"...With frenzied thoughts beset...": Depictions of Female Madness on the Nineteenth-Century English Stage.

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Ph. D.

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ABSTRACT:

"...WITH FRENZIED THOUGHTS BESET...": DEPICTIONS OF FEMALE MADNESS ON THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH STAGE

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Nineteenth-century drama has long been viewed as insignificant in its contribution to the intellectual culture of the period. It has been assumed that until the advent of Wilde and Shaw the theatre had nothing to offer the literary scholar beyond a memory of colourful spectacle and theatrical anecdotes. The Victorian drama has been seen as a simple form of escapist entertainment. However, the plays performed in the nineteenth-century theatre reflected contemporary mores and ideals. An examination of a selection of these plays will look at the effect they had in mirroring and solidifying such ideals, especially in the way that women were portrayed.

The heroines and villainesses of the nineteenth-century theatre encapsulated the wider societal view of the feminine psyche at a time when psychology began to emerge as a separate discipline. In a comparison of contemporary biological and psychological texts with certain of these popular theatrical female characters, it becomes evident that the theatre was significant in its contribution to the broader culture. While being described by biologists as the weaker sex, women were portrayed as helpless heroines on stage. As women gained more autonomy in society their fictitious stage representations became more threatening and dangerous; this same contention was also put forward by social scientists and biologists. With the advent of the New Woman in the 1880s, the theatre attempted to come to terms with the changing role of women in society and concluded, frequently, that they were a dangerous hybrid which threatened the race. At the same time psychologists continued to warn of the danger of such fractured psyches.

An examination of popular nineteenth-century plays will show that the mad woman was not simply a conventional figure of Victorian melodrama, but also a puzzling, and occasionally frightening, reality for society at large.
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INTRODUCTION

FEMALE MADNESS: POPULAR MYTH AND SCIENTIFIC SUPPOSITION

In Act III of Pinero's play of 1895, The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith, Agnes Ebbsmith states, "I believe, to be a woman is to be mad." Such a statement could be seen as a nineteenth-century commonplace. The interesting fact about Agnes's statement is not the content but the speaker, for she is reflecting on the assumed normality of female madness rather than surrendering to it, as many nineteenth-century stage heroines had done. Agnes's awareness of her social condition and her questioning of it, although short-lived, are rare examples in native British drama of the period. The "normality" of female mental instability was a supposition that was tacitly accepted and expressed on stage throughout the nineteenth century. The concept that women were, more or less, congenitally and constitutionally predisposed to insanity or, at least, to hysteria was a popular myth in this period: hysteria was frequently a synonymous term for madness when it was applied to women. This supposition coloured the portrayal of women on stage, in the novel, and in articles and books which engaged with the subject of women in society. Even a cursory glance at these texts leads one to believe that the state of being female was thought to be at best a weakened state or at worst a potentially pathological condition. The obvious differences in female anatomy and biological make-up were given moral and psychological significance; social divisions between the sexes were seemingly reinforced by medical research.

Laennec's invention of the stethoscope in the early part of the nineteenth century led one of his compatriots to hypothesize on the gender differences between two parts of the same organ. Paul Louis Doroziez thought that the left ventricle of the heart was the male part because it was calm and stable, while the right ventricle was assumed to be the female part because it was "nervous, impressionable, and easily disordered." Doctors argued that the female reproductive system predisposed women to fits of hysteria and nervous excitement thus making them unfit to engage with the world at large. It was assumed that, left uncurbed, the hysterical woman could harm the social fabric.
In the 1880's S. Weir Mitchell, novelist and physician, developed a “rest cure” to return the hysterical female to a state of equilibrium, not just for herself but for her immediate society. He remarked, “An hysterical girl is, as Wendell Holmes has said... a vampire who sucks the blood of the healthy people about her.” This was only one of many images of dangerous, mythic or fictitious creatures with which the hysterical woman was compared. She was, variously, a life-draining succubus, a siren, a harpy or a potentially deadly untamed beast in much of the literature of the period from Keats's Lamia, through Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Mason, to Du Maurier’s Trilby. All these characters are assumed to be dangerous because their sensual appetites are destructive. This view was maintained throughout the period, for example Paula in Pinero’s The Second Mrs Tanqueray (1893), is described by Aubrey as having “strange” and “warped” notions which are a result of her promiscuous past. When Agnes Ebbsmith makes the statement quoted above, Lucas replies, “No, to be a woman trying not to be a woman -- that is to be mad.” (517) Being a woman meant for Lucas (who is voicing a widely-held belief) conforming to the notion of femininity which society fostered and demanded.

Such a notion relied on strict sexual differentiation which, it was asserted, was founded on unassailable biological fact. The eminent alienist Henry Maudsley writes:

> When Nature spends in one direction, she must economize in another direction. That the development of puberty does draw heavily upon the vital resources of the female constitution, needs not to be pointed out to those who know the nature of the important physiological changes which then take place.

Maudsley goes on to say that women are therefore more easily subject to mental problems: “Their nerve-centres being in a state of greater instability, by reason of the development of their reproductive functions, they will be the more easily and the more seriously deranged.”
Furthermore, the notion that women “acted out” their derangement was also a widely held belief. J. McGrigor Allen notes:

With regard to public professions, the stage perhaps offers the most legitimate field for the display of female energy and talent, whatever moralists may say to the contrary...woman follows her natural vocation, and gratifies her passion for exhibiting herself, and attracting the admiration of the other sex of man.  

He continues by stating that “all women are more or less actresses.” Significantly, actresses were often called upon to portray insanity, while the general female population was considered to be prone to insane fits which they then acted out in their real lives. The subject of female insanity was therefore seen in terms of external display both on and off the stage.

The subject of this thesis is an examination of the myth of “madness” in women seen through a selection of nineteenth-century plays which are informed by such myth. The contention that females were predisposed to insanity and hysteria was not new, but the cultural climate of the Victorian period lends a sense of urgency to this supposition. Thomas Szasz describes hysteria as, “expression and communication -- chiefly by means of non-verbal bodily signs -- of a state of disability or ‘illness’.” He contends that “the implicit aim of the communication is to secure help.”

The display of the madwoman on stage in the nineteenth century is a symbol of a collective cry for help; she is part of a social code which at once valorised hysteria and also condemned it. Such displays provide a reflection of the collective fears of a society which was changing rapidly. I shall attempt to show that the madwoman on the nineteenth-century British stage was both a locus for the resolution of societal fear and a symbol of the source of such fear.

In the following chapters I shall show how the theatre dealt with the fantasy of female idealization and female madness for the entertainment of its
huge audiences, and how such fantasy was given validity by the medical and political establishments. Chapter One will examine the social, political, scientific and theatrical environment which fostered the dramatization of female madness in this period. Chapter Two will focus on the widespread popularity of the character of Ophelia who epitomized the Romanticisation of madness, and who was reinvented and rewritten in varying modes throughout the century. I shall show that the Ophelia-type was as popular at the end of the century as she had been at the beginning, although significant changes were made to her character in order to make her acceptable to the changing tastes of the audience. In Chapter Three I shall examine how theories of hereditary insanity were fertile ground for sensation drama and how the "Call of Blood" had a shady, thrilling side as well as a sentimental one. Chapter Four will concentrate on the concept of evolutionary degeneracy and the fear of the "New Woman" as a dangerous and deviant hybrid.

The texts that I have chosen to demonstrate melodramatic female madness are representative of a plethora of such plays which held the stage throughout the nineteenth century. These plays have been chosen because they were extremely popular and played to large audiences. Two plays which did not reach such a wide audience, Ainslie's Clemenza and Bell and Robins's Alan's Wife, are also included. The former demonstrates that even in a small provincial theatre showing a play written by an amateur, a distracted female was an obviously identifiable and believable character. The latter shows, by its tempestuous reception and short run, that the fantasy of the ideal was not easily displaced and that even at the end of the century, when there were vociferous demands for a more literary and socially relevant theatre, literary merit did not ensure a box-office success and that public demand, rather than critical approbation by the avant-garde, determined the content of the plays that were offered.

5 H. Maudsley, "Sex in Mind and in Education," Fortnightly Review, 15 (1874) 466.
6 Maudsley, 473
7 J. Mc Grigor Allan: "On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women." Journal of the Anthropological Society, 7 (1869), cxcv-cxix
CHAPTER I

MADNESS AND MELODRAMA

Throughout the nineteenth century one of the most pervasive elements in Victorian discourse, according to Walter Houghton, was a sense of anxiety.\textsuperscript{1} Much of this anxiety was related to what came to be known as the Woman Question. Woman’s role and status were the focus of open debate and discussion in many and varied forums, from Parliament to the popular press. The debate caused by the woman question was especially interesting in scientific circles, where psychological and biological theories served either to sanction the traditional societal view of woman or, more rarely, to dispute it fiercely. Woman’s mental powers and weaknesses were at the centre of this debate. Scientific theory was used to rationalize long-held beliefs on woman’s mental, and consequently, her social status; woman was considered to be biologically and hence mentally, unclean and suspect. When woman’s mental status was addressed on the stage in popular melodramas, the “mad” or distracted heroine was a powerful symbol of the ambivalent attitude of society towards women, and one which reflected society’s anxiety about her persona both onstage and off. According to Elaine Showalter:

We learn from the study of Victorian women and insanity that definitions of both insanity and femininity are culturally constructed, and that the relationship between them must be considered within the cultural frame.\textsuperscript{2}

This is not to argue that all incidences of female mental illness in the nineteenth century were merely the results of an anti-feminist climate, but rather to demonstrate that the way in which female madness and hysteria were portrayed in serious and non-serious texts influenced how insanity was acted out in the asylum and in literature, and furthermore, how such acting-out captured the imaginations of the public and of the medical communities.

The popular theatre of the nineteenth century was part of the cultural frame in its construction and reinforcement of dramatic stereotypes that, in their turn, reflected certain social stereotypes and cultural constructs. An exploration of the woman question and of contemporary psychology and medicine in relation to popular drama illustrates the cultural climate in which such drama existed and shows how the drama exploited, magnified, or more rarely, undercut the cultural stereotype of the “mad” heroine. Furthermore, melodrama enacted the suppositions that were to be found in biological and psychological debate; such dramatizations reinforced these myths so that
they became embedded in the public psyche. Jill Matus points out:

Recent historicist criticism has argued that by locating literary texts in a differential field, we can observe how they underwrite or confront other constructions of reality, and how they function in relation to other discursive practices. Such criticism has also proposed that literature participates in constructing a culture's sense of reality, that it is not simply reflective but helps actively to constitute the larger symbolic order by which a culture imagines its relation to the conditions of existence.³

What melodramatists took for granted, and capitalized on, scientists attempted to prove. For it was the melodramatic cliché of distracted, weakminded, or mad womanhood that was also a scientific and political supposition, and a subject which preoccupied writers on both sides of the woman question in the Victorian period. The intensely serious pronouncements of science worked within the same relative discourse, as did the writers of popular drama on the subject of female sanity and insanity. Woman's turbulent role was as central to Victorian society as it was to the often seemingly irrational working-out of a melodramatic plot.

The "mad" or distracted heroine is only one of a variety of stage heroines, but she is a popular type throughout the century as the woman question becomes the subject of more intense debate. The fate of the "mad" heroine is a recurrent theme in nineteenth-century drama, although her "madness" becomes more problematic as sensation drama gains ascendancy. The pitiful figure of distressed and distracted womanhood that is found in such plays as Fitzball's The Floating Beacon (1824), in Somerset's Crazy Jane (1829), or in Ainslie's Clemenza (1822) and in Salvadore Cammarano's libretto of Donizetti's Bride of Lammermoor (1848) (based on Sir Walter Scott's novel of 1819) was transformed into the irrational and frightening anti-heroines of plays such as Hazlewood's and Suter's versions of Lady Audley's Secret (1863) and Palmer's East Lynne (1874), all of which were dramatizations of extremely successful novels. Towards the end of the nineteenth century woman's sanity is depicted and questioned in different and, superficially at least, more thoughtful ways, but it is still questioned and remains a powerful theatrical motif which reflects society's concerns and suppositions about the female mind: at the same time, such dramatic representations help to solidify these suppositions. Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) and The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith (1895) and Henry Arthur Jones's Breaking a Butterfly (1884) emphasise the potential social destructiveness of female irrationality and demonstrate the widely held belief that a woman who attempted to escape her "intrinsic womanliness" had no place in the social fabric. In contrast, Elizabeth Robins and
Florence Bell’s *Alan’s Wife* (1893) was reviled by the critics because the heroine untypically insisted on her sanity when an admission of insanity would have provided a conventional, and thus forgivable, explanation of her criminal action. Bearing in mind that nineteenth-century playwrights were subject to theatrical managers whose main aim was to fill their theatres and have financial successes, the continuous popularity of this recurrent motif of female instability is important in cultural terms. The madwoman, evidently, was popular with the audience. She satisfied a taste for sentimentality and intense dramatic moments; at the same time, she was also a subject of ridicule.

Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta *Ruddigore* (1887) exploits all the popular conventions of melodrama which, at the time of its production, were considered somewhat hackneyed and comic. Central to the convoluted plot is Mad Margaret who appears “wildly dressed in picturesque tatters, and is an obvious caricature of theatrical madness.” (181) She sings illogical songs, laughs wildly, hints at heartbreak and threatens to kill her supposed rival. Mad Margaret is a comic mixture of Meg Merrilees, Crazy Jane and Ophelia. The attenuated phrasing and staccato diction of Gilbert’s words which introduce her to the audience are meant to show her erratic and confused mind while Sullivan’s melancholy refrain echoes her mood. She sings:

Over the ripening peach
Buzzes the bee.
Slash on the billowy beach
Tumbles the sea.
But the peach
And the beach
They are each
Nothing to me!
And why?
Who am I?
Daft Madge! Crazy Meg!
Mad Margaret! Poor Peg!
He! he! he! he! he! *(Chuckling.)*
Mad, I?
Yes, very!
But why?
Mystery!...*(182)*
Gilbert’s Mad Margaret, in keeping with tradition, regains her wits when Sir Despard Murgatroyd marries her. She still retains some of her mad ways however, and has to be kept in check by Sir Despard. There is a broad hint that sanity is somewhat dull for Margaret, who enjoyed the attention her madness gave her. Weir Mitchell asserted that the hysterical woman was manipulating her family because her illness made her the centre of attention. Gilbert is burlesquing such an hysteric as is shown in the following exchange:

MARGARET: I was an exceedingly odd young lady-
DESPARD: Suffering much from spleen and vapours.
MARGARET: Clergymen thought my conduct shady-
DESPARD: She didn’t spend much upon linen-drapers.
MARGARET: It certainly entertained the gapers.

My ways were strange
Beyond all range-
DESPARD: I’ve given up all my wild proceedings.
MARGARET: And paragraphs got into all the papers.

(Dance)

DESPARD: We only cut respectable capers.
MARGARET: My taste for a wandering life is waning.
DESPARD: Now I’m a dab at penny-readings.
MARGARET: They are not remarkably entertaining...(208-209).

Sir Despard has to keep reminding Margaret that she has “her emotions well under control” (209). Despite her recovery she still has a tendency to go into hysteric, especially when there is a full moon and begs, extravagantly of course, for “some word that teems with hidden meaning -- like Basingstoke” (210). Gilbert is making fun here of the convention of the sudden recovery of the mad melodramatic heroine and of the power of mesmeric suggestion. As the scene progresses Margaret alternates between demureness and hysteria, always being “revived” by the word Basingstoke. Gilbert’s Mad Margaret encapsulates all the characteristics of the classic melodramatic madwoman which had held the stage throughout the century. She also illustrates the dichotomy of the character, who is both pathetic and ridiculous. Her pathos is achieved by Sullivan’s musical score of Ruddigore. When Mad Margaret first enters it is to the accompaniment of doom laden music and a trilling flute reminiscent of Lucia di Lammermoor. Her contralto voice provides a contrast to the previous lighthearted song which has just been sung by the soprano Rose in company with Richard and Robin. The music as Mad Margaret
enters indicates a change in mood from that of the trio. As Margaret enumerates the various names by which she is known she reaches a series of crescendos which heighten her dramatic impact. Sullivan’s music provides a counterpoint to Gilbert’s nonsense-verse so that Margaret is presented both as a figure of pathos and amusement.

Music was a vital element of melodrama and gave it its name. Originally unable to present plays without music, the owners of the non-patent theatres incorporated music into their productions of popular burlettas in order to side-step the theatre regulations, but music also contributed to the dramatic content of the plays and remained a significant part of romantic theatre long after the Theatre Regulation Bill of 1843 abolished the monopoly of the patent theatres. Musical accompaniment enhanced the emotional effect of the performances and acted as an indicator of the mood that was to be produced. Music is a vital part of the pattern which Michael Booth states is what gives “what appears on the surface to be a wildly chaotic and exceedingly trivial drama a logical and moral coherence.” Rousseau’s Pygmalion (1762) is cited as the first drama which was denoted melodrama but the term has various definitions. In opera it is used to create a special balance between words and music; Beethoven’s Fidelio is noted for the melodrama in the dungeon scene.

Many nineteenth-century musicians incorporated melodrama into their work; in the eighteenth century most melodramas were based on serious and classical subjects but the form was expanded in the nineteenth century to general dramatic subjects including comedy; one example is Kotzebue’s parody of Benda’s Ariadne. The emotive power of music was used to carry forward the dramatic tension. The heightening of emotion was of primary importance to Wagnerian opera. In Opera and Drama (1851) Wagner presented his theory of a “drama of wonders” which relied on a perfect melding of musical melody with voice melody. He described this as “organic growth...a growing from below upwards, an advance from lower to higher forms of organism, a binding of needy moments into one satisfying moment.” Wagner’s stated aims were different from those of melodramatic theatre, but they shared the romantic impulse to produce a heightened emotional effect. The musical crescendo which greeted the audience before the curtain fell over a highly wrought stage picture, such as the death of Lady Audley or Sweet William’s last-minute reprieve from the hangman, served to emphasise the high dramatic moment.

Why was the distracted heroine so popular as a stage representation? Why was she considered to be both frightening and attractive? What was involved in her appeal? Why was the image of the mad woman so pervasive, and why did both the popular imagination and
psychological experts consider it to be the nature of woman to lend itself so readily to madness, despair, and distraction?

In order to attempt to answer these questions it is necessary to examine nineteenth-century thought on madness and on women, and to look at the social climate in which such thought developed and in which the popular dramatic depictions of women prospered. It will be necessary to examine how madness was defined and how women's presumed mental distinctiveness was circumscribed by the definitions presented. The stage heroine, in common with women in the general population, is described frequently as mad when she is thought to be out of control or behaving in a socially aberrant manner, or when she is being ridiculed. Furthermore, the convention of the female collapsing into madness was not simply dramatic excess or melodramatic exaggeration (a view that some twentieth-century critics imply) but a reflection and reinforcement of nineteenth-century thought on women's mental powers and weaknesses. The supposed female disposition to madness is the implied reason for woman's dramatized actions as it is also for her social actions: if in societal terms women are often described as mad when their behaviour is perceived to run counter to contemporary societal expectations, in dramatic terms they are portrayed as mad, or confess themselves as such, in order to provide an exciting dramatic denouement, and to achieve a comforting sense of closure and restored order for the audience. Gilbert's Mad Margaret does this: the fun for Gilbert was in making her do it again and again; he both exploits and undercuts the convention.

An examination of a selection of plays from the 1820s to the 1890s will attempt to show how theatrical representations of "mad" women were an integral part of the nineteenth-century construct of womanhood and demonstrate that, in the popular imagination, as well as in scientific treatises, the madness of women was a powerful symbol of societal anxiety and a reflection of the changing focus of that anxiety. The fear of woman's potential "explosiveness" was addressed in all literary genres, including popular drama and opera, as well as in contemporary scientific writing.

The figure of the madwoman has been explored in the realm of the nineteenth-century novel and, indeed, in that of the writers of the novels themselves, but theatrical representations of madness have been largely ignored. Since this is in part due to the generally poor reputation that nineteenth-century melodrama has had, both when it was playing to full houses and in recent critical appraisals, it will be useful first to look at both contemporary and recent criticism of the genre in order to establish its sphere of influence and to examine how melodrama appealed to its public. While reference will be made to certain salient historical facts relating to the genre, I
shall not attempt to cover its history comprehensively since the history of melodrama has been covered extensively.

The Melodramatic Stage: The Problem of Melodrama

Melodrama has been extensively and variously defined. The term was often used pejoratively, but there has been an increased interest in the form in recent years. Peter Brooks writes that in an attempt to rehabilitate melodrama literary critics have suggested that "melodrama at heart represents the theatrical impulse itself: the impulse toward dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out." However, Brooks also notes that focusing on melodrama as "essential drama" loses sight of the cultural specificity of the genre in the nineteenth century, he notes that the term becomes meaningless in such a generalisation. Brooks adds:

While recognizing that melodrama, like such terms as romanticism and Baroque, may be legitimately extended to represent constants in imaginative literature, it seems to me more interesting that melodrama (like romanticism and baroque, in fact) can also be located historically and culturally, that there is a form, calling itself melodrama, that comes into existence near the start of the nineteenth century, and that this form itself is vital to the modern imagination.8

The conventionalized and socially acceptable series of formats, which are the hallmark of many popular nineteenth-century plays, may seen banal or even ludicrous to modern readers. It is frequently asserted that there are no subtle psychological insights into character, merely truisms and clichés. George Taylor writes: "Melodrama, almost by definition, is based on cliché."9 But this leads us to the question, why are these particular clichés chosen over and over again? What is interesting about these plays is the choice of formats and the psychological climate which informs them, as it does other literary genres.

Peter Brooks has documented the importance of the "melodramatic imagination" to all literature of the nineteenth century: Its hallmark is an excess of fierce emotion combined with a rigid moral code in which right always prevails; this combination, which is viewed as simplistic, is the target of most of the criticism of the genre. In Blood and Thunder, Maurice Willson Disher states that the concept of virtue being its own reward is a myth that "hoodwinked humanity for two hundred years."10 He goes on to say that melodramas "have been despised because of their limited variations on Virtue Triumphant as their given theme."11 Melodrama fares badly when
compared to the “new drama,” and when it is measured by the same critical criteria, but in order
to judge its merits and interest as theatre and as cultural artefact it has to be assessed on its own
terms and in the context of its social climate. George Bernard Shaw did not dismiss the genre as
being theatrically worthless, so long as it was true to its form, noting, “A melodrama must either
succeed as a melodrama or else fail with the uttermost ignominies of tedium....” (Saturday
Review 28 March 1896).12 Nineteenth-century drama was both a product of its time and an
important social force; as such, it is worth further study. Joseph W. Donahue Jr. tells us:

One of the most stimulating aspects of the study of dramatic character is that its
link with surrounding ideas and assumptions about human experience is close and
sure... Few better ways exist of understanding the past than by studying its theatre.
The subjects, the conventions of art in a given time say much about that time as a
whole -- its delights and aversions, its shared attitudes and tacit preconceptions,
its image of itself.13

Theatre historians have long recognized the fascination of popular theatre in the
nineteenth century and the concomitant critical disparagement of much that was on display.
Michael Booth informs us:

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were full of critics decrying the taste of
the times, the corruption of the stage, the decline of the drama, and the ignorance
of the public...during the nineteenth century, when ink on the topic of ‘the decline
of the drama’ flowed from a thousand pens, the voice of the critic was indeed
heard in the land. But people kept coming to the theatre....14

In Nicholas Nickleby Dickens introduces Mr. and Mrs. Curdle who are provincial
connoisseurs of the theatre. Mrs. Curdle is described as possessing “quite the London taste in
matters relating to literature and the drama,” while Mr. Curdle has “written a pamphlet of sixty-
four pages, post-octavo, on the character of the Nurse’s deceased husband in Romeo and
Juliet.”15 Miss Snevellici comes to visit the Curdles in an attempt to get them to attend her
“bespeak” at the theatre. While both of them agree that the “drama is gone, perfectly gone,” they
promise to subscribe to the performance on the understanding that they support only Miss
Snevellici and cannot be supposed to guarantee the quality of the entire production to their
friends and neighbours. Miss Snevellici advises Nickleby that if he fails they will say they
always knew he would, while if he succeeds they will claim to have been his patrons. Dickens’s
vignette of the Curdles shows the disparity between what people said about the theatre and their
actual attendance, as well as the snobbery and pseudo-criticism that was directed at the theatre of
the day. Booth has documented the rise of the audience population for the theatre and related it to the rapid influx of people into large cities as the industrial revolution advanced. The Romantic movement’s ties with Jacobinism and dangerous political dissent made it a threatening form. In his Essay on the Drama Sir Walter Scott does not criticize his contemporaries but he does complain of Kotzebue’s “demoralizing falsehood” and “intellectual jacobinism.” Many plays were imported from France and Germany but had to be purged of potentially revolutionary incitement. The Examiner of plays held a rigid control over their content, and while mention is often made of censorship of improper or impious language, the main thrust of such censorship was political, as it had been since Walpole sought to silence John Gay. Melodrama domesticated and tamed Romanticism for its large audience, not all of whom were uneducated or poor, as has been sometimes assumed. While the fashionable classes did not patronize the drama as much as they had done formerly, they still attended the theatre; however, theatre locations often dictated the demographics of the audience, and the Surrey-side theatres became notorious for lurid performances that catered to unruly mobs. Charles Kean’s “gentlemanly” melodramas (favoured by Queen Victoria), Madame Vestris’s burlettas and extravaganzas, and the Bancrofts’ genteel comedies lured the respectable middle-class back to the theatre in larger numbers as the century progressed, thus expanding the audiences which found delight in these performances.

The popular drama of the nineteenth century was described by contemporary critics as worthless from a literary point of view, and while its emotional appeal was usually acknowledged, such appeal was decried as shallow and simplistic. James Cook complained that it was the high price of legitimate theatres that along with other causes had, “Pushed aside the rightful owner of the dramatic throne - upon which, arrayed in the horrid robe of melodrama, translation, and the like, it now sits grinning.”

There was an attempt throughout the century to revive verse drama and restore “legitimate” drama in order to rescue the theatre from the morass of melodrama and sensationalism. In English Bards and Scotch Reviewers Byron complains:

Now to the Drama turn -- Oh! motley sight!
What precious scenes the wondering eyes invite!
Puns, and a prince within a barrel pent,
And Dibdin’s nonsense, yield complete content...
Who but must mourn, while these are all the rage,
The degradation of our vaunted stage!
Heavens! Is all sense of shame and talent gone?
Have we no living bard of merit? -- none!¹⁸

The general consensus amongst the literary classes would have been to reply "No" to this question. Contemporary theatre critics and serious writers sought, with Byron, a return to a more poetic and respectable form of drama, one which could be considered worthy to be staged in the land that had produced Shakespeare. Despite several attempts to reinstate verse drama, some of which met with success (the plays of Sheridan Knowles and Joanna Bailey being examples), melodrama and spectacle were what the general public patronized.

When the early critics demanded a more serious theatre, they were lamenting the lack of comedy and tragedy in the Shakespearean tradition. However, Charles Dickens, who was both a keen social commentator and an avid critic, a theatre-goer, an actor, a playwright and frequently a strong apologist of popular entertainment, asserted that the melodramatic mixing of extreme emotional highs and lows was a reflection of the vagaries of real life. In *Oliver Twist* he writes:

> It is the custom of the stage: in all good, murderous melodramas: to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in a regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky, well-cured bacon... We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and her life alike in danger; ... we are straightway transported to the great hall of the castle: where a grey-headed seneschal sings a funny chorus...

Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only, there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on; which makes a vast difference.¹⁹

Dickens describes the heart of melodrama in the passage quoted above as the combination of highly dramatic episodes with low, broad comedy. Melodramatic comedy is an adjunct to the plot and upholds the same values as the "serious" content; in general, the nineteenth-century taste for comedy was vested in broad farce or pun-ridden parody. As far as tragic content went, melodrama's focus was not on a great soul destroyed by a fatal flaw but on the fate of common man buffeted by misfortune and villainy. As Vincent Crummles tells Nicholas Nickleby, who wonders at the disparity in size between two combatants, "Why, it's the very essence of the combat that there should be a foot or two between them. How are you to get up the sympathies of the audience in a legitimate manner, if there isn't a little man contending against a great one?..."²⁰ Crummles's literal interpretation of the law of melodrama might be a comic
exaggeration, but it illustrates the audience's demand to see the victory of the "little" man. The heroes of melodrama frequently assert their humble beginnings and demand that the world should treat them fairly and with respect, which with the help of a beneficent providence it usually does, but only after they have been through a series of spectacular misfortunes. Michael Booth states that the world of melodrama is a world of absolutes where virtue and vice coexist in pure whiteness and pure blackness; and a world of justice where after immense struggle and torment good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards.  

Melodrama's focus, then, is on raising the mundane to dramatic heights and endowing plebeian characters with noble attributes and aspirations. James L. Smith describes it as "an essential form of protest theatre." Good is always pitted against evil and, according to the logic of melodrama, always triumphs. Melodrama has for one of its roots the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility. Smith tells us that melodrama's greatest debt is to "the genre of serious prose tragicomedy which derives its sentimentality from Cumberland and its bourgeois didacticism from the horrible homilies of George Lillo." We find in Dickens an example of the potential effect of such a play. In Great Expectations he shows Pip being subjected to a reading of Lillo's The London Merchant by Wopsle. Pip's reaction is depicted in a facetiously comic style, emphasising both Wopsle's exaggerated interpretation and Pip's discomfort with the plot while under the scrutinising and critical eye of Pumblechook. Pip explains:

What stung me, was the identification of the whole affair with my unoffending self. When Barnwell began to go wrong, I declare I felt positively apologetic, Pumblechook's indignant stare so taxed me with it. Wopsle, too, took pains to present me in the worst light. At once ferocious and maudlin, I was made to murder my uncle with no extenuating circumstances whatever...Even after I was happily hanged...Pumblechook sat staring at me, and shaking his head, and saying, "Take warning, boy, take warning!" as if it were a well-known fact that I contemplated murdering a near relation...

Comic though this may be, Dickens also uses Lillo's play as a foreshadowing of Pip's future, where murder and death by hanging will have their place. Dickens knew the usefulness and effectiveness of the melodramatic mode, which he employed throughout his own fiction.

James L. Smith goes on to say:

Triumph, despair and protest are the basic emotions of melodrama, and the art of working each to its highest pitch occasions the catharsis of the form... In short, melodrama is the dramatic form which expresses the reality of the human
condition as we all experience it most of the time. Melodrama is therefore seen as simplistic, uncomplicated (except for its exaggerated plots), and superficial, and yet, despite these drawbacks, essentially real. Its psychological impact in its interplay with the audience is not so simplistic or shallow. Melodrama's immediacy, its sudden shifts from high to low and back again, is what Peter Brooks describes as "part of a sense-making enterprise...a certain fictional system for making sense of experience." The pitiful madwoman and her more dangerous sister, the aberrant madwoman, are an integral part of melodrama's "sense-making enterprise," for it is female madness that is often used to explain or expose the complications of melodrama. Rebellion is embodied in these female characters: in the early plays the heroine's mind is the site of that rebellion; if it is not restored she perishes: in the sensation heroine the rebellion is social and disruptive, and blamed on mental aberration; to achieve social harmony she must also die: in the New Woman plays which emerge towards the end of the century, the heroine is depicted as fighting against nature (an insane gesture in the context of the time) and cannot survive unless she capitulates. This brings us back to the threat of Romantic rebellion and the threat of Jacobinism which society could not tolerate: If such rebellion is sited in an inferior person who is deemed mad, it is perceived as ridiculous or pitiable. It may be thrilling but it cannot, ultimately, be threatening; the madwoman is marginalized by her behaviour. As Mad Margaret sings in the patter song of Ruddigore Act II, since she is "as mad as any hatter" she will keep her ideas to herself "because (her) opinion doesn't matter."

It has been stated that anxiety was a driving force in the nineteenth century: melodrama, by its very excesses, imposes a logic on such anxiety and attempts to teach that anguish, pain, and injustice must be lived through in order to return to a sense of order, harmony, and justice. It is important to note, in this context, that melodrama gained its initial popularity with Parisian audiences during the French Revolution. From its earliest inception melodrama was imbued with a sense of didacticism and conservative values, while at the same time it teased its audience with thrilling demonstrations of such values being constantly undermined. The form rarely questioned the nature of good or evil but held up for display ideals of both types. The French dramatist Pixérencourt was the first exponent of melodrama as it came to be known in the nineteenth century. Gabrielle Hyslop writes that early French melodrama was defended by "the conservative writer, de Pongerville" and that,

the common people, still moved by revolutionary torments, astonished by the changes which surrounded them, barely recognized themselves... The theatre
became their school. The most valuable lessons were unfolded there. Crime always appeared odious, and was always punished; sincerity triumphed, innocence was protected by an invincible hand: finally, people were not shown the world as it is, but rather as it should be.27

Despite the critical outcry against the literary mediocrity of the theatre, apart from the general reverence for Shakespeare, the recorded, enthusiastic attendance of popular theatre implies that theatregoers did not require their drama to be invested with intrinsic literary worth. If melodrama’s early exponents had a strong didactic purpose, many in the audience were not concerned with being instructed overtly by the theatre. Nor would they necessarily respond “appropriately” to the scenes of pathos and threatened virtue which were presented to them on stage. The performances were frequently subjected to loud interjections from the audience, and if the audience determined that the actors were inferior, or if the play did not suit their mood, the most pathetic and emotionally charged scenes could be hooted and ridiculed and reduced to farce. Indeed, for some, Shakespeare was judged inferior to the more spectacular stage events that could be found both in London and the provinces. In Martin Chuzzlewit Charles Dickens, perhaps wryly, has one of his characters exclaim against the merits of Shakespeare in contrast to popular theatre. Pip, one of Montague’s guests, quotes “the Viscount” as saying:

Shakespeare’s an infernal humbug, Pip! What’s the good of Shakespeare, Pip? I never read him. What the devil is it all about, Pip? There’s a lot of feet in Shakespeare’s verse, but there ain’t any legs worth mentioning in Shakespeare’s plays, are there, Pip? Juliet, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and all the rest of ‘em, whatever their names are, might as well have no legs at all, for anything the audience know about it Pip. Why, in that respect, they’re all Miss Biffins to the audience, Pip. I’ll tell you what it is. What the people call dramatic poetry is a collection of sermons. Do I go to the theatre to be lectured? No, Pip. If I wanted that I’d go to church. What’s the legitimate object of the drama, Pip? Human nature. What are legs? Human nature. Then let us have plenty of leg-pieces, Pip, and I’ll stand by you, my buck!28

No doubt the “Viscount” was only one of many who liked their theatre to thrill and excite them rather than inspire philosophical thought. Dickens’s novel was written during the heyday of Madame Vestris, who was famous for her “leg pieces.” Madame Vestris was born Lucy Eliza Bartolozzi in Marylebone 1797. She was a highly trained musician with a mezzo-soprano voice (the song “Cherry Ripe” was written for her), a skilful dancer, and an actress. Vestris was also
the first actress/manageress to take over a theatre when, in 1830, she assumed management of the Olympic in Wych Street. The Olympic was, what Erroll Sherson describes as, “In the midst of the stench and filth of this most unsavoury district.” It had been opened by Philip Astley at the beginning of the century and specialised in displays of horsemanship after which it went through various hands until Vestris took it over. Sherson tells us, “She could not get any other house, and being fully determined to have a theatre of her own resolved to make a slum-centre the most fashionable rendezvous in the Town.” Vestris made the old Olympic respectable by making certain changes which altered the type of audience in the theatre. She discontinued the practice of free tickets and of half-price tickets after 9 p.m. which effectually excluded drunkards and the prostitutes who sought customers at the theatre; she also ended the performance by 11 p.m. thus encouraging a more respectable and orderly clientele.

Vestris’s most notable and long-lasting achievement, however, was as an innovative producer; she paid great attention to details of staging by introducing more realistic sets than were customary. Vestris and her players performed in a theatrical space which conveyed the idea of a real interior. Tom Robertson, who worked as prompter to Vestris’s company, was to extend this idea more fully when he emphasised detail in the staging of his own plays later on in the century. Vestris’s innovations at the Olympic influenced the development of realistic staging. The box set had been in use in Paris before the end of the eighteenth century but was introduced to London by Vestris, who had performed in Paris in the early part of her career. However, she was, initially, given little respect for her innovations. When she and her husband took over the management of Covent Garden in 1838, we are told that Macready was horrified that “the national drama” was in their hands.

However, Vestris and Matthews were noted for their careful rehearsal and professional pride in their art. Vestris was the first producer in England to try to present historical pieces in authentic costume and settings. She was helped in this by Planché who wrote many extravaganzas and burlettas for her, and who shared her interest in historical accuracy. When her first season at Covent Garden came to an end she stated that she had tried, “In the presentation of plays, to look to the production of a harmonious picture, rather than to the prominence of an individual character.” The monopoly of “legitimate” drama was coming to its official end, and the public, who had supported the “illegitimate” drama, continued to attend the comedies, extravaganzas, and melodramas that were offered.

The taste for spectacular, sensational theatre was challenged in the 1880s, when social realism started to creep onto the stage. However, since the 1860s realism had meant more a realization of pictorial images than an in-depth psychological treatment of individual characters,
and this concept of a realistic theatre was maintained to the end of the century. What had been seen as the tyranny of the legitimate theatre before the abolition of the Patent Monopoly in 1843, had been replaced by a different tyranny based on market forces which acquiesced to public demand and the edicts of Mrs Grundy. Tom Taylor, in 1871, noted:

It may be that the abrogation, five and twenty years ago, of the old theatrical patents was inevitable, that they were not the right means to a good end, but most certainly, since they were abolished, the elements of stability, permanence, aspiration and advance in art have been gradually dying out in the theatrical profession, and those who were foremost in advocating the change have been compelled to admit that almost every evil consequence of abolition prophesied by the defender of the patents has come to pass. Without intending it, the soi-disant reformers destroyed the only thing which maintained a distinction in the theatrical world. They hoped to raise all theatres to the level of the patent ones. They brought down the patent houses to the level of the lowest. Free trade in the drama was no sound philosophy. The demand was not educated enough to influence the supply in the best way. The bulk of the purchasers had no power of judging the wares offered.33

Taylor's remarks are illustrated by the problems the "new drama" had in reaching an audience. However, Shaw contended that it was the Tayloresque drama itself that was undermining the advent of new ideas into the theatre. For Shaw, the need to expand the consciousness of the audience was denied because theatre managers were reluctant to stage anything that might alienate their audiences. He wrote:

The play with which Ibsen conquered the world, A Doll's House, allots to the "leading man" the part of a most respectable bank-manager, exactly the sort of person on whose quiet but irresistible moral superiority to women Tom Taylor insisted with the fullest public applause in his Still Waters Run Deep. Yet the play ends with the most humiliating exposure of the vanity, folly, and amorous beglamourment of this complacent person in his attitude towards his wife, the exposure being made by the wife herself. His is not the sort of part that an actor-manager likes to play. Mr Wyndham has revived Still Waters Run Deep: he will not touch A Doll's House.34

In the 1880s and '90s Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones still worked within an essentially melodramatic framework in a modification of "Ibsenite" drama, even though their plays catered
to a more sophisticated audience than that which had been found at the Surreyside theatres earlier in the century. However, they had also to work within a framework of acceptable social codes; while their polite audiences would not engage in the lively and noisy exchanges between audience and actors which had been a characteristic part of many nineteenth-century performances, they would have booed off the stage any explicit or controversial play which ran against the values of "the little parish of St. James." More especially, the depiction of female characters was still strongly reliant on the melodramatic pattern.

Henry Arthur Jones's *Breaking a Butterfly*, (co-written with Henry Herman), was an attempt at an English version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*: it bears little similarity to Ibsen. Jones uses the skeleton of the storyline of Ibsen's play to present a version of domestic melodrama. The idea of the "doll wife" is not dissected to show, as in Ibsen, the shallowness of such a contemporary marriage, and the impossibility of an honest and real relationship within such an institution. On the contrary, Jones's play upholds the very values and ideals that Ibsen is challenging. Jones adopts the same dismissive attitude to his Flora as Torvald does to Nora; the "doll wife" is simply a charming, irresponsible child. Whereas in Ibsen we see Torvald's infantilizing description of Nora as his little "lark" and "squirrel" set against Nora's strength in coping with her moral dilemma, at the same time as she is being forced to act out the part that Torvald, her father, and society at large expect of her, in Jones's play there is a simple infantilization of the heroine. Flora's childlike simplicity, capriciousness, and near-sexlessness are emphasized by her own childlessness, and by the contrast of her character with two other women in the house, her husband's mother and sister, both sober, reliable, and sensible in contrast to the "butterfly" of the title. In Act I Agnes describes Flora as "giddy and thoughtless," and Mrs Goddard says that "she has not as much common sense and prudence as a girl of ten"(7). When Flora comes in she behaves like an overexcited child, throwing her husband's business papers to the floor to make way for the Christmas tree, oblivious to the fact that there is a visitor in the room who, however, finds her simply charming. She is described as "clapping her hands with childish glee"(15) and then, as if to show the potential hysteria of her character, she states that she is so happy she wants to either cry or "scream out something dreadfully wicked."(15) Unlike Nora, who is conscious of the financial burden she carries, Flora is depicted as an innocently incautious spendthrift. Her language is used as a key to her immaturity, such as when she tells her husband, "You know, Humpy, you'd never have anything nice if your wifey didn't buy it for you." (17) Jones's Flora is presented with no apparent internal life; her confusion and shame at being found out in forging the note are all externalised.
Jones’s characters demonstrate the characteristics of the melodramatic ethic; they repeatedly extol their moral and emotional states. There is no room for doubt within such an ethic, no place for Krogstad, or Doctor Rank or Nora to struggle with moral and social questions. It is the world of absolute blackness or whiteness which Jones displays. The play does not even convince its audience that Flora has really committed a crime; The Athenaeum (March 8th 1884) found the play “disappointing” and remarked that Flora is involved in a merely domestic “predicament.” The critic notes her behaviour is simply that of ignorance, and her fears without foundation for, “So devoted... from the wifely standpoint, has been her conduct that her indiscretion (it is in fact no worse) is calculated to endear her (husband) to him instead of, as she dreads, divorcing him from her.”

Unlike Nora, Flora is never shown to have an adult conversation with another character. Jones replaces Doctor Rank with a type of old retainer in the character of Martin Grittle. There is no suggestion, as there is between Ibsen’s Nora and Rank, of any sexual attraction and affection between them. Instead, Grittle is a grandfatherly figure who will eventually rescue Flora by stealing the forged promissory note from the archetypal stage villain, Dunkley, whose vindictiveness stems from being jilted by Flora. While Ibsen’s Nora struggles to control the inevitable destruction of her life with Torvald, Flora half-confesses to Agnes who sensibly and, it is emphasised, quietly obtains the balance of the debt from an old suitor.

Humphrey Goddard, displays the same characteristics and follows the same course as do many melodramatic heroes who, faced with ruin, rely on manly fortitude to withstand destruction. He states, with reference to Flora, “I will answer for her innocence with my life”(45). His resolution is contrasted with Flora’s increasing confusion in the exchange which follows Flora’s enquiry about the severity of the crime of forgery:

**HUMPHREY:** Is forgery a dreadful thing? What a question to ask! You know it is! next to murder it’s one of the worst of crimes!

**FLORA** *(gasping, hiding her face, rising, dressing the Christmas tree):* Won’t this look pretty? And -- and -- do they always give seven years imprisonment for forgery?

**HUMPHREY:** Of course, it all depends on the case, sometimes five years, sometimes seven; in very bad cases, fourteen. A couple of generations back, the sentence was -- Death!(46)

Flora displays no real despair, only a type of confused and distressed petulance as the stage
directions indicate that she is hysterical. Unlike Nora, she has no concerns that her crime will morally pollute the household; indeed she is shown to think of the forgery as a type of game as she compares herself to the Christmas decoration of Punch. As if to emphasise her doll-like quality, Jones has Flora align and measure herself with the doll:

Yes, Punch, we’ll hang you there, because you’re a dreadful criminal you know.
You killed your wife and child, and that’s worse than forgery! (hysterically)
That’s worse than forgery!(46)

Her vow to kill herself is patently unbelievable, even if we are to assume that she believes it herself momentarily. Flora bears a closer resemblance to Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn than to Ibsen’s Nora as she declares, “And when I am dead, perhaps they will be sorry that they made such laws, and drove me to do it.”(51) She later declares, laughing hysterically: “Ha! I feel I am dead already. How strange it is. (shutting her eyes) So cold-no life, no feeling; but I am happy! Yes, I don’t mind it. And they are all crying over me” (72).

