Title of Paper: The Victorians and Their Fallen Women: Representations of Female Transgression in Nineteenth Century Genre Literature
Author: Jane M. Kubiesa
Affiliation: University of Worcester
Section: Articles
Date of Publication: June, 2014
Issue: Volume 2, Number 2

Abstract:
During the Victorian era there developed the particular character of the fallen woman who existed within her own sphere of genre literature. This literature and its frameworks changed over time to adhere to the overriding socio-cultural mores exhibited at different points of the nineteenth century. This paper aims to investigate the development of the figure of the transgressive female initially as represented in 1850’s novels Ruth (1853) and Adam Bede (1859), followed by novels of the 1890s in the form of Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891) and Esther Waters (1894). These novels will be read with discussion of Victorian socio-cultural conventions and fallen woman genre theory.

Keywords: Fallen woman, genre literature, transgression, period morality, socio-cultural conventions, genre theory

Author Bio: Jane M. Kubiesa is currently a PhD researcher at the University of Worcester, England. Her work is based around representations of the physical form and its contemporary environment, with a Masters thesis on the changing body in Victorian literature and current PhD research on the modern vampire body in teen fiction. She has most recently guest edited on an academic journal focusing on physical representations in gothic and fantasy literature and is Associate Editor on a new interdisciplinary journal.

Author email: kubjl_11@uni.worc.ac.uk
The popularity of the tale of the fallen woman reached its pinnacle during Queen Victoria's reign, when readers became obsessed with its handling of the associated, deep-seated social anxieties in its paradigm of moralizing through punishment. These stories riveted the growing middle-classes and underpinned their fears of women’s unrepented sexuality, increasingly unstable gender roles, mounting class conflict and the overriding anxiety on all issues outside of their realm of normality.

This kind of Victorian novel acts largely as a didactic tool to warn women of the dangers of marital indiscretion and ultimately transgression. The way such a woman is treated reflects the sympathies of a particular author, but also the social rules governing acceptable behavior at the time. This literature had a great effect on readers, both in terms of the stigma attached to such immorality and in terms of an examination of the shifting social and authorial viewpoints in literature of each part of the period. These changing viewpoints and the corresponding treatment of the fallen woman in literature at different times during the nineteenth century will be the topic of this paper. It will discuss representations of the female in question from 1850’s texts *Ruth* and *Adam Bede*, followed by 1890’s texts *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Esther Waters*, in conjunction with socio-cultural readings of the texts and fallen woman genre theory.

An exploration of the 1850’s texts of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) and George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), uncovers a literary dialogue between these contemporary works on the subject of the compromised woman, which in turn reflects contemporary views on propriety. *Ruth* is cited as one of Eliot's inspirations for *Adam Bede*. She uses it to construct her narrative of protagonist Hetty, but in such a pragmatic manner that the groundbreaking sympathies unleashed to protect the heroine in *Ruth* are lost.

In both texts the female protagonists are shunned once they are “unmasked” (Pyckett 63), a standard device of the genre. Another paradigm staple is to rely on the framework of repentance through suffering, but surprisingly the heroines receive very different treatment from each author in this area. Ruth is conjured as the innocent who is unwittingly led astray, whereas Eliot creates Hetty as a vain person who courts the affections of men as if she were an “eloquently clad coquette” (Eliot 303), endowed “with no spiritual or physical gifts that draw the reader's sympathy.” (Auerbach 174)

Both women fall victim to the concept that their lives are predestined to failure once they sin. This is part of the formulaic construction of the fallen woman novel and reveals a great deal about the influences upon the narrative and the hidden social anxieties attached to it. In Ruth’s case she has to endure a series of humiliations to prove her worthiness and repentance to society and the reader. The Victorian view that it was “both natural and inevitable that for a woman,
falling genuinely in love evoked feelings of cheerful self-sacrifice” (Rowbotham 43) also comes into play. According to Ruth, “the strange yearning kind of love for the father of her child” described as “pure and natural” (Gaskell 191) was inevitable. However, not even her continual state of grief and religious fervor can compensate for her past, although she does reach martyrdom status by the time of her death. Apparently “Mrs Gaskell has great faith in the fact that innate virtue will have its ultimate victory and reward, in this world or the next.” (Watt 38)

