"Poem[s] of a New Class":
Women Poets and the Late Victorian Verse Novel

by

Samantha MacFarlane
BA (Hons), Queen's University, 2011
MA, Queen's University, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Because of its importance in the history of the verse novel and the history of women's writing, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) has overshadowed the works of other female verse novelists in Victorian studies scholarship. By focusing on non-canonical works by four understudied women poets writing in the late nineteenth century— Augusta Webster's "Lota" (1867), Violet Fane's *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse* (1875), Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884), and Emily Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist" (1891)—this dissertation expands our understanding of both women's poetry and the verse novel in the Victorian period. It demonstrates that the genre was taken up in multiple ways after *Aurora Leigh* by women poets who, like EBB, addressed urgent and controversial social and political issues—such as parliamentary enfranchisement, adultery, marital rape, political sovereignty and land use in the Scottish Highlands, as well as socialism and the Irish Question—through inventive and complex generic combinations. This dissertation does not outline a teleological development of genre but, rather, recovers works through case studies that offer microhistories of verse novels at particular historical moments in order to expand the canon and definition of the Victorian verse novel.

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Dedication

For Alison Chapman.

INTRODUCTION:

"Poem[s] of a New Class"

After Elizabeth Barrett Browning published *Aurora Leigh*, her nine-book verse novel about the growth of a woman poet, in 1856,[1] the critic W. E. Aytoun predicted in his review in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* that many more works like it would follow: "We doubt not that . . . many poems on the model of *Aurora Leigh* will be written and published" ("Mrs. Barrett Browning" 36).[2] From Aytoun, a conservative critic who disagreed with Barrett Browning's (hereafter referred to as EBB)[3] famous declaration in the metapoetic Fifth Book of *Aurora Leigh* that the poet's "sole work is to represent the age" (V.202, *WEBB* 3: 125), this prediction was not a positive one, but he proved to be correct.[4] A number of verse novels heavily indebted to *Aurora Leigh* did follow, fulfilling EBB's own intention, articulated more than ten years earlier, "to write a poem of a new class" (Letter to Mary Russell Mitford, 30 Dec. 1844,

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[1] Date-stamped 1857.

[2] In full, the sentence reads "We doubt not that, before a year is over, many poems on the model of *Aurora Leigh* will be written and published; and that conversations in the pot house, casino, and even worse places, will be reduced to blank verse, and exhibited as specimens of high art." Aytoun's forecast that these new poems will appear within the year is strange considering the time it took EBB to complete *Aurora Leigh* (over ten years) and how long the verse novel itself is, but it suggests an anxiety about a decreasing standard of quality in the increasing volume of popular literature flooding the market, of which he considered EBB's verse novel a part. By beginning with a review from a conservative critic in a conservative periodical, I do not intend to give the impression that the response from critics was overwhelmingly negative. As Victorian poetry critic Marjorie Stone explains in the critical introduction to *Aurora Leigh* in *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (hereafter *WEBB*), in contrast to "the long-held view that *Aurora Leigh* was almost universally condemned by Victorian reviewers" (*WEBB* 3: xxi), in fact "responses were as diverse as the conflicting ideological perspectives that reviewers (and their periodicals) brought to the poem" (*WEBB* 3: xx).

[3] I follow scholarly convention in referring to Barrett Browning as EBB throughout this dissertation, even in reference to events prior to her marriage to Robert Browning. Her maiden name was Elizabeth Barrett Moulton-Barrett, and as Alison Chapman notes, "she commonly signed herself [EBB] before and after her marriage" (*Networking the Nation* xxv).

[4] Aytoun's review condemns EBB's representation of the modern era, insisting that "it is not the province of the poet to depict things as they are, but so to refine and purify as to purge out the grosser matter; and this he cannot do if he attempts to give a faithful picture of his own times" ("Mrs. Barrett Browning" 34). Rather, Aytoun contends, "all poetical characters, all poetical situations must be idealised. The language is not that of common life, which belongs essentially to the domain of prose. Therein lies the distinction between a novel and a poem" ("Mrs. Barrett Browning" 34-35). Nonetheless, Aytoun grudgingly foresaw how influential "the model of Aurora Leigh" would be.

Brownings' Correspondence[5] 9: 304). *Aurora Leigh* was immensely successful: it sold out in two weeks when it was first published and was reprinted five times by 1861 and over twenty times by the end of the century (Reynolds vii). "It became," Margaret Reynolds notes, "one of the books that everyone knew and read" (Reynolds vii). But while the importance of *Aurora Leigh* in the field of Victorian poetry has been well established since its reassessment by feminist critics beginning in the 1970s, there remains a gap in literary history when it comes to the story of *Aurora Leigh*'s successors, particularly those by other women poets. Although *Aurora Leigh* was considered by Victorian readers and critics to be initiating a new generic tradition, it was the only verse novel by a woman poet that, until recently, survived in Victorian studies scholarship, giving the impression for a long time that it was the only work of its kind. This dissertation takes as its subject some of these "poems on the model of *Aurora Leigh*," the poems "of a new class" that followed the publication of EBB's influential work but that have been overlooked in scholarship as a result of the neglect of women writers in twentieth-century criticism and the practical challenges presented by studying verse novels.[6] Taking a hybrid methodological approach that combines historicism, formalism, feminist criticism, and narratology, this dissertation argues that the verse novel is a capacious, heterogeneous genre worth rediscovering, and one in which women poets were more heavily involved than has previously been recognised. Like Angela Leighton in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (1993), I combine

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[5] Hereafter *BC*.

[6] While feminist criticism has recovered many works by nineteenth-century women writers, verse novels by women poets—with the exception of *Aurora Leigh*—are not available in critical editions. Even in cases when critical editions of writing by these poets are available, the length of verse novels prohibits their inclusion. In fact, finding verse novels in print at all is a challenge. While I have had the opportunity to see first editions of all the works studied in this dissertation, either at the University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections and University Archives or the National Library of Scotland, this project was possible largely because of the digitisation of nineteenth-century books, especially by Google Books. From a pedagogical perspective, the lack of available editions and length of verse novels also make them difficult to assign as course readings, and the fact that students do not read them perpetuates their absence from critical discourse.

biographical and historical context with formalist readings to recover the works of forgotten women poets. In line with critics who argue for the importance of historical poetics, such as Victorian poetry scholar Yopie Prins[7] and Romanticist David Duff, I view genre as a historical phenomenon and analyse the generic innovations of these poems in their specific historical contexts. This dissertation does not offer a progressive literary history that begins with *Aurora Leigh* and traces the influence of EBB's verse novel in a teleological thread to the end of the century. It is not really about *Aurora Leigh*, nor its afterlife, but about its *aftermath*, examining through case studies how women poets at particular historical moments in the latter half of the nineteenth century politicised generic combination in their verse novels.