Jones retains the Tarantella to heighten Flora’s loss of control, rather than any true sense of desperation. He emphasizes this by stressing in the stage directions that her dancing is to become wilder and wilder until finally, “Her hair gets loose and tumbles over her shoulders. She does not perceive it, but dances more wildly than ever, her eyes fixed” (SD 56). When Nora dances just as wildly it is with a self-conscious purpose rather than with Flora’s half-crazed abandon. Flora’s dilemma is swiftly solved when her husband takes the blame on himself. Act I ends with a picture of high melodrama as Goddard faces Dunkley:

HUMPHREY: (very calmly) You make one mistake, Mr. Dunkley! My wife did not forge that note.
DUNKLEY: Not? Then who did?
HUMPHREY: I did!
DUNKLEY: You?!
HUMPHREY: Yes-I! Now do your worst to me. You shall not touch a hair of her head! [Flora rushes forward from the door with a shriek, and falls at Humphrey’s feet] Curtain. (61-62)

This denouement is far removed from Nora’s ideal of “the wonderful thing,” although it would seem that Jones’s reading of Ibsen inclined him to believe that the answer to the questions posed in Ibsen’s play was in a simplistic reshaping of the Torvald character. There is no questioning of the romantic ideal that Nora first relies on and is then forced to cast aside. For Jones the problem is resolved by the melodramatic invention that is based on such an ideal -
manly fortitude. Such fortitude could always be relied upon in melodrama to withstand any assault against womanly virtue. Goddard’s challenge to Dunkley echoes numerous heroic stands against villainy which had filled the stage throughout the century. Louis dei Franchi, in Boucicault’s The Corsican Brothers (1852), confronts his enemy, Chateau-Renaud with a similar exchange, “A challenge in the presence of a lady! Oh, sir, it lacked but this to give a finish to your character. Come, madame, my blood to the last drop is yours; my life is nothing to your honour....”

Flora counters with an equally conventional wifely devotion as she resolves to kill herself and leave a confession note, but the timely intervention of Grittle brings the crisis to a swift conclusion. Dunkley exits cursing, as would any self-respecting melodramatic villain. The play concludes with Humphrey replying to his mother’s enquiry as to what has happened, “Nothing has happened, except that Flossie was a child yesterday: today she is a woman” (76).

Just as Shaw observed, the play makes the same statement of strong male authority that was made by Tom Taylor in Still Waters Run Deep which was originally played in 1855 at the Olympic. When he presented the play it was a movement away from spectacular melodrama, as Taylor attempted to bring more realism to the stage with subjects of topical interest. However, the same code of ethics as those of melodrama were retained, and it is this code to which Jones also adheres in Breaking a Butterfly. As Shaw noted this “so entirely reversed the idea of Ibsen’s play that (it) could scarcely be called even an adaptation.” Jones’s attempt to combine a theatre of ideas with the pervading moral ethos demanded by the general public resulted in a play that delivered neither the physical vitality of true melodrama nor the intellectual vitality of Ibsenesque drama; but Jones did know what the audience would not tolerate. Clement Scott’s review in The Illustrated London News remarked that the playwrights were obviously keen not to offend their public, but that “livelier fare is required at the Prince’s”. The Athenaeum found a problem with the central idea of the drama, implying that the subject matter was, at once, trivial and distasteful and noting:

Under no circumstances... could a piece of this description take a firm hold upon an English audience.”Norah,” as the original of “Breaking A Butterfly” is called, belongs to that idyllic class of pieces which seldom find favour in this country except when seasoned with satire.

Breaking a Butterfly is an attempt to bring social relevance to the stage, but lacks the necessary conviction in its subject- matter to challenge the audience. It is a curious hybrid which, in its attempt not to offend the sensibilities of the audience, fails to engage their attention. The
title itself, (taken from Alexander Pope’s *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 1734*) infers that the central crisis of the play is trivial; Flora’s behaviour, which occasions the domestic crisis, is presented as a weakness too easily exploited by Dunkley. She does not mature by the end of the play, despite Goddard’s final statement, but only submits to the inevitability of her position in the home. Far from ending with the force of Ibsen’s play, Jones ends with an assertion of domestic and womanly duty. As William Archer noted:

> It falsified, or rather ignored, the whole ethical import of Ibsen’s play, distorted the motive by making the husband a would-be ideal character, and converted the tragedy into a commonplace comedy-drama. All this manipulation - I had almost said stultification - was necessary to make Ibsen tolerable to the English theatre-goer, and even then the piece proved unattractive.39

The ethos of melodrama, and the comforting clichés it embodied were difficult to discard. While melodrama continued to thrive, so did negative critical appraisals of the genre. William Archer, writing in 1886, states: "One does not, indeed, look for great clearness of thought in this branch of art. Melodrama may be defined as illogical tragedy, in which causes and effects are systematically disproportionate, and the hero is the plaything of special providences."40 He states later, in a discussion of the plays of Victor Hugo:

> Melodrama is illogical and sometimes irrational tragedy. It subordinates character to situation, consistency to impressiveness. It aims at startling, not at convincing, and is little concerned with causes so long as it attains effects. Developments of character are beyond its province, its personages being all ready-made, and subject at most to revolutions of feeling. Necessity and law it replaces by coincidence and fatality, exactitude by exaggeration, subtlety by emphasis.41

Archer’s comments come at a time when the theatre was being treated more “seriously,” and his criticism comes from his desire to see a more socially relevant drama and one which more closely reflected the accent of the late nineteenth century. However, although it was castigated for being “non-literary,” the theatre was very much alive as a force in society throughout the century. Robertson Davies tells us that despite the protestations of purists:

> The drama was not gone; it was proceeding from strength to strength, noisily, coarsely and...delightfully. It was literature that was gone, and even it had not gone irreparably. It would be truer to say that it was sulking. There was poetry and beauty in this theatre, but it was not poetry of the spoken word; poetic feeling was present, but poetic utterance of the sort that can be separated successfully
Davies asserts that the dominant literary force of the nineteenth century is Romanticism, while the predominant theatrical form is melodrama, which, as stated above, is a domesticated version of Romanticism. Unlike Archer, George Bernard Shaw appreciated melodrama, and enjoyed it when it was done properly. He recognized the power it could have over its audience, and saw what Archer had described as its weaknesses, as its strengths. He wrote:

A really good Adelphi melodrama is of first-rate literary importance, because it only needs elaboration to become a masterpiece. It should be a simple and sincere drama of action and feeling, kept well within that vast tract of passion and motive which is common to the philosopher and the labourer, relieved by plenty of fun, and depending for variety of human character, not on high comedy idiosyncrasies which individualize people in spite of the closest similarity of age, sex, and circumstances, but on broad contrasts between types of youth and age, sympathy and selfishness, the masculine and the feminine, the serious and the frivolous, the sublime and the ridiculous, and so on. The whole character of the piece must be allegorical, idealistic, full of generalizations and moral lessons; and it must represent conduct as producing swiftly and certainly on the individual the results which in actual life it only produces on the race in the course of many centuries.

Shaw had no quarrel with the allegorical significance and theatrical pleasure to be found in good melodrama. His adverse criticism was for plays such as Breaking A Butterfly which pretended to be more sophisticated than melodrama, but failed both as plays of ideas and as melodrama. They were melodramas without the necessary passion or fire; they were emotionally diluted pieces which met neither the criteria of melodrama nor those for real plays about real people, which Shaw himself both admired and wrote. He had especial contempt for plays which purported to be “plays of ideas,” but which compromised truth in order to have a mass appeal and financial success. In a letter to the editor of The Dramatic Review on 27 June 1885, Shaw addresses this problem in relation to Henry Arthur Jones’ and Henry Herman’s Breaking a Butterfly. He asks why the original version of this play, Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, was not popular, and reasons that it was “because no manager would produce it until its intellectual seriousness was deliberately extirpated by British adapters.” He goes on to say: “Happily, the resultant elaborate frivolity failed.”

In his own work Shaw used the conventions of melodrama to undercut and question such cosy domesticity, which he believed belied the social conditions of his time: he recognized the
significance of the myths embedded in melodrama, and sought to dig them up and expose them. However, it was only with the tragedy of the first world war that melodramatic myths were truly exploded. Siegfried Sassoon illustrates, with heavy irony, the emptiness of the melodramatic code in the context of the Great War when he notes in his diary for June 12, 1918:

Busy again all to-day. Another fine day. The weather is miraculous. Like the opening scene of a melodrama-Chorus of haymakers. Act II thunder and lightning. Heavy firing in the wings. Act III limelight; dying speeches; 'Kiss me Hardy.' Act IV Memorial tablet erected in parish church. Melodrama, which had provided such a believable code in the nineteenth century, could survive (and survive only barely at that) as quaint nostalgia after 1918. The awful reality of Ypres and the Somme belied a benign Divine Providence.

**The Power of Melodrama**

As it has been described, melodrama is a theatrical style which relies heavily on the concept of the “sacred emotions,” on unquestioned stereotypes of good and evil, and on predominant myths which society fostered. Thomas Szasz, writing on the history of psychiatry tells us:

Myths are not artistic embellishments, fairy stories men make up to amuse themselves and their fellows; they are the very heart and brain, as it were, of the social organism, necessary for its survival--as that particular society.

The mythic quality of many melodramas draws on the fears, hopes, and aspirations of a society that was undergoing social and economic upheaval. Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador points out:

What the disclosure of near-universal and recurrent mythic patterns in works of literature can do is to explain the emotional hold the work has on us. The universality and recurrence of the mythic patterns are conclusive and emphatic proof of their appeal to our basic emotional needs, and this appeal is exerted regardless of any literary merit.

Melodrama reaches out and draws its audience into a world that shifts quickly from order to disorder and back again to a restored and comforting sense of closure and resolution. This theatrical confrontation with chaos and ruin is replayed again and again throughout the nineteenth century, and the mad or distracted heroine is often the site of such chaos and ruin. As stated above, madness or mental fragility in the heroine was often a symbol of a societal fear of
women, although the emphasis was seemingly on a fear for women. Stage fictions of female instability upheld both popular wisdom and new social and scientific theory on the mental status of women. The theatre’s popularity made it a powerful instrument in the proliferation and reinforcement of such views for, as Peter Brooks states, popular drama was one of “the fictions that influence on a scale that higher literature must regard with envy.”

In a society that saw itself going through rapid changes due to the Industrial Revolution and subsequent urbanization, there was a sense of loss of the perceived stability of earlier times; the changing status of women added to this sense of loss. Throughout the fluctuations in economic growth and political stability, the sense of anxiety as a societal mood remained a constant theme, although it was expressed in a variety of forms and with changes in emphasis as new societal ills were identified. Novelists, poets, philosophers, political scientists, historians, psychiatrists (or as they were then known, alienists), sociologists (a new phenomenon), and artists all engaged in the exploration of the problems which beset modern man. The shifts in class and status were greeted, not only with enthusiasm, but also with a sense of dread and cultural displacement. Melodrama’s rigid code of ethics and a reliance on Divine Providence to provide poetic justice were both a result of, and a response to, the uneasiness of the disruptive social climate.

The Victorian theatre did not exist in a cultural vacuum but responded to, and helped confirm, contemporary ideals. Those ideals may seem naive and simplistic to modern readers, and the plays are seldom, if ever, performed. It is important to remember, however, that the texts that survive are only vestigial remnants of the actual performances: to appreciate and understand the full power of melodrama it would be necessary to recreate it on stage, and even then we would lack the colourful, noisy social milieu that was so intrinsic a part of the Victorian theatre, and we would also lack the cultural milieu which both audience and players shared. Thomas Keneally, commenting on the conclusion to his novel The Playmaker, notes:

... one is aware of the dangers posed by melodrama. Antibiotics and plumbing have made melodrama laughable to the modern reader. It is only in our own third world, where in the one phase of time lovers are sundered, clans consumed, and infants perish without once saying “Mother,” that melodrama causes tears still to flow. The Sichuanese, the Eritreans, or the Masai would understand better than us the destinies which befell some of our players.

David Mayer also argues that it is wrong to assume that modern perceptions of a play are the same as contemporary ones. “If the play investigated is a melodrama,” he goes on to say
error may be further compounded by the widespread fiction, still unexorcised, that melodrama is devoid of social and political content, and, further, that these pieces were enjoyed by audiences who sought relief ("escape" is a favourite word) from the pressures of their troubled urban environments in anodyne diversions.

Victorian theatre-going, to melodrama and comedy in particular, is still regarded as passive and secondary behaviour, a mere reflection of nineteenth-century daily life, not as activity itself, as by-product rather than socializing process.50

The Victorian audience engaged with the myths of melodrama in order to seek affirmation that the dangers inherent in a rapidly expanding and changing society could or should be averted. But if the nineteenth-century was, as stated above, an age of anxiety, it was also an age of optimism. Walter Houghton informs us:

If the decline of the old order in political institutions and religious doctrine was viewed by some Victorians with dismay, it was greeted by others with whole-hearted satisfaction. There was a happy sense that the burdens and errors of the past were now yielding before the march of civilization.51

Definitive arguments on man's nature in relation to the world sought to eradicate former philosophical theories. The notion of progress -- of leaving the old world behind as technology and industry advanced -- had a profound effect on society. Traditional world-views were augmented and "explained" by scientific discovery. At the same time, the problems which were emerging as society made an unprecedented shift towards urbanization were huge and seemingly uncontrollable. Melodrama combines optimism with anxiety: these two aspects of the collective Victorian psyche are displayed again and again on the nineteenth-century stage. Virtue triumphant is rewritten and replayed within the conventions of melodrama so frequently that it assumes the power of ritual, and the dreams and myths of melodrama can be interpreted as integral aspects of the social code. Melodrama can be seen as a working-out of fears as well as an exploitation of them. This is especially relevant to the status of the "mad" heroine and her significance in the ritual.

**Romantic Madness**

The role of the heroine is central to the psychic vitality of melodrama: it is she who is the focus of what might be described as the anxiety nexus. If the heroine embodies anxiety, the
“mad” heroine also heightens it, for not only can she be pitiable in her state of fearful subjection, but she can also be seen as an object of such fear. The dramas selected show that although women were, on one level, the symbols of safety and security, representatives of a cosy domestic world, they were also seen, paradoxically, as essentially unstable creatures prone to mental weakness, which was related to their sexuality: they were, therefore, potentially dangerous. Melodrama, which works by codifying behaviour in terms of moral absolutes, presents some variations in the depiction of its “mad” heroines, but their role is essentially to thrill, instil fear, or titillate the audience as they lose control. The overt display of madness or distraction in women was a symbol of their sexuality, which, when it was perceived to be unbridled or out of control, was dangerously threatening, or if thwarted, led to complete loss of sanity and displacement in the world. This aspect of female madness is used by Boucicault in Led Astray (1874), as well as in many sensation dramas. It is also found in the closet dramas of Romantic poets such as in Wordsworth’s The Borderers, Coleridge’s Remorse, and Shelley’s The Cenci.\textsuperscript{52} Madness and romance were close confederates in their work.

Robertson Davies tells us:

The nineteenth century was pre-eminently an era of Romance in drama, poetry, and the novel, and the approach of the age to madness was deeply romantic. The squalor and destructiveness of lunacy were overlooked. Romance was itself often equated with madness...\textsuperscript{53}

The “mad” Victorian stage heroine is not a permanently fixed stereotype, but rather one whose manifestations fluctuate as the psychiatric focus changes and as perceived female mental instability is rationalized by contemporary medical, psychological, and social theory. A pattern of staged female madness emerges as the nineteenth-century progresses. In the following chapters three types of theatrical female mental insufficiency will be traced. Chapter Two will look at the Ophelia type, the gentle victim of erotomania whose wits are destroyed by love. Chapter Three examines the concept of moral madness in the context of two sensation heroines. Chapter Four will focus on plays which embrace the concept of the inevitability of failure for the neurasthenic New Woman. These plays show that the performance of madness mirrored contemporary concepts of female psychology. A parallel examination of psychological and biological texts shows that the nineteenth-century stage reflected these concepts.

Although the nature and focus of her distraction can be seen to change on stage, as ideas on insanity and as the status of women changes, it would be wrong to assume that the popular theatre kept pace with the niceties of psychological theory. The traditional female victim, whose
mental powers are easily dissolved, played as well at the end of the century as she had done at the beginning (the success of Paul Potter's adaptation of Du Maurier's novel *Trilby* [1895] is a good example). Their more psychologically troubled, and troubling, sister, the "new woman," cannot be seen as an evolutionary development of the traditional heroine, but rather as an inevitable result of the change in woman's social status linked with conventional wisdom on her mental capacities. Indeed, evolutionary development was another vexed question when it related to women. Woman's social sphere may have widened a little during this period, but the perception of her predisposition to insanity remained a constant. As women gained ground in the law the arguments which attempted to prove their mental incapacities increased in vehemence and were weighted with the "proven facts" of contemporary science.

This thesis will show that the influence of Romanticism is to be found not only in the literary world, but also in the asylum and in psychological and medical texts; the disciplinary cross-currents between psychiatry and literature are symbiotic in nature. Within the world of moral absolutes that makes up most melodramas the heroine's "madness" can signify extremities of good and evil, but it can also signify a temporary shadow area, an area of uncertainty which serves to heighten the dramatic impact of a play. Within the asylum female madness was displayed and documented in ways that emphasized the picturesque theatricality of the female inmates. Elaine Showalter writes that female lunatics were expected to care about their appearance if they were improving, since it was thought to be unnatural if their hair was not dressed or they were bareheaded. On the other hand, popular stage madwomen influenced fashion; the coiffure à folle came about after Harriet Smithson stunned the Parisian audience with her performance of Ophelia, while the ballad of Crazy Jane led to a style of hat which was tastefully "distrat." On stage it was a sure sign that the heroine was displaying signs of madness when her hair was loose, her clothes were disarrayed, and her feet were bare. She is presented as becoming undone, and it is her undoing that provides both dramatic excitement and moral message.

The madwoman's undoing is a necessity to provide the thrill of the drama, but it has to be curbed and controlled by the conclusion of each play. Art reflected life in this instance. Showalter describes the importance of Shakespeare to the alienists and asylum keepers who "turned to his plays for models of mental aberration that could be applied to their clinical practice...the case of Ophelia was one that seemed particularly apt." Actresses were advised to visit the asylums to get the real picture. In 1870 Ellen Terry did so but complained that the madwomen were too theatrical to teach her anything. Elaine Showalter has described the intense
theatricality of the female inmates of Charcot’s hospital, the Salpêtrière, which indicates that staging female madness was not confined to the melodramatic stage. She writes:

By far the majority of his [Chariot’s] hysterical patients were women, and several, such as Blanche Wittmann, known as the “Queen of the Hystercs,” became celebrities who were regularly featured in his books, the main attractions at the Salpétrière’s Bal des Folles, and hypnotized and exhibited at his popular public lectures... The hypnotized women patients put on a spectacular show before [a] crowd of curiosity seekers... The grand finale would be the performance of a full hysterical seizure.56

Just as overt displays of madness freed the melodramatic heroine to act out her anguish, so did these displays of the asylum’s female inmates give them a certain degree of liberation from the day-to-day routine of their confinement. Robert Bolles states that Delboeuf discovered in 1893 that Charcot’s patients (the stars) were performing as expected to escape the wards.57

Within the world of supposed scientific absolutes the madness of women was taxonomized and rationalized. Woman was described as being biologically flawed and unsound, a victim of her bodily functions; leading writers in science and medicine declared over and over again that woman’s biological destiny defined her psychological and hence her social destiny.

The same philosophy informed the display of female insanity on stage. The “mad” or distracted heroine is one of the most fascinating characters in nineteenth-century melodrama; in this guise, woman is the vessel into which is poured all the troubles of a dangerous and seemingly uncaring world, and the victim who is subject to the threats of the world as they are symbolically personified in the villain. Her indecorous yet exciting lack of control allowed the audience to see behind her hidden nature; it was an encoded display of her sexuality. Such display is triggered by catastrophe and dispelled when she is rescued. The helpless heroine is popularly seen as the epitome of nineteenth-century melodrama as she swoons and screams, hair flying and clothes disarrayed, from one plot to the next in search of rescue, although occasionally finding death. However, “mad” heroines are sometimes not simply helpless but frighteningly powerful and disruptive. The mad heroine can also be dangerous. As the “Woman Question” became more urgent, the mad heroine became more threatening.

It would be erroneous to assume that nineteenth-century melodramatists engaged with the topic of the “mad” woman in an overt attempt to enter into the ongoing debate about woman’s place in society. Melodrama is not a theatre of ideas in the modern sense: its aims are very different from those of the social realist drama that emerges towards the end of the century. Its
purpose is to display popular types and to squeeze as much dramatic impact out of them as possible. But this does not detract from the cultural significance of the stage representations of the “mad” woman; in fact, the preponderance of female distraction in plays which cater to the popular imagination emphasises its centrality. For a theatrical type to be so popular in the realm of melodrama, it must grip its audience by being instantly recognizable and psychologically convincing. It must have an immediate emotional appeal. Although the dramatic situations of many nineteenth-century plays are often unreal, fantastic, and hyperbolical, the emotions which they displayed to, and engendered in, their audiences were nonetheless real. Robertson Davies asserts:

...even at its worst, melodrama continued to draw on that realm where ‘everything was seething with life’, and to transfer as much as possible of that extraordinary psychic vitality to the stage. The plays, so neglectful of the externals of reality, were psychologically convincing because they spoke from these depths to corresponding depths in their audiences.58

The stage view of the mad woman speaks to and from such depths as Davies describes, and the melodramatic stage heroine fulfils a cultural need by confirming cultural beliefs. Robertson Davies describes the various aspects of these beliefs in Jungian terms:

In the nineteenth century women on the stage had to be presented in terms that women and men in the audience would accept ...It included every sort of woman ...One is the Mate and Mother, and her opposite, The Witch or Destructive Woman. Another is the Hetaera or Companion, whose negative aspect is the Harlot. Third is the Amazon, and her shadow aspect is the Termagant or Brawling Woman. Fourth, and rarest, is the Medium, the woman in touch, it seems, with things not normally accessible, and her negative aspect is the Madwoman, always more terrifying to men than to her own sex. They all appeared on the nineteenth-century stage, time and again.59

However, although this is a useful way to see how such characters achieved their emotional appeal with contemporary audiences, it assumes that such archetypes are eternally fixed in the human psyche, whereas, as Freud recognized, all subconscious thought is culturally based. Donna E. Smyth notes:

The literature of society provides cultural identification points where overt and covert values of that society are reflected and distilled in language, image and literary type. Changing attitudes to mental illness, for example, can be observed
in the type of Mad Woman, particularly the Mad Wife.\textsuperscript{60} Smyth goes on to say that this type has been described by Elaine Showalter in \textit{A Literature of Their Own} as a “feminine archetype” and adds, “but, as we shall see, it is at times difficult to distinguish archetype and stereotype in either literary or cultural terms.”\textsuperscript{61}

Nineteenth-century melodrama’s depictions of the “mad” woman made an important contribution to the collective Victorian imagination as it constructed its ideals of womanhood. Popular theatre can be seen not only as a mirror of nineteenth-century perceptions of the female mind but also as a creative force in shaping such perceptions, as Nina Auerbach writes:

The myth of womanhood flourishes not in the carefully wrought prescriptions of sages, but in the vibrant half-life of popular literature and art, forms which may distil the essence of a culture, though they are rarely granted Culture’s mighty imprimatur.\textsuperscript{62}

\textbf{The Social, Psychological, Literary, and Political Climate}

The prevailing myths which surrounded nineteenth-century perceptions of womanhood were paradoxical. On one level, woman was seen as the centre of society, the guardian of the home and the reason for man to succeed outside the home: she was protector and mother or dutiful daughter, and the locus of refuge in a dangerous and uncertain world. On the other hand, with the exception of a relatively small number of independently wealthy women, she had limited financial and legal power. It was often assumed that she was the physically weaker sex; she was also biologically suspect or “other”, and therefore she was an alien in a man’s world, while being expected to exert a strong moral sway in society.

At the root of the concept of female “otherness” was her role as mother, or prospective mother, and the overriding significance of the menstrual cycle to her physical and mental development. Sally Shuttleworth notes:

Although the physiology of pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation drew unprecedented medical attention in the early nineteenth century, it was the functioning of menstruation, whose processes remained threateningly mysterious well into the latter part of the century, that seemed to haunt the male imagination.\textsuperscript{63}

Spencer argued that from a biological point of view women had an arrested development; this was necessary in order for them to conceive and give birth. Women were seen as
intellectually inferior because they were organically different. The uterus was at the crux of the matter, since it was assumed that this organ had an overriding importance in its effects on female physiology and intellectual ability. There was an obsessive concern about the regularity of the menstrual cycle; it was assumed that any irregularity (a favourite contemporary term was stoppage) had a disastrous effect on a woman’s physical and mental health, (the word, hysteria, has for its roots the concept of the “wandering womb”, which had been everywhere extant since the Greeks coined the term). Women were therefore considered to be at the mercy of their physiological make-up. Since woman’s dominant organ was assumed to be the uterus, it followed that her brain had to be inferior. Her brain was less developed because all her supposed strength had to be focused on her reproductive organs; furthermore, it was also subject to damage when her reproductive cycle was disturbed. Physicians such as S. Weir Mitchell wrote about the dangers of overburdening females with too much intellectual activity as this would inevitably lead to complete physical and mental breakdown. Nor was this simply a medical obsession; advertisements in popular magazines and newspapers offered numerous cures for “female complaints,” which usually meant some kind of menstrual disorder. They promised to restore women to their full health and vigour, and offered testimonials from satisfied customers who had been rescued from a life of constant ill-health by purchasing the patent medicine on offer. There was a huge demand for these products throughout the century. What was considered to be an appropriate and healthy menstrual flow was vital to the concept of true womanhood, for it was assumed that any cessation in the cycle could not only indicate infertility but also an unhealthy maintenance of noxious menstrual blood which would cause sexual obsession, hysteria or complete insanity. Theories abounded on the effect of irregular menses on women’s mental health, from spinal irritation, to migraine, to hysterical paralysis, or even murderous mania. Helsiger, Sheets, and Veeder write:

Woman’s brain is judged inferior both organically and functionally. To explain the organic inferiority, scientists offer the medical version of that tit-for-tat reasoning which sanctioned a double standard by equating women with purity and men with passion. Woman is praised for a superior nervous system, while man is credited with a brain organically superior both in quantity and quality. Quantity is important because the Victorians view intellec tion as a function, and conclude (erroneously) that the larger the engine, the more numerous and energetic its operations.\(^4\)

Such a supposedly superior nervous system was also under threat by the inferior physiological
structure of the female. This made up what was considered to be woman's "intrinsic nature." As feminists of both sexes and their opponents debated the nature of woman and her position in society the question became more vexed and more complex, but as in many of the melodramas, the fundamental question focused on woman's "intrinsic nature." The Woman Question was perceived to be a problem which became more disturbing as proposed solutions were put forward which attempted to address both woman's needs and the needs that society expected her to fulfil.

Woman's place in the economic and social structure of Britain underwent a significant change in the nineteenth century; this change in her position was perceived as disturbing because it led to constant and varied re-evaluations of traditional views of her supposedly unchanging "womanliness." Fixed ideas and ideals confronted the shifting realities of woman's place in the social order.

The shift in the economic structure of society from a rural and land-based economy to an increasingly urban and industrial one began in the eighteenth century, and woman's status in society changed accordingly. Utter and Needham point out that women's economic value lessened as industrialization expanded. They write:

Under the domestic system of industry, a wife was no less an economic asset to a man than a husband was to a woman. They bore practically equal shares in the economic burden of the family. They worked together as a unit, the wife not only performing the household tasks, but working with the man in whatever industry was his. Thus it was less often a question of whether a man could afford to marry than whether he could afford not to...When industry was organized, she [woman] could not so much as learn his trade, for he carried it on at his master's place of business instead of in his own cottage. Working women, neither organized nor trained to meet new conditions, were pretty completely deprived of opportunity to share in the more profitable forms of production.65

The low economic status of women led to their marginalization in society outside the home: at the same time, middle-class women were often left with little to do inside the home as the change in the economy provided them with servants who did the household work, and with ready-made goods which, formerly, they had produced themselves. The problem of "surplus women" became increasingly a topic of discussion for social and legal policy makers. In Cassandra Florence Nightingale addresses this problem when she writes about the intense boredom and excess of "nervous energy" which left such women feeling as if they were going mad. Nightingale writes in a melodramatic style to express the overriding sense of frustration.
which she felt, in common with other like-minded women. For Nightingale there can only be one form of rescue from this maddening existence, and she chooses to express her conclusion in melodramatic voice as she writes: “Free-- free -- oh! divine freedom, art thou come at last? Welcome, beautiful death.”

While political changes such as the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867, and 1884 meant an enlargement of the franchise, women’s exclusion from the political arena meant that they became more politically marginalised as the century progressed. Sally Mitchell reports:

So long as society had been essentially hierarchical, with power held from above, the middle-class man and woman had both been subordinate. But with changing economic conditions, the male was, by mid-century, moving into a contract-based social order, in which he took status from his work and his advancement in it, rather than from a fixed order based on birth and family. The social and political changes were expressed by the Reform Bill of 1832, which gave the vote to most middle-class men. It was also the first occasion on which the word “male” was explicitly attached to the description of those persons entitled to the franchise. The middle-class man had moved into the ruling class and left his woman behind.

Nevertheless, despite their anomalous position, women were deemed to be central to the social welfare by embodying domestic virtues. The Victorian cult of womanhood, which was to find one of its strongest voices in Coventry Patmore’s poem The Angel in the House, was centred on her place in the home. Patmore’s poem celebrates a courtship and marriage and emphasises the angelic qualities of the perfect Christian wife, whose essential virtue is innocence of the outside world. Patmore declaims, “How wise in all she ought to know!/ How ignorant of all beside!” Her “feminine nature” makes her home and family an idealized refuge for her husband and children; she is the epitome of English womanhood, whom Patmore describes as “Ladies, whose innocence makes bright/ England, the land of courtly homes,/ The world’s exemplar and delight!” The apotheosis of the Angel in the House implied that outside the house, women were unfit to cope with the world. Their nature could not bear the exertions of business, politics, higher education, or the professions. This argument ignored working-class women, who were considered to be a different breed; the rationale for their place in society was to be explained in evolutionary terms: they were seen literally as being of a lower order. Even they, however, were distinct from working-class men and were still circumscribed by an “essential womanhood.” True, it was on a lower plane than their middle-class counterparts, but even the lowest were
accorded their feminine sphere.

The concept of the "Angel in the House" was based on just such an idyllic myth as that which informed melodramatic literature. The structure of society was far more varied than the romantic ideal would lead one to believe. As Harriet Martineau explains in her article for The Edinburgh Review in 1859, women made up a considerable section of the workforce. Martineau rejects the limited ideas about women workers, and the romantic ideology, which saw them as unprotected victims. She writes:

We wearied as some of us are with the incessant repetition of the dreary story of spirit broken governesses and starving needlewomen, we rarely obtain a glimpse of the full breadth of the area of female industry in Great Britain...the conditions of female life have sustained as much alteration as the fortunes of other classes by the progress of civilization. Sooner or later it must become known...that a very large proportion of the women in England earn their own bread; and there is no saying how much good may be done, and how much misery may be saved, by a timely recognition of this simple truth...We go on talking as if it were still true that every woman is, or ought to be, supported by father, brother, or husband... Martineau goes on to argue for better wages and education for women, which would afford them a more secure economic future and, she affirms strengthen the "character of the population."

Martineau's housewife is far removed from Patmore's ideal, although she too emphasises the significance of the woman's influence in the home.

If we wish to arrest the growth of national vice, we must go to its real seminary, the home. Instead of that thriftless untidy woman who presides over it, driving her husband to the gin palace by the discomfort of his own house, and marring for life the temper and health of her own child by her own want of sense, we must train up one who will be a cleanly careful housewife, and a patient skilful mother.

Women could and did work to support themselves and others, but the romantic view was to depict such women as forlorn and abandoned creatures who needed rescuing from employment. In Tom Taylor's The Ticket-of Leave Man(1863), the heroine, May Edwards offers her savings to her lover Bob Brierly who has been in prison:

BRIERLY: Bless your kind heart! To think of those little fingers working for me -- a lusty big-boned chap like me! Why May lass -- I've a matter of twenty pounds in brass of my own earnings at Pentonville and Portland--overtime and allowances. The Governor paid it over to me, like a man, before I started
yesterday -- aye, and shook hands with me. God bless him for that.

MAY: Twenty pounds! Oh, how small my poor little earnings will look! I was so proud of them too.

BRIEFLY: Well, keep 'em May -- keep 'em to buy your wedding gown.\textsuperscript{71}

The melodramatic heroine which May typifies cannot be self-supporting; her earnings are trivial and she must wait to be rescued from poverty by the hero. This is an essential part of the myth which extols manly strength and womanly weakness; both extremes are required to make up the pattern of melodrama which reflects a societal ideal.

In such a pattern the heroine is always delicate and ladylike. On stage, this was seen in the language of heroines. Melodramatic heroines of the period, however humble, speak a language of refinement which identifies them as "true" women. Susan, a sailor's wife, and "simple country girl" in Douglas Jerrold's popular melodrama, \textit{Black Ey'd Susan}, has a vocabulary which, in everyday life, would seem to be more appropriate to a fashionable drawing room than to a seaport. But the voice of the "true woman" is always eloquent, especially in the defence of virtue, and Susan declares her contempt for the villain in the following manner:

Sir, scorn has no word—contempt no voice to speak my loathing of your insinuations. Take, sir, all that is here; satisfy your avarice—but dare not indulge your malice at the cost of one, who has now nothing left her in her misery but the sweet consciousness of virtue (Act I. sc III).\textsuperscript{72}

Lofty language symbolizes a superior sensibility; a true womanliness, which however fictitious, represents an ideal. Within the context of melodrama such language heightens the worth of the heroine, and implicitly recognizes the worth of the audience which sympathises with her. It is all part of the glorious theatrical display, as Shaw notes:

What one goes for is \textit{Black Ey'd Susan}...the real original, with San Domingo Billy, hornpipe, song about My Sweet Willy-yum, and nautical lingo all complete...

Miss Millward [\textit{Black Ey'd Susan}], when rudely accosted by Mr Fulton as Captain Crosstree, says, "He is intoxicated.I must hence, " as if that were the most natural observation possible for the wife of an able seaman. But \textit{Black Ey'd Susan}, when it once gets to business, is an excellent play.\textsuperscript{73}

The implication of such language is that the voice of "essential womanhood" was universal, as was her societal role: Marriage and motherhood were the only proper aims of women if they were to be happy and useful, while deviation from such norms could only lead, it
is implied, to madness and despair. Many voices debated how women could make useful wives and mothers if they did not engage with the world at large; however, there were worries about the social consequences of enlarging their sphere of influence. There was also the ever-increasing problem of “surplus” women who needed employment and concomitantly needed integration into society. Often, the arguments were circular; they always came back to the problem of essential womanhood.

For some, such as Ruskin and Margaret Fuller, woman was an exalted being whose accomplishments should be expanded in order that she might contribute to society. For others, such as Dr. Patrick Geddes and Walter Bagehot, woman’s physiological nature prevented her total integration into society: many of their theories suggested inherent dangers in woman’s nature which would actively threaten the social order if they were once unleashed. This intrinsic potential of women to sow seeds of chaos into the developing world was emphasised by many doctors and scientists and by social scientists such as Herbert Spencer. Feminist essentialists such as Mrs. Sarah Ellis relied on emphasising woman’s traditional role and making a heavy virtue of the necessity of her position. “Radical” feminists such as J.S. Mill argued that logic and right-thinking could only lead to woman’s full participation in the political and social structure of society. Few who entered into the polemical argument concerning woman’s rights and responsibilities escaped the common problem upon which many of their arguments turned: that of the concept of woman as “other,” as distinct from “mankind,” as “essential female.” A review of a selection of these arguments will illustrate the social climate which fed the popular theatre with its virtuous, hapless, and “mad” female characters demonstrating that popular culture, as exemplified in the drama, presented female characters that would not have been out of place in other, more literary, forms and who were often described in scientific, social, and political treatises.

**The Romantic Ideal and the Woman Question**

Ruskin, in *Of Queen’s Gardens*, argues for the advanced education of women but only within certain boundaries. Ruskin’s central argument is that women (and he is talking about the middle- and upper-classes only) are the moral foundation of society and as such need to be educated accordingly. *Of Queen’s Gardens* was written as a companion piece to *Of King’s Treasuries*, in which Ruskin sets out the necessity of the appreciation and teaching of arts and sciences to the moral welfare of the nation. The titles of the two pieces suggest that Ruskin, in
common with many writers on the woman question, set women in the femininized natural world in opposition to the masculinized industrial wealth-producing sphere.

In Of Queen's Gardens Ruskin tackles the place women should have in his educational scheme. They are, he says, wasted in their domestic circle and have a duty to society outside their homes. But the paradox of women's role is never resolved by Ruskin; his arguments are firmly based on the concept of an "essential femininity" which limits their powers although, according to his rationale, it heightens them within certain parameters. Ruskin asks, first of all, "What special portion or kind of this royal authority, arising out of noble education, may rightly be possessed by women?" However, despite his assertion that men and women share the same "mission" and rights, Ruskin comes back to the essentialist position regarding women's nature -- what he calls essential truths. While arguing that a girl's education should be the same as a boy's, the ends to which that education should be aimed are perceived by Ruskin to be very different. He uses examples from Shakespeare, Scott, and Dante to show that woman's moral qualities are superior to man's; for Ruskin, woman is Lady Soul in his chivalric code. He relies on the same dichotomy as other Romantic writers, including the popular playwrights, for whom Lady Soul was a central focus. If woman fails, then so does man's quest. Ruskin asserts:

You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight's armour by his lady's hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth—that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails.
While asserting that the mission of men and women is the same, Ruskin defines their separate roles. Woman's role is to guide, not to determine policy: to judge the contest rather than to enter into it. Her place is the shelter of home, in which she is both protector and protected. In order to reach perfection in her role, woman needs a good education -- not, Ruskin asserts, for her own self-development but rather to provide an idyllic environment for her husband and family, and by extension for society at large. According to Ruskin:

The man’s duty, as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the maintenance, in the advance, in the defence of the state. The woman’s duty, as a member of the commonwealth, is to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state.\(^77\)

For Ruskin, then, woman must act as moral vanguard, not hide away in the comfort and ease of her walled garden. Of course, Ruskin fails to answer the question as to who has constructed that wall, and he never resolves the paradox of women asserting their power without usurping male power. His division of power into its moral and physical aspects is based on a romantic fiction, the same fiction that pervades much of the drama of the period. Ultimately, his argument fails because it is based on a false premise: women were not, as he contends, members of the commonwealth at all but merely observers. Ruskin's extended trope of the garden is limited by the very walls which he builds himself in his final reliance on an intrinsic, unchanging female nature.

The same view of women that Ruskin expressed can be seen in the writing of Margaret Fuller. Fuller was a feminist writer whose own life defied normally prescribed conventions. She argued for woman's rights and insisted that women were equal in intellectual power to men and therefore deserved to be treated accordingly. However, her ideas are fundamentally romantic; she too relies on the concept of Lady Soul in her argument, which bears a resemblance to Tennyson's argument in The Princess. In Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845), Fuller states that women should be allowed to develop intellectually and spiritually. She writes: “What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home.”\(^78\) She goes on to say, however, that although “there is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman,” there is an “especial genius of Woman” which she defines as “electrical” and spiritual.\(^79\) Once again woman is defined by her supposed intrinsic womanly attributes and intuitions, although Fuller valorises these distinctions and sees them as supreme, superior gifts which should be loosed on the world so that men and women might benefit from
them. In an argument that Elizabeth Barrett Browning was to contest in her poem *Aurora Leigh*, Fuller expounds on woman's superior "otherness." "Woman", says Fuller:

excels not so easily in classification, or recreation, as in an instinctive seizure of causes, and a simple breathing out of what she receives, that has the singleness of life, rather than the selecting and energizing of art. More native is it to her to be the living model of the artist than to set apart from herself any one form in objective reality; more native to inspire and receive the poem than to create it. In so far as soul is in her completely developed, all soul is the same; but in so far as it is modified in her as Woman, it flows, it breathes, it sings, rather than deposits soil, or finishes work; and that which is especially feminine flushes, in blossom, the face of the earth, and pervades, like air and water, all this seeming solid globe, daily renewing and purifying its life.80

Potter's dramatization of Du Maurier's novel, *Trilby*, emphasizes the role of woman as the "stuff of art", presenting an allegorical heroine who has all the "native" qualities which inspire the artist, but who is physically incapable of creating art independently. Fuller's "Apocalyptic Feminism"81 was intent upon opening up the possibilities for women but still circumscribed them, not by denying women's intellectual power, but rather by defining that power in essentialist terms, as did Ruskin and Tennyson. Fuller's panegyric to the superiority of female instinct, which, she says, is essential to the progress of both male and female within a true marriage, is similar to Tennyson's resolution of the problem in his poem *The Princess* (1847). Princess Ida, after the failure of her experiment in creating a society inhabited only by women whose focus is on education, is consoled by the Prince, who says:

The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink
Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free:
For she that out of Lethe scales with man
The shining steps of Nature, shares with man
His nights, his days, moves with him to one goal,
Stays all the fair young planet in her hands...
We two will serve them both in aiding her --
Will clear away the parasitic forms
That seem to keep her up but drag her down --
Will leave her space to burgeon out of all
Within her -- let her make herself her own
To give or keep, to live and learn and be
All that not harms distinctive womanhood.
For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse...
Yet in the long years liker must they grow;
The man be more of woman, she of man.82

The Princess doubts that this will happen but, like Margaret Fuller, puts her faith in “true marriage” where:

Each fulfils
Defect in each, and always thought in thought,
Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,
The single pure and perfect animal,
The two-cell’d heart beating, with one full stroke,
Life.83

If Tennyson and Fuller saw the integration of woman into society as a desirable evolutionary necessity, many scientists and doctors questioned the place of woman in human evolution and found her wanting. Tennyson’s “two-cell’d heart” was an important metaphor for them and the influence of romanticism was to be found in the sciences as elsewhere. Tennyson provided an image which reflected scientific fact bolstered by a priori reasoning on woman’s place in the natural order. In fact, the notion of a “two-cell’d heart” was not new but a restatement of the Platonic ideal. An article in the Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology (1851) shows how science referred to this ideal. The author writes:

The ancients had a notion that man was originally androgynous, a being compounded like a flower, of the two sexes in one; that subsequently a division took place, and as only half an individual comes into the world at each birth, under the altered circumstances, the two halves so separated seek to be united again to each other, in virtue of an imperious sympathy; and that inconstancy in love and marriage resulted from the difficulty which the two halves experienced in finding each other.84

The writer goes on to say that such difficulties are due to the female half who is victim to the “morbid actions of the reproductive organs” and who develops “hysterical cunning” and “moral insanity” as she reaches sexual maturity.

The laws of evolution were called into play and combined with romantic myths to
demonstrate woman’s inevitable inferiority in society and in nature. Such inferiority was seen as being due primarily to her limited, and flawed, mental capacities. Woman’s mental powers were dominated by her physical nature, according to contemporary scientific thought, which relied on ancient paradigms of sexual difference and of unavoidable instinct. The role of instinct in the behaviour of both males and females was called on to explain the “essential truths” of their differing natures. Although the 1860s saw a burgeoning of interest in experimental psychology, most notably in Fechner’s work in psychophysics, mental activity and disturbance were still, for the most part, explained in physical, mechanistic terms which had more in common with Galen’s classical explanation of vital spirits than with the new explorations in psychology. Psychology was slowly separating itself from physiology (although not from philosophy), but it was not until the late nineteenth century that Freud succeeded in distinguishing the importance of psychology in his work on the subconscious mind; even he could not discard entirely the role that instinct might have to play in human behaviour.

In Biological Politics, Janet Sayers states: “Biological accounts of sex differences have often been used to reinforce and maintain traditional sex roles.” She goes on to say that the argument which maintained that because of biological factors, sexual equality can be achieved only at the cost of damage to women’s reproductive functions...in fact relies on appeal to social attitudes -- to nationalism, to class prejudice, and to sexism.

This argument, and extensions of it, were everywhere extant throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century. The excitement in the scientific and the general community created by Darwin’s theory added a new focus to time-honoured assumptions about woman’s biological and psychological status. History was conflated with evolution as many scientists set out to argue and prove that the feminist side in the woman question debate denied “simple” biological fact. Freud acknowledges these simplistic and thus misleading views in his lecture on femininity when he attempts to dispel the idea that masculinity and femininity are mental qualities which can be related to active and passive behaviour, respectively. Freud notes that while primary sexual differences are real, the extrapolation of psychological values from basic biological difference is simply what he describes as “the error of superimposition.” However, pre-Freudian writers on the subject in the nineteenth century relied on the biological sexual differences between males and females as an explanation for their behaviour. One of the most influential voices was that of Herbert Spencer, the first self-proclaimed British social scientist. Sayers writes:

Spencer claimed to derive his moral opposition to women’s intellectual development on the basis of pure biological theory. He argued that physical and
mental development (or evolution, as he termed it) normally proceeded less far in women than in men because energy had to be reserved in their case for reproduction.88

This theory of capital and expenditure in nature echoed contemporary economic theory and was frequently called upon by other writers on biological science. In Spencer’s plan, as in Ruskin’s Of Queen’s Gardens, the difference between male and female natures echoes their respective places in the economic system. Science and social science worked within the same paradigm. In The Story of Psychology, Robert C. Bolles states: “The accepted paradigm dictates what kinds of theories are acceptable... The paradigm also dictates all the rules and procedures by which the science conducts itself.”89 He continues: “Paradigms...have great staying power, and are usually abandoned only when there seems to be a more attractive alternative.”90 The evolutionary paradigm was applied widely; it was interpreted and adjusted to rationalize many social and political assumptions, including the physical and mental status of women and how that status influenced the social and political economies.

