, reducing her to easily read symbols […] as the girl comes to know Edith, however, [Edith] is neither virgin nor whore, but a grieving mother’ (2001: 260). While this seems to be the case, the impulse to visualise her characters as the tragic heroines of art, suggests an understanding that the ability of any writer in the period to imagine femininity is limited and defined by the language and the belief systems made available by the society they inhabit. Egerton vehemently rejected such belief systems in both her fiction and her personal correspondence, criticising conventional marriage and instead championing ‘free unions’ based on egalitarian values of sexual equality. Her reliance on established mid-Victorian stereotypes to construct her fictional ‘fallen’ women suggests an inability to break free of the male-dominant ideological representations of femininity diffused by the work of pre-Raphaelite artists like Millais, Hughes and Waterhouse. By aligning her imagery of female sexual corruption with infantilised and eroticised pre-Raphaelite objects of desire, Egerton attempts to re-inscribe authoritative male discourse but adopts limiting feminine topoi tied implicitly to the very cultural mores against which she fought. This central conflict in Egerton’s work can be read as a testament to her own complex position in the gender debates of the Fin de Siècle. Although Egerton championed sexual, rather than legal or social freedom for women, this freedom was often undermined.

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335 See Bronfen (1992) and Gates (1989) who discuss the image of the drowned woman as a sexually compromised figure in Victorian culture.

336 Her letters are available in letters in De Vere White (1958).
in her writing by her complicated and extremely restrictive attitude towards motherhood which has already been noted in this thesis.

In Grant Allen’s ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’ (1889), Egerton included her own contribution to the debate surrounding Victorian motherhood, noting of the emancipated woman that:

I should like to see her a great deal more emancipated than she herself as yet at all desires. Only, her emancipation must not be of a sort that interferes in any way with this prime natural necessity. To the end of all time, it is mathematically demonstrable that most women must become the mothers of at least four children, or else the race must cease to exist (Egerton 1898: 173).

The ironic tone aside, Egerton’s contribution certainly points towards an essentialist and ultimately narrow minded view of women’s duties with regard to reproduction. Indeed, her stories appear to support this conclusion. The fictional characters who achieve the greatest fulfilment and personal happiness in Keynotes & Discords are those who reject conventional relationships and accept the joys of maternal enterprise. The mothers in ‘A Cross Line’, ‘The Spell of the White Elf’, ‘Under Northern Sky’, and ‘The Heart of the Apple’ all benefit from motherhood, if not necessarily from other roles as wives or mistresses. Conversely the most miserable of Egerton’s heroines are those to whom motherhood is denied; the unhappily married mother in ‘Wedlock’ and Edith in ‘Gone Under’, both die as a consequence of failed maternal enterprises, whilst the childless mistress of ‘A Psychological Moment’ is held captive by a man whose own wife has suffered several infant mortalities. Although maternal drives are championed, they are also posited as ‘potentially dangerous to individuality and personal development’ (Liggins 2000: 27) within the stories. As Lyn Pykett has observed ‘In Egerton’s work sexual and maternal feeling are both woman’s glory and her curse’ (2006: 174) and it is the tendency to valorise maternity while critiquing a range of other biologically-determined duties into which women were forced, which exemplifies Egerton’s ambivalence towards the Woman Question. Egerton represents an ideal in which un-married mothers prosper compared to those who are contained within unproductive conventional unions. However, she also depicts the punitive economic and social realities faced by women who choose to defy social expectations in favour of asserting maternal rather than matrimonial instincts. Thus Egerton’s stories work to both assert and undermine her advocacy of sexual freedom for women as a practical solution to the Woman Question.
Egerton reluctantly, but repeatedly, altered the stories produced in her later collections, yet traces of her preoccupation with self-mutilation continued to appear. In the 1897 collection Symphonies the process of self-mutilation is depicted as a strategic choice, crucial to one of Egerton’s most disturbing stories. Set in the Basque region of Spain, ‘Pan’ is the story of Tienette, a young girl who is sexually assaulted by a man from her village. After having refused his proposal of marriage, Tienette is lured by Sebastian into a wood, where, despite her attempts to struggle, she is raped. The rape is seen by Sebastian as a means by which to force Tienette into the marriage, as she has resisted his advances until this point in the story. After conceiving a child, Tienette is abandoned by Sebastian who transfers his affections to a woman with a large dowry. Sebastian is eventually encouraged to marry his victim by her Uncle, who offers a more substantial sum. Conspired against by her family, and the women of her village – who advise her attacker that ‘some must be wooed and some must be taken’ (Egerton 1897: 224) – Tienette is sacrificed to custom by a society which asserts male authority over the female body. Restricted by censorship laws, Egerton depicts the rape scene as a narrative black-out. Similarly to her use of textual aporia in ‘Wedlock’, Egerton signposts her heroine’s experience of trauma through ‘the total absence’ (in this case a narrative absence) ‘of the significant event’ (Luckhurst 2008: 1). In denying the textual expression of her heroine’s violated body, Egerton herself creates a narrative body with a textual wound. This gap, through its very presence as absence, foregrounds the wounded female body as spectacle whilst erasing it as a site of epistemophilic appropriation.