Similarly Hetty’s predestination is sealed once her innocence is lost. Noting that “womanhood is primarily significant in Eliot’s novels because it is the most immediate and overwhelming of deterministic factors” (King 74) cements this assertion. Hetty’s portrayal as a socially immoral person whose mind has “no strong sympathies at work, where there is no supreme sense of right” (Eliot 322) is given at every turn of her character’s development. Eliot’s construction of her begins with minor vices such as a youth’s conceit to beauty and her unwomanly aversion to children, dispelling the notion of “the automatic match between the capacity to mother and the beauty men find irresistible” (Matus 130), and rapidly descends in a spiral of untruths, culminating in infanticide and death as a prisoner and social outcast. At no point is she given any opportunity to repent and lead a normal life because her character construction is not equipped for such a prospect. Instead Hetty’s principal use is as a cautionary tale to sinning women and a mechanism by which to follow the male protagonist’s moral development.

Given Gaskell’s sympathy to the lot of the fallen woman, expressed through the eyes of Miss Benson who is startled into “pity for the poor lovely creature” (Gaskell 114), and that the novel “expresses indignation at the shame and social stigma sexual transgression attract” (Matus 115), it is surprising that Gaskell too finally conforms to societal demands and refuses to end Ruth’s cycle of mourning and self-recrimination. Any happiness due to her is confounded by her fallen status, from the attentions of Mr Farquar to the reappearance of Mr Bellingham/Donne. Tellingly it is only with death, until which point “Gaskell practices what liberal reformers preached” (Auerbach 169) in her sympathies, that Ruth’s debt is paid and the members of her society can find resolution once “it is over”. (Gaskell 449) Again this closure with the sinning individual’s demise is a common component in the arsenal of the fallen woman framework.

The predestination to failure of these relationships is not entirely due to their fornicatory nature, class plays a huge part too. As a working class woman desirous to “be a grand lady, and ride in her coach, and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk” (Eliot 147) Hetty’s relationship is doomed by regulations governing rank. Correspondingly Ruth’s liaison, as middle class woman, with the upper class Bellingham is also damned. Victorians of all stations feared and deplored relationships crossing class boundaries. The middle classes detested the
The Victorian

concept of aping their "betters", while the aristocrats were grappling to preserve their status, inheritance and wealth with suitable marriages.

The representation of the male lovers forms an important foundation to the reading of each text. The "selfish, worldly" (Gaskell 163) Bellingham is portrayed as the opportunist wheedling his way into Ruth’s life by covert means and in a similar way to Eliot’s Hetty, who takes on that male gender stereotype in Adam Bede, has no redeeming qualities. His one kind act of saving a drowning boy is sullied by its use as a tool to entrap Ruth. And when Gaskell offers him the opportunity to end his plans to disgrace Ruth with elopement to Wales, he refuses. This also acts as a means to rid Ruth of compliance with the plans and Gaskell “lovingly exonerates her pure heroine from the appearance of sin.” (Auerbach 168)

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Arthur Donnithorne has some misgivings as to his conduct with Hetty. Unsurprisingly she is the one seen to chase the lord of the manor with her brazen beauty. He is shown to be of poor judgment, saying “I did struggle. I never meant to injure her” (Eliot 445) as explanation of his conduct. He is partly vindicated for falling victim to a social climbing female, by virtue of the fact that he is male and acts with the appropriate response expected from his sex. On the other hand, his oscillations of decision and lack of reasoning force him into the realm of the stereotypical behavior of the female and thus he must be repatriated to his sex after a period of castigation to retain the rightful equilibrium of the sexes.

This vindication is again seen to a degree in Ruth. Mrs Bellingham and the villagers of Wales believe Bellingham has been led astray by a "very depraved" (Gaskell 118) and "degraded girl" (Gaskell 90), taking on the masculine identity as pursuer, and that she is the one solely responsible for the situation. This is a common misconception in Victorian society. The nature of man is viewed as sexual and worldly. Women, on the other hand, were thought to be innocent and incapable of caring for themselves without a guardian or husband. This was epitomized in the gender idealization of the sexless angel of the house. This dichotomous view alters radically once an indiscretion occurs when women are transformed from being “non-sexual” to “anti-sexual, criminals, mad women or prostitutes” (Pykett 16) and then they are demonized as contaminating women of good standing. Gaskell parts company from this view by championing Ruth’s innate goodness and creating her saintly platform for self-sacrifice, while simultaneously revealing the other characters' bigotry in tandem with exposing their own moral weaknesses.