**Romanticism and Scientific Determinism**

In an article in Popular Science Monthly (1873), Spencer stated that men and women were as different mentally as they were physically, and that to deny this would create social consequences for which society was unprepared; he hinted at dire results for society if the female psyche infiltrated into the halls of power. For Spencer, woman’s role in the natural order, and consequently her psychological strength and weakness, was determined by her potential or real motherhood. In his view, woman had evolved for the specific purpose of procreation; such specificity meant, within the profit and loss model, that she was unfit both mentally and physically for non-traditional female tasks and roles. It also provided a comforting assurance, in its obverse implication, that the male of the species was at the summit of the evolutionary order. Spencer writes:

Two classes of differences exist between the psychical, as between the physical, structures of men and women, which are both determined by this same fundamental need—adaptation to the paternal and maternal duties. The first set of differences is that which results from a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men, necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction. Whereas, in man, individual evolution continues
until the physiological cost of self-maintenance very nearly balances what nutrition supplies, in woman an arrest of individual development takes place while there is yet a considerable margin of nutrition: otherwise there would be no offspring... This rather earlier cessation of individual evolution thus necessitated, showing itself in a rather smaller growth of the nervo-muscular system, so that both the limbs which act and the brain which makes them act are somewhat less, has two results on the mind. The mental manifestations have somewhat less of general power or massiveness; and beyond this there is a perceptible falling short in these two faculties, intellectual and emotional, which are the latest products of human evolution -- the power of abstract reasoning and that most abstract of the emotions, the sentiment of justice--the sentiment which regulates conduct irrespective of personal attachments and the likes or dislikes felt for individuals.  

Within such a model as Spencer's, woman was an inferior biological being with limited intellectual power and with stronger but less discriminating emotions. In common with mechanist psychologists such as Hobbes or the mechanist/associationists such as Hume, Hartley, and James Mill, woman was the lesser machine; woman was "other" and was therefore, potentially dangerous to the social fabric.  

According to Spencer, biological difference is inextricably linked to moral difference, and again, woman is found to be lacking in moral sense except when it comes to her "natural" predisposition to leave the managing of the world to men. Spencer argues, in the same article, that women are more easily found to be in awe of male authority as exemplified in "all embodiments and symbols of authority, governmental and social." His conclusions are not innovative but the force of his argument and its authority was vested in the burgeoning respect and popularity which science enjoyed throughout the nineteenth century. This is not to say that evolutionary theory, for example, was widely accepted; on the contrary, the widespread hostility to, and ridicule of, Darwinism has been well documented. However, science and technology were granted a new respect and excited popular interest. When science seemed to uphold traditional values, and give added weight to them, it was embraced as learned doctrine which could not be disputed.  

If science could have frightening conclusions, such as placing mankind within the general animal order, it could also produce seemingly comforting ones as well. While Darwin had deliberately shied away from anthropocentric conclusions his readers had not, and the experience created a chasm of self-doubt. If man was just another animal, a higher ape, what was his
purpose? By concentrating on supposed evolutionary differences between human males and females the post-Darwinists reinstigated a psychological balance of power (the same psychological balance of power that was enacted in melodrama) in the on-going arguments about both evolution and the woman question. Mankind was different, they asserted, because it was more differentiated and specialized; this was evidenced by the greater difference between men and women as opposed to less-differentiated lower species. In the same article, Spencer, in comparing men and women, asserts: "To suppose that along with their parental activities there do not go unlikenesses of mental faculties, is to suppose that here alone in all Nature there is no adjustment of special powers to special functions." The greatest difference between males and females, according to Spencer, Bagehot, and many others, was inevitably to be found in their unequal mental powers. The political implications of scientific research in the area of the difference between the brains of men and women were recognized by Walter Bagehot in an article for the Popular Science Monthly (1879). Bagehot notes: "The doctrine of natural selection is successfully utilized in the study of certain political subjects." He goes on to use the same argument as Spencer, that of broad biological differentiation between men and women, to argue against women's rights, relying heavily on the supposed significance of smaller brain size in the female. Evolution is called upon once again to support the contention of male superiority. Bagehot relies on the doctrine of broad differentiation in higher species to support his argument stating that le Bon, a biologist, notes that the respective weight of the brain in man and woman constantly goes on increasing as we rise in the scale of civilization, so that as regards the mass of the brain, and consequently in intelligence, woman becomes more and more differentiated from man.

The tone of Bagehot's article fluctuates between optimistic reliance on scientific "fact" and a pessimistic hostility towards those who would argue against him. Bagehot asserts that all the scientific data is on his side of the argument and that counter-arguments are contrary to natural law. He writes:

The attempt to alter the present relations of the sexes is not a rebellion against some arbitrary law instituted by a despot or a majority -- not an attempt to break the yoke of a mere convention; it is a struggle against Nature; a war undertaken to reverse the very conditions under which not man alone, but all mammalian species have reached their present development.

In The Evolution of Sex, Drs. Geddes and Thomson put forward an argument that differentiates the male from the female even further, this time at a cellular level, to the
disadvantage of the female. For Geddes and Thomson the distinction lies in basic metabolic differences which they term anabolic and “katabolic” (sic). While both anabolic and catabolic metabolism are biological facts, the preponderance of one over the other according to the sex of the subject is an invalid biological statement, except when it is used to describe the specific cellular activity of the gonads. Geddes and Thomson take the part for the whole in their treatise on human biology, and argue that catabolism is the driving biological force which is to be found in male subjects, whereas females have a passive anabolic metabolism. They are eager to demonstrate the political significance of their findings and relate the supposed cellular differentiation to the futility of women attempting to change their status in society. While ostensibly looking at different species for sexual differentiation, Geddes and Thomson demonstrate a constant subtext of concern with humanity. This can be seen when they are detailing examples of sexual selection in insect life and concluding that the male is more active, the female more passive; suddenly, and somewhat incongruously, they add:

In some cases the body temperature, which is an index to the pitch of life, is distinctly lower in the females... In many cases, furthermore, the longevity of the females is much greater. Such a fact as that women pay lower insurance premiums than do men, is often popularly accounted for by their greater immunity from accident; but the greater normal longevity on which the actuary calculates, has, as we begin to see, a far deeper and constitutional explanation.93

This constitutional explanation was the basis from which Geddes and Thomson extrapolated their thesis of a necessary biological distinction between male activity and female passivity. They write that, “It is generally true that the males are more active, energetic, eager, passionate, and variable; the females more passive, conservative, sluggish and stable”. For them male “katabolism” provides the necessary variety and dynamism for evolutionary development, whereas the female’s passive traits preserve, “the constancy and integrity of the species....” They assert that, as mothers, women have more altruism than the male of the species, but also have a concomitant lack of intelligence and energy. Because men are physically stronger, they are more independent and courageous, while women are more sympathetic and affectionate. Men are more energetic and women are more patient. Geddes and Thomson see this as an “expression of constitutional contrast, and by no means, as some would have us believe, a mere product of masculine bullying. The stronger lust and passion of males is likewise the obverse of predominant katabolism.” The “katabolic” male is more original, while the female is more stable and patient. She conserves past variations in her biological make-up, whereas the male
introduces new variations which strengthen the species. They conclude by saying, “Man thinks more, woman feels more. He discovers more, but remembers less; she is more receptive, and less forgetful.”

The same romantic concepts of male and female behaviour which inform popular drama also inform this biological text. The valiant hero, the lustful villain, the self-sacrificing mother, and the faithful maiden were all psychologically believable and all of them were simple representations of “undeniable” biological facts. Geddes and Thomson end their text with a statement that would not have been out of place in the concluding speech of a melodrama. They write: “While philosophers are disputing about the government of the world, Hunger and Love are performing the task.” In melodramatic terms, therefore, Geddes and Thomson conclude with a “hold picture” direction for their readers and look to Providence to provide the last word. Biological determinism is given a dramatic force, and human agency is overridden by biological necessity.

The Dramatization of Determinism

Woman’s constitution was non-negotiable for all the authors quoted above; it was reliant on unavoidable instinct, an instinct for passivity and motherhood. Any attempt to escape these instincts or to subvert them would lead to personal madness and social disarray. Such instincts were described in dramatic terms as the “sacred emotions.” The dramatic force of melodrama in the nineteenth century relied on the sacred emotions coming under attack; this provided the dramatic conflict necessary for a successful play. And it is often through the experience of the heroine that the melodramatic catharsis is achieved as she struggles with both external and internal conflicts.

While this type of theatre is not what we would now term realism, the psychological conflicts which are enacted in melodrama are based on the assumed reality of a feminine sensibility which was inscribed in the social code, and as such, convey an interesting and realistic picture of the society which produced it. Joseph Donahue writes:

What becomes ever more remarkable as one looks into the characteristics of female dramatic characters from this period is the extent to which, in their essence, they reflect the general life of the age. This realism strikes me as remarkable...because so many critics and historians have assumed that the drama of this age has a high component of fantasy, that it consequently makes things
come out 'right' at the end in blithe, uncomprehending defiance of probability and the facts of ordinary life, not to mention the dictates of common sense. But fantasy in dramatic art exists because fantasy is there in life itself... The verbal codes of this complex kind of communication, the explicit dialogue and stage directions from the scripts of these plays, seldom identify the rich concentration of deeply plausible cultural signs conveyed to an audience in actual performance.\(^6\)

The volume and variety of nineteenth-century popular theatre testifies to the vitality of the form, but more significantly, within this variety there runs a common thread of concern with the state of the female mind and the construction of a gendered feminine psyche. Biological determinism is echoed in dramatic determinism, which has its heroines follow familiar and reassuring plots to ensure a successful theatrical denouement. The aberrant, mad, and socially dislocated woman serves to heighten the dramatic power of the performance and demonstrates that the "ideal" female was, in fact, subject to multiple threats not the least of which was her own tendency to aberrance and madness.

That the assumed ideal nature of woman was envisioned as so fragile and easily fragmented, either by external conditions or by her own nature, shows that such an ideal was, at best, rare or, at worst, illusory, and that nineteenth-century theatre audiences, in common with other segments of the population who would have denied any links with theatrical display, were conscious of the disparities between such idealization and the reality of their daily lives. What was to be made of gin-soaked nurses, of murderous baby-minders, of scandalous ladies of fashion or less-sensational women whose daily existence of poverty, ignorance and degradation made their lives far removed from the perfection of "essential womanhood?" The need to replay the ideal female under siege, or to depict the awful fate of women who attempted to escape from their "true" natures by holding them up as examples for the audience, demonstrates an underlying unease about the validity of such an ideal.

The public's appetite was for performances which emphasise the ideal; but the same ideal was constantly undermined, subtextually or overtly, in the role of the mad or hysterical woman, which points to a preoccupation with the implied problematic nature of women in the nineteenth century.


4. W.S. Gilbert. Ruddigore, in H.M.S. Pinafore and Other Plays, 161-196. New York: The Modern Library, 1925. All future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.


23. Smith. 3.


30. Sherson. 78.

31. Revels History of Drama Volume VI. 133.


35. Henry Arthur Jones. Breaking a Butterfly. London, 1884. 6.(All future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.)


38. The Athenaeum March 8th 1884. 322.


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42. Revels History of Drama Volume VI. 149.


45. Siegfried Sassoon’s Diaries 1915-1918. Ed. Rupert Hart-Davis, London: Faber and Faber,
1983. 267.


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64. Helsiger, Sheets, and Veeder. Volume 2. 75.


75. Ruskin. 49 - 50.
76. Ruskin. 57.

77. Ruskin. 72.


79. Fuller. 301-302.

80. Fuller. 301.


83. Tennyson. 199.


86. Sayers. 7.


88. Sayers. 12.


90. Bolles. 9.


95. Geddes and Thomson. 332.

CHAPTER II

THE OPHELIA TYPE: PATHOS AND DISTRACTION

The stereotypical, sentimentalized image of attractive female madness on the nineteenth-century British stage was rooted in Shakespeare's Ophelia. Elaine Showalter writes: "For a variety of reasons, Ophelia was a compelling figure for many Victorian artists, writers, and doctors seeking to represent the madwoman." For them, Ophelia was the perfect embodiment of distressed, innocent womanhood made mad, partly by a world she could not be expected to understand or control, and partly by her own nature. They interpreted Ophelia's distress and subsequent madness as being dependent on her thwarted love for Hamlet. Ophelia's charm and appeal were embedded in her romantic unworldliness, her youth, her assumed virginity, and her saint-like devotion to Hamlet, to her father, and to a duty which could not be reconciled with her emotions. Robertson Davies states, "Every age gets the Shakespeare it wants: the nineteenth century wanted it sweet and hot and deeply personal." Ophelia's madness was tailor-made to fit the taste of nineteenth-century audiences, and the role was also highly melodramatized, as were all contemporary Shakespearean performances. Showalter has discussed the varying depictions of Ophelia on stage as the part was appropriated (as it continues to be) to satisfy contemporary taste. Showalter writes:

Late Augustan stereotypes of female love-melancholy were sentimentalized versions which minimized the force of female sexuality, and made female insanity a pretty stimulant to male sensibility...Even Mrs Siddons in 1785 played the mad scene with stately and classical dignity. For much of the period, in fact, Augustan objections to the levity and indecency of Ophelia's language and behaviour led to censorship of the part. Her lines were frequently cut, and the role was often assigned to a singer instead of an actress, making the mode of representation musical rather than visual or verbal.

Davenant's Restoration Hamlet which was introduced in 1661 made many changes to Shakespeare's text including Laertes's and Polonius's advice to Ophelia. Garrick's alteration of Hamlet, first performed at Drury Lane in 1772, retains all of Ophelia's lines and songs, but omits the gravediggers' scene and the description of her drowning. Hamlet does refer to her death
before his own when he addresses Laertes, but it is not dwelled upon as Garrick brings the play to a swift conclusion.  

Kalman A. Burnim notes that before Garrick’s version was staged Mrs. Booth portrayed Ophelia as a “typically innocent, unhappy maid” but "Mrs. Cibber, who played Ophelia at Drury Lane until 1766, was the first actress to give depth to the character." Burnim quotes from a review of her performance in The St. James’s Chronicle (March 3 - 5 1772):

"The propriety of her Deportment, the expression of grief mixed with terror at the behaviour of Hamlet, and the whole completed by a harmony and pathos in her scenes of madness, is only to be conceived by those who have seen her."

Mrs. Maria Smith, who played Ophelia at Drury Lane during the last four years of Garrick’s management was especially noted for her singing in the part. In October 1775 a review described her appearance and performance:

...long flaxen hair hung partly down her back, and partly over her shoulders; in her left hand she held a bunch of loose straw, and her whole demeanour in her madness was as gentle as the passion which caused it. The songs, which she sang charmingly, were fraught with such plaintif and tender melancholy...

Although Garrick was criticized for his alterations to the text of Hamlet, especially the compressed fifth act, his version restored a great deal of Shakespeare’s original play, including some of Ophelia’s part. George Winchester Stone notes that Garrick’s version gave the audience a Hamlet that “had not been heard for a century.” This was the version that continued in the nineteenth century.

The idea that Ophelia was unseemly in her speech was not a new one to the eighteenth century. Earlier critics had balked at her expressions, which did not fit into the ideal which she was meant to represent for them. Not surprisingly, Jeremy Collier found fault in the character of Ophelia. In 1698 in his Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage he criticises Shakespeare for displaying Ophelia’s madness, noting,"since he was resolv’d to drown the Lady like a Kitten he should have set her swimming a little sooner. To keep her alive only to sully her Reputation, and discover the Rankness of her Breath, was very cruel."

Notwithstanding Collier’s and subsequent critics’ objections to Ophelia’s speech, the character retained the reputation of spotless innocence marred only by madness; such madness, however, was the most piquant quality of her character for the sensibility of the Romantic period.
Whereas Collier advises keeping such a monstrosity in a dark room, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century audiences found the character perfect for display and an inspiration to the sensibility which they wished to cultivate. Samuel Johnson exemplifies this when, in his edition of Shakespeare he asserts, in the endnotes to Hamlet, “the mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness.”

Michel Foucault contends that madness in the early part of the eighteenth century had been viewed as pure unreason in an age of reason, whereas the age of sensibility ushered in a curiosity in the details of such unreason; this, for Foucault, is primarily a concern with scandal. The obsession with Ophelia’s mad abandonment in this period, which led to many variations on the same theme, illustrates Foucault’s premise. There is a dual appeal in such display; as well as demonstrating womanly virtue, the freedom of speech and action which comes with madness, when it is displayed on stage, is an abandonment of decorous behaviour, and allows the audience to glimpse the passion that would otherwise remain hidden. These characters are literally seen to come undone, both physically and mentally. Their characters are liberated by their madness from the restrictions of gentility, while their hair and clothing is also loosened from restraint. One of the commonest stage directions found in plays which concentrate on an Ophelia-type is that which directs the heroine to enter distracted, with her hair down and singing. In its appreciation of the Ophelia-type the audience could satisfy its taste for scandal without relinquishing a proper acknowledgement of female virtue: it could thus indulge its taste for pathos as well as its taste for scandal. As the nineteenth century progressed, Ophelia-types were adapted to appeal to the changing taste for such scandal. Collins’s The Woman in White capitalizes on the scandal of private insane asylums: Potter’s Trilby exploits the popular novel by Du Maurier, which concentrates on Bohemian life in Paris, and the dangers of mesmerism on an impressionable demi-mondaine. Cammarano’s libretto of Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor, has the heroine murder her husband. Although the picture of womanly madness which is found in certain of these plays may seem removed from Ophelia, since their actions are less benign or guiltless, they still retain iconographic aspects of Ophelia and share a common root. Their distraction stems, like that of Ophelia, from love-melancholy. Trilby is vulnerable to Svengali’s power because of her attachment to little Billee, Laura Fairlie is driven to madness by her husband’s cruelty in conjunction with her seemingly hopeless love for Walter Hartright, and Lucy Ashton’s
murderous frenzy is a result of her thwarted love for Ravenswood. However, a purer, more recognizable Ophelia-type also held the stage. Ainslie’s *Clemenza* and Somerset’s *Crazy Jane* rely heavily on Shakespearean tradition, while Calcraft’s *The Bride of Lammermoor* retains the sentiment, but discards the murderous nature of the main character.

What was it that made Ophelia such a compelling figure and inspired recurrent representations on stage? Why was womanly confusion worked up to a frenzied pitch such an appealing symbol to nineteenth-century taste? The disparity between her external passivity and internal, mental conflict was at the heart of Ophelia’s appeal. Ellen Terry notes, “I think there is no “sane” scene in Shakespeare which moves us as much as this “mad” one, this beautiful painful scene in which Ophelia prattles and sings.” In common with other depictions of mad women on the nineteenth-century stage, Ophelia embodies danger, but it is ultimately directed against herself and is therefore innocuous; she can be pitied while she thrills, rather than feared; this is one of her greatest virtues.

The character of Ophelia was analyzed and interpreted by writers, psychologists and actors, all of whom attempted to come to terms with, and provide explanations for, the perceived conflicts in her character. Mary Cowden Clarke attempted to explain Ophelia’s implied ribald knowledge in her book *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Characters*, first published in 1850. Ostensibly written for children, Cowden Clarke’s tales found a wide audience. In them, she provides histories of the childhood of Shakespeare’s heroines. In the chapter entitled “The Rose of Elsinore” Ophelia, we are told, was put out to nurse at a young age because her parents left Denmark on a diplomatic mission to Paris. The peasants with whom she lives give her a knowledge of herbs and their common, occasionally earthy, names. Cowden Clarke’s sentimental fabrication of Ophelia’s early life provides an innocuous excuse for Ophelia’s songs. According to Cowden Clarke’s story, Ophelia is also subjected to the sight of the daughter of the house’s betrayal by her lover, which leads to pregnancy and death. This seems to provide evidence for Ophelia’s fear and knowledge of betrayal without implying that she, herself, had any sexual guilt. Cowden Clarke’s Ophelia is sentimentalized throughout the piece. We are told that “Ophelia grew into delicate girlhood. Ever quiet, - ever diffident, in her retiring gentleness and modesty; but serene and happy.” Cowden Clarke’s speculations also continue the interest in Shakespearean character analysis that had been growing since the eighteenth century, and which
had been taken up by psychologists, who also found the character sentimentally appealing.

The alienists, Bucknill and Conolly, both wrote psychological analyses of Shakespeare which were aimed at a lay audience. Helen Small points out that these analyses were not primarily designed to elucidate psychological facts but rather, to indicate the refined sensibilities of the authors. Always suspect the alienists or mad-doctors asserted their refinement through such character studies. Bucknill’s comments about Ophelia demonstrate the need to dispel any association of guilt with the character, and to rationalize her actions which, to him, are in keeping with a female love-melancholic or erotomaniac. He asserts that “never was sentimental mania more truly and more exquisitely depicted than in this effusion of mad song.” For Bucknill Ophelia is madness elevated to an art form: the truth he finds in her characterization can be related to contemporary theories of female madness, but exquisite would seem an odd choice of word to juxtapose with insanity were it not for the concept of depersonalisation which went hand-in-hand with ideas of female melancholics; if all women are predisposed to the condition (and this contention persisted throughout the period) in Ophelia it reaches a type of sublimity beyond the commonplace. He goes on to write in florid terms of the attractiveness, and the transparency of her character. Bucknill finds nothing in Ophelia that needs explanation; she is the instantly readable and eternal female; he explains in rhapsodic terms his own affection for the character, and concludes with the idea that she represents an eternal picture of idealized femininity as he writes:

Ophelia’s prettinesses are as natural as they are touching. The freshness of reality encircles her head like the wild flowers with which she weaves her garlands. This fantastical dress of straws and flowers is a common habit of the insane, but it seems more natural in Ophelia than in the angry and raging madness of old Lear...the picture of her insanity is perfected by many other touches as natural and true...There is no hidden meaning in aught that poor Ophelia says...utterly lost, except to the insane train of ideas, she is as insensible to danger as a somnambulist; and singing her life away, she passes from the melody of madness to the silence of the grave. Bucknill also insists that, despite her silence, Ophelia is knowable and that her pathos is part of a universal code of Romantic sensibility: he writes, “It is strange how thoroughly we seem
to know Ophelia, notwithstanding her taciturnity and reserve. She says nothing of herself, and yet we seem to look into the very recesses of her clear soul."^{15} For Bucknill, Ophelia is a blank page onto which can be drawn a highly sentimental and emotional picture: her stage presence's impact was due to the extent to which she could be objectified to satisfy the prevailing fantasy of womanhood. Ellen Terry interpreted Ophelia as a timid, fearful creature noting that, "Her brain, her soul and her body are all pathetically weak."^{16} In contrast, the role of Hamlet was portrayed by Garrick, Kemble, Sullivan, and Booth as an essentially sane man who only displays signs of madness when he is in conflict with society: the part was analyzed and discussed with the majority of commentators agreeing with such an interpretation. However, no-one ever doubted Ophelia's insanity: it was entirely plausible due to her gender and needed no discussion. Elaine Showalter points out:

Whereas for Hamlet madness is metaphysical, linked with culture, for Ophelia it is a product of the female body and female nature, perhaps that nature's purest form. On the Elizabethan stage, the conventions of female insanity were sharply defined. Ophelia dresses in white, decks herself with "fantastical garlands" of wild flowers, and enters..."distracted" playing on a lute with her hair down singing.^{17}

Anna Jameson also adopts this attitude to Ophelia. Jameson appears to want to identify with Ophelia, whom she describes as being:

Someone, in whom the feminine character appears, resolved into its very elementary principles-as modesty, grace, and tenderness. Without these, a woman is no woman but a thing which, luckily, wants a name yet; with these, though every other faculty were passive or deficient, she might still be herself. These are the inherent qualities with which God sent us into the world.^{18}

Ophelia's descent into madness is not simply tragic in Jameson's terms, but an expected outcome of her idealized femininity: it is, therefore, laudable as well as pathetic, inevitable as well as pitiable. Jameson's analysis of female characters relies on the same concepts of essential femininity, as do contemporary writers on feminine psychology. She explains that these qualities:

- may be perverted by a bad education - they may be obscured by harsh and evil
destinies - they may be overpowered by the development of some particular mental power, the predominance of some passion; but they are never wholly crushed out of the woman's soul, while it retains those faculties which render it responsible to it's Creator...When thrown alone amid harsh and adverse destinies, and amid the trammels and corruptions of society, without energy to resist, or will to act, or strength to endure, the end must needs be desolation.19

Jameson adopts the same attitude to Ophelia’s madness as do Laertes and Claudius in Hamlet. However, the potential political dangers of Ophelia’s mad ramblings are noted by Horatio (IV. v. 115).20 While Shakespeare thus points out the expediency of the King’s simply classifying Ophelia as mad, the same stereotype which proves so useful for Claudius’s ends was unquestioned by Jameson and her contemporaries. So affecting is Ophelia’s condition to Jameson that she eulogizes her in pseudo-Shakespearian elegiac prose:

Ophelia - poor Ophelia! O far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the briars of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life!...her madness has precisely the same effect that would be produced by the spectacle of real insanity, if brought before us: we feel inclined to turn away and veil our eyes in reverential pity, and too painful sympathy.21

Although Anna Jameson may have averted her metaphoric gaze from the sight of Ophelia’s distress, the character’s stage presence commanded attention, and inspired multiple reinventions of her descent into melancholic madness. In fact it could be argued that Jameson, herself, adopts a melancholic mood in her analysis of the character. She assumes the role of sentimentalized voyeuse, and aligns her own feminine psyche with that of the character she is describing. While she feels impelled to show that the gaze should be averted by anyone with true sensibilities, such sensibilities require an object on which to focus. As object, Ophelia’s apparent blankness is ripe for personalised inscriptions.

Jameson emphasizes the ephemerality of Ophelia: she is the scent of a violet, a melted snowflake, a broken bubble of water. It is as though her appeal is in her lack of corporality; she is a disembodied woman and yet, in Jameson’s terms, essential woman. This being/non-being that was Ophelia to nineteenth-century sensibilities was immensely attractive, especially in the mad scene, because she only becomes a stage presence in her own right when she is mentally
"not there." Since modesty denies display and madness excuses it, Ophelia is the epitome of the feminine ideal. In the other scenes of the play Ophelia is acted upon, the object of the advice or wrath of the other characters: it is only in the mad scene that she comes into her own and, in this scene, she is unknowable and mysterious, yet knowable because she fits into the ascribed convention of the female love-melancholic. Nineteenth-century commentaries emphasize the guiltlessness of Ophelia as she acquiesces in the wishes of Polonius, Laertes, and Claudius. The only action she takes, which is not directed by another character, is to go mad and die. Poor Ophelia, it is implied, has no one to turn to and, when thrown on her own ephemeral resources, is driven to a watery grave by erotomania, to become one with an element which is just as difficult to pin down. She is both unknowable womanly mystery and predictable womanly confusion; she is a victim of passion and of nature.

It is worth noting, in this context, that the two paintings of Ophelia which were displayed at the Royal Academy in 1852 emphasize the dualism of the character. Arthur Hughes' Ophelia is a sexless fairy-like creature, wearing a spiky garland reminiscent of a crucified Christ and strewing flowers into the river which we know will soon envelop her, emphasising what Goethe's Wilhelm Meister described as "the innocence of insanity," whereas Millais' painting of the same title shows a sumptuously-dressed woman abandoning herself to death, as if to a lover. Millais' Ophelia is surrounded by lush growth, she and her dress seem to be part of the abundant vegetation, while Hughes' Ophelia is in a misty, undefined landscape. (See illustrations I and II) These two paintings show the two sides of Ophelia which so intrigued and attracted the nineteenth-century audience. In 1859, J.C. Bucknill wrote: "Ophelia is the very type of a class of cases by no means uncommon. Every mental physician of moderately extensive experience must have seen many Ophelias. It is a copy from nature, after the fashion of the Pre-Raphaelite school."22

This leads one to question which pre-Raphaelite Ophelia Bucknill would have chosen as being the most psychologically true-to-life: the answer is that they both were. For Bucknill and others, Ophelia was the ideal erotomaniac, at once both pathetic and exciting, a spiritual and an earthly presence. The blighted innocence which could still be regarded as blameless, the loss of control which could not offend, and the thwarted passions which retained essential womanliness were ascribable to the veil of madness that is drawn around Ophelia. It was to prove an invaluable
stage convention and, since it drew on the work of Shakespeare, it could claim an honourable and serious precedent. From the viewpoint of nineteenth-century critics, Shakespeare was the ideal poet and, more importantly for them, an exemplary judge of character. His insight into humanity was lauded as unsurpassed in English literature; his characterizations were considered to be so true-to-life that they resonated in the popular imagination, and were absorbed into the construction of ideal types. Helena Faucit, in the introduction to On Some of Shakespeare’s Female Characters, shows how Shakespeare’s characters live for her when she describes her response to Ophelia. She also provides an apologia for actresses, whose profession was considered to be less than respectable, as she attempts to elevate her art by associating it with Shakespeare. She states:

I look on Ophelia as one of the strongest proofs our great master has left us of his belief in the actor’s art (his own), and of his trust in the power possessed, at least by sympathetic natures, of filling up his outlines, and giving full and vivid life to the creatures of his brain...he must have looked beyond “the ignorant present,” and known that a time would come when women, true and worthy, should find it a glory to throw the best part of their natures into these ideal types which he has left to testify to his faith in womanhood, and to make them living realities for thousands to whom they would else have been unknown.23

According to Faucit, Jameson, Conolly, and Bucknill Ophelia is not simply an ancient dramatic persona but a living, breathing character whose reactions are as believable to them as though they had personally known her. Her descent into madness is entirely proper given the context of her life and, more significantly, continues to depict the truth about female sensibility in their own society. It is the performative aspect of Ophelia’s madness that they find so appealing and truthful. Ophelia’s behaviour is clearly recognized as madly bizarre, and therein lies another of its attraction. The sense of the bizarre had a strongly Romantic resonance in this period. Sander Gilman notes:

For the Romantics, the “bizarre,” the “extraordinary,” came to have a positive connotation. Since Romantic writers saw themselves as consciously marginal, they also proclaimed that their art was “bizarre.”... The Romantics expropriated bizarre, a term associated with mental illness, from the medical sciences of the nineteenth century and returned it, altered and hardly recognizable, to the
Ophelia’s mad display is aesthetically pleasing in the context of Romantic sensibility, and the writers quoted above, are keen to identify with the Romantic aesthetic. For example, Jameson writes excitedly about Ophelia’s madness and death: it is, for her, an affecting catharsis of female emotion, the apogee of romantic madness. She exclaims:

Of her subsequent madness what can be said? What an astonishing - what an affecting picture of a mind utterly, hopelessly wrecked! - past hope - past cure! ...Ophelia’s madness...is not the suspension, but the utter destruction of the reasoning powers: it is the total imbecility which, as medical people well know, too frequently follows some terrible shock to the spirits....her quick transitions from gayety to sadness - each equally purposeless and causeless; her snatches of old ballads...are all so true to the life, that we forget to wonder, and can only weep...

Jameson relies on a medicalized rationale for Ophelia’s indecorous behaviour, thus conflating age-old assumptions about the feminine mind with a newer scientific reasoning, and with the Romantic aesthetic. She continues:

It is one of the symptoms in this species of insanity, as we are assured by physicians. I have myself known one instance in the case of a young Quaker girl, whose character resembled that of Ophelia, and whose malady arose from a similar cause...Ophelia, ‘divided from herself and her fair judgement,’ appears here like a spotless victim offered up to the mysterious and inexorable fates.

Ophelia’s ribaldry is acceptable once it has been medically classified and explained. Her frustrated sexuality is depicted as thwarted domesticity: the implication is that if the plot had only allowed her to marry Hamlet she would have been as happy as any other love-stricken maiden but not, for the audience, so tempting a figure. A character that was so successful in tragedy was also ideal for the conventions of melodrama. A valuable and exciting plot device in melodrama found Ophelia-types thrillingly insane but achieving recovery and domestic happiness before the final curtain.
Three Versions of the Love-Melancholic: Clemenza, Crazy Jane and Lucy Ashton.

In 1822, at Bath, Sir Whitelaw Ainslie presented his play *Clemenza: or the Tuscan Orphan.* Ainslie was a surgeon in the Indian army and lived abroad for twenty-seven years, returning to England in 1815. *Clemenza* was the only play he is recorded having written, although he published several medical texts. His authorship of the play can be seen as an extension of his medical practice as he gives as his reason for writing the play the need “of amusing the mind of a dear relative, then gradually sinking into the grave.”(8) Records indicate that the play, while being well-received at Bath, was never revived. The significance of *Clemenza* in a study of female madness on stage is in the fact that a casual dramatist would find it entirely proper to include a Romantic madwoman amongst his characters. Ainslie’s primary profession is also significant to his choice of topic. The play is the product of a self-confessed educated and gentlemanly sensibility whilst it is also the work of a doctor, thus sensibility and science combine to produce this drama.

In his preface Ainslie points out that it is with some temerity that he has attempted to write an historical play whose subject matter has already been addressed by Byron (it is assumed that Ainslie is referring to Byron’s poem of 1816, *The Prisoner of Chillon*) but adds that he has been “Strongly allured to it by some of the most pleasing recollections of his younger days, so that he may in truth say, he wrote from the heart.”(7) Ainslie thus aligns himself with Byron, and expresses his desire to adhere to historical truth in the setting of the play, although not in its content. He shows that he intends to respect the dramatic unities throughout the piece, noting that the “time does not occupy quite twenty-four hours; with respect to the place, the farthest range does not exceed two miles.”(7) This play, according to the author, is to be written along classical lines: despite the self-deprecatory preface, it is a serious attempt at a verse drama written by someone who considers himself to be a scholar and a gentleman, and to be one who aims at depicting psychological truth in his characters. The play is set in the romantic alps so that storms, sublime scenery and picturesque folkloric characters can be used to embellish the gothic romanticism of the tale.

In the preface Ainslie provides pocket-characterizations of the various roles in his play
and says that he has intended the character of Clemenza to be amiable, eloquent, and affectionate. The plot is centred around love melancholy and sexual jealousy, with Clemenza as the object of the villain Rinaldo's obsession. Clemenza has escaped from Italy and is in despair because she has had no word from her lover, Lord Dudley, whose letters have been purloined by Rinaldo and his co-conspirator, Scevola. In the prologue Ainslie claims:

Clemenza is the being of his brain-
A sweet ideal Tuscan, all his own,
Without a reference, sapient or insane,
To any other heroine that's known...

However, there are obvious parallels to Shakespeare's Ophelia in Ainslie's play: Clemenza's father has been poisoned by Rinaldo, Rinaldo is insane because of his jealousy of Lord Dudley, and Clemenza prattles and sings of her father's death in her mad scene at the end of the play.

From the first scene, the dominant focus of love-melancholy and impending madness are referred to as the various characters are introduced. In Act I Clemenza, in a state of heightened agitation, warns her companion, Teresa, of the dangers of love when she exclaims: "Beware, there is a poison in the cup,/Which howsoever honey'd it may come,/Too often leads to endless misery" (20), and goes on to speak of the despair which she dreads. The stage directions show the author's intention that Clemenza should appear distracted and agitated until she reaches a crescendo of madness in the final act. The whole timbre of the play is redolent of this inevitability; Act I ends with a melancholy song from the maid, Blanche, who sings about her sister who has died of love-melancholy:

Sad victim of a dire despair,
Ah! love!
In vain against thy guileful snare
She strove! (31)

Clemenza is, however, not the only mad character in the play; Rinaldo and Dudley are also oppressed by love melancholy. But Clemenza's madness is only dangerous to herself, while Rinaldo's is expressed as a fierce madness, dangerous and uncontrolled. Scevola describes him thus:

Forever prone to passions in extreme,
There is of late a wildness in his air,
So many frantic starts and frightful frowns,
That I should almost deem him downright craz'd! (41)

Clemenza refers to Rinaldo as a "strange, frantic man" (59) whose passion for her is threatening and oppressive. In contrast, Dudley's love for Clemenza, and the fear that it is unrequited, are expressed with decorum and dignity implying a sadness under control, a true sensibility with which the audience can identify. While the three characters in the love-triangle are all oppressed in various ways by their feelings, in Clemenza there is a progressive decline towards a hopeless insanity. Rinaldo's jealousy leads to his attempted murder of Dudley; he exclaims, "madness ever drives me." (80) When Clemenza meets Dudley for the first time she faints and waking asks, "Is this a vision of my whirling brain?" (54) The audience is led to believe by her statement, and by those of the people around her, that she is always on the brink of hysterical collapse. It is Dudley's supposed death which leads the heroine to her final fall, Ophelia-like, into complete distraction. Clemenza's loss of control is described as inevitable for one of her nature; the priest, Anselmo, states that she is, "By nature little fitted to sustain/ The shocks, the rude mischances, of a world/ Not seldom harsh..." (54)

The plot proceeds with the added complexities of disguises, mistaken identities, and the interventions of a good wizard until Clemenza finds Rinaldo's dead body; he is disguised as Dudley, and has been murdered by Scevola. Characteristically, she screams and faints and then the stage direction indicates that she, "coming out of her swoon, but from the shock having gone distracted, raises herself a little on one arm, looks with a frantic gaze towards Rinaldo's body, conceiving it to be her father asleep." (86) Clemenza now becomes loquacious; her soft silences and decorous speeches are replaced by an insane chatter in which she dwells on her father's death and, as the stage direction notes, "with a frantic laugh" (87), rages at the priest whom she mistakes for Rinaldo. Her distraction has given her the ability to express her true feelings towards him; in madness she gains a liberty of speech which she could not have in the demure characterization of an ideal sentimental heroine. In Act V Clemenza is found in the church, in a state of physical disarray; she is described by the priest as, "So fair! so fragile! so calamitous!/ Loose flow'd her raven hair-her zone unbound!" (95) As the tension heightens, the stage directions indicate that Clemenza must become ever more frantic as she speaks wildly to an
imagined Rinaldo:

Nay, now avaunt!-I like thee not-Begone!-
Thou 'twas that robb'd me of my only pride,-
First rous'd a flame within this burning brain,
Then dragg'd me houseless through these mountain snows.(97)

While all her rage against Rinaldo is seemingly directed against his hand in the death of her father, she sings - after seizing “wildly a guitar” (SD 98) - of the loss of her lover Dudley. The deaths of both her father and Dudley become one source of distraction and grief as she descends further into melancholy madness. That her distraction is mostly due to erotomania becomes apparent when it comes to an abrupt end when Dudley appears; a long stage direction indicates:

Clemenza gives a frantic scream, occasioned by seeing Dudley enter pale and exhausted, without his helmet and cloak...She swoons, and falls...on recovering, she looks for some time wistfully at Dudley-then with a heavenly smile of renovated reason she advances, when they rush into each other’s arms. (SD 99)

Ainslie gives his audience an Ophelia without death. Like Ophelia, Clemenza is given a verbal freedom which she could not have had before; she appears in the classical state of female madness with her hair down and her clothing dishevelled, she sings and she raves, but she recovers when her lover returns and the play ends with their hands being joined by the priest. After her reconciliation with Dudley, Clemenza becomes completely silent. The juxtaposition of silence with the recovery of Clemenza’s sanity demonstrates the conventional idea that sanity, in woman, demands quiescence. Melancholy love-madness has been displayed and exploited to excite the sensibilities of the audience, but it all ends happily and with a reference to the ever-watchful eye of Divine Providence, as the priest states in the final speech of the play:

Thus the Omnipotent, to try our truth,
“Through fate, and chance, and change in human life,”
Works his peculiar end-oft while we seem,
In our scant wisdom, to be harshly doom’d
To hopeless misery or perpetual toil,
Nay, for a time are absolutely sunk
Beneath th'imperious progress of the base;
Prove we but worthy of celestial age!
Unshaken, firm, and faithful through the storm;
Lo! least expected, forth bursts brighter day,
The wicked prostrate, grateful we receive
The bless'd reward of Persevering Virtue! (103)

While Dudley remains unshaken, firm, and faithful throughout the drama, Clemenza succumbs to madness, demonstrating what Robertson Davies sees as the essence of the melodramatic heroine, that is, her representation of the hero's soul or spirit as Lady Soul. Davies says that the woman in melodrama was the embodiment of the hero's soul in a world where, if only justice would prevail, the hero, whose nature is "all courage, goodness and devotion", would get his true deserts. The priest's final speech in Clemenza makes no apology for the heroine's distraction; she is not to be blamed for not having the qualities of the hero since that is not expected of her. She is the vehicle which can embody the confusion of the world, since she is all emotion and irrationality. However, if woman has no sense of justice, as Spencer and his contemporaries contended, then the threat to Lady Soul is also her fault-her flawed self is the focus of injustice-abducted, wronged, abandoned she may be, but nonetheless her intrinsic, passionate, irrational nature lends itself to such a fate, and thus endangers the hero. The villain understands, only too well, this fatal flaw in woman with its potential to unleash destruction, and thus exploits it for his own ends which are also the dramatic ends of melodrama. Lady Soul carries the legacy of Eve in that she embodies original sin; it is the goodness of the hero which has to prevail despite the flaws of his female-embodied soul. Clemenza and other heroines of her ilk demonstrate this premise in order to entertain and instruct their audiences. At the same time, they reinforce the premise of female insufficiency.

In the treatment of the insane the horrors of Bedlam were being replaced by a beneficent moral management, just as on stage the madwoman was elevated to a figure of pity and instruction. The sentimentalization of female madness in drama can be seen as running concurrently with a more tolerant and humane response to insanity, and its treatment in society at large. It was no longer acceptable to pay one's penny to see the mentally afflicted chained to the walls of Bedlam, but it was perfectly in keeping with Christian virtue to witness madness tamed
and domesticated, whether it be in the theatre, or in Conolly’s Hanwell Asylum. Just as the character of Hamlet was appropriated by the Romantics as the ideal hero striving for self-knowledge, so these versions of Ophelia, a delicate, crazed girl, who by her very nature could have no self-knowledge, realized a Romantic ideal which was to be played over and over again on the popular stage in the nineteenth century.¹

The attractive, pathetic female erotomaniac was not confined to the stage or the text but was to be found, according to contemporary accounts, in the real world, especially in the asylums. John Connolly urged actresses to come to see the “real” Ophelias there, although, as noted above, Ellen Terry for one found them too theatrical. However, the classification of female hysterics into such types as Ophelia by nineteenth-century alienists was not a simplistic garnering from literature that fitted into their predisposed mode-of-thought on female insanity. Literature and medicine shared a common lexicon and a common social context, so that the psycho-literary loop provided an expanding feedback for both disciplines. As Helen Small notes:

> Literary representations have had a significant role in shaping the history of female insanity, but in approaching the representation of nervous illness in literature we need to recognize that...it was already the stuff of fiction in the real world. When we look at madness in literature we are looking at a representation of something that is already representational.²⁸

¹This idealised image of female insanity was found not only in ballads and popular drama but also in the weighty verse dramas of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley where there are references to women driven mad by despair over the death or loss of their lovers. The picturesque madwoman is an integral part of the atmosphere of their plays. For example in Wordsworth’s The Borderers Oswald refers to “the poor tenant of that ragged homestead, /Her whom the Monster, Clifford, drove to madness” (Act II II 20-21). In Remorse Coleridge presents Teresa comparing her imaginings of Alvar (presumed dead) to those of a madwoman who bears some resemblance to Ophelia:

> As once I knew a crazy Moorish maid
> Who drest her in her buried lover’s clothes,
> And o’er the smooth spring in the mountain cleft
> Hung with her lute, and played the self-same tune
> He used to play, and listened to the shadow
> Herself had made.(Act I sc ii II 30 - 35)

Byron’s hero Manfred in the dramatic poem of 1817 is guilt-ridden because his implied incestuous relationship with Astarte has driven her to madness and suicide while in Shelley’s The Cenci Beatrice wavers on the edge of madness and references to her supposed inevitable insanity heighten the horror of her existence and show that she is expected to go mad.
It is hard to say where art and fantasy began and reality ended, or if it even did. Edward Shorter notes that every society develops a symptom pool, and this constitutes a cultural collective memory of how illness is subjectively portrayed and objectively interpreted. The interplay of psychogenesis and the theatrical representation of mental aberration was extremely close. John Conolly, in his *A Study of Hamlet*, places his emphasis on the intrinsic psychological reality of Ophelia, noting:

In days when the life of every man and woman above the reach of the lowest poverty is diversified by frequent changes of scene and incident, all this may seem overstrained, as if to dwell on disappointed affections were but a weakness, and to die of a broken heart a mere phrase. Physicians, however, still recognize these casualties, and in every rank; sometimes in words, but more frequently in their effects, revealed, if not confessed, in various forms of sickness and decline. Our asylums for ruined minds now and then present remarkable illustrations of this fatal malady, so that even casual visitors recognize in the wards an Ophelia; the same young years, the same faded beauty, the same fantastic dress and interrupted song.