Although *Aurora Leigh* is not the main focus of this dissertation, I begin with EBB's verse novel because, not unusually, that is where my thinking about verse novels started. *Aurora Leigh* often serves as the introductory, and sometimes only, work of the genre that students and scholars study. Indeed, the fact that I did not read *Aurora Leigh* until my candidacy exams (it had never been assigned in the Victorian literature courses I took as an undergraduate or graduate student, its length likely prohibiting its inclusion on course syllabi) suggests that the pedagogical challenges presented by verse novels may account in part for the scholarly neglect of the genre.

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[7] Prins frames her definition of historical poetics by quoting the call for papers for the conference "Poetic Genre and Social Imagination: Pope to Swinburne," held in 2014 at the University of Chicago, which stated that "'scholars of English and American poetry have recently called for a new historical poetics capable of analyzing relations between culture and poetic form (including meter and rhyme as well as specific verse forms . . .)'" and that "'two approaches have dominated this conversation. The first recovers lost ways of thinking about form—in prosody manuals, recorded performance, private correspondence, newspaper reviews, and so on—and reads them back into cultural history. The second historicizes poems from the inside out, making evident social affinities and antagonisms in literary form by comparative description'" ("What Is Historical Poetics?" 14). For Prins, "the schematic division into two kinds of historical poetics—one practiced by cultural historians, who read from the outside in, and the other by literary critics, who read from the inside out—implies that the former are more interested in discourses about poetry and its mediations, and the latter in the poems themselves" ("What Is Historical Poetics?" 14). She contends that, "while we might be tempted to see these concerns in opposition, I believe that we cannot separate the practice of reading a poem from the histories and theories of reading that mediate our ideas about poetry" because "poems are read through the generic conventions that make up the history of reading poetry" (Prins, "What Is Historical Poetics?" 14, 15).

Aurora Leigh was the first work I came across that was categorised as a verse novel, and it introduced me to the taxonomical problem of the genre. In a letter to Robert Browning, EBB herself classified *Aurora Leigh* as “a sort of novel-poem” (Letter to Robert Browning, 27 Feb. 1845, *BC* 10: 102), and the appellation stumped me. For readers accustomed to defining poetry as verse and the novel as prose, as I was, the term novel-poem— or verse novel, as I will refer to the genre throughout this dissertation—initially seems inherently contradictory. But, in fact, hybrid genres like the dramatic monologue dominate Victorian poetry; the verse novel is just the most ambitious example, both in formal complexity and scale, of this broader trend in generic combination. In particular, the verse novel’s conceptual difficulty is productive in the way that it forces us to consider what, beyond verse or prose, we mean when we designate something as poetic or novelistic, as well as what the particular uses of genre and generic combination might be. The fourth edition of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the definitive reference guide for the study of poetry, suggests that verse novels are long poetic works that present “something not dissimilar to the verisimilitude of the realist novel” (Kinney 913).[8] Yet poetic language, which is highly figurative, calls attention to itself as language and dispels the illusion that it represents reality. And if an author sought merely to write a realist novel in verse, why not just write a novel? What is the purpose of combining the two?

In *Epic: Britain’s Historic Muse, 1790-1910* (2008), Victorian poetry critic Herbert F. Tucker provides one explanation by suggesting that the obscurity of poetic language offered an advantage to allow poets to address more contentious subject matter, such as adultery, than novelists could. “Novels in verse,” he contends, “could handle culturally hazardous material (like

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[8] There is actually no complete entry for *verse novel*. The volume redirects you to the entry on *narrative poetry*, which offers a history of Western poetic narrative from the classical era to the twentieth century and skims over some Victorian verse novels (although it does not refer to them as such): *Aurora Leigh*, George Meredith’s *Modern Love* (1862), and Robert Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69).

adultery and cynicism) because the foregroundedness of poetic form put more distance between the reader and that material than did the comparative transparency of fictional prose" (*Epic* 410). Building on Tucker's point, Stefanie Markovits, a leading scholar of the verse novel, similarly notes that "it has been suggested that Victorian poets were actually able to adopt more radical content than the novelists precisely *because* the dangers of sympathetic identification are allayed by the particular generic purview of verse," notably "its formal reliance on figurative language, its intellectual challenge, its ostensible distancing from the real" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 41). As I discuss in chapters 1 and 2, prose fiction of the period engaged with topics like marital infidelity more than these critical perspectives acknowledge, but the argument about the nature of poetic language—its "foregroundedness" and its "distancing from the real"—remains an important counterpoint to the idea that verse novels are simply realist novels in verse. Verse novels must produce some other effect, something achievable only through the combination of poetry and the novel.

In EBB's case, as she explains in the 1844 letter to Mitford cited above, she sought to produce a work suited to the representation of the modern age, one modelled on Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24):

> And now tell me,—where is the obstacle to making as interesting a story of a poem as of a prose work—Echo answers *where*. Conversations & events, why may they not be given as rapidly & passionately & ludicly in verse as in prose—echo answers *why*. You see nobody is offended by my approach to the conventions of vulgar life in 'Lady Geraldine'—and it gives me courage to go on, & touch this real everyday life of our age, & hold it with my two hands. I want to write a poem of a new class, in a measure—a Don Juan, without the mockery & impurity, . . under one aspect,—& having unity, as a work

> of art,—& admitting of as much philosophical dreaming & digression (which is in fact a characteristic of the age) as I like to use. (Letter to Mary Russell Mitford, 30 Dec. 1844, *BC* 9: 304)

