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“Not as She is” but as She is Expected to Be:
Representations, Limitations, and Implications of the “Woman” and Womanhood in Selected
Victorian Literature and Contemporary Chick Lit.

by
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A thesis submitted to the faculty of Gardner-Webb University in partial fulfillment of the
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2017

“Not as She is but as She is Expected to Be:’ Representations, Limitations, and Implications of the ‘Woman’ and Womanhood in Selected Victorian Literature and Contemporary Chick Lit.”

One face looks out from all his canvases,
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
 A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
 A saint, an angel -- every canvas means
 The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
 He feeds upon her face by day and night,
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
 Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

-Christina Georgina Rossetti, “In an Artist’s Studio”

Introduction

Above is the famous poem “In an Artist’s Studio,” by Christina Georgina Rossetti, a well-known Victorian poet writing this poem partly to call attention to the fact that Victorian images of women were incredibly limited and flawed. Reading the poem itself, we can see this idea showcased through the woman portrayed in all of the canvases. The woman is “not as she is, but as she fills his dream;” she is “one selfsame figure;” she is “nameless,” seen simply as *his* ideal – a beautiful, kind, pure angel. It could be argued that this woman is symbolic for all women and the artist for society, as it attempts to define women, womanhood, and femininity within limiting stereotypes and images. The poem simultaneously points out the limitations of depicting women only ideally, or as she is expected to be by others – influenced ultimately by the gendered expectations of the Separate Spheres ideology – compelling “us to consider the real woman who ‘looks out from all his canvases,’ whose face the painter ‘feeds upon...by day and

night,” who is “objectified by the artist,” being nameless and voiceless herself (Orlando 614). Can one not see the symbolism for all women, as society attempts to define her “not as she is,” but as she is expected to be, as she fills his dream (i.e. society’s)?

Like Rossetti, women writers have been challenging such limited images of themselves for quite some time, attempting to give themselves a voice, a name, and a chance at self-identification and expression. In Victorian Literature, I observe three primary images of women that existed during the period – the Angel of the House, the Governess, and the New Woman – observing first, how they existed stereotypically and historically; second, how they each related to the Separate Spheres ideology in unique and bifurcated ways with the women writers typically countering and complicating those images; and finally, how the newer contemporary genre of Chick Lit seems to be influenced by the social impacts of the gendered expectations within the ideology making the writing and its overall ideals parallel their predecessors. Ultimately, women have been and continue to call for women’s self identification and expression in their own right as the human beings that they are – to be able to be who they are, not just who they are expected to be – displaying how they’re more complex than limited, prescribed images, but even potentially a mix between the old and new, the feminist and the anti-feminist all at the same time.

As mentioned, first I cover the actual images of the women as they existed historically and stereotypically. Joan Perkin’s book entitled *Victorian* covers many representation and ideas surrounding women during the Victorian Era, detailing the social situations behind the images and more. Her general thesis is that women have always been represented as inferior to men, and yet few women really believed it, and many found ways to dispute these assigned positions. Other scholars provide information on specific images. Pamela Horn’s essay “The Victorian

Governess,” for example, discusses the historical Governess while Elizabeth Langland describes the Angel of the House and domestic ideologies. For each chapter, I relate these images as they exist historically and stereotypically to a specific novel or piece of writing coming out of the Victorian era, and then later to a piece of Chick Lit writing. Thus, some of my research has also been precisely on the novels I employ within my thesis as examples. The chapters and novels are as followed:

Chapter 1: The Angel of the House

The Daisy Chain by Charlotte Yonge

Little Earthquakes by Jennifer Weiner

Chapter 2: The Governess

Agnes Grey by Anne Brontë

The Nanny Diaries by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus

Chapter 3: The New Woman

The Heavenly Twins by Sarah Grand

Eat, Love, Pray by Elizabeth Gilbert

With such a structure, many sources directly relate to and discuss the novels specifically, such as Maggie Berg’s essay “Hapless dependents:’ Woman and Animal in *Agnes Grey*,” in which she explores the connection between women, animals, and their positions of oppression within the novel. Berg’s approach generally conforms to the image of the stereotypical governess, which is helpful, but she also shows how that conformity works in Brontë’s feminist agenda of “drawing attention to the socially constructed nature of the Victorian chain of beings” (Berg 194). I must also note that Gilbert’s book *Eat, Pray, Love* is not a fictitious novel, but instead a memoir. However, her memoir addresses the same stereotypes and ideas surrounding women today.

Next, the Separate Spheres ideology and its impacts are insurmountably significant to my thesis. This dominant ideology heavily influenced stereotypes, images, and expectations surrounding women during the period. It worked as a bifurcated system separating women's qualities from men into binaries such as public/private, market/domestic, sinner/saint. These ideas "rested on a definition of the 'natural' characteristics of women and men," (Hughes, Kathryn). Women were generally and ideally seen as morally superior, saintly angels, pure and kind – much like the image seen in Rossetti's poem – while men were generally seen as more aggressive, morally inferior, hardy, and corrupted by the public arenas of life. Because of this, women were destined to the private, domestic sphere where they were to preside over the "home and family" with a "mission" to provide a sanctified haven from the rough-and-tumble world of business and politics," and raise up another generation of young men and women with this ideology internalized and ingrained within their being, unquestioningly (Henderson 1520). Each image relates to this ideology in bifurcated ways and they were influenced by the gendered expectations coming out of the ideology. At the same time women were also reacting to, often attempting to counter and complicate, the ideas as well.

For example, the Angel of the House could, on the forefront, be seen as accepting and adopting the Spheres ideology, while the New Woman could be seen as rejecting it, with the Governess caught somewhere in the middle of the two. On the other hand, though, each of these images also ends up somewhat paradoxically resembling the tenets and ideas of what should be the opposite of their stereotypical ideals. The Angel sometimes parallels the New Woman and vice versa. In fact, Nancy Armstrong brings up this interesting paradox when comes to women's domestic writing of the time in her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. Although ideal women were meant to be seen as domestic and subjected, she argues, the rise of women authors of

domestic novels showcased the neglect of the “political world run by men,” and that these women “writing for and about the female introduced a whole new vocabulary for social relations, terms that attached precise moral value to certain qualities of mind” (Armstrong 11). In essence, these same women who are meant to be nameless and voiceless, silent and submissive, ultimately become the voices shaping the social and cultural ideas surrounding them. These domestic novels said “what was female” and that proved to be more complex than the simplistic images prescribed to women during the time (Armstrong 12). In turn, these women writes “had to manage the difficult task of simultaneously subverting and conforming to patriarchal standards” (qtd. in Armstrong 14).

Likewise, these women, being in charge of the moral atmosphere of the home, could influence their husbands and children, again ultimately and potentially shaping the social and cultural ideas surrounding women. Armstrong points out the paradoxical power these women had through this bifurcated system of the Spheres ideology. Women, as the ones who observed all that went on in the household, and worked to mold the people and their values within that household, ultimately held more power than assumed at the forefront. This shows within the literature of the time as well. So even as this ideology is so internalized and ingrained within society, and although images, connotations and stereotypes of women were certainly influenced by this ideology; women writers certainly reacted to and often countered the traditional expectations and notions. Through all of this, we end up with these interesting, paradoxical representations of women that sometimes lie more in the middle of the anti-feminist to progressive woman rather than as simple as some would understand them to be seen.

Of course, many scholars, such as Armstrong herself and Monika Elbert, display the ways in which the Spheres ideology simply didn't hold, disappeared with time, or was

inaccurate. I argue against this point showing, instead, how the ideology still impacts images of women even today, centuries later. Of course, the ideology does not exist in the way it did in the 19th century. Then, it was an obvious part of the social atmosphere. The public knew about the ideology's existence, acknowledged, accepted, and reacted to it in many ways. Today, the ideology is more ingrained and internalized within society as a whole. Andrea L. Miller and Eugene Borgida, scholars of psychology, say in their essay "The Separate Spheres Model of Gendered Inequality":

the general notion of the separate spheres for men and women is deeply ingrained in our culture. Journalists, legal scholars, and social scientists have observed a wide variety of gendered phenomena that seem to be manifestations of the public's insistence that men and women occupy separate spheres. In contrast, we propose that the separate spheres ideology is a measurable psychological construct with individual and situational variability. (Miller 2)

Of course, today, there are still those that know about the ideology, acknowledge and react to it, but the general public does not seem to – outright anyway. Instead their resistances to this ideology, along with its influences and impacts, are within their writing, art, etc. mimicking the stories of the Victorian women's writing. Thus, the ideology never truly "disappeared" so to say. Women have, since the beginning of the ideology, attempted to battle these ingrained notions that stem from the ideology and its surrounding expectations. Although circumstances may have improved over the centuries, we find that women have continued to be haunted by the impacts and influences of the ideology, as Virginia Woolf describes in her speech "Professions of Women," saying "The Angel inhibits by reminding a writer to maintain the approved feminine image" which continues today (Blodgett 6)

While it still exists, not everything is as rigid as it seems. Although this ideology has continued to be dominant and internalized, it is often more blurred than many assume. Many “Post-deconstructionist, revisionist critics have enjoyed the freedom in exploring rather amorphous territory that includes experiences common to both sexes,” showing that “there is often no clear demarcation between the male/public realm and the female/private realm” (Elbert 2). Of course, the ideology continues to exist and influence heavily, but to some degree, such an “essentialist, reductionist position is dangerous in coming to terms with diverging experiences of different kinds of women” (Elbert 2). The ideology limits even within its own limitations, sometimes neglecting race, class, and more, which are also important in the larger cultural and social understanding of women’s identities.

Nonetheless, since the Separate Spheres’ influences still linger today and the ideology never truly disappeared, the images and stereotypes also persist. They are paralleled in the women’s writing today – popularly coined Chick Lit, and some of its subgenres. There are many that refuse to take the genre of Chick Lit, and its encompassing subgenres, seriously. Some scholars coin it as simple, as mere beach reading for women to enjoy. To make such accusations is absolutely ridiculous, but not anything new. For much time, women’s writing has been just that – simply for women, not to be taken as serious minus some exceptions. Chick Lit scholar Chris Mazza shows in his essay “Who’s Laughing Now? A Short History of Chick Lit and the Perversion of a Genre” the necessity for the genre of Chick Lit today, explaining why women’s representation in society needs to be an ongoing discussion quoting several important reasons. Mazza so bluntly states:

writers with double-X chromosomes have been set apart, frequently called ‘women writers’ while the others remain, simply, wholly, ‘writers.’ What these women writers

produce has been ‘women’s fiction,’ and the rest, unconditionally, is ‘fiction’ (or even ‘literature’). The translation to me always has been that men write about what’s important; women write about what’s important to *women* (Mazza 28).

I would simply add to this argument that women’s characters in literature are no different. Even as protagonists, women in literature are so defined by stereotypes that often, women’s true complexity is missed, and they can be no more than the prescribed “angel of the house” and not simply the woman that she is, but expected to be.

Further, the modern women’s writing certainly parallels the plotlines, messages, and ideas incorporated in Victorian writing. For example, the Angel of the House and domestic novels are mimicked in today’s subgenre known as “Mommy Lit,” which tells the stories of women as they exist as wives and mothers, as they exist domestically. Each of those stereotypical images of women have a Chick Lit counterpart. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young’s anthology entitled *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction* includes a plethora of information on the genre and subgenres of Chick Lit. The authors also use this anthology to argue the potential this newer genre has for both social/cultural understanding and its potential relevance in scholarship, despite what many think. Understanding how these images connect, even as they exist across centuries, is so significant to continuing the conversations on womanhood, femininity, and how its ultimately understood within our still bifurcated society of gendered expectations influenced by an ideology of the past.

Thus, what my paper does focus on are the various ways in which women are represented in Victorian Women’s Literature versus the newer contemporary genre of Chick Lit, which is also considered to be “women’s literature.” There seems to be some gaps in scholarship when it comes to discussing these specific representations as they are influenced by the Spheres

ideology, how they're more complex than the simple parameters society attempts to see them as, and how these Victorian representations and stereotypes linger into today's Chick Lit, paralleling their predecessors. While some scholars may do one or two of these, they do not address them all as a whole. Armstrong wrote before Chick Lit really began, Elbert never addresses the genre, and other studies are merely limited to either Victorian literature as it relates to the images alone or Chick Lit alone. In each chapter, then, I introduce the images in question as they are stereotypically and historically seen, discuss how they relate to and were influenced by the Spheres ideology, show how women writers used the images through selected works – first Victorian, then Chick Lit – and finally how those women writers challenged notions surrounding each representation in their own unique ways, often countering/complicating the image altogether.

All in all, I will be showing how representations of women reflected in literature are flawed, being defined and influenced by societal ideologies such as the separate spheres and how writers have attempted to work through and past the ideology and its surrounding expectations. Women, in reality, are much more complicated and complex; so much so that even they have conflicted views on the woman question(s), both in the Victorian period and in contemporary writing. I also want to continue the argument that we still need to be having conversations about women in society and literature because women are still falling into these same trends and stereotypes as appropriated by society's attempt to define women, womanhood, and their roles and obligations. Women just cannot be placed in finite representations and definitions. Society needs to start rethinking how we characterize, label, define, and represent women. Women are not simply mothers and wives. They are individuals whose experiences and perspectives need to be accounted for in the reconceptualization of women as a whole. If not, this trend in women's

literature will only continue as women continue to demand to be heard and demand to self identify, define, and express. We need to learn to see her “as she is,” not as she fills anyone else’s dream or as she is expected to be.

Chapter 1 The Angel of the House

Arguably the most prominent representation of women in the Victorian era is coined as the “Angel of the House.” This is because the Angel was the stereotypical ideal for a Victorian woman, so much so that she became the icon of a civilized woman during the time. Much of her characterization stems from the prevailing gendered ideology of the Separate Spheres, in which “the house [was regarded] as a haven, a private domain (sphere) opposed to the public sphere,” (Langland 291). Within this haven, women were in charge, but of course, not entirely. However, Perkins points out that this domesticated wife exists in two distinct lights, the perspective held by men and the other by women. She says, “Men’s idea was of a decoratively idle, sexually passive woman, pure of heart, religious and self-sacrificing...an ivy-like wife who was also a doting and self-abnegating mother, clinging to her husband on whom she was totally dependent” (Perkins 86). On the other hand, she says that women authors “portrayed women of independent mind and strong passions,” and that these authors “analyzed women as people in their own right, not simply as adjuncts to men” (Perkins 86-87). While Perkins displays how both existed at the same time in an excellent way, I would argue that it was less of a side-by-side existence, and more of an intermingled, blurred and complicated one, just as the Separate Spheres ideology is less rigid than many see it to be.

On one hand, some women truly enjoyed their position as the Angel. They acknowledged it, were proud of it, and even strongly advocated it, teaching not only their children how to grow up with similar gendered constructions, but teaching other women to thrive in their role as well. Chieko Ichikawa argues that there was even an “increase in the number of advice manuals for women in Britain...to cultivate female virtue” (Ichikawa 87). One of the leading women’s advice writers of the time was Sarah Stickney Ellis, an Angel herself, and a teacher to other women to

blossom into Angels also. She wrote a number of “popular guides to female conduct, including *The Women of England* (1839), *The Daughters of England* (1842), *The Wives of England* (1845), and *The Mothers of England* (1845);” and in these guides she “advised women to accept their inferiority to men and devote themselves to happiness and moral elevation” (Henderson 1525). Often, she is considered the creator of the popularized image of the Angel. Ichikawa says, “In her conduct books, Ellis intends to construct a new image of the domestic women, namely, the ‘angel in the house’” (Ichikawa 88).

Likewise, Ellis had a particular vision for this new image which included several key elements that did not always line up with the vision of others. Many middle-class families were enthusiastic towards a woman being “educated as a lady,” and to “acquire accomplishments,” whereas Ellis thought that women’s education should be based around moral virtues and faith in Christianity saying that, “ ‘Christian virtue’ brings a young woman intelligence and purity of mind, which enables her to naturally master elegant behavior” (Ichikawa 88-90). Ellis also argues that she can use these moral virtues to “be of essential service in aiding the judgments of their husbands, brothers, and sons, in those intricate affairs it is sometimes difficult to discover worldly wisdom from religious duty” (qtd. in Henderson 1525). Next, Ellis advocates “self-denial,” so that women can fully focus on their domestic and moral responsibilities. Sure, she is the domestic comfort, spiritual councilor, and manager at home; but she also virtuously lives for others, “visiting and caring for the sick,” as well as “bringing [Angelic] principles into exercise, and of obtaining influence, both in their own domestic sphere and in society at large” through Angelic middle-class contributions (Henderson 1527). Finally, being this Angel would also mean she, as a mother and wife, is responsible for bestowing these beliefs on her children and husband, ultimately reproducing and reinforcing the ideologies into the next generation. Overall, Ellis was

wildly influential towards this representation of women, but the image itself is still far more complex than Ellis anticipated or hoped.

