DBS SCHOOL OF ARTS

JULIE NICHOLL-STIMPSON

KILLING THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

EXPLORES REPRESENTATIONS OF MARITAL VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE ENGLISH VICTORIAN NOVEL AND THE ROLE THAT WRITERS OF FICTION PLAYED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF ATTITUDES AND LAW.

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SUPERVISOR: DR. MICHAEL KANE

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the representation of marital violence and domestic abuse in the English Victorian novel and the role that writers of fiction played in the transformation of attitudes and the law.

Using Victorian fiction as a central focus, this thesis explores the role of women and wives in marital violence and the contradictory attitudes of Victorian society towards the harsh cruelty they endured. Secondary to this, I will look at the portrayal of Domestic Violence in Victorian Literature by writers such as Emily Bronte, Charles Dickens’, and Sarah Grand.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century ideologies, theories and policies relating to domestic violence against women changed radically. Through modern feminist thinkers of the period such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart-Mill, they paved the way for a radical judicial overhaul which led to the punishment of offending husbands. Chapter one establishes the oppressive ideals, history and law of surrounding these abuses throughout the period. Chapter two examines Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* paying particular attention to Heathcliff’s maltreatment of his wife Isabella. In Chapter three I explicate instances surrounding emotional and mental abuse in Charles Dickens *Hard times*; through Mr. Gradgrind’s attempts at the mechanisation of the human spirit. Chapter four observes Sarah Grand’s *Ideala* as the ‘new woman’ paving the way for other women to live independent lives away from the oppression of Victorian marriage.

Ultimately I conclude the role that these writers played in raising awareness, creating a space for discussion and leading to the changing of attitudes and law in the nineteenth century.
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Introduction

‘The Angel in the house’ was a dominant middle-class domestic ideology, defining women throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. This ideal represented a view of femininity, which supported patriarchal dominance and female dependency in the domestic sphere.

This thesis examines representations of marital violence and domestic abuse in three Victorian novels: Emily Brontes *Wuthering Heights*, Charles Dickens *Hard Times* and Sarah Grand’s *Ideala*. These novels explore the social, moral and legal views of the authors and their influence on changing attitudes of the time.

The objectives of this thesis are to establish the role of the Victorian woman, wife and the expectations of their roles; to define the attitudes towards women and domestic violence, and what the law deemed acceptable/ punishable at this time; the shift in attitudes and the emergence of the New Woman. Therefore examining, the development of women in Victorian English literature and the violence endured by the Victorian woman and the ineffectuality of the judicial system at this time.

Lisa Surridge’s *Bleak Houses* demonstrates how Victorian fiction was concerned about the wife assault debates of the nineteenth century which invaded the privacy of the middle-class home. *The Marked Body* (Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky) examines the ‘discarded and violated bodies of middle-class women in Dickens’ and Bronte’s novels. Pikes essay ‘*My Name was Isabella Lindon*’, explores the theme of domestic violence in *Wuthering Heights* and the progression of Isabella from an immature girl to a hardened independent woman.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the rights of Woman* (1792) which emphasised women’s rights and need for education marks the beginning of the ‘women debates’ and John
Stuart-Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869) which argues for gender equality, both aim to further the growth of women’s rights towards equality between the sexes.

This thesis reviews specific instances, themes and portrayals of violence in the three novels in order to illustrate the growth in the portrayal of female characters throughout the nineteenth century.
Chapter 1
The Angel in the House

This chapter will discuss Victorian Gender Ideology: the history and contradiction of those ideals, the truth behind them and writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart-Mill who campaigned to change women’s rights and position in society. These campaigns led to some ground-breaking legislation in the law courts regarding domestic violence.

In chapter seven of Susie L. Steinbach’s *Understanding the Victorians: Gender*, Steinbach examines politics, culture, and society in nineteenth-century Britain. Steinbach surmises that Victorian society was organised in terms of a number of different factors including: “Class, Race, Nationality, Ethnicity, Religion and Sexual Orientation”, and maintained that “gender roles” differed according to these (132). The Victorian central belief system was organised by the ‘Doctrine of Separate Spheres’ which viewed men as public creatures and women private and “by 1840 the ideology of separate spheres emphasised men’s identities as workers or professionals, and husbands’ and fathers … as good providers” (132). They often worked long hours to ensure their families were comfortable as “they valued independence” and their “professional identities”. In the previous century women and men had worked side by side and this was carried through into some middle class families. Up until 1860, and in line with middle class ideals, women were expected to marry and avoid work. However middle class women usually brought an inheritance into the marriage and assisted their husband’s endeavours in family shops, directing households and managing accounts. Women were now expected to stay at home in the ‘domestic sphere’, running the house, raising the children and caring for their husbands. This led to the view of men as independent beings and a corresponding view of women as dependent, remaining enclosed in the ‘private sphere’ of the home where they were viewed as “morally superior” (133). One
result of the “separate spheres ideology was domesticity” which was an “idealisation of the home” (134). These ideals increased pressure on both men and women, which further provoked the expectations within marriage and led to an increase in marital violence.

In *Men of Blood* Wiener examines male aggression as a growing problem in Victorian England, which was “denounced as a relic of benighted ages” (6). The eighteenth-century notion of ‘men of honour’ was now being replaced by revised concepts such as ‘men of dignity’ (6) and the ideal of “manliness” (134). In an effort to control male aggression, and keeping in line with more pacific ideals of “manliness”. “The new era” of young Queen Victoria’s reign saw sharp changes in the ideals of men’s behaviour and equally the female ideal “distinguished itself from what went before…in the heightened moral influence of women and attention to their protection” (4) which was of course a justification for “male paternalism” (5).

The idealisation of the Victorian woman as needing “protection” (4) became known as ‘The Angel in the house’ enshrined in her ‘haven’. This phrase was epitomised in a poem by Coventry Patmore in 1854, using the same title in which he idealised his wife as an exemplar of the perfect Victorian wife. Patmore believed that his wife was the perfect example of what a Victorian wife should be. The poem was not popular when it was first published but as the century wore on it became increasingly influential, gaining the attention of Virginia Woolf who abhorred the repressive ideal of women. She believed that “killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer” (Showalter, 207). She believed that this ideal needed to be stamped out or it would “suffocate her work”.

Queen Victoria was the role model for middle-class society in the nineteenth century. During her ‘sixty-four year reign’ she encouraged the ‘angel’ ideal; and “the treatment of women…became a touchstone of civilization and national pride” (Wiener, 3). The Queen
encouraged the values of domestic life by devoting herself to her husband and children which spread throughout nineteenth century society (Wiener, 3). Victorian women were expected to be “devoted and submissive to their husbands”, which Queen Victoria was not. The ideal Victorian woman was expected to be pure, and passive and therefore powerless. She was also expected to be refined, modest, self-sacrificing, and religious; this ideal was supported by strict etiquette and manners. Victorian culture emphasised ‘the home’ as a woman's place of security; yet domestic violence (both physical and sexual) was rife throughout this era.