As generically experimental poems that represented contemporary life, *Don Juan*, Byron's mock-epic presenting an ironic reversal of the legend of Don Juan,[9] and "Lady Geraldine's Courtship: A Romance of the Age," a ballad that EBB first published in her 1844 volume *Poems*, were both important precursors to *Aurora Leigh*. In particular, Byron's first-person narrator—who is not the protagonist but an unnamed, cynical figure who deviates from telling the story of Don Juan's escapades to satirise contemporary English society—provided a model for "philosophical dreaming & digression" and social satire.[10] "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" represented "the conventions of vulgar life" in its description of modern technology and depiction of cross-class marriage (anticipating the relationship between Marian and Romney in *Aurora Leigh*).[11] These poems, which combined novelistic qualities with poetic conventions of the epic and ballad, helped shape *Aurora Leigh*. EBB, even in the early stages of planning her verse novel, believed that representing the contemporary era required combining the narrative action, discursiveness, and immediacy of the novel with lyric contemplation and philosophical exposition. When *Aurora Leigh* was published over ten years later, its final form therefore

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[9] Typically represented as a libertine, Don Juan is as a naïve young man seduced by multiple women in Byron's poem.

[10] In *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Origins of a New Poetry* (1989), Dorothy Mermin notes many similarities between *Aurora Leigh* and *Don Juan*: "Despite a good deal of high-minded solemnity, [*Aurora Leigh*] is Byronic in range, scope, and tonal variety—wit, travel, politics, celebrations of nature, social satire, passions of many kinds . . . all jostling comfortably against each other" (184).

[11] As Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor explain in their headnote to the poem in *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, "'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' combines a contemporary cast of characters with allusions to steam engines and the telegraph (among the first in English poetry), framing this subject matter within Renaissance courtly love conventions and imagery," in this manner "integrating the modern with the traditional" (*WEBB* 1: 383). Furthermore, they suggest that "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" may also have served as a model in terms of form and narrative voice: like *Aurora Leigh*, they remark, "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" is a generically mixed poem: "As a ballad or 'romaunt' in a modern setting it reads like a novel; yet it is also an epistolary dramatic monologue written by a poet, much as *Aurora Leigh* is the fictional autobiography of a dramatically portrayed poet" (*WEBB* 1: 384-85).

combined all of these elements, incorporating epic[12] and lyric conventions with the *Künstlerroman* (a plot about the growth of an artist) in a blank-verse narrative that, as Stone explains, also participated in a tradition of sage writing and incorporated a narrative voice indebted to the dramatic monologue and the first-person novel.[13]

With *Aurora Leigh*, then, I began to wrestle with the conceptual difficulty I found the verse novel—this "new class" of poem—posed, and I began to appreciate the level of granularity that analysing the generic combination in verse novels required. But I also became increasingly curious about other examples of the genre, specifically those by other women poets, because *Aurora Leigh* is both the most prominent verse novel of the Victorian period and a major work of feminist literature. Markovits calls it "the most influential of Victorian verse-novels"

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[12] Mermin describes *Aurora Leigh* as "of epic size (longer, reviewers pointed out, than *Paradise Lost*) and epic scope, with a woman poet as hero and her country's destiny hanging in the balance of her deeds," whose "argument is that writing a poem can itself be an epic action that leads, like an epic hero's, to the creation of a new social order" (183). In "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: *The Princess* and *Aurora Leigh*," Marjorie Stone lists *Aurora Leigh*'s epic qualities as "the numerous epic similes and allusions, the division into nine books, the in media res narrative order, the epic catalogues (including catalogues of genres), and above all Aurora's (and by implication her creator's) explicitly epic aspirations" (125-26), which she expresses in the Fifth Book of the verse novel (lines 213-16). Stone argues that EBB often introduces these conventions to then subvert them in a mock-heroic fashion in order to challenge the gendered associations of the genre, just as she also "revis[es] . . . the gender and genre conventions of chivalric romance" ("Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion" 127). In *Epic*, Tucker highlights the ending of *Aurora Leigh* as one its major epic qualities: "The long final scene of *Aurora Leigh* concludes . . . with a vision of the New Jerusalem out of Revelation . . . , having begun with the extended apocalyptic image of a city drowned beneath the opening heavens" (377).

[13] According to Stone, "*Aurora Leigh* enters the tradition of Victorian sage writing through its representation of a prophetic speaker, its pronounced Biblical allusions and typological patterning, its polemical sermonizing on the times, its argumentative intertextuality, its exploitation of metaphor and definition as strategies of persuasion, its quest for a sustaining 'Life Philosophy', and its vision of a new social and spiritual order" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 138). Its dramatic quality, she contends, emerges through the complex narrative voice in *Aurora Leigh*, in which Aurora is "a dramatic speaker whose reliability is in doubt more often than critics have assumed" and who is indebted to EBB's earlier experiments in the 1840s with the dramatic monologue (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 12-13). She argues that EBB "employs a narrative perspective in *Aurora Leigh* that has strong affinities both with the dramatic monologues she experimented with throughout the 1840s and with the experimental first-person form of novels like Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* [1853]" (138). Mermin lists additional novelistic qualities in *Aurora Leigh*: "like Victorian novels, it is attentive to the ways in which character develops and relationships change through time; it relies heavily on dialogue and effectively differentiates characters' voices; it presents with considerable realistic detail a social world that encompasses England, France, and Italy, aristocrats, artists, and tramps; and it takes up the kinds of political, social, and religious questions that novelists dealt with too" (184-85). Its poetic qualities, she contends, are in "its heightened, highly charged feeling and language, especially the elaborate metaphors and ostentatious epic similes"; she concludes that "the fusion of two apparently incompatible genres gives it a startling originality and allows for a scope and flexibility that neither genre alone could provide" (Mermin 185).