See, not all women were as enthusiastic about becoming this Angel. Many women ended up falling into more of a strange in-between zone. Often, women found it to be burdensome overall. Ichikawa says, “Pursuing these duties described...must have been a burden to women who had intellectual or professional aspirations,” and that women, in this ideology, are categorized only from the position of “daughter,’ ‘wife,’ and ‘mother’ instead of being considered as individuals” (Ichikawa 100). Many women longed both to be and to do more than what the very limiting, constrictive societal expectations allowed. However, at the same time, many of these same women felt pressured and even haunted by these same expectations. These women were conflicted, wanting to be both the ideal wife and mother, keeping to the Angelic conduct, but yearning to be an individual in her own right as well, beyond the simplified stereotype. Popular writer and early feminist, Virginia Woolf displays these more complicated views in her 1931 paper and speech “Professions of Women,” read to the London/National Society for Women’s Service (Blodgett 6). As a writer, Woolf felt as if she was confined by the Angel “haunting her.” She describes the societal expectations as the personified oppressive phantom of the Angel that whispered as she wrote, “Be sympathetic, be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure” (qtd. in Showalter 207). She is not alone in this. Many women writers wrote self-consciously, avoiding the true expression of their feelings. Harriet Blodgett says, “The Angel inhibits by reminding a writer to maintain the approved feminine image,” (Blodgett 6).

Elaine Showalter, feminist scholar, adds to the conversation saying that this “battle to stay alive, to fight for one’s emotional independence against the smothering embrace of the

Angel, is fought repeatedly in women's literature" (Showalter 208). Such conflicts ultimately lead to characters and themes in much of the same light. For example, readers can see this fight in Ethel May's character in Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*. Woolf recognizes the hold the image has over her, and although she wants to "kill the Angel," and many assume she succeeds to through her writing, "her actual point is that she is indelibly stamped with the image and cannot destroy it," (Blodgett 6).

Still, the lines can be blurred and complicated even further. While many saw these Angels as being purely domestic and subjected, some scholars, such as Nancy Armstrong, point out the paradoxical power the Angel seemed to have by being the manager and influencer within the home. Women who were writing, likewise, had the power over their novels and the characters within them. There has been such a history "to silence and marginalize [women]. Men represented women as they wished them to be...And women therefore wrote despite a tradition that was hostile to their own desires and requirements for self-expression" (Armstrong 261). Yet, through writing, Armstrong continues to argue that these women have been empowered at the same time. These women could ingrain messages of resistance, even more subtle ones, to both the Spheres ideology and the images and expectations influenced by the ideology. They could become the voices shaping social and cultural ideas surrounding women, internalizing these ideas into their children at home and the readers of their novels, who would potentially do the same with their own families. So although these women writers "had to manage the difficult task of simultaneously subverting and conforming to patriarchal standards," they did so in order to blur the stereotypes and to call for self-expression and recognition of women in their own right (qtd. in Armstrong 14).

With such variations of individuals (despite the attempt to limit individualism and self-expression in women), there were, too, mixed reactions to the Spheres ideology and the expectations surrounding it. Again, many women ultimately ended up having mixed feelings, falling more in the in-between. At first glance one could easily argue that the Angel, and all women who endeavored to be the Angel, seems to adopt the Separate Spheres ideology in totality. After all, she exists in her private, domestic sphere and she seemingly follows the gendered expectations that are influenced by the ideology. However, through detailed looks at even some of the notable anti-feminist, conservative writers' literature, we can see these women attempting to work through and potentially beyond the Spheres ideology and its prescriptive limitations. This just shows women as the human beings that they are, rather than the stereotypes many attempted to limit them as. It shows that women may claim to be anti-feminist, but may have mixed feelings about specific issues, falling elsewhere on the spectrum at times. Charlotte Mary Yonge, I would argue, is one of these women writers.

Yonge is an author famously known for her conservatism within her novels and is often considered antifeminist (Thompson 4). In fact, her conservatism is often heralded as the reason she is not included in Victorian canon. Scholar Tamara Wagner calls Yonge a "forgotten Victorian woman writer" and traces it "to her endorsement of hierarchical family structures and a paternalistic deity overseeing this essentially patriarchal world" (Wagner 279). Nonetheless, she wrote domestic novels about and advocating for the ideal Victorian family, which was religiously based, morally sound, and separated by the approved spheres. Valerie Sanders says that she was a novelist who believed that "women essentially belonged at home – ideally as wives" (Sanders 26). One would say she clearly adhered to the Spheres ideology and subsequently, one can find the image of the Angel within Yonge's novels quite easily.

This was something modern feminists simply were not interested in when rediscovering the forgotten women's writers, which is partly why Yonge remains less popular. Interestingly though, the image of the Angel and the antifeminist may not always be presented in the way one would expect from an author considered to be so notably reserved in her views. As Nicola Thompson suggests, Yonge's views, like many others, on women were more complicated and conflicted. Thompson argues that "beneath the overt conservatism in [her] plot-lines, [her] novels reveal distinctly emphatic identification with the limitations women faced in Victorian society" (Thompson 4). Her novel *The Daisy Chain* points towards some of these conflicting ideas as it displays ideal domestic life, while also sharing a longing to surpass the limitations of a simplistic yet prescribed stereotype through her characters. Thus, her novel can arguably be seen as an attempt to work through and potentially beyond the expectations and influences of the Spheres ideology because she recognized the limitations, despite her reserved views on it at the same time.

The novel begins painting a portrait of ideal domestic life with Mrs. May as the epitome of Angel of the House. She is described as:

a little woman, with that smooth pleasant plumpness that seems to belong to perfect content and serenity, her complexion fair and youthful, her face and figure very pretty, and full of quiet grace and refinement, and her whole air and expression denoting a serene, unruffled, affectionate happiness, yet with much authority in her mildness – warm and open in her own family, but reserved beyond it, and shrinking from general society (Yonge 11).

Beyond this, we find that she is gentle, able to keep the family calm. She also teaches her many children religious and moral lessons to shape them in societal standards so that they may, too,

grow to have the ideal domestic life. She is the expert house manager, spiritual teacher, mother and wife, as any Angel should be. Such a characterization understandably leads readers to recognize Yonge's clear-cut association with conservatism and domestic stories. This, however, is surprisingly short-lived.

In the third chapter of the novel, Mrs. May meets her untimely death in a carriage accident caused by Mr. May's own "headlong driving," (Yonge 34). The more we read the novel, the more we understand that Mr. May is "headlong" in more than just his driving. In fact, we learn that he is quite careless about a large sum of things in his life, and that his wife only perpetuated his carelessness in order to be the ideal Angel and take care of him. She even took care of all of the revenue from her husband's business. He simply left her to be the sole manager of the home, from caring for and teaching the children, to household chores, to taking care of the money. Scholar Valerie Sanders makes the point that Dr. May's "headlong," carelessness, to the point of accidentally killing his wife, shows how Yonge "symbolically implies that marriage is reckless on women's lives" (Sanders 27). Mrs. May dies in the wake of her husband's frivolousness; also symbolically showing the way she sacrifices herself and her own desires for the sake of her Angelic duties as wife and mother, while Yonge kills the primary Angelic example of the story. Later, we learn that Mrs. May longed for more saying that she "always regretted that she had so many duties at home, that she could not attend as much to the poor as she would like" (Yong 75). This sense of wanting more than the limited life allotted to them (the women in the novel) is a theme that circulates throughout the novel in the midst of the domestic lifestyle and messages. It's as if Yonge herself advocated for the traditional lifestyle for women, wanting them to follow their duties, but also noticed the confining limitations placed on women as well.

After their mother's sudden and unfortunate death, the novel "depicts the eldest siblings almost vying for the right to domestic responsibly" (Wagner 287). Although she is crippled and confined to her bed, another symbolic implication, the eldest sister, Margaret, acts as the stand-in mother in many ways. The siblings brought every care and concern to Margaret for her advice, spiritual guidance, and even for educational purposes. Remarkably, she even continues her mother's habit of handling the household money coming from her father's business, after he learns he is utterly hopeless at the task – still as headlong as ever. Margaret also continues the domestic message throughout the novel, understanding the importance of women's duties, advocating the necessity of those duties, and often correcting the younger siblings when they rebel against the typified gendered ideals, especially Ethel. She continuously points out Ethel's flawed femininity in motherly, affectionate ways, attempting to bring her up to be the ideal woman. In all of these ways, Margaret has stepped up as the new Angel within the novel.

However, Margaret finds such a confined position of "ordinary mornings, and the talk she could not escape, somewhat oppressive" (Yonge 111) Several more times throughout the novel she notes her discontent. Her being crippled and so confined also presents an interesting symbolism of feeling stuck. She says "I am too happy to be of some use, and it is too bad to repine, but sometimes a feeling comes of its being always the same, as if a little change would be *such* a nice treat" (Yonge 98). On one hand, Margaret is happy to be the useful, ideal woman as any Angel is supposed to be; but on the other hand, just as her mother, she longs for something more outside of her "stuck" position. Despite these yearning feelings of both the mother and Margaret, though, we see that they continue with their duties, even keeping the domestic message, silently longing all the while.

This brings us to Ethel May, one of the middle sisters of the May family and arguably the most interesting character in the whole novel. Ethel is a predominant protagonist as the story follows her uncanny whims and “growth.” Ethel is interestingly the opposite of what a young woman is supposed to be in an idealistic household. Everything about her is described as odd or unfeminine for much of the story. In fact, the first time she is described at all, she is compared to her father and her brother. Yonge says, “Ethel was almost an exaggeration of the Doctor’s peculiarities” (Yonge 12). She is smart, wanting to get a higher education, bold, candidly and bluntly outspoken, and often quite tom-boyish. In a letter, Ethel’s mother says:

Norman (her elder brother) and Ethel do indeed take after their papa, more than any of the others, and are much alike. There is the same brilliant cleverness, the same strong feeling, not easy of demonstration, though impetuous in action; but poor Ethel’s old foibles, her harum-scarum nature, quick temper, uncouth manners and heedlessness of all but one absorbing object, have kept her back, and caused her much discomfort; yet I sometimes think these manifest defects have occasioned a discipline that is the best thing for her character in the end. They are faults that show themselves, and which one can deal with, and I have full confidence that she has the principle within her that will conquer them (Yonge 44).

Her mother brusquely points out her flaws, but we see more of Ethel. We see her grow as her mother could not. Although she just is not what you would expect in such a domestic, conservative novel, her mother ultimately is right as we watch Ethel slowly mold to the Angel, yet never losing touch of her earlier self.

Towards the beginning of the novel, there is a thought-provoking instance that gives such a symbolic understanding of her character as a whole. The siblings wish to go on a walk and

Ethel asks to borrow her father's spectacles just so she can see better, but her siblings object, saying it is embarrassing when she wears them. They were not made for women. Yet, she argues the injustice saying her father would not go without them, as it is so tiresome to not be able to see. All Ethel wants is to see equally, but she cannot. She does not care that wearing the spectacles would make an "object" of herself, and make her odd, because they make her equal. This is how Ethel is throughout the novel – acting out her right to "see" equally, even if it makes her seem strange and unfeminine.

As mentioned, though, Ethel slowly starts to be shaped into the Angel. Later, Ethel comes up with the bold idea to start a Sunday school in a poor section of town. She, along with help from others, makes this dream happen and begins teaching there. However, trying to keep up with Cocks Moor (the Sunday school) and her former studies and wants proves to be too difficult for her, but she wants to keep trying no matter how tired it makes her. Still, she goes to Margaret for advice who tells her to give up learning alongside Norman. He would bring homework home from school and Ethel did all of it with him, so she could learn Latin and Greek too. Margaret tells her, "we all know men have more power than women, and I suppose the time has come for Norman to pass beyond you. He would not be cleverer than anyone, if he could not do more than a girl at home," (Yonge 155). Margaret also reminds her that her first priority should be being "a useful, steady daughter and sister at home" and that their mother would not have liked "Greek and Cocks Moor to swallow up all the common lady-like things" (Yonge 155). Although it pains her, Ethel does give up the Greek saying "I suppose it is a wrong sort of ambition to want to learn more, in one's own way, when one is told it is not good for one. I was just going to say I hated being a woman, and having tiresome little trifles – my duty – instead of learning" (Yonge 156). Thus, we see the first instance where Ethel sacrifices herself for her womanly duty. She

lets go of the educational accomplishments for the Angelic missions, yet longs beyond them as her mother and sister before her.

Of course, Ethel is still growing and has not completely morphed wholly yet. Her change continues to come in small bits as she grows more. When Flora, who took over the more physical womanly house duties since Margaret was confined to the bed, announces her proposition of marriage, Ethel realizes she will have to step up as mistress of the house. She “was terrified at the prospect of becoming responsible housekeeper” also noting that much of her leisure time would vanish (Yonge 343). When Flora actually gets married, the novel says “the bells struck up, each peal ending with a crash that gave Ethel some vague idea of fatality” (Yonge 347). This fatality, she realizes, is one of herself. She realizes the entering of a new beginning, which will completely eradicate herself and her desires. After which, she finally becomes the Angel, despite her being terrified, unhappy to lose so much of herself, and the oppression she knows it will bring. With Ethel, we see the same sense of longing for more beyond her duties at home, just as we saw with her mother and her sister.

Earlier in the novel, Ethel claimed she’d never marry because she could not give so much of herself up. When the opportunity arises, as Norman’s college friend Mr. Ogilvie clearly connects with and feels for Ethel, she quite literally flees with her father at the first moment she can despite the fact that she feels for him too. Although this seems like her holding to her earlier promise, refusing to marry so as not to lose herself, we learn with time that by fleeing she was doing the opposite. Flora says that, “no one could look at her without seeing that she liked him. I had left her to be the only effective one at home, and she sacrificed herself” (Yonge 553). Ethel fully embraces her duties to her home, noting how necessary she is, but also showing that she is unable to come beyond this stage and enter as the Angel of her own home, as most daughters

would. On one hand, you almost have to wonder if Ethel still has some of her prior independence leading to her flee from marriage. Sanders argues that “Ethel also seems too original to marry, too intellectual and to subordinate her strong personality to a husband’s” (Sanders 28). She knows that will truly, forcefully tie her to the Angel position, whereas in her current angelhood; she is still just a fill in. On the other hand, Ethel still longs for Norman Ogilvie, or at least the idea of him, up to the very end of the novel, showing a similar sacrifice to that of her mother and Margaret.

As the official Angel, Ethel longs for more than just a would-be marriage though. When Norman decides to go on a mission trip to New Zealand she says “How I wish I could go with you,” and reminisces about their dreams as children, but they both note that her mission is at home (Yonge 438). She also continues to long for a higher education. Still she convinces herself that she is content despite these longings and despite the fact that she is not really herself anymore. Her siblings worry about her, and describe her as “worn and haggish” (Yonge 552). As the Angel, she is no longer the outspoken, vivacious character we saw towards the beginning, but one trapped in a stereotype. Despite Yonge’s domestic idealization during the entire plot, through such conflicted female characters, we can see Yonge’s overall sympathetic undertones towards these women having such limiting positions in Victorian society.

Of course, Yonge is not the only Victorian author who shows the complications within this image of the Angel. Scholars have labeled novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward variously, ranging from “Victorian anti-feminist’ to ‘New Woman novelist’ and ‘rebel’” and her characters, especially her heroines, are much in the same as an interesting mix of conventional and new (Argyle 939). Thompson lumps Yonge, Mary Oliphant, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Mrs. Henry Wood into the same basic category of anti-feminist, conservative authors who showed

sympathy towards limitations of women, and whose novels' "heroine rebels from convention and in each case the behavior is dramatically condemned" until "willful actions and conventional order is restored at the end" (Thompson 5). Ultimately, we are left with incredibly complicated and conflicting images of the iconic Angel. She was more than simply the domestic, pure, spiritually and morally perfect wife and mother who catered to the needs of her family and home. She was also the individual, having unique desires and longings, yet feeling trapped by societal expectations and limitations. This ultimately creates a complicated relationship with the Spheres ideology and the gendered expectations influenced by it. While women were attempting to adhere to it, they sometimes, too, felt trapped and limited by it while others embraced the ability to have some power through it – like the authors themselves showing resistance through their literature.