Kate Lawson’s *The Marked body*, examines the ideal of ‘the angel in the house’, which largely expressed the values of the rising middle class, however, Lawson also reveals the “depths of aggression [which lay] “[b]eneath the surface” of middle-class society” (12). Marriage demanded that a woman cede rights she possessed over her body, children, wages and inheritance to the control of her husband. Comparisons between the relationship of wives and husbands, versus slaves and their masters is a common theme in Victorian literature concerning domestic violence. However, “attempt[s]” made “to define… “Marital cruelty”” throughout the nineteenth-century highlights legal inabilities to determine “normal marital behaviour”. It is these inabilities which are “a good example of the complex…field into which a body of evidence is thrown” (12).

Victorian novels, in particular *Wuthering Heights*, *Hard Times* and *Ideala* highlight the shifting attitudes regarding domestic violence that first developed towards the middle of the 19th century. The Victorian era forged a landmark in this long offensive and the ‘treatment of serious violence by men against women in nineteenth-century England. “During Queen Victorias reign …criminal law [began] to punish …violence…systematically and more heavily, [which] [promoted] a more pacific ideal of manliness” (Wiener, Intro). Wiener notes
that “Britain…saw [itself] as bringing law and order to those who possessed little of them” (14).

The *Victorian Web* outlines introductions of new legislation in the war on violence, including the *1828 Offences Against the Person Act*, particularly relating to rape cases but did not refer to marital rape with “most complaints of rape or attempted rape … dismissed” (Wiener, 38). The *1853 Act for the Better Prevention and Punishment of Aggravated Assaults on Women and Children* gave women greater legal protection. However it did not ban spousal violence, although it had legal limits on the amount of force that was permitted. “Wife-beating now joined the ranks of other… officially recognized social evils in the “age of reform” (157).

The ground-breaking *1857 Divorce Bill* meant that violence was recognised as grounds for divorce and was the first act to protect a wife’s property which up until then had been in the control of her husband. Prior to the introduction of this act only “90 divorces were granted in the nineteenth century … [with] only four [granted] to women” (Steinbach, p. 137). The *1878 Matrimonial Causes Act* was radical in that it meant women could claim a separation on the grounds of cruelty and she could take custody of their children. These laws were met with mixed response; increasing marital conflict in the court and in society.

In *Bleak Houses* Surridge asserts that the “dominant middle-class ideology of this period denounced violence in the home” but also “valued the absolute privacy of the domestic sphere” (14). This idealised male authority, alongside female obedience rather than public debacles to regulate the home. Throughout the eighteenth century, village brawls and aristocratic duels were the norm, used to emphasise ‘manliness’, but the “Victorians didn’t see … physical violence as necessary to virility” and Wiener asserts that “the protection of women became a powerful justification for the exercise of power and the disciplining of [the] population” (32). “Men prone to violence” were encouraged to join the military, moving the
problem away from English soil throughout the commonwealth dominions as “orderliness and non-violence [were] both more valuable and more necessary than ever before” (13).

Religion, as Wiener suggests, also helped narrow the gap between violence and sexual desire, “making …the home more central to religious life”, which introduced strict moral codes that were followed rigorously, “increase[ing] the importance of seeing that women were encouraged to carry out their spiritual and moral duties and … protected from harm at the hands of un-Christian husbands” (151). The Victorian era seems to have been trying to right the wrongs of the previous century, a reaction perhaps to the frivolous morals of that period. By imposing stricter morals within society, it allowed for greater control of people’s actions, further strengthened by the introduction of evangelical religion. Victorian notions of gender dictated a sexual double standard, both Men and women were expected to have different levels of sexual desire, women ultimately “passionless” (Steinbach 132), yet they were expected to submit to “marital pro-creational” (135) sex on demand, despite their physical or mental state. This stemmed from the earlier belief that women’s “natural destiny” was to give birth, were purely dominated by their reproductive systems, incapacitated by menstrual cycles and pregnancy (135). Women were treated like invalids, incapable of any mental or physical exertion which would drain energies from their wombs (135).

Physical and sexual violence were prominent both inside and outside marriage against women of all ages including prostitutes, despite their relationship to the offender. This was often by married men, guardians and employers of the women, who committed the crime. This was not helped by a leniency towards men within the legal system. *Punch*, a satirical magazine est. 1841 (OnlineBooks), in 1842 printed a list of fines for various assaults ranging from “ten shillings for a pair of black eyes”, to a fine of £10 to a kick to a female in the
abdomen warranting. Surridge claims that *Punch* printed the fines as a warning to the lower income earners so they could choose their punishments according to their pocket (84). It was extremely difficult for a married woman of good character/repute to take a case and nearly impossible if the woman was single or a prostitute – even if the accused admitted the crime. Even ‘women’ over the age of twelve had little protection from the law courts against such violence (Wiener, 114). There was some reform in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with allowance for defence counsel for offenders; the 1836 *Prisoners Council Act* proved to be yet another barrier for women in attaining justice (Surridge, 84). However there were those who fought behalf of these women, funding legal representation for them, where they otherwise would either go without representation or the case would rarely make it to court.

In *A Common Cause with All the Females in This Kingdom*, Steinbach notes as early as 1820, inspired by the Queen Caroline affair, women’s groups from around Britain were campaigning for women’s rights (Including Females of Bristol, The Married ladies of London and The Ladies of Edinburgh.). The “Queen Caroline affair was a major event in British politics” (132). Queen Caroline was due to marry the Prince of Wales in 1820, and he tried to stop the wedding by accusing her of adultery to stop her “claiming her title”. Queen Caroline received “an outpouring of support” from women’s groups around Britain. They felt that they had a common cause and “your Majesty’s case [became] a common cause with all the females in the Kingdom”, proving that the power of gender in Victorian Britain was immense and gathering momentum (132). It was however in this period that the treatment of women became of greater importance and met with severe disapproval as the century wore on. Towards the end of the Victorian era, social attitudes towards gender relations began shifting away from patriarchal male dominance and female dependency
towards a sense of greater gender equality, sparked by campaigners like Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart-Mill and then later in the century writers such as Sarah Grand and Mona Caird with the emergence of ‘the New Woman’ fiction.