Upon meeting with Sebastian early in the story, the narrator describes how ‘his nearness oppressed her, as it always did, half-frightened her, until she became a mere jangle of sensory nerves and almost desired to be hurt in some way as a relief’ (Egerton 1897: 230). Egerton’s heroine expresses the desire to avoid a dissociative state of depersonalisation, through painful distraction which asserts her own reality as more than a ‘jangle of sensory nerves’. The second part of the extract which describes the ‘relief’ of physical pain, is a repetition of the words first used in ‘A Psychological Moment’ from Keynotes and Discords. Through Tienette, Egerton articulates in 1897, the psychological process by which dissociative self-mutilation would be defined a century later. Although the character communicates a desire to ‘be hurt’ rather than to self-harm, what is most significant is that such pain is elicited as a means of release from mental anxiety via the enactment of such anxiety on the body. Tienette articulates the paradoxical process of self-harm and self-care
inherent in self-mutilation, at a time during which the psychological and pathological framework for such behaviour had yet to be established. Egerton thus depicts Tienette as she is, and not as man might like to imagine her – as wounded and traumatised by a ‘happy’ marriage to her rapist.

In three of the four stories within which Egerton deploys the imagery of self-mutilation, the characters who harm or wish to harm themselves as a means of relief from their respective anxieties are ‘fallen’ women. The unnamed heroine of ‘A Psychological Moment’ is blackmailed into becoming a mistress; Edith from ‘Gone Under’ is returning to her lover only to reappear later in the story as a prostitute; whilst Tienette is raped, pregnant and unmarried throughout much of the narrative in ‘Pan’. All three characters are depicted as working class or lower-middle class, and all three have been sexually ruined and socially disgraced by their relationships with men. Although the New Woman character in ‘Her Share’ is neither working class nor ‘fallen’ her sexual desire for a working-class man suggests a transgressive attitude towards class and sexuality which would have been shocking to Victorian readers, to a certain extent aligning her with the other female characters. Unlike Caird, Cross, Grand, Gissing and Mary Angela Dickens, Egerton’s female self-harmers are not highly educated middle-class women forced into unhappy marriages or fallen on hard financial times. Instead they are poor, usually forced to sell or give away their bodies in one way or another, in order to survive in a society which values them only in relation to their sexual labour. While the other writers examined in this thesis represent the struggle for middle-class women who resort to self-harm in order to conceal or communicate their psychological pain, Egerton insists on casting the poor body as the canvas upon which self-harming signifiers are written. Since the readership of New Woman short stories would have been limited to those able to buy the periodicals and collections in which they were published, Egerton’s use of the discourse of self-mutilation in relation to the working-class and fallen body is curious. It represents a strategy by which to shock her readership and garner sympathy for these women. However, it also exploits the poor body as a site of sexual corruption and cements its construction as doomed. Despite Egerton’s disdain for conventional marriage and alleged support for sexual freedom, the fate of all four of these characters suggests the painful reality of such freedoms in all but exceptional circumstances.