Conolly's comments on Ophelia concentrate on the performative aspect of her madness, unlike the character analysis which he applies to Hamlet. For Conolly, perfection in the part is reliant on an actress fully understanding the pain of Ophelia, although for him, this is not without danger for the actress, whose very sensitivity in the role might indicate the loss of her own wits. In his attempt to demonstrate the simple veracity of the part, Conolly includes a theatrical anecdote which had been passed down from the eighteenth century. He writes:

A painful illustration of the exalted tone of mind, at least allied to a perfectly truth-like representation of Ophelia, is recorded in Campbell's *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, as related by Mrs. Bellamy, who had it from Colley Cibber. Mrs. Mountfort, an actress who had been withdrawn from her profession by the derangement of her mind, got away from her attendants one evening when Hamlet was the play performing, and went on stage as Ophelia, before the actress could do so to whom the part was assigned; and she exhibited, it is said, "a representation of it that astonished the performers as well as the audience;"
added, however, that "she exhausted her vital powers in this effort, was taken home, and died soon after."

If Conolly found his patients believable, and actresses found the madwomen too histrionic, at the same time, the photographs of female inmates who were classified as Ophelias emphasized a theatrical type. Elaine Showalter notes that Conolly's photographs of such types look staged. Just as the clinical photographs of ersatz Ophelias became part of the iconography of nineteenth century female madness, so the theatrical realizations and extensions of the same types added to that iconography, and female erotomania became a highly pictorialized, and dramatically realized theatrical phenomenon, both on and off the stage. The theatrical fashion of pretty madness also extended to fashions in women's headgear on the streets. When Harriet Smithson played Ophelia in Paris in 1827 she was considered so sublime that she became a sensation, and established a fashion for "coiffure à folle"; this consisted of a black veil with wisps of straw woven into the hair.

The ballad of "Crazy Jane" inspired a similar vogue, known as the Crazy Jane hat. The literary figure of Crazy Jane, originally found in a ballad by "Monk" Lewis (1793), also helped to popularize the image of a wronged, lovesick woman driven mad by the loss of her lover. The ballad was set to music and became a popular party piece for young women to sing. Once again it is seen that the theatrical madwoman was not out of place off-stage, even if it was only as a temporary pose to impress one's guests with the display of a suitably sentimental nature. Lewis stated that the poem was the result of a real encounter with a "poor maniac," thus emphasizing the veracity of an erotomaniac's plight. The stage versions of Crazy Jane (Allardyce Nicoll lists Crazy Jane being performed at the Surrey Theatre in 1827 with a revival at Sadler's Wells in 1830), expanded Lewis's ballad and, after building up to a crescendo of madness in the heroine, provide a comforting conclusion for the audience.

C. A. Somerset's play Crazy Jane capitalizes on the romantic past made popular by Scott's novels and ballads, and is set in the Elizabethan period. Although the play is based on a modern ballad, the attributes of the old form are aligned with Monk's work and the play. In a foreword to the printed edition of the play, an anonymous critic sings the praises of the ballad form, writing: "If any portion of literature be more interesting than another, it is an ancient ballad founded on fact....The chief characteristics of an ancient ballad are simplicity and
Once again, the finer feelings of the audience are being addressed: true sensibility and an appreciation of the past are necessary attributes for a full appreciation of the play. The forward also stresses, as did Monk, the essential truth of the story and of the inevitable madness of the heroine. The plot involves a love-triangle with Jane and Henry’s marriage being threatened by the villain, Lord Raymond, who has an obsession with the heroine, and tries to have her lover murdered; at the same time, he provides a forged letter to prove Henry’s faithlessness. Just like the villain in *Clemenza*, Lord Raymond is made mad by his fascination with the heroine. Women are not only predisposed to insanity, implies the subtext, but have the ability to bewitch weaker men, so that they are driven mad with desire. Lord Raymond’s madness is violent and destructive, while Jane’s is self-directed. He vows “black revenge” when Jane refuses him (20) and speaks of “the secret griefs that ring his tortured breast and goad him on to madness.” (52)

Jane and Lord Raymond are not the only characters in the play who are afflicted by insanity. Lord Raymond’s sister, also called Jane, is another love-melancholic, although in a minor key. She does not lose her wits completely, but only “endeavours to conceal her confusion” (22) and trembles when she sees Henry. Lady Jane’s hopelessness leads her to threaten to enter a convent when she learns that Henry is betrothed; her obsession is more decorous and controlled. Unlike Jane, she does not abandon herself to a crazed misery but states, “Fond foolish heart be still it is in vain/ Why then dost agitate this heaving bosom.” (41) She then dons the black dress indicative of a tragic heroine, and mentally withdraws from the action.

A more frantic vision of insanity is seen in William, Jane’s father, who is in debt to Lord Raymond, and who rages against his daughter, and throws her out of the house when she refuses to marry the lord. Just as Jane is an Ophelia-figure, so William is a lesser Lear. He curses his daughter:

Bareheaded may the tempest overtake thee
Barefooted mayst thou tread on nought but thorns
A miserable monument of vengeance..
Begone and detestation follow thee
I would to prison and while I languish there
May conscience lash thee with her scorpion’s scourge
From door to door to beg for mouldy bread
Thy beauty blasted and thy reason fled. (44)

Later he states:

I've read in history of old King Lear
His two ungrateful daughters drove him mad
Was it a wonder? I am nearly so
That had but one... (54)

Somerset's play is therefore filled with a variety of romantic mad characters; but it reaches its height in the character of Crazy Jane herself, who is also portrayed as the source, however unwitting, of the madness of others. In common with all melodramatic heroines of simple birth, Jane's speech reflects a refinement which denotes a natural nobility. This is in contrast to Amy, the female half of the comic couple, whose expression is more prosaic, and is not given the dignity of blank verse as is Jane's. When Amy is discussing her upcoming marriage with Walter she says, pertishly and simply, "My dear Edwin is going to be married to me, and I to him, if you've no objection." (12) In contrast Jane states, more ponderously, to her father:

Deep in this heart your counsel is engraved
And I will guard it as a sacred treasure.
Yet should I need a model in my state
Of happy wedlock, where could one be found
More perfect than the parents whom I honour'd?
I need but love my husband as my mother
Lov'd you; and he must be a wretch indeed
Who could requite such love with aught but love. (11)

From the beginning, Jane is more serious, more decorous, and more easily threatened than Amy; she is also quicker to ascribe blame, and to rush to judgement, which will eventually be her undoing. When the double wedding is delayed Jane exclaims, "This is indeed unkind of you my father", whereas Amy simply states, "I shall cry my eyes out!" (15) Unlike Amy, Jane slips easily into melancholy as she wishes farewell to Henry. She gives him one of a pair of doves which, she says, "...are a loving pair/ And separation would be death to both." (25) Her demeanour and
this action anticipate the tragedy that will ensue. Both she and the audience are thus prepared for her fall into despair.

Act II provides Lord Raymond with the excuse he needs to rid himself of Henry. He raises a militia to fight the rebels and Henry is recruited; Lord Raymond hires a murderer to make sure that Henry will never come back, and steals a letter for Jane which he then tells her is from Henry to Lady Jane, thus proving Henry’s betrayal. The murderer has also injured the dove, which however, finds its way back to its mistress. On seeing the letter and believing that Henry is dead, Jane cries, “Kind heaven preserve my reason.”(45) On the brink of despair she receives the curse from her father and “utters a piercing shriek as if deprived of her reason.”(46) As Act 2 ends, Jane “Tears the bridal flowers from her hair and in a fit of frenzy rushes off.”(46) Jane’s descent into madness is rapid, as is that of all melodramatic mad heroines, and the final act centres on the pathos of her confusion and distraction.

Jane holds the stage for Act III, as she enacts her misery and mental anguish. Just as Clemenza was able to find her tongue to rail against Rinaldo, so Jane exclaims against an imagined Lord Raymond. The stage directions point to a scene filled with the classic hallmarks of female melodramatic madness. Jane is still wearing her wedding dress but without its ribbons or girdle-she is undone in mind and in appearance. The scene is described as “A wild rocky glen with thorns and briars...left a seat or bank with flowers under it. Enter Jane wildly her hair in disorder.” Jane enters in a full flight of distraction saying:

Follow me not my Lord, in pity spare me
Bid me to plunge into the raging ocean
Nurse serpents in my bosom,
Sport with tigers or drink in copious draughts
The rankest poison and I will obey.
But ask me not again to be your wife (shuddering)
No that were hell on earth (looking wildly around)...
Distracted, houseless, fatherless, forlorn
Here in this dreary wilderness I’ll dwell...(50)

She then enumerates the reasons for her distracted state, and beseeches the understanding and identification of the audience, before she sings the original ballad which inspired the play:
Henry faithless, Henry dead
Beauty blighted, reason fled
Wonder not poor Jane ran wild
When her father cursed his child
And her lover proved untrue
Have you ever loved, or you?
Have you felt the joy and gladness
When at eve your love returned?
Have you felt the cruel sadness
When affection he has spurned?
Maidens, wonder not to find
This deception in mankind.
And you look for love in vain
As was the lot of Crazy Jane.(50)

When Walter and his younger daughter enter we see the extent of Jane’s confusion. She does not recognize either of them and offers her father water which she thinks is wine. She has not lost her compassionate and loving nature however, and sympathizes with the old man saying, with a “deep-rending sigh” (SD 54) “I am mad and therefore I can pity...I hate deception it has driven me mad.” (54) Walter casts the cup aside and Jane suddenly recognizes him and expresses filial duty and fear of her father’s curse. The stage direction states that she, “gives a loud scream and drops on her knees” while pleading “O curse me not again, I cannot bear it./My brain is quite distracted,/One more curse will make it burst asunder...,” before swooning at her father’s feet.(54) Jane’s madness is therefore episodic and stimulated to new heights by further trauma. She drifts in and out of lucidity for the exigencies of the plot: she is also strangely aware of her mental state, a peculiar aspect of her particular mental aberration, which is intended to heighten the pathos of the part, and which is a direct transfer from Monk’s ballad. The militia’s return from fighting sees Jane partially recovering from her swoon, only to be cast down again into a more distracted state. The stage direction explains that “Jane revives but relapses into partial delirium.”(55) Having brought Jane’s madness to a height, the author provides her with an immediate recovery, when she hears that Henry is not only alive, but also faithful. Raymond’s
schemes are unmasked and he kills himself. The only words that Jane now speaks are “My Henry” and the curtain closes (slowly, as directed) as Jane and Henry are left holding hands standing over the body of the villain. Jane’s wits return as quickly as they fled and her sanity and silence are equated with closure and a return to order.

Helen Small, writing on female insanity in the novel and poetry, explains with reference to Lewis’s ballad:

A banally literal dramatization of the masculine hold on reason (is) now more likely to provoke laughter than tears, and many early nineteenth-century readers would have felt the same way. By 1812 sentimentalism had long been under concerted attack. While the narrative of the love-mad woman had proved its fundamental appeal many times over, it had become a convention in need of revision.  

While Small’s contention may apply to the novel and poetry, the stage continued to use this convention throughout the century, with some changes, but with the basic premise of “the masculine hold on reason” remaining a tried and tested dramatic ploy. It was, perhaps, the strong visual nature of the medium which kept the convention alive on stage, when it no longer held sway in the novel. Sander Gilman has chronicled the increasing importance of illustration in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century documentation of the insane, from Philippe Pinel’s illustrations of the insane in Philosophical Nosology or Analytic Method as Applied to Medicine of 1798, to Conolly’s The Physiognomy of Insanity of 1858, and Albert Londe’s photographs of the insane for the Salpêtrière under Charcot in 1888. Female melancholic madness was photographed and classified, and the Ophelias were especially appealing; more significantly, they were dramatic and theatrical. Sentimental representations of female madness were, therefore, not cast aside as being ridiculous, in the discourses of psychiatry or the theatre, but were magnified. Gilman notes that with the rise of photography, mental illness became more defined, and more easily categorized by the use of illustrations. Dramatization of these strong visual images heightened their power and popular appeal.

Perhaps the most familiar melodramatic madwoman is Lucy Ashton, from Sir Walter Scott’s novel, The Bride of Lammermoor (1819), which inspired many theatrical versions, including the most enduring of them, Donizetti’s opera (libretto by Salvatore Cammarano).
Throughout the nineteenth century Lucy Ashton’s story was rewritten for, and held, the stage with various changes to the original story. Allardyce Nicoll lists six versions by anonymous authors under the title of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, or Lammermuir, or *Lucy of Lammermoor*. These were presented in 1819, 1831, 1848 and 1863. Dibdin and Moncrieff both presented versions in 1819 and John William Calcrafl’s *The Bride of Lammermoor* was presented in Edinburgh in 1822. J. P. Simpson wrote the *Master of Ravenswood* in 1865, and it was in an adaptation of this version, by Merivale, that Ellen Terry and Irving played in 1890. In some, Lucy is mad and murderous; in others, she is simply a tragic figure, who dies of love-melancholy, with no sign of violent madness or murderous intent. Lucy has obvious iconographic links to Ophelia: her youth, her divided loyalties that cause her mental deterioration, and her romanticism. The link is especially strong in her mad scene, when barefoot, hair down, and dressed in white, she confesses her crime. In the operatic version, this is the point where the soprano comes into her own with the celebrated aria.

Donizetti’s opera was first performed in Naples in 1835. Cammarano’s libretto condenses the plot of Scott’s novel, excluding many of the characters and making the names Italianate. Lucia’s mother and father are absent; her brother, Lord Enrico, is the one to force her betrothal to Bucklaw. Far from being the driving force behind the tragedy, and only long-lived survivor, as she is in Scott’s novel, Lady Ashton is already dead at the opening of the opera, and we are told that Lucia is grief-stricken. Normando relates that Lucia is in love with Ravenswood, Lord Enrico’s enemy. Cammarano’s heroine is, therefore, presented from the start as suffering from grief and love. When Lucia first appears she expresses her love-melancholia, and sings of her fear that Ravenswood will not come back to her:

...Return, return, dear object;
And bless me with a look
Come, my much loved Edgar,
And my sad days console;
Let me hold thee to my heart,
And talk to thee still of love,
All my heart’s sad grief
I shall then forget.
Lucia is at a high emotional level throughout the opera, constantly affirming her grief, and her conviction that she will die of it; "Does not my grief suffice thee? Wilt thou see me die with fear?", she sings. Just as Ophelia was torn between her love for Hamlet and her duty to her family, so Lucia is torn as her brother threatens her with visions of his execution if she refuses to marry Bucklaw. Her distraction is blamed on her excessive mourning as the chorus tells her brother, "Grief seems to conquer her. She mourns her mother's death." (25)

When she signs the betrothal papers she begins to collapse physically, and finally falls to the ground as Ravenswood curses her. In scene IV of the final act, the wedding celebrations are disrupted by the news that Lucia has killed Bucklaw. The chorus sings of her madness:

"My husband," said she, "where is he?"
And her pale face
A smiled illumined.
Hapless one! of reason
She was bereft. (37)

Lucia then enters, in a white nightgown covered in blood, and the famous mad scene begins. Lucia, apparently unaware of her crime, sings of Edgar, and to Edgar, reliving their betrothal and imagining that she is marrying him, but also singing of death as a shadow that is dividing them. She calls for a garland of flowers to wear on her head, as she seems to hear "the angelic choir...they sing for us!" (39). Lucia's aria jumps back and forth from pleasure at seeing her lover, and fear at his rejection of her. The chorus emphasizes that she has lost her reason, and Lucia’s final words are of death, followed by a prayer that she and Edgar will be reunited in heaven. As the scene closes she collapses on stage. Her death is announced to Edgar as he prepares to commit suicide; the chorus sings:

Yes, the hapless one is dying;
Sad were her nuptials;
Through love she lost her reason,
Her end draws nigh;
On thee she calls and sighs.
Ah Lucy, Lucy!...
The bell's
Mournful sound proclaims her death.(45)

Cammarano’s libretto, then, focuses on the final stage of Scott’s novel; the madness of despair of the melancholic heroine is at the heart of the opera. In keeping with the tradition of operatic tragedy, there is no room for the comic aspects which are to be found in the novel, or in some of the non-operatic dramatized versions. Lucia is portrayed as a spotless victim, despite the murder, because, it is assumed, she has no other recourse. Whereas the opera’s main interest lies in Lucia’s madness, Calcrafi’s version of the play follows the novel faithfully except for Lucy’s final act. She is presented as a simple sentimental heroine, a victim of love-melancholy, who dies of a broken heart, when Ravenswood curses her. Calcrafi’s Lucy Ashton does not show any signs of excessive emotion for most of the play; she is a dutiful daughter whose father encourages the match with Ravenswood. The first three acts of the play concentrate on the relationships between Ravenswood, Bucklaw, and Sir William Ashton. The comic scenes of Caleb are also reproduced from the novel. It is only with her mother’s return, and the enforced betrothal, that Lucy becomes distressed and distracted. The stage direction for Act IV notes, “Lucy is extremely pale and appears to pay little attention to the passing scene, as if almost unconscious of the conversation.”41 Lucy displays hopelessness rather than a tendency to madness, although she is convinced that she will die if she breaks her betrothal to Ravenswood, “To sign and seal! To do and die!” (Clasps her hands in agony, and sinks into a chair).(15) Her brother does not take her seriously, but blames her excessive emotion on reading too many romances, “...that’s some speech out of your romances. My mother says they have turned your head.”(15)

Calcrafi introduces a contemporary idea into the early eighteenth-century world of the play, that of novel reading being a foolish and dangerous exercise for young girls. Jane Austen exploited this concept, to humorous effect, in Northanger Abbey; as the century progressed, romantic fiction became the target of criticism for doctors and alienists in their discussion of the female tendency to hysteria. The physician, E. J. Tilt warned against “the habitual reading of hair-uplifting novels.”42 He felt that romantic plays and operas were especially damaging to the female psyche. This argument was everywhere extant, and relied on the same romantic fiction that it purported to disdain, in order to support its contentions. The critics believed that the female sensibility was so weak and impressionable that it needed to be guarded from romantic
fiction; the novelists and playwrights, who produced the works under discussion in these treatises, relied on this premise in the elaboration of their plots. Calcrafi’s self-reflexive statement on the danger of such fiction, in the context of Lucy’s overwhelming struggle, and the conclusion of the play, seems to belie the idea that her feelings are romantic nonsense. However, he is working on the same assumption, that of female mental vulnerability and weakness, as are the critics of the genre. Once again, the romantic fiction of female impressionability pervades both discourses, that of the fiction itself and that of the medical establishment which sought to eradicate its presumed dangerous influence.

When persuaded that Ravenswood has abandoned her, and persuaded by her mother to sign the betrothal papers, Calcrafi’s Lucy slips into decorous distraction. She exclaims: “Grant that I may retain my senses in this awful trial. Already my weak brain begins to waver. One struggle more and all will be concluded.”(18) Ravenswood’s arrival, and outburst of anger at her are enough for Lucy to collapse and die. The stage direction shows that she, “gazes on him unconsciously—raises her hands, and endeavours to disengage the ribbon, by which the piece of gold is suspended round her neck.”(19) With a final lament and a request that Ravenswood forgive her, Lucy dies. Calcrafi’s conclusion has Lucy die as a pure victim, without the troubling episode of her stabbing Bucklaw. Whereas Cammarano’s libretto heightens the gothic horror of Scott’s story by having Bucklaw die, Calcrafi concentrates on the pathos of the heroine; his conclusion is an appeal to the sensibility of his audience. Lucy is yet another picture of “essential woman,” and Conolly’s conclusion on Ophelia could apply, equally well, to her character, “Sweet womanly instincts alone survive the wreck, and float upon the disturbed stream of her thoughts.”43

**Malleable Female Minds: Trilby and The Woman in White**

The strength of the visual appeal of the female mind under threat is powerfully represented in the 1895 play *Trilby* by Paul M. Potter, which was based on the popular novel by George Du Maurier. In *Trilby*, the heroine’s mind is under the control of two men. It is a malleable mind which is easily swayed. It is weakened initially by love for Little Billee, and then taken over, through fear, by the fascinating Svengali. The character of Trilby O’Ferrell is, in
some ways, far removed from the gentle virtuousness of a Clemenza or Crazy Jane. She is, after all, an artist’s model who lives freely in the Latin Quarter of Paris. She is a demi-mondaine who dresses in half-male clothing (the old army coat she wears implying the notion of a camp-follower), who smokes and banters with her all male companions. Smoking was a common signifier of sexual laxity in women. Linda and Michael Hutcheon write:

In France, women who smoked were seen as either immoral--prostitutes advertised their profession by smoking, and courtesans were imagined to smoke with their lovers--or unconventional and therefore threatening in their bravado...the French literary imagination consistently associated smoking with the voluptuous, the languorous, the exotic.\(^{44}\)

What could such a character have in common with Ophelia? In Du Maurier’s novel there is little similarity between Trilby and Ophelia, but the play refers back to the traditional love-melancholic. The photograph of Dorothea Baird, from the 1895 production in London, illustrates the shared iconography of both Trilby and Ophelia: Trilby entranced by Svengali’s mesmeric power, when she is literally out of her mind, has the wistful distracted look, typical of an Ophelia, in contrast to her free, confident expression from Act 1. She embodies the youth, the sadness, and the interrupted song which Bucknill noted in his critique of Ophelia. Trilby’s song, which is not her own, but Svengali’s, demonstrates a variation on the theme of distracted singing. Her own song is tuneless and ridiculous, while she captivates her audience when she is under Svengali’s control.

Writing on Du Maurier’s novel, Martin Wood notes: “though dealing with Bohemia, the author is conventional; that is, he keeps strictly to the surface of things. And every true sentiment of the book is spoilt by the quickly following laugh in which the author betrays his dread of being thought to take anything seriously...”\(^{45}\) Du Maurier’s Paris is naughty rather than decadent, and this is the aspect on which the play concentrates. The play is presented with fun, immediacy, and excitement which are not found in the novel, and it extracts the melodramatic aspects which are at its heart. Potter takes only the frame of the story for his drama, as he capitalizes on the extreme popularity of the novel.\(^2\)

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\(^2\)Du Maurier’s novel was especially popular in the United States. Mary Russo notes in The Female Grotesque (New York, London: Routledge, 1994 p.135) that a cult grew up in the US and produced “Trilbyana” including glossaries on details of Bohemian life and “objects including sheet music,
The stage Trilby is far less worldly-wise than her novelistic counterpart; her character is merely sketched, with the emphasis being given to her good nature, and her kindness to the English painters. Her nude modelling is still used as a catalyst for the prevention of her marriage to Little Billee, but while the novel presents this as a great moral divide between them, it is skirted over on stage, and becomes simply part of the general Bohemian atmosphere. The dramatized character of Little Billee does not battle with social and emotional demons, or die a disappointed and disillusioned man. Instead he is portrayed as a conventional, if somewhat insipid, hero; however, contemporary audiences found the Little Billee of the novel and the play to be lovable. The affection for the character outweighed the inferior acting of H. V. Esmond, whose physical resemblance to Du Maurier’s illustration was sufficient for his success, demonstrating that although there were many differences between the novel and the play they worked together in the public’s imagination, and that a knowledge of the novel, especially the illustrations of the novel, was essential for a full understanding and appreciation of the play. The critic for *The Stage* (November 7 1895) noted:

As a rule plays taken from books are not very satisfactory from an artistic point of view, and *Trilby* is no exception. Those who have read the book will be delighted to find its characters reproduced, both in dress and appearance, on the Haymarket stage, scenes which in the book have, perhaps, given amusement and pleasure are recognized as being familiar in the theatre, and therein no doubt is the secret of the success of this curiously crude play, in which hypnotism proper is almost burlesqued, and child-like romps are seriously gone through to the delight of a West-end audience. The audience has read the book and each scene, each character comes forward as an old friend. But with any playgoer who is ignorant of the novel the case is different...

Shaw’s critique of *Trilby* points to the weakness of the play (and to the general state of the theatre) which, in his view, simply pictorializes the characters of the novel, but he recognizes the costume jewelry, novelty food items (e.g. Trilby ice-creams and sausages), contests, amateur musicals, parodies and travesties (called ‘Thrillbies’”). Beerbohm Tree recognised the box-office potential of the play, especially as a star-vehicle for himself as Svengali, when he attended a performance at the Garden Theatre New York in 1895. He bought the rights to the play, from Potter, during the interval after the second act.
hold it has over its audience. He writes: "Trilby is the very thing for the English stage at present. No need to act or create character: nothing to do but make up after Mr Du Maurier’s familiar and largely popular drawings, and be applauded before uttering a word..."46

The 1895 production of Trilby looks back to the classical melodramatic madwoman for its visual impact, rather than to Du Maurier’s original vision and Trilby’s character is also modified and toned down for the stage. The play was a theatrical sensation; in England it was more popular than the novel had been. After opening in America, the play was revised by Beerbohm Tree and played at the Haymarket in 1895 and Her Majesty’s Theatre in 1897. There were also plays with the same title written by unknown authors: Allardyce Nicoll lists three that are to be found in the Lord Chamberlain’s collection; one was performed at Darwen in April 1896, one at Eastbourne two weeks later, and a third, entitled Trilby the Model, at Loughborough, also in April 1896.

The dramatic emphasis in the play is given to the character of Svengali, which was appropriated and transformed, by Herbert Beerbohm Tree, into a solo tour de force. Trilby is seen to be spellbound by Svengali from the first act, when he puts her under her initial hypnotic trance. He is able to do this because she complains of pain in her head, which is brought on by Billee turning away from her.

Trilby’s pain is linked to her troubled psyche; from the start, Trilby’s mind is shown to be suffering from her conflicting emotions as she is subjected to Billee’s disapproval, and Svengali’s malign influence, just as in the novel, Trilby states that she will go mad if Billee doesn’t love her. In the midst of a light-hearted scene Trilby displays the beginnings of love-melancholy, while still showing some of her buoyant spirit; she says:

Billee don’t want me. (Pause-no answer) Do you, Billee? (Billee turns round to her and back again-no answer. She pouts) But the Laird and Taffy want me -- that’s a majority of the house -- I shall stay. (Smacks leg)47

And when Taffy replies that they would love to have her light heart she says, “You wouldn’t give as much for my head -- for I’ve -- Oh, such pain in it... Neuralgia in the eyes, or something.”(212)

Potter’s script jumps right into the theme of Svengali’s hypnotic power over Trilby, and the ease with which he is able to control her mind; it is this which becomes the main focus of the play, and is strongly melodramatic. It relies on the age-old concept of the weakness of the female
mind, but with the added frisson of that mind being easily influenced by a strong and sinister hypnotic power, wielded by an exotic villain. With Trilby, the melodramatic convention of the heroine being held against her will by the power of the villain enters into the realm of experimental psychology, in which hypnotism had a part.

Hypnotism had surfaced in the 1770s, when Franz Mesmer first introduced his theory of animal magnetism. Mesmer asserted that by placing magnets at various points on the subject’s body, he could direct the magnetic fluid, and channel it to promote mental equilibrium. The subjects (most of whom were female, in Mesmer’s displays) were placed in a trance during the channelling, which Mesmer described as lucid sleep. The theory of hypnotic control was popular and often, in literature, used to denote an uncanny link between the real and the spiritual world.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, in The Blithedale Romance, while describing The Veiled Lady dismissively as “the birth of a new science, or the revival of an old humbug” nevertheless endows Priscilla with an otherworldly sensitivity to atmosphere and a seeming gift of premonition. Coverdale recalls that she would make an “unintelligible gesture, when she seemed to be listening to a distant voice.”(75) Westervelt, who exploits Priscilla, is the master showman presenting his Veiled Lady under the guise of science. Coverdale recounts Westervelt’s explanation of the “psychological phenomenon.”:

It was eloquent, ingenious, plausible, with a delusive show of spirituality, yet really imbued throughout with a cold and dead materialism...He spoke of a new era that was dawning on the world; an era that would link soul to soul, and the present life to what we call futurity...He described (in a strange, philosophical guise, with terms of art, as if it were a matter of chemical discovery) the agency by which this mighty result was to be effected.(200)

Westervelt’s act is almost immediately destroyed by Hollingsworth. There is shown to be no supernatural hold over Priscilla but a strong psychological one which Zenobia has exploited in order to rid herself of her half-sister. In The Blithedale Romance Hawthorne sees the mesmerist as one who can exert (through his will only, rather than through any supernatural gift) his power over his subject. Such control has always the tinge of evil in it and a question is posed as to whether mesmerism should ever be attempted both in Hawthorne’s and in Dickens’s treatment of the subject. Dickens was also fascinated by the “science,” and attended the demonstrations of
mesmerism given by John Elliotson who was a professor of clinical medicine at University College Hospital in London. Dickens himself was instructed by Elliotson in the art of mesmerism which he then practiced on his family and friends. He believed strongly in his own powers and was convinced that he had cured Augusta De La Rue of a nervous tic and insomnia in 1844. In this period Faraday was conducting experiments in the production of an electric current from a magnetic field; mesmerism sought to apply the same logic and control to supposed magnetic forces in human beings. Harriet Martineau believed that mesmerism had been able to cure her of a long illness but mesmerism was never truly accepted by the scientific community. Its pseudo-scientific basis never escaped the tinge of charlatanism, or its more menacing link with the demonic supernatural.

Despite his belief in the healing power of mesmerism Dickens explores its negative aspect in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* giving the villain Jasper an uncanny and sinister power over the mind of Rosa Bud. Although she despises Jasper Rosa Bud feels compelled to listen to him as he both courts and threatens her. Dickens writes, "his face looks so wicked and menacing...that her flight is arrested by horror as she looks at him." Jasper’s power is described as a strong and vicious will to control, and his outward calm is belied by his words. Although there is no overt attempt at mesmerism in his interchange with Rosa Bud, Jasper’s very presence is enough to fix her to her seat. He is portrayed as a malign magician who can crush any obstacle that stands in his way. Dickens emphasises Jasper’s menace by endowing him with the stage tricks of a conjuror. His gesture of metaphorically casting onto the ground everything that he thinks Rosa Bud should value provides Dickens’s readers with an image of Jasper performing a psychological sleight of hand:

"...There is my fidelity to my dear boy after death. Tread upon it!"

With an action of his hands, as though he cast down something precious.

"There is the inexplicable offence against my adoration of you. Spurn it!"

With a similar action:

"There are my labours in the cause of a just vengeance for six toiling months. Crush them!"

With another repetition of the action when Rosa Bud awakes out of a faint: "It even seemed as if [Jasper’s words] had pursued her into her insensibility, and that she had not had a moment’s
unconsciousness of it." (232)

In this, his final unfinished novel, Dickens demonstrates the negative side of mesmeric power and links it with an evil need for control. The fact that a human being could exert a psychological control over another was what gave mesmerism its fascination for Dickens and others.

Benjamin Franklin, Lavoisier, and Joseph Guillotin were commissioned to investigate the efficacy of mesmeric treatment, and concluded that any effect it had was due to the patient's imagination.\(^5\) Robert Bolles notes that while the influence of the theory of hypnotism was not important from a scientific standpoint, it captured the public's imagination. As a credible scientific exercise, it had been mainly discredited by the 1850s, but it lived on in the realm of popular entertainment, and invited questions about the relationship between mind and body. Bolles writes:

The historical importance of hypnosis lies in the fact that by the 1880's, the time of Bernheim and Charcot, there had been a great number of people who had worked with it, entertainers, hoaxers, healers, and doctors, who together had discovered a great variety of ways in which mind and body can interact. In particular, there appeared to be deep levels of mental functioning that could produce all sorts of changes in the body. In Descartes' time it had been very simple. There was the machinery and there was the rational mind, and they interacted in the pineal body. By the 1880's there was still the body and still a rational mind (although it had shrunk somewhat in importance), but the main development was the discovery of the vast, complicated, intriguing area in between and the multitude of ways in which mind and body interact.\(^5\)

This intriguing middle-ground was the site of Freud's experiments and theory of psychoanalysis. Freud studied Charcot's methods which had relied on hypnotism to a minor degree. The general acceptance of "lucid sleep" in the popular imagination, the notion that there were un plumbed depths in the human mind, especially in that of the female, enabled a public acceptance of the transition from theatrical display to psychoanalytic couch. The stage-version of Trilby capitalized on this acceptance, while confirming its veracity. Furthermore, at this time the "Woman Question" was becoming ever more contentious due to the Married Women's Property
Act of 1882, and the call for female suffrage which was brought before Parliament, and rejected several times, after 1886. The feminine mind was, therefore, a central political concern. Potter’s play, which is set in the nostalgic past, with a warning against the danger of untrammeled freedom to a woman (however charming she may be), was timely. It confirmed the Ophelia type, and brought it up to date, giving it a slightly risqué air, and a pseudo-sophistication by being set in a Bohemian environment, but ultimately leaving its audience with a warning about female instability, and returning to order only when such instability is destroyed. Trilby’s death is suitably sensational and sentimental, but it is also inevitable, given her life and moral standing. She can be pitied but not rescued.

The fourth act of the play was abandoned by Tree, when he took it on tour; in this version, the play ends with Svengali’s death and leaves Trilby’s fate open-ended, thus providing the possibility of a happy ending for her and Billee. Tree, who rewrote his part when he bought the rights of the play, discarded Act IV because, after the death of his character, the remainder of the play seemed anti-climactic; he always took a lengthy bow after Act III. However, as noted above, a knowledge of the novel was almost essential for an understanding of the play, and although Trilby may have been left alive on stage, her ultimate fate would be known to the audience. The possibility of her survival is a sentimental illusion in order for Tree’s performance to end on a high note. But it does not solve the problem of Trilby’s moral stature.

In his novel, Du Maurier presents Little Billee talking to his dog on the subject of women and morality, and faith and science. Billee refers to “that poor, soft, pathetic thing of flesh and blood, the eternal woman--great heart and slender brain--for ever enslaved or enslaving, never self-sufficing, never free...” This is reminiscent of Ruskin’s contention in “Of Queen’s Gardens.” For Billee and his cohorts, and for Svengali, Trilby is the stuff of art, never the artist. Just as Billee captures her perfect foot on the wall, in his sketch, so Svengali captures her voice and turns it to his own profit. The free Trilby is described by Du Maurier as being “an absolute savage” and it is only when she is appropriated by art that she reaches perfection. This aspect of her character is sketched in the play by her swaggering attitude, outlandish dress, and discordant song. When Trilby is out of the artist’s control she is an almost comic figure. This is emphasized by her tone-deaf singing of the plaintive ballad of Ben Bolt. The song is a reminiscence of long-past happy days, which anticipates the sad memories that the three English
artists will have of their youth in Paris. Sung badly by Trilby, it is described as grotesque and outrageous. She can only ape the sentimental regret of the song which, in her rendition, is tuneless and cacophonic. She is wild and untamed; her beauty is debased by her professional modelling. Anatomically perfect, but flawed intellectually and morally, Trilby has to be divided up in order to satisfy the needs of art and music. In Svengali’s and the artists’ terms Trilby has to be controlled and shaped before she is aesthetically pleasing. In the play, the emphasis is placed on the musical transformation that overtakes Trilby. She sings Ben Bolt again, while under the influence of Svengali’s mesmeric gaze, and dazzles her audience, including her old friends, with the purity of her voice. Billee reevaluates Trilby on the strength of her musical performance, he says: “What a wife! Think of all she must have in her head and brain to move a lot of clods like that.” (258) But the performance is an illusion; when she is in her right mind Trilby still cannot sing a note; she loses her power over her audience and becomes ridiculous again.

As Madame Svengali, Trilby is dressed in white; her bare feet are almost ensnared, in sandals. Her dress and train are decorated with flowers and she is holding a bouquet of lilies which were associated with death. (See illustration III) Her hair, which formerly she had worn free, is bound by a coronet which also suggests flowers. Baird’s costume, for the final act, would not be out of place were she playing Ophelia, and it contrasts greatly with the early Trilby. The clothing, the stance, and the expression are those of a typical (if well-dressed) love-melancholic. The clothing is formal, but the looseness of the drapery around the neck and sleeves has a suggestion of deshabille. This was unlike the portrait of Trilby which Du Maurier presented in his illustrations to the novel. His view of Trilby is strong and statuesque (at one point in the novel he refers to Trilby as Galatea); she is described as being big-boned, with large teeth; she is the picture of health, a personification of a Greek ideal. This is, after all, why she is so successful an artist’s model. At the end of the novel Trilby is pale and wasted, and described as being even more beautiful than she has ever been. The theatrical Trilby, however, is always delicate and fragile. La Svengali, as drawn by Du Maurier, remains statuesque with an absent and lifeless quality to her face; in contrast, the stage Trilby is piquantly ethereal and traditionally feminine. She is also overtly sexual, a point which a poem in The World (quoted in The Stage, November 7th 1895) emphasizes with its pun on the actress’s name, (Dorothea Baird). It is
"Truly, dear, my name—Trilby O'Ferrall."

Today: I won't try another note.
addressed to "The Haymarket "Trilby", from her admirers:

   With "Little Billee" we compete,
   And "Taffy" and "The Laird"
   In laying homage at the feet
   Of Dorothea -- bared.

Trilby's feet, which are described at length in the novel, symbolize her physical perfection and her free and easy sexual morals. As stated previously, bare feet also denoted the distracted woman on stage, so that in Trilby the audience is presented with aspects of a familiar character. They are presented with a demi-mondaine, who also has aspects of the eternal victim of love-melancholy. Sander Gilman, writing on the representation of disease notes:

   The act of seeing is the act of the creation of historically determined (and therefore socially acceptable) images that permit a distinction to be made between the observer and the Other. On the one hand, this distinction can be simply the line between the observer as "healthy" and the Other as "diseased." But this dyad can be articulated in a much more complex manner. For the late nineteenth-century avant-garde accepted (indeed, revelled in) the label of "degenerate." Here the ill and corrupt became the positive pole; the staid and stolid--the healthy--the negative pole...the image of the patient can be a depiction of the Other as diseased, but it can also serve as the alter ego of the observer, an alter ego that is the glorification of difference.\textsuperscript{53}

   The extreme popularity of both the novel and play-versions of Trilby, which depict a mild "degeneracy", seem to exemplify Gilman's argument; the audience can glory in Trilby's eccentricity and difference. But Trilby is a cheat if it is judged in terms of an example of fin-de-siècle decadence. It simply plays with old stereotypes and flirts with degeneracy only to have Trilby die as swiftly as Lady Audley or Lucia di Lammermoor from what Robertson Davies has described as "heroine's disease."\textsuperscript{54} The play accomplishes this more quickly, and less discursively than the novel, but the novel too has the air of being not quite honest in its depiction of a so-called Bohemian life.

   Du Maurier's novel is set in the 1850's and is written in a facetious mood. The time is depicted as one of almost insouciant decadence, with the three English male characters leading a
Bohemian life in Paris, while still hanging on to their English gentlemanly code. They are untainted by their surroundings, and experience the life of Parisian artists like schoolboys, eager for fun but always conscious of a spiritual headmaster lurking in the background. The narrator patronizes his characters as he looks back into the past and their sojourn in Paris. The novel has an air of worldly wisdom combined with disdainful affection for a youth long past. It is, in part, a satire of the Bohemian life it describes, but it also deals with the contentious issues of sexual and racial politics. Du Maurier is also criticizing the English social code which he describes as stifling real feelings. In this respect he has something in common with his friend, George Meredith, whose work he illustrated.

However, Trilby is a far more gentle and good-humoured attack than Meredith would have made, and ultimately the status quo is not really challenged; instead of attacking social mores, Du Maurier relies on the pathos of Trilby’s individual character, and her tragic fate, to engage his audience. He creates a fairy-tale, combining the charming and the grotesque; he uses the fairy-tale’s traditional moral centre to provide a conclusion. The three artists echo the theme of questing brothers, Trilby is the enchanted princess, and Svengali is the figure of evil. William Archer, who wrote of Tree’s production, said that it was: “A fantastic fairy-tale...Not for nothing does Svengali wear the features of a gargoyle from some medieval minster. He is lineally descended from the Devil of the Miracle Plays...”

Potter emphasizes the fairy-tale elements in the stage-version. Dodor says, “People declare that she’s not mortal at all. She’s like an enchanted princess in a fairy tale.” (250) Taffy mistakenly thinks that Trilby has said that her mother was a mermaid (222) which conjures up the image of a dangerous and mythical siren. She is a pagan force and a classical relic; she is there to be anatomised and moulded, but there is chaos at her centre. Trilby appears to be essentially unstable and dangerous, coloured by the shadows of madness and death. She declares in Act I, “I’m out of my mind with grief...I believe I shall go mad and die.” (226) She repeats this in Act II saying “I sometimes think I am going mad.”(236) In the third act, Zouzou implies that Trilby must have drowned herself, saying “The river keeps its secrets.” (249) The most arresting association with death and Trilby comes from Svengali, who places her under hypnosis at the end of Act II and, in an effort to prevent her marriage, describes her as a corpse in the Paris morgue as he succeeds in overpowering her mind:
There is a little light glimmering yonder—it is light of ugly little building (*bringing her downstage*) and inside are eight marble slabs—all in a row. It is called the Morgue, and be careful, oh, my Trilby, you...who leave Paris so gaily, that you come not back to sleep on one of those little marble slabs. (*She tries to get her eyes away from his, but cannot. She struggles ineffectually, her face wearing an expression of horror*) So that the people shall look through the plate glass windows and say ‘Ach! how beautiful was Trilby! She should be riding in her carriage and pair—but she would not listen to Svengali, and for that she lost him.’ (*She attempts to rise--is overcome by Svengali’s hypnotism*)

Yes, there you will lie, fast asleep. (*Pointing to Morgue*) And all day long and all night long the water shall...trickle, trickle, trickle from your beautiful white face to your beautiful white feet, till they turn green—(*gesture with left hand, down body*) and above your head shall hang your damp, muddy, draggled rags—Drip, drip, drip.(242)

This lurid description of death and decay presents Trilby as a figure of horror, a prospective rotting corpse which Taffy, in his search for artistic realism might paint; she is dangerous, as well as vulnerable. Like a siren, she has the power to inspire obsession which will lead to death; she is the monster to Svengali’s Doctor Frankenstein — another example of the “bizarre” which was so important an aspect of the Romantic aesthetic. Although she inspires creative genius, she is destructive because she can only be tamed at the cost of the life of the artist. When Svengali and Trilby are alone, the lighting cues call for eerie semi-darkness or green lime-lights to heighten the macabre relationship between the two. Svengali is weakened by his mesmeric powers; he says that he is taking on Trilby’s pain, “It is my strength—my genius—my life which is passing into hers. If I take not care—it will kill me!”(243) In Act III Svengali is destroyed by his creation. Trilby is presented as a pathetic, distracted creature whose mind is wandering in the past. The stage direction notes that Trilby enters from the stage:

“*Her eyes are set but, with that exception, her demeanour is normal. She is smiling and waves her hand in the old friendly way, as though acknowledging the applause of the art students.*”(252)

She babbles and smiles, reliving past events and lost in a nether-world from which Svengali finds
it harder and harder to abstract her. Trilby’s fragmented mind is the site of destruction both for herself and her master. Svengali, finding it more difficult to control Trilby, states: “If I could wake her!...But it is too late--My life has passed into hers--and every note she sings is killing both her and me.”(253)

Trilby’s sanity is held up for question throughout the play. As stated above, she questions it herself when she is with Billee and the other artists and, as Svengali’s puppet, her mind is not her own. However, it is only when she regains her own voice that she is declared to be mad. Colonel Kaw rushes in to remonstrate with Svengali, who has just collapsed and died, “Don’t you know that your wife--has gone mad! Yes--stark, staring mad upon the stage!”(263) Although she is rescued by Billee, Taffy and the Laird, she is unable to survive without Svengali. Their symbiotic relationship is too close for one to be able to survive without the other. The artist could not live with his creation, and that creation is nothing without the artist. The Laird describes Trilby’s condition as “A peculiar sort of brain fever”(268) and hopes that by reviving the happy past she can be cured. However, Trilby remains easily suggestible, so that seeing Svengali’s portrait is enough to turn her mind. She regains her beautiful voice briefly, before dying in Billee’s arms, calling out for her master, Svengali.

*Trilby* is a disturbing play, combining the sentimental and the macabre. It’s superficial light-heartedness cloaks troubling questions about the nature of art and the nature of a woman who can inspire such art. Ultimately, both are seen as dangerous. The play ends on a sentimental high note, with the death of its heroine. The final stage-picture is of Trilby as victim. But in the novel *Billee*, who has become a successful and conventional society painter, loses his ability to paint after Trilby’s death and dies shortly thereafter. Taffy and the Laird live on, sensibly married and settled into a distinctly un-Bohemian life. The art which Trilby was able to inspire dies with her. Du Maurier describes Trilby just before her death and concentrates on the macabre seductive quality of his heroine: "Trilby’s pathetic beauty, so touching, so winning in its rapid decay; the nameless charm of look and voice and manner that was her special appanage, and which her malady and singular madness had only increased.”(399) The juxtaposition of female madness, beauty, and death are as relevant to the dramatic success of *Trilby*, as they are to all Ophelia-types. However, in *Trilby* the madness is specifically linked to an intrinsic lack of control, which is reflective of loose living and unconventional behaviour. Trilby O’Ferrall has
the pathos of Ophelia, but she also acts as a warning of the dangers of too much freedom in a woman. Her charm comes from her depiction as “essential female”, denoted by her gentleness and playful, if erratic, domesticity; her danger, to herself and the men around her, comes from living beyond the pale of society. If she survived she would have become the monster that is hinted at throughout the play; dying, she can join the ranks of piteous theatrical madwomen.