Victorian literature shows evidence of disquiet and resentment towards the strict gender roles and moral codes impressed on society. Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* and Sarah Grand’s *Ideala*, all contain important messages on domestic violence, morality and female independence. Emily Bronte’s attempts to destroy the sentiment attached to the middle-class home throughout *Wuthering Heights* (1847) proves that even in the nineteenth century, homes could be turned into “Gothic Castles, imprisoning young women” (Pike, 381). The central theme in Wuthering Heights is the destructive power that vengefulness and jealousy create and the ‘violent’ effects on people’s lives. Although it could not have been Emily’s intention to rouse controversy, as the novel was published after her death, it was received with mixed reviews and considered controversial because of its depiction of mental and physical cruelty. It was viewed as uncommonly bleak in its confrontation of strict Victorian ideals, such as morality, religious double standards, and its treatment of social class and gender issues. The Examiner (1848) described it as a “strange book… wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable”. The reviewer surmised that the author “who [made] up the drama… is tragic… and are savage…, ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer” (*Wuthering Heights*, 2014, para. 3).

In *Wuthering Heights* the character of Isabella is one of the first characters in the Victorian novel to leave a violent marriage. It was extremely uncommon in this era for a woman to leave a marriage as there was no legal protection for women, married or single. They became the sole property and responsibility of their husbands. *Wuthering Heights*, written after the
1828 *Offences against the person act*, when divorce courts were flooded with battered wives trying to regain their rights away from their husbands, through legal separation (Surridge, 18). Bronte presents a grim portrayal of domestic violence in a middle class setting through the comparison of the Linton’s upper class home to the gloom and chaos of the ‘Heights’. Isabella eventually escapes the claustrophobic confines of the house, signifying the beginning of the ‘New Woman’ (movement) Fiction.

Charles Dickens’ moral purpose throughout the nineteenth century led him to be called "the greatest instructor of the Nineteenth Century" by the London Times in his obituary. His works, in particular *Hard Times* (1854), highlighted the brutality of the period. Dickens believed writers had a moral purpose (VictorianWeb, 2014, para. 3) and began campaigning through his works to awaken moral sentiments and to encourage virtuous behaviour in readers and within society. Whilst Dickens main focus remained the abuse of children, he campaigned against political corruption and the abuse by people in positions of authority. Although sometimes unaware that his novels were perceived this way, they still had a profound effect on the way these situations were viewed. Dickens’ views have been likened to those of Marx because of the similarity of their backgrounds and the fact that they were experiencing the same societal and class systems. Although it is thought that Dickens was not aware of this within his work and his attacks were more on human nature than on society (VictorianWeb, 2014 2-3). Significantly Dickens’ novel *Oliver Twist*, plays a key role in developing public intervention in wife assault cases in the public arena with the deaths of Nancy and Sikes (Surridge, 43). Lawson claims that Dickens, ‘in spite of [his] subtlety and [the] complexity of his social analysis …attempts to sequester domestic violence within the poor and working classes”. Lawson also lays claims to this through Dickens’ use of names such as ‘Sikes in Oliver Twist’ (10).
Sarah Grand was a feminist writer whose work focused on the ‘New Woman ideal’ in its quest for female liberation. Her first novel, *Ideala* (1888), inspired the awakening of the new woman fiction towards the end of the nineteenth century. *Ideala* has a strong anti-marriage message because of the inequality it emphasises. In many respects it depicts her own unhappiness within her marriage, the decision to leave her marriage, and her journey to support herself. Changes to the law at this time strengthened her decisions to leave and pursue her own writing career - *The Married Woman's Property Act* of 1870 allowed women to keep earnings or property acquired after marriage. In 1882 a further amendment to this allowed women to keep what they owned at the time of the marriage (VictorianWeb, 2014, para. 3).

Along with other writers campaigning for women’s rights such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, Grand was also a part (and coined the phrase) of the ‘New Woman’ movement. This provided inspiration to women trapped in marriage or positions of dependence, who wanted to support themselves. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many women had started to question the idea of loveless marriages, and the inequality within the “institution” for women. Woolfe’s attempts to stamp out, even ‘Kill’ this ideal is brought full circle in Sarah Grand’s *Ideala* (1888) which will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Kate Lawson’s, *The Marked Body* disassembles the ideal of ‘The Angel In the house’.

Lawson articulates the ‘physical violence against women’ in mid-century Britain, as “Iron cages of marriage” where women “‘die slowly day by day’” (p. 15, 16.). Lawson’s reading of Mona Cairds 1888 “expose of nineteenth century marriage”, compares British society to that of the Mongolian market place, teamed with enormous cages, containing ‘condemned prisoners’; “it is difficult to avoid seeing in that market-place a symbol of [British] society…women are held in bondage, suffering moral starvation…”(15).
Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), challenges the notion that women are naturally inferior to men and that they may appear to be only because they lack education.

"If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim." (27)

She argues that if their heads were not filled with nonsense “from their infancy… and taught by the example of their mothers” that “should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives” (20). This is one of the reasons Wollstonecraft argues against the subordination of women. They are cultured at every turn to be docile and dependent on men. Wollstonecraft argues that

“the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature …and that women, [should be] considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, [and be allowed] to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being, one of Rousseau's wild chimeras." (41)

John Stuart-Mills *The Subjection of Women* (1869), chapter two entitled *Marriage*, compares the legal status of women to the status of slaves and argues for equality in marriage and under the law. He concludes that after basic necessity, “… Freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature” (34). Mills concludes that of “hardly any slave…is a slave at all hours and all minutes”; but the wife’s unfortunate situation is worse that the slaves, who “in general … [has a] fixed task, and when it is done, or … off duty, he … [has his own time] into which the master rarely intrudes”. The wife’s predicament however is that this “cannot be so” for her and “she is held in [the] worst description of slavery as to her own person”. The most despicable example of ‘slavery’ enforced on the Victorian wife was conjugal rights. Mill concludes that “a female slave” could “refuse” to have sex with her master, “not so the wife:
however brutal a tyrant” (11). Mill protests that, “he can claim from her and enforce the
lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function
contrary to her inclinations” (11). It was these degrading acts of marriage ‘law’ that sparked
the ‘women debates’ of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The * Married Women’s
Property Act* introduced in 1870 gave women the right to “earnings, Investments and
inherited property”. The *Matrimonial Causes Act* (1878) gave further support to abused
wives, granting them “automatic separation” orders and under certain extenuating
circumstances “spousal maintenance and custody of children under ten”. The *Married
Women’s Property Act* (1882) granted “married women the same rights as the ‘femme sole’”
which had always given unmarried women … equal rights to men… The final Act passed
excluding amendments, with regards to women’s rights during this century was the
*Guardianship of Infants Act* (1886) which improved women’s custodial rights over her
children, “specifying that after divorce the welfare of the child should be taken into
consideration in custody decisions” (Surridge, 187-188). After the publication of these Acts,
“it was not until 1891 that a High Court ruling denied the husband the right to imprison his
wife in pursuit of his conjugal rights” (Andrews, 2014, para. 8). Mills’ argument highlighted
the contradictory ideals of the British legal system in which gender differences were poles
apart. Further to this, marriage law in general belittled the ‘idealised’ role of wives against
single women who were more empowered.