Unfortunately, the hauntings of this image persist even today for women writers, despite how far women have come in terms of civil rights, independence, and equality. Virginia Woolf made an apt conclusion for her time - that is sometimes still quite relevant - when she said that "even in the present day the woman writer's task is more difficult than the man's because 'she still has many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome,'" (Blodgett 6). The general societal ideals for women, as well as their stories, still often revolve around the home, domestic, family, and mother/wifehood. Much of the Chick Lit that exists today focuses on plots surrounded on these very themes, with women still often feeling haunted by images and whisperings reminding them of societal ideals that are still significant and influential today.

Of course, the Angel of today's household is not entirely the same of the Angel of the Victorian house. Progressive feminist movements have made it not only possible but widely acceptable for women to work, and have lives outside of the home. Still, often, "women's work-

family choices reflect a ‘separate spheres’ imagery that is still morally and culturally relevant today. The Spheres ideology was incredibly influential, and it ultimately left impacts psychologically, socially, culturally and more. However, today, such gendered expectations from the ideology are more ingrained and internalized. Patricia A. Roos points out that the ideal has depicted a world in which women remain at home as caregivers, while men are ‘ideal workers’” (Roos 58). This is to say that although women can work, the ideal is still placed on their positions and duties at home, in the family. There is also a societal fixation on women being perfect mothers, “super moms” who just have it all together, so to say. There are societal stigmas that come with working mothers, with mothers who choose their own desires and passions above their household responsibilities, and more. These stigmas exist because of the impacts of the Spheres ideology. Of course, these spheres aren’t entirely black and white, just as they weren’t in the Victorian era either. “These spheres are no longer separate, and they no longer reflect the reality of most women’s lives” (Roos 58). Because all women are so unique, we will, once again, find muddled images and representations of women, much more complicated than women simply fitting into one label or another – just as we found with women in the Victorian era.

On one side of the spectrum, some, more privileged women, have the ability to make choices to leave work and become a stay-at-home mom, seemingly committing themselves to the ideal mother/wifehood. These women seem to personify the Angelic ideal, but still may long for more as Yonge’s characters did. The reality, though, is that many women today either have to work to provide the extra income for the home, or they simply choose to. Either way, “for the first time in history, women account for more than half of the U.S. labor force” (Roos 58). More often than not women, as individuals, fall somewhere in the middle, both on the spectrum of work-family life, and their feelings about it all. The problem is that it’s hard to see the truth

because rarely are people honest about the realities of womanhood/wifedom/and motherhood. The gendered expectations are too ingrained, and the pressures make this hard. Although society may sometimes make it seem so, today, “contrary to the separate spheres imagery, work and motherhood are not opposed identities –mothers simultaneously value work and motherhood” (Roos 58). The Chick lit existing today represents women characters personifying this very idea to better show their individuality. Their plots may often exist around the domestic, but like many of the Victorian writers, the authors show the limitations of labeling so finitely because as seen, women just aren’t finite beings.

In Chick Lit, a subgenre was born to showcase these experiences. This subgenre is known as Mommy Lit. Heather Hewett, a forerunner of this subgenre, says, “Like Chick Lit, the plot of these books is centered on their heroine’s quest. But the mommy heroine...is on a journey from womanhood to motherhood, and her challenge lies in integrating her new role into her former identity” (Hewett 120). Thus, we see characters who struggle with keeping ahold of their individual identity as motherhood takes over much of who they are. We see an example of this in Jennifer Weiner’s novel through Ayinde’s character. In truth, Hewett says that society:

has created an ideology of motherhood, the ‘new momism,’ which has increased the standard of what it takes to be a good mother to unattainable heights. The new momism is the ‘insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has kids, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being 24/7 to her children.’ It represents a backlash against many of the changes brought on by the feminist movement, and its power lies in its ability to make

women experience a ‘thick, sedimented layer of guilt, fear, and anxiety’ surrounding motherhood. (qtd. in Hewett, 120-121).

This sounds familiar right? I’d argue that it stems from the same impacts of the Spheres ideology. The mommy in today’s Mommy Lit is the Angel. However, Mommy Lit exists in an attempt to show the “real’ experience of motherhood honestly, without sedimentality or idealization or judgment...[circling] around the issues of work, identity, and motherhood” (Hewett 121). Furthermore, I’d argue that in writing such real experiences, these women writers of Mommy Lit are ultimately challenging the finite ideals set in place for women/mothers. Instead of seeing this “super mom” as described through momism, we see a wave of varying voices sharing varied experiences. We see individuals attempting to keep that individuality in a culture that demands its death to wife/motherhood. We see women attempting to do the same as their Victorian predecessors, working through and beyond the gendered expectations that have continued with the Spheres ideology.

Jennifer Weiner, a popular Chick Lit author, often writes stories that follow such domestic plots, but like our Victorian conservative authors, she is able to show limitations on restricting women to specified and defined barriers. We can see this in her novel *Little Earthquakes*. This novel follows the lives of four very different wives/mothers. Although the story centers on plots that are primarily about their wife/motherhood, they aren’t defined as solely either, being more than simply the “wife,” and/or the “mother” as expected. Instead, we also get to see the individualism of each woman. They are wives and mothers, yes, but they are also individuals who have unique desires outside of their hearth and home. Often, such stories are about the women finding themselves, in spite of their wife/motherhood, two overly defining,

limiting, barriers. Isn't this reminiscent of Yonge and some of her contemporaries' overall empathy for societal limitations placed on women?

Ayinde, one of the mothers in *Little Earthquakes*, seems to be most obviously haunted by Angelic images. After having her baby, Julian, receives an advice book for mothers, reminiscent of Sarah Stickney Ellis' conduct books. Ayinde uses this conduct book very strictly for the entirety of the novel, attempting to be the perfect mother. It often leads her to make decisions she wouldn't have before, such as becoming a fulltime stay-at-home mom, because it is defined as ideal. In all circumstances, Ayinde hears whispers from these very advice books that teach her how to be the perfect mother, sometimes influencing her beyond her individuality and normal ideals, so that she can meet that ideal image. Sometimes the whispers are small reminding Ayinde to keep the baby on a strict schedule, and how mothers should all breast feed. On the other hand, when Ayinde's husband, Richard, has an affair and ends up fathering another child, Ayinde feels the gut instinct to leave him; but she sees pieces of the advice book "floating in front of her eyes," saying things like "Remember what really matters... the most important job in the world... mommy and daddy under the same roof," and decides that she just can't leave her husband (Weiner 269). She forgives Richard and makes her marriage work for the sake of her child, inevitably showing her dedication to her duties over her feelings, similar to the women in *The Daisy Chain*. Weiner says she read many books like this herself when preparing to become the perfect mother, but adds, "it's no accident that the initials of the book Ayinde adopts as her bible are B.S..... and in creating that book, I pulled some of the more extreme elements from all of the different books I'd swallowed whole when I was expecting" (Weiner 424).

Also reminiscent of our *Daisy Chain* characters, is the idea of wanting a job outside of the home and the duties there. We see several characters in *Little Earthquakes* who have similar

wants. Ayinde desires to go back to work after having the baby missing her days as an anchorwoman, but when called an anchorwoman after her son, she meekly says “I’m just a mom now” as if she couldn’t be both (Weiner 196). This shows the way in which society sometimes defines women as simply “wife,” or “mother,” forgetting that they are individuals, sometimes more than those limiting titles. We see a stark contrast here to the other mothers in the novel, Becky and Kelly, who do show us how women don’t all fit into the limited categories.

Kelly is the mother in the novel, who wants to stay at home and take care of the home life for her husband and baby. She says she liked when “Steve [her husband] worked long hours, and [she] took care of the house,” (Weiner 248). However, when her husband gets laid off from work, Kelly is forced to return to the work field. At first, she hates even the idea of it knowing people will think less of her asking “What kind of woman goes back to work” with a baby at home (Weiner 245). She comes to resent her husband because he doesn’t seem interested in looking for work immediately, and he makes messes at home. Important, also, is that even while Kelly works, she never lets her husband help around the home either, even though he’s home all day. She continues to clean up after him and the baby, to do the laundry, pay the bills, cook for them, and more. She continues to see these things as her Angelic, domestic responsibility. She is ever influenced to be the Angelic mother and wife.

Eventually, Kelly comes to find some relief in her work as a break from the domestic life, showing her desire for more, though. She says she, of course, loves her son but, “after fifteen minutes playing with him...her fingers started itching for the keyboard, for the blackberry and Palm Pilot, for the cell phone, the relics of a life where she had places to go, important things to take care of,” (Weiner 290). This shows that although she loves her son and husband, and her role at home; she also loves her public, working life just as much. She finds purpose and

importance in both areas of her life, making her a little more complex than the image stereotypically paints.

A third mother in the book, Becky, is a lot like Kelly in this regard, but she is also much more progressive than any of the other mothers in this book. She consistently mocks Ayinde's advice books, as well as the idea of falling into perfect categories of mother/wifeness. She says people like Ayinde's advice book author, "make it sound like you're a horrible person if you leave your baby with a sitter for the afternoon, and you're about two steps away from a psycho killer if you hire a nanny. But some women have to work," (Weiner 136). Before she ever even has her baby, she plans to go back to work soon after the birth, not only for financial reasons, but also because she loves her work. Even though she loves her work, though, she still feels pangs of guilt for it. Becky says, "I like working. I love Ava...but I'm so happy when I drop her off at the hospital and I get to go to work...I'm a terrible mother," (Weiner 355). These guilt pangs exist because the influence of the Angelic image is still culturally relevant, even in whispers or pangs.

In the end, Weiner discusses how we live in a "culture of perfection in parenting," especially in mothers; and through this book, she shows how unrealistic the image of the "perfect mother" is, because women are individuals. Society is so fixated on the image of the "super mom," and Weiner is able to both show that and challenge it. What's great about her novel is that she shows the experiences of several very different mothers. With her characters being all so different, it complicates the ideal image in many ways. Yes, this is a book whose plot is largely about mother/wifeness, but it's also a book that shows how a woman is more than any simple representation can make her out to be. A woman can be a loving mother and wife at home, and still be an individual outside of those connections. She can work, and enjoy it. She can be a

feminist and domestic at the same time, or even more conservative and domestic at the same time. Essentially, she is more than simply “wife” and “mother,” for she is an individual.

Of course, Weiner is not alone in challenging such ideals. There are many other Chick/Mommy Lit authors attempting to question and challenge societal ideals through their writing, and that doesn't just mean published novels anymore. Currently, the trend of writing online only adds to the amount of women writing about these ideas. “The pure volume of Internet Mommy Lit suggests that plenty of women are speaking out,” and “these online communities are taking the cultural conversation about motherhood in new directions. In the act of writing about themselves and connecting with one another, they're redefining and repoliticizing motherhood” (Hewett 134). This type of questioning and challenging society to create cultural messages is so evocative of the same messages many Victorian women writers were attempting to get across.

Even within the genre, scholars often “fail to address how the factors of race, class, and sexuality [and more] factor into the messages these books are sending” (Arosteguy 410). More often than not, scholars focus on the dominant ideology of motherhood through the middle-class white lens. However, there are more voices, perspectives, and experiences to consider on this quest for fair representation of women. We must remember to include the story of the mother that adopts, the infertile wife, the lesbian mother, the mother of another race, and many, many more. These women are also individuals, demanding to be heard. Scholar Katie Arosteguy points these ideas out in her essay “The Politics of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Contemporary American Mommy Lit,” saying “The inability to envision alternative styles of mothering – and the stark reality of just how intensely the dominant ideology of motherhood is policed – is more

than unsettling” (Arosteguy 429). The multifaceted experiences of women deserve to be told without a stereotypic lens clouding them.

Chapter 2 **The Governess**

During the Victorian period, there was an unfortunate surplus of women. Because of this surplus, many women never got the opportunity to marry and become the Angels of their own homes. Those in the middle or lower classes who could not be supported by family members were likely to have to work to provide for themselves. The consequences of not marrying, according to Joan Perkin, “were often economic hardship and social marginality” (Perkin 161). However, opportunities were scarce in a society that deemed it socially inappropriate for women to leave the domestic and enter the public sphere of life in order to work. “Almost the only career open to middle-class women was that of the governess,” often “grossly overworked and shockingly underpaid” (Perkin 35). The sheer lack of opportunities, however, forced many women into this governess lifestyle as a means to support themselves. Of course, there were mixed reactions. Some women accepted and welcomed their new jobs enthusiastically, while others found themselves miserable. Nevertheless, the job was a popular resort for women needing to work.

Censuses recorded high numbers of governesses in Victorian society. “Already in 1851 the population census recorded nearly 21,000 women engaged in governessing, and that had increased to nearly 25,000 a decade later” (Horn 333). Consequently, the governess became another popular representation of women in Victorian literature. In fact, the governess story may be one of the most widely known stories coming out of the Victorian era. A scholar studying this

image, James R. Simmons, Jr., even said, “the figure of the governess’ ... must be one of the most familiar and abiding images in nineteenth century literature, and certainly even the most casual reader of the Victorian novel would have to agree” (Simmons 25). The image’s familiarity stems from her existence, even if it is as a small role, in so many Victorian novels. The children in Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain* had a governess, Miss Winters. Although she plays a very minor role in the book, she still exists as a character Yonge thought to write about and the same can be said about a number of Victorian works. Beyond the minor governesses, there are also many tremendously popular Victorian novels solely about the governess such as *Jane Eyre*, *Agnes Grey*, and *Vanity Fair*, for example. It’s obvious that they were written about because there simply were so many governesses, but is that the only reason governesses were so frequently included in popular works?

“At a time when much stress laid upon the home as the ‘appropriate sphere’ of females, governessing had the undoubted merit of domesticity, even if it had other disadvantages” (Horn 333). In some cases, becoming a governess was “a chance for upward social mobility to women on the fringes of the ‘respectable’ middle class,” showing stories of “farmers who educate their daughters for governesses’ in the hope of raising their station in society” (Horn 333). On the other hand, having the ability to hire a governess was a “form of conspicuous consumption – a symbol of social aspirations,” identification, and showing-off (Horn 333). Writers, then, often included governesses in their stories to represent these ideas. However, sometimes the authors, especially ones with major character governesses, used these characters to show the reality of the woman who was a governess, both complicating the overall representation of *the governess* and ultimately reacting to the Spheres ideology from which ideas surrounding that representation were influenced.

Looking at the governess, as she existed historically and stereotypically, there seemed to be the “governess story” to which these women prescribed. The literature was no different, tracing pretty clear cut plots, following the same bullet points. Starting at the beginning, then, understandably not all women who became governesses wanted to do so. The main reasons as to why women became governesses had to do with economic pressures and lack of other alternatives. Some had to support themselves, while others “were not only compelled to earn their own living but had to support indigent parents, sick relatives or younger brothers and sisters as well, thereby completely overturning the traditional view of the ‘dependent’ female” (Horn 337). Regardless of the reason, though, “Many women took the work without any interest in teaching and even with a dislike of children” simply because they had no other choice (Horn 164). With the governess being a prominent figure in literature, many governess stories begin much like this, showing how a young woman falls into her position through some form of economic hardship or pressure.

Once in the position, her problems were not solely financial, even though her financial struggle continues throughout. Unfortunately, their pay was far too low to help their economic hardship. “In 1843 the GBI,” or the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution – an institution which provided valuable aid and advice to many governesses, “estimated average remuneration as ranging between £25 and £80 a year, but with ‘very many’ receiving only £25 or £30. That changed little over the next few decades” (Horn 338). On top of her low pay, she faced a large sum of duties, disrespect, and isolation, making her job quite difficult as well.

The governess often moved in with her employers. In her new “home,” her duties were plentiful, often lasting all day. Most important was her duty to teach the children, and they were often expected to be able to teach a wide range of subjects including “reading, writing, simple

arithmetic and a range of ‘accomplishments’ designed to make female pupils attractive on the marriage market in later life,” (Horn 338). In some cases, governesses were even expected to teach beyond those basic lessons, adding music, singing, drawing, and more into the curricula. She’d teach the boys until they were old enough to be sent off to school, but the “upper-class girls did not go to school at all, being taught at home by the governess and tutors until they ‘came out’ into ‘society’ at the age of seventeen” (Perkin 27). Beyond this, though, many governesses were also tasked with “taking care of their baths and meals” as well as generally keeping up with the children (Perkin 164).