In contrast, an early twentieth-century portrayal of Du Maurier’s story presents both Trilby and Svengali as victims. In Archie Mayo’s film version of Svengali (1931) Trilby is depicted as totally blameless as she is subjected to Svengali’s mesmeric power. The film is influenced by psychoanalysis; many of the scenes appear to be in a nightmare world of shadowy labyrinthine corridors. John Barrymore, as Svengali, is a comic imp, a dangerous charlatan, and a lovelorn romantic. It is not simple greed for money and power which leads him to take control of Trilby’s mind but a desperate obsession with her. Ultimately, this cannot satisfy him as he says, “You are beautiful my manufactured love but it is only Svengali talking to himself.” Earlier in the film, as he calls Trilby to him while she is asleep, the camera focuses on Svengali’s burning eyes as the wind howls over the rooftops of Paris. Svengali’s passion is shown to be part of wild elemental nature. In part he wants to save her from the tedium of a respectable life with Billee; he says that “Trilby in England would be like a butterfly in soup.” For Barrymore’s Svengali there is a subconscious bond which he shares with Trilby. He is fond of reminding the English artists that “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” with which he implies that they are dull and unimaginative. In the film Billee pursues Trilby and Svengali until the latter is exhausted by his effort to maintain his mental control over his protegee. His final instructions to Trilby are a self-conscious death sentence as he tells her “Do not take your eyes off me for an instant and remember there is nothing in your mind, nothing in your heart, nothing in your soul but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali.” In this, the final scene, Svengali is tearful and pitiable, and as he collapses he prays, “Grant me in death what you denied me in life, the woman I love.” Trilby, with Svengali’s name on her lips, dies a moment later as if to show that Svengali’s prayer has been answered and that subconsciously she shared his need. Both of their tortured psyches are extinguished together. The film emphasises the concept of the power of the unconscious over the conscious mind in a way which would have seemed alien to a nineteenth century audience, for Svengali’s obsession is not ultimately deemed
evil but tragic. The film retains aspects of melodrama but is devoid of a nineteenth-century melodramatic ethos in its post-Freudian treatment of the subject. Both Svengali and Trilby are subject to their subconscious selves.

At the same time as there was a persistent belief that women could, and did, develop melancholy madness, there also arose a fear that this belief could be exploited by unscrupulous relatives for personal or financial reasons. The obvious dramatic appeal of such a theme found its way into the novel, and onto the stage. Monk Lewis’s monodrama The Captive (Covent Garden, 1803) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s unfinished novel, Maria, or The Wrongs Of Woman (1797), in common with other writers of Gothic fiction, had both used the plot of wrongful incarceration in a madhouse. However, in the 1860’s there was a rash of highly publicised incidences of wrongful incarcerations; these were related to the growth in public and private asylums inspired by the Lunatics Act of 1845, and a growing distrust of moral management. A scandal had followed the “imprisonment” in an asylum, of Bulwer-Lytton’s wife, Rosina, at the beginning of the decade; her release created a great amount of publicity, and public sympathy. Charles Reade used another such case as the basis for his novel Hard Cash (1864), which was serialized in Dickens’s Household Words. And Wilkie Collins dealt with the subject in his sensation novel, The Woman in White (first serialized in All the Year Round 1859-60). Collins dramatized his novel in 1871; it was performed at the Olympic theatre on October 9th of the same year, and was judged superior to a version that had been presented at the Surrey theatre ten years earlier. The Times for October 12th, emphasized the skill of the author in making a true adaptation of his novel for the stage, rather than simply presenting dramatized episodes from it. This opinion was held generally; The Pall Mall Gazette (Oct 11th 1871) wrote:

"The story of a novel may be also told upon the stage, only it is indispensable that it should be told upon a different plan...Mr Collins has fully appreciated this view of the case, and has been heedful to present his story from first to last in an intelligible form. In his dramatized version of The Woman in White, Collins abandons the forensic enquiry framework, which characterizes the novel, and he frees the mysteries which are at its centre. He introduces most of the main characters, at least by name, in the Prologue. The Prologue is set in the churchyard and vestry of Old Welmingham, and the audience witnesses Sir Percival tampering with the church records which would reveal his
illegitimacy, watched by Anne Catherick. Collins simplifies and pares down the plot of his novel, so that on stage the dramatic tension is produced by the conflict between two pairs of adversaries, Glyde and Fosco and Marian and Hartright. With the mystery banished from the stage, the drama comes from the traditional melodramatic struggle between good and evil, or absolute whiteness and absolute blackness. Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick are both presented as powerless figures at the centre of the struggle, as legal control, epitomized by Glyde and Fosco, is pitted against the moral courage of Marian Halcombe and Walter Hartright.

The distraction of Anne and Laura is secondary to the financial and political aspects of the plot, and yet it is on the manipulation of their mental states, or supposed mental states, that the whole of the intrigue hinges. Both Anne and Laura are conventional melodramatic heroines in the Ophelia tradition. Between them, the two characters embody the sane and insane attributes of the type. Anne is described as behaving distractedly, and wildly, while Laura is demure and lovelorn. The Times, (October 12th 1871) commented: "For obvious reasons Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick are sustained by one actress, and a very difficult task is accomplished with much propriety and truthful feeling by Miss Ada Dyas, the half-witted girl being necessarily a more telling personage than the sane young lady." This review emphasizes the significance of the total femininity (as it was conventionally prescribed) of both Laura and Anne. That the actress's portrayal of Anne was thought to be more "telling," shows the persistent power of a display of female madness on the stage. The Daily News, (October 12th 1871), noted "Her child-like weakness and uncontrollable wandering of the mind, her restlessness and vague terror...." Anne's "madness" was emotionally powerful, because as well as appearing pitifully distracted, she also held the truth behind the mystery. In his novel, Collins slowly constructs a feeling of mystery and impending catastrophe through the gradual revelation of family secrets; in his play, these feelings are created, for his audience, through the character of Anne Catherick. It is her agitation and distraction which play on the nerves of the audience. Her sudden appearances and disappearances, her fearful hints of danger, and the revelation to the audience of Fosco's control over her, heighten the dramatic tension of the play. The audience shares Glyde's secret with Anne, so that they can identify with her sense of urgency and anxiety. Collins produces a sense of fear in his audience, by showing how Anne's attempts to warn Laura have gone awry, and he plays with the idea of madness, and half-madness, as the truth is manipulated by Fosco. At the
end of Act One, the asides of Sir Percival, Marian, and Fosco demonstrate the significance of Anne’s easily distracted state to Fosco’s machiavellian plot, and contrast her simple powerlessness with Fosco’s sinister genius. Anne’s letter has been received by Marion, and the act ends with the following dialogue:

SIR PERCIVAL. I court the fullest inquiry, Miss Halcombe. (Aside) I shall catch her at Carlisle.

MARION. (Aside to Laura) I shall trace her through the post-office!

FOSCO (aside) I have got her here. (32)

The tension is heightened further when Fosco notes Anne’s resemblance to Laura. The stage direction indicates:

FOSCO picks up Anne’s cloak, and draws back a little, looking at her. She lies exactly in the same position which Lady Glyde assumed when she rested on the sofa. The moonlight falls in the same way on her face and bosom. The orchestra plays the same music which it played while Lady Glyde was reclining. Fosco is struck by the resemblance... An irrepressible cry bursts from him. Oh! what a thought! (52) (See illustration IV)

Anne’s distraction becomes Laura’s terrifying nightmare. The nightmarish quality is heightened in the discovery scene in the madhouse, which was highlighted on the playbill (see illustration). Unlike the scene in the novel, which takes place in a garden, Marian’s discovery of Laura, who has been put in Anne’s place, is set in the interior of the asylum. This scene captures the claustrophobic atmosphere that is a signature of the novel. The rapid sequence of events in the play, and the medium of the theatre itself, disallows the gradual, haunting, horror of Laura’s virtual imprisonment and terrorization in her own home. Instead, Collins presents his audience with the ultimate horror of Laura locked in the asylum, and thus increases the dramatic tension. Laura displays her own distraction in fragmented speech, which always indicated that the heroine’s wits were wandering. The stage direction indicates:

(Laura enters slowly on the right. The door is closed behind her. Her face and manner show that confinement in the asylum has already shaken her mind. She pauses near the door, looks at Marian, and shakes her head sadly... pausing at the door; uncertain whether it is Marian, or the phantom of her own imagination. (70)

Then Laura speaks: “Dreaming of her last night. Dreaming of her now. Oh me! mad! mad!” (70)
When she finally realizes that it is indeed Marian, Laura says nothing; in common with other melodramatic madwomen, recovery means silence. The curtain falls as Laura smiles in recognition of her sister, and the two rush into each other's arms. This discovery scene is the sentimental climax of the play; once it is over Laura Fairlie has little further interest for the audience. Once she is rescued, Laura becomes a secondary character. We only see her one more time as she "appears in violent agitation"(79) when she asks where Walter has gone at the end of the penultimate scene.

Fosco's character was the chief delight of the audience: like Svengali, he is a larger than life villain, and dominates the action. After having manipulated Laura's intolerable marriage for his own financial gain, Fosco makes some interesting and cynical comments on the status of women in marriage. In a mock-excuse for his wife's part in the plot to steal Laura's money and identity, he endorses sarcastically the ethos of marriage which Mrs. Sarah Ellis advocated:

You have mentioned Madame Fosco in a tone that there is no mistaking. I assert my wife's sublime devotion of herself to my interests, as one of my wife's virtues. What duty does the marriage obligation impose on a woman in this respectable country of yours? It charges her, unreservedly, to love, honour, and obey her husband. That is exactly what Madame Fosco has done. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, wives of England, for Madame Fosco!(86)

Collins uses the same convention of pitiful female distraction as other dramatic authors, but he offers a variant on the theme. In The Woman in White, female "madness" is shown to be a useful social tool. Fosco's praise of his own wife's devotion suggests that the ideal of feminine submission, which society endorsed, was seriously flawed. At the same time such submission which denoted the "true woman" was helpless in the face of the superior male intellectual power of a Fosco or a Svengali.
FORMATION OF THE PLOT.

ACT I. DATE-JUNE 30, 1862.

"Swiss Chalet," Limmeridge Park, Cumberland.

THE FUGITIVE.

ACT II. DATE-AUGUST 31.

BLACKWATER PARK, HAMPSHIRE.

THE LIKENESS.

EXECUTION OF THE PLOT.

N.B.—The Acts will be divided by the usual Act Drop, but a Tableau Curtain will descend for an instant between the Scenes, to mark the lapse of Time and change of Dates.

ACT III.—IN THREE SCENES.

The First Scene. DATE-SEPTEMBER 1.

PICTURE GALLERY, BLACKWATER PARK.

The Second Scene. DATE-SEPTEMBER 4.

SMOKING ROOM, BLACKWATER PARK.

The Third Scene. DATE-SEPTEMBER 16.

THE MADHOUSE.

ACT IV.—IN TWO SCENES.

The First Scene. DATE-SEPTEMBER 26-MORNING.

ROOM IN THE VILLAGE INN at LIMMERIDGE.

The Second Scene. DATE-SEPTEMBER 26-NIGHT.

Drawing Room at Fosco's Villa, St. John's Wood, London.

THE STUDY DOOR.

To conclude with the NOV. FAUC, by JOHN DOUGLAS, Esq., entitled

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

Henry Muswell Hill, Esq. (a Servant) — Mr. W. BLAKELEY.
Frederick St. Pauls. — Mr. C. H. PEYERIL.
Mr. Worthyman. — Mr. ROBSON.
Mrs. Muswell Hill, Mrs. IRVING, Matilda Hill, (her Daughter) Miss SUTHERLAND.
Kitty. — Miss BUTLER.
(a Waiting Maid) — Miss STEINBERG.

The Band under the Direction of Mr. RICHARDSON, will perform as follows—

"Laura," O. Richardson. — "FOSCO," (Published by GRACER & CO.)
("La Diablerie Ruse" O. Metz.

Directress. — Mrs. W. H. LISTON.

STALLS, 7s. DRESS CIRCLE, 4s. BOXES (with Bonnets), 4s. PIT, 2s.
Amphitheatre. ONE SHILLING. Gallery. SIXPENCE.

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Subverting the Stereotype: Parodies and Travesties

The picturesque madwoman was deemed to be so attractive that she inspired imitation in the real, "sane" world, in asylums and on the stage. However, a mental state that can be literally "put on" is almost a parody, and certainly inspires parody. There were several travesties of The Bride of Lammermoor, later in the century, when sentiment was no longer so fashionable. In 1848, a play entitled Lucy Did Sham Amour by Northall and Loder found success on the New York stage. Henry J. Byron presented Lucia di Lammermoor: or, the Laird, the Lover, and the Lady, a comic version of the play with a happy ending, at the Prince of Wales theatre in London in 1865. Although these travesties are late in the period, there was a tradition of ridiculing the romantic heroine, which ran concurrently with the most sentimental displays of female love melancholy that the stage had to offer. Together with a romantic appreciation of displays of maddened grief, there is also a sense of fun and ridicule to be found in some early performances of Ophelia and the Ophelia-type.

Charles Dickens provides an example in Great Expectations. When Pip attends an inferior performance of Hamlet, at the invitation of Mr. Wopsle, he relates the reaction of the audience to the antics of Ophelia. Dickens writes:

Ophelia was a prey to such slow musical madness, that when, in course of time, she had taken off her white muslin scarf, folded it up, and buried it, a sulky man who had been long cooling his impatient nose against an iron bar in the front row of the gallery, growled, "Now the baby's put to bed, let's have supper!" Which, to say the least of it, was out of keeping.58

Pretty maniacs could also be comic therefore, because of the inevitability of their distraction. Dickens's description is of an Ophelia who is too decorous and slow to provide the audience with the thrill required in order to keep their interest; her fault is that she is old-fashioned and unexciting, and therefore comic.

There was also a strong suggestion that the distraction of the Ophelia-type was merely a feminine ploy to gain sympathy, and that far from being out of her wits, such a character was manipulative and even dangerous. On stage, this idea can be seen in the multitude of Hamlet travesties and burlesques which played during the same period. In these productions, Ophelia is
portrayed as a flirtatious figure of fun who is determined to get her own way, even if it kills her.

Poole's *Hamlet Travestie*, performed at Covent Garden in 1823, had John Liston in the role of Ophelia; it was common to have a man play the part in these comedies. In Poole's production, Ophelia is not at all demure, but a flirt who sings racy songs whilst handing out vegetables. She is still described as being "fantastically dressed with straws and flowers; her clothes splashed with mud and dirt." She sings an old song (*Unfortunate Miss Bailey*), by George Colman the younger." A captain bold in Halifax/Who lived in country quarters/Seduced a maid who hang'd herself/One morning in her garters." (Vol. I. 43) Poole's Ophelia is not weighed down by melancholy, and not overburdened by too much virtue, but is determined to get her man, as she sings:

I've kissed and I've prattled with fifty young fellows,
And changed them as oft d'ye see:
But if he would not be so devilish jealous,
Young Hamlet's the lad for me (Vol. I. 26).

A travestie by Talfourd, 1849, has Ophelia play a scold who declares that she will not go to a nunnery, but will sue Hamlet for a breach of promise. In this production, Gertrude describes Ophelia as a "guy" when she appears in her mad costume. (Vol. II 90) These burlesques and travesties remained popular throughout the century, and played more or less loosely with the original text, sometimes completely reworking the characters and the location. An anonymous play from 1866 entitled *Hamlet! The Ravin' Prince of Denmark!! or, The Baltic Swell !!! and the Diving Belle!!!!* sets the action in London, with Ophelia as a nursemaid, and Horatio as a policeman. Ophelia is flirtatious and silly, her main concern is her appearance as she declares:

I feel half-inclined, indeed, I've a considerable mind
To go stick stark staring mad, I do declare
To tear my hair right out in handfuls my mind up made is,
Only, unfortunately, it isn't mine but another lady's,
And I am much ashamed to say it isn't paid for. (Vol IV 49)

When this Ophelia decides to commit suicide, it is without pathos, but quite matter of factly, that she declares:

My time is up, I go; Polonius' daughter
Concludes to jump into the dirty water,
Off the suspension bridge. Be bold my soul,
I’ve just a half-penny to pay the toll (Vol. IV 130).

This Ophelia is aligned with the countless “fallen-women” heroines who, in fits of remorse, jumped off one of the many bridges in London, which were notorious locations for female suicides. W. S. Gilbert, (who was to play with the notion of a supposedly simple love-stricken girl to great comic effect in Engaged), wrote Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in 1874, wherein Ophelia is in love with Rosencrantz, and plots first to have Hamlet executed and then exiled.

In all of these travesties Ophelia is always very much in control of her actions, and any sign of madness is simply display to gain sympathy and achieve her own ends. She is the epitome of the calculating female, driven to comic despair, not by any real emotional crisis, but by the threat of being thwarted. In 1882 A. C. Hilton in Hamlet, or Not Such a Fool as He Looks, has Ophelia complain:

Prince Hamlet is so very hard to catch,
I really cannot bring him to the scratch.
I’ve done my best, been coy and pert,
A bashful prude, and a tremendous flirt;
Cruel and kind, and hot and cold by turns,
But still ungratefully my love he spurns...
It’s all no use -- I’m horribly afraid
That I shall die a miserable old maid. (Vol. IV 319)

The travesties play with the notion of female “hysterical cunning” which was discussed widely by nineteenth-century alienists, and assumed to be a product of the “morbid actions of the reproductive organs.”60 This hysterical cunning was seen to have a performative aspect which the doctors found both disturbing and ludicrous. Robert Brudenell Carter writes: “thus the hair will often be so fastened as to fall at the slightest touch, in most admired disorder,” a ploy in the hysteric which is “designed to gain sympathy and attention.”61 Dr Walter Johnson ascerbically describes the sight which he expects to greet a doctor attending a typical female hysteric:

When called to visit a patient in hysterics, the physician usually finds her sprawling upon her back, violently agitated, a fearful and at the same time a
ridiculous spectacle. Her head is thrown backwards, or jerked from side to side; her dishevelled hair hangs about her shoulders; her throat swells as though dilated by some foreign body in its interior, and frequently various choking or gasping sounds are heard. The patient beats her breast with her hands, or tears her hair, or flings her arms about...  

Thus the hysterical is found to be feared and ridiculed in the clinical setting as much as she is on stage, in the travesties. The one constant factor, whether the hystericia was a comic sham as in the travesties, a pitiful portrait of a wrecked mind as in Clemenza, Crazy Jane, Trilby and Lucia di Lammermoor, or the acting out of a psychiatric patient, was the display of certain recognizable characteristics which signified a mental collapse due to a conflict of emotions, usually related to lovesickness. In the nineteenth-century, the idea that a woman was “playing Ophelia,” was a common assumption applied to both pitiable and comic hysterics, and the line between the two types was considered to be very fine.

The trope of female madness could serve a variety of purposes, but whatever the mode or the medium, such a trope had a widespread appeal. It played on the widely-held belief that women were emotionally labile. Nineteenth-century theatre audiences were already convinced by this hypothesis. Apart from learned treatises on the subject, popular reading material also emphasized this side of woman’s character: one example can be found in Samuel Beeton’s Englishwomen’s Domestic Magazine which published an essay by a reader stating: “The extent to which the intellectual power of Woman is associated with and dwells in the affection, constitutes their characteristic weakness and their characteristic strength.”  

This weak strength pervaded the stage and thrilled audiences, up to the 1860s when a more threatening madwoman made her appearance. The pitiful romantic madwoman did not leave the theatre, but was upstaged by her more sexually vigorous and frightening sister, the mad “sensation” heroine.

1. The Female Malady. 90.


15. Bucknill. 145.

16. Terry, 165.


22. **The Female Malady,** 90.


(Further references to the text will be given by page number in parentheses).

27. **Lady Soul and the Devil’s Burning Throne: The Golden Age of Melodrama.**


32. **The Female Malady,** 97.

33. **The Female Malady,** 90.


36. C. A. Somerset. *Crazy Jane.* London: 1827. (All future references to the text will be given in parentheses).


38. Gilman. 28-43.

40. Salvadore Cammarano. Lucía di Lammermoor. Libretto. London: H.G. Clarke, 1848. (Further references to this citation will be given as page numbers in parentheses throughout the text).

41. John William Calcraff. The Bride of Lammermoor. Dick's Standard Plays. No. 344. 1880 (1819). 14. (Future references to this text will be given in parentheses).


43. Conolly. 172.


47. Trilby. Paul Potter in Trilby and Other Plays: Four plays for Victorian star actors. Ed. George Taylor, Oxford University Press, 1996. 212. (All further references to this edition of the play will be given in parentheses throughout the text).


49. Charles Dickens. The Mystery of Edwin Drood. (1870) London: Penguin, 1974. 228. Future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.


51. Bolles. 244.


53. Gilman. 7.

54. Robertson Davies. The Mirror of Nature. 70.


57. Wilkie Collins. *The Woman in White.* Published privately by the author, London: 1871. (All references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.)


(Further references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text).

60. "*Woman in her Psychological Relations,*" *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology,* 4 (1851).8-50.


63. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* III 1854-5:76
CHAPTER III

MADNESS AND SIN: SENSATION HEROINES.

The tragically doomed madwoman on stage always had a hint of danger. And, as noted in Chapter Two, woman’s tendency to collapse into distraction, while pitiable, was also presumed to be a sign of her intrinsically erratic and flawed mental state and was therefore suspect. The mad heroine is always guilty (even if only passively) by virtue of her having a mind so easily susceptible to disorder. This disorder is presented as being both responsible for, and subject to, social disorder. If social order is restored as in Crazy Jane and Clemenza, then the heroine’s mental disorder is also vanquished. If the social order is irreparably damaged, as in Lucia di Lammermoor or Trilby, then the mad heroine has no recourse but death. In the plays discussed above, whether the outcome was reconciliation with order or death, the heroine’s primary attraction was her ability to inspire pity. The pitiful madwoman was always acted upon, was always subject to a set of circumstances which left her no option, it seemed, but to go mad. Her madness was instigated by having her “truly womanly” loving nature thwarted; what she did or became was for “proper” romantic love and her character was consumed by it. If however, the heroine’s actions were inspired by ambition, lust, or a selfish sense of self-preservation she was depicted as mad in a very different way. This type of heroine was no less doomed by her mental state, but she was far more dangerous, and inspired shock more than pity. She was “sensationally” bad and thrillingly deviant. She exemplified what was considered to be “moral madness.”

The term “moral madness” was coined in 1835 by James Cowle Prichard in his A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders of the Mind. “Moral madness” has been defined, not as a loss of reason, but as “deviance from socially accepted behaviour.” It was presumed to develop from a perversion of “natural” impulses which were subject to an excess of emotional stress. The development of moral madness in an individual was considered to be due to an intrinsic weakness and lack of control in the patient. The treatment for moral madness was “moral management” which emphasized the need to provide a pleasant, domestic environment to counteract the deviant behaviour of the subject. Elaine Showalter notes that by the 1850s, most of the patients treated for moral madness were female and, “in line with their celebration of women’s domestic role, the Victorians hoped that homelike mental institutions would tame and domesticate madness and bring it into the sphere of rationality.” The erratically irrational victim of “moral madness” was at the heart of “sensation” literature and journalism. At the same time that society attempted to come to
terms with, and to find a logical scientific reason for, seemingly illogical behaviour, and to control and eliminate it, such deviant behaviour was found to be exciting to witness; the theatre exploited the appetite for this excitement, as did the sensation novel, and the police reports in the newspapers.

Such deviance was also of concern in the medical and legal communities. The link between criminality and lunacy was under debate as alienists asserted that in certain cases of criminal behaviour mental disease was the source. At the same time the question of mental disease itself was a vexed point; some alienists insisted on a purely physiological explanation while others saw psychological or "moral" causes. The concern with criminal lunacy was part of a broader picture of secularization in medicine; rational scientific causes were sought where formerly sin had been blamed. Roger Smith writes:

Medical claims about lunacy were a small part of a much wider campaign by social reformers to base policy on facts. In the 1830s and 1840s, 'social science' became a programme which accompanied major legislative innovations. This new science used a utilitarian language and devoted a great deal of effort to the collection of facts or 'statistics'. The programme evolved and expanded during the course of the century, in the 1860s acquiring a stronger biological element influenced by evolutionary and hereditarian thought.³

Proving mental disease was difficult, especially in cases of so-called moral madness where the perpetrator appeared to be rational. Humanitarianism influenced the verdicts in many of these cases; rather than condemn the prisoner to death by hanging they were classified as insane and incarcerated in an asylum. While there was no consensus about the use and application of the insanity defence, the Criminal Lunatics Asylum Act of 1860 pointed to a shift in the treatment of certain criminals, and asylums specifically for the criminally insane were built; Broadmoor opened in 1863. Sensation literature developed at the same time as these questions were being debated.

The 1860s also saw the advent of experimental psychology with the publication of Fechner's Elements of Psychophysics. Fechner said that perceptual magnitude -- loudness or brightness or weight -- is determined by the logarithm of the physical intensity of the stimulus, and that perceptual magnitude increases when physical intensity multiplies. Fechner conducted experiments which measured the relationship between the physical and the psychological worlds.⁴ Although Fechner's main aim was to illustrate the truth behind his animist, transcendentalist philosophy, his experiments did help lay the groundwork for experimental psychology. Helmholtz conducted experiments in spatial sense in the 1860s, and concluded that perception was, in large part, psychological and dependent on prior experience. Therefore, around the same time that
sensation in popular entertainment became a heated topic of discussion, it was also the subject of psychological discourse. The taste for the “sensational,” and the psychological impulses which it exploited, were undergoing examination while they proliferated on the stage and in the novel. There was a consciousness of its effect, and while few, if any, of the public who enjoyed “sensation” were aware of Fechner’s or Helmholtz’s studies in particular, there was a growing awareness of what is now termed psychological motivation. The mysterious inner workings of the mind were the unexplained source of much that was written about, both in the police reports and in sensation fiction, just as psychology was slowly moving away from a purely physiological explanation. The world of the mind, as much as the physical world, was becoming more complex. How were apparently incomprehensible forms of behaviour to be explained? People who seemed to be quite sane were shown to be capable of apparently insanely aberrant acts. While the aberrant acts might be seen to proceed from a damaged psyche, the impulse to find a root cause for a susceptible psyche remained the same. The female mind was once again the site of a possible explanation.

Despite the growing interest in the psychological grounds for insanity, biological determinism was not abandoned, but came to be reinforced by Darwinian theory; such determinism can be seen in the stage versions of East Lynne and Lady Audley’s Secret. On stage, the mad heroine’s appeal was extended and transformed by presenting her as an embodiment of heightened danger. Unlike the Ophelia-type, this mad heroine was corrupt; this corruption was seen as both “unwomanly,” because it contravened the ideal type, and at the same time “womanly” because it stemmed from, what was presumed to be, a gendered pathological weakness. The sensation heroine is depicted as going against nature, yet the impulse for her aberrant behaviour is also an intrinsic part of woman’s flawed nature in the context of the period. At a time when there was a growing feminist advocacy movement women who strove for personal agency began to be depicted on stage as disruptive monsters, and freedom was equated with dangerous licence. The strict demarcation between good and evil, which characterizes melodrama, provided the perfect vehicle in which to present a popular interpretation of the view that woman’s mind (if allowed to range freely) was potentially destructive to the social fabric. The destructiveness of such a mind was presumed to inform a physical intensity which, in turn, provided the dramatic intensity. This variant of the “mad” heroine was one whose physicality, and more especially whose sexuality, was dangerously palpable. At the time that criminal insanity was undergoing examination the plays East Lynne and Lady Audley’s Secret concentrate on sin as the cause for seemingly irrational and criminal behaviour and reject rationalist, naturalist views.
One might question if, in fact, the extreme position which melodrama's form takes in relation to mad, dangerous, women is merely theatrical exaggeration but the same ferocity of expression, the same "melodramatic" polarities between extreme goodness and evil in women, are also to be found in political treatises and medical discourse throughout the century. Elaine Hadley in *Melodramatic Tactics* equates the rhetoric of melodrama, and its uses outside the theatrical world, with political concerns, especially in its symbiotic relationship with a growing commercialism. For Hadley, what she describes as the melodramatic mode "was profoundly reactionary...it thoroughly idealized a passing deferential society and the status hierarchies such a society nurtured." Melodramatic expression and tone can be seen in the writings of those who opposed perceived threats to the social order. J.M. Kemble, in 1838, vigorously wrote against the Custody of Infants bill, declaring that allowing women to have custodial rights over their children would unleash moral and social mayhem. He wrote:

You cannot diminish the checks to licentiousness without increasing the chances of their occurrence! You cannot take away the least of the safeguards of domestic virtue without an injury to public morality...As well might you expect, when you have unbarred the cages of so many wild beasts, that they will remain quietly in them at the wish of their keepers!

And John Tilt wrote in 1851, more sympathetically but no less vehemently, of the necessity,

To keep in check the too sudden development of those sentiments which...in girls of the higher classes, often assume a wrong direction, attain a morbid intensity, and are productive of the most deplorable consequences. Far better off in this respect are the daughters of the poor, in whom the wild freaks of imagination are successfully kept under by poverty and hard labour...

Melodrama adopted the dangerous madwoman at a time when the fears of Kemble and Tilt (amongst others) were thought to have been realized as frightening social facts; this could clearly be seen daily in the newspapers' sensational reports. "Unnatural" ambition and self-assertion in the sensation heroines is assumed to lead to their "mad" criminal behaviour, and within the essentially conservative form that is melodrama, it also leads to their ultimate defeat; their behaviour is exciting, their physical intensity makes thrilling theatre, but they are finally checked (as Kemble and Tilt advised they must be). This checking is portrayed as an inevitable conclusion in the context of the period, because they have attempted to disrupt the domestic sphere which it is presumed is their only "proper" place.

Jenny Bourne Taylor says that the fascination of "sensation" in the 1860s "encapsulated the
particular ways in which the middle-class sense of cultural crisis was experienced through that
decade." Certainly, sensation and the sensational were frequently used to describe disturbing,
unnerving, and outrageous events which, while shocking the public, both created, and fed into, the
public’s appetite for such “sensational” news. This was evident in the police reports, documented
in new and cheaper newspapers. These reports gave details of divorce trials (engendered by the
new Divorce Act of 1858), of rape or sexual misconduct, and of murders, often multiple murders,
by seemingly respectable members of society. They inspired a great deal of copy and editorial
comment which censured the acts especially because the perpetrators had betrayed the social, as
well as the criminal, code.

Thomas Boyle has documented the large number of these crimes, and the reports which
capitalized on them, and notes that although they were relatively common, they were always
described as unusual aberrations; such behaviour, however widespread, could not be “normal”:
there was an implied distinction between observer and observed as though the facts that were
reported were on a separate plane from the reader. The relationship between these reports and their
audience was similar to that found in the theatre. The reports reached a wide audience who seemed
eager for the details; the distribution figures for the newspapers testify to their popularity. They
were criticized for their wealth of unsavoury detail, and were felt to add to the corruption which
they purported to condemn. Of course, there was nothing new in the public interest in crime. The
Newgate novel, the Newgate Calendar, and broadsheets containing confessions and final words of
convicted criminals had always found an audience, as had the Penny Shockers and Penny
Dreadfuls. The difference between the sensational reporting of the 1860s, and that of the past, was
in the salacious detail, and in the speed with which it was brought to the public view. This was
facilitated by the telegraph and by railway travel. It was an exciting form of journalism which came
from exciting and modern times, and its effect was both electrifying and frightening. It confirmed
societal anxiety as well as a pride in society's progress. Some of the reports are also slyly funny,
especially as they enumerate the sometimes farcical details of divorce cases. The assumed sacred
ties of marriage and family were challenged in the newspaper reports’ expositions of adultery and
blackmail. This was what was seen to be going on in supposedly respectable families, at a time
when the family was considered to be sacred; the subtext was a warning to the reading public to
make sure it did not happen to them.

Crime had also always been a staple of the stage. So-called “sensation” drama first hit the
stage in the 1860s. It was an extension of melodrama, and relied on startling stage-effects with
detailed pictorial realism, to enthrall its audience. Hamlet’s mock lament in one anonymous travesty
focuses on the growing appetite for sensation:

No Kean, no Kemble now salutes you here,
No Siddons draws the sympathetic tear!
But what instead? the stage can condescend
To soothe the sickly taste it dares not mend...
In fact, my friends, there animates the nation
One taste, one passion, one desire-Sensation!...
Here, there, and everywhere, no matter what in station,
Everybody’s looking out for a new sensation;
It is not only on the stage, nor only in the play, sirs,
But everyone’s sensation mad in this our modern day, sirs.¹⁰

Sensation drama, especially in the plays of Boucicault and Daly, carried the staging of spectacle further than had been possible in the past. Violent action and spectacle had always been important to melodrama; for example, the early melodrama by Isaac Pocock, The Miller and His Men (1813), ends with a loud explosion, as Ravina lights the fuse which blows up the robbers, and in many plays of the period gunfire, explosions, or other stimulating effects often signalled the conclusion of a highly-wrought episode. Stage pictures were also always a significant mainstay of melodrama’s impact; the elaborately staged sea-battles recreating Nelson’s victories attempted to realize, albeit in miniature, the glory of the British navy, and Planché delighted his audience with elaborate transformation scenes in his fairytale extravaganzas. Furthermore, the stage direction to “hold picture” is given at the end of many melodramatic scenes in order to emphasize a particularly high dramatic moment; in other words, the audience was encouraged to hold the mood, to savour the full dramatic impact of the scene’s sensation.

The creation of a specific dramatic sensation was therefore not new to the stage. Although the melodramatic stage always relied on a strong visual appeal, spectacle became more sophisticated with the advent of the sensation drama of the 1860s. Elaborately constructed scenes, such as the sight of the heroine almost drowning in realistic-looking water, as in Boucicault’s The Colleen Bawn (1860), or of a burning house being saved by real firemen, as in the same writer’s The Streets of London (1864), or of a man being rescued from the railway track just as the train pulls onstage, as in Augustin Daly’s Under the Gaslight (1867), drew large crowds. Sensation drama had the same emotional appeal as earlier melodrama; the ends were the same, while the staging techniques were more extravagant. Although still reliant on strong declamation, and laced with heavy sentiment, this type of drama also relied, more heavily, on pictorial realization. In 1888,
Boucicault described the importance of constant movement and excitement in the staging of his sensational melodramas stating, "The stage is a picture frame, in which is exhibited that kind of panorama where the picture being unrolled is made to move, passing before the spectator with scenic continuity." Sensation drama also relied on what was most exciting and up-to-the minute in everyday life. Tom Taylor's The Ticket-of-Leave Man (1863) has groups of navvies who are digging the new Underground railway; this was something the audience could see happening in the streets outside the theatre. This type of drama then, was presented with a sense of immediacy (the same sense that was generated by newspaper reports), and a sense of excitement in all that was fresh and innovative in the contemporary world.

Running concurrently with these elaborate spectacles was a quieter type of drama, which relied on a different type of pictorial realism. These were the so-called cup-and-saucer plays of Tom Robertson, staged by the Bancrofts at The Prince of Wales theatre. Robertson, who had worked as a prompter for Madame Vestris, took her attention to detail even further in his productions at The Prince of Wales. These plays, such as Ours (1866), emphasized the detail of the microcosm of everyday life; in this play, realistic snow blowing through the door, and the heroines cooking a real roly-poly pudding on stage, delighted the audience with their novelty. This was the extreme opposite of the attempt at macrocosmic display in sensation drama, but came from the same impulse to heighten the realism of stage illusion. Such details of realistic domesticity may seem far removed from sensation drama, but the detailed pictorialization of their staging serves to provide the audience with the believable interiors in which a Lady Audley, and others of her ilk, could wreak havoc. Whether the pictorial realism presented was a perfectly appointed drawing-room, or a steaming train-wreck, the audience was invited to engage with a true and vital slice of life on stage. It was real, it was thrilling, and it was right there before them. It showed that the world was advancing; technology and detail were as important to the success of the Great Exhibition of 1851, as they were to the development of elaborate stage effects. Sensation drama captured and capitalized on the spirit of the age.

Sensation on stage, however, had a meaning other than that of a dramatic appeal to the audience through detailed stage spectacle, although it was closely aligned with it. The reports of sensationally shocking events in the newspapers affected melodramatic representation on stage. Sentiment was not replaced entirely by shock tactics, but it was pushed to the side somewhat. It could also be argued that the traditions of melodrama also affected the newspaper reports. These depicted criminals who were described as being melodramatically extreme in the perpetration of their crimes, while their victims were totally powerless and vulnerable. Progress, in the ever-
expanding industrial and urban environment, laid people open to new experiences and more fluid social contacts. This was exciting and modern, but it could also be disruptive and frightening. The “shock of the new” was not displeasing, but it could be unnerving. The feeling of being unnerved was sought out by a public who clamoured for more details of criminal behaviour, and seemed to take a vicarious pleasure in it. Such pleasure was perceived to come from being emotionally stimulated by the “sensational” reports. The same emotional stimulation was achieved by the dramatization of “sensational” tales on stage. Sensation, in this sense, indicates the production of an emotional frisson, not only from spectacular incidents, but from emotional turmoil in the characters presented; in this drama there is an attempt to shock the audience by presenting a character who, initially and to all external appearances, is a stable and attractive member of society, but who hides some terrible secret within. The secret can only be maintained by a series of daring, ruthless or criminal acts. At first glance, these characters do not seem to differ much from the traditional stage-villain or villainess; their criminality is not always immediately apparent to the other characters in the play, but the audience is soon made aware of it. However, they are also the heroine or hero of the play; they are central to it; they are the characters in whom is invested all the interest. They are also, troublingly, part of an otherwise “normal” domestic world. The emotional excitement in these plays comes from their unmasking, after the extent of their crimes has been detailed, and thrillingly played out. Divine Providence still provides a fitting conclusion finally, in keeping with the ethics of melodrama, but the sensationally bad character is also attractive and even sympathetic. Their world is depicted as a place where things are not as they seem and where domestic virtue, and more especially the notion of “true womanhood,” is sometimes a sham.

The disruptive sensation heroine is key to this type of drama. Unlike the comic pseudo-Ophelias in the Hamlet travesties and burlesques detailed above this type of depiction of aberrant womanhood is serious, and points to a moral lesson. Menace comes, not from an external source, but from the heart of the family environment. The signature of the menace is uncontrolled passion and degenerate female longing; both of these are symptoms of what was considered to be “moral madness.” Two of these plays were based on highly successful sensation novels of the 1860s; Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Lady Audley’s Secret, and Mrs. Henry Wood’s East Lynne. In all the stage adaptations, the notion of unbridled passion, or of insanity in a female character, is a feature of the plot. Both were extremely successful in the many stage versions that appeared: Allardyce Nicoll lists three versions of Lady Audley’s Secret by G. Roberts, W. E. Suter and C. H. Hazlewood which all appeared in 1863, a year after the novel was first published in book form; East Lynne is listed with six versions by known authors, J. Oxenford (1866), T. A. Palmer (1874), J. Poulton
(1889), L. Wilde (1898), J. P. Hardacre (1898), and H. Shelley (1899), as well as nine anonymous versions which played in the 1860's, 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's. There was obviously a huge demand for the productions of these plays as there was for the novels which inspired them.

The sensation novel fed the same appetites as the police reports, and came under even more criticism for its depiction of attractive people, especially women, who broke both the law and the social code. These themes, however, were not new to fiction; an appeal to the senses of the implied audience, through startling narratives had often been an intrinsic part of fiction, both in the novel (even Richardson's *Clarissa* [1748] is sensational in this sense), and on the stage. What was new and seemingly shocking to critics of sensation fiction, was the mass appeal of a form whose content now depicted and targeted a middle-class, rather than a working-class, audience. As Ann Cvetkovich notes, the negative critical response came from those who perceived the form to be weakening the standards of a presumed higher culture. That is, the emotional content, which was standard fare on the stage, was now infiltrating the middle-classes through so-called sensation fiction. She adds,

> As defined by the Victorian critics, the term "sensation novel" refers more to the genre's status as mass culture than to its particular narrative style or content... The sensation novel was specifically the target of attack because it represented the entry into middle-class publishing institutions of the sensationalism that characterized the working-class literature of the preceding decades... and the stage melodrama.\(^{12}\)

The form was seen as degenerate and, perhaps more significantly as effeminate, as it combined a supposed overstimulation of the mental faculties in order to produce its stirring effects. Women were perceived to be the primary audience for such fiction, and particularly susceptible to it (Mrs. Sarah Ellis warned "A novel read in secret is a dangerous thing")\(^{13}\); it was considered to be both a product of as well as a stimulus to weak-minded females.

E.J. Tilt, the senior physician at the Paddington free dispensary, thought, in common with other experts on female mental problems, that there was a danger to the female sex caused by sensation fiction. He wrote, "We are convinced that very little good and much harm is done by the host of novelists who feed with trash the insatiable want of education in the fair sex."\(^{14}\) He felt that the theatre was especially dangerous to the mental health of young women, and in common with many critics of the theatre, complained, "Instead of borrowing moral filth or melodramatic horrors from the French stage, why do not our dramatic writers, since they lack original inspiration, seek that of nobler models?"\(^{15}\) Tilt was an advocate for wider education for women, writing, "the promotion of the future happiness of thousands of educated women depends upon their
emancipation from the state of intellectual degradation in which they still remain." However, despite some of his feminist views, Tilt still relied on the ancient model of the feminine disposition for hysteria, adding that an accumulation of overstimulation could be transferred from female to female. He noted: "We must observe that nervous affections are catching; that as the vibration of one chord causes similar chords, attuned to the same note...so the mysterious vibrations of the nervous system of one girl may cause that of another to vibrate in the same hysterical way." Tilt’s associationist ideas reveal that he relied on the same paradigm as the purveyors of the fictions he denounced. Although Tilt advocated a wider sphere for women, he felt, in common with many others, that such widening needed to be closely guarded; woman was in danger of such easy mental disruption that she needed careful monitoring. He advised, “one or two hours a day may be devoted to such reading as a judicious husband or friend may think best suited to a wife’s actual position.” Sensational literature was not to be allowed because it was thought to encourage dangerous and deviant behaviour by making such behaviour romantic and attractive. That two of the most successful sensation novels were authored by women added to the criticism of the form; they were the products of unhealthy female imagination.

Jenny Bourne Taylor points out that, “by assuming a set of nervous responses that had become pathological by their very susceptibility to intense excitement and reaction...the sensation novel was seen as a collective cultural nervous disorder...." That is, an increasing awareness of the criminal behaviour in the main character produced a shock that was not displeasing, but electrifying and fascinating; such fascination was deemed morbid and unhealthy. It was also deemed a gendered morbidity, since pathological nervous responses were considered to be mainly attributable to women. The popularity of Wood and Braddon’s fiction led to a debate in the literary journals of the day which condemned the novels, both for their assumed lack of literary merit, and their supposed unsavoury subject-matter. The charges laid against the sensation novel were similar to those charges which were laid against the theatre throughout the century. It supposedly appealed to the lower end of society, and was an inferior art form, if it could be described as art at all. It was considered to have no artistic strength, (or virility, as it was described), but merely appealed to the instinct for gossip and scandal. An article in the North British Review complained that this type of fiction was “as fascinating to ill-regulated minds as police reports and divorce cases.” The public’s obsessive fascination with criminal behaviour in sensation fiction indicated, to its critics, a threat to society in the reprehensible decline of literary standards, which was achieved by an unhappy combination of sensational journalism and overwrought romanticism.

The form in which it reached its public also contributed to the content of sensation fiction,
according to the critics; cheap serializations were aimed at a broad audience, and serialisation demanded cliffhanging endings and new excitement with each episode. Since its main audience was perceived to be female, it was thought to be dangerous in the way it glamorized what Lyn Pykett has described as “the improper feminine,” and placed its readers in the thrall of heroines who transgressed acceptable moral codes.21

The sensation novels of Braddon and Wood have received a great deal of interest from feminist writers for, what is perceived to be, their potentially subversive heroines, and the way the narratives undercut the idea of the idealized bourgeois marriage and home. The negative critical reaction to them is seen as a reaction to a crisis of gender in the mid-Victorian period. However, the stage-versions of these sensation novels present more simple constructs of the “improper feminine.” Thrillingly bad, misguided, or mad, they are ultimately defeated, and go to their doom in a classically sentimental manner. At the same time as theatrical displays of “ill-regulated minds” thrilled their audiences, they upheld the conventional wisdom on female insanity, and presented the heroines as a dreadful warning of uncontrolled female passion. “Fallen” women, wrapped in black shawls to cover their shame, were familiar characters on the melodramatic stage. The new fallen woman was just as conventional, although she was presented as more dangerous and brazen, and less pathetic, than her earlier counterpart. The stage adaptations of overwhelmingly successful sensation novels, written in response to popular demand, were therefore not sensational in the sense of the new spectacle drama, nor were they as sensationally shocking as the novels themselves. They teased their audiences with exciting displays of female wantonness and dissipation, but they never let them triumph. They were also glamorous objects of display; all the sensation heroines were beautiful and alluring, which added to the emotional frisson engendered by their madly wicked behaviour.