A sharp turn was seen towards the end of the nineteenth century in the treatment of male
violence against women in the courts. Criminal law began to punish violence more steadily
and rigorously during Queen Victoria's reign as she was promoting a new, more pacific ideal
of masculinity - although records cannot be accurate regarding the number of crimes
committed as many did not make it to court for financial reasons. This legal progression was
not without resistance, from offenders and those who engaged in arguments about
democracy, humanitarianism and patriarchy to establish sympathy with these violent men, (Wiener, Introduction).

The nineteenth century witnessed unprecedented growth in city living and industrialisation, with many writers mourning the loss of traditional values. This Dickens’ best portrays in his novel *Hard times*, which depicts the industrialisation of the fictional small urban, Coketown. This period, possibly more than any other age, saw the greatest change in terms of moral and social ideals. Victorians became increasingly more secular and literature seemed strained in trying to compensate for the loss of moral and spiritual meaning in society. The literature of the Victorians therefore articulates anxieties surrounding alienation and insignificance.

Many women throughout the Victorian period were trapped in badly matched and loveless marriages with no escape, while it was socially acceptable for men to be promiscuous and violent. Women paid the price for male dominance and oppression in the home and in society. Victorian literature is full of examples of women paying for straying from moral expectations as portrayed in *Wuthering Heights, Hard Times* and in the ‘New woman’ fiction such as *Ideala*. This literature contributed to enormous changes in women’s lives away from public and familial scrutiny. The ‘New Woman’ was no longer a victim of the oppressive Victorian double moral standards; instead she was paving the way towards the demise of accepted conventions in marriage, and redefining relations between the sexes.
Chapter 2

Bleak Houses: Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights

The Victorian period saw instances of erratic female behaviour and masochism which is evident in Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights (1847). Issues of domestic violence and marital abuse were sensationalised in Victorian literature (Lawton, 12). This can be viewed as either positive or negative, but in the case of my thesis, I would argue towards the positive. Authors such as Bronte, Dickens, and Grand paved the way for a dialogue about an otherwise hidden subject. Bronte dealt with the obsessive confines of marital cruelty, while Dickens highlighted the harsh brutality of the middle class towards the lower classes. Dickens’ depicts oppressive industrialism and, the harsh working environments and poverty which have been blamed for the domestic downfall of the Victorian marriage. He maintained that the strict moral codes which oppressed women and the restraint of their sexuality were also at fault; thus trapping them in passivity for fear of becoming improper.

Mr. Earnshaw is the master of Wuthering Heights and Father to Catherine and Hindley. After Hindley is sent to college, Catherine’s love for Heathcliff grows and their relationship becomes more complex. It is deemed inappropriate as he has grown up as her brother. After an accident at the Linton’s, Catherine falls in love with Edgar and Heathcliff sets out to become a gentleman in order to win her back. She rejects Heathcliff’s love and marries Edgar for his social status. When he returns to the ‘Heights’ and after Catherine’s death, he sets out a path of revenge.

Isabella embodies the Victorian ideals of the ‘the angel in the house’; domesticity, passivity and femininity. Bronte portrays Isabella as the weak character, but she is the strongest in
many ways, mostly for her strength in leaving her violent marriage to Heathcliff at a time when this could lose her respectability within society.

In Judith E. Pike’s article *My name was Isabella Linton: Domestic Violence, and Mrs. Heathcliff’s Narrative in Wuthering Heights*, Pike examines Isabella’s quiet strength among the other characters who “fail even to acknowledge [her] presence” (348). Heathcliff’s treatment of Isabella is grounds for legal separation, but it is his account of the story that would hold most weight in the eyes of the court. Pike reveals that “Heathcliff’s… [explicit] knowledge of Victorian marital laws: …regarding confinement, chastisement and what [the court] would constitute a rationale for a wife’s petition for separation”. Heathcliff claims he “confines her to …preserve his social standing” (367). Heathcliff is every bit the ‘monstrous’ villain but Isabella breaks through the ‘angel ideal’ by stating “The single pleasure I can imagine is to die, or to see him dead” (151).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) is a feminist reading of Victorian literature. They believed that female writers in the nineteenth century were limited in their writings of female characters being portrayed as either angelic ‘angel’ or the manic “monster.” This notion does not hold true in Bronte’s *Wuthering heights*. At first glance it seems that Catherine is the ‘monster’ and Isabella is the ‘angel’, but both characters are far more complex than initial surface appearances. They tend to focus on studies of female characters and leave out the affect which the male characters have had on the female behaviours. Catherine and her daughter Cathy are both victims of obsessive love and cruelty at the hands of Heathcliff and react to this patriarchal oppression.

Studies of Victorian Domestic violence focuses mainly on violence amongst the lower classes. However, studies of court records for the period prove that there was an equivalent
amount of marital abuse among the middle class, as Kate Lawton examines in *The Marked Body* “the violent markings on the bodies of bourgeois women are not the result of spectacular depravity, but of…unspeakable, evaded, deferred [and] denied [cruelty]” (12). This cruelty at the time perhaps seemed less obvious because of the increased privacy of the home. Lawton also suggests that some middle class families felt they were above this kind of physical torture (associated with lower class). Victorian definitions of abuse did not consider emotional abuse to be a problem, leading to many victims of abuse and indeed the abusers themselves not to consider emotional abuse as part of the problem; Should “mental feelings” be mentioned, the victim was expected to “bear with the situation” (12-14).

Wiener explains in *Men of Blood* that middle class families increasingly valued the family unit, with many Victorians seeing the home as a buffer from the chaos of the world (152). Increased emphasis on privacy created a home life obscured by etiquette, which led to physical barriers from the outside world. The walls of middle class homes as depicted in *Wuthering Heights*: bricks and mortar – became physical barriers from the public eye; portraying false images of a tranquil family life – yet yielded domestic abuse within. This isolation of family life perhaps led to the idea that domestic abuse lay among the lower classes. With “every newspaper [and] police report [full] …of the hideous maltreatment of their wives by working men” (12), that collided with the ‘perceived’ realms of idyllic middle class family life. As Lawson, Wiener and Surridge have shown through close analysis of court records that domestic violence lay in all corners of society, not just the public debacles associated with the working class life/ community.