These tasks may not sound so bad, but the governesses were often plagued with ample emotional, mental, and sometimes even physical strains caused by indifferent parents, to unruly children, to isolation, and more. As mentioned many governesses were forced to deal with indifferent parents, who placed their social lives ahead of their home life. Of course, this applies more so for upper-class families than middle-class ones. The men focused on their business, public lives, and networking/social calls, which were usually also for the purpose of their business. On the other hand, the aristocratic women had vigorous social lives in and outside of the home, much unlike their middle class Angelic counterparts. The upper-class women “travelled frequently, at home and abroad... They controlled the employment of the staff” around the house, and “they had an intricate system of card leaving and calling” ultimately deciding “who was ‘in’ and who was ‘out’ of ‘society’ ...excluding anyone they disliked” (Perkin 78). Middle-class homes were a bit different in that while the fathers were busy at work, the mothers were often very busy not with a social life, but as being that Angel of the House.

Due to such busy and/or indifferent parents, the children were often placed in the full-time care of nurses and governesses. The consequences of upper-class indifference were often

spoiled, unruly, disobedient, and downright difficult children. “The Brontë sisters looked after difficult children when they were governesses in the 1840s. Anne was expected to cope with what Charlotte called ‘an unruly, violent family of modern children’ whose parents would not back her authority” (qtd. in Perkin 16). Of course, the Brontë sisters are famous for their contributions to Victorian Literature, and their governess stories certainly reflect many of these conditions. Yet, the governesses were also supposed to instill moral values within the children they taught. This was a hard, sometimes impossible, task when inattentive parents offered no support, and restricted the governess from holding much authority over the children. Nonetheless, these upper-class parents had high expectations of their governesses and often, the children’s rotten behavior was blamed on her unjustly.

As if conditions for many governesses weren’t hard enough, the governesses also had to endure isolation and a lack of social interaction, and yet, almost contradictorily was always surrounded by people because of her long work days with the children and/or employers. The governess was “caught between classes in a rigidly class-structured society. Too low for the family, too high for the servants, she was isolated, yet had no privacy, and was almost universally despised” (Perkin 164). During Anne Brontë’s time as a governess, “not only was she excluded from the life of the family and friends [of which she worked], but from the circle of their acquaintances as well. She was expected to trail behind and behind and be generally ignored as though she did not exist” much like a maid or a servant (Horn 338). Sadly, even if the children were friendly, most governesses were discouraged from any affectionate relationship with them because of her “inferior” position to the family. It’s understandable that many governesses were wildly unhappy in their positions. They were treated poorly, while paid too

little for too much work yet dependent on that work at the same time. Adding to this, they felt incredibly isolated and incongruous, and they missed their families.

Although entirely dependent on their governess' work, when employers felt a governess' services were no longer necessary, she would be left without work, pay, and a home until she could find a new position, which wasn't always a quick transition. Many governesses consequently felt "trapped" by their positions and their dependability on it. "Getting married was one way that the governess might be able to leave her job. But it was hard for her to meet suitable men" in her position (Hughes, Kathryn). Some escaped through marriage, but many continued in their unfortunate stations. Eventually the Governesses' Benevolent Institution (GBI) was established in 1843 ultimately to raise the standards for governesses, train them, and even help them find new employment when needed (Horn 334). Other institutions, such as Queen's College, eventually followed in this endeavor. In such programs, women were sometimes offered "wide curriculums which included rigorous 'academic' subjects as well as the ubiquitous 'accomplishments.' This meant the inclusion of English, ancient and modern history, Latin, modern languages, geography, mathematics, science and scripture, as well as art and music" (Horn 340). Of course, many of these subjects were considered to be "masculine" at the time. Yet, these women were more sought after as governesses because of their significant preparations and education. Even with the raised standards and more competent governesses, progress for the governess was slow. "Poorly paid, poorly qualified governesses were common even in the final quarter of the Nineteenth century" (Horn 342). Fortunately, though, these institutions influenced the start of raising female academic standards, eventually leading to new opportunities in education for women seeking an education (Horn 342).

Despite all of the above factors, the governess is one of the most known stereotypical Victorian images of women. The literature reflecting the lives and experiences of these women was typically generic, following the basic stereotypes and plotlines outlined above. In his study on governesses, James R. Simmons, Jr., aptly points out that there were exponentially more women working in much harder jobs, such as factory workers, and yet “in very few novels were the heroines factory workers” (Simmons 25). He then questions this very sentiment asking “what accounts for the Victorian fascination with the governess?” (Simmons 25). Simmons’ basic argument to answer this question stems around the Victorian societal focus and awareness of social classes, and how the governess falls in a strange overlapping ground between middle and working class, showing many issues with class consciousness in the Victorian era. While this is undoubtedly true, it does not account for Victorian women’s writing as a challenging force to this stereotypical representation, nor does it account for the influence of the dominant separate spheres ideology during the period.

In much of the literature, these governesses were often represented as just that, solely “the governess.” Her story became quite typified, and in the end, all governesses end up blending into, or really fading into, the background. The position, her job title, seemed to qualify as her identity in entirety, primarily because of the capitalistic, class driven mindset of society. As seen with other representations, a woman cannot be solely defined and limited within any single stereotyped image, despite society’s attempt to lump them all in specific parameters. Several women writers, most notably those that had experienced the reality of being a governess, decided to share stories common to the typical governess plot. However, these women writers also combated the stereotypical images and representations by also making the governess the heroine

of the story, a woman in her own individuality. As we will see with *Agnes Grey*, the governess, Agnes displays her individuality despite her position.

Many would argue that the governess falls somewhere in the middle when it comes to the Spheres ideology as well. Despite the unfair treatment and ideas surrounding the governess, the profession was still seen as one of the only respectable occupations women could have during the time. This might seem surprising considering how they were treated, but “at a time when much stress was laid upon the home as the ‘appropriate sphere’ of females, governessing had the undoubted merit of domesticity,” (Horn 333). She worked within the home, often having many of the duties of the traditional Angel of the House, and often operating much like a mother without the authority, of course. At the same time, though, she operated somewhat in the public sphere as well. The governess leaves her own home and has to earn her own living. Of course, the “ignominy of earning a living undermines her femininity” and she is seen as a working woman, contradicting the design of the separate spheres ideology (Berg 178). Thus, her character is sometimes seen as a paradoxical combination of feminine and masculine, private and public, dependent and independent, middle and lower class, etc. making it harder to accurately represent the governess as the individual that she is, and complicating the true image of the governess versus the stereotypical one. The representation of the governess is influenced by this in the literature, and we can see how these governess characters also have some paradoxical characteristics, being both feminine and masculine, public and private, etc.

The Brontë sisters, Anne and Charlotte, are both well known Victorian women writers having governess heroines as leading characters in their novels. Both experiencing the reality of being a governess themselves, the sisters were able to capture the reality of the governesses’ plight within their stories. While other novels, such as Charlotte’s *Jane Eyre* or Marguerite

Blessington's *the Governess*, are the more well-known governess stories of their time, "nowhere is the governess more realistically depicted than in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, says Scholar James Simmons (Simmons 26). Her novel is "written unsentimentally," so this "readers learn of the trials and tribulations of the governess, and of her social status, in a relatively objective and factual manner" (Knapp 65). Anne Brontë follows the stereotypical governess plotline, including all of the typical associations that went with her representation, helping readers to truly see that traditional representation of the governess. However, at the same time, Brontë is able to present her feminine agenda through such a candid, stereotypical representation.

Agnes Grey, following the stereotypical plotline, starts immediately with the way Agnes comes into the governess position in the first place. Agnes' father invests much of the family money on a merchant's ship, which unfortunately wrecks before returning home with their profit. This causes the family to fall into a poverty they hadn't known before, and consequently the father, feeling guiltily responsible for their economic hardship, falls ill. Wanting to help in their economic crisis, Agnes excitedly decides to become a governess, with the promise that she'll save money for the family. Her excitement, however, is short lived.

Once in her first position working for the Bloomfields, an upper class family of the lower percentage, Agnes faces the common plight of the governess, dealing with unending duties, unruly children, unsupportive and neglectful parents, and the odd mix of little privacy but extreme isolation. She reasons that "the name of the governess was a mere mockery" as she considered her "limited powers" when dealing with the children (Brontë 551). They were disobedient, yet she was not allowed to even acknowledge their defects. Her job there seems impossible as she is mistreated, and of course, grossly underpaid for the amount of work she is given. She says:

“I have had the utmost difficulty to restrain my tears; but I have restrained them, till my little tormentors were gone to dessert, or cleared off to bed (my only prospects of deliverance), and then, in all the bliss of solitude, I have given myself up to the luxury of an unrestricted burst of weeping. But this was a weakness I did not often indulge: my employments were too numerous, my leisure moments too precious”

To top it all off, with little notice and even less improvement on the children, Agnes is let go, underappreciated and feeling inept, after a few tough years at the Bloomfield's. However, Agnes is a strong-willed heroine and quickly decides to try again. In her second position, working for a much higher tiered upper class family, the Murrays, the other side of being a governess is shown to more of an extent. Agnes still has to deal with egotistical children, uninvolved, self-centered parents, and a mixture of isolation and mistreatment. However, in this position Agnes also is paid more, has a less demanding schedule allowing her a bit more free-time, and her position is largely focused around sharpening the moral character and preparing the two misses of the house to be respectable ladies in their society. Between the two positions, readers see a mix of all of the common experiences and associations of the governess to fully balance out that traditional image.

Interestingly enough, the way she comes out of governessing is the biggest part of the plotline that does not seem to follow that stereotypical governess story, at least not outright. As mentioned, most governesses end up having to marry in order to stop governessing. Agnes, on the other hand, starts a school with her mother after the death of her father. Although the school is a small boarding school, she becomes quite proud of their endeavor. Some might say that this is quite similar to governessing, and they'd be right, but it's also quite different as well. Of course, she would still be teaching academic and moral lessons and the schoolroom was, at the

time, seen as a “feminine space” according to Jessica Enoch (Enoch 275). This may be surprising to many, but it was a newer rhetorical development within the Nineteenth Century itself as schools “transitioned from the place where the schoolmaster disciplined with his birch rod (a pedagogy focused on obedience, authority, and control) to that where the schoolmarm nurtured with her feminine virtues” and likewise, “from a public, exposed, masculine space to an enclosed, private, and feminine space” (Enoch 276, 277). This image of the nurturing, calm, and endearing young female teacher certainly still persists even today, and was influenced by this very transition. The classroom became “an extension of the domestic sphere,” and this development is shown quite literally through *Agnes Grey* as the school they create also operates as their home.

Thus, teaching within a classroom was certainly similar to governessing, but there were large differences as well. There are the obvious differences such as not having an upper-class employer, not being mistreated, assigning your own duties and the like. However, the biggest difference is the independence Agnes was able to have, and because of this sense of independence, I’d argue that Brontë conscientiously chose this as the way Agnes leaves governessing. Brontë wanted to showcase a woman’s ability to be independent despite cultural labels, definitions, and expectations. However, as readers know, Agnes eventually does marry. This marriage, though, is simply of her own desire for the man himself. When Mr. Weston asks her to marry him, we know that she has been infatuated with him for some time, but she still takes the time to make sure everything is settled with her school. Her marriage is not used as an escape to governessing, for as we saw, she took herself out of that situation.

Not only was Agnes’ characterization objective and stereotypical, showing the traditional governess plotline including the common associations with governesses, but in doing so, she was

also sympathetic to her heroine's overall representation and limitations due to societal expectations. Being a governess herself, she understood the harsh realities that befell these women, and her novel was unmistakably an attempt to vindicate the governess as an individual woman, an attempt to instruct society on her unjust predicament, and finally, an attempt to change the ways in which women were being represented in such limited ways. Feminist scholar, Bettina L. Knapp, shares similar views on the novel saying that:

Agnes Grey is a feminist novel preoccupied not only with moral problems, but social ones as well. Brontë's voice was raised against paltry salaries, poor working conditions, and offensive treatment accorded governesses; against society's denigration of working women... In *Agnes Grey*, Brontë pleaded for self-fulfillment for women and equality of the sexes (Knapp 63).

Not only does Knapp discuss the governess, but the working woman in general. Women simply were represented in unfair, unrealistic, and limited ways. Agnes, as a character, ends up being representative of Brontë's feminine agenda for this novel.

Throughout the book, even when facing incredibly difficult circumstances, Agnes' "faith in her ability to overcome obstacles increases" (Knapp 67). Along with that, Agnes consistently and persistently stands up for her convictions despite the fact that she's in a lower station than those around her and that they look down on her. One key moment where this happens is while Agnes is employed by the Bloomfield's. Much to Agnes' chagrin, she learns that young Master Tom (one of the children) has a "propensity to persecute the lower creation," i.e. animals, in horrific ways (Brontë 562). Tom's Uncle Robson gives him little callow nestlings to do with as he pleases. Agnes tells Tom that she will not allow him to torture the birds, and gives him an ultimatum to either simply kill them or return them – if he chooses otherwise, she asserts that she

will kill them herself, saying “I shall do what I think right in a case of this sort, without consulting any one” (Brontë 563). Sure enough, when Tom voices his intentions of inhospitably torturing these birds, Agnes drops a stone on them, crushing them, saving them from his devilish plans. Of course, she is later reprimanded, something she knew would follow, but that did not stop her from inspirationally living by her own convictions. Even during Mrs. Bloomfield’s admonishment of her conduct, Agnes is straightforward about her convictions and her duty to stand by them, showing her sense of individuality, strong willpower, and self fulfillment early on in the book.

This scene with the birds, along with others throughout the novel, shows an interesting theme of women being analogous with the animals, the “lower creations.” Scholar Maggie Berg explores this idea in her article “Hapless Dependents:’ Women and Animals in Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*,” quoting that “women and animals are similarly positioned in a patriarchal world, as objects rather than subjects,” and that in her novel “the representation of animals—as exploited and abused—is indistinguishable from its analysis of the objectification and exploitation of women,” (Berg 177-178). In the case of the bird scene, for example, what makes Agnes’ decision to stand up for herself so powerful is that she “transgresses the distinction between victim and oppressor. When after months of remaining silent, Agnes discovers the courage to speak up against the Bloomfields’ treatment of animals, she also implicitly condemns their treatment of herself” (Berg 188). Through the rest of the novel, Agnes continues to find her voice, and thus self identification and fulfillment, despite circumstances that make it hard to do so.

When employed by the Murray’s, Agnes quickly discovers that she is practically invisible. Even when she joined the young ladies of the house for walks, she says:

But when I did walk, the first half of the journey was generally a great nuisance to me. As none of the before-mentioned ladies and gentlemen even noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them, while they talked over me or across, and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy—as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so. It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for, in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not to imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic, (Brontë 597).

Through Agnes' inner debacle, we see her voice stand out once again, placing herself at just the same level as her employers despite her knowledge of their objecting mindsets. Her following action of pretending "to be perfectly unconscious or regardless of their presence" wonderfully shows that Agnes is still attempting to transgress that distinction between victim and oppressor. Likewise, she is self identifying, not accepting the stereotypical classifications placed on and expected of her.

Through all of this, too, Agnes consistently voices her convictions to the ladies in attempts to better their moral character, but not in the way Mrs. Murray would have her do. In fact, "she was disappointed because *real learning* was not the parents' objective...the girls were to learn the social graces and sufficient rudiments of the arts to enhance their attractiveness to young men of high society" and frankly, "Agnes believed such an education was hypocritical—a sham" (Knapp 69). After Rosalie's "coming out" ball, she expresses her interest in Sir Thomas Ashby to Agnes, even though he is known for being quite wicked. Of course, Agnes knows that Rosalie is only interested in Sir Ashby because of his high station and that Mrs. Murray wants

her daughters to attract this exact kind of man. Despite this knowledge, Agnes encourages Rosalie to “keep single, and never marry at all, not even to escape the infamy of old-maidhood,” (Brontë 582). If Mrs. Murray knew of Agnes’ encouragements, Agnes would certainly have been reprimanded, going against her own wishes. Yet, Agnes continues to urge Rosalie against the typical feminine tendencies up until the very time Rosalie finally marries Sir Ashby and leaves. Agnes’ differing teaching methods caused difficulties from time to time, but she again, continued to live by and stand up for her own convictions, even in her invisible, oppressed station.