("Adulterated Form" 636), and Mermin even posits that *Aurora Leigh* is "the only one of its kind, except for some very minor works, in nineteenth-century English literature" (184). But in addition to its generic prominence, *Aurora Leigh* also depicts the personal and artistic development of a woman poet in the nineteenth century. It represents the events of modern life from the first-person perspective of its female protagonist, and it addresses the place of women writers in literary culture and issues related to the Victorian "woman question" such as rape and single motherhood. Indeed, critics have argued that EBB's bold generic combination is itself a feminist undertaking.[14] Yet, although *Aurora Leigh* features prominently in scholarship on Victorian women poets and on the verse novel genre, these two strains of criticism have not yielded a study that combines these two approaches by analysing verse novels by women poets after *Aurora Leigh*. Most other verse novels that have received critical attention are works by male writers. These include Alfred Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847; for example, Stone, "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion" and Natasha Moore) and *Idylls of the King* (1859-85; for

[14] Stone, for example, argues that *Aurora Leigh* subverts the male tradition of sage discourse: "Barrett Browning . . . transforms the sage tradition through her gynocentric adaption of its characteristic strategies, and her subversion of the authoritative stance so strenuously asserted by Victorian prophets like Carlyle" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 138). Stone also contends that EBB "combines a verse bildungsroman or spiritual epic like *The Prelude*, tracing the growth of a woman poet's mind, with a treatise on poetics (including a survey of poetic genres) and a heavily plotted novel in the manner of George Sand, Charles Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë—all enlivened by liberal dashes of racy social satire in the manner of Byron's *Don Juan*," a "fusion of genres [that] entails a fusion of genders since Victorians viewed epic, philosophic, and racy satiric poetry as male domains, but thought the novel more suited to female writers" ("Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion" 115). Moreover, as I noted above, Stone argues that *Aurora Leigh* challenges gender and genre conventions of epic and chivalric romance; EBB's verse novel "appropriates, revises, and satirizes many of the actions, situations, and speeches in Tennyson's [*The Princess*]," which Stone reads as an ultimately conservative poem in terms of gender politics, "often by inverting them" (Stone, "Genre Subversion" 116). Critics have also pointed out the influence of Spasmodic poetry, a type of long dramatic poem expressing a male poet's subjectivity in exaggerated detail, on *Aurora Leigh*. Richard Cronin, for example, explains that "for contemporary readers *Aurora Leigh* was evidently a Spasmodic poem" because it demonstrated parallels with works such as Alexander Smith's *A Life-Drama*, an immensely popular Spasmodic poem published in 1853 (302). Tucker argues that EBB appropriated conventions of Spasmodic poetry "for the platform it offered women's poetry" (378), "advanc[ing] a woman's claim to epic spokesmanship by so grounding the tropes and tones of spasmody in female physicality as to make the movement appear to have been, in its deepest fiber, feminine all along" (380). This reworking of Spasmodic poetics, Tucker contends, enabled EBB's political and social agenda by "provid[ing] practical leverage with which to promote for public recognition the rights of women, and with them the wrongs of the poor and the shame of oppression, up to and including that of the Italian people with whose political welfare Barrett Browning was throughout the 1850s passionately engaged" (*Epic* 380).

example Tucker, "Trials of Fiction: Novel and Epic in the Geraint and Enid Episodes from *Idylls of the King*" and Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel*), Arthur Hugh Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich: A Long-Vacation Pastoral* (1848; for example, Isobel Armstrong and Moore) and *Amours de Voyage* (written in 1849 and serialised in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858; for example, Felluga, "Verse Novel"; Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel*; and Moore), Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (published in four volumes between 1854 and 1863; for example, Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel* and Moore), Owen Meredith's *Lucile* (1860; for example, Addison, "The Victorian Verse Novel as Bestseller" and Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel*), George Meredith's "Modern Love" (1862; for example, Felluga, "Verse Novel"), William Allingham's *Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland* (serialised 1862-63; for example, Campbell, "Irish Poetry in the Union"; Linda K. Hughes, "The Poetics of Empire and Resistance"; and Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel*), and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (serialised in volume form 1868-69; for example, Felluga, "Verse Novel" and Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel*) and *The Inn Album* (1875; Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel*). Verse novels by women poets remain largely unstudied, despite the fact that, among the long list of admirers of *Aurora Leigh*, "it was the women poets of the latter nineteenth century," according to Reynolds, "who formed Aurora's most dedicated band of acolytes" (viii).[15]

My dissertation focuses on four non-canonical works by understudied women poets, all published after *Aurora Leigh* in the late nineteenth century: Augusta Webster's "Lota" (1867),

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[15] Reynolds mentions, in addition to George Eliot, Dora Greenwell, Bessie Rayner Parkes (also a prominent activist), Emily Hickey, Michael Field, and Charlotte Mew (Reynolds viii-ix). Even as Reynolds makes this important point, however, she does not name many women poets who wrote *verse novels* specifically, listing only Hickey as an example a woman poet who adapted the verse novel genre that EBB popularised. I interpret "acolytes" here as the audience of EBB's verse novel.

Violet Fane's *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse* (1875), Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884), and Emily Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist" (1891). These works use diverse combinations of genres in order to engage with topical socio-political issues, issues that are often related to the "woman question," such as parliamentary enfranchisement, adultery, and marital rape, but that also include matters such as political sovereignty and land use in the Scottish Highlands as well as socialism and Irish Home Rule. As I explain in more detail below, these writers produced works "on the model of *Aurora Leigh*" by politicising generic combination, incorporating poetic and novelistic conventions to address particular political issues. Before I outline the distinct types of generic combination that these works employ and situate them in their contemporary contexts, often with reference to specific legislative measures, I will first provide an overview of the existing scholarship on the Victorian verse novel, then present my own definition of the genre.

The Verse Novel in Victorian Studies

When I began research for this dissertation, there was a dearth of scholarship on verse novels by women poets, although feminist literary criticism had made some important headway in recovering these works. Anthologies edited by critics such as Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds include some excerpts from verse novels; Linda K. Hughes points to the need for a revaluation of the literary canon that includes women's narrative poetry in her article "Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Women Narrative Poets, 1995-2005" (2006), which refers to both "Lota" and "Michael Villiers"; and essay collections edited by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, Joanne Shattock, and Alison Chapman include important works on generic

experimentation by women poets, including some of the poets studied in this dissertation.[16] Important scholarship on the literary history of the Victorian verse novel has begun to emerge, notably in the work of Catherine Addison, who provides a transhistorical and transnational genealogy of the genre; Felluga, who examines the verse novel in a Bakhtinian theoretical framework; Markovits, who takes a thematic and formalist approach in the most sustained analysis of the genre to date; and Moore and Tucker, both of whom discuss the formal innovation of the verse novel in relation to epic. However, the gap in criticism on verse novels specifically by Victorian women poets still persists.