In ‘A Psychological Moment’ Isabel describes herself as ‘a target for every woman to shoot at with arrows dipped in the venom the best of them have in their nature’ (2006: 92),
whilst Edith’s sufferings are met by women who ‘purse their lips, look virtuous, and change the subject’ (2006: 105), and Tienette ‘dreads the gossip, the prying eyes the tongues of women’ (1897: 235). In ‘Her Share’ it is the potential for social ruin which stops the heroine from perusing her romantic feelings, and she is left miserable by her unconsummated desires. Egerton’s stories appear to respond to George Eliot’s insistence on the power of female community to rehabilitate the female self-harmer, which I discussed in chapter three. Egerton’s ambivalence surrounding the derision of women by their own kind, and their sexual exploitation by men appears inextricably intertwined with the figure of the self-mutilating ‘fallen’ woman. In deploying and displaying the body of the working class ‘fallen’ woman as a site for narrative exploration, Egerton gives credence to the very social anxieties about women’s sexual freedoms, against which she wrote. While her imagery is highly subversive, representing severe criticism of both sexes by publicising women’s traumatised psyches through the dramatisation of their wounded bodies, it also promotes self-mutilation as a genuine strategy of self-defence. Egerton’s fallen women embark unsuccessfully upon unconventional relationships, and internalise their transgressions through physical pain. They repeatedly resort to self-wounding, and the fictional repetition of this process (in one instance three times in one collection) demonstrates Egerton’s participation within the wound culture of post-Ripper Victorian modernity in which self-harm, like serial murder is ‘bound up through and through with the drive to make sex and violence visible in public’ (Seltzer 1998: 106-107). It is not the serial-killer, but the self-mutilator who is compelled towards repetitive bodily violence in the late-nineteenth-century wound culture which produced the New Woman short story. The psychological scars of wounded feminine consciousness are exhibited as public atrocities by the fictionalisation and publication of stories which situate self-mutilation as a means to survive. However, Egerton shows herself willing to butcher any female character who fails to adhere to the principles of either a free union or free and ‘natural’ motherhood, and frequently represents them as eroticised and infantilised through established ideological stereotypes. In doing so, Egerton’s work suggests the extent to which any women writing against the grain of late-nineteenth-century propriety, was forced to participate (perhaps even unconsciously) in a self-mutilative act of literary and political self-sabotage.
**Conclusion**

In this thesis I have shown how, in New Woman writing published between 1880 and 1900, self-harm emerges as a central concern in narratives about women’s experiences within a restrictive society which devalues their bodies, and limits their capacity for achievement. Self-harm is also a way of reading the process of New Woman writing; it can be read as a strategy of female bodily display through which the damaged body is dramatised, by writers who rebelled against Victorian patriarchy but also wrote within its cultural, political and religious frameworks.

In the course of my research it has been possible to demarcate a roughly chronological arc of textual production, in which the novels of the 1880s and early 1890s gradually gave way to shorter narrative forms. This was, in part, a consequence of the increased accessibility of print media, at a time in which serial publishing was endlessly reproducing bodies of text. These texts featured bodies which had hitherto been contained within traditional narrative forms, and, in both social and narrative worlds, within the private, domestic sphere. Some of the writers I have considered, Sarah Grand, for example, continued to produce novels throughout the period, but by 1894, when George Egerton’s *Discords* appeared, New Women writers had largely abandoned the form.

Key to my conceptualisation of self-harm in New Woman writing is the assertion of a corresponding arc describing the way in which these artists were able to explore and enact progressively violent images of self-harm in the increasingly short forms with which they experimented. In the novel form New Women writers both foregrounded and elided the damaged body from the plot; its corporeal absence and symbolic presence are the paradox at the heart of the New Woman novel. In my readings of Amy Levy’s lyric poetry I posit her use of male speakers as a strategy through which to express that which would have offended her readership had it originated from a female voice. Levy appropriates the notion of the Romantic genius poet to manifest the passion and emotional excess which transgressed Victorian ideals of womanhood. She goes as far as imitating Swinburne’s subversion of poetic convention, his undermining of religious tropes and bodily self-wounding, in an effort to express frustration at a range of issues, including the exclusion of women from the literary canon. I have argued that Levy’s poem ‘Felo de Se’ represents a transitional point between New Women writers’ use of the unwieldy and restrictive format of the novel, and the more permissive space of the short story. I argue that Levy is an
example of the pioneer work of New Women poets which opened rhetorical space where concerns about the female body as commodity could be broached.

George Egerton’s collection *Discords* marks the apotheosis of formal and thematic development in New Woman writing. It was the high point which was disrupted by the trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde in 1895, after which all forms of writing became subject to closer scrutiny and censorship, but particularly those written by New Women. Egerton was unable to achieve commercial or critical success with the novel, her attempts to reproduce the psychological interiority of her female characters fails, and her protagonists are written back into the hegemonic order. Similarly, Mary Angela Dickens, who was better able to weather the post 1895 publishing environment, was, nevertheless, unable to make a cohesive critique of patriarchy in her novelistic offerings. In her short stories, however, Dickens mercilessly lampoons the clerical establishment, and by implication, the Victorian patriarchal project. Dickens’s self-harming heroine emerges unsullied at the end of the story, whilst the male protagonist is shown to be subject to the carnal impulses for which women are traditionally condemned. If the development of the New Woman oeuvre was interrupted by its perceived association with the moral corruption of literary Decadence, the onset of the First World War in 1914 brought the genre to a premature end.