Throughout the Victorian era, English law was constructed to protect the institution of marriage. There were few options available prior to the 1857 *Divorce Act*, in which a battered wife could regain independence (Lawton, 8). Separation was difficult to obtain, but divorce
was granted on the grounds of adultery and assault on the husband’s part if evidence could be provided. Many wives however were still financially dependent on their husband’s and many chose to remain in abusive and loveless marriages for fear of becoming ‘improper’ as middle class women “could not earn wages without losing their respectability” (143, Steinbach). John Stuart Mill argued that domestic abuse occurs when patriarchal control is taken too far - for example, Heathcliff’s treatment of Isabella, when “so many other things which came down from the same odious source have been done away with” (Bronte, 2). Mill identified links between the ineffectuality of the legal system regarding marriage and the cruelty of its abuses, in which “everyone who desires power, desires it most over those who are nearest to him...in whom any independence of his authority is [most often] likely to interfere with his individual preferences” (4). This is particularly true in Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff looking for revenge against Catherine, Cathy, Edgar, Hindley and Hareton.

Heathcliff’s emotional and mental cruelty towards Isabella’s affections would never warrant a separation in the eyes of the law and he plays on it. The first major sign of his violence and psychological imbalance was through his torture of Isabella’s dog. He takes immense pleasure in seeing her suffer. Heathcliff calls her “delusional” and relishes his recount of events to Nelly of all his cruel “experiments [to see] what she could endure” (150). Heathcliff is fully aware that if an outsider were to view Isabella they would think her mad as Pike points to in Nelly’s observation of them: Heathcliff “a born and bred gentleman” and Isabella “slatternly” (367). Heathcliff “solicits Nelly as a potential witness” (367) both in his torment of Isabella and in case the issue should go to court, “If you are called upon in a court of law, you’ll remember her language” calling on Nelly to remember Isabella’s comments on death “I pray that he may forget his diabolical prudence, and kill me!” (151).
As Lawton examines in the 1790 case *Evans v. Evans*, “great caution” is taken with cases of cruelty, as the wife may have “condoned” the action “which would negate its force in law” (13). Judith Johnson in *Women and Violence in Dickens*, asserts that the law determined that self preservation must take priority over the duties of marriage; and that “if you thought your husband was going to kill you, and you could prove it, you might be permitted to leave the matrimonial home” (95). Johnson notes that following divorce law reforms in 1858 “the period between 1858 and 1863 saw a significant increase in [bids] for release from bad marriages [which] provoked considerable public concern” (95). This was, in effect because it was “viewed as a floodgate which would lead to licentiousness” (Johnson, 95). During this time (1861) “the criminal law had been significantly amended, specifically the offences against the persons Act [1828]” and so there was a greater demand for tougher punishments (96). However, as Johnson also points out “the law was cautious…stating [that]:

“What merely wounds the mental feelings is in few cases to be admitted where they are not accompanied by bodily injury, either actual or menaced. Mere austerity of temper, petulance of manners, rudeness of language, [or] a want of civil attention…do not amount to legal cruelty” (95).

It was under this safe assumption that the law sided with the male, that Heathcliff acted out his maltreatment of Isabella and challenged her “endur[ance]” (150).

Isabella tells Nelly that she plans to leave Heathcliff because “He's not a human being” (174), having “boasted of … murderous violence”. The only pleasure Isabella claims to have “experienced [was] in being able to exasperate him” which encouraged an awakening “of self-preservation” (174). Isabella’s suffering is best highlighted in her depiction of her
feelings, “I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death” (174), which is symbolic of killing old Ideals. This is particularly significant with her impending escape to London.

The Victorians began to question the limits of male authority, the husband’s power to chastise, the definition of matrimonial cruelty and the community’s role in regulating domestic violence (Lawton, 6). At this time a woman refusing to return to the marital home could be imprisoned and although divorce was a possibility, legal cruelty was defined as extreme violence with obvious physical injuries and there must be a danger to life or health. Bronte depicted this emphatically through Isabella’s suffering and highlighted her inability to prove Heathcliff’s cruelty to her family. Surridge concludes that it was “Brontë’s use of the wife/animal… analogy …anticipate[ed] the debates on the 1853 Act for the Better Prevention and Punishment of Aggravated Assaults on Women and Children, in which the … punishments for wife beating and animal abuse became a matter of national concern” (101). Surridge also notes that “the Matrimonial Causes Act 1878 [that] represented a key change in legislative emphasis, from punishing the male offender to securing financial independence for the abused wife”(101).

Surridge acknowledges in Bleak houses that “while [Bronte’s] novel does not endorse the model of mutually combative marriage that Dickens and others found so abhorrent, neither does it endorse the figure of the passive wife. Instead, the text suggests that women’s submission served to perpetuate abusive relationships”(95). Significantly, in an era when most Victorians preached a woman’s duty to stay within the marriage, but Bronte’s father advised a Mrs. Collins “to leave [her husband] forever, and go home, if she had a home to go to” (95 Lawson). Lawson notes that Mrs. Collins “had made an independent life for herself after her husband had abandoned her” and “had managed to support herself and her children”
(95). This was a ground-breaking development leading towards ‘the new woman’ of the new era.
Chapter 3

Bleak Houses: Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*

Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* articulates his views on morality amid the changing social landscape of Victorian Britain. The novel also deals with the domestic emotional abuse of Mr. Gradgrind’s daughter Louisa. This abuse was carried out through his attempts at the mechanisation of the human nature, which Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish Philosopher who was a great influence on Dickens’, described as the “mechanistic and inhuman system which deprived people of such human qualities as emotion, affection and imagination” (2014).

Dickens’ repeatedly rejected the idea that class was more important than human courtesy. In particular, he launched attacks on the destructive nature of society’s institutions and the people who governed them; which is evident in *Hard Times*. His later work becomes more insistent and unrestrained, as he campaigned against these societal structures.

Dickens published *Hard Times* in August 1854, during a period of intense public debates and the novel expresses his unease concerning such issues as these: class, social order, morality and gender issues.

In light of the fact that *Hard Times* was written in 1854, at a time when Dickens was under severe financial strain, the founding reason for his publication of *Hard Times* was in fact a direct attack on English society. In essence, Hard Times highlights the social and economic difficulties working class people were facing during the middle of the nineteenth century. It is set in a fictional Industrial town named *Coketown*. The novel deals with trade unions and Dickens’ own pessimism regarding ‘capitalist’ mill owners and their ‘undervalued’ workers.

Dickens also launched an attack on Utilitarianism which was a dominant school of thought during the latter half of the Victorian era. Founded by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill,
father of John Stuart Mill, it ultimately promoted general social welfare. Their ultimate goal for the individual and society promoted understanding and tolerance toward all religions. This infuriated Dickens, who believed that a totally rationalised society could lead to misery. There is evidence of this immediately in the first few pages of *Hard Times*, the children in school are discouraged from any creativity and are being taught pure ‘Facts’. “Dickens’ believed in the ethical and political potential of literature” (Diniejko, 2014, para. 2) and this idea is carried throughout the novel in Louisa’s rebellion against societal restraints.