What becomes interesting in this representation of the governess is the opposing representation of the employer-upper-class-mother that goes alongside the image of the governess. Since the governess story points out the exploitation of the governess by her employer, and her job often paradoxically operating as the “stand-in mother,” we end up seeing a sort of dilemma when it comes to traditional gender roles, as the separate spheres ideology is being unconsciously opposed. First, we’ve already seen how the governess operates in a strange mix between the feminine and masculine spheres. Their mothers, on one hand, are the idealized Angel who instilled Angelic feminine values into their daughters. Her upper-class counterpart similarly has a strange relationship with the separate spheres ideology. Kirsten Fest, a feminist scholar also looking at the connections between Chick Lit and 19th Century Lit, says “The upper-class woman, who often has married for money rather than love, is corrupted by her husband’s prosperity and has lost even the most natural and essential of feminine feelings, her maternal instincts” (Fest 46). True, she “manages” the house hold, but she does so through hiring people to do what would traditionally be considered the jobs of the wife. In the case of the governess, she hires a stand-in mother for her children who is often “a better care-taker than the biological

mother she encounters” truly opposing the core elements of the separate spheres ideology (Fest 46). Further, the governess ends up judging her employer on the terms in which she was raised, valuing traditional ideologies, and deeming herself morally superior. Ultimately, the characters each have unique relationships with the Sphere ideology, making their conscious and unconscious reactions to it just as unique.

Finally, these examples and others throughout the novel show how a governess, despite her stereotypes and her class position, can also be an individual. Even with gendered expectations placed on her and the influence of the Spheres ideology, we, as readers, get to see Agnes as more than the stereotype of her representation/occupation, but also as a woman in her own right. Agnes is a strong-willed, independent woman – more so than her employers even – who stands up for her own convictions and beliefs despite her clear awareness of her station and everyone’s thoughts of her. She has personal hobbies, ideas, beliefs, and more that all work to show how her identity is not solely wrapped up in her title as governess, despite what society around her might think. All of these ideas and more throughout the novel ultimately showcase the feminine agenda that I’d argue Anne Brontë intentionally incorporated into her novel. She wanted to see societal changes, both in the way women were being represented in such a limited fashion, and in the ways in which women, especially working women, were being treated unjustly. In order to accomplish that, Brontë chose to write her novel as accurately as she could, being able to pull from her own experiences, showcasing the many issues surrounding Nineteenth Century representations and treatment of women. In doing so, she simultaneously was able to react to the gendered expectations that are ultimately influenced by the Spheres ideology.

Similar issues persist today when it comes to representing working women, although to somewhat of a lesser degree. It is true that “women have made tremendous strides in workforce participation,” since the Victorian era, but Sociologist Madeline E. Heilman points out that “they remain woefully underrepresented” in many occupational arenas (Heilman 114). In many cases, the separate spheres ideology has influenced specific occupational gendered constructions that do exist today. Even today, there are certain jobs that are simply regarded by the general population as being either “feminine” or “masculine.” Imagine what you first think of when you hear construction worker, nurse, fireman, nanny, and secretary. These are just a few of the stereotypically gendered occupations that exist in our culture. Many women have noted the unfair occupational segregation of women in certain fields, and further, the limited stereotypes that are associated with the positions gendered as feminine, much like the limitations governesses faced with their own representations. Of course, as many attempting to figure out the cultural gaps which ultimately cause such a bifurcated occupational system have found, “the reasons for persistent labor market inequalities remain a puzzle,” (Hanson 229). There’s simply no easy answer for such a complicated issue.

Madeline E. Heilman suggests in her study of “Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Bias,” that there are two ways in which gender stereotypes work against women in the workplace. She says:

Descriptive stereotypes (how men and women *are*) promote negative expectations about a woman’s performance by creating a perceived ‘lack of fit’ between the attributes women are thought to possess and the attributes necessary for success in traditionally male positions. Prescriptive stereotypes (how men and women *should be*) establish

normative expectations for men's and women's behavior, resulting in the devaluation and derogation of women who directly or indirectly violate gender norms. (Heilman 115).

Nonetheless, these varying kinds of stereotypes can certainly obstruct women from various "male-dominated" fields, or even from advancement within a field. Yet, where do these stereotypes come from? I'd argue that they have trickled down through time from the Nineteenth Century's gendered ideologies of the Separate Spheres.

The separate spheres ideology "rested on the definition of the 'natural' characteristics of women and men. Women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior to men..." (Hughes, Kathryn). Men were seen as naturally aggressive, haughty, bold, competitive, and ambitious, while women were seen as naturally nurturing, endearing, dainty, pure, and more. Such stereotypes would be familiar to anyone today, and it's easy to see how certain occupations might value specific "natural" stereotypic gendered identities over others. This is part of why governessing was seen as one of the only semi-respectable jobs affordable to women during the Victorian era. The profession still centered around their feminine qualities prescribed to be natural by the separate spheres ideology. Such ideals still operate surrounding occupational segregation. Attempting to go beyond prescriptive stereotypic identities is looked down on in our society as well. Ultimately, the "social disapproval that results from not fulfilling gender stereotypic prescriptions can result in decrements in performance-related outcomes," as well as obstructions from various fields and advancement opportunities for women (Heilman 123). It's almost a paradox in itself. To fulfill ones gendered stereotypes holds them back, but any attempt to go beyond them holds them back as well.

However, there may be room for optimism. Although women are still facing issues with occupational segregation and gendered stereotypes that hinder their work life, the conversations

on such issues are advancing. With these progressions, women writers are still finding a way to have a voice in these conversations by displaying the issues in their fiction, both realistically and in a way that promotes the need for advancing the conversations and the need/desire for change. Often “at the center” of modern Chick Lit, is the theme of “the protagonist’s working life” (Fest 44). However, Fest also points out that “the heroines work in fields in which they can showcase their feminine traits: they mainly help and care for others,” meaning they “tend to work in menial positions such as [assistants], PAs, waitresses, or nannies,” and these same women sometimes “find it hard to combine their femininity with their work...as the ‘good’ woman is expected to neglect her work and prioritize her private life” (Fest 44-45). As mentioned though, such ideas are written into works to accurately display the gendered stereotypes that are associated with working women and the occupational segregations that occur in our modern society. Like Anne Brontë, displaying accurate representations—or rather misrepresentations and under representations —ultimately works for the cause of the feminine agenda to promote change through their literature.

Continuing in her study of women’s femininity related to the workplace, Kirsten Fest, and other Chick Lit scholars such as Elizabeth Hale, aptly compares Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* to Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus’ *The Nanny Diaries*. “Nanny Lit,” sometimes categorized along with “underling” or “assistant” lit, is yet another subgenre of Chick Lit, and it so pertinently parallels the Victorian Governess Literature. It could even be argued that these genres were influenced by the Governess Literature. The two genres, existing so far apart in time, share so much in common. Their plotlines, overall feminine aims, and much more are shared. Fest says “The workplace in these texts becomes a testing place for middle-class femininity and the site of confrontations with other versions of womanhood. Although the

working women in a way escape the traditional female fate and sphere, their depiction still remains entangled with the question of what it means to be a woman” (Fest 47).

Fest continues, making the argument that the “traditional answer” to this question “remains the same,” but I’d argue the opposite. Just as women writer’s challenged traditional answers to the question in the Victorian era, modern Chick Lit writers are challenging the traditional notions that are still in existence and still influencing their representations and stereotypes today. Through their writings, we see women who do these very things. They challenge, question, and ultimately attempt to influence societal ideals surrounding womanhood by complicating those traditional representations and stereotypes, showing how they are limited. As before, in doing this, the women writers are also working through the gendered expectations and impacts influenced by the Spheres ideology of the 19th century, still lingering today internalized in societal ideals and expectations. We will see this displayed through the comparison of the two remarkably similar stories, told centuries apart.

Elizabeth Hale says about the two novels (*Agnes Grey* and *The Nanny Diaries*): “Each of these novels has a governess-heroine; each exposes the exploitation that underpins the nannying situation...[they] are written by women who have undergone, in some measure at least, what their protagonists have suffered” (Hale 104). The Brontë sisters, Anne and Charlotte, were governesses for a period in their lives, having to handle difficult children. Likewise, “the authors of *The Nanny Diaries*, Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus, became friends while studying at NYU and sharing their experiences working for more than thirty New York families,” and “while they deny that their novel corresponds exactly to specific real-life employers and incidents, they nevertheless claim that it is true to life” (Hale 105). Thus, these authors all wrote accounts which incorporated realistic experiences in order to create an accurate depiction. The

similarities between these novels, of course, do not stop there. Let's look towards the plot of *The Nanny Diaries* for how these novels parallel.

Although Nanny, the heroine of *The Nanny Diaries*, is excited about her job, the primary reason she wants to be a nanny at all, and why she later keeps the job despite its hardships, is to support herself financially. Being a student at NYU, living in a studio apartment, and affording the New York City lifestyle is expensive. Thus, much like Agnes, Nanny decides to be a nanny for economic reasons. She notes, as she meets other nannies, their similar reasons for becoming nannies, but often they are in worse situations. Elizabeth Hale says "Often immigrants in difficult positions, such as Sima, an engineer from San Salvador, who sends money back each month to her husband and children" are the nannies she encounters (Hale 108). This motif of women having to work due primarily to economic hardship and/or supporting their families (who couldn't support themselves for some reason or another) should be familiar as its one common in Victorian Governess Lit.

As you may have noticed, it's strangely interesting that the authors chose to name their heroine Nanny. Adding to this, the first chapter of their novel is called "Nanny for Sale." Such choices, of course, have incredible implications. Remember that another motif of the Governess Lit. was that once a woman became a governess, her occupation was often seen as her identity in entirety. To others, she is simply "the governess," or "the nanny." The heroine's name being Nanny, both her identification and occupation, pays homage to this societal idea and motif. Next, in naming the very first chapter "Nanny for Sale," the authors seem to consciously recognize that motif, and that not only is she attempting to work but she is also about to sell herself, her identity. The woman, Nanny, is for sale. Her individuality will not be seen by those around her, because she will simply and solely be "the nanny," a hireling. However, much like in *Agnes*

Grey, we will see that the authors challenge this notion by showing that Nanny is a woman in her own right, with her own individuality, complicating the stereotypical ideas surrounding her limited representation.

The motif of having to deal with difficult children who are often spoiled, unruly, and disobedient is present with *The Nanny Diaries* as well, although to somewhat of a different degree. When Nanny is first hired, Grayer is definitely a little unmanageable. He calls her names, kicks at her, throws a stroller at her, screams, and tells her that he hates her. However, we learn that his attitude exists only because he is hurt by the constant replacing of nannies he grows attached to while his parents are relatively absent in his day-to-day life. Eventually, Nanny and Grayer grow attached to one another forming special bond of their own as well, but this bond is short lived. “Nanny’s emotional attachment to Grayer (and his to her) is somehow déclassé, inappropriate for the son of an X” who is clearly in a higher station than their hired nanny (Hale 109). Of course, the discouragement of such a relationship was prevalent in *Governess Lit.* as well due to the different class statuses and the implications that came with those class distinctions. Eventually, just like the rest of Grayer’s nannies, Nanny is also replaced because of this inappropriate bond.

Still, we see examples of difficult children through other nannies in the novel. Sima is forced to take care of a much more difficult child named Darwin. For example, Nanny and Sima take Grayer and Darwin on a play date to an indoor playground. Nanny watches as Sima attempts to help Darwin on a slide and “he rejects her offer by smacking her squarely on the head, then laughs and flies down the slide” (McLaughlin 172). However, we know that Sima stays despite the difficult child to financially support her family back in San Salvador.

Much like Governess Lit., nannies in Nanny Lit. have more duties than one would expect their job to entail as well. In the beginning, Nanny agrees to work part-time for the X's, but she ends up working triple the amount agreed to. By the end of the novel, Nanny works more than full-time for the X's, even going on vacation with them only to end up being underpaid and underappreciated. In one instance, she ends up, unaware until it happens, being the nanny for twelve kids as all the parents enjoy a party. Even before this, though, Nanny is expected to do jobs she never signed up for. She runs many errands for Mrs. X such as having to run all over the city getting items for favor bags for a party Mrs. X is throwing, finding a last minute dinner reservation for Valentine's Day, and more. Sometimes, Mrs. X even calls to ask Nanny to do things for her when Nanny isn't even on the clock, with no regard to Nanny's life outside of her job (because to Mrs. X, remember, she is simply and solely "the nanny"). Nanny's mother even speaks up about the exploitation of Nanny saying, "I'm really concerned that you're going to fail out of school and be making other people dinner for the rest of your life! This is a red flag here, Nan. Now, if memory serves, you signed on to provide child care for this woman. That's all, right? Is she paying you any more for this extra service?" (McLaughlin 60). Of course, underpaid and underappreciated, Nanny must answer "no."

Already clearly shown, Nanny, like Agnes, comes from a concrete familial foundation. Both characters have "solid mothering forces," which "provide our heroines with strong role models and an idealized vision of what mothers *should* be like," (Hale 110). Such a prescriptive stereotype, as discussed in a previous chapter, is complicated in itself, but nonetheless, it serves to show how these women both have a strange relationship with the separate spheres ideology. They blur the boundaries between the private/domestic, masculine/feminine, public/private binaries making Nanny operate in much the same way as Agnes, breaking down the constructed

binaries. Still, they end up comparing themselves to their upper class employers, who stand in a juxtaposed position as them in regards to this ideology. They deal with neglectful parents. The father is chiefly absent for a large portion of the novel, and when he is around, he either believes it to be a waste of his valuable time or is focused on things he deems more important. Mrs. X, though, gives us a look back at the similar mothers Agnes faces, Mrs. Bloomfield and Mrs. Murray. For one thing, Agnes and Nanny end up standing in as “substitute mothers” while their employer-mothers focus on social activities, themselves, and their children climbing the social ladder.

One key moment in *The Nanny Diaries* where we truly see the extent of Mrs. X’s lack of any prescribed “natural maternal” qualities, occurs when she leaves for a spa trip, knowing her son is sick. She mentions that Grayer “had a ‘tiny bit of an earache’” as if it isn’t a big deal, but when Nanny goes to Grayer, she encounters scarily raspy coughs and a high fever develops (McLaughlin 140-141). However, neither parent can be reached. She cannot call Mr. X who never comes home that night, staying with his lover in Chicago, while Mrs. X is having all of her calls screened by the reception desk at the spa. We see how “Mrs. X is an example of corrupted, unnatural femininity typical of the upper classes” in novels such as this (Fest 48). Like in *Agnes Grey*, we see the dilemma associated with these women and their relationship with the separate spheres ideology. “Nanny and Agnes’s femininity, that is their kindness, empathy, and good common sense,” and their occupation of substitute mothering, “are products of their stable domestic background and both of them are able to retain these traits in their professional life despite the influences of the unfeminine public sphere,” (Fest 49). Yes, they are forced to work for a living entering into the public sphere, but they redeem themselves as respectable as women in society’s eyes by having prescribed feminine traits within a prescribed feminine job.

Nanny's isolation despite a lack of privacy, and her yearning for a social life outside of work is yet another familiar motif operating in the two novels. Nanny constantly makes jokes towards how lonely she is, and how she has no time for a social life because of her job. She recognizes her invisibility, like Agnes, to all those around her saying "Everyone here looks *through* me...I'm not supposed to talk to anybody and everybody acts as if I should be *grateful* just to be in Nantucket...I'm so lonely" (McLaughlin 274). Yet, at the same time, Nanny is never alone. She is always with her charge, Grayer, even sleeping in the same room as him when in Nantucket. Even when the parents are absent, she learns that they installed a Nanny-Cam to watch her at their disposal.

Despite this invisibility and the difficult circumstances in which she works, though, we see Nanny's strong-will, resilience, perseverance, self-fulfillment, and individuality throughout the novel, exactly as we saw with Agnes. Throughout the entirety of the novel, Nanny is in her last year of NYU, working on her thesis. Although her work schedule and Mrs. X make it very hard on her, Nanny ends up finishing her thesis, graduating, and finding a distinguished job in her field of child development (which we learn about at the very end). When she turns in her thesis, she recognizes her own self-fulfillment excitedly saying "I am a woman who has taken this place by the horns and made it!" (McLaughlin 231). I'd argue that Nanny's sense of individuality, self-fulfillment, and self identification are definitely more reserved than Agnes' though.