The Victorian verse novel as a genre only began to receive serious critical attention in approximately the last twenty years. In his essay on the verse novel in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (2002), one of the earliest works of criticism in Victorian studies that attempts to define the genre, Felluga makes two main claims about the verse novel: one, that the genre may have been shaped by the contemporary print market, and two, that its generic hybridity is highly subversive. Positing that the emergence of the verse novel "could be said to respond to the increasing marginalization of poetry that occurred after the collapse of the poetry market in the 1820s," Felluga points out that publishers (with the notable exception of Edward Moxon) mostly stopped publishing original books of poetry at this point and that poets needed to adapt to a market newly dominated by the novel ("Verse Novel" 171).[17] In these circumstances, poets

[16] *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900* (1999), edited by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain; *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900* (2001), edited by Joanne Shattock; and *Victorian Women Poets* (2003), edited by Alison Chapman.

[17] Felluga draws here on the work of Lee Erickson, who argues in *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (1996) that genre formation is traceable to the demands of the market in the nineteenth century and that "the history of literary forms demonstrates that literature is materially and economically embedded in the reality of the publishing marketplace," as "writers seek to accommodate their writing to the demands of the marketplace and to suit part of it" (8, 14). According to Erickson, after the first two decades of the nineteenth century—during which poets such as Byron and Walter Scott produced bestsellers—the market for poetry volumes declined with the rise of the periodical press and the proliferation of cheap print. "The English poetry market peaked in 1820, when more than 320 volumes of poetry were published, of

could either "embrace [poetry's] marginalization as a virtue and explore increasingly rarefied forms that self-consciously rejected the dictates of the market" (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 171) or they "could attempt to play to that market as best [they] could by exploring those characteristics that made the novel such a popular success (narrative sequentiality, realistic description, historical referentiality, believable characters, dramatic situations, fully realized dialogism and, above all, the domestic marriage plot)" (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 171).[18]

Yet, according to Felluga, whose critical framework is more theoretical than print culture-based (he draws prominently on the work of genre theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, for example), verse novels were not simply poets' efforts to subsist in the market; they were also ideologically subversive works: "Because of its hybridity, the verse novel could be said to resist . . . both the monological tendencies of the Romantic lyric and the hegemonic ideologies of the bourgeois novel" (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 174). On the one hand, he suggests, the verse novel avoids the monologism that Bakhtin associates with poetry (which he argued expressed the singular viewpoint and voice of the poet) and demonstrates instead qualities of novelistic dialogism such as polyphony, which resist the expression and centralisation of a single, unified worldview (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 173-74). On the other hand, he points out that the novel has been subject to its own set of criticisms by scholars who contend that "the novel may, in fact, be far from liberatory, since it helps to establish the patriarchal hegemony of middle-class, heterosexual, domestic ideology in the nineteenth century" (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 174). In

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which a little more than 200 were original publications" (28), Erickson states, but "by 1830, almost all publishers refused to publish poetry" (26). Original poetry volumes were edged out by the popularity of annuals and other periodicals, as well as gift books (Erickson 29) and, of course, prose fiction.

[18] Felluga also acknowledges that the place of the verse novel in mid-Victorian print culture was not so simple, noting that "one problem with discussing the question of the 'verse novel' is that poetry had for centuries before the rise of the novel valued various forms of fictional narrative, from the epic and the romance to the pastoral and the ballad" (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 172), so the emergence of the verse novel as a form of long narrative poetry was not in itself remarkable.

particular, he argues, verse novels tend to critique domestic ideology. "It is no coincidence," he contends, that so many Victorian verse novels "revolve around perverse or failed domestic relationships"; whereas "the idyll of the Victorian 'angel in the house' found its preferred literary expression in the heart—and at the hearth—of the domestic novel," verse novels "[seem] intent to question that ideology on the level of both content and form" (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 174). Felluga thus puts the failed marriage plot at the centre of the verse novel and considers its generic hybridity a disruption to conventional Victorian prose fiction.

Tucker offers a brief commentary on the verse novel in his historicist study *Epic: Britain's Historic Muse, 1790-1910*, which traces the literary history of British epic poetry with such comprehensiveness that it also "take[s] cursory note" of the verse novel, which he designates a "para-epic genre" (408). In more detail than other critics, Tucker outlines the pre-history of the Victorian verse novel, contending that the genre was "developed in prototype during the later eighteenth century and then suspended during the war years of the early nineteenth," then "refined after Waterloo by Eleanor Porden, Tom Moore, and Leigh Hunt, until the post-Byronic epic 1820s blew it out of reach again. In the 1830s Sarah Stickney Ellis and Alexander Ross started the form up again in raw earnest" (*Epic* 408). He also makes a generic claim about the verse novel, differentiating it from biographical epic by noting that whereas epic poems tend to represent "great, collectively defining actions over exemplary lives" of individuals (*Epic* 490), verse novels focus more closely on the development of the individual. "To epicize the story of personal development required an author to hold the protagonist in a longer view," he explains, "a view that subordinated individuating particulars to a collective history" (Tucker, *Epic* 492). In contrast, verse novels that present stories of personal development emphasise, like prose fiction *Bildungsromane*, the "self's mission to find its niche within a given social scheme,

rather than to found or remake one" (Tucker, *Epic* 492). Finally, he makes an assessment about the narrative structure of verse novels, arguing that "personal development sympathetically narrated from a standpoint outside the developing self was a model not for the period's epics but for its biographies and prose fiction. The more closely a long poem conformed to this model the stronger its affiliation with the verse-novel" (Tucker, *Epic* 490).