With this in mind, it is significant to consider the guardian’s role in each novel. A popular belief among Victorians was that it was imperative for both parents to be present during the upbringing of a child to produce balanced and stable offspring. In turn this introduced the idea of heredity and the importance of
legitimacy. This results in a noteworthy inclusion in the recipe for the fallen woman novel— that of an imbalance in the familial arena. As orphans, both Ruth and Hetty require guidance from people outside their parental sphere. In Ruth’s case “early in the novel she is surrounded by incomplete characters” (Watt 23) from her class-divided parents to her unnamed guardian and Mrs Mason. Mrs Mason provides no support to the recently bereaved Ruth, who is “too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting the subject of a woman’s life”. (Gaskell 44) To George Watt’s mind “Gaskell’s point is obvious. Girls fall, not because of an innate perversity, but because they are just not looked after.” (34) A notion continued with Bellingham, as the product of a one parent upbringing. Hetty is equally let down by her family. Mrs Poyser as the mother of four children and the keeper of a large house has no time to guide her, other than with remonstrations and unfavorable comparisons with the moral Dinah.

This is something Eliot carries throughout the novel, as Adam points out in opposition to Hetty’s “love of finery [that] was just the thing that would most provoke his mother” is “Dinah Morris [who] looks very nice, for all she wears such a plain cap and gown”. (Eliot 213) Dinah is the blonde, religious Madonna opposite the dark, sinning Hetty as the Magdalene, whose “ambitious sexuality” Eliot condemns with “unyielding austerity”. (Auerbach 168) The situation is reversed in the comparison between the dark-haired, reliable Adam and the weak-willed, fair-haired Arthur. Again the concept of binary opposition adds a remarkable dimension to the building blocks of this genre.

One well-liked Victorian literary convention and furtherance of the framework of fallen woman fiction is the reaction of the elements and the invocation of nature to represent characteristics and mood. Typical of “woman’s indissoluble link with nature” (Pykett 14) Ruth is always portrayed as a child of nature and is surrounded by fine weather and love for the pastoral. The image of her innocence is impressed upon the reader in her “white dress against the trees which grow around her; her face flushed with a brilliancy of colour which resembled that of a rose in June”. (Gaskell 74) In contrast, Bellingham is surrounded by bad weather and “great shadow[s]” and “the eternal moan of waves” (Gaskell 296) and storms announce his arrival. Fitting within this convention, the elopement of the pair occurs amidst the vast wilderness of Wales. Their child is also described as a combination of natural elements as “bright animal life”. (201)

The sense of wilderness as a location for unnatural acts is also in place in Adam Bede with Hetty and Arthur’s meetings in the woods. Throughout the novel Hetty is referred to with animal descriptions such as “a kitten setting up its back, or a little bird with its feathers rustled” (Eliot 250) as an indication of her preparation to graduate from tamer forms of nature to moral destruction. This
theme is continued when Adam and Arthur fight “with the instinctive fierceness of panthers in the deepening twilight darkened by the trees.” (Eliot 285)

In both texts the authors offer interventions of prolepsis to guide the story, to offer prescience about future occurrences and to show their moral positioning. This played an important role at the time because the literary trend tended towards tales of instruction to guide individuals along the strict codes of societal morality.

Once Ruth’s past is widely known in Eccleston, Mr Bradshaw leads her expulsion from polite society. Conveniently his illegal bribery in the election foreshadows his disapproval of Ruth’s conduct and is followed by his son’s revelation as a thief. This solidifies the author’s sympathies in the direction of the fallen woman. By the end of the novel, the poor uphold Ruth’s virtue as a result of her martyrdom and she is accepted into the lower strata of society. This ascension could have continued to allow her re-admittance into polite society, but she dies before this point. This untimely death may have been influenced by a real societal creed where a fallen woman would never be received in good company. Such a level of acceptance seems to fall short of even Gaskell’s liberal attitudes. Once Hetty’s status as a fallen woman is revealed, and the “unmasking” segment of the literary formula is complete, she is abandoned by her family when they are left “mourning for a misfortune felt to be even worse than death.” (Eliot 391)

The notion of the disgraced woman as a symbol of moral corruption acts as a cautionary tale to Victorian women seeking power or life outside domesticity and literature of the period deals with the subject in depth. However, one grey area is the retelling of the sexual act, which was too explicit for readers’ sensibilities. As Duncan Crow asserts “if what went on in the dark bedroom was never mentioned...sex could be dematerialised by ignoring it.” (25) In Ruth the reader must assume that sexual relations occur. At the time the prospect of an unmarried couple staying at an inn would have been enough to elicit disgust, even alongside Ruth’s insistence that they are friends. Today’s audience could very well view that covert chapter as being exactly as Ruth suggests, since she is “too sublimely innocent to understand the fact of her own fall” (Auerbach 169), had it not been for her pregnancy.