Agnes, although it took some time, learned to voice her convictions and stand by them. Nanny never does this, and many readers find this to be a lacking quality of the novel. Readers of *The Nanny Diaries* finish the novel feeling quite unsatisfied that Nanny never stands up for herself, or "says her piece" to Mrs. X. While this is frustrating, Hale admits that "perhaps this

desire for escapist fantasy is unrealistic, first on the grounds of truth to life, and second, because each novel does in fact allow its author to speak for herself” (Hale 116). So although readers want a sort of revenge, we ultimately get another answer that may be more powerful in the long run. Hale says, “Anne Brontë’s novels were surely uncomfortable for Victorian readers, because they realistically exposed the abuses of servants, animals, and governesses, and were part of a general movement toward improving conditions for a wide range of workers,” (Hale 116). I’d add, that the novels, too, were part of the feminist agenda to make society reconsider stereotypical and limiting representations of women as they relate to the separate spheres ideology. These novels demonstrate such representations aren’t accurate, and that women are more complicated and complex as the individuals that they are, in their own right and value.

Chapter 3

The New Woman

Towards the latter part of the Victorian Era, a new image of women began to rise in popularity coined as the “New Woman,” yet the original origin of that coinage is somewhat debatable. First off, it’s important to know that ultimately many mid to late Victorian feminists were beginning to voice themselves and their beliefs concerning womanhood and ideologies surrounding the “Woman Question.” Women writers included heroines in their novels who certainly did the same things, sometimes challenging the very same ideas. In essence, then, the representation existed before it was coined and recognized. Nonetheless, some attribute the origin of the term chosen for this representation to Sarah Grand, while others attribute it to Ouida. Both of these women were certainly important figures in the discussions concerning New Women, but they were writing at the same time. Scholar on the matter, William A. Davis, says

that these two women “were well positioned to bring the term ‘New Woman’ into popular usage, and that is exactly what happened,” but he calls attention “to the use of the term ‘new woman,’ without the upper-case letters,” that existed before Ouida and Grand made it popular (Davis 577). In other words, Buzwell points out that “the qualities and characteristics that came to define ‘The New Woman’ had already been around for some time” and it can be seen through much of the literature being written during the time (Buzwell). Nonetheless, with its popularization through a title, of course, came gendered stereotypes, limitations, and challenges. Sifting through that title’s origin points to some of these in different ways.

Some might argue that such a matter is unimportant in the long run, so long as we know the title existed and what it meant. Why was/is its origin so contested among scholars after all? Perhaps it is because there would be certain implications that ensue concerning the overall depiction of the “New Woman” depending on who named her. This New Woman was two distinctly different women with distinctly different qualities and connotations depending on who you talked to. Scholar “Kate Flint suggests that Grand’s New Woman ‘may represent both the actuality and self-construction of one conspicuous group of readers of the 1890s,’ while ‘an alternative set of images was created’ by women such as Linton, an anti-feminist (qtd. in Broomfield 254). Her representation may be one of the more complicated of all during the Victorian era, because of the controversy surrounding what the representation actually stood for.

On the more positive outlook, Dr. Andrzej Diniejko says she was a “significant cultural icon of the fin de siècle, departed from the [traditional & idealized] Victorian woman. She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent, and self-supporting” (Diniejko). Usually considered to be radical and rebellious, Kirsten Fest adds that she was “a figure that challenged society’s norms and values by questioning Victorian strongholds” and ideologies (Fest 55). In

doing so, she began to “play a significant part in complex social changes that led to the redefining gender roles, consolidating women’s rights, and overcoming masculine supremacy” as she demanded changes in societal institutions and ideologies surround and limiting women (Diniejk). Such challenges were the result of women being “frustrated with the narrow domestic role to which she was confined,” the lack of opportunity, and the prescribed gendered stereotypes and limitations placed upon them (Heilmann 85). Thus, to some women, the New Woman was an inspiration, a woman fighting for her own in a world that did not understand.

Reasonably, there was a second outlook on the New Woman, one with many negative connotations and controversy among Victorian society, notoriously known for being incredibly apprehensive and anxious to change. These more conservative Victorians were afraid that “the boundaries between the sexes were no longer as clear as they had been, and should be,” and that “modern women threatened the institutions of marriage and the family by rejecting the domestic sphere and invading the male public sphere. Many such women, moreover, challenged what had been ‘scientifically’ established as woman’s nature,” (King, 129). Some of the controversy for the New Woman, then, understandably exists because of the New Woman’s relationship with the dominant separate spheres ideology, which she clearly resisted and challenged. Simply put, “she threatened conventional ideas about ideal Victorian womanhood,” and thus, her stereotypical representation sometimes suffered because of it (Buzwell). Davis highlights the typical charges brought against the New Woman in his study by quoting the anti-feminist writer Lady Mary Jeune:

She is among the abnormal productions of our modern society; political speaking has done more to ‘unsex’ her ‘than any invention of the Evil One’; she has ‘thrown aside all the distinctive qualities that once were the pride and glory of Englishwomen’; ‘the injury

[she] will inflict on the nation is impossible to describe or even contemplate with philosophical indifferent'; her children are 'nervous, rickety, and bloodless' as a 'result of her mode of life'; she suffers from 'Constitutional weakness' and has 'many fewer work days in the year' than a man; she and her sisters 'are all nearly cases of hysteria or nervous exhaustion, the result of the perfectly unnatural life they have led'; she has abandoned her 'legitimate sphere'; she has ceased to be a 'womanly' woman; and, finally, her object is to attempt to frustrate her maternal instinct. (qtd. in Davis 578).

Of course, these are only some of the typical charges as presented by one woman, but it gives a look into why the New Woman had negative representations. Overall, people generally had issues with her debauchery of traditional marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and basic 'natural' feminine values. Because of this, for some, her stereotypical representation was thus, just as negative. She could be depicted as mannish, cross-dressing, child-hating, sexually promiscuous, and more. While on the foreground, it may seem as if the New Woman, no matter which depiction you choose, simply rejects the Spheres ideology; many people could not realize that a woman could be both a New Woman and still hold many traditional values.

As you can tell, then, figuring out the "New Woman" as she existed realistically can be difficult because of such conflicting images and ideas surrounding her depiction, characteristics, and qualities. The heroines in New Woman Fiction were no different, especially depending on the author. On one hand, the "novels of Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Emma Frances Brooke, 'Iota' (Mrs. Mannigton Caffyn), and Menie Muriel Dowie were challenging more radically than ever before the traditional concepts of the feminine role" and "the heroines depicted by the popular novelists were New Women in the sense that all rejected some features – though by no means always the same ones – of the feminine role as then defined" by the dominant spheres

ideology (Cunningham 178). With New Woman fiction on the rise, these women writers were “proselytizing for women’s rights as effectively through their fiction-writing as through their political and social activism” (Ardis 190). While some simply wanted a fair chance at self-expression and identification, some women were truly fighting for rights to education, property ownership, divorce rights and more.

Important is the idea that not all New Woman Fiction writers chose to focus on the same issues. Many issues surrounding the Woman Question(s) and the separate spheres ideology were covered within New Woman Fiction. Cunningham wonderfully highlights some of the main issues covered by New Woman writers including how “socially-sanctioned function of marriage discriminated against women,” sexuality and women’s sexual behavior “which had previously been unthinkable,” women who were “unusually independent, intelligent, and free from convention,” and more (Cunningham 178). Easy to see, then, there were many variations within the New Woman fiction genre. Of course, some writers were more fervent and radical than others, and some were a bit more reserved but questioning than others. “Though there is no consistent thesis unifying these novels, they have certain ideals in common” which focus on “their interest in the woman question” and their social challenges, whether big or small (Cunningham 179).

Because of such variations, scholars have had quite a time attempting to categorize, explain, and define New Woman Fiction. Some scholars have attempted to put New Woman Fiction into sub-categories as related to their common ideals. For example, two main types of New Woman fiction were typified by Grant Allen. The first became known as “purity school,” the “less radical” novels in which “the bold independent girl which decided opinions on a particular social problem,” yet “for her a monogamous relationship was still the ideal, but her

intelligence and independence were used to dispel the hypocrisy which surrounded the Victorian concept of marriage,” (Cunningham 179-180). The second type was much more radical “in their treatment of sexuality,” marriage, and they “presented a heroine more akin...to the ‘bachelor’ girl – the intellectualized, emancipated, bundles of nerves” (Cunningham 180). Even with these categorized, there were novels outside of these parameters as well. Simply put, New Woman fiction has an array of complex variations.

At the same time, however, some scholars argue that these “variations” are sometimes more akin to contradictions, and because of that, the genre “sometimes appears to be antifeminist” as they often show the failures of these New Women (Pykett 135). She says:

It is one of the many paradoxes and contradictions of New Woman fiction of the 1890s, that at a time when women writers were so numerous, commercially successful and much discussed in the newspaper and periodical press, their books should have focused so frequently and minutely on the conflicts, frustrations, and the compromised or thwarted careers and/or vocations of the professional woman writer and the aspiring woman artist. New Woman fiction is littered with would-be literary artists, painters, and musicians who break down or give in under the pressures of various circumstances which conspire against them, and end up as lonely spinsters, or happily – or, more usually, unhappily – married wives and mothers, whose aesthetic ambitions have declined (Pykett 136).

Such failures, she argues, seem to appear antifeminist in nature. I’d argue the opposite, though. Ultimately, these novels still share the attitudes of New Woman fiction, however we see the sometimes unfortunate and realistic outcomes in these failures. It’s important to see how women felt conflicted because these women were individuals, not prescribed stereotypes, and not images

on a piece of paper. Of course, they would have conflictions in such a time of huge social changes.

For example, Lady Mary Humphry Ward is a perfect one as “current evaluations of Mrs. Humphry Ward as a novelist range from ‘Victorian anti-feminist’ to ‘New Woman [novelist]’ and ‘rebel,” because her heroines were considered to be “halfway between the conventional Victorian woman...and the Late-Victorian ‘New Woman’” (Argyle 939). Such confliction first shows how it can be hard to attempt to label any woman within the limitations of one image, as she is more likely a conglomerate of more than one typified label and second, that Ward, like her contemporaries, was a freethinking individual, showing that through her fiction. Beyond that, such an idea also shows how the “boundaries between feminist and anti-feminist positions were more permeable and fluid than might be assumed” (Heilmann & Sanders 289). The New Woman was anxious and more reserved in some ways, but curious, questioning and even challenging in others. New Woman scholar Lyn Pykett says that fictions such as this:

cannot simply be written off as conservative narratives of the containment of the feminine, nor can they be read off as heroic stories of feminine or, as some would argue, feminist transgression and subversion. Rather these complexly fissured narratives are vehicles for the exploration of the psychological as well as social and material contradictions of the situation of women at the end of the nineteenth century. (Pykett 148).

In other words, I'd agree with Pykett and argue that New Woman fiction truly showcases the complexity of women as they existed realistically. Women were conflicted, possibly more so than ever, because so much was happening and changing around them during this important period, and such conflictions certainly existed within their novels through their heroines.

Many novels written by women during the Victorian Era should be thought of in this way because, to some degree, they incorporate New Woman attitudes through their characters, as the women attempt to work through their own confusions and questions. Look back to the other extreme, the Angel. In Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*, labeled to be anti-feminist and conservative to most, Ethel May is unfeminine, bold, outspoken, fights to get her higher education, and never marries. Of course, she develops into the stereotyped Angel with time, but even the anti-feminist Yonge is sympathetic to some of the limitations that exist within the societal construction and expectations associated with the confined label. Could this novel and author, too, be considered to include New Woman elements and attitudes? I'd argue that it does even if it is to a much lesser degree, but I believe most women's writings do, although this may be an unpopular opinion.

The variety of New Women stories was just so vast. "Moreover, far from having 'one story to tell,' as Elaine Showalter once suggested, the New Woman figures in a multiplicity of stories about gender and culture," and likewise, authors varied in focus as well with some falling more on the conservative side and others, more open-minded (Ardis 190). Of course, all of these novels, no matter where they fall on this spectrum, are indispensable and influential. "Their contribution to both the feminist cause and the development of the English novel of the period should not be underestimated. The way was paved for a more realistic characterization of women in fiction to match" the transitional, conflicted, complex era in which they existed themselves (Cunningham 186).

Of course, this image's relationship to the Spheres ideology was just as complicated. The negative connotations that came with the New Woman image were certainly influenced by the ideology as the New Woman seemed to reject the gendered expectations of society. On the other

hand, though, some New Women still valued the traditional, meaning they had a somewhat different relationship with the ideology, existing on both ends of the spectrum in a sense. Essentially, a woman could be both traditional and non-traditional, private and public, feminine and masculine, old and modern, or even somewhere in the middle.

Sarah Grand, one of the most prominent figures of the New Woman movement – even credited with making the term widespread in itself, wrote novels including women’s stories, as they would exist realistically as human beings in their own right, more than a limiting label or stereotype. Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell introduce Grand saying that she was “a feminist whose essays and novels exposed the most sensitive issues of Victorian sexuality to direct sunlight...well known for her radical ideas, daring style, and aggressive wit...and a prominent figure in the in the 1890s debates about what women were, should be, or could be” (Broomfield & Mitchell 655). Common to many New Woman writers, she challenged traditional notions and the hypocrisy/double standards and degradation that sometimes occurred within societal ideas of marriage, femininity, womanhood and sexuality. Most importantly, to my points specifically, Grand “called on women to recognize their value to each other and to the human race,” (Broomfield & Mitchell 655). Believing in education and literature’s “capacity to change people’s lives,” she certainly included such ideas within her novels as an attempt to inspire, educate, and sway people (Bloomfield & Mitchell 657). Arguably her most famous piece of literature, *The Heavenly Twins*, thematically focuses on these very ideas.

One of the most prominent themes throughout her novel challenges the traditional views of marriage and the double standards that exist within the institution of marriage. Of course, Grand tirelessly disputed “against the double standards that endangered and degraded women” (Broomfield & Mitchell 655). Likewise, there are several marriages that take place within the

novel, each of them show this theme in some form or another. Evadne's, one of the main women of the novel, parents stand in as the traditional image of what a marriage ideally should look like to Victorians. Her mother is the angel who manages the household, sees to her children's education and conventional upbringing, and is entirely submissive to her father, who has very conservative ideas of how women should behave and think. Interestingly, despite her father's very conservative notions concerning women, he ends up being her primary influence on learning for herself, forming her own opinions, and more. Due to this, Evadne grows to have what her father considers "unusual" and "unnatural" opinions for a woman, and with these, she consistently voices her ideas on the double standards existing within her parents' marriage as well as her father's ideas concerning women and their capabilities.

This is seen best after Evadne leaves her husband, and is corresponding with her mother (who is really writing on behalf of her father and his ideas), through letters, until her father simply says her mother can no longer correspond with Evadne. Evadne notes that this restriction is as binding on her mother as her and writes to her mother saying "We are not the property of our husbands; they do not buy us. We are perfectly free agents to write to whomsoever we please" and encourages her mother to openly and fearlessly continue writing to her as it is her right to do (Grand 46). Her mother, still writing "surreptitiously, as if she were doing something she should be ashamed of," refuses such opposition, so Evadne directly writes to her father reproaching him for his actions saying "You have never had any reason to complain of want of devotion on her part, and when you make your disagreement with me a whip to scourge her with, you are guilty of an unjustifiable act of oppression" (Grand 47). Here, she perfectly points out the double standard that husbands can order as they please, even to the point of unjustifiable oppression of their wives, and their wives are simply supposed to "bear the cross" and

submissively acquiesce to any demands of the husband. Evadne points out the sheer unfairness of such ideas, and clearly wants her mother to stand up for herself because it is her right, not being the property of her husband. Unfortunately, her mother does stand up, but it's very temporary, and she quickly falls back into the ideal position to please her husband, and because of this, she unjustly has no communication with her daughter for many, many years.

Evadne's own marriage shows even more so the degradation and double standards within society. When she is engaged to Colonel Colquhoun, Evadne asks her father if he really believes the Colonel is suitable for her, and if he has had anything objectionable in his past life which she'd be unhappy about. Her father simply reassures her saying he is "a very fine, manly fellow" and that "he has been very straightforward about himself" (Grand 26). She discovers, unfortunately, on her wedding day, that he in fact did have an objectionable past and is infuriated, so she leaves him and refuses to live with him as his wife. Evadne says "marrying a man like that, allowing him an assured position in society, is countenancing vice and helping to spread it," and that "So long as women will forgive anything, men will do anything" (Grand 34). Even after Evadne agrees to live with the Colonel to keep up appearances, she does not change her views and although she always has a soft spot for him and they live on amiably, she never submits to being his wife and her views never change. When the two are having a conversation about their relationship she tells him, "You meant to marry always. You treasured in your heart the ideal of a woman; why could you not have lived so that you would have been her ideal, too?... Did it never occur to you that a woman has her ideal as well as a man?" (Grand 125). In other words, Grand points out the double standard that women have to be pure and angelic, while men can do as they like and get away with it because women should simply accept them.