Dickens’ opens the novel with the promise of a new ‘factual’ routine that would change life in the Victorian era. Dickens’ “treated his fiction as a springboard for debates about moral and social reform” (Diniejko, 2014, para. 2). This was aimed directly at the working-class in the factory and the effects of Industrialisation. The Introduction of the *Poor Law Amendment Act* of 1834 instilled fear into many working-class homes. The reforms reshaped the poverty relief system which led to the creation of work houses, putting increased pressure on the working class men already aware of the impossible Victorian ideals of ‘manliness’. The added angst that their families could end up in the work house (Steinbach, 133) may have led them to drinking, drugs and increased aggression. “Dickens showed compassion and empathy towards the vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of English society” (Diniejko, 2014, para. 2).

Dickens’ launches his initial attack through Mr. Gradgrind the founder of the school in Coketown. Mr. Gradgrind, a Utilitarian, believes in only fact and statistics which he insists are for the common good. His voice is “dictatorial”, opens the novel by stating “Now, what I want is facts” (7) at his school in Coketown. Dr. Andrzej Diniejko notes in his essay *Charles Dickens as Social Commentator and Critic* that he is a man of “facts and calculations”, which
Dickens associates with “the Utilitarian denial of [the] human imagination” (VictorianWeb, 2014, para. 6). The introduction of these ‘new’ mechanised routines restricts the characters behaviours, and emotional development by controlling their ideological behaviour.

Gradgrind appears to the narrator as “a galvanizing apparatus… charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away” (8). The teacher Mr. Choakumchild is villainous but is representative of Dickens’ views on the assessment in 1861 by the “Newcastle Commission of the possibility of extending …elementary education to all classes” (Litvack, 2014, para. 8) including the working class. The Children in the school have numbers instead of being addressed by name which Gradgrind believes is “to be in all things regulated and governed” and they are … to be a people of fact” (10). He attacks one of the pupils, a young working-class girl Sissy Jupe because she cannot define a horse: “Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!” (9). Sissy is told to suppress her fanciful notions of flowers and horses in favour of fact “You are never to fancy… Fact, fact, fact!” (10).

Louisa Gradgrind’s eldest child has also been taught to suppress her feelings like all the other children at the school. Her father scolds her for bringing her brother Thomas to the Circus. Gradgrind is furious and Louisa retorts, “I was tired, father. I have been tired a long time. …of everything” (14). This underpins Dickens attacks on the suppression of human imagination and the emotional violence incurred by the victim. Louisa finds it difficult to express herself clearly, and claims her life is a “conscious death” (128) through education and her marriage to Bounderby. Emotionally stunted, Louisa has made an unhappy marriage to escape her Father’s control, and like many Victorian women suffered the oppression of both
her Fathers and husband’s control. It is only after Louisa’s breakdown that Gradgrind realises that art and literature are not “destructive nonsense” (33).

In *Bleak Houses* Surridge examines the earlier works of Charles Dickens in the context of the intense debates on wife assault and manliness in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Illustrating how fin-de-siècle fiction,

“which refers to the end of a century, [yet] at the end of the 19th century in Britain, the term did not just refer to a set of dates, but rather a whole set of artistic, moral, and social concerns. To describe something as a fin de siècle phenomenon invokes a sense of the old order ending and new, radical departures”.

This brought male sexual violence and the viability of marriage itself under public scrutiny. *Bleak Houses* thus demonstrates how Victorian fiction was concerned about the wife-assault debates of the nineteenth century, debates which both constructed and invaded the privacy of the middle-class home. The fin de siècle movement highlighted concerns both political and social, such as the problem of wife assault and discrimination within the law courts. However intense debates over the viability of the movements ‘decadent and naturalist influence’ within the arts, gave way to grave concerns about the ‘moral responsibility of art’ (Oxford).

It was part of this “ideological upheaval” which “consisted of a widespread questioning of marriage and concern[s] that—despite considerable legal reforms—the issue of marital abuse had not been resolved” (187, Surridge)
Mrs. Gradgrind represents repressed femininity and Louisa the product of her cold nature, which was strengthened by Mr. Gradgrind’s emphasis on learning ‘fact’. It was through Louisa’s rebellion against his morals that Dickens emphasised the restorative powers of the female nature, in combating the effects of Mechanisation on the human spirit.

Louisa does not conform to Victorian ideals and has realised that her life, spoiled by “frost and blight” (129) is insufferable and she desires a more meaningful existence. In a similar way to Isabella’s ‘awakening’ in *Wuthering Heights*, Louisa has realised she must take action for her own ‘self-preservation’. She beseeches her Father to explain himself, “What have you done, O father … with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!” (128). Louisa implores her Father to see that his philosophies and his ‘mechanised’ methods of child rearing are culpable for Louisa’s detachment from others, “I [was] so young. In this condition, father…I show you…the deadened state of my mind” (128).

Grandgrind finally sees the affects of his neglect in “the triumph of his system, [Louisa] lying, [in] an insensible heap, at his feet” (130-1).

In Judith Johnsons essay *Women and Violence in Dickens’ Great Expectations*, she discusses “Miss Havisham [who] threatens the domestic ideal” (106) of women, as does Mrs. Gradgrind. Miss Havishham asserts that “her education of Estella perpetuates [this] threat” which is echoed in the Gradgrinds education of Louisa which “must therefore be brought under control” (106). Mr. Gradgrind asserted his power over his ‘passive’ wife, as Johnson also highlights that “married women were … placed in the same class legally as lunatics and idiots who were … ‘dead to the law’” (94). Mrs. Gradgrind did not obtain the ‘authority’ to nurture Louisa’s imagination or emotions, as like Heathcliff with Isabella, Gradgrind would surely have branded her a ‘lunatic’ or ‘slatternly’.
Studies of women’s “social, legal and financial conditions” as Johnson argues “should not simplistically posit women as merely victimised and helpless, but should also allow the reader to challenge and question the representations of women [in particular here with] Dickens” (96). Within *Hard Times*, and *Great Expectations*, “the main female characters are portrayed in opposition to an ever present stereotyped domestic ideal” (96). Similar to *Hard Times*, Dickens previous novel *Great Expectations* highlights the marginalisation of women through his character Biddy, placed within the domestic ideal. It also contains acts of physical violence toward women where as in *Hard Times* Dickens’ portrays a form of the ‘unrecognised’ ‘mental abuse’ within a domestic setting.