Adam Bede deals with the subject in an equally implicit manner, bringing “hell-fire...on all lewd thoughts and fumplings.” (Crow 25) The revelation that sex takes place between Hetty and Arthur occurs when he finds her scarf in the Hermitage and hides it from Adam. This well known symbol of sexual indiscretion\(^1\) is thought to be enough of an indication on the subject. However,

---
\(^1\) Made famous by Shakespeare’s Othello. However, this is slightly distorted as the indiscretion never takes place in Othello.
considering Hetty’s many appearances changing her prized outfits, this confuses the matter and could easily account for the discarded clothing.

Adam is the only one who shows a belief in Hetty’s goodness and it is through him we glimpse the unerring faith love can bring. Eliot allows Hetty this much elevation from the depths of negativity, but even this is merely to indicate Adam’s moral development rather than any goodness on her part, and it is not enough to save her.

The “fallen woman” novel of the 1890s continues the literary tradition as set out during the 1850s. However, it follows on from the “sensation novel” of the 1860s, which contains all the prescribed genre tools of fallen woman fiction but in an exaggerated form to shock readers. This genre greatly contributes to the less rigid view of the fallen woman in the 1890s with a return to the less embroidered form of fiction. Comparing novels from this age, Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891) and George Moore’s *Esther Waters* (1894), shows further development of the fate of the fallen woman and reveals a social and literary dialogue reflective of values at the time. Here the subject of these gender representations as drawn from male perspectives comes into play because “women’s images...were distorted by being refracted through the male point of view” (208) and according to Shanta Dhutta, this is something that Hardy was particularly aware of. Coupled with the slightly more lenient views of the compromised female, both Esther and Tess are allowed a level of forgiveness and reintegration in society that would not have been previously possible.

In authorial sympathy reminiscent of *Ruth*, Hardy and Moore have a great deal of understanding for their working class characters. While Hardy’s identification with Tess is well known, so are the hardships she must endure. Hardy attempts to protect her, but is in no doubt that her fate is inevitable. As compensation he gives her the opportunity of reconciling with her estranged husband and of having the honeymoon she was denied due to her loss of innocence. Equally this brings an end to the mental anguish she falls victim to once her true love deserts her. Thus she goes to the scaffold having regained her inner tranquility, in a process of simultaneous physical degradation and spiritual regeneration. (King 112) Hardy’s influence is not great enough to allow for her long term happiness as even he is unable to fully defy the demands of society and the law to save his heroine from desertion, adultery and murder; although he does remain “unflinchingly loyal” (Dhutta 208) to her throughout.

Moore also attempts to aid Esther by offering her a lifeline with a string of jobs which appear from nowhere thanks to his authorial assistance. His reintroduction of William also gives her the unique opportunity to rectify her fallen woman status, to a degree, by marrying her son’s father and legitimizing the relationship in the eyes of the novel’s other characters and the reader. This exceptional occurrence is possible because her lover is of the same rank so the
The Victorian

coupling would not cause class friction and because the pairing did not arise from malignant intent to instigate a fall. However, it is a matter of judgment as to whether Esther’s end is “the sadness of fate” (Moore 390), punitive, or merely the lot of the working class woman. She ends her days at the location of her fall; this can either be perceived as her retirement from hardships, or as her confinement for sin.

Another form of assistance which characterizes this kind of literature is the installation of helper characters as suggested by George Watt. Here, like Ruth’s relationship with the Bensons, Esther is given both Mrs Barfield and Miss Rice to support her. Tess is denied this assistance as she is too proud to contact her husband’s family. As compensation she is given the partial aid of former dairy companions, but is still very much alone in a way reminiscent of Hetty, whose helpers arrive for her confession rather than her salvation.

Almost predictably, both female characters come from families where they are the eldest siblings and find themselves either taking on the parental role or forced out of a family too financially strained to nurture them. In both cases this stereotypical instability of upbringing means they are ill equipped to deal with the advances of men and fall into the category of the incomplete female destined to transgress.