The sensational impact in the novels comes from the combination of recognizable, pleasant domestic detail, with less pleasant family secrets. The most sensational secrets are the passionate (often jealous), sexual longings of the heroine which lead to apparently startling acts. As Henry James noted, these novels deal with “those mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries that are at our own doors.” 22 Lady Audley is a bigamist and attempted murderer; Lady Isabel Carlyle’s jealousy and suspicion lead her to be seduced into leaving East Lynne with her lover, abandoning her husband and children. While it is true that the dramatizations of these novels reflected the growing taste for a more detailed pictorialization on stage, their predominantly domestic content discounted the need for technically elaborate scenes. Where such scenes might have been admitted, they were ignored. In the novel of East Lynne, for example, the erring heroine is in a spectacular train crash,
but none of the many stage-versions depicted it. What these plays do is to distil the emotional sensation from the novels, and build up to a crescendo of strong feeling, which is vital to effective melodrama. Sensation novels, in fact, rely strongly on melodramatic stage-conventions (both Braddon and Wilkie Collins had connections with the theatre); the dramatized versions then take back their own and, in the process, they simplify the main characters, and rely on the traditional, conservative ethos that is at the heart of melodrama. They combine the stage realism which came to be associated with Robertsonian drama, with the emotionally charged characters borrowed from sensation fiction. James Smith writes that, in melodrama, “plot, structure and language are all designed to heighten the persecution inflicted by (the villain),” and that the “great aim of the plot is to expose distressed innocence to as many trials as possible.” In the dramatizations of *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret* there is an inversion of this impulse. The plot structure and language are designed to heighten the persecution of the villainess, who is also the heroine. These dramatized versions of sensation heroines provide the audience with a heightened emotional appeal which is the obverse of the Ophelia-type of madwoman. Whereas the latter type’s undoing has been shown to be an encoded display of female sexuality, so the former takes such display a little further. The sensation heroine is even more thrillingly out of control than her sentimental counterpart, and she presents a more dangerous aspect of female sexuality. Whereas the Ophelia-type is a victim of her sexual nature, the sensation heroine uses her sexual allure to control her victims.

**Motherhood and Madness: The Floating Beacon and East Lynne.**

The plot of *East Lynne*, with its fallen heroine, abandoned at an early age, is standard melodramatic fare. Its sub-plot of a murder mystery, complete with a wrongly-accused wayward youth, made victim by an aristocratic scoundrel who is finally found out, is similarly familiar. The play does not have the time or space to explore the details of the motivations of the heroine, nor is it the task of melodrama to delve into psychological realism with which the novel plays; it relies instead on the popular wisdom of woman as the weaker vessel. The interest in the play comes from the failure of the heroine as a wife and mother, combined with her success as an attractive, even sexy, stage presence.

The sanctity of motherhood had gone unquestioned in melodrama until now; the mother in melodrama was faithful and generous to a fault, and would endure anything for the sake of her children. Just as the Ophelia-type epitomized the ideal female love-melancholic, so the melodramatic mother idealised self-sacrifice and maternal virtue. She had a universal appeal on the
melodramatic stage. In Fitzball’s *The Floating Beacon: or the Madwoman of the Wreck* (1824), the eponymous heroine Mariette is a wronged mother, who has her revenge on the Norwegian wreckers who have murdered her husband, separated her from her son, and kept her a prisoner as “wife” to the head of the gang. Self-confessedly maddened by her ordeal, she recognizes her son and attempts to save him from the same danger that took his father’s life. The denouement of the play presents Mariette as the sacrificial melodramatic mother. When she and her newly-found son are in imminent danger she heightens the emotional impact by expressing her maternal concern, as she says,

> Our pursuers are at hand—what will become of us, we must perish—for myself death were nothing, but to witness thy destruction!—till now I never knew the climax of misery, my son—my son!24

Such a display was extremely popular with audiences; female madness in pursuit of justice made exciting theatre. Fitzball recalls, in his memoirs, how Mariette was cheered by the audience, and how her role had a longstanding appeal:

> The appearance of Mrs. W. Clifford, as the Maniac of the Wreck, in her picturesque costume, with her magnificent figure, and large black eyes, gave a perfect finish to the whole; so perfect, that the dome of the theatre rang with general and enthusiastic applause...It is now more than twenty years since the production of *The Floating Beacon*, but I think I can speak with perfect truth in stating, that there has scarcely been one week since, in which it has not been represented in some theatre, either in London, the country, or America.25

In contrast, the sensation heroine fell short as a mother; she seemed to lack, or as in *East Lynne* to temporarily abandon, the sacred emotions that were so close to the hearts of melodramatists and their audiences. But nevertheless, motherhood, whether devoted or aberrant, invited the audience to witness the highly-charged emotion of, what was assumed to be, one of the most sacred bonds of humanity.

> Marriage and motherhood were supposedly the ideal states for women, but if the natural feminine predisposition was for marriage and motherhood, it was also potentially predisposed to insanity, perhaps even as a result of these ideal states. Perfection and destruction were both potential aspects of such an ideal. The dramatization of “sensation” heroines exploits the overwhelming success of the novels, and confirms the stereotype of the mad wife and mother. Sentiment is not abandoned, in either the plays or the novels, but the status quo is not challenged by the actions of the erring heroine in the play versions. Elaine Showalter argues that the women in
the sensation fiction of Braddon and Wood are subversive feminist deconstructions of the supposed ideal. However, the stage-versions of these novels present the heroine as totally responsible, by virtue of her “tainted” wits, for her own tragic ending. The plays do not provide a strong subtextual critique of marriage or motherhood, but instead rely on the melodramatic code of sacred emotions. These sacred emotions may be corrupted by the aberrant heroine, but there is no doubt that they are still sacred. As she falls from grace, the sensation heroine can be pitied as she shocks, but closure is always achieved by her sudden and decisive death.

It has been stated above that the earlier melodramatic heroine represented Lady Soul; the sensation heroine is no less a spiritual adjunct to the hero, but she is a tarnished and sinful soul, epitomising the corruption that was felt to be lurking in the heart of society. She also represents the ancient idea of a diseased mind being the result of a diseased soul. This concept of the diseased Lady Soul was integral to the plot of plays depicting sensation heroines, and shows how societal anxiety remained invested in the character of the flawed female, who suffered from “moral madness.” It is significant that the pre-eminent example of maternal pathos on the nineteenth-century stage is one which presents a mother who is seriously flawed, and therefore, presumably mad. East Lynne, both upholds the presumed sanctity of motherhood, and at the same time, undercuts it.

The apparently mad behaviour of sensation heroines is the main focus of the plot; both East Lynne and Lady Audley’s Secret expand the idea of the mad wife. The mad wife had been a mere cypher on stage until the advent of the sensation heroine. For example, the 1848 stage-version of Brougham’s Jane Eyre presents the mad wife with no attempt at a reason for her behaviour. She has no name, and is simply described as “the Maniac Wife” in the cast list. She never speaks, and appears only briefly at the end of Act IV; her lurking presence, in the early part of the play, is reported by a servant, John who describes her as “a wild-looking ghost-like thing, with heavy hair.” Her only action is to appear at a window in the church at Jane and Rochester’s wedding, brandishing a torch with which she has started the fire. This maniac wife is presented as a simplistic contrast to the equally simplistic characterization that is Jane Eyre, who is an ideal “doll-wife.” Unlike Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Mason, Brougham’s maniac wife is given no history; her role is attenuated so that she becomes a type of stage-devil, the embodiment of madness and sin who appears at the climax of the play to cause demonic destruction. Although the play thus greatly simplifies Charlotte Brontë’s novel, the idea of the sinful menace of the mad wife did reflect her own ideas on the character. She wrote to her editor W. S. Williams explaining why she created Bertha Mason as such an extreme example of insanity, and showing how the concept of moral
madness was a pervasive and persuasive argument:

...the character...is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend nature replaces it. The sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end. The aspect of such cases, assimilates with the disposition, all seems demonized...Mrs. Rochester indeed lived a sinful life before she was insane, but sin is itself a species of insanity. 28

Unlike Ibsen’s A Doll’s House (1879), which examines and questions the problems behind the supposed ideal of the “doll-wife,” the plays under discussion here which deal with the fallen wife do not tamper with this same supposed ideal. Rather, they depict the shady converse side of that ideal; they never question the supposed intrinsic reality of “true” motherhood or sublime wifely fidelity, but present a distorted mirror-image of this reality. That two of the most sacred Victorian icons, the eternal mother and the “doll-wife,” could have shady, sinister sides was a subject of great interest, not only to writers of sensation fiction, but to the medical and social science communities as well. Just as with the depiction of the erotomaniac, woman’s intrinsic predisposition to display insanely aberrant behaviour was seen as being biologically determined. It might lay dormant for extended periods but, if uncontrolled, it could wreak havoc in domestic life. The all-important role of motherhood may have been considered sacred, but it was also thought to be potentially catastrophic.

Authorities agreed that woman’s instincts were for motherhood; E. J. Tilt wrote that a child was:

A poor weak thing, requiring all a mother’s loving care to retain possession of a life which, for many months, will be chiefly spent in eating, sleeping, or crying. The utter helplessness of man in his infant state leads us to admire the strong instincts by which his life has been protected; instincts common, indeed, to all animals, but strengthened in man by the voice of reason suggesting to the mother, that the tender bud of thought and feeling she nestles in her bosom may in a few years repay her for all her toils and anguish...it is this, joined to religious feeling, which tends to the preservation of the human race. 29

Tilt notes here that it is reason as well as instinct which imbues the mother with her particular qualities, but as noted above, female reason was also suspect since it was thought to be
prone to easy displacement. There was, therefore, an intrinsic conflict in the idea of the presumed womanly instinct for motherhood. Jill Matus writes that there were

Problems that exposed ideological contradictions in the construction of motherhood. On the one hand, 'mother' meant instinctive care, nurturing, responsibility and self-sacrifice: on the other the mother's 'parturition' and 'confinement' became associated with precarious mental health, derangement, emotional perversity, and murderous destructiveness.30

Tilt also presumes a "religious feeling," implying that motherhood was upheld by Christian virtue; to deny both motherly and religious feelings was sinful. Until mid-century many alienists believed, like Charlotte Brontë, that insanity was a direct result of a sinful life, and this belief persisted in the popular imagination. In the context of the nineteenth-century ideal of family life, an erring wife would inevitably succumb to madness as the result of her sin. If woman attempted to defy her instincts, or give in to conflicting emotions, the consequences were dire both for herself and for society; rebellion was futile because it was assumed to be against God and nature. Maudsley wrote: "they cannot choose but to be women; cannot rebel successfully against the tyranny of their organization".31

However, that same "organization" could also harbour the seeds of madness. While there was the belief that sin led to certain types of female madness, there was also a concurrent belief that madness led to the sin. Whether it be cause or effect, madness provided a comforting explanation of aberrant behaviour; it also made exciting drama. The insanely aberrant behaviour of the sensation heroines in East Lynne and Lady Audley's Secret was the secret of their theatrical success.

East Lynne was one of the most famous, and most frequently performed melodramas of the nineteenth century; it also played well into the twentieth century, both on stage and in film. There were many versions of the play, based on Wood's best-selling novel, notably John Oxenford's of 1866, and T. A. Palmer's of 1874. East Lynne is a melodrama of motherhood (it could be described as the melodrama of motherhood); it is steeped in pathos, and concentrates on the divided mind of the main character, Lady Isabel Carlyle. The play was generally well-received, although the Athenaeum found that, "We cannot say that the subject has any special qualities for the modern stage." 32 Notwithstanding such criticism, the play had a mass appeal. Avonia Jones, who played Lady Isabel in Oxenford's version was felt to achieve a tragic intensity in the role.1 As with

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1 The ERA (Feb 28 1866) noted,"The Surrey is also nightly thronged, Miss Avonia Jones
Potter’s *Trilby*, part of the attraction of the play came from the representation of characters who were already familiar. The *Illustrated London News* noted, “The story of East Lynne is so well-known to our readers that it would be impertinent to repeat it.”

Lady Isabel is a seemingly-perfect “doll-wife,” rescued from poverty by her husband, Archibald Carlyle, and brought to live at his comfortable home, East Lynne. Palmer’s version of the play uses a prologue to establish quickly the interconnection of the Isabel/Carlyle/Levison plot with the Richard Hare/Barbara Hare/Levison sub-plot. Isabel is immediately identified as an object of pity; her uncle, Lord Mount Severn, describes her as “that poor girl,” whose aunt is jealous of “the poor girl’s youth and beauty.” Isabel is depicted initially as suffering from the traditional love-melancholy of the melodramatic heroine. When Levison leaves she complains, “When he leaves me, it seems as though the sunshine had faded from my life.” What is shown to happen to Lady Isabel is an extension and disruption of the Ophelia-type; she remains obsessed with Levison throughout her marriage to Carlyle. The pitiful love-melancholic is shown to have a subversive and destructive side. She replies to Carlyle’s proposal of marriage with a solemn acknowledgement of the seriousness and sanctity of marriage, but in her aside she is shown to be suffering from a conflict of emotions. She says:

> You are more than deserving of the truest love which the best of women could bestow, but I—*(She rises and goes to window. Looking off through window). (Aside).*

> His wife and I fear that I love, or almost love another, ah! If he would ask me to be his wife, or that I had never seen him. *(Abstracted)* (356)

Lady Isabel is portrayed as someone who is not in control of her own actions; she has the potential to be the perfect wife for Carlyle, as witnessed by her solemn statements on marriage, but her weak nature leads to her desperate acts. Her helplessness is one of her main attractions for Carlyle, and for the audience; but this same helplessness, shown in her childlike dependence on him, is easily manipulated by Levison, who distorts the relationship between Carlyle and Barbara Hare to make Isabel jealous. Up to this point Isabel plays the ideal wife, and she denounces Levison’s insinuations about her husband’s supposed infidelity in the haughty melodramatic style of an outraged heroine:

> having created a decided sensation by her impressive acting in East Lynne,” and, although the *Athenaeum* may have found the play a trifle old-fashioned, it admired Avonia Jones’ performance, noting that “In the more pathetic portions she rose to some tragic intensity.” (*Athenaeum*, February 10, 1866).
What right dare you impugn Mr. Carlyle’s proceedings, if you have not forgotten your duty as a gentleman, you would scorn to play the part of a spy and informer, or even attempt to raise doubts in the mind of a wife who loves and honours the husband to whom she owes so much. (Exit) (363)

Despite her protestations, Lady Isabel is madly jealous of Barbara Hare, and Levison works on her irrationality. She is easily persuaded to leave her husband, as the play emphasizes the mental confusion she experiences. She speaks of “wild, strange, feverish dreams,” (365) and “sinful throbings of my heart.” (367) Sin and mental anguish are indistinguishable in this erring melodramatic heroine; never wholly bad, but seriously flawed, she submits to “sin and shame” because she is weak-minded. Each act of the play ends with Isabel sinking further and further into despair as she is alienated from respectable life. The play rapidly catalogues her social and moral decline. The prologue has her indecisive about her marriage; act one has her running away from her home, leaving her children crying for her; act two leaves her discarded by Levison, as she declaims, “Lost, degraded, friendless, abandoned, and alone!” (381) Act three ends with her death from what is presumed to be sin and remorse. Throughout the play, as she succumbs to Levison’s lies, Lady Isabel declares that she is losing her mind. After Levison has explained, to the audience, that he will work on her “desire for revenge, next to love a woman’s pet passion.” (370) Lady Isabel becomes more and more passionately angry and irrational. She declares, “I am almost mad,” and seals her fate by abandoning her husband and children.

Such overwrought romantic sensibility, which had made Ophelia and her imitators so appealing, was potentially destructive. The critic for The Era acknowledges the essential weakness in Lady Isabel’s character, and its attraction for the audience, when he writes that she has “oversensitive feelings,” and “works herself up to a pitch of frenzied jealousy which cannot be controlled...” (35) Lady Isabel is conscious of her sin, but is unable to resist temptation because of her injured pride. But the letter that she leaves for Carlyle shows that, even at this point, she cannot abandon entirely the sacred instincts of motherhood. She reads the letter as she writes, emphasizing her emotional turmoil to the audience:

When years have passed and my -- my -- children ask where is their mother and why she left her home, then tell them that you, their father, goaded her to the rash act. Tell them that you deceived, outraged her feelings and her pride, until driven to the verge of madness, she -- she - quitted them for ever...may heaven forgive me. (373)

Once she has abandoned her home and children, Lady Isabel’s torment increases; this torment is defined, primarily, as being the result of the loss of her children. Her motherly instincts,
which are reinstated when Levison abandons her, take precedence over everything else. From this point in the play, Lady Isabel is an icon of grieving motherhood. This is what makes her such a powerfully sympathetic figure, over which audiences wept. Despite her fall from grace, the supposed eternal longing of a mother for her children redeems her in the eyes of the audience. The emphasis is on the indissoluble bond that she has with her children. Act II ends with her exclaiming, "Never to hear their infant tongues murmur the holy name of 'mother!'" (381) As the curtain falls to the strains of Home Sweet Home, the audience is left with a picture of abject pity, a mother who has alienated herself forever from the assumed true aim of her life. The letter she writes to her uncle, after she is injured in a railway accident, dwells on her mental suffering, "I can write no more, my bodily pain is so great, but no greater than my mental agony and remorse..." (382). The dramatic emphasis is on the impossibility of even the most erring woman to deny her maternal instincts.

Carlyle's new wife, Barbara Hare, while not unkind to Isabel's children, is shown to be a pale imitation of the "true mother." Lady Isabel's reappearance at East Lynne, in the guise of the governess Madame Vine, stresses the difference between the two women. The "call of blood" (a melodramatic device which was firmly upheld throughout the century) is the source of Lady Isabel's despair. She is deprived of the ability to acknowledge her motherhood, and this, far more than the physical scars which she has suffered, leads to her death. Furthermore, the physical scars are more than a plot device to allow her to return unrecognized to her former home. They are the extraneous signs of both a damaged psyche and a tarnished soul. Lady Isabel is no longer beautiful after she returns from the accident; she appears to age prematurely as the result of her "sin." Her physical appearance is no longer important to her; the implied moral being that the attempt to abandon her duty to her husband, and more especially to her children, can only result in inevitable self-destruction. She has gone against nature, and must suffer the consequences. The play shows her as an outsider in her old home, forever excluded from the domestic sphere. She has been brought to realize that this is the only proper place for her; Barbara Hare has been able to usurp her place because she has more "proper" feminine attributes. Isabel's denial of this implied basic truth in the past is the cause of her misery; she says, "Laugh on Barbara Hare, laugh on; you've won him, I have sealed the forfeit of his esteem and love by my own mad act." (385)

Although the "call of blood" is a strong force in Lady Isabel's response to her children, it is absent in their response to her. It emphasizes the point that she has severed the natural ties that would normally bind them to her; they have no reciprocal instinctive attachment to her. This is what gives such added pathos to the much-misquoted line from the play, "Oh, Willie, my child
dead, dead, dead! and he never knew me, never called me mother!” (390). Lady Isabel’s death comes swiftly after that of her son. Without the status of motherhood she cannot survive and, once her disguise has been discovered, she can no longer remain as governess to her other children. She gives the traditional reason for her behaviour to her husband, madness and sin, which have made their mark on both her body and her mind:

I was mad! I must have been. I have not known one moment’s peace since I became a guilty creature, in the sin that wrecked me--see Archibald! see what it has done for me! (Tossing up her grey hair and holding out her attenuated wrists.) (395)

The pitiful picture of distraction that was Ophelia’s hallmark, the loosened hair, is used here to show that age and decay lie behind a "criminal" and misdirected erotic passion.

Lady Isabel is, of course, not always insane; no one in the audience would have thought she was; but the only explanation that could be given for a woman who abandoned her children was a temporary type of madness, since there seemed to be no other feasible answer. The defence of “partial insanity” was often used in criminal proceedings where signs of obvious lunacy were absent, but where the defendant claimed a temporary loss of reason or distraction. Abandoning her children is not simply a sin against God, but a sin against society; the mother’s duty was to protect her children, and Lady Isabel’s behaviour lays them open to being tainted by association. Her illegitimate child is killed in the accident, as if to imply that her sin has condemned it. At the end of the play she begs her husband not to “let their mother’s sin be visited” on her remaining children (396). In the novel there is even more emphasis given to this, especially to the effect it will have on her daughter. It was firmly believed that character traits, and certain diseases, would be inherited from the mother. Madness was especially feared as an inherited trait, and it was in the middle of the nineteenth-century that Darwin’s theories began to have an effect on the concept of insanity, and that the eugenics movement began to explore the ideas of social Darwinism. Elaine Showalter writes, "Following Darwin’s theories of inheritance, evolution, and degeneration, an emerging psychiatric Darwinism viewed insanity as the product of organic defect, poor heredity, and an evil environment."36 In East Lynne, there is a strong suggestion that Lady Isabel herself comes from tainted stock; her father was an aristocratic wastrel, who leaves her penniless and ill-equipped to deal with the world. Carlyle is therefore shown to bring to his healthy and prosperous middle-class home, a doll-like wife whose aristocratic beauty hides a degenerate pedigree. Mrs Sarah Ellis warns against such an incursion in Mothers of England when, speaking of the seriousness required for motherhood, she challenges the choice of wives such as Isabel Carlyle. She writes:

From the duties of a mother there is then no escape; and hence it follows, that if
ever, in the whole course of woman’s life, she is called upon to think seriously, it is when she first becomes a parent. I cannot but suppose, however, that English mothers will most of them have learned to think seriously long before this period, except indeed, in those lamentable cases, where the husband has chosen a companion for life, simply from the fancy of a moment...  

The displacement of Lady Isabel by the far more suitable, and middle-class, Barbara Hare suggests the restoration of equilibrium with a presumed purer stock. Just as the police reports thrilled their readers with the scandalous behaviour of their social betters, and the social Darwinists urged the same attention to breeding humans as was given to lesser species, so East Lynne both warns against and confirms, the stereotype of the highly-strung, mentally unstable, aristocratic wife who wrecks havoc in the respectable middle-class home of her husband by introducing moral madness into it.

**Heredity and Insanity: Lady Audley’s Secret.**

Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* was an immediate success when it was finally published in serialized form in *The Sixpenny Magazine* in 1862. The publication of Braddon’s story started in 1861 in Robin Goodfellow, but when that magazine went out of business Braddon abandoned the tale until she was encouraged to continue it by readers who were eager to know its conclusion. In the same year as the serialization *Lady Audley’s Secret* was published in the form of a three volume novel; it was also a notorious success. Within a year there were four theatrical productions of plays based on Braddon’s novel; they were performed at the Queen’s theatre in February 1863, the St. James’s in March 1863, the Grecian in May 1863, and the Royal Victoria, also in May 1863. The play continued to hold the stage throughout the next twenty years, in various adaptations, and survived even longer in revivals.

C.H. Hazlewood’s version, which was first performed at the Royal Victoria in 1863, is a two-act melodrama which greatly simplifies the novel. In his version Hazlewood concentrates specifically on presenting Lady Audley as a “beautiful fiend,” which comes from Braddon’s description of her portrait. Although Lady Audley has many secrets, (her bigamous marriage, her various aliases and her seemingly successful attempted murder of her first husband) her main secret is that she carries an inherited trait of madness. Her charm and beauty allow her to delude her husband, and everyone else around her, into thinking that she is just as she presents herself. Only Robert Audley suspects her, and even he is not immune to her charm.
As Braddon allows the various mysteries to unfold slowly the novel plays with the idea of the importance, and easy acceptance, of appearances and of the insidious danger of a woman who can act a part so well that her family/audience are in her thrall. Lady Audley’s success in her part is due to her meeting the apparent needs of those around her. She is charming, attractive and adjusts brilliantly to the role of the wife of a rich man. Until Robert Audley becomes suspicious of her Lady Audley is secure; she has relaxed into her role and her husband is happy with her. Lady Audley’s duplicity is a purely domestic arrangement which, in the privacy of Audley Court should, she thinks, never be detected. Such privacy is described in the first paragraph of chapter one. Braddon writes almost as a challenge to her readers to dare to invade Lady Audley’s world which is fortress-like in its isolation:

It lay low down in a hollow, rich with fine old timber and luxuriant pastures; and you came upon it through an avenue of limes, bordered on either side by meadows, over the high hedges of which the cattle looked inquisitively at you as you passed, wondering, perhaps, what you wanted; for there was no thoroughfare, and unless you were going to the Court you had no business there at all.39

The novel’s opening lines invite, as well as challenge, Braddon’s readers to enter this secret, indeed sacred domestic space. As Robert Audley (who has no purpose in life before he sets out to unmask Lady Audley) hunts down her secrets there is a gradual unpeeling of intricate layers of identities and the reader is invited to share in Lady Audley’s sense of invasion. This is most apparent when Robert and George Talboys go secretly to Lady Audley’s private rooms where she keeps her unfinished portrait. By presenting Robert as a voyeur Braddon undermines his enquiry; it is as if he “had no business there” himself.

However, Hazlewood’s play presents Lady Audley as someone who is very obviously playing a part; the audience is presented with a character who is transparently bad to them, if not immediately to all the other characters in the play. She is too charming to be true, and the comments of Phoebe and Alicia quickly establish this. When Lady Audley protests that she would not know what to do if her husband died, Phoebe mutters, “Do? Why bid adieu to a country life, I warrant.”40 Alicia, who is presented as a sensible, honest girl in stark contrast to her new stepmother, whom she mistrusts, says that she is “a perfect wax doll, as regards complexion; fair as the day when in good temper, but black as night if she can’t rule anybody as she likes” (243-4). Lady Audley is shown to be a charlatan from the start in Hazlewood’s melodrama, and everyone is subject to her selfish schemes. She is delineated with no attempt to explain her character until her declaration of madness at the end of the play, in keeping with the simple separation of absolute
badness and absolute goodness which melodrama presents. There are numerous alterations to the plot of the novel in order to heighten the effects of Lady Audley’s mad and devious behaviour on stage. Her new husband is represented as older and more foolish than he is the novel, an easy dupe to the conventional scheming siren. George Talboys, her first husband, is presented more sympathetically than he is in the novel; he does not desert her and her child, of whom there is no mention in the play. Far from deserting his wife, he is given the attributes of an Empire builder. He explains to Robert Audley: "A relation procured me an appointment abroad -- I left my wife in England and sailed to perform the duties of my office. When I possessed the means to send for her, I wrote to my wife -- the letter was unanswered...." (242).

Talboys is portrayed as a dutiful husband, whose absence was temporary, to give added weight to his wife’s purposeful schemes to escape from him to a life of luxury. Lady Audley is shown to have deliberately chosen her criminal career, rather than having been forced into it by circumstance; she is unrelievedly calculating and ruthless. She is also very clever at disguising her true feelings. The dramatist adopts the theory that was prevalent amongst alienists concerning the ability to be duplicitous as a characteristic of females. Thomas Laycock, in A Treatise on the Nervous Diseases of Women (1840), wrote, “One of the most remarkable of the faculties developed... and peculiar to the females of the higher classes of animals is their artfulness.” In her asides, Lady Audley expresses her duplicity, and when alone, she displays her “true” nature:

I live now for ambition and interest, to mould the world and its votaries to my own end. Once I was fool enough to wed for love. Now I have married for wealth. What a change from the wife of George Talboys to the wife of Sir Michael Audley! My fool of a first husband thinks me dead. Oh excellent scheme, oh cunning device, how well you have served me (245)

The play concentrates on Lady Audley’s crimes, and her conviction in her strength to defeat anyone who stands in her way. She says to George Talboys, “I am a resolute woman--and where I cannot remove an obstacle I will crush it.” (247) Such resolution in this context is enough to display to the audience that she is mad. As Elaine Showalter notes, “mental breakdown... would come when women defied their “nature,” attempted to compete with men instead of serving them, or sought alternatives or even additions to their maternal functions." Once it appeared mental disorder was thought to be passed on to the next generation of future mothers. But Hazlewood’s Lady Audley is more than competitive, and there is no indication that she has a child in the play; she is portrayed as a fiend whose rebellion puts her not just beyond the pale of society, but of humanity. She is shown as having none of the traditionally “good” womanly traits only the bad,
uncontrolled instincts which were presumed to be characteristic of moral madness. In this, Hazlewood’s Lady Audley bears a similarity to Brougham’s Maniac Wife in Jane Eyre. J. Mc Grigor Allan, in 1869, describes this type of woman as a monster, recalling the eighteenth-century paradigm of madness “Compare the true woman... with the little creature...who rebels against the very instincts of Nature...a monster more horrible than that created by Frankenstein.” Hazlewood dehumanises Lady Audley and presents a traditional picture of evil; she is almost like a medieval Vice figure in this play, as she explains how bad she is going to be, and how much pleasure she gets from her crimes. Lady Audley is described as “exulting” after she thinks she has murdered Talboys, and Act One ends with her laughing manically, as she repeats, “I am free! I am free!”(248).

Lady Audley is beset by a guilty fear of discovery, and although she struggles against it, she cannot escape from it. Her crime has been witnessed; as she revels in her success, and vows that she will overcome her conscience by sheer power of will, her nemesis arrives in the form of Luke. The horror of her crime, the madness that is demonstrated by her thinking she can elude detection, and the stage-conventional inevitability that evil will out, are shown in the immediate appearance of Luke, just as she declares her invincibility. Lady Audley speaks aloud:

> By day I think of it, and at night I can fancy he is before me in the solitude of my chamber, when sleep should be sealing my eyelids and rest bring me repose -- repose, did I say. I know it not, but I will, these abject fears and whisperings of conscience shall be hushed. I am Lady Audley, powerful, rich, and unsuspected, with not one living witness to rise up against me.

> Enter Luke Marks, flushed with drink.(251)

From this point onwards, Lady Audley’s behaviour becomes more erratic and desperate, and the mask which she so consciously wears begins to slip. She states, “Let me again resume the mask, which not only imposes on him, but on all the world.” (252) Robert Audley tells her, however, that she assumes “a levity which is forced and unnatural in my eyes.” (254) When he accuses her of bigamy and possible murder, Lady Audley plays what she thinks is her trump card. She tells Robert that exposing her will only bring disgrace on his own family. When he refuses to give in to her blackmail and leaves, she once again declares aloud her implacable will-power, “Shall I yield to his menaces, and leave rank, wealth, and position because he merely suspects me? No; my motto has hitherto been death or victory; and to that end I am fixed.”(255) She uses her sexual attraction as a weapon, persuading her husband to send Robert away by accusing him of making improper sexual advances to her. As Lady Audley seeks to cover up her crime by another
attempted murder, she becomes more reckless and more determined. She is portrayed as an instrument of destructive madness, whose sole aim seems to be to annihilate anyone who stands in her way. She threatens Robert with implacable vehemence “I have wealth, boundless wealth, and I will use it to crush you -- to crush you, Robert Audley.”(265) Almost immediately after this defiant speech there is news of Sir Michael’s death, and Luke and George Talboys are shown to be alive. As she stands accused by Talboys and Robert, Lady Audley collapses into undisguised madness. This takes the form of her reliving the fantasy that she has acted out in her life. She is described as speaking “vacantly” as she holds an imaginary conversation with Sir Michael, in which she persists in attempting to deceive him and take him away from his family. Declared mad by Robert, to the horror of everyone around them (the stage direction indicates that everyone repeats the word “mad” and retreats from her), she ends the play with a final display of madness, which, however, is strangely lucid:

Aye, aye! (Laughs wildly) Mad, mad, that is the word. I feel it here -- here! (Places her hands on her temples) Do not touch me -- do not come near me -- let me claim your silence -- your pity -- and let the grave, the cold grave, close over Lady Audley and her Secret. (266)

The last stage direction indicates that she falls and dies, accompanied by music and “a tableau of sympathy.”(266) George Talboys is directed to kneel over her in an attitude of uxorious concern and pity. Impropriety has been avoided by Sir Michael’s death (the two husbands are never shown on stage together), while order is restored by Lady Audley’s death, and the audience can indulge itself in the tragedy of self-destructive madness and beauty, after having enjoyed its wickedly thrilling exposition. The reviewer in The Era (July 8th 1887) described the effect that Bella Pateman’s performance as Lady Audley had on the audience, noting especially “the terrible scene in which reason totters from its throne,” and the actress’s convincing display of “a fierceness which was terrible in its reality.” He goes on to say that, “The audience watched her and listened to her with breathless interest; the wand of the enchantress was over them....”

W.E. Suter’s version of Lady Audley’s Secret (1863) presents the main protagonist in a less fiendish way than Hazlewood. In his play there is more ambiguity surrounding her character, and in this Suter relies more closely on the novel. Lady Audley’s reasons for her bigamous second marriage are presented as something to which she was driven. Suter achieves this by juxtaposing other characters’ opinions on the contractual status of marriage and the significance of money in such a contract. The notion of romantic love is of secondary importance to the real business of marriage in this play; romance is presented as an unrealistic ideal that can have disastrous
consequences. When Talboys tells Robert Audley of the circumstances which led to his separation from his wife the audience, through Robert’s reaction, are invited to sympathize with him and to condemn Helen for her apparent mercenary attitude to her marriage. He describes the argument they had:

I could obtain nothing, and when tired out and down-hearted, I returned to my wife, and told her that I had failed in everything, she burst into a storm of sobs and lamentations, telling me that I ought not to have married her if I could give her nothing but poverty and misery, and that I had done her a cruel wrong in making her my wife...I wrote a few brief lines to my wife which told her that I never had loved her better than now when I seemed to desert her; that I was going far from her to try my fortune, and that if I succeeded I should come back to bring her plenty and happiness, but that if I failed I should never look upon her face again. I did not leave her to hopeless poverty, for she had still her jewels...while I -- but, no matter...44

Robert concludes in an aside that Helen cannot have been a very devoted wife; he adds that since he is unmarried he is unfit to comment, then asserts that he will put off the “evil time” of his own marriage for as long as he can (10). When he finally proposes to Alicia, who is depicted as a silly, sentimental girl plainly jealous of her new step-mother, it is in a distinctly unsentimental manner. He tells her, “...of course, if you wish it, I will marry you...Some day: and you will have to wait; I can’t tell how long, for just now I have something far more important to attend to” (34). Love is therefore viewed somewhat cynically by Robert who nonetheless expects it in both a prospective wife of his own and in George Talboy’s. However, Lady Audley argues for a different dimension in marriage; for her it is a matter of survival. When she is introduced to the audience she states in an aside, “No more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations -- every trace of the old life melted away, every clue to identity buried and forgotten” (13). She explains a little later to Talboys the reasons for her bigamy, and asks him to behave calmly. Throughout the exchange it is George who is emotional and Lady Audley who appears the more rational:

TALBOYS. Calmly! are you not my wife?
LADY A. I was! the wife whom you deserted -- abandoned!
TALBOYS. No, ’tis false! You know it, I but fled from you in the hope I might return and make you wealthy.
LADY A. Listen to me. After your departure, I vainly sought employment -- a wife whom her husband had deserted
could not be innocent of all fault -- and no one would receive me as the instructress of their children. I was penniless -- helpless -- hopeless; before me was starvation or a repulsive life of infamy! I shrunk from both and resolved to live anew, and for myself alone...(16).

Lady Audley rejects the idea of romantic attachment in favour of a secure and comfortable life. She offers a bribe to Talboys and stabs him when he refuses to accept her terms. Although she is a subtler character in Suter’s version of the story than in Hazlewood’s, the source of her criminality is still explained as madness. However it is not the vicious mania of Hazlewood’s Lady Audley but an attempt at a more realistic depiction of moral madness. Prichard noted that a person who exhibited signs of moral madness was quite capable of shrewdness, and might appear rational, but that their actions showed that they were perverted and depraved. It is the cold calculation that Lady Audley displays which condemns her to the audience and her wilful, and therefore unwomanly, fierce self-assertion. She admits to being selfish but throws it out as a challenge to the society in which she lives as she tells Sir Michael,

I should be sorry for you if I could, for you have been very good to me; but I can’t, I can’t. I can feel nothing but my own misery. I have ever been selfish, now more selfish than ever in my misery. Happy, prosperous people may feel for others -- I laugh at other people’s sufferings, they seem so small compared to my own (37).

Sympathy and compassion are simply luxuries that Lady Audley cannot afford within the profit and loss model of the marriage market.

The importance of money is emphasized by the other characters in the play. The third scene of Act One is taken up by the comic duo of servants, Bibbles and Bubbles, who are rivals for Phoebe, Lady Audley’s maid. Her main attraction is that she is well paid by her employer and is likely to bring some money to her husband. Both suitors dwell on her “liberal salary and handsome presents” (18). Ultimately Phoebe marries Luke, whose sole concern is the money she will bring him through Lady Audley’s patronage, more especially since he plans to blackmail her over George Talboys’s apparent murder. Bubbles decides to transfer his affections to the housekeeper Martin, when she tells him she has substantial savings. Sir Michael tells Lady Audley that “My marriage with Alicia’s mother was but a dull, jog-trot bargain, made to keep an estate in the family...”(13)

Lady Audley’s attitude to marriage as business is therefore in keeping with society, but that same society is shown to be hypocritical; that she has to commit bigamy in order to achieve her ends is a crime, but she is more guilty in the eyes of Robert and George because she has abandoned her first
husband and striven to find a comfortable life than because she has deceived Sir Michael. Talboys says that he “will never forgive [her] for the lie that has broken my heart” (16) and Robert accuses Lady Audley of the lie “that struck my poor friend to the heart.”(22) Sentiment is what they find lacking in Lady Audley but, as the play shows, sentiment provides little return in the world they inhabit. That world is one where profit and loss are constantly being assessed and calculated. When Phoebe is afraid that the fire at the inn has killed Luke, Lady Audley challenges her reaction with “Fool! idiot! coward! is your husband such a precious bargain that you should be lamenting and groaning for him?”(31) The focus on property and on spouses as property in Suter’s play echoes the Braddon original in which Lady Audley is shown to be both a consummate consumer and a valuable commodity; furthermore her madness is also assessed and valued when Robert Audley calls in the “mad doctor” who assumes that the family want her committed “to save the escandrel of a Chancery suit.”

Suter does not emphasize the “beautiful fiend” of Hazlewood’s version; his Lady Audley is a strong, controlled character. Although agitated by her fear of discovery she manages to maintain control until the denouement of the play. When she realizes that she can maintain the pretence of her character no longer she challenges Robert’s victory over her by telling him that he has only succeeded in defeating a madwoman. With this statement she essentially devalues herself, implying that Robert’s efforts have been wasted; she also saves herself from ultimate guilt by relying on an insanity plea and presents a frightening aspect to Robert:

LADY A. ...You have conquered a madwoman.

ROBERT. A madwoman?

LADY A. Yes! when you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. When you say I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie -- I killed him because I am mad! because when George Talboys goaded me, as you have goaded me, and reproached me, and threatened me, my mind never properly balanced, utterly lost its balance, and I was mad! ...Now bring Sir Michael...let him know too that she is mad! that she is mad! (laughs wildly, tossing up her arms, and then dashing herself to the ground. Robert is standing petrified.—Music) (33).

In the last scene of the play Robert challenges Lady Audley’s declaration of madness. Madness itself is shown to be a commodity which has its uses in the profit and loss model of marriage which both Lady Audley and Robert rely on; since it is useful to the family to declare her mad Robert will agree to it, but he puts a price on it for her; she must be locked away:

ROBERT. My uncle may believe that you are insane -- I do not deem you mad, but
dangerous; yet, for all our sakes, madness shall be supposed the excuse for your crimes, and the rest of your life shall pass in the mad woman’s proper home (37).

The question that Robert poses, that is whether Lady Audley is mad or bad, is answered for him by her final act. Rather than submit to incarceration in an asylum Lady Audley takes poison and dies. This final self-assertion demonstrates the extent of her moral madness; she resists the “cure” of moral management because it is simply a form of imprisonment as Robert Audley admits. However, with her dying speech she asserts that they will not publicize her crimes, “You will not give my memory to infamy? No, you will not dare! -- for your own sakes you will not dare! and buried in the grave with her will be ‘Lady Audley’s Secret’--ah!” (38). The play ends with a tableau of grief similar to that used by Hazlewood; the stage direction indicates:

(She half-raises herself; presses both hands to her heart, and falls back dead; SIR MICHAEL appears, door R., and gazes on her with grief and terror; TALBOYS kneels beside her, covering his face with his hands; ROBERT raises his hands towards heaven. Music. Curtain). (38)

Suter’s tableau also emphasizes the final invasion into Lady Audley’s secret as the men who have influenced her life and death are grouped around her proprietarily. Robert’s hand to heaven indicates that he has been following the dictates of God in her unmasking. The last scene shows the audience that none but a madwoman would attempt to fight against such natural and religious boundaries, and that if she did death was inevitable. However, Lady Audley’s implacable will controls the final scene of the play and thus her madness is also questioned. The ambiguity concerning her mental state, as shown in this play, reflects the inconsistency of medico-psychological causal theories which were extant in the nineteenth century.

That the stage versions of Lady Audley’s Secret were adaptations by male authors leads to the question of a possibility of gender bias in the depiction of the sensationally mad, bad heroine. Gilbert and Gubar write: "The madwoman in literature by women is not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine. Rather, she is usually in some sense the author’s double, an image of her own anxiety and rage.”46 Mrs. Braddon was eager to distance herself psychologically from her heroine. She wrote to Bulwer Lytton,

Of all horrors sensuality is that from which I shrink with the most utter abhorrence--and to you, Lord Lytton, as a phrenologist, I may venture to say-without fear of provoking ridicule-that all those who have examined my head phrenologically know that this sin is one utterly foreign to my organization, that indeed, the great weakness of my brain is the want of that animal power-which, as I am told, gives force and
activity to the higher organs. 47

Mrs. Braddon’s need to disassociate herself from the taint of her fictional character shows that the subject of mad female agency was a sensitive one. Mrs. Braddon is obviously anxious that no connection be made between herself and Lady Audley and yet, subtextually, her characterization is sympathetic.

In her discussion of the sensation novel Cvetkovich writes: "The genre creates sensationalism by locating crime where one would least expect it -- not only in the home but in the actions of a woman -- and in the process violates the separation of the private and public spheres crucial to Victorian culture." 48 However, both popular fictions and medical discourse lent power to the assumption that home is exactly where one would find criminal madness. A reading of nineteenth-century psychiatric texts points to the fact that given woman’s labile and erratic nature, and her predisposition to insanity, the home was not necessarily so safe as it should be. Woman’s tendency to insanity, especially during her reproductive years was both a popular belief, and one which held sway amongst the medical community throughout this period. Tilt stated, “Insanity is most frequent in women from twenty to forty, or during the full activity of the reproductive system”(395).

The novels which present mad or aberrant heroines can be read as cautionary tales as much as texts of subversion. The stage versions emphasize the former by their simplification of the source texts. They concentrate on the sensational aspects of insanity, without ever questioning the causes. They assume, in common with a popular opinion, which they tacitly reinforce, that madness was the heritage of many women after childbirth, as did the medical community. John Conolly in his Physiognomy of Insanity (1856) discusses a case which bears a strong resemblance to that of Braddon’s heroine; Conolly’s patient does not respond in the same violent way as does Lady Audley, but the conviction that madness could emerge so suddenly was deeply-held. Its more violent aspects made good melodramatic theatre, and held the audience with its display of an unquestioned supposed truth.

In Braddon’s novel, Lady Audley declares that her madness is an inherited trait from her mother, which she describes as “the hidden taint that I had sucked in with my mother’s milk.” 49 There is also a strong suggestion in Braddon’s text that Lady Audley only began to display signs of madness after the birth of her child. Puerperal psychosis, while not yet named, was a subject of deep anxiety and discussion at this period. Thomas Boyle notes: Like many women who turned up in police reports of court proceedings accused of madness and on their way to asylums, Lady Audley’s first awareness of her “insanity” came with the “milk-fever” which accompanied her
pregnancy.\textsuperscript{50}

It was also in mid-century that wet-nursing began to be considered a dangerous practice, since it was thought that undesirable character traits, as well as diseases, could be transmitted through the milk. Marina Warner writes that an increasingly sociological importance was attached to the biology of the female body throughout the nineteenth century, as certain functions became isolated and interpreted. For example, the microscope eventually revealed the importance and function of the ovum in human generation, giving the chief responsibility for successful procreation to the mother.\textsuperscript{51} For the sake of the "race" then, it was considered vitally important that women should be mentally and physically healthy. The sense of the "race" itself became more urgent with the application of Darwinian principles to the concept of social evolution and with the expansion of the Empire. George Talboys, it should be remembered, was absent because he had joined the ranks of imperial expansion; it is implied that he is furthering the advance of his "race" in contrast to his wife who contributes nothing, but is shown to have a rapacious appetite for the products of such expansion. Although insanity had traditionally been thought to be hereditary, psychiatric and social Darwinism gave weight to the supposition. Criminality was also thought to be a hereditary trait. Crime and madness were the signs of evolutionary degeneracy. It was vital, therefore, to be certain of the "breeding" of one's mate. Madness in mothers was not therefore, simply a thrilling dramatic device, it was the subject of serious discussion which concentrated on the role of the mother to ensure a healthy nation, and by extension, a vigorous empire. Andrew Wynter, M.D. wrote:

\begin{quote}
It is agreed by all alienist physicians, that girls are far more likely to inherit insanity from their mothers than from the other parent, and that the same rule obtains as regards the sons. The tendency of the mother to transmit her mental disease is, however, in all cases stronger than the father's.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Wynter goes on to say that, although there may be no direct sign of mental disease, "all the children, more or less, by the virtue of their inheritance, have passed into the Borderland of insanity" (43-44). Latent lunacy was a very real fear. Both Lady Isabel Carlyle and Lady Audley, are dramatic representations of this fear; by reinforcing a social and psychiatric stereotype these plays contributed to the discourse on moral madness. They also show an anti-Romantic ethos; the rage of the heroines to be self-determining while hiding within society is deemed a social evil and the collective social good is shown to be threatened by them. Lady Audley is a heroine of the Byronic type but her fierce individualism is diminished because of her gender. The domestic environment which, as a woman, she should serve is reduced to a setting for her greed and self-aggrandizement.