Characterisations of women within the novel are portrayed in an uncontrolled manner, such as Mrs. Joe who possesses a violence more male than female. Both the portrayal of women and the concept of punishment are extraordinary for the amount of violence physically and mentally that they imply: Miss Havisham’s ruthlessness and Estella’s coldness which she taught her to possess. What destroys her is the realisation that Estella’s loveless nature will crush not only Pip, the real “victim of domestic violence” (Johnson, 99) and the girl’s other suitors but herself as well. *Estella’s coldness breaks Miss Havisham’s heart:*

“So proud, so proud,” moaned Miss Havisham, pushing away her grey hair with both her hands.”Who taught me to be proud?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“But to be proud and hard to me!” Miss Havisham quite “shrieked”, as she stretched out her arms. “Estella, Estella, Estella, to be proud and hard to me!” (Ch. XXXVII.)
Neither Miss. Havisham nor Estella embodies the Victorian ideals of ‘femineity,’ and they challenge these ideals continuously in comparison to Mrs. Joe, who is presented entirely as a desperate housewife, with middle-class morals.

Therefore, “as Dickens’s texts participate in the newfound visibility of marital violence, they reveal a deep ambivalence concerning public intrusion into domestic privacy” (Surridge, 18)
Chapter 4

The Emergence of ‘The New Woman’

Within this section it is necessary to examine the growth in the number of educated, liberated women questioning the paternalistic foundations of society and the ‘bliss’ of traditional Victorian Marriage. This chapter will use critical analysis of Sarah Grands Ideala (1888) through Lisa Surridge’s Bleak houses (which compares fictional representations with lived experiences of the New Woman). Surridge gives an insightful understanding of the "woman question" in the late Victorian period. Dr. Andrzej Diniejko explains in his article The New Woman Fiction on the Victorian Web that the New Woman “was a significant cultural icon of the fin de siècle, [who] departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman”. Part of the “The Victorian fin de siècle” as Surridge explains “identified with widespread gender crisis, the interrogation of masculine and feminine roles …and [of course] the rise of the New Woman” (187).

“The term “New Woman” was coined” by Sarah Grand in 1894, after the publication of her first novel Ideala (2014, para.7). Sarah Grand, born Frances Bellenden Clarke (1854 – 1943), changed her name after leaving her husband, symbolizing her break with the old ideals of the woman and her journey to become a ‘new woman’ with fresh ideals. She was a feminist writer campaigning in Great Britain for women’s rights. Her work such as Ideala and her second novel Heavenly Twins represent a strong anti-marriage polemical as they dealt with the subject of marriage failure; and so became known as part of ‘the New Woman’ Fiction. Grand shows in her novels how oppressed female characters such as Ideala could become liberated. Ideala struggles with the choice of staying in an unhappy marriage, tied to a dominant adulterous man, or leaving to be with her lover Lorrimer. Further still Ideala struggles with
the choice to be a single woman free from the restraints of male dependence and breaking the confines of the Victorian ideals completely.

Sarah Grand’s *Ideala* (1888) was written after Grand had entered a bad marriage to escape an unhappy childhood home and a controlling father. The novel is to an extent based on her own struggle to find a sense of freedom within the confines of the ‘ideals’ of the time. Ideala, the central character, faced with the decision whether to leave her husband for another man or embrace a feminist philosophy that requires her to sacrifice personal relationships, thus ‘setting an example’, for the future good of other women. The Novel details Ideala's journey to understanding herself and her place in nineteenth-century society. In *Ideala*, Grand lays out the foundations for ‘the New Woman’ of the 1890s by showing how one woman navigates the legal and economic restrictions women in unhappy marriages faced in the nineteenth century. In doing this she works through how to remedy her own situation. It was through a ideology such as Grand’s, that led to the redefinition of gender roles, women’s rights and led to the decline of masculine supremacy towards the end of the nineteenth century.

The novel narrated by Ideala’s close friend Lord Dawne, appears strange at first as it casts the novel from the male perspective and his views on Ideala's choices. Lord Dawne struggles to understand why Ideala would want to leave the security and respectability of her marriage or why she would put into question her role in society (95). Grand cleverly places the reader in the position of the male perspective of the day, giving them an opportunity to engage with the story and the widespread crisis in gender roles, from both sides of the gender divide.

Ideala believes that the contract of marriage is one sided, in that it favours the male side, putting the male in a position of power and isolating the woman in the home with little or no authority. She attacks the archaic ‘oath of obedience’ required of Victorian women. She concludes that ‘the ages’ deserve no respect for upholding such ‘nonsense’ as to make
“A woman…swear to love a man who will probably prove unlovable, to honour a man who is as likely as not to be undeserving of honour, and to obey a man who may be incapable of judging what is best either for himself or her.” (59)

She quite rightly adds what many women in the same position of unhappy unions were thinking at the time, that “If men were all they ought to be, wouldn't we obey them gladly?” (59). The important statement here is regarding freedom of choice, on the subject of taking the oath of obedience, “To be able to do so is all we ask” (whether to take it or not) (59). The problem facing many women was that their rights were taken from them on entering into the Contract of Marriage, their “legal existence… [was] suspended during the marriage” (136, Steinbach). Married women were defined by the “doctrine of Coverture” (136) as feme covert, whose existence became merged with her husband’s and claimed all rights on her behalf. Women were therefore passed from their father’s house and his rules, to their husband’s house and rules. Victorian marriage by today’s standards sounds more like a cold business proposition than anything else, where women were expected to fall into the social mould created for them by men. As Lawson points out, one must understand it within the context of a Victorian, bound by the British Ideal of the Middle classes struggling to maintain some form of control over the brutish behaviours in the early half of the 1800’s (6-8)

Ultimately, Ideala argues for the reform of Marriage laws - which Lawson claims are “responsible for victimi[s]ing women” (16). This underpins the increasing fervor of this topic in the growing campaign for Marriage law reform towards the end of the nineteenth century. Ideala declares to Lorrimer that “The marriage oath is farcical” believing the oath to be an “absurd” notion as the expectation of marriage usually disappoints (59). In addition to this, Ideala attacks the Victorian notions of gender and sexual double standards that women
suffered. An example of this can be seen in Lorrimers’ response to Idealas’ outburst regarding marriage. He does not want to enter into a discussion about it, and instead labels her question “difficult” and quickly changes the subject, “do you like flowers?”; “Yes” Idealas replies “and all other sensual pleasures” which signifies the sexual repression of women in Victorian Britain (59). This conversation between Lorrimer and Idealas represents “the misery of [many Victorian] bourgeois women” (Lawson, 16). Grand portrays these themes of moral double standards within Idealas; an example of this rests with Idealas’s friend Lord Dawne, who advises Idealas of her moral responsibility to society rather than herself: "Idealas, you are going to fail in a duty; … in the most important duty of your life—your duty to society". However, she rejects this, "I owe nothing to society" (95). Lord Dawne implores her to see ‘sense’ “Am I to understand… you are going to give up your position in society”? (95). Idealas is outraged, “if I give up my position in society for his sake … I am content. And it is my own doing, too” (85). Idealas is eager to be free of the restraints of a loveless marriage but understands that “there cannot be one law for [her] and another for all the other women in the world” (85). She is determined to try, and states that “if I break through a social convention I am prepared to abide by the consequences” (85). Although, it is not clear whether Lord Dawne is worried about her tarnished name: "You will be spoken of contemptuously”, or her influence on other womwn: “A woman in your position sets an example” (96). His outlook is a clear portrayal of the Victorian moral outlook on Marriage, separation and the feminist outlook on freedom through Idealas’s statement, “I am free, am I not” (95).