The notion of Tess’ fall is heavily intertwined with the D’Urberville curse and her grisly end is foretold with the loss of her familial status generations before, as Hardy comments: “Doubtless some of Tess D’Urberville’s mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls.” (91) Fate plays a large role and the narrator’s pity for Tess is almost suggested as a result of the fate of the pure, as inevitability rather than a disgrace. Esther’s fall is viewed largely as the natural progression of courtship, but her austerity and her view that “she could only win [William’s] respect by refusing forgiveness for a long time” (Moore 75) following the act deprives her of the rightful place of wife. Even William concludes that it was “that temper of yours that did it.” (Moore 200)

In true fallen woman fashion, Tess must endure a series of trials, not least the death of her child, desertion and hard farm labor. In development of the earlier mentality of forgiveness through suffering, fallen woman fiction of the 1890s deals with the notion of trials which transform the ordinary woman into mythic proportions. As part of this, each time Tess attempts a rise from her lowly position of repentance, she is forced back down to serve as a farm hand and her rightful social position is re-asserted. Similarly Esther’s place as maid is lost several times following her discovery as a ‘loose woman’. It is such humiliations and obstacles that she must overcome to ensure the survival of her child, including facing the wrath of an unsympathetic class of bourgeoisie employers “that can’t have loose women about”. (Moore 171) It is this determination for the
The Victorian

well-being of her child, even after she is presented with the opportunity to remove the burden, which sets Esther apart from similar working class women and it is this martyrdom which transforms her character to heroine status of a “mother’s fight for the life of her child against all the forces that civilisation array against the lowly and the illegitimate.” (172)

Although differing in nature, Tess’ fall being at the hands of the landowner and Esther’s with her sweetheart, both women experience a state of submission that leads to their loss of innocence. Esther Waters’ sexual scene reflects the “climate of a greater sense of sexual frankness” (Allen 3) and is rendered more explicitly than in the other novels viewed. Many critics believe this is in part due to the probing male viewpoint used. Another important factor is the shifting moral standpoint which renders matters such as bigamy, adultery and divorce more socially explosive than the increasingly common unmarried female with child. Pointedly it is the scenes from the workhouse and the adultery that are excluded as taboo in this novel, as although both are alluded to they occur between chapters. As “the sanctity of the Victorian marriage demanded silencing of all content which threatened the innocence of the female sex and threatened the tenets of its being” (Watt 181), the adultery in particular is avoided. Similarly, it is Tess’ trial and hanging which take place outside of narrative observation, to spare her the indignity of public revelation and to protect her from the prying reader, just as her rape is omitted. This is deemed to be related to Hardy’s “inability to deal frankly with sex [and] a prudish refusal to confront sexual activity or desire” (Allen 3), rather than to his capitulation to morality.

The concept of transference of sin to the child is greatly felt in Tess, as Sorrow falls victim to his unavoidable status as an “offence against society” (Hardy 116) and the product of a socially untenable encounter between incompatible classes. Conversely Jack is unscathed by his legacy of illegitimacy because he is one of many illegitimate children in the city. He is a product of a seemingly regularized industry formed by the ranks of single working class mothers and their middle class employers in a society with a “long-held belief that sex with a fiancé was acceptable, since the couple were to be married anyway.” (Frost 99)

The running theme of nature opposing culture comes to the fore in both of the texts. In Tess the natural world is very much emphasized and it is to this rural tradition that Tess belongs. The idea that it “Tis nature...what do please God” (Hardy 104) for a man and woman to have premarital relations is a prominent one among the villagers and not until the introduction of the middle class Angel does this concept become villainized. Even Tess herself holds the view that following her seduction Alec is then her husband by nature. Her bigamous marriage, if only in the psychological sense, to Angel as her husband by law is then the problematic one.
According to conventions of the time, when colonial viewpoints saw culture as a mark of civilization and nature as a corrupting force, it is revealing that Tess’s fall takes place in a woodland, while the downward spiral of her life has an ever increasingly barren backdrop moving from the domestic realms of the dairy, to the harsh Flintcomb Ash and finally to the pagan domain of Stonehenge. Her representation as a manifestation of nature with her “flower-like mouth” (Hardy 114), in Alec’s view as a wild animal that must be tamed and in Angel’s as the domestic animal (King 117) and ideal agricultural spouse further ingrains her with the domain of the natural world.

Esther’s suburban situation means nature appears as a “mass of weed and briar” “run to waste” (Moore 391) at the end of the novel resulting from neglect of the once immaculate garden. This was a fashionable metaphor for civilization at the time. The other prominent natural force is the race horse, which spells disaster for people in its path, through suicide, disease or financial ruin.