My readings of self-starvation in New Woman writing focusses largely on the novels of Sarah Grand. In these works the anorexic body functions to metaphorise the constraints placed on specifically intellectual women. As the New Women characters exercise their minds, their bodies become correspondingly diminished. They are depicted as so entrenched in Cartesian dualism that their bodies are of no use to them. Tellingly, the body of her characters are of little narrative importance in Grand’s discursive scheme. The characters are described only in terms of their thinness, their bodily lack, despite the fact that the novel form provides as many as nine hundred pages in which to elaborate.

Alcoholism is treated differently by the sympathetic male novelist I refer to, from the New Woman short story writers. In George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*, the alcoholic female body is largely absent, referred to only in the language of conduct, mood and manners. Conversely, in the short stories of George Egerton and Mary Angela Dickens, female drinkers are described in visceral detail; their alcoholism forms the primary plot concern around which the narratives revolve and their bodies are the focus of textual detail. In an
opposite manoeuvre to that undertaken by the starving heroines in Grand’s novels, the female alcoholic body demands to be heard, and asserts its corporeality in a world which requires its erasure. Like alcoholism, self-mutilation in the New Woman novel functions as a strategy which requires the body, which deploys it as a communicative surface on which traumas are inscribed. However, self-mutilation, much more so than alcoholism, violently ruptures the boundaries between the inner and outer surfaces of the body and society. While the female drinker swallows her pain in New Woman fiction, reproducing Christian conceptual frameworks, self-mutilation is furthered by New Woman writers, as a strategy to both disrupt patriarchal control of the body, and survive the internalisation of religious codes.

Where self-harm emerges as a trope in late-Victorian women’s writing, it does so in order to symbolise the female body’s response to patriarchy, and to resist the epistemophilic control exerted by the apparatus of Victorian social, economic, medical, and religious power. However, self-harm in women’s writing also encodes a New Woman dialectic of subversion and compliance, by which the masculine gaze is disrupted, but also reinforced by, the display of wounded female bodies in texts by and about the New Woman.

By deploying the topoi of corporeal self-destruction, New Woman writers ruptured the boundaries between private and public, and undermined the power of the gaze by taking control of their bodies (and their bodies of text) into their own hands. However, they did so in ways which at times placed the female body as an object of erotic fascination, at the heart of their texts, inviting, and thus ultimately strengthening the masculine field of vision. In attempting to redistribute the gendered power dynamics of the nineteenth-century sexual economy, the New Woman asserted women’s right to transcend their roles as commodities within a male-oriented and male-produced literary and social marketplace. However, in doing so, she adopted traditional and often disappointingly orthodox representations of the female body which reproduced internalised masculine religious and moral codes, and situated the damaged body as an erotic spectacle – corrupted by patriarchy, but corrupt all the same. The New Woman thus both resists and partakes in the epistemophilic project of the Western literary tradition, even when deploying experimental forms which rejected the realist imperative for conclusions which reinforced cultural hierarchies and asserted outdated bourgeois religious and moral imperatives. I have drawn on the work of Mark Seltzer, but I suggest that the scope of Seltzer’s hypothesis can be extended. I apply the notion of Victorian wound culture to the figure of the female self-
harmer, who emerges out of the same conditions which produced the serial killer, and is exploited by the New Woman writer of the Fin de Siècle.

In addition to the literary and theoretical understandings of New Woman writing provided by this study, I would argue that this research also contributes to cultural and historical accounts of the period. Virtually no substantive evidence of the rates of self-harming amongst Victorian women has ever been recorded. As I have discussed, it is impossible to know the rates at which women starved, consumed excessive quantities of alcohol, or wounded themselves, because only the most sensational cases of these acts were reported. However, this thesis has shown that the fictional texts produced by the New Woman represent one source of evidence which demonstrates that these practices were adopted by women to cope with a range of pressures at the Fin de Siècle. Self-harm in New Woman writing functions as a metaphor for women’s powerlessness and lack of bodily control, as well as for a range of socio-historical and political debates which were cast onto the female body as a source of masculine anxiety.

337 Although anecdotal evidence suggests that the rates of alcoholism amongst the working classes were high and did include women, even this culturally-acceptable form of self-harmful behaviour in women escaped official record, and classification as self-harm, until the mid-twentieth century.
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