Tucker surveys a range of verse novels that attest to the genre's prominence in the period, including Alexander Ross's *Selma: A Tale of the Sixth Crusade* (1839), Meredith's *Lucile*, Alfred Austin's *The Human Tragedy: A Poem* (1862, revised in 1876), Allingham's *Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland: A Modern Poem*, and Thomas Woolner's *My Beautiful Lady* (1863) (Tucker 329, 408-14). In particular, his overview emphasises just how many works by women poets are missing from the literary history of the verse novel: he mentions Eleanor Porden's *The Veils; or the Triumph of Constancy* (1815), Mary Arnald Houghton's *Emilia of Lindinau; or, The Field of Leipsic: A Poem, in Four Cantos* (1815), Harriet Downing's *Mary; or Female Friendship: A Poem in Twelve Books* (1816), Catherine Luby's *The Spirit of the Lakes; or Mucruss Abbey: A Poem in Three Cantos* (1822), and Sarah Stickney Ellis's *Sons of the Soil* (1840) (*Epic* 149, 197-98, 207, 246, 305-7). He also briefly discusses Fane's *Denzil Place* (he refers to it by its American title, *Constance's Fate*) and Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist" (*Epic* 491-92).

In *Victorian Poetry and Modern Life: The Unpoetical Age* (2015), Moore takes a thematic and formalist approach to argue that the generic forms of *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, *Amours de Voyage*, *The Angel in the House*, and *Aurora Leigh* resulted from Clough's, Patmore's, and EBB's attempts to find a poetic form to represent the modern age. According to Moore, the Victorian period, characterised by "technological advances, rapid industrialization

and urbanization, intellectual and religious combativeness and uncertainty, and both political and cultural democratization," was imbued with a sense "of miscellaneousness—heterogeneity, fragmentation," and "the problem of giving poetic form to the apparent chaos of the modern world became a site for the development of new forms, reliant on a kind of generic miscegenation to lend them the breadth and flexibility necessary to their subjects" (146). "The generic hybridity of *Aurora Leigh*, as well as *The Bothie*, *Amours de Voyage* and *The Angel in the House*," therefore, "is a function of their engagement with a period they experience as itself overwhelmingly diverse, and uneven in its diversity" (Moore 170). For these poets, "life itself, but especially (they felt) modern life, [was] an awkward compound of high and low, of the banal and the sublime, and works that aspired to capture their age in any meaningful way sought to mirror that mixedness on the level of genre in their combination of 'high' and 'low', traditional and innovative, contending, connotation-laden forms" (Moore 170). Specifically, Moore argues that they combined the novel, associated by "a mid-Victorian novel-reading audience . . . with contemporary and everyday subject matter" (Moore 152), and the epic, using its conventions as "a means of elevating the unheroic material of modern life to the dignity of epic experience" (Moore 155). Furthermore, the combination of epic and novel was a response to the multiplicity and diversity of the modern age ("the apparently exponential increase of more or less everything—population, cities, books, ideas, technologies, even of the world itself, thanks to the burgeoning of both empire and tourism" [Moore 181]) and "the erosion of a coherent cultural and religious framework within which this multiplicity could be apprehended" (Moore 181). "For Clough, Patmore and Barrett Browning," Moore explains, "the attempt to fuse the elasticity and diversity of the novel with the grand unity of the epic was a method of testing and either disputing or reasserting the survival of a comprehensive worldview in the face of the irreducible

variety of the modern world" (186). In other words, these verse novels represent the fragmented nature of modern life with all the detail of the novel and then seek to unify those fragmented parts into a picture of cultural unity in the manner of epic poetry.

My work differs significantly from Moore's both in selection of texts and focus of analysis. Moore does not seek to define or study the verse novel genre; in fact, she eschews the use of the term *verse novel* for much of her book, opting to categorise *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, *Amours de Voyage*, *The Angel in the House*, and *Aurora Leigh* instead as "'long poem[s] of modern life'" (12). She contends that "the term 'verse-novel' . . . fails to categorically specify the modernity of subject that is a constitutive feature of these works" (12) and that is the primary focus of her analysis. As she puts it, "although the way in which the term [verse novel] is used in the period usually implies a contemporary theme of everyday life, its applicability equally to poems like Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book* (1868), with its Renaissance setting, renders the denomination too broad for my purposes" (12). As I explain in more detail below, my understanding of the verse novel's modernity differs from Moore's: I relate the genre's modernity to the political issues with which verse novels engage rather than their depiction of contemporary settings. Furthermore, my focus on the engagement of women poets with specific political issues differs from her more thematic approach, which considers how certain verse novels represent "the nature of the age itself" (Moore 108).

Building on both Felluga and Tucker's work, Markovits's *The Victorian Verse-Novel: Aspiring to Life* (2017), which also takes a thematic and formalist approach to the verse novel, is the most comprehensive analysis of the genre in Victorian studies to date. Markovits makes a number of important claims about the verse novel, including the genre's tendency toward "self-conscious intertextuality" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 35) and its emphasis on the representation of

modern life, citing one of the most famous passages in *Aurora Leigh*—when EBB makes the case for treating the events of contemporary life as epic rather than turning to a chivalric past—as fundamentally characteristic of the genre (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 1-2).[19] Most importantly for Markovits, however, "form and content intersect" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 269) in verse novels. Highlighting the verse novel's "hybrid nature," she argues that "poets turned to the mixed form to try to resolve tensions between the novelistic (present, objective, real) and the poetic (past, subjective, ideal)" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 7). *Aurora Leigh*, for instance, presented "a plot that joined quotidian narrative development with a desire to transcend the boundaries of the mundane" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 268). Like Felluga, Markovits considers love and marriage central preoccupations of the genre, emphasising the fact that verse novels frequently revise or resist the courtship plot so common in Victorian fiction by representing adulterous relationships, failed courtships, or life after marriage. "Victorian writers," she argues, "self-consciously used the generic indeterminacy of the verse-novel to contest social as well as literary norms, expressing a broad range of cultural concerns that prominently included, but were not limited to,

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[19] In the Fifth Book of *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora declares that "every age / Appears to souls who live in 't (ask Carlyle) / Most unheroic" (V.155-57, *WEBB* 3: 123), but insists that

> if there's room for poets in this world,
> A little overgrown, (I think there is)
> Their sole work is to represent the age,
> Their age, not Charlemagne's, – this live, throbbing age,
> That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires,
> And spends more passion, more heroic heat,
> Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing-rooms,
> Than Roland with his knights at Roncesvalles. (V.200-7, *WEBB* 3: 125)