The parallels of nature for Esther are also internalized, as with all of the female subjects, thus relating the world and men as culture, and the feminine as the uncivilized threat. Scientists of the period were convinced a woman was governed and defined by her reproductive function (Pykett 14) and thus she was inextricably tied to nature. However, “Moore wanted to tell the truth about working class attitudes… [and] the animal in man”. (Watt 182)

Both texts offer an ethically definitive choice of two lovers, with the instigator of the fall on one hand and a moralistic individual on the other. Tess is presented with the “swarthy complexion” and “a well-groomed black moustache” (Hardy 44) of Alec, who stalks her for her refusal to accept his advances and attacks her when she is in a weakened state. His attentions are known among the female farm hands and fit comfortably within his stereotypical gender sphere. At the other end of the spectrum is Angel, whose ardent promises of matrimony “under any conditions, changes, charges or revelations” (Hardy 230) come with the proviso of Tess’ purity. Except, as Nicola Diane Thompson explains, that notional purity was based on an ignorance “both intellectual and sexual” (14) and as Angel had sought to educate his wife, he was already hastening her decline. Although Alec instigates Tess’ fall, it is Angel’s desertion that is much crueler because it breaches Tess’ faith in humanity after he initially restores it. However, both men pay for their treatment of her. Alec is punished for his role in her fall and subsequent adultery with his death, so Angel is punished for his weakness with illness overseas. Tess’ choice of Angel on both occasions show her innate goodness, while the choosing of Alec only takes place in her husband’s absence in order to save her family, thus she is morally absolved from the consequences of willing adultery.

Esther’s choice between the dour Fred “whom she did not like any better for his purity” (Moore 191) and the moneyed William is presented as a difficult decision
to safeguard her reputation as a moralistic woman and it is rationalized on the
grounds of inheritance and legitimacy, even though the struggle between the two
men is "an outright manifestation of two parts of her own nature". (Watt 196)
Choosing the instigator of her fall is presented as a way to legitimize her status,
even though she commits adultery to achieve this. However it is obvious that she
opts for a comfortable life with the prospect of excitement rather than a stable
and potentially dull existence with Fred, despite her meagre protestations "that
it wasn’t to be”. (Moore 241) This choice is clear as Fred’s two dimensional
rendering means he would be unable to carry the central segment of the plot.
Thus William is rewarded with Esther as a bride, even though he caused her fall.
This action does not go unpunished, as his worsening illness and ultimate death
prove.

An important point to note is the mediation through which a narrative reaches a
reader. The majority of writers were middle class or aspirational working class
and it is with these views of society that the novels are created. The extent of the
societal control exerted over the authors is also an important point to consider in
the conflict between realism and the demands of the middle class reader. They
may well have felt sympathy for their characters’ situations, but to what degree
this feeling would be allowed against the prevailing hegemonic views is
questionable, as the culmination of each text shows. Pressure on the author to
negotiate this debate, described as one of “prohibition and production” (18) by
Barbara Leckie, would have been two-fold for the female authors as not only
would they have to abide by these literary restrictions, they also “operated under
several crucial constraints...not least of which was their idealised role as pure,
domestic angel of the house.” (Thompson 13)

While airing an artistic view on the fate of the compromised woman, a writer
must also be censored to a degree by the accepted status quo- after all, the all-
important circulating libraries with their “effective censorship” (Crow 26) must
be placated in order for the novels to reach the reader, but the reader must also
be satisfied with the book. It should fall between the rigid boundaries of being
inoffensive to the vulnerable young, female or working class reader, according to
the 1857 Obscene Publications Act, while offering only enough scandal to
warrant the female’s partial redemption or repentance. Evidentially it would
seem that the rigors of meeting these stringent controls won out over the desire
for realism.

The impelling nature and popularity of fallen woman fiction stems from its
duality. Acting chiefly as a moralizing device to quell insurgence in the female
masses through forewarning, it is used as a means of suppression because “if the
sexual is suppressed in Victorian fiction, then such dangerous amphitheatres can
be held in check.” (Allen 31) However, “this discourse on censorship contributed
to the social production of the very topics...that it worked so vigorously to deny”.

The Victorian
(Leckie, 19) Ironically, this very suppression is inverted because it brings prohibited subjects into the idealized home the stoics are trying to safeguard.

**Works Cited**