Throughout the course of the novel, Idealas learns to find solace beyond the drudgery of her marriage through helping others in need, for example Polly, a dying prostitute whom she is fetched to help. Polly wished to inform Idealas before she died of her husband’s indiscretion, “the old story aggravated by every incident that could make it more repulsive—and [Idealas’s]
husband was the hero of it” (67). Lord Dawne concludes that “Ideala's attitude always...gathers the useless units of society about her, and makes them worthy women” (116); writing and travelling rather than conforming to common expectation.

There are themes of imperfection and male aggression evident throughout the novel, and each of the short thirty chapters’ end rather abruptly, portraying the imperfections of marriage and the expectations forced on women of the time. The continual repetition of words such as ‘shriek’ and ‘groan’ in the novel with reference to female characters, highlights the male ideology that women were ‘silly, hysterical’ creatures not to be taken seriously (50).

Lorrimer, Ideala’s lover, has a deep anxiety and mistrust of women, stating that they have a “corrupt tendency”, particularly female writers who he decides “mak[e] the worst ideas attractive” (10). Lorrimer’s mistrust extends to his refusal to admit female patients into his hospital, trivialising their illnesses, based on the assumption that “nature” would have equipped them to deal with their ills. He concluded that “sentimentality, hysteria and silliness” were the root causes, “of all their mental troubles, which did not, therefore, merit serious attention”(50).

Surridge’s chapter Marital Violence and the New Woman analyzes marital violence and ‘the New Woman’ fiction via The Wings of Azrael (Mona Caird), inspired by previous novels in ‘the New Woman’ genre including Ideala. Surridge concludes that The Wings of Azrael’s central female character Viola, represents the “demise of the Victorian Woman” (190) through her death. In the Westminster Review, Caird argues that “Modern Marriage” which “began during the reformation” – a period of particular social and political unrest in Britain - “is linked to commerce, competition, and the rise of the Bourgeoisie” (191). She links Marriage – “sexual property of one man” - as parallel to prostitution - “sexual property of many” - where both classes exist to serve the sexual needs of men (Surridge, 191).
In Victorian Britain, writing was predominantly a man’s profession, with the result that many female writers used pen names such as Emily Bronte’s, Curer Bell. Lyn Pykett explains that “what women could say in fiction, and how their voices [would probably] be heard, [was] constrained by both the prevailing discourses on wom[e]n, and a gendered discourse on fiction” (22). Sarah Grand having received numerous rejections from publishers decided to publish Ideala “anonymously” (DS, 2014, para. 4).

Gilbert and Gubar note in The Queen’s Looking Glass that “it is no wonder that women historically hesitated to attempt pen” (15) as “the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy” but first “she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass… [the] mythic masks…males…invented – to possess her more thoroughly” (17).

Virgina woolfe declared that “before we women can write…we must “kill” the “angel in the house” (17). It is therefore through Viola’s death, that Caird concludes the journey that Grand began in attacking and killing ‘the angel in the house’.
Conclusion

This essay has examined the representations of marital violence and domestic abuse in the three novels presented: *Wuthering Heights*, *Hard Times* and *Ideala*. These novels explore the social, moral and legal views of the authors and their influence on changing attitudes of the time. The nineteenth century, possibly more than any other age saw the greatest change in terms of moral and social ideals. Victorians became more secular and literature seemed strained in trying to compensate for the loss of religious and moral values. The literature of the Victorian’s therefore articulates these anxieties surrounding alienation and insignificance, seeking to provide answers to questions that arose around gender equality. Victorian culture emphasised ‘the home’ as a woman's ‘haven’ and place of security; yet instances of domestic violence soared throughout this era. The novels highlight oppressive marriages, demanding that women ‘obey’ their husbands and suffer at their hands, relinquishing all rights over her body, children, wages and inheritance. The comparison between the relationships of a ‘wife and husband’ versus a ‘slave and his master’ is a significant assessment in the portrayal of domestic violence throughout Victorian literature.

*Wuthering Heights*’ representations of cruelty and violence shocked the Victorian readers. It highlighted a topic which was kept concealed amongst middle class society and in so doing created a space for dialogue regarding the topic among women of the time. Her “novel also forms part of an emergent feminist critique of marriage and marital violence that arose in the late 1840’s” (Surridge, 83). Bronte’s handling of class through the Earnshaw’s and the Linton’s ultimately contributes to the toppling of the class structure within the novel, by focusing on the emotional qualities of the characters rather than monetary possession. Many women throughout the Victorian period were trapped by law, in badly matched, loveless marriages with no escape while it was socially acceptable for men to be promiscuous.
and violent. Women paid the price for male dominance and oppression in the home and in society. Victorian literature and art is full of examples of women paying for straying from moral expectations, such as in the characters of Catherine and Isabella in *Wuthering Heights*; Louisa in *Hard Times*, Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*; Viola in *The Wings of Azrael* and *Ideala*.

Dickens’ work is placed in a period of intense debate on wife assault and manliness in the late 1840s and early 1850s. *Hard Times* argues for intense reconsideration on the mechanisation of the human spirit and moral teachings. It is thus that Louisa’s breakdown symbolises disillusionment at the collapse in the morality of Victorian society.

The new woman movement gave many women such as Grand, the courage to work and educate themselves; bringing into question the idea of marriage reform and the harsh inequalities between men and women. Grand led the way for other women to speak out about the inequalities they suffered and the harsh ideals forced on middle class women to conform to certain standards. With the introduction of new laws from the 1870’s (1870-1886), gave women the empowerment they required to move beyond the realm of domestic violence to pursue education, careers and manage their own affairs thus enabling women to become more liberated.

*Ideala* paved the way for women in oppressive marriages to look toward a more autonomous lifestyle. ‘The New woman’ fiction contributed to enormous changes in women’s lives away from public and familial scrutiny. ‘The New Woman’ became a figure no longer a victim of the oppressive Victorian double moral standards between men and women, instead paving the way for the abolition of the conventional marriage, and redefining relationships between men and women.
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