In 1861 John Stuart Mill wrote:
All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have.\footnote{53}

The sensation novels of the 1860s and the dramatized versions which they inspired question the same moralities and affections to which Mill refers. The popular stage thus addressed the contemporary problem of female agency and concluded, as did the alienists, that the inevitable outcome of such self-assertion was madness and death. The plays would seem to reject Mill’s notion that women did not naturally align themselves with the “current sentimentalities.” However, in addressing the subject of the rebellion of Lady Audley and Isabel Vane, and by finding a wide audience, such plays demonstrate a tacit acceptance of such rebellion, and coincidental with a need to find an explanation for it, they invest their strong emotional appeal in the erring heroines. Mill (whose words would not be published until 1869) also noted that: “It is only a man here and there who has any tolerable knowledge of the character even of the women of his own family.”\footnote{54}

For Mill this was a societal problem which needed reform; for the playwrights and their implied audiences it was a social danger, a source of anxiety, and a source of excitement.

\footnotesize

1. The Female Malady. 29.

2. The Female Malady. 17.


10. "Hamlet! The Ravin’ Prince of Denmark!! or, The Baltic Swell !!! and the Diving Belle!!!!"


15. Tilt. 225.

16. Tilt. 150.

17. Tilt. 225.


20. “Sensation Novelists--Miss Braddon”, *North British Review* 43, September 1865. 204.


26. The Female Malady. 71-72.


35. The ERA. Feb. 11 1866.

36. The Female Malady. 18.


42. *The Female Malady*, 123.


44. W. E. Suter. *Lady Audley’s Secret*. London: Lacy’s Acting Edition, 1863. 9. (All future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.)

45. Braddon. 369.


48. Cvetkovich. 46.

49. Braddon. 386.


54. Mill. 454.
CHAPTER IV

FRACTURED PSYCHES: NEURASTHENIA AND THE NEW WOMAN

In 1909 Shaw wrote, "the old mad heroines, the Ophelias and Lucies of Lammermoor, were rhapsodists with flowers in their hands: the new ones were clinical studies of mental disease."[1] He is referring to some of the characterizations of women which appeared in the drama which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. In an attempt to rise to the challenge posed by Ibsen and the new drama, social realist drama of the 1890s represented the so-called New Woman on stage in ways which would appeal to the audience, combining topicality with drawing-room manners within the framework of the well-made play: the neurasthenic female arrived on stage. Mrs. Patrick Campbell refers to this type of character in her memoirs noting, "We were neurotic, weary ladies in tea gowns when Ibsen gripped us."[2]

In his *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* Pinero created heroines who were in conflict with society and the mores on which that society depended; neither of them survive the conflict and their failure is shown to be a result of divided psyches. Both plays were written at the height of the New Woman debate which engaged both serious writers and the popular press in the 1890s.

The term "New Woman" was first coined by Sarah Grand in her novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). The idea of the New Woman was pursued in radical female journals which endeavoured to promote ideas of women's rights and female suffrage. Certain legislative changes had already opened the door to further female autonomy. The Custody of Infants Bill of 1872 granted women the custody of children up to the age of seven. The Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870, 1882, and 1884 gave women rights over their own property within marriage and established women as separate and independent persons. 1889 saw the inauguration of the Women’s Trade Union League, and in 1893 the Independent Labour party was founded. The campaign for women's rights was associated with the growth in the labour movement, although the latter had aims, which sometimes conflicted with the former. Eleanor Marx (a feminist) for one, gave primacy to the working-class movement over that of female suffrage stating in 1892: “If every demand raised by these women [the equal rights feminists] were granted today, we working women would still be just where we were before. Women
workers would still work infamously long hours, for infamously low wages, under infamously unhealthful conditions.” The labour movement did not question the sexual division of labour whilst the female literary establishment was predominantly bourgeois and rarely socialist.

Amongst feminist writers there was no clear picture of what exactly the New Woman was; the image was often contradictory in regards to her role in society. Once again it was female sexuality and a presumed biological inevitability which informed the discussion. Some writers emphasized sexual purity and motherhood while others advocated free love and opposed marriage completely. Frances Power Cobbe wrote against the latter, seeing in them a dangerous degeneration:

I have striven to warn my hearers against that neglect of social bienseances, that adoption of looser and more “Bohemian” manners, and, worst of all, that fatal laxity of judgement regarding grave moral transgressions, which have appeared of late years among us as the inevitable extravagance of reaction to earlier strictness. These faults and mistakes constitute, I conceive, deadly perils to the whole movement of the advancement of women and with all my strength I would implore every woman who sympathises with that movement to set her face like flint against them. It is our task to make society more pure, more free from vice, either masculine or feminine, than it has ever been before, not to allow its law to become one shadow of a shade less rigid.

Critics of feminism concentrated on the permissive extreme element and associated it with fin-de-siécle decadence, while the feminist press denied any such link and concentrated on the concept of the ideal woman. She might choose independence, but she would also be capable of becoming a suitable wife and mother.

Women’s suffrage was also being given serious thought in Parliament where, in 1892, a bill to grant women the vote was only narrowly defeated in its second reading. Political changes coincided with access to higher education (although not graduation) for women at Oxford (1879) and Cambridge (1881). Middle-class women were seen to be entering into traditionally male areas. The New Woman was depicted as independent, educated, and even professionally qualified. The status of women was therefore undergoing a gradual change while, at the same time, society was facing challenges due to an economic depression and an increasing demand from the labour force for better working conditions.

There was a continuing anxiety about the state of society and about the role of women in
the changes that were taking place. Emile Durkheim’s work on suicide focused on what he described as anomie that is, a feeling of displacement in society brought about by the individual having his “horizon ...broadened beyond what he can endure, or contrariwise contracted unduly....” Durkheim found that anomic suicide was becoming a chronic state and associated it with a basic flaw in the social fabric. Although the neurasthenic was seen as a symptom of a gradual social erosion or degradation, Durkheim noted that the suicide rate was not restricted to the neurasthenic population which he described as “nervous degenerates.” On the contrary, Durkheim noted that there was a useful purpose for the neurasthenic in society, writing:

Both his muscular weakness and his excessive sensitivity, though they disqualify him for action, qualify him for intellectual functions, which themselves demand appropriate organs. Likewise, if too rigid a social environment can only irritate his natural instincts, he has a useful role to play to the extent that society itself is mobile and can persist only through progress; for he is superlatively the instrument of progress. Precisely because he rebels against tradition and the yoke of customs, he is a highly fertile source of innovation.

The popular press and the popular drama did not share Durkheim’s conclusions about the neurasthenic. They presented the image of a neurasthenic male who was weak and who stood as a contrast to the “manly” man, just as the New Woman stood in contrast to the “womanly woman.” She was also often portrayed as neurasthenic and, it was implied, contributed to the atmosphere in which the neurasthenic male dwelt. She was not a pitiful Ophelia, nor was she sensationally mad; she was a nervous degenerate whose influence was pervading society and, more significantly, having a deleterious effect on certain vulnerable males within that society.

The New Woman was seen as an important factor in societal anomie.

The more widely read popular press therefore had a very different image of the New Woman to that of the feminist press. For them she was mannish, unnatural, emasculating, and neurotic. She was unduly interested in sexual matters, although she was depicted as undesirable herself. She was seen as a type of unnatural hybrid who denied her femininity while emulating traditionally male modes of behaviour. She was thought to be particularly influenced by the plays of Ibsen and the Yellow Book; she opposed marriage, eschewed decorum, adopted rational dress and was linked symbolically with cigarettes and latchkeys, both indicative of attempts to behave with the same freedoms as men. Punch was particularly scathing in its critique of such a figure. In a cartoon of 1894 the bespectacled and plainly dressed New Woman is depicted
waving a latchkey over her head while she reads an "advanced" book. The contents of the book are given as shadowy images around her; the caption of the cartoon is taken from a line from Don Quixote, "A world of disorderly notions picked out of books, crowded into his (her) imagination." (See illustration VII) One of the contributors to such disorderly notions, according to the cartoon, is Ibsen.

William Archer's translation of Ibsen's The Pillars of Society was first produced in England in 1880. Archer's translations of Ibsen's work, and his support for it, found a reading audience and in 1889 there was a successful production of A Doll's House. While Ibsen had his followers such as Shaw, Archer and Gosse, as well as the actresses Elizabeth Robins and Janet Achurch, he also had his detractors, notably Clement Scott, theatre critic of The Illustrated London News and the Daily Telegraph, who is famous for his stern denunciation of Ibsen's work. The outcry against Ibsen's Ghosts made by Scott has been well documented. The popular theatre was not yet ready to embrace Ibsen's drama wholeheartedly; theatre managers found the subject matter of his plays too risky from a financial point of view since, in general, public opinion was at one with Clement Scott. More importantly, so was that of the Edward Pigott, Examiner of Plays. In the 1892 Report of the Select Committee on Theatres and Places of Entertainment, Pigott stated:

I have studied Ibsen's plays pretty carefully, and all the characters in Ibsen's plays appear to me morally deranged. All the heroines are dissatisfied spinsters who look on marriage as a monopoly, or dissatisfied married women in a chronic state of rebellion against not only the conditions which nature has imposed on their sex, but against all the duties and obligations of mothers and wives; as for the men they are all rascals or imbeciles.

At the same time Ibsen's theatrical changes were having an effect on British drama. In some of their work Pinero and Jones attempted to move away from the melodramatic tradition by presenting "problem" plays which addressed contemporary life in the style of Ibsen. Both Pinero and Jones were eager to raise the intellectual level of drama; at the same time they did not share the same philosophy which informed Ibsen's work. Both admired the dramatic form of his plays but balked at some of the content; ultimately they were both interested far more in theatrical success than in diffusing new ideas. They produced plays in which the external influence of Ibsen can be traced in their style and structure, but which abandoned much of the internal conflict that is to be found in his characterizations. Pinero wanted to make the theatre of his time more
relevant to “grown-up people” as he wrote in a letter to Edmund Gosse in 1893, the year *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was first performed. At the same time he wanted to reach a wide audience which he felt was alienated by Ibsen’s drama. In the following letter which he wrote to William Archer in 1892, Pinero expresses his concern that native British drama is doubly threatened by the plays of Ibsen; on the one hand the critics acclaim it, on the other the majority of the theatre-going public find it distasteful. For Pinero, what was needed was a middle-ground in drama which would not shake his public but rather stir them a little:

A few years ago the native authors were working with a distinct and sound aim and with every prospect of popularising a rational, observant home-grown play. Then came the Scandinavian drama, held up by the New Critics as the Perfect drama and used by them as a means of discrediting native produce. Just for the present everything is knocked askew; the English dramatist has little influence and the public, urged to witness *A Doll’s House*, patronises the Empire Theatre of Varieties!\(^9\)

Pinero’s and Jones’s “problem plays” do not ultimately challenge the status quo; they lead their audience into a world that will not be shaken fundamentally, but rather into one in which societal problems cause ripples of unpleasantness which are ultimately smoothed over by convention. For both Pinero and Jones the New Woman was a puzzling aberration around which their dramas revolved, but she is shown to have no real place in society. Pinero treated the subject more sympathetically than Jones but always left his audience with the comforting sense of her confusion and failure. Paula Tanqueray and Agnes Ebbsmith only pose a threat to themselves they do not open up new ways of seeing and living as does Nora Helmer. They are presented as misguided and irrational, but are presumed to be pitiable and forgivable because they are fighting against their “true” female natures. In other words, they are neurotic and thus dismissable. They do not pose any real threat.

The fictitious compound that was known as the New Woman was often seen as a threat to the “race” at a time when the eugenics debate was becoming more fervent. Havelock Ellis, a leader of the eugenics movement, while supporting women’s rights insisted on their primary fiction as mothers. He wrote:

The breeding of men lies largely in the hands of women. That is why the question of Eugenics is to a great extent one with the women question. The realization of eugenics in our social life can only be attained with the realization of the woman’s
movement in its latest and completest phase as an enlightened culture of motherhood, in all that motherhood involves alike on the physical and psychic sides. Motherhood on the eugenics basis is a deliberate and selective process, calling for the highest intelligence as well as the finest emotional and moral aptitudes, so that all the best energies of a long evolution of womanhood in the pathos of modern culture here find their final outlet.¹⁰

Biological determinism was to be embraced with religious fervour if the “race” was to prosper according to eugenic philosophy. The notion of “race” was significant to imperial expansion, and northern eurocentric concepts of superiority relied on the same narrowly defined concept of female power which had been stressed throughout the century by Mrs. Sarah Ellis and her admirers; the ideal “womanly woman” knew her strength to be in her role as wife and mother. The New Woman, in contrast, was seen either as a selfishly decadent egotist or a spinsterish crank. If she married someone who agreed with her views he would be a “poor specimen”; his masculinity was questionable at best and would be eroded even further by his “unnatural” wife.

Dangerous Cranks: The Case of Rebellious Susan and The New Woman.

The popular theatre lampooned the New Woman and pitted her against the “womanly woman.” In his The Case of Rebellious Susan (1894) Henry Arthur Jones created the character of Elaine Shrimpton who epitomized the New Woman’s follies, especially in her effect on her effete husband. Her first entrance is described in the stage directions, “Enter Elaine Shrimpton, a raw, self-assertive modern young lady, with brusque and decided manner.”¹¹

Elaine is argumentative and irrational; she has, what her uncle describes as, “a smattering of pseudo-scientific knowledge, chiefly picked up from unwholesome feminine novels” (22) which she uses to extol the virtues of social reform at every opportunity. This is much to the amusement of her uncle, Richard Kato Q. C., the raisonneur of the play, whose contrasting commonsense deflates her. She enters arguing the right to be married to Fergusson Pybus (“a lank, dreamy young man of twenty-five, with longish light hair, with precise, nervous and rather affected manner...”[16]):

ELAINE: Fergusson has a career before him; I too, have a career before me. Why should we blind our eyes to the plainest and most sacred duties that lie
before us -- our duties to ourselves?

SIR RICHARD: [Trying to get a word in.] Well -- I --

ELAINE. [Stopping him.] Why should we check the natural, self-ordained, self-consecrated development of our characters?

SIR RICHARD: Well --

ELAINE: Why should we dwarf and stunt ourselves physically, morally, intellectually, for the sake of propping up a society that is decrepit and moribund to its core? Why should we?

SIR RICHARD: I wouldn’t if I were you.(20)

Elaine always rants and, as in the above exchange, is always on the offensive. She is, in her uncle’s view, hopelessly naive about life and cannot even be trusted with her own income. Sir Richard insists that, since she wishes equality with Pybus, she should have the same income that he has, which is only a fraction of what she is worth. Elaine is therefore set up for failure although, from the point of view of the author, it is for her own good and in order to teach her some sense. Her complaints about her uncle’s control over her income provide another excuse to show her explosive and, it is implied, her irrational outbursts.

In the second act, which takes place ten months after the events in Act One, she and Pybus are having marital problems because of their impracticality and Elaine’s political aspirations. Pybus appears more shabbily dressed and unkempt; he is obviously not being cared for by his wife, who neglects their home in order to concentrate on socialist politics. Pybus is already weary of Elaine’s feminism but is too weak to control her. Despite Pybus’s objections, Elaine is determined to start “The Clapham Boadicean Society for the Inculcation of the New Morality among the Women of Clapham.”(43) To the delight of Sir Richard, and through him the audience, their new-style marriage is failing. They are both miserable and fractious in their new home, which is in a lower middle-class district of London. As Sir Richard, the urbane realist, points out sarcastically, “You made it a rule to avoid all that is mean and petty and commonplace in life, and you took up your residence in Clapham.”(42)

The Case of Rebellious Susan is a drawing-room comedy which is essentially about the business of marriage, and of the need to compromise and accept the traditional role differences between the sexes for, as Jones describes through the voice of Sir Richard, men and women cannot change what nature has decreed. He tells Elaine, “It isn’t Man that is ungallant to Woman. It’s Nature that is so ungallant and so unkind to your sex.” When she replies that they
will correct nature Sir Richard continues:

By changing your sex? What is it that you ladies want? You are evidently dissatisfied with being women. You cannot wish to be anything so brutal and disgusting as a man. And unfortunately there is no neuter sex in the human species. What do you want?...While you ladies without passions -- or with distorted and defeated passions -- are raving and trumpeting all over the country, that wise, grim, old grandmother of us all, Dame Nature, is simply laughing up her sleeve and snapping her fingers at you and your new epochs and new movements.(75)

Jones adopts the same argument as Geddes and Thompson in The Evolution of Sex, as well as that of Spencer and Bagehot. Woman’s intrinsic nature cannot be changed, and any attempt at such a change will harm both herself and society. To emphasize this Jones shows that Elaine’s political activity only results in creating a strike amongst “all the telegraph girls and shop girls in Clapham,”(72) causing a near-riot, which Sir Richard tells Pybus, he will have to pay for. She insists on defending herself in court and vanishes from the action of the play.

Elaine is dismissed as a dangerous fool in contrast to the other women in the play who use more traditional methods to get their own way. Lady Susan succeeds in making her husband jealous and keeps him guessing about her behaviour during their separation, while Lady Darby happily turns a blind eye to her husband’s infidelities. The main contrast with Elaine, however, is with Mrs. Inez Quesnel, a widow who is portrayed as politic and discreet, and above all, womanly in Jones’s terms. She is attractive, sensible, and charming; the play ends with a strong suggestion that Sir Richard will marry her. The two most reasonable and well-adjusted characters, (the “womanly” woman and the “manly” man), are thus united, while Elaine and Pybus go their separate ways, he back to Clapham and she to jail.

Elaine embodies the worst characteristics of the New Woman for Jones. She is ignorant yet stridently opinionated, argumentative and illogical. More importantly she cannot see the world as it is, and her attempt to change society consists only in the destructive and ludicrous “Boadiceans.” In Jones’s terms Elaine is a woman who see the world upside down, and who wants to turn the rational world upside down in an attempt to make it fit her supposedly crack-brained schemes. Jones is making a conscious swipe against the new Ibsenesque drama in this play which he also pursued in some of his other work. In his burlesque on the theatre of ideas he incorporates a woman like Elaine Shrimpton into his allegorical tale; she is also badly influenced
by the new drama:

With startling eagerness, she suddenly tucked up her skirts to her knees, bent down...This gave her a splendid opportunity of seeing things upside down, without the pain and trouble of standing upon her head...The moment she saw things upside down, she began to squeal incoherently for her rights.12

Jones's comedy is an overt attempt to deflate and ridicule the concept of the new woman and of the political changes that were associated with her.

Sydney Grundy's play The New Woman (1894) also poked fun at strident feminists.13 Not only are they ludicrous and unattractive, they are also dangerous to the "race." Their vehement protests against marriage are viewed as unnatural and damaging. The influence of the New Woman in Grundy’s play is seen as unhealthy not only because its advocates seem to despise marriage and motherhood but also because they foster a supposed effeminacy in Gerald Cazenove. Grundy implies that association with such women is eroding Gerald’s virility. His apartment is described as being "effeminately decorated" (5), much to the disgust of his uncle, the Colonel, who has come "to knock the nonsense out of him," and who takes pleasure in casting aside the antimacassars and cushions which litter the room.(6)

Grundy portrays hostility to the intellectual climate and the aesthetic movement which were thought to be contributory factors to the emergence of the New Woman and the neurasthenic male. The play also displays an anti-intellectual stance in the attitude to education put forward by the Colonel and Gerald’s aunt, Lady Wargrave. Gerald is over-educated in their view, having taken prizes at Oxford. He is now involved in writing a book on "The Higher Morality" with Mrs. Sylvester and is surrounded by literary feminists who all agree that the theatre is dying and will be swept away by the feminist novel. The Colonel voices all the popular prejudices about them and their work in his conversation with Mr. Sylvester, whose wife neglects him for "The Higher Morality."

COLONEL: [taking up a book] This is what comes of educating women. We have created a Frankenstein. "Man, the Betrayer -- A study of the Sexes - By Enid Bethune."

SYLVESTER: Oh, I know her. She comes to our house.

COLONEL: And has a man betrayed her?

SYLVESTER: Never. Not likely to.

COLONEL: That’s what’s the matter perhaps?
SYLVESTER: Her theory is, that boys should be girls, and young men should be maids. That’s how she’d equalize the sexes.


SYLVESTER: Another soul! She’s also for equality. Her theory is, that girls should be boys, and maids should be young men. Goes in for latchkeys and that sort of thing.

COLONEL: *[Throws down the book]* Bah! *[Takes up a third]* “Naked and Unashamed -- A Few Plain Facts and Figures - by Mary Bevan, M. D.” Who on earth is she?

SYLVESTER: One of the plain figures. She comes to our house too.

COLONEL: *[reads]* “The Physiology of the Sexes!” Oh, this eternal babble of the sexes! *[Throws book down]* Why can’t a woman be content to be a woman? What does she want to make a beastly man of herself for?

...A woman, who is a woman, doesn’t want to be anything else. These people are a sex of their own, Sylvester. They have invented a new gender. And to think my nephew’s one of them!(9)

The literary women, Mary Bevan, Victoria Vivash, and Enid Bethune are, like Jones’s Elaine Shrimpton, loud, ridiculous, and argumentative. They are also portrayed as hypocritical and ludicrous spinster as they all flirt with the Colonel who eventually proposes to Enid. She accepts with apparent alacrity, despite the Colonel’s colourful past which conflicts with her purported views on male purity. Grundy dismisses these three in his cartoon-like sketches of their characters in which he includes all the popular jibes against the New Woman. They offer no threat and are dismissed as comical cranks. The really dangerous new woman, in Grundy’s play, is Mrs. Sylvester, whose interest in Gerald is romantic and who attempts to break up his marriage to Margery who is, in contrast, “a womanly woman” in the Colonel’s terms. Much to his feminist friends’ chagrin Gerald meets Margery in the country, and eventually marries her. She is a farmer’s daughter and it is her lack of sophistication that Mrs. Sylvester targets as she tries to lure Gerald away from her; she contrasts her own sophistication and learning with Margery’s simplicity, and uses the arguments from their book on the “Higher Morality” to try to convince him to abandon his wife. She tells him, “Your marriage was a mistake from the beginning...Now you have come back to your better self you feel the need of sympathy...Haven’t
I made the same mistake myself?... I am not unhappy but my soul is starved -- as yours is!...Gerald do you love me?"(83)

Margery decides to leave Gerald when she overhears him with Mrs. Sylvester. In Grundy’s view she displays wisdom in her understanding of Gerald and his friend because she sees through the talk of the “Higher Morality”; she declares that it is only old-fashioned immorality disguised as something new as she tells her husband:

It’s she who’s robbed me of your love! ... Be careful, or she’ll steal your honour too. Don’t trust her fine phrases. She deceives herself. She wants your love, that’s what that woman wants -- just to be happy -- nothing more or less; but she won’t make you happy or herself. If I am no companion, she’s a bad one.(85)

She emphasizes the point to Mrs. Sylvester:

You call yourself a New Woman -- you’re not new at all. You’re just as old as Eve. You only want one thing -- the one thing every woman wants -- the one thing that no woman’s life’s worth living without! A true man’s love! Ah, if we all had that, there’d be no problem of the sexes then...(89-90)

Mrs. Sylvester’s husband, who is dominated by his wife, decides to pursue Margery into the country but she tells him to go back to her, and blames him for her behaviour. Margery is the voice of true “womanly” reason in the play, as Gerald admits when they are reconciled. The last line of the play shows that Gerald has learned his lesson and finally been made to see sense. He tells Margery, “I want you to be nothing less or more -- only a woman!” (104)

In Grundy’s play the New Woman is either a crank or a shrill hypocrite; what she really needs, in his terms, is a husband to steady her and keep her away from pseudo-intellectual pursuits. By voicing his opinions through Margery, Grundy adds weight to his argument. The familiar melodramatic voice of “true” womanhood is heard through her; portrayed as a simple country girl, she nevertheless becomes eloquent in the defence of her virtue and her marriage.

While the New Woman was being lampooned in the popular press and on stage, radical female journals countered with an ideal type who conformed to the Ruskin ideal in Of Queen’s Gardens and to Margaret Fuller’s Apocalyptic Feminism. The Woman’s Herald (June 1893) wrote of the:

Truer type of woman...springing up in our midst, combining the ‘sweet domestic grace’ of bygone days with a wide-minded interest in things outside her own immediate circle, extending her womanly influence to the world that so sadly
needs the true woman's touch to keep it all that true woman would have it. The woman comes forth for the world's need.

Such idealism was met with some cynicism and the question which seemed uppermost in the minds of the critics of the so-called new woman was how to reconcile female agency with woman's inevitable biological destiny. The result, they concluded, was a divided creature suffering from weak nerves (or neurasthenia) as she struggled to attain the former at the expense of the latter. Elaine Showalter notes:

During the decades from 1870 to 1910, middle-class women were beginning to organize in behalf of higher education, entrance to the professions, and political rights. Simultaneously, the female nervous disorders of anorexia nervosa, hysteria, and neurasthenia became epidemic; and the Darwinian "nerve specialist" arose to dictate proper feminine behaviour outside the asylum as well as in, to differentiate treatments for "nervous" women of various class backgrounds, and to oppose women's efforts to change the conditions of their lives.¹⁴

The neurasthenic woman was seen as one who was mentally exhausted by the struggle to escape from her intrinsic womanliness. The effort of trying to evolve into something that it was thought she could never be left her psychologically divided and, while not mad in the old sense, at least mentally unstable.

**Neurasthenia and Despair: The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith and The Second Mrs Tanqueray.**

Pinero's *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* (1895) typifies this struggle. Pinero was keen to address topical subjects on stage but he had no sympathy for the New Woman and so created, in Agnes Ebbsmith, a character who expresses many of the ideals of the New Woman, but who finds that those ideals ultimately prove to be false. Hamilton Fyfe writes:

Pinero had not made up his mind how far he could afford to shock his age. In truth, he was not sure how far Agnes could go without shocking him. He did not know her; therefore he could not understand her. He never for a moment saw her, or anything from her angle. He did not even like her. She represented all that he had been taught to consider unladylike, unwomanly, and immoral. Having borne with her through three acts of naughtinesses he slapped her hard in the fourth and put her in a corner to meditate over and repent them.¹⁵
The political becomes personal in Pinero’s play; in fact, he indicates that, to his understanding, the political must always have a personal basis for a woman; their fundamental problems reside in the domestic and the romantic spheres. Shaw noted that this made Pinero’s play contrived and outdated. For Shaw, Pinero simply did not know the political world or the type of woman he was attempting to represent. He wrote:

The Duke of St. Olpherts, when he went to that iron building in St. Luke’s, and saw “Mad Agnes” on the platform, might more probably have found there a future Cabinet Minister, a lady of his own ducal family, or even a dramatic critic...But Mr. Pinero has made a deeper mistake. He has fallen into the common error of supposing that the woman who speaks in public and takes an interest in wider concerns than her own household is a special variety of the human species...16

Pinero presents Agnes Ebbsmith as a lost soul whose own unhappy past, rather than a broader political agenda, has prompted her to abandon traditional moral conventions. She has grown up in a home with a politically activist father and an irritable shrewish mother: despite her childhood vow never to make the same mistake as her parents she nevertheless makes an unfortunate and unhappy marriage. She is widowed and takes to the political platform to lecture on socialism; however the main thrust of her campaign is against marriage which she describes as “The choked-up, seething pit.”17 Unable to make a living from political activism, she begins to work as a nurse where she meets Lucas Cleeve. He was initially her patient and, at the time of the action of the play, they are living together in Venice. Agnes is an idealist who believes that she and Cleeve can live and work together as equals. Cleeve, who is also escaping from a bad marriage, was an M.P. but his relationship with Agnes will force him to abandon this and, as Agnes explains to Gertrude Thorpe, “We shall write much together, urging our views on this subject of marriage.” She goes on to say, “...it’s our great plan to live the life we have mapped out for ourselves, fearlessly, openly; faithful to each other, helpful to each other, for as long as we remain together.” (233)

Pinero was keen to portray Agnes as an essentially moral being who was living an “immoral” life because of her misguided quest for freedom. Agnes is no decadent; she is fearfully earnest in her views on marriage reform and somewhat severe in appearance. (See illustration VIII) Her previously unhappy experience of marriage colours all her actions and, despite her living arrangement with Cleeve, she is eager to define herself in terms of a non-sexual object. Indeed, she suggests to Cleeve that they should be “simply linked by a mutual
trust...devoid of passion.” (242) She tells Gertrude that for twelve months her husband, “treated me like a woman in a harem, for the rest of the time like a beast of burden.” (230) Gertrude suggests that since she is now widowed she could begin again. Agnes denies this, saying that she has lost her faith in marriage but believes that she can be happy with Cleeve if they can work together.

Pinero could not represent Agnes as a woman who simply chooses to live on her own terms; he had to find an excuse for her behaviour, since he could not reconcile such choice with his own moral values and with those of his implied audience. Pinero shows that Agnes’s problem is that she is confused about what she wants. She is scarred by her marriage but is obviously more in thrall to Cleeve than to her stated ideals. She always defers to him and, in fact, behaves like a conventionally devoted wife. On stage she is preoccupied with domestic details and traditionally feminine chores such as sewing and arranging flowers. Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who created the role, notes in her promptbook that Agnes is always “fussing.” The character is hardly believable as a former political campaigner. Hamilton Fyfe suggests that Pinero really did not understand the type of woman he was attempting to portray, stating that:

Pinero had waded into water too deep for him. In the desire to be “modern,” to show that the drama could be as “intellectual” as the novel, he had tried to put together a “new woman” from such scraps as he had read about her in the newspapers and recollected from lunch-table talk at clubs.18

However, Agnes is rather more than the broad comic characterizations of New Women that Jones and Grundy created. Pinero sincerely attempts to show some understanding of her character, and concludes that her troubled past, both in her childhood and her marriage, have forced her into a life of “sin” and warped her mind. He emphasizes that, despite her living with Cleeve, she is obviously not a “bad” woman. She is however, for him, a deeply troubled one. The photograph of Mrs. Patrick Campbell from the first production shows her with a haunted, gaunt expression as she stands in her plain dress, partly challenging the audience and partly afraid of it. In the role of “Mad Agnes” Mrs. Pat presents the face of an apparently disturbed psyche. (See illustration VIII) “Mad Agnes” was the name Mrs. Ebbsmith had been given when she was on the political platform, and she tells Lucas that she thinks being a woman must mean being mad. She means that the inherent conflict in trying to retain her own identity while still trying to establish a relationship with him appears to have no solution. She tries to believe that he understands this. However, when he replies that it is only a woman trying not to be a woman
that is mad, by which he means her attempting to deny her sexual nature, Agnes gives no counter-argument but simply sighs and moves away from him. At heart she believes in the same old double standard of sexual morality as he does. Pinero wanted to present Agnes sympathetically, and to do so he has to show that she is somewhat reluctant to continue the sexual relationship with Lucas. Lucas is shown to be as shallow, self-absorbed, and vain as his relative, the Duke of St Olpherts, says he is. His pronouncement on Agnes’s state of mind is not to be trusted, but she herself tacitly agrees with him because his statement proves that she has been deluding herself about their relationship.

Although the drama focuses on Agnes Ebbsmith, Pinero presents two other types of women in his play. The first is Gertrude Thorpe; the second is Sybil Cleeve. Gertrude Thorpe represents the “voice of true womanhood.” She is a respectable widow travelling with her brother, the Reverend Amos Winterfield. Although initially she is shocked when Agnes tells her the truth about her relationship with Cleeve and feels that she can no longer associate with her, Gertrude is the character through whom the audience can view Agnes sympathetically. It is to her that Agnes details her history, and it is she who decides that Agnes needs to be saved from herself. Pinero also provides his audience with Gertrude’s own history of an unhappy marriage, in an attempt to prove that to know all is to forgive all. It is when Gertrude tells her brother about her own misfortune that he agrees to help her “rescue” Agnes. Gertrude’s explanation is used by Pinero to show how common such marital misfortune is and how it is only through the grace of God that Gertrude herself has not chosen Agnes’s path. In an impassioned speech she tells him:

Yes, I am a virtuous woman, Amos and it strikes you as odd, I suppose -- my insisting upon friendship with her. But, look here, both of you! I’ll tell you a secret. You never knew it, Amos, my dear; I never allowed anybody to suspect it... The sort of married life mine was. It didn’t last long, but it was dreadful, almost intolerable... After the first few weeks of it, my husband treated me as cruelly [turning to Agnes] just as cruelly, I do believe, as your husband treated you. [Amos makes a movement, showing consternation.] Wait! Now then! There was another man -- one I loved -- one I couldn’t help loving! I could have found release with him, perhaps happiness of a kind. I resisted, came through it. They’re dead -- the two are dead! And here I am, a virtuous respectable woman; saved by the blessed mercy of heaven...(330-331)
Gertrude collapses in tears and Amos immediately becomes more understanding of the situation. Agnes’s redemption becomes the central focus of the play. Her denial of religious faith and her initial, angry rejection of the Bible that Amos offers to her leads up to the highly-charged melodramatic moment when Agnes retrieves the Bible from the stove seconds after she has thrown it there. In order to keep the sympathy of his audience Pinero felt that he had to save her from her avowed apostasy almost as soon as she has stated it. In dealing with this serious and, for its time, daring subject Pinero develops a religious frame which informs the play. Agnes’s crisis occurs at Easter; the first stage directions note that it is Easter, and to emphasize the point one of the servants also refers to Easter. By setting his play in the middle of the most significant Christian festival of the year Pinero echoes the atmosphere of sacrifice, redemption, and rebirth. Agnes is betrayed by her secular religion and is forced to recognize the truth of traditional morality epitomized by the Thorpes. The action of the play takes place over the space of two days echoing the trial, death, and entombment of Christ. The problem play becomes a morality play and the development of Agnes’s character bears a similarity to medieval psychomachia. Agnes is portrayed as a tortured soul and, just as in the plays concerned with bad sensation heroines, sin is equated with mental unbalance. She is not irredeemable because she is mentally fragile rather than wicked. This idea is first given in the old epithet of “Mad Agnes” and its use is continued by both Lucas and Gertrude as they take opposing sides in the struggle for Agnes’s soul/mind.

When she is faced with the possibility of losing Lucas Cleeve Agnes changes into a fashionable evening dress which he has bought for her. Prior to this she has scorned it and all it stands for in her eyes. Cleeve takes her wearing the dress as a cue to denounce his formerly avowed philosophy and to exult in what he describes as the return of their senses. He tells her, “My dear Agnes, we’ve both been to the verge of madness, you and I -- driven there by our troubles.” He then asks her to repeat after him that she will “never be mad again.”(299) She realizes that her relationship with Cleeve is simply a repetition of the early days of her marriage. However, she is willing to make a sacrifice in order to keep him and in the following exchange with St. Olpherts she explains her reason for the recantation of her beliefs; at the same time she demonstrates a growing distraction:

AGNES: My sex has found me out.

ST. OLPHERTS: Ha! tsch! [Between his teeth.] Damn it, for your sake I almost wish Lucas was a different sort of feller!
AGNES: [Partly to herself, with intensity.] Nothing matters now -- not even that. He’s mine. He would have died but for me. I gave him life. He is my child, my husband, my lover, my bread, my daylight -- all -- everything. Mine, mine... This is my hour.

ST. OLPHERTS: Your hour --?

AGNES: There’s only one hour in a woman’s life.

ST. OLPHERTS: One --?

AGNES: One supreme hour. Her poor life is like the arch of a crescent; so many years lead up to that hour, so many weary years decline from it. No matter what she may strive for, there is a moment when Circumstance taps her upon the shoulder and says, “Woman, this hour is the best the Earth has to spare you.” It may come to her in calm or in tempest, lighted by a steady radiance or by the glitter of evil stars; but however it comes, be it good or evil, it is her hour -- let her dwell upon every second of it.

ST. OLPHERTS: And this little victory of yours -- the possession of this man; you think this is the best that earth can spare you? [She nods, slowly and deliberately, with fixed eyes.] Dear me, how amusin’ you women are! And in your dowdy days you had ambitions! [She looks at him suddenly.] They were of a queer, gunpowder-and-faggot sort -- but they were ambitions.

AGNES: [Starting up.] Oh! -- [Putting her hands to her brows.] Ambitions! Yes! Yes! You’re right! Once, long ago, I hoped my hour would be very different from this...

St. Olpherts’s derision and condescension highlight what Pinero sees as the inevitable consequence of Agnes’s attempt to escape her intrinsic nature. In an attempt to portray Agnes sympathetically he turns her into a type of secular martyr to feminism. Agnes displays a religious type of fervour in her belief in this “hour”; her speech has a Biblical diction and is a revision of John. 17. 1. “Father the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” When he was questioned about the Bible-burning episode Pinero defended it as realistic; he related it to Agnes’s mother’s beliefs.19 Although she has not displayed any orthodox Christian views up until the episode of the Bible burning, the above exchange with St. Olpherts prepares the audience for such an action.

In Pinero’s view Agnes’s character is ripe for salvation because she already has the germ
of religion in her, given to her, significantly, by her mother; for him it has been subverted by the secular religion of her father. In the play all the male characters, except for Amos Winterfield, are avowedly products of a secular Godless society; Lucas is an egoist, St. Olpherts is a decadent cynic. Gertrude Thorpe sees through both of them immediately; she is the ideal type of woman for Pinero and his implied audience. That Agnes is not wholly irredeemable is indicated by her assertion that in dealing with St. Olpherts Gertrude is "a splendid woman." (308) In contrast to Agnes, she has experience of the world but deals with that world with the traditional female weapons of Christian virtue and compassion. When she tells Agnes to pull herself out of the mud she calls her "a mad thing" in a further emphasis of the apparent irrationality of Agnes’s neurotic behaviour. (329) Agnes’s behaviour and chosen life are put down to mental aberration by Gertrude; the only feasible explanation possible in her eyes. It is when she sees that Agnes is willing to forego her ideals, however misguided she thinks they might be, that Gertrude challenges Agnes with the threat of a wicked rationality. Agnes can be pitied for being "a mad thing" until this moment and then Gertrude says:

I called you a mad thing just now. A week ago I did think you half-mad -- a poor, ill-used creature, a visionary, a moral woman living immorally; yet, in spite of all, a woman to be loved and pitied. But now I’m beginning to think that you’re only frail -- wanton. Oh, you’re not so mad as not to know you’re wicked... (334)

Agnes agrees that she has been mad in the past but asserts that she is perfectly sane now and tells Gertrude, " [beating her breast and forehead] that Hell or Heaven is here and here!" (335) The whole of the third act, with its statements about Agnes’s supposed mental state have been leading up to this episode of the Bible-burning. Agnes recoils in horror at her action and the act ends leaving the audience with a picture of traditionally distracted womanhood, on her knees having burnt her hand rescuing the Bible from the stove.

Agnes’s martyrdom is completed when she agrees to leave Lucas and return to Yorkshire with the Thorpes. The photograph of Mrs. Pat from the last act shows her with the expression of a Renaissance saint. (See illustration IX) The religious motif is completed as Agnes experiences a spiritual reawakening and looks forward to a new life in which prayer will take precedence over sexual politics. She tells Lucas that she will pray for him every day. She has been saved by Gertrude’s example. The last act of the play has Agnes being treated like a patient in need of the rest cure that was so fashionable for nervous disorders at the time of the play. As the Thorpes and Lucas Cleeve’s family argues about her future she is absent and silent. When she enters the
stage directions indicate, “her face is haggard, her eyes are red and sunken. A strip of linen binds her right hand.” (350) Agnes has been reduced to the role of a fragile patient in need of care. She speaks “in a low, quavering voice” (352) and is described as moving weakly and unsteadily.

Just as Gertrude Thorpe represents true Christian womanhood so Lucas’s wife Sybil, the third woman in the play, represents a decaying secular society. She has been brought over to Venice by St. Olpherts and her brother in order to persuade her husband not to abandon his political career. She voices the family’s suggestion that Agnes could be included in the arrangement by living as Lucas’s mistress. Confronted by Sybil’s suggestion and by her accusations Agnes takes on more of the conventional characteristics of the distracted heroine. She “breaks into a low peal of hysterical laughter” (355); she “rises and approaches Sybil, fearfully” (356) and she whispers and groans as she addresses her. Persuaded by her newfound guilt and Sybil’s argument, Agnes prepares to leave with her to assist with the conspiracy to persuade Lucas to return to England. Gertrude accuses Sybil of destroying Agnes; Agnes’s feminist philosophy is now replaced by a more traditional female compact as Sybil takes Gertrude’s words to heart and says, “No -- I will not accept the service of this wretched woman. I loathe myself for doing what I have done.” (358) Gertrude takes her hand after this and, as she leaves, Agnes is seen clutching Sybil’s skirts and then speaking “in a low voice, rocking herself gently to and fro.” (359)

From her beginning as visionary and vocal feminist, Agnes is reduced to a silent broken figure by the end of the play. Mrs. Patrick Campbell did not think that this was consistent with the character, but acknowledged the reason that The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith ended in such a way. She wrote:

The role of Agnes Ebbsmith and the first three acts of the play filled me with ecstasy. There was a touch of nobility that fired and inspired me, but the last act broke my heart. I knew that such an Agnes in life could not have drifted into the Bible-reading inertia of the woman she became in the last act: for her earlier vitality, with its mental and emotional activity, gave the lie to it -- I felt she would have arisen a phoenix from the ashes. That rounding off of plays to make the audience feel comfortable is a regrettable weakness. 20

It was, however, a weakness which produced satisfied audiences and a theatrical success. Clement Scott’s review in The Illustrated London News (March 23, 1895), applauded Pinero’s
treatment of, what he describes as, a “gloomy story.” For Scott Agnes Ebbsmith’s recantation of her former beliefs is wholly believable and, more importantly for him, true to a wider, comprehensive view of nature. He writes:

Against a dark and lurid background and amidst the roar of this impressive life-storm we see the pale anxious face of Mrs. Patrick Campbell -- a weird, lonely figure fighting desperately for the principles of a lifetime...I ask myself continually how it is that I like this play far better than any of its predecessors; why it appeals to me more directly and interests me far more than the previous problem plays...It is that in this last play the victory is won after a tremendous struggle by love and religion...love and religion conquer....

Scott continues by stating that Agnes’s brain has been “on the rack”, but that her struggle has been in vain because she has thought that “All nature from the creation of the world has been wrong, and Mrs. Ebbsmith was born to set it right. Poor Mrs. Ebbsmith! With what a subtlety of persuasion does Nature defeat her.” For Scott there can be no possibility of escape for the character from her intrinsic womanhood.

In contrast, Bernard Shaw hated the play although he admired Mrs Pat’s performance in it, saying that she had managed to salvage something. Shaw found the entire premise of the play weak and unconvincing. He summed up the “problem” of the play thus:

She...finds out that he does not really care a rap about her ideas, and that his attachment to her is simply sexual. Here we start with a dramatic theme capable of interesting development. Mr. Pinero, unable to develop it, lets it slip through his fingers after one feeble clutch at it, and proceeds to degrade his drama below the ordinary level by making the woman declare that her discovery of the nature of the man’s feelings puts within her reach “the only one hour in a woman’s life,” in pursuance of which detestable view she puts on an indecent dress and utterly abandons herself to him. A clergyman appears at this crisis, and offers her a Bible. She promptly pitches it into the stove; and a thrill of horror runs through the audience as they see, in imagination, the whole Christian church tottering before their eyes. Suddenly, with a wild scream, she plunges her hand into the glowing stove and pulls out the Bible again. The Church is saved; and the curtain descends amid thunders of applause....

In his review Clement Scott had anticipated the type of scorn that Shaw, amongst others,
would cast on the scene with the Bible, and countered with his own interpretation,

I hear Socialists say that this scene is ridiculous and indefensible, because no woman with Mrs. Ebbsmith’s pronounced views would rescue any Bible or defy her own principles. Why not? Have there never been death-bed repentances for Atheists and blasphemers?...It seems to me that this scene, instead of being preposterous and theatrical, is at once the strongest and most natural in the play...