Of course, traditionally it was believed that pure women would accept and marry men, despite their flaws, and through their angelic purity and moral superiority, they would change the men and their distasteful ways. Colonel Colquhoun believes these more conventional views of marriage, and he uses them as a scape goat to do as he pleases, as many men did during the time. He reflects to himself saying, “The first thing they [women] do when they begin to know anything is to turn around upon us and say we aren’t good enough. And, by Jove! If we aren’t, isn’t it their fault? Isn’t it their business to keep us right?” (Grand 119). Later he brings these ideas to Evadne saying she “might have made anything” she liked of him had she “adopted a different course,” but her response shows the flaws in such socially recognized thinking. She says, “No, I do not flatter myself that I should have succeeded where Mrs. Beston and a half a dozen ladies I could name even here, in a little place like Malta, all more lovable, estimable, and stronger in womanly attributes generally than I am, have failed,” (Grand 122). Evadne continues to show the double standards by pointing out how if they positions were reversed, men would not be satisfied and would be just as miserable as these wives find themselves. Likewise, she consistently points out the unfairness that women should have to live unhappily as wives to such men, who only degrade them through their actions, produce double standards, and treat them unjustly.

With these ideas in mind, though, Evadne does not blame or even stay mad at Colonel Colquhoun or her father for allowing her marriage. Instead, she blames society for the double standards shown through her marriage. Evadne says “It is the system that is at fault, the laxity which permits anyone, however unfit, to enter upon the most sacred of all human relations” (Grand 123). Evadne also makes the claims that good women who submissively acquiesce only allow the system to continue and that women have the power to change that system. She says

that women “have it in [their] power to set up a high standard of excellence for men to reach in order to have the privilege of associating with [them]” and that “There is this quality in men, that they will have the best of everything; and if the best wives are only to be obtained by being worthy of them, they will strive to become so. As it is, however, why should they? Instead of punishing them for their depravity, you encourage them by overlooking it” and this mindset continues from generation to generation (Grand 34).

Edith has a very similar marriage to Evadne, but the marriage is handled differently, showing the effects of a woman who does submit to a man she knows is objectionable in the hopes to angelically change his ways, only to find that she cannot. When Edith announces her engagement to Mosley Menteith, a soldier under Colonel Colquhoun in Malta, Evadne quickly voices her disapproval and tries to persuade Edith from marrying him as she knows he is objectionable, but in an attempt to protect Edith from an unhappy life. Edith’s mother even admits that they know of the errors, and Edith unwaveringly says “if he is bad, I will make him good; if he is lost, I will save him,” to which her mother approves (Grand 87). “Edith’s spirituality and innocence make her vulnerable to the predatory Mosley Menteith” (Jones 225).

Evadne notes again the double standard that Mr. Menteith can get away with such actions simply for his position but does not fight the matter anymore. However, her thoughts are proven to be correct later as Mr. Mosely is not changed, despite all of Edith’s womanly angelic ways. Edith becomes this “spectacle of suffering,” being the image of the miserable wife, who contracts syphilis because of her objectionable husband, who never did change his ways, gives birth to a baby who is syphilitic, and ultimately dies as a result of her disease (Jones 225). Although Edith’s was a dramatic case, it showcases the common effects of marriages such as hers and Evadne’s if the woman simply overlooks a man’s flaws because society allows it.

Women suffer and are degraded because their husbands' vices are overlooked due to their positions in society.

Angelica's marriage is quite different than the others in the novel. She does not marry based on what she feels is love, as the other women in the novel, but instead for her own convenience. Her father decides that Angelica will "come out" to society as a proper lady should, but although Angelica wasn't necessarily opposed to coming out, she did not enjoy the way in which the arrangements had been made – being coerced into it because she couldn't object. Being the strong-willed, spirited woman that she is throughout the entirety of the novel, and wanting to be the one who makes her own path, immediately after her father's announcement, Angelica walks up to a family friend and says bluntly "Marry me! Marry me, and let me do as I like," (Grand 117). She makes her own arrangements so as to convenience herself, and take control so no man can do that for her. Of course, Mr. Kilroy does as she wishes, marrying her and letting her do as she pleases, making her marriage the least conventional of all in the novel.

Having such a marriage allowed Angelica the freedom to experience new ways of thinking, thereby allowing Grand to challenge another type of degradation, finite and fixed notions of femininity, womanhood, gender identity and roles. During what is known as "the Interlude," Angelica chooses to cross dress in order to "infiltrate the male world," without the obstacle of her femininity/womanhood, as influenced by the Sphere ideology, restraining her from experiencing it objectively and accurately (Bogiatzis 51). Angelica says "I wanted to be free to go and come as I would, I felt a galling sense of restraint all at once, and I determined to break the law that imposed it" (i.e. the fixed gender norms) and that "...my dress was my obstacle. As a woman, I could not expect to be treated by men with as much respect as they show each other. I know the value of men's cant about protecting the 'weaker' sex! Because I was a

woman I knew I should be insulted, or at all events hindered., however inoffensive my conduct; and so I prepared this disguise” (Grand 160). She knew the fixed notions would be an obstacle for her, so she found a way to transgress them altogether, thereby forcing readers to reconsider their notions as well. Ann Heilmann says that in literature, during “periods of social transformation, cross-dressing, by demonstrating the essential performativity of gender, enables individual women and politically organized feminists to challenge the patriarchal conflation” with socially constructed notions of gender and “hegemonic power” based on such notions, which is exactly what Angelica ends up doing through her exploration (Heilmann 83).

During this cross-dressing, gender-bent experience readers see two main perspectives. Demetris Bogiatzis discusses these perspectives saying the first is that of the Tenor who has “rigid distinctions between masculine and feminine qualities” and who “falls victim to the misogynist streak of patriarchal rhetoric that stereotypes women as nurturing creatures untainted by lust” (Bogiatzis 50-51). Ultimately, the Tenor represents the conventional societal notions regarding gender identity, roles, femininity, and womanhood. He idealizes Angelica from the first time he sees her based on societal ideals attached to womanhood. The second perspective is that of “the Boy,” or Angelica, who represents the transgression of those notions by using her own “dual perspective (male/female) of different gender positions afforded by [the] disguise,” doing so “to pinpoint the defects in the Tenor’s” and thereby society’s “attitude toward women” (Bogiatzis 50). For some time, the two exist in harmony, but when “the Boy” is discovered to be Angelica, everything changes.

“The Tenor’s reaction” to this situation “shows how deeply gender stereotypes were embedded into the cultural matrices of Late-Victorian England” (Bogiatzis 52). The Tenor is not only severely disappointed, but somewhat disgusted at the same time. He realizes that “his idol

was shattered,” being that his idyllic image of woman was simply that, an idealization and not reality, often the case of society’s attitudes toward women as well (Grand 158). When a woman dares to not be as she is expected to be, societal reactions vary from disappointment to anger to disgust. Nonetheless, through the Interlude, we see constantly shifting perspectives on gender-marked “clothing, behavior, mannerisms, and ideas” associated with popular and idealized notions of gender identity (Bogiatzis 53). Such shifts not only show how societal attitudes toward femininity and womanhood are too fixed, and therefore flawed, but also worked to transgress these traditional, defected notions challenging society to change the ways in which women were defined, labeled, and stereotyped. Grand draws attention to these ideas and “the monolithic nature of gender distinctions, exposing them as socially constructed cultural inscriptions that serve to perpetuate unequal power distribution and preserve the status quo,” ultimately degrading and oppressing the women (Bogiatzis 55).

Of course, it is important to remember that throughout all of this, Angelica is still married to Mr. Kilroy, but as a convenience to herself being forced into coming out by her father. However, as seen this marriage allows her to escape the typical plight of the unhappy wife, unlike Evadne and poor Edith. Instead, Angelica’s subsequent marriage plot is quite triumphant. After Angelica learns that the Tenor died shortly following his unhappy discovery his false idealizations, she goes through a sort of identity crisis which ultimately leads her to realize that Mr. Kilroy “loved her with all her faults, cherished her with a patient, enduring, self-denying fondness” and that he “knew she was headstrong, excitable, wild, original, fearless, and with an intellect large out of all proportion for the requirements of the life to which society condemned her” and still let her be the individual she was (Grand 192). With this in mind, she confesses her Interlude actions to him, and he still accepts her, leading her to choose to devote herself finally

as his wife. However, this does not mean that Angelica gives in to socially accepted notions of wifehood. She, as always, challenges the conventional by writing speeches, which her husband reads in Parliament. She is also the only woman, until the end, who is happy in her marriage and when compared to Evadne who looks “like a pale and fragile flower in want of water,” Angelica is considered to be “a more splendid specimen of hardy, healthy, vigorous young womanhood” (Grand 209).

However, this stark comparison can only be explained by a large difference in their marriages and their association with self-expression and identity, another theme important to Grand and within her work. As mentioned, Grand called on “women to recognize their value” and often, women were too confined to do so, like in Evadne’s case. While Angelica’s husband acknowledged and even indulged her unusual (to society) but expressing qualities, Colonel Colquhoun was quite the contrary. Evadne, like Angelica, was presented as the clear New Woman heroine from the very beginning of the novel. In her very nature was the “need to know” and she demanded instruction “as a right,” constantly reading books, inquiring, and forming her own opinions and principles on as many matters as she could possibly learn about, which eventually leads to her choosing to powerfully standing up for some of those very principles throughout the rest of the novel (Grand 8). As we have seen already, she stands up to her parents, to her husband, and ultimately challenges the social system as well.

Despite her obvious strength, Colonel Colquhoun was embarrassed by her unconventional “views,” and worked to stifle them in many ways in order to keep up his own social appearance. He simply didn’t want to be the center of any scandal or gossip. Although he lets her read and further her own intellectual and personal pursuits in private, the downfall comes when he gets her to promise not to mix herself up publicly in any way, including actions such as

“joining societies, making speeches, or publishing books” on social subjects because he believes “it would be too deuced ridiculous for” him “to have [his] name appearing in the papers in connection with measures of reform” (Grand 123-124). At the time, she didn’t realize the oppression of such a promise. After Edith’s death, Evadne receives a letter from her aunt, Mrs. Orton Begg, who’s views changed with Edith’s death and wrote to Evadne in the hopes to alter the state of things. When her fellow companions excitedly ask Evadne if they will all join up in the pursuit at first she emphatically answers with a yes, but upon remembering her promise, she turns them down, forcing herself into a dreadful, stifled state in which she does not allow herself any form of self-expression.

Before I continue, it is important to note that in the beginning of the novel Evadne comes to the conclusion that “it now rests with themselves [women] to be inferior or not, as they choose,” (Grand 11). Evadne is not allowing Colonel Colquhoun to place her in any position of inferiority, however, at the same time, we see frequently how important Evadne’s principles and convictions are to her. She places them above all else including society and her reputation within society. Thus, when she makes that promise, the principle of her promise supersedes her want to alter things. While frustrating to the reader who wants to see her triumphantly bold and active, we must realize that Evadne holds her principles strongly, and thus, she *chooses* the inferiority of having a lack of self-expression, which is ultimately, still within a New Woman mindset as it is her decision, not someone else’s. Nonetheless, she also realizes how such a decision leaves her “reduced to an existence of objectless contemplation” when she desires to act and it becomes incredibly stifling to her as “we are like running water, bright and sparkling so long as the course is clear; but divert us into unprogressive shallows, where we lie motionless, and very soon we

stagnate” (Grand 126). Thus, we come to see her compared to Angelica, one thriving with the other withering, one expressing her true self with the other stifling her self.

Through all of this, we ultimately see Grand’s call for women’s self-identification and expression in their own right as the human beings that they are, as opposed to limiting labels and stereotypes that place heavy societal expectations on them. Mrs. Sillenger, a friend of Evadne, says that men/society needs to “learn to think of us women, not as angels or beasts of burden – the two extremes between which you wander – but as human beings” (Grand 69). So often, women are labeled as one extreme or another, some limited specific or another. She is either the New Woman or the Angel, not recognized for how she is simply a human being (which takes you back a century to the similar arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft), an individual in her own right who may be conflicted, more complex, and fall somewhere more in the middle. In Sarah Grand’s essay “The New Woman and the Old,” she describes a story in which she meets one of these women saying:

I saw a lady the other day standing beside a bicycle on a country lane. She was a young creature, slender, elegant, admirably built, her figure, set off to the best advantage by the new cycling costume, being evidently undeformed by compression of any kind. Judging by what the papers say of the effect of this costume on the female character, I really should have been afraid to accost her. However, she spoke to me, very courteously asking her way, which she had lost. I directed her her, and then she prepared to mount.

“Oh! Wait one moment,” I exclaimed, emboldened by the charm of her manner.

“Do pardon me for asking, but are you the New Woman?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” she answered, laughing. “I only know that I enjoy every hour of my life, and that is a new thing for a woman. But pray excuse me. I am hurrying home to put my baby to bed, and get my husband’s tea.”

She whirled away, leaving me at first under the impression that, of course, she could not be the New Woman. On second thoughts, however, I felt pretty sure that she was – the New Woman and the Old too – new in the perfection of her physique, old in her home-loving proclivities: a stronger, better, more beautiful creature than the blockhead majority can conceive. (qtd. in Broomfield & Mitchell 668)

Such a story showcases Grand’s innovative ideas that women don’t have to be classified by one label or another, limiting/stifling their true self in the process. Instead, they are much more complex, and their own self-identification, value, and expression should be acknowledged rather than stifled, or else their being will suffer and wither, much like Evadne.

Along with this celebration of women’s “self,” Grand works to break down those negative connotations with the New Woman at all, because she is more than a set of expected stereotypes. Colonel Colquhoun reflects about Evadne at one point,

He had so little conception of the depth and tenderness of her nature, or of her fidelity, that had he been required to put his feelings on the subject into words before this revelation, he would, without a moment’s hesitation, have declared her to be cold, and wanting in natural affection, a girl with ‘views’ and no heart. But after this, a few questions and a very little observation served to convince him that she not only cared for her friends, especially her brothers and sisters, but fretted for their companionship continually in secret. (Grand 84).

In a later moment, Angelica is fascinated with a baby and the novel says “Angelica had never been in the same house with a baby before, and she was all interest. Whatever defects of character the new women may eventually acquire, lack of maternal affection will not be one of them” (Grand 105). In these two instances, and more, Grand works to break down negative connotations associated with New Woman such as their cold-heartedness, and neglectfulness towards their home-life and children. Much like before, this kind of breaking down shows how women are simply more complex than a label. A woman can have strong “views,” unusual to society, be educated and active, and still be a wonderful wife and mother, attending to her home.

Finally, Grand uses her novel to show how women can exact change, even if only in small doses. “Grand demanded that women enact a ‘remedy.’ This meant setting new standards in marriage and particularly in the parenting of young women whose ignorance about sex, venereal disease and wife abuse ensured their oppression by men,” challenging gendered stereotypes, identities, limitations, and roles, and “reminding women of their duties not to men, but to the sisters and daughters who could benefit from their experience” (Broomfield & Mitchell 655). However, Grand recognizes the many ways women help on the front. Not everyone will have opportunities as Angelica, to write speeches delivered in Parliament and work to be “all the heroic women of all the ages rolled into one, not for the shedding of blood, but for the saving of suffering,” but sometimes small actions help too, although “the power [effects] will only be for her daughter’s daughter,” as if women are creating stepping stones to get to their goals, which take take to be reached (Grand 108, 40). Some women will fight for rights to their own education, which may provoke them to do the same for their daughters and fellow women; while other women may set higher standards in their marriage, such as Evadne, and educate daughters on doing the same as to avoid oppression until surely change will come.

In the end *The Heavenly Twins* is a fantastic example of a New Woman novel, written by a New Woman author. Anna Maria Jones even classifies it as a “transitional text, caught, like the New Woman of the 1880s herself, between the old and the new, the Victorian and the modern” (Jones 218). Even Grand, who is considered to be one of the most prominent New Woman influencers of her time, was conflicted herself, and it shows in her transitional text. While Grand challenges, she also upholds some traditional values. For example, Grand does not disagree with marriage as an institution itself, but merely challenges the sometimes oppressive nature of marriage that society allows. She wishes to see marriages bettered. Of course, her conflicted, transitional notions do not take away at all from the novel’s powerful messages, challenges, and influences; but instead, create a more realistic experience for readers looking into the condition of women, their labels, and stereotypes as influenced by the Spheres ideology of the time. Women themselves were conflicted, and more complicated than the societal labels and stereotypes expected them to be and Grand recognized and celebrated that as a call for self-identification and expression as human beings. As such, she challenged society’s conventional, oppressive notions that degraded these women, created double standards against them, and subjugated them. Her novel certainly contained the power to change, sway, inspire, and educate the people whilst giving voice to women in their own right – showing, as Elaine Showalter suggested, how there was far more than “one story to tell” (Ardis 190).