She elaborates by pointing out that

> King Arthur's self
> Was commonplace to Lady Guenever;
> And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat
> As Fleet Street to our poets.
> Never flinch,
> But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
> Upon the burning lava of a song
> The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age. (V.210-16, *WEBB* 3: 125)

anxieties surrounding gender and marriage" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 7). Shifting away from the critical attention to epic in long narrative poems (offered by, for example, Tucker's *Epic*), which she contends produce a "resulting attention to war and nation-building" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 5), she situates love at the centre of her paradigm of the genre instead, dividing her book into two sections on temporality and spatiality. She contends that verse novels are highly self-conscious about temporality and frequently vacillate between, and sometimes try to reconcile, the forward progress of narrative with the stasis of the lyric present. By embedding lyrics within or between the parts of a narrative poem, verse novels can often hold two different kinds of time in tension, "lyric's *kairos*—what might be called time out of time, or the capture of the moment of ecstatic intensity," and "*chronos*," which we find in narrative, "an awareness of time passing, of the inevitability not only of death but of aging, of duration" (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 8). Fane's *Denzil Place* thus "insists on the distinction between . . . durational (narrative) happiness and the momentary, albeit epiphanic (lyric), pleasures of sex" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 33). In contrast, Patmore's *The Angel in the House* seeks "to fashion a form appropriate to the representation of marriage" by "expanding lyric love through durational narrative" (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 80), while Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and *The Inn Album* aim "to convert the rectilinear progress of narrative sequence into something capable of spherical lyric transcendence" (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 126). For Markovits, verse novels such as *Amours de Voyage* also display an awareness of spatiality through a tendency to travel, which allows them "often [to] avoid not only the epic *teloi* of nation founding and empire building but also the novelistic *telos* of the courtship plot: marriage" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 22). The Victorian verse novel, according to Markovits, "combin[ed] the forward momentum of narrative drive with the ecstatic potential of lyric escape," providing "a

new model for generic experimentation" that influenced the modernist novel (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 275). My approach in this dissertation departs from Markovits's by focusing on case studies arranged chronologically and, rather than attempting to establish a grand narrative about the genre, by providing deep, focused analyses of specific works in which I demonstrate the political nature of personal relationships.

My approach also differs from Addison's wide-lensed approach to the verse novel in *A Genealogy of the Verse Novel* (2017). Addison's work is, on the whole, more descriptive than argumentative, seeking to catalogue the genre's development across various cultures, historical periods, and languages, but she also identifies a feminist valence to many verse novels. "Almost from the beginning," she states, "a thread of feminist or, at least, woman-oriented verse novels can be traced. The texts in this line," including Anna Seward's *Louisa* (1784), *Aurora Leigh, Denzil Place*, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's *Griselda* (1893), "mostly but not all authored by women, sympathetically anatomise the situation of specific women characters in social settings of their times, often focusing in radical ways on female sexuality in the process" (3).[20] This is a crucial point, but despite her recognition of this legacy in the genre, Addison's chapter on Victorian verse novels still only makes reference to *Aurora Leigh*, *Denzil Place*, and Marguerite A. Power's *Virginia's Hand* (1860), leaving open a gap in scholarship on verse novels written by women poets in the nineteenth century.

My dissertation makes two major interventions in scholarship on the Victorian verse novel. First, in its historicist approach, it challenges assumptions about the longevity of the verse novel in the nineteenth century by focusing on late-nineteenth-century verse novels, contributing

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[20] Addison contends that this trend persists "in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries," with "Susan Miles's *Lettice Delmer,* Eileen Hewitt's *Donna Juana*, Dorothy Porter's *The Monkey's Mask*, Diane Brown's *8 Stages of Grace*, Bernadine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe*, Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*, Ana Castillo's *Watercolor Women Opaque Men* and Pam Bernard's *Esther*, to name but a few" (Addison 4).

to criticism by scholars such as Addison, Felluga, Markovits, and Tucker. In his essay on the verse novel, Felluga outlines the received version of the literary history of the verse novel according to which the genre emerged in the 1850s and disappeared by the end of the 1860s:

> Here is the story as it has been told so far: in the middle of the nineteenth century, at the very heart and height of the Victorian period, a peculiar and peculiarly perverse genre, the verse novel, arose in England only to disappear again by the 1870s. By the late 1860s, the form had achieved enough cohesion and visibility to be parodied in Edmund C. Nugent's *Anderleigh Hall: A Novel in Verse* (1866), a sure sign of the genre's ossification and imminent obsolescence. (Felluga, "Verse Novel" 171)

This account of the verse novel's emergence and decline characterises it as an anomalous, short-lived category that includes only a handful of works within the genre.[21] Similarly, Moore states that "the mid-century proliferation of verse-novels . . . slowed to a trickle sometime in the 1860s or early 1870s" (198), citing "Modern Love" as one of the "later specimens" before the genre "die[d] out" (199). Tucker, Addison, and Markovits have all challenged this timeline. As noted above, Tucker contends that the genre emerged first briefly in the eighteenth century and remerged in the 1830s, then persisted until the 1890s. Addison goes back even further, suggesting that "a seventeenth-century poetic narrative, William Chamberlayne's *Pharonnida*, may in fact represent the first attempt at a verse novel in English" (2), but she classifies Byron's *Don Juan* as the first major example of the genre (2). She also identifies a "major outburst of production in the later nineteenth century," noting that the genre's "time of proliferation occupied a longer period than the mere two decades between 1850 and 1869 accorded it by

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[21] Felluga himself does not adhere to this timeline; he notes, for example, that verse novels such as Vladimir Nabakov's *Pale Fire* (1962), Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (1998) appear much later ("Verse Novel" 185). However, the works he focuses on—*Aurora Leigh*, *Amours de Voyage*, "Modern Love," and *The Ring and the Book*—were all published in this timeframe.