Although Agnes’s religious conversion salvaged the play for Scott, he disliked the trend for presenting subjects such as hers on stage; he felt that Pinero had abandoned the more wholesome drama with which he had had his initial successes. He stated that, in general, the public found them as distasteful as he did. In his column for The Illustrated London News for November 2, 1895 he wrote, “the majority, as things are presently constituted, prefer romanticism to realism.” Following two full columns about Mrs. Patrick Campbell’s dresses in the play, a column in The Sketch (March 20, 1895) entitled “Between the Acts” presented a fictitious discussion between two playgoers, one a “Pretty Woman” and the other “An Old Playgoer”, after a performance of The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith. The woman is in favour of the play while the old playgoer is nostalgic for plays like The Hunchback and The Lady of Lyons, which he says have real plots. They are both impressed by the Bible-burning episode, however. The woman sees it as being full of deep symbolism while the old playgoer thinks it “a wonderful climax to the act.” The column concludes with the old playgoer saying, “A cynical little woman of the world moved to feeling, an old playgoer converted to the new drama -- surely, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith must be a masterpiece.” (See illustration X)

Pinero clearly understood what his audience (and his theatrical managers) would accept. John Hare had rejected Pinero’s The Second Mrs. Tanqueray because he thought the subject matter too risky, and only accepted The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith after the former play had proved successful. Pinero asserted that he wanted to write about real people but he created real people who had been raised on melodrama, as had his audiences. The melodramatic mode, the values of melodrama and the melodramatic convention of the mad or distracted woman still pervaded the stage. In his problem plays of the nineties Pinero adapted and updated the convention in order to achieve success in reaching his public. His plays were sufficiently innovative to appeal to a sophisticated audience, but they did not entirely relinquish the concept of good and evil which was at the heart of melodrama’s appeal. Agnes’s repentance echoes that of many nineteenth-century “fallen” dramatic heroines. Pinero teases his audience with
suggestions of grey areas of morality but the plays do not leave the audience in a moral vacuum; furthermore the “manly” man and the “womanly” woman are still pre-eminent, or as The Stage for March 21, 1895 wrote, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* “is more in the better French style, though fortunately without the Norwegian form of emasculation with which Henrik Ibsen has made us familiar.”

Virtue in Pinero’s plays is misprized and threatened as it is in melodrama. It is not solely the virtue of the individual however that is threatened; Pinero casts a wider net in an attempt to reflect the conflicts of his modern world. His protagonists in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* misprize virtue themselves which leads to their failure. The traditional melodramatic concepts of good and evil are not embodied in opposing characters such as Sweet William and Doggrass in Jerrold’s *Black Eye’d Susan*, (which it should be remembered was still playing at the time Pinero was presenting his problem plays), but they are still vital elements in his work. These concepts are moved to the spaces between his characters who manoeuvre around them; ultimately, though, they have to make a choice. To achieve success with his plays Pinero had to ensure that virtue was not cast aside. A socially acceptable moral prerogative was essential if the plays were to even have the chance of reaching an audience. Examining and questioning such a moral prerogative was not in Pinero’s brief. Agnes Ebbsmith bears some similarities to Thomas Hardy’s Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* which was published in the same year as Pinero’s play. Hardy quotes from a German critic of the book in his preface who said that Sue Bridehead was the type of woman:

...who was coming into notice in her thousands every year -- the woman of the feminist movement -- the slight, pale “bachelor” girl -- the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing...who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession, and boast themselves as superior people because they are licensed to be loved on the premises....  

Like Agnes, Sue Bridehead is forced to turn to conventional religion; for her it is because she is in despair over the deaths of her children. She comes to the conclusion that they have died because of her “sin.” For Hardy, who quoted “The letter killeth” on his title page, this conversion is a bitter irony and a tragic conclusion; for him the immorality consisted in Sue Bridehead being forced by social convention to return to her first husband. But the outcry against his novel had the effect, as he wrote, of “curing” him of any further interest in writing novels.
MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL, AS "THE NOTORIOUS MRS. EBBSMITH," IN MR. PINERO'S NEW PLAY AT THE GARRICK THEATRE.
THE SKETCH.

MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AS MRS. EBBSMITH, AT THE GARRICK.

Photographs by Alfred Ellis, Upper Baker Street, N.W.

"I am quite myself again, Lucas, dear."

The rescue of the Bible from the stove.

"I've astonished my wamanhead often enough."

"Lucas, dear, when I have learnt to pray again, I will remember you every day of my life."
In a letter to William Archer, concerning The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, Pinero wrote that Clement Scott was “a man towards whom I have ... expressed feelings of contempt”, he continues:

As a matter of fact, though I was glad that Hare’s theatre had the benefit of a favourable criticism in a popular journal -- he is old fashioned enough to believe in the commercial value of such things -- Scott’s present praise filled me with as much disgust as his dishonesty and misrepresentation have done in the past...

Despite his antipathy towards Scott, Pinero’s play did bow to the conventions that Scott embraced and, unlike Thomas Hardy, Pinero was not denounced from the pulpit because of his portrait of the “new woman.” On the contrary, he had a theatrical and commercial success for, unlike Hardy, Pinero placed the source of the problem not in society but in the disrupted emotions of his heroine.

In The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith Agnes’s decision to leave Lucas Cleeve redeems her, in Pinero’s earlier play The Second Mrs. Tanqueray it is implied that there can be no redemption; the female protagonist is given no option but to choose death. The tragic outcome of the play is due to the inescapable social code which informs the premise of the play. Aubrey Tanqueray, a widower, decides to marry Paula Ray who is known to various friends of his under several names since her former career has been that of professional mistress to a number of men in their set. The play revolves around the impossibility of reintegrating such a woman into polite society. The double standard of sexual misconduct is highlighted in the play but never really questioned.

Paula, herself, wants to escape from her former life into respectability; at the same time she finds such respectability boring. Not only does she want the security of marriage, she wants to be accepted, even welcomed into her husband’s world but on her own terms. Mrs. Patrick Campbell created the role and wanted the audience to see Paula in a sympathetic light. She wrote in her memoirs, “I tried from the beginning to lift Paula a little off the earth, to make her not merely a neurotic type; to give her a conscience, a soul.” Mrs. Pat’s performance as Paula was extremely successful and widely acclaimed; despite her stated intentions the part does require the actress to behave neurotically, even hysterically. Without this gloss to the character the part would not have induced the sympathy that both she and the author aimed for.

From the first scene of the play Paula behaves unconventionally; she arrives at Aubrey Tanqueray’s apartment in the Albany late at night, to his annoyance and the manservant’s shock.
She exists outside the strict social codes which define a lady’s behaviour but has her own sense of honour for example she offers to give Aubrey a last chance to cancel their proposed marriage. However, she is also capricious and brittle. She states that she would have killed herself if Aubrey had had second thoughts. Aubrey Tanqueray’s first wife was cold and distant in contrast Paula is warm and impulsive. However, he is as hampered by strict notions of correctness as the society he states he wishes to challenge. Paula is a little too natural for him sometimes. She flings her arms around his neck when she arrives and proceeds to eat an apple. Mrs. Patrick Campbell’s promptbook notes that she spits the seeds into her hand, a small gesture of unladylike nonconformity that would not have escaped the audience. The promptbook also reveals that Mrs. Pat’s performance showed Paula as jittery and unsettled; she is frequently agitated and mobile on stage in contrast to Aubrey’s daughter Ellean’s quiet demeanour and to Mrs. Cortelyon’s stately elegance. Paula’s behaviour flits back and forth between seriousness and frivolity throughout the play, but she becomes more erratic as the action progresses.

Aubrey Tanqueray has been warned by his friend, Cayley Drummle, that by marrying Paula he will be in a “social Dead Sea.” Aubrey has already prepared some of his friends for his marriage, indicating that their wives might not want to know Paula. Aubrey’s future position in society is foreshadowed by Drummle’s story about George Orreyed who has also married a demi-mondaine. Drummle describes her to the group of friends, “Lady Orreyed, as she now is -- was a lady who would have been, perhaps has been, described in the reports of the Police or the Divorce Court as an actress.’(60) Aubrey’s friends from Act One are never seen again and after their marriage he and Paula are ignored by their polite neighbours in Surrey.

Drummle, who is a bachelor, is free to associate with the Tanquerays. He is sympathetic towards Paula and, as the raisonneur of the play, his acceptance of her is an indication that the audience should also see her in a sympathetic light. In order to emphasize this Pinero has Drummle describe himself as a member of the audience. He says, “I’m merely a spectator in life; nothing more than a man at a play; only, like the old-fashioned playgoer, I love to see certain characters happy and comfortable at the finish.”(79) Since this statement aligns the audience with the raisonneur, it also releases them from any blame in the outcome of the play, they do not have to question the morality of society in its adherence to the double standard of sexual behaviour; like Drummle, they know their world and accept its standards without question. Drummle (and by association the audience member) does not snub his friend or Paula but, as a man of the world, he is aware of the problems they will encounter.
Paula is angry and frustrated at their exclusion from polite society. In Act One she tells Aubrey that she has day-dreamed about a time in the future when she and he would be able to entertain his friends and “none of our guests had ever heard anything -- anything -- anything peculiar about the fascinating hostess."(83) Her marriage has not had the result she wanted and her anger over this is compounded by the presence of Ellean. She is jealous of the attention Aubrey gives to his daughter and, at the same time, she wants Ellean to love her and treat her as a second mother. Ellean, who has been raised in a convent, instinctively dislikes her. There is a strong suggestion that despite Ellean's innocence of the world, which would automatically preclude any knowledge of such a woman as Paula's existence, her stepmother appears tainted in her eyes. It is implied that her dislike of Paula is a natural aversion for a pure girl to have.

Her relationship with Ellean shows Paula becoming more irrational and unreasonable. She accuses her husband of talking about her with his daughter stating, “Do you think I couldn’t feel it, like a pain between my shoulders?”(98) Her jealousy and her sense of exclusion make her behave in ways which will only worsen her position. She states that she wants to be accepted but rejects the social niceties of behaviour that would be necessary for such acceptance. This is shown in her behaviour towards Mrs. Cortelyon.

Drummle has persuaded a neighbour of the Tanquerays (Mrs. Cortelyon, a friend of Aubrey's first wife) to visit them and to offer to take Ellean into society. Paula sees through this and is immediately on the offensive. She pretends not to know who Mrs. Cortelyon is and then makes it clear that she knows that she has been snubbed. The contrast between Paula's undisguised annoyance and Mrs. Cortelyon's studied sang-froid shows that their two worlds are far apart. Paula does not hide her injured pride and behaves with excited anger when Mrs. Cortelyon proposes to take Ellean away to Paris. At first she accuses Aubrey of wanting to deprive her of Ellean's company and when he agrees that Ellean should go with Mrs. Cortelyon she becomes more agitated to the astonishment of her guest:

PAULA: [Rising and striking the table lightly with her clenched hand.] That decides it! [There is a general movement. Excitedly to Mrs. Cortelyon, who advances towards her.] When do you want her?

MRS. CORTELYON: We go to town this afternoon at five o'clock, and sleep tonight at Bayliss's. There is barely time for her to make her preparations.

PAULA: I will undertake that she is ready.

MRS. CORTELYON: I've a great deal to scramble through at home too, as you
may guess. Goodbye!

PAULA: [Turning away.] Mrs. Cortelyon is going. [Paula stands looking out of the window, with her back to those in the room.]

MRS. CORTELYON: [To Drummle.] Cayley -- ... I’ve gone through it, for the sake of Aubrey and his child, but I -- I feel a hundred. Is that a mad-woman?

DRUMMLE: Of course; all jealous women are mad.(119-120)

Paula is only mad in a social sense; she will not accept that she is beyond the pale and that her aspirations are hopeless. Her sense of isolation and her pique at her husband’s agreeing to Ellean leaving with Mrs. Cortelyon induces her to invite the Ôrreyeds to the house in Surrey, despite her husband’s objections. However, she soon realizes that she has nothing in common with the frivolous Lady Ôrreyed or her weak drunkard husband. She says that she hates them, that “(She lies) awake at night, hating them.”(135) Paula finds that she has no place in either world; the café society which she had formerly inhabited seems coarse to her now, but the genteel world rejects her. Her anger and jealousy have induced her to hide letters from Ellean and Mrs. Cortelyon to her husband and she admits this, laughing hysterically, to Drummle who advises her to tell Aubrey.

The discussion that follows shows Paula’s agitated state of mind. Aubrey reminds her that she must have been as innocent as Ellean herself once but that she offends and embarrasses his daughter by deriding all that she values. Paula then “drops upon the ottoman in a paroxysm of weeping” and pleads for forgiveness; she asks Aubrey for “another chance.”(143)

Almost immediately after this Ellean arrives home with the news that she has formed an attachment to Hugh Ardale, a man she has met in Paris. Ellean has softened towards her stepmother and treats her more warmly; this affects Paula who says she is shaky because she has not been sleeping. The Ôrreyed’s visit and her argument with her husband have produced in Paula a state of nervous excitement which is exacerbated by her learning about Ardale, who was once one of her lovers. Paula’s conversation with Hugh Ardale shows her that she cannot escape from her past. The stage direction indicates that she is slipping into an uncontrolled hysteria

[Suddenly realising the horror and hopelessness of her position, and starting to her feet with an hysterical cry of rage] PAULA: This will send me mad.

While Ardale wishes to keep their former relationship a secret, Paula insists on telling her husband and, by this action, alienates Ellean who says she has always known what Paula was. Although her husband says that they can go abroad and enjoy a future together, Paula declares
that she is “tainted through and through”, and that Ellean can never forgive her.(187) Paula alternates between self-loathing and anger at the double standard of sexual morality which places her at such a disadvantage (see illustration XI). She notes that while Ellean is willing to forgive Ardale, she will never forgive her, “She’s a regular woman too. She could forgive him easily enough -- but me! That’s just a woman!”(187) Although Paula rails against the unfairness of the situation she also, in this speech, acknowledges the concept of the “womanly woman” that Ellean embodies. She apologises to Aubrey and tells him that they can never escape her past and says that the world contains only the distances that “we carry within ourselves.”(190) The play then ends with Paula’s suicide and Ellean wishing that she had treated her step-mother more mercifully. Paula is never less irrational than she is at the conclusion of the play. Pinero suggests that suicide is the only logical action she could take under the circumstances. He has her tell Aubrey that once she has lost her looks he will start to despise her, and despite his protests she is convinced that they can have no real future together. Bernard Shaw pointed out that Paula’s collapse into self-hatred showed that "she makes her reply from the Tanqueray-Ellean-Pinero point of view, and thus betrays the fact that she is a work of prejudiced observation instead of comprehension...Mr Pinero, then, is no interpreter of character, but simply an adroit describer of people as the ordinary man sees and judges them.”

In order to retain the audience’s sympathy and pity, Paula has to die because by dying she convinces them that she is “womanly” in their terms. She assumes the appropriate sense of shame that was to be expected of her. Whether this was true to the type of person she was is, as Shaw realized, irrelevant to the denouement of a “well-made play” in the Scribean tradition. Paula’s initial charm and lively unconventionality make her appealing to the audience; they have to understand why Aubrey chooses to marry her. However, they also have to be convinced of the inevitability of the conclusion. In order to accomplish this Pinero shows that not only has Paula’s past history come back to invade her new life, but also that her past history has affected her mind. Aubrey complains to Drummle in Act II that Paula is scarred by her promiscuous past, and that this makes her an unfit companion for his daughter. He says:

...am I doing right in exposing her to the influence of poor Paula’s light careless nature?... I assure you I long to urge my girl to break down the reserve which keeps her apart from Paula, but somehow I can’t do it...Cayley, there’s hardly a subject you can broach on which poor Paula hasn’t some strange out-of-the-way thought to give utterance to; some curious warped notion...it makes it the more
dreadful that such thoughts should be ready, spontaneous; that expressing them has become a perfectly natural process; that her words, acts even have almost lost their proper significance for her, and seem beyond her control...the pain of listening to it all from the woman one loves...who is really and truly a good woman, as it were, maimed! (107)

Throughout the play Paula is shown to be a victim of her own tortured mind a mind that is unable to reconcile her past life with her new marriage. Aubrey points out to Drummle that Paula looks “ill and wretched.”(130) Paula complains that she cannot sleep and that she believes she has “got the horrors.”(138) She tells Ardale that “The life I used to lead spoilt me completely.” (162)

Paula’s mental crisis comes to the fore in her argument with Ellean in Act IV. She becomes violent in her desperation to convince her stepdaughter that she is not wicked:

PAULA. It’s a lie! It’s all a lie! [Forcing Ellean down upon her knees.] You shall beg my pardon for it. [Ellean utters a loud shriek of terror.] Ellean, I’m a good woman! I swear I am! I’ve always been a good woman! You dare to say I’ve ever been anything else! It’s a lie! [Throwing her off violently] (186)

Pinero is modifying the concept that Charlotte Brontë expressed in reference to Bertha Mason, that sin is a species of insanity. Paula does not display murderous rage but embodies psychological damage which is directly related to her past life. Pinero shows that the double standard of sexual morality may be unfair, but it is inescapable; Aubrey acknowledges this when he curses Ardale in his conversation with Drummle: "Yes, I do curse him -- him and his class! Perhaps I curse myself too in doing it. He has only led “a man’s life” -- just as I, how many of us, have done...My poor, wretched wife!"(194) Paula can be pitied but the audience is not expected to condone her life before her marriage. She herself expresses their implied reaction when she states, “I believe the future is only the past again, entered through another gate.”(190)

For its time The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was innovative and daring. It was acclaimed as a turning point in English drama. The author thought that the subject matter was risky and did not expect that it would be as successful as it was; in fact, it was only by chance that it was accepted as a regular production. George Alexander, the actor-manger at the St. James’s Theatre, initially agreed to present the play in a series of afternoon productions and it was only when he suddenly needed a change in his evening bill that he decided to present The Second Mrs. Tanqueray. There is no doubt that it was Mrs. Patrick Campbell’s performance which made the
MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL AS THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY.

From a Photograph by ALFRED ELLIS, 120 W. 33rd Street, N.Y.
play so popular. She was acclaimed for her portrayal of the “temperamental” heroine, and her exotic looks made her an exciting stage presence. Although the play was enormously successful, the critics were reluctant to condone the subject matter. Not surprisingly, Clement Scott said that he loathed and hated the story and blamed the Ibsen influence for such a play being staged in London. Shaw found the play contrived and unbelievable and his opinion is the one that survives. However contemporary audiences found it a powerful exploration of the tragic inevitability of a life such as Paula’s. The Athenaeum review (June 3, 1893) stated:

Thoroughly realistic in conception and execution is the ingenious, but depressing play...It cannot be said to owe anything directly to the Ibsen drama, yet its heroine might easily take her place among “Trolls,” and something of the mist and gloom of the winter fjord seems to hang about and cling to it...The theory that there is no salvation for the woman that has fallen is familiar and jéjune. It is accentuated in the present case by the manner in which the woman recognizes that the obstacles spring from within...Part one consists of the revelation of a shallow, impressionable, self-willed, and hysterical nature; part two of the punishment, self-earned and inevitable, that is meted out to it....

Pinero’s The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith did not offer any new insight into the anomalous position faced by women who stepped outside convention. Distraction and repentance or death were still the only conclusions that Pinero could, and chose to present in order to ensure a safe, theatrical denouement. Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins, in their play Alan’s Wife (1893), tried to reject the ethos which informed other plays of the period. The result was critical outrage and a limited audience.

Refuting Madness: Alan’s Wife

Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins’s play was performed by the Independent Theatre Society at Terry’s theatre; there were initially two matinee performances only. The playwrights and the producer were not aiming at a wide general audience; the play was, from the first, intended for a more discerning and dramatically literate theatre-goer of the type who appreciated Ibsen’s work. The Independent Theatre Society relied on the subscriptions of its members to stage plays which would otherwise never reach an audience. J. T. Grein, the founder of the Society, wanted to create, in England, a theatre similar to the Parisian Théâtre des Jeunes which
Eugene Desroches had founded in order to promote new drama. Grein’s aim was to encourage original plays which would be free of both the official censor (the Examiner of Plays) and the unofficial self-censorship imposed by the commercial demands of theatre managers. Any play which was considered too risky would be avoided by the managers while many would never receive a licence from the Examiner. Furthermore, theatre licenses could be revoked if unlicensed plays were performed, and theatre managers were naturally reluctant to jeopardize their businesses. Apart from a shortage of funds, Grein had the added problem of finding a location in which to stage his productions for the private, subscription audiences since he had neither a permanent company nor his own theatre. Despite these difficulties the Independent Theatre Society survived and provided a forum for plays such as Alan’s Wife.

The play was taken from a Swedish story by Elin Ameen entitled Befriad which means released or set free. The authors presented the play anonymously and Elizabeth Robins herself played the leading role. The subject matter of the play is the murder of an infant by his mother because he is deformed, and because she cannot tolerate the idea that he would have to face a life which, to her, seems unbearable. The play is short and sparse, consisting of three separate scenes which concentrate on the character of Jean Creyke, the mother. In the first scene Jean is shown to be a strong-willed woman, devoted to her husband because of his strength and zest for life. Her mother indicates that she would have preferred her to marry the local minister, James Warren, a more educated man, but to Jean he is a weakling and, above all else she values strength. She tells her mother: “We can’t all marry scholars, mother dear -- some of us prefer marrying men instead.” (7) She notes that when they were children Warren had been a fearful, timid boy while she “didn’t know what it was to be afraid. I don’t know now.” (9) She continues:

I want a husband who is brave and strong, a man who is my master as well as other folks; who loves the hills and the heather, and loves to feel the strong wind blowing in his face and the blood rushing through his veins! Ah! to be happy -- to be alive! (9)

She emphasises that her greatest joy will be to have Alan’s child and that:

He shall be called Alan, too, and he will be just like him. He will have the same honest blue eyes, that make you believe in them, and the same yellow hair and a straight nose, and a firm, sweet mouth...and all the neighbours will come in and see his sturdy little limbs, and say, “My word, what a fine boy!” He’ll be just such
another as his father. (17)

Almost immediately there is news of an accident at the factory and Alan is brought home dead on a bier.

The second scene shows Jean with her mother and a neighbour after her child has been born weak and deformed. Jean appears to show little interest in him, but she is visibly horrified when the child is referred to as a cripple. She tells her mother that she has “no hope left...only certainty.”(26) Her mother tells her: “You must put off that hard, rebellious spirit, and put on a meek and submissive one, else you will be punished for your pride some day.”(27) Jean can find no comfort in the conventional wisdom of her mother and the neighbour, and says after they leave:

Oh, if only they would give over telling me it’s for the best! (Looks at cradle) For the best! That for the best! (Bends over cradle) But he has got a darling little face all the same! Poor little bairn -- my poor little bairn! They say I don’t love you -- I don’t care for you at all! Yes, yes, I do, dear, yes I do! (Buries her face and sobs.) (30)

She also rejects the pious, well-intentioned advice that the minister hopes to give her, asserting the harsh reality of the child’s condition in the following exchange:

WARREN: Your mother asked me to look in, and --
JEAN: And tell me of my sinful ways -- yes, I know!...
WARREN: Jean, how ill you look! You’re fretting; you mustn’t rebel so against the visitation o’God! His laws are --
JEAN: Good and merciful. Yes, I’ve heard that!
WARREN: Eh! I hope you’re not doubting his loving-kindness, Jean!
JEAN: I’m not thinking about God, nor about loving-kindness.
WARREN: But you must, child. It’ll steady and strengthen ye. Ye’ll find His mercy everywhere.
JEAN: Do you think I’ll find it in the cradle, yon? (31)

When Warren tells her that eventually the child will be a comfort to her she asks him “But how shall I comfort the child?”(32) Warren’s visit has made Jean think that the child will survive infancy and, when left alone, she ponders aloud on what kind of life is in store for him. She blames herself for the baby’s handicap and in a long, final speech states that she cannot bear to see him suffer. She addresses the child as she comes to the decision that she should take his life:
Baby, I’m frightened! Listen, I don’t know what to do. Do you want to live? Tell me, shall you ever hate me for this horrible gift of life? (With wild vacant eyes) Oh, I seem to see you in some far-off time, your face distorted like your body, but with bitterness and loathing, saying, “Mother, how could you be so cruel as to let me live and suffer? You could have eased my pain; you could have saved me this long martyrdom; when I was little and lay in your arms. Why didn’t you save me? You were a coward -- a coward!” ... Are you asking for life? No, you don’t want to live, do you? No, no, you cannot!...

As the second scene ends Jean, who is described in the stage directions as someone “who moves like a woman in a dream”, baptises the child, prays and as the curtain falls, blows out all the candles in the room and moves towards the cradle to smother him.

The final scene is set in a prison. Jean has evidently been found guilty of murder and is to be hanged unless there is a reprieve. It is this scene which is the most interesting in the play as throughout it Jean refuses to speak. A warder says that they “Can get nothing out of her”, and Colonel Stuart, the supervisor of the prison, states: I can’t help feeling there must be some extenuating circumstance if only we could get at it.” (38-39) However when he asks Jean’s mother, who has come to visit her: “Do you think her mind was at all affected at the time?” she denies this and says that she believes that her daughter killed the child because it was “a poor wreckling” which Stuart finds incomprehensible.(40) Jean’s mother tells him “Oh, my poor girl, she was always too proud. I always told her she was. The Lord has punished her.”(41)

When Jean is brought in the stage directions indicate that her dialogue is to be completely internal until the end, “Jean’s sentences are given as a stage direction of what she is silently to convey...” (41) Mrs. Holroyd urges her daughter to tell them that she was deranged when she killed the baby, but Jean refuses to speak, only indicating that she knew what she was doing and is not afraid to die. She does, however, give a sharp cry when her mother begins to talk about the night of the child’s death. Warren arrives with the news that the reprieve has been denied and begs her to confess her sin to God, but Jean indicates that she does not believe that she will die unforgiven. Mrs. Holroyd’s and Warren’s distress at Jean’s silence and lack of repentance are conveyed through their heightened agitation as they plead with her to speak. But it is only when Warren urges her to confess her crime that Jean does speak. She repeats the word “crime” and responds to Stuart’s assertion that she had killed the child because she did not have the courage to bear the sight of its “misfortunes” saying:
JEAN: I hadn't courage? I've had courage just once in my life -- just once in my life I've been strong and kind -- and it was the night I killed my child! (She turns away to the door).

WARREN: Jean! (Mrs. Holroyd cries something inarticulate as she tries in despair to hold Jean back).

JEAN: Don't mother, don't! You don't think I could live after this, do you? I had to do what I did, and they have to take my life for it. I showed him the only true mercy, and that is what the law shows me! Maybe I shall find him up yonder made straight and fair and happy -- find him in Alan's arms. Goodbye -- mother -- goodbye!

The play ends as Jean is led away to await her execution.

*Alan's Wife* suggests that a seemingly horrific and irrational act is not the product of an insane mind but is, on the contrary, a feasible, even responsible, action. Significantly, in the protagonist's terms, it is beyond any conventional explanation. Jean steadfastly refuses to share her story, to explain her reasons for suffocating her child. Jean denies a melodramatic framework for her actions by refusing to admit that she was unbalanced when she performed the act. She denies the audience the comfort of the familiar explanation of female distraction and mental aberrance. It is a startlingly silent part that Jean plays in the third scene. Her silence indicates that she is in control; it denies any hint of insanity since, as the examination of earlier plays has demonstrated, it is quiescence, which traditionally denotes female sanity on stage. Although criticism of the play concentrated on the infanticide, Jean's actions are not as powerful as her silence in dramatic terms.

Bernard Shaw complained that the play was little more than a failed melodrama, asserting that a woman in Jean's position would never be hanged, and that furthermore many such infanticides went undetected and unpunished, their perpetrators being perfectly capable of hiding their crimes. He felt that the plot was a cheat from beginning to end as he explains in a letter to William Archer:

Women do, as a matter of fact, polish off invalids and children on the ground that it is the most sensible and humane thing to do. Infanticide on that and other grounds is not a thing that women confess to; but every coroner knows how frequent it is...Such women are not in the least like Jean, and never do it in Jean's way. They don't get hung; and they don't repent...The tragedy, if there is a
tragedy, lies in the fact, and not in the fuss that is made about it. To represent a woman killing her child in such a way as to convince nine tenths of the audience that she is suffering from puerperal mania, and then getting hung for it, is to my mind shirking the problem as completely as it can be shirked.\textsuperscript{28}

From the point of view of realism, Shaw’s view cannot be denied. Jean would never have been hanged; such a sentence for infanticide had not been carried out since 1849. The courts favoured leniency in such matters and the cases were difficult to prove. Showalter explains:

Victorian judges and juries...were reluctant to sentence infanticidal women to death, and...responded compassionately to the insanity defense generally used in their behalf. Infanticidal women who were committed for life to Bethlem or Broadmoor were also more likely to be released by order of the home secretary than any other group of the criminally insane.\textsuperscript{29}

Shaw wrote to Archer, stating that if he had written the play, Jean would have successfully hidden the fact of the crime, everyone would have been aware of it, and she would have eventually achieved respectability by marrying Warren. The first and second scenes of Alan’s Wife do have the somewhat stagey and tired elements of melodrama which Shaw decried: the audience does not see the strength of the relationship between Jean and her husband; instead they are told of it through the conversation of the women. Furthermore, the obvious distress of Jean in the second scene would lead the audience into thinking, with Shaw, that she is suffering from puerperal mania. However, she insists by her silence in scene three that she is not.

Catherine Wiley has pointed out that the text of the play gives its readers the chance of knowing exactly what Jean’s internal dialogue is, whereas the stage version gives the audience only the facial expressions and gestures of the character.\textsuperscript{30} This must have been disconcerting; the stillness of the final scene is heightened by its juxtaposition with the two previous scenes in which there was first a celebration of life and second, a deliberate choice of death. Elizabeth Robins was noted as a powerful and intelligent actress; she was most closely associated with Ibsen’s work, in which melodrama and symbolism had their place. The last scene of Alan’s Wife can be seen as a response to, and a denial of the melodramatic framework which had gone before. Jean’s silence can be seen as a symbolic rejection of a male discourse which demands a verbal engagement. This, it could be argued, is managed somewhat heavy-handedly: Colonel Stuart’s insistence that Jean explain away her crime and Mrs. Holroyd’s pleas with her daughter to admit to being deranged at the time of the murder after she herself has denied the possibility, give the
impression that the two characters are mere cyphers. Their purpose is simply to create the noise which serves to heighten Jean's silence. Warren's final plea with Jean to confess her "sin" is similarly strained. However, despite these weaknesses Alan's Wife does portray the horror of Jean's problem from her personal point of view. Shaw would have preferred a political polemic on the general hypocritical attitude of society to infanticide but that was not what the authors were concerned with. Their concern was with the inability of a woman who had made the decision to kill her child to ever hope or expect anyone to understand why. In the terms of the play she is not being hanged so much for the murder as for her refusal to comply with the explanation that is expected of her. Warren and Mrs. Holroyd both chide her for her "pride" in refusing to make such a concession.

The play presents the inability of society to accept female agency and autonomy. The authors chose an extreme scenario in order to bring this to the attention of the audience; they also chose one which was familiar and which was invested with a strong cultural significance, the Victorian idealisation of the wife and mother. Jean is not the new woman of the city, she is no "latchkey" feminist; she is portrayed as an ordinary, intelligent countrywoman whose one stated aim in life is to be the ideal wife and mother. That an obviously devoted wife and loving mother could decide to smother her baby because, in her own mind, that is the only rational course of action was a radical challenge to contemporary mores.

Jean Creyke is, initially, the perfect wife and mother-to-be. She glories in her relationship with her strong, handsome husband; he is her life, as the title of the play suggests. In this she is the epitome of Victorian womanhood, totally devoted to her position as Alan's wife. She cannot be accused of wishing to be other than her sex as was the "New Woman." Her infanticide mirrors the reality of Darwinian ethics in which the survival of the fittest was applied to human endeavour, and of eugenics which sought to eradicate physical and mental weakness in human stock. Robins and Bell are positing what they see as the inevitable outcome of living in contemporary society for such a woman. Her life without her husband will be no life; society will pity her but she will have lost her place in it. Her child will be rejected by that same society since he too will have no value beyond being an object of pity. Jean refuses to be objectified; instead she assumes total subjective responsibility for her own life and that of her child.

The play is not completely successful; the sentimentality of Jean's final speech, her hopes of finding her child and husband in heaven, seem to strengthen Shaw's claim that it was "superstitious atheism -- sensational anti-Goddity." But by her assertion of sanity, the character
of Jean refutes the various mad, hapless heroines which had proved such a mainstay to the nineteenth-century theatre. She refuses to be treated as a victim. In *Alan's Wife* the authors are at odds both with the Romantic concept of female insanity and with the notion of the impropriety of flying in the face of Providence. Melodramatic tactics are used by them to heighten the stark reality of the main character's mind in Scene Three. They turn the convention in upon itself and replace it with a silence which is meant to promote questions in the audience rather than the simplistic answer of a seemingly inevitable conclusion.

*Alan's Wife* was not a successful play. It was found too distasteful even by proponents of the new drama. The symbolism of Jean's silence was largely ignored as an argument raged over what had actually been staged. A. B. Walkley claimed that he had seen a mutilated body covered in red paint when Alan's body was brought onstage, and that the audience had been subjected to the scene of the actual murder of the child. Walkley contended that the audience shared his outrage. The inner strength of Jean's silent effort to communicate was displaced by the expectation of sensational melodrama. This mode of seeing, and thus of comprehending, the play was dependent on the dominant paradigm of female insufficiency. Jean's actions challenge this paradigm and are thus found to be incomprehensible. The playwrights depiction of Colonel Stuart's reaction to Jean pre-figures that of the implied audience. He demands, and is denied, the same explanation that the critics sought.

In his lengthy introduction to the printed edition of *Alan's Wife* William Archer recounts the series of letters between himself and Walkley in *The Speaker* where, despite evidence to the contrary which Archer provided, Walkley insisted that he had seen what had never been shown. Archer notes that Walkley's reaction to the play proved its power over its audience "it proves", he wrote, "beyond a doubt that Mr. Walkley was actually 'upset' by *Alan's Wife* to such a degree as to be incapable of discriminating between what he saw and what he imagined."(xx) Walkley found the subject-matter of *Alan's Wife* unsuitable for a play purporting to be a work of art. Archer quotes one of his comments:

Drama, like any other art, deals with ideas; by ideas it lives and moves and has its being. But there are hateful, intolerable, damnable facts in life which convey no ideas...They do not interest the spectator; they stun him. The odious, brutal, cruel malignity of nature, of which *Alan's Wife* gives us an instance, is outside -- whether above or beneath I know not -- but it is outside the region of art.(xxix)

Walkley asserted that there was no serious subject-matter in the play which showed only
"A poor wretch, maddened by horrible misfortune, her brain still dizzy with the pangs of childbirth [who] kills her child" (xxx). Archer argued that the play's effect on Walkley proved that it did present an ethical dilemma to its audience, but it was not one which they would choose to examine closely. Archer states that Jean is "neither lunatic nor heroine" (xlvi); she does not conform, at first sight, to any of the conventional female stage presences with which the audience was familiar. However, she does echo and subvert such presences.

Catherine Wiley notes:

Walkley witnessed a feminist play aware of its own excess, which staged the violent but bloodless disruption of the nineteenth-century mechanics of representation keeping women captive in the role of idealized motherhood. By writing and performing the New Woman character of Alan's wife, Elizabeth Robins both personified and subverted the nineteenth-century stage version of the feminist subject, a subject whose expression was denied by the very discourse that defined her.32

The play's reception illustrates Wiley's interpretation. Jean's experience and motivation are inexplicable both in the realm of the play (which is indicated by her insistent silence in Scene Three) and in the realm of the critics of the play, who would reject that silence and displace it with their own subjectivity. Walkley claimed it should not have been written: Shaw, as noted above, would have altered it to provide a forum for his political views: Archer wished it had been written as he had suggested, and that it had kept the title of the original. However, Robins and Bell rejected the sentimentality of the idea that Jean or her child had been set free. By naming their play as they did they concentrated on the troubled concept of the Victorian ideal of woman's place in society. They reject the notion of hysteria or insanity and replace it with a stark emptiness and with silence. The anonymity of the co-authors was maintained for thirty years after Alan's Wife was first performed, their silence echoing that of their protagonist. Just as their character Jean Creyke did, they declined to participate in the dominant discourse. However, they were also circumscribed by that discourse.


4. Ibid. 41.


7. Durkheim. 76.


11. Henry Arthur Jones, The Case of Rebellious Susan. London: The Chiswick Press, 1894. 19. Future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.


13. Sydney Grundy. The New Woman. London: The Chiswick Press, 1894. (All future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text.)


18. Fyfe. 166.


27. Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins. *Alan’s Wife*. London: Henry and Co. 1893. (All future references to this work will be given in parentheses throughout the text).


32. Wiley. 432.
CONCLUSION:

The last act of Alan's Wife focuses on the silence of the main protagonist, Jean. This refusal to melodramatize an assumed insanity came when there was emerging a paradigmatic shift in the study and treatment of mental illness. Freud's work was concentrating on listening rather than looking at the subject under therapy. The visual appeal of the melodramatic madwoman was no longer current; she was to be replaced by dramatized psychological examination in the early twentieth century. However, the foundation of Freudian theory, and the subsequent influence of that theory on the theatre, owed not a little to the melodramatic mode of thought and expression which was extant at the time of Freud's enquiries.

Freud's case histories have something of the narrative appeal of melodramatic plots; he acknowledges this in his study of the case of Dora. He explains that psychoanalysis has to delve deeper than simple narrative, but he recognizes that both the analyst and the storyteller refer to similar sources:

I must now turn to consider a further complication to which I should certainly give no space if I were a man of letters engaged upon the creation of a mental state like this for a short story, instead of being a medical man engaged upon its dissection. The element to which I must now allude can only serve to obscure and efface the outlines of the fine poetic conflict, which we have been able to ascribe to Dora. This element would rightly fall a sacrifice to the censorship of a writer, for he, after all, simplifies and abstracts when he appears in the character of a psychologist. But in the world of reality, which I am trying to depict here, a complication of motives, an accumulation and conjunction of mental activities - in a word, overdetermination - is the rule.¹

Despite Freud's attempt to distance himself from the narrative and the poetic in favour of an objective, rational, medical rationale he reaches into the world of romanticism in his search for the unconscious. In his lecture The Dissection of the Personality (1933), Freud comments on the powerful appeal of the insane, noting:

Even we cannot withhold from them something of the reverential awe which peoples of the past felt for the insane. They have turned away from external reality, but for that very reason they know more about internal psychical reality and can reveal a number of things to us that would otherwise be inaccessible to us.²

This is reminiscent of the psychic vitality and sense of psychological truth, which has been ascribed
to the melodramatic theatre by Robertson Davies and Peter Brooks. Brooks writes:

The interpretive system of psychoanalysis is itself expressionistic in its premises, and it casts retrospective light on melodramatic expressionism, for it to some degree reformulates melodrama's concerns and realizes its possibilities...Melodrama in general...suggests the dream world in its enactments, in its thrust to break through repression and censorship, in its unleashing of the language of desire, its fulfilment of integral psychic needs.3

While Freud's research had a profound effect upon the diagnosis, treatment and fictional representation of mental illness in the twentieth century, it was also inevitably a product of the nineteenth century. In his writing, Freud echoes the mythic patterns that had influenced both alienists and romantic writers. He notes that psychoanalysis, in its early stages, tried to find answers to long-held questions and that it was tempting to rely on traditional interpretations to modes of behaviour.

Just as did Herbert Spencer, Freud noted that women were lacking in the concept of justice, and in 1920 Freud was to refer to the Platonic ideal of the "two-cell'd" heart which had held sway throughout the nineteenth century, although he leaves the question open as to accepting the myth. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle Freud hypothesises on the death wish which he sees as an inherent biological instinct.4 He writes: "It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces..."5 Unlike the mechanist psychologists such as Hobbes or the associationists such as Hume, Hartley and James Mill, Freud is reluctant to admit the existence of definitive instincts, although he concedes that such definitions are appealing. He goes on to say:

No knowledge would have been more valuable as a foundation for true psychological science than an approximate grasp of the common characteristics and possible distinctive features of the instincts. But in no region of psychology were we groping more in the dark. Everyone assumed the existence of as many instincts or 'basic instincts' as he chose, and juggled with them like the ancient Greek natural philosophers with their four elements-earth, air, fire and water. Psycho-analysis, which could not escape making some assumption about the instincts, kept at first to the popular division of instincts typified in the phrase "hunger and love."6

Although Freudian theory has been seen as a paradigmatic shift from the rest of nineteenth-century psychology, Freud's need to explain the inexplicable, most especially in what constitutes femininity, leads him to look back to the comforting myth of the androgyne found in Plato and the
Upanishads. He writes:

...science has so little to tell us about the origin of sexuality that we can liken the problem to a darkness into which not so much as a ray of a hypothesis has penetrated. In quite a different region, it is true, we do meet with such a hypothesis; but it is of so fantastic a kind—a myth rather than a scientific explanation—that I should not venture to produce it here, were it not that it fulfills precisely the one condition whose fulfillment we desire. For it traces the origin of an instinct to a need to restore an earlier state of things.

What I have in mind is, of course, the theory which Plato put into the mouth of Aristophanes in the Symposium, and which deals not only with the origin of sexual instinct but also with the most important of its variations in relation to its object.

Freud ends by saying he does not know how far he believes in the basis for the mythic explanation but he gives the myth added weight by its inclusion in his hypothesis, showing that the new psychology did not discard entirely the old for some of its conclusions. It also shows the need to encapsulate within a narrative the complex problems of psychology. Notwithstanding Freud's overwhelming influence on the reinterpretation of the psychology of human sexuality, his statement indicates the same sense of "otherness" which had been traditionally applied to women. His sense of the female psyche as a still-indecipherable entity and, as such, differing from the male continued throughout his work. He notes, at the end of his 1932 lecture entitled "Femininity":

That is all I have to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary and does not always sound friendly...If you want to know more about femininity, enquire of your own experiences of life, or turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information.

Thus Freudian theory was conflated with traditional mythology on the subject of the female psyche.

From the beginning of the proliferation of Freudian theory feminist writers have sought to condemn Freud for his seemingly anti-feminist stance, although Juliet Mitchell notes that Freud was conscious of the fact that he was analyzing a patriarchal society; a society of which he was a part. Such condemnation has taken on the characteristics of the same mythic struggle which was enacted on the melodramatic stage.

The psychopolitical argument even now tends to depict women as the unwitting victim either of a patriarchal society, psychiatric institutions that represent such a society or of individual males. This argument reached its height in the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960's, which was
led by R.D. Laing. While this is not the place to go into a detailed examination of Laingian theory, (and the subsequent retraction of such theory), it is worth noting that such an essentially romantic view of female madness retained credence, and still exists in popular culture, 200 years after the birth of the Romantic movement. An element of magic and mystery still clings to the concept of female insanity despite convincing biochemical explanations. Biochemistry makes poor copy and poor melodrama: there is a sense that the seeming irrationality of an individual cannot possibly be explained in rational terms. Madness, it would seem, is too exciting to be so banal. There is little narrative value in a blood sample: a story needs to be constructed around the process of madness for it to be acceptable or useful in popular culture. A seemingly irrational act needs to be explained in terms which convinces us that it is, indeed, the product of an aberrant mind or even a "special" mind which is somehow more in touch with truth than the normative. In dramatic terms such an act must convince an audience that such a mind is to be pitied or feared since it cannot be understood; the Ophelias, the sensation heroines, and the neurasthenic new women were all attempts to provide such dramatic convictions. As Susan Sontag has written:

The romantic view is that illness exacerbates consciousness. Once that illness was tb; now it is insanity that is thought to bring consciousness to a state of paroxysmic enlightenment.⁹

The mad heroines of melodrama were also romantic symbols of such exacerbated consciousness; therein lay their appeal and their endurance as familiar characters on the nineteenth-century stage.


5. Freud. Beyond the Pleasure Principle. 36.


Appendix I

The Ballad of Crazy Jane, M.G. Lewis.
(from The Life and Correspondence of M.G. Lewis, London: Henry Colburn, 1839. 188-9).

Stay, fair maid! On every feature,
Why are marks of dread imprest?
Can a wretched, helpless creature
Raise such terrors in your breast?
Do my frantic looks alarm you?
Trust me, sweet, your fears are vain:
Not for kingdoms would I harm you--
Shun not then poor Crazy Jane.

Dost thou weep to see my anguish?
Mark me, and escape my woe:
When men flatter, sigh, and languish,
Think them false--I found them so!
For I loved, Oh! so sincerely,
None will ever love again;
Yet the man I prized most dearly
Broke the heart of Crazy Jane.

Gladly that young heart received him,
Which has never loved but one;
He seemed true, and I believed him--
He was false, and I undone!
Since that hour has reason never
Held her empire o'er my brain.
Henry fled!--With him, for ever,
Fled the wits of Crazy Jane.

Now forlorn and broken-hearted,
Still with frenzied thoughts beset,
Near the spot where last we parted,
Near the spot where first we met,
Thus I chant my lovelorn ditty,
While I sadly pace the plain;
And each passer by, in pity,
Cries 'God help thee, Crazy Jane!'
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