So what is the “New Woman” fiction of today? Some scholars, such as Shari Benstock, would argue that the genre of Chick Lit as a whole can stand as a “new ‘woman’s fiction’ as well as fiction about the ‘new woman,’” as it “engages with complex and significant issues regarding women’s fiction and lives – past, present, and future,” (Benstock 253). Of course, not all scholars agree with this sentiment as Chick Lit has sometimes been “disparaged as ‘unserious’ and

antifeminist,” despite its many cultural values (Ferriss 9). This idea shouldn’t be considered new by any means, though. Women’s writing has traditionally been written off in similar ways. Scholar of Chick Lit, Chris Mazza, who was one of the first to coin the term “Chick Lit” itself, explains her reason for coining the term, saying:

Writers with double X chromosomes have been set apart, frequently called “women writers” while the others remain, simply, wholly, “writers.” What these women writers produce has been “women’s fiction,” and the rest, unconditionally, is “fiction” (or even “literature”). The translation to me always has been that men write about what’s important; women write about what’s important *to women*. So our title of *Chick-Lit* was meant to point out this delusion, this second-class differentiation (Mazza 27-28).

As readers and scholars, we should all be familiar with such differentiation. Popular feminist scholar, Johanna Smith, adds that we have a “masculinist construction of the past: a literary canon top-heavy with white male writers,” and that the “rigid separate-spheres doctrine suppressed women’s history” (Smith 34). Women’s writing being unjustly written off as inconsequential, unserious, and particularly for women then, is not a new idea by any means.

Nonetheless, Chick Lit as a genre operates in many ways like New Woman fiction, and should be recognized as critically important, if nothing else for the cultural value embedded within it. Of course, women have been successful in many of their feminist battles, and today, women have much more freedom than any Nineteenth Century women. However, inequities remain and women are still struggling to overcome hurdles from not being taken seriously, to being marginalized, to still facing double standards, denigration, unfair stigmas, and more. “Women now struggle to balance professional and personal satisfaction. Traditional expectations about women’s roles as wives and mothers have proven remarkably persistent and even the most

confident and self-assured women must negotiate conventional expectations,” (Benstock 255). Along with that, women are still facing stigmas surrounding aspirations that forfeit such conventional expectations.

Some people “scratch their heads in bewilderment at the idea that feminism remains necessary for this enlightened age: both men and women often seem to believe that feminism had one goal – women’s entry into the work force, that the goal has been achieved, and that this achievement should therefore, signal feminism’s demise,” (Smith 34). However, as shown, there is more to fight for, and Chick Lit, even in its sometimes quirky ways, shows women authors and characters still fighting, still challenging, still attempting to solve the inequities women face everyday. For these reasons, Chick Lit can be seen as the New Woman fiction of today, influenced by the New Women of the Victorian era, and should gain more scholarly attention.

Much like Victorian New Woman fiction, Chick Lit as a genre is fluid and can be seen as transitional, as many women attempt to decipher where they stand on the feminist spectrum but often have conflicted views. There are still stigmas in the twenty-first century with being “too feminist,” and with that there are still some negative connotations to feminism. Women sometimes feel that they are “caught between competing demands to be strong and independent while retaining their [conventional] femininity” (Ferriss 9). In other words, they are haunted by the internalized influences of the Spheres ideology, lingering today through ingrained notions of gender. Thus, we end up with a fluid variety of women with a variety of focuses, exactly like in the Nineteenth Century. Nonetheless, we do find common themes within Chick Lit that parallel the Victorian New Woman fiction including self-identification and expression, challenging societal ideals, double standards, and the denigration of women, as well as issues of lingering stereotypes, gender, womanhood, femininity, sexuality and roles. Likewise, themes such as

marriage, family, pressures, work life and more are common as well. Ultimately “many women can identify with them [novels of Chick Lit]” because of these common themes and efforts (Mazza 24).

There are still many more stories than simply one to tell, as Elaine Showalter suggests, and that can easily be displayed through the variety of focuses. Incredibly, the genre has also allowed room for diversity when it comes to race and class as well. “It is indeed impossible to deny that the overwhelming majority of Chick Lit continues to focus on a specific age, race, and class: young, white, and middle. But it is equally impossible to deny that the demand for and popularity of fiction focusing on protagonists beyond those categories is growing exponentially,” (Ferriss 8). The women beyond those rigid categories have stories that need to be heard, too, and in writing them, they are participating in this new women’s fiction of today in the hopes to bring about change also. In the end, this genre is “rife with possibilities and potential” and “because of its newness, Chick Lit is one of the few genres that is completely open to debut novelists and has offered to make an impact in the male-dominated publishing industry” and society (Ferriss 12). In these ways, Chick Lit can definitely be seen as the New Woman’s fiction of today.

Elizabeth Gilbert, best known for her memoir, *Eat Pray Love* – which was also later made into a wildly successful movie – explores similar themes as Grand did in *The Heavenly Twins*. I recognize that this is a bit different than my other chapters, as I use a memoir rather than a fictitious novel, but as mentioned, her memoir addresses many of the same ideas. For example, Gilbert challenges traditional notions and stereotypes that still exist around marriage, family, femininity, and womanhood in her novels. As a memoir, we see a journey of self-discovery, identification, and expression as well. Such a piece works in the same ways as New Woman fiction did in the Nineteenth Century, making it the New Woman fiction of today. This is a tale

of Evadne's legacy, showcasing where her path of stepping stones of suffering led to, which is essentially why I chose this memoir over some others.

Towards the beginning of the memoir, the narrator, Liz, is married, contemplating bringing children into that marriage, has an incredible job writing for *GQ* magazine, and has a nice, comfortable home and plenty of money. This is more than many women can say, and some would argue that she had everything she could possibly want or need. However, Liz was still lacking in many areas of her life, starting with her marriage. She had grown depressed in her marriage and came to the realization that she didn't want to be married anymore, but the thought of leaving made her feel guilty and lesser because of societal pressures. Still, the thought "consumed her," and staying with her husband only made her depression and weariness worse, spending many nights locked in their bathroom sobbing – "sobbing so hard, in fact, that a great lake of tears and snot was spreading before [her] on the bathroom tiles, a veritable Lake Inferior (if you will) of all my shame and fear and confusion and grief" (Gilbert 10)

One of the more notable disagreements between her and her husband was the matter of having children. Gilbert reflects on this time saying, "I had internalized society's messages back then about who and what a woman is supposed to be by the age of thirty-four...I had been trained to believe that a woman was *supposed* to have children by her mid-thirties – or at least that she was supposed to want them. And if you didn't follow that path, what kind of woman were you?" (Gilbert xvii). Such internalized pressures are certainly lingering stereotypes from the Victorian Spheres ideology. She was being haunted, as Virginia Woolf would say, by the phantom of the Angel, and to stray in any way made her feel shameful and confused because she wasn't being the woman she was *supposed* to be. At the time, though, she didn't see that socially internalized pressure within her, and that made her struggle more within her marriage and as a

woman. She says that she and her husband “had built [their] entire life around the common expectation that after passing the doddering old age of thirty, I would want to settle down and have children” and she claims that, that “deadline of THIRTY had loomed over [her] like a death sentence” (Gilbert 10-11).

To put it simply, Liz didn’t want to have any kids, but she was merely having a hard time letting herself accept that because she wasn’t sure if she was allowed to be so unconventional. She says, “I couldn’t relax back then, because I wasn’t yet certain I was allowed to take such a different path from my mom, my sister, my grandmothers, my aunts – from pretty much every woman in my family’s lineage, in other words, since the world was new” (Gilbert xviii). Nonetheless, she miserably starts trying to conceive a child with her husband, based solely on those internalized societal pressures. She tries to be as she is expected to be. However, she says “every month when I got my period I would find myself whispering furtively in the bathroom: *Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for giving me one more month to live*” (Gilbert 11).

Confused Liz contemplates how she had wanted all of this – the big new home, the new apartment the marriage, the marriage, and all that came with it – and how it all felt empty. She says “I had actively participated in every moment of the creation of this life – so why did I feel like none of it resembled me?” (Gilbert 12). Feeling empty, she questions her whole life until, with time, she decides to leave her husband and get a divorce, which ends up being a far from amiable situation. Still, she is able to leave, which is more than Evadne or Edith could do. Like Evadne, she says “I don’t think that marriage means to suffer endlessly,” and she calls for women to recognize this, as so many women still believe they have to stay committed in a miserable marriage stocked with double standards, denigration, and emptiness (Gilbert xx). Such ideas, even today, are a bit unconventional socially and culturally, although they are more

accepted generally. It takes Liz quite some time to accept that her decision was okay, for she surreptitiously feels like a failure as a woman. Such feelings stem from having those internalized societal expectations and pressures, influenced by the Spheres ideology, looming over her.

Of course, in being able to leave her miserable situation, she is one of the “daughters” in which Evadne stood for in a sense. Through Gilbert’s story, and others, we can see how women’s situations were slowly improved generation to generation, reaching this point. Still, we also see how stereotypes and expectations linger, and Gilbert continues in Grand’s agenda of challenging them. She challenges the traditional notions of what women are “supposed to be,” unconventionally making the decision to leave her husband, decide never to have children, leave her job, and start an exploration of the self, which is what comes after her divorce. Gilbert says:

By escaping your own trash compactor of an existence, you can revive, reinvigorate, and reinvent yourself, almost at a cellular level. To put it mildly, this is not a message that women have been receiving for centuries. On the contrary, society’s message to women has always been the opposite: Embrace the trash compactor that is your life. Bow down beneath your burdens and shut your mouth about it. Be a good sport. Give up more. Work harder. Surrender more. Endure more. Sacrifice more. Become a good martyr. Remember that life is not your own; your life belongs to everyone else. Your life belongs to your father, your husband, your children, your community... But *Eat Pray Love* asked this question: “What if your life belongs to *you*?” (Gilbert xvi)

Thus, Liz decides to set out on a journey with that question at the forefront, setting out to self identify, define, and express. Eventually, she would write this journey in the form of *Eat Pray Love*, a memoir, which calls and inspires all women to do the same.

Of course, setting off on a year-long traveling vacation to three different countries is unconventional in and of itself. She quits her jobs and leaves everything behind in pursuit of her own path. Some critics find fault here saying such a trip is unrealistic and does not account for the burdens and experiences of the average woman – as Gilbert is obviously privileged. While I agree that this is certainly a journey most women could never venture to take and that Gilbert was privileged enough to have the opportunity, I'd argue that the bigger messages within the memoir don't fade because of this. Gilbert even acknowledged her privilege and reassures her readers that they don't have to take a fancy journey to find themselves. They just need to ask themselves questions such as: Who am I, who does my life belong to, do I have the right to change my own path, what would bring me pleasure and peace, and more (Gilbert xxi). Then, those readers need to find their own paths. "Such questions suggest that Gilbert's tale could lead readers to the development of a critical consciousness that would result in not only a greater awareness of their own desires, but also the larger forces that seek to rob them of the capacity to live out those desires," (Williams 615).

Thus, Gilbert asks herself these questions and unconventionally leaves, pursuing everything for herself. In Italy, she seeks her own pleasures, learning Italian simply because she loves the language, eating anything and spending her time only as she desires. In India, she seeks her own peace, serving and learning in an Ashram because her spirituality is something she found important within herself and she wanted to expand it. In Indonesia, she seeks to balance the pleasure and peace, and likewise, balance herself – with the main goal of the whole trip to self identify and express herself as the human being she claims to be, not as society expects, and not as she is defined by others.

During Liz's time in Indonesia, she happens to fall in love again with a handsome Brazilian man named Felipe. However, everything about her time with him is set on her own terms. She decides when they cross over into a sexual relationship, and she also says she'd never marry again from the beginning – of course, we learn later that they do marry only because he couldn't stay in the country with her otherwise. Still, she defines the relationship wholeheartedly. Some readers feel cheated by the novel's ending of love, when she set out to find herself, but it's important to remember that she powerfully sets all of the conditions in this new romance, that this love didn't save her, nor did she find herself through the love but before she ever decided to give the romance a shot. She says "I was not rescued by a prince; I was the administrator of my own rescue," (Gilbert 363).

Through Gilbert's challenge of societal expectations and stereotypes of what women are supposed to be, marriage, and her call for women's own self identification and expression, we can see how Chick Lit can function as the New Woman's fiction of today, paralleling the Victorian New Woman fiction. Women are still haunted by and face stigmas and lingering stereotypes influenced by that Separate Spheres ideology, yet, many women are still attempting to challenge those ideas and incite change through their writing. "Despite writing to 'help herself heal,' Gilbert's story has managed to profoundly impact countless readers who have connected to her tale of self discovery" (Williams 615). Grand wanted the same for her own readers, as did the many women writers of the time, each attempting to make their own impacts on the "Woman Question" of the period, and women today will continue doing the same influenced by their predecessors whether they even know it or not. In the end, Chick Lit:

has offered incredible opportunities for young women to make an impact in the male-dominated publishing industry...Even if Chick Lit's popularity were to diminish, the

body of work amassed over the past decade alone raises issues and questions about subjectivity, sexuality, race and class in women's texts for another generation of women [and scholars] to ponder (Ferris 12).

In my own eyes, I, like Elaine Showalter, see the many voices of the many stories being told. Through those unique voices, we see the complication that comes with attempting to define and label based on stereotypes women, womanhood, and/or femininity. Instead, we should strive to see women for the human beings that they are, which usually consists of a mixture of the old and the new, the prescribed feminine and the masculine, the private and the public, and more.

Conclusion

As seen throughout this paper, the Separate Spheres ideology of the Victorian era not only influenced their own representations of women in literature and the messages in which women chose to incorporate within their stories, but also the modern women's writing and representations today. This ideology has become so ingrained and internalized that the representations have become so typified and expected. Gender expectations seep into every part of our culture, from familial relations, to educational and occupational ideals, and more.

However, women have always related in different ways to such expectations, and some of those reactions can be seen through the writing coming out of the time. Women have and will continue to work through and move past such ideologies and expectations that attempt to limit them in any way. Like Evadne, we must be the stepping stones to a more acceptable future for our daughters.

With this in mind, we, as a society, have got to reconsider the ways in which women are labeled, stereotyped, defined, and sometimes spoken for by society itself. Such representations of women are incredibly limiting and tend to be influenced by lingering representations and the

Separate Spheres ideology of the 19th Century. In many ways, stereotypes and ideas surrounding women have continued to exist and because of this, we find so many parallels and similar patterns between Victorian women's writings and the women's writings of today. These similarities ultimately suggest that women are still fighting for a desire to escape societal limitations placed on them through said stereotypes, ideals, and definitions. Literature has allowed a space for these women to have a voice and patterns such as the ones discussed here will only continue within literature until society begins to see women for the complex, complicated human beings that they are and to allow for self identification and expression

Although conclusions signify an "end" of sorts, this conversation is simply far from ending. Throughout these chapters, from the Victorian literature to today's, we see messages of reform and change forcing us to question why women still feel the need to write such similar messages within such similar plots. Why are we having to ask the same questions and challenge the same notions centuries later? Hale says that maybe "the fact that they [these novels] are written at all offers a kind of revenge, and may result in reform that goes wider than the specific targets," (Hale 117). In other words, until women feel as if their experiences are accurately being represented as the individuals that they are.

Ultimately, women just cannot be placed in finite representations and definitions. The gendered expectations and the Spheres ideology that have continued to be ingrained in societal and cultural ideals also continues to be flawed, and women show this through their writing. Society needs to start rethinking how we characterize, label, define, and represent women or these cycles will only continue. Women are not simply mothers and wives, daughters and sisters. They cannot continue to be defined as men wish them to be, as they relate to the men, and as they fulfill their intended positions. They are individuals whose experiences and perspectives

need to be accounted for in the reconceptualization of women as a whole. If not, this trend in women's literature will only continue as women continue to demand to be heard, as they continue to be the voices when told to be voiceless.

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