Felluga" (Addison 9). Markovits agrees with Felluga that the verse novel emerged recognizably alongside the explosion of the novel around mid-century, but she also traces the genre's beginnings to *Don Juan*.[22] She finds, too, that the verse novel's generic legacy persists in modernist novels such as Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* (1904), Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931).[23]

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[22] See also EBB's letter to Mary Russell Mitford in which she explicitly acknowledges the influence of *Don Juan* on her writing of *Aurora Leigh*: "I want to write a poem of a new class, in a measure—a Don Juan, without the mockery & impurity" (Letter to Mary Russell Mitford, 30 Dec. 1844, *BC* 9: 304). In a more recent article, Felluga also argues that *Don Juan* influenced many nineteenth-century British verse novels in its resistance to the realism associated with the novel and the idealism associated with lyric: *Don Juan* "questions the emergent theorization of the novel's verisimilitude and the eventual tendency in the Victorian period to establish realism as the highest cultural form for the nineteenth-century aesthetic" and "resists . . . lyricism's association with pure subjectivity or love or transcendent sublimity or the truth of the age," which "set the stage for the similar maneuvers performed by Victorian verse novels later in the century" ("Truth Is Stranger than Fiction" 108, 109). Markovits points out that *Don Juan* was also influential for Russian poet Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1833), "one of the earliest recognizable continental verse-novels," which was "born of reading *Don Juan*" and "appeared in Russia in volume form in 1833," but did not appear in English translation until 1881, "mak[ing] little direct mark on British practitioners in the genre" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 19). Markovits also notes the impact of early modern prose romances, Walter Scott's historical romances, metrical romances by writers such as Anna Seward, the metrical stories of George Crabbe, Romantic lyrical ballads and closet drama, and Spasmodic poetry on the development of the verse novel (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 17-19). She acknowledges, too, that "the roots of generic mixture lie even deeper in literary history: in the work of Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney, Milton, and . . . Shakespeare," authors who "provided examples to nineteenth-century poets interested in revising generic contracts in order to reinvigorate poetic vision" (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 20), but concludes that "the way Victorian verse-novelists filter their sources of inspiration through the contemporary phenomenon of the novel makes their poems something radically new" (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 21).

[23] These novels, Markovits argues, like verse novels, "combin[e] the forward momentum of narrative drive with the ecstatic potential of lyric escape" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 275). According to Markovits, who builds on the work of Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *The Golden Bowl* demonstrates an "ambivalence about closure" through James's dense prose style, which defers the conventional progression of a novelistic plot, an ambivalence that Markovits considers "characteristic of long narrative poems, including verse-novels" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 271). Of *The Good Soldier*, she suggests that "the novel's convoluted narrative progression, focus on marital discord, and Dowell's own unreliability as a narrator seem to gesture toward *The Ring and the Book*" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 270). *Ulysses*, "in the style of so many Victorian verse-novels . . . makes the old new by mixing things up," combining "a variety of formal innovations through the novel's eighteen episodes," including the "fugue-based lyricism of 'Sirens'; to the newspaper collage of 'Aeolus'; to the sharp, impressionistic episodic shifts of 'Wandering Rocks'; to the Browningesque . . . split perspective of 'Nausicaa' . . . ; to what has been described as 'the narrative closet drama' of 'Circe' . . . ; to the amazing prose-poem that is 'Penelope'" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 273). Markovits concludes that "each of these episodes demonstrates the spirit of generic experimentation that characterized the verse-novels of the previous century" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 273). Finally, *The Waves*, she argues, features "a series of rapidly transitioning monologues" and "interspersing the monologue sections, descriptive passages, set in italic font, portray the progress of the sun's diurnal course over a coastal scene. The combined effect," according to Markovits, "closely resembles the back and forth between narrative sections and intercalary lyrics that is so frequent a feature of Victorian verse-novels" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 266).

These critics have thus established that the genre predates the 1850s and persists well past the 1860s. However, they do not provide close analyses of works published in the 1880s or 1890s. In her wide-ranging and comprehensive work, Markovits provides readings of earlier works such as Patmore's *Angel in the House* (1854-62), Meredith's *Lucile* (1860), and Browning's *The Inn Album* (1875), but the only work published after the 1870s that she briefly examines is Bulwer-Lytton's *Glenaveril* (1885).[24] My dissertation, which analyses works published from 1867 to 1891, therefore expands our growing understanding of the genre by focusing in depth on late-century verse novels.

Second, the major aim of my project is to correct the underrepresentation of women poets in scholarship on the verse novel, a serious omission given *Aurora Leigh*'s popularity and influence as a work of feminist literature. Not only was EBB's verse novel highly acclaimed by prominent writers of the period, including Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, John Ruskin, and Algernon Charles Swinburne (Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 32), but Stone explains that it also "reflect[ed] the growing activism of mid-Victorian feminist reformers" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 143) such as Barbara Leigh Smith (later Bodichon) and Frances Power Cobbe. *Aurora Leigh*, which "confronts the pressing questions associated with women's work, women's education, women's property rights, [and] battered wives and systemic prostitution in their complex interactions with" class inequality and socialist agitation for reform (Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 143), was understood immediately by readers as a feminist text. Although there is some dispute about the degree to which EBB intended to address the "woman question,"[25] in its reception *Aurora Leigh* was unquestionably perceived as a work aligned with

[24] Bulwer-Lytton published *Lucile* under the pseudonym Owen Meredith and *Glenaveril* under his proper name, Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, so I use these names accordingly.

[25] In a May 1858 letter to Julia Martin, EBB asked, "Did you see in the list of lectures to be delivered by Gerald Massey, (advertised in the Athenaeum) one on 'Aurora Leigh & the woman's question.'? I did not fancy that this

the women's rights movement and adopted as such. The impact of *Aurora Leigh* on the feminist activists that Stone mentions, for example, is clear in the citations of EBB's verse novel in their own publications on "the woman question." As Stone notes, Smith used a quotation from *Aurora Leigh* as one of the epigraphs to the 1857 pamphlet *Women and Work* (Stone 174),[26] which she had first published in *Waverley Journal* (the newspaper Smith and Bessie Rayner Parkes took over in 1857, a precursor to the feminist *English Woman's Journal* that they co-founded in 1858 and that led to the establishment of the Langham Place Group), and Cobbe references *Aurora Leigh* in her essay "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" (1862) (Stone 174-75). Arguing that women's art is characterised by strength rather than "softness and weakness," Cobbe asserts that the

> age has given us in the three greatest departments of art—poetry, painting, and sculpture—women who, whatever be their faults or merits, are pre-eminently distinguished for one quality above all others—namely, strength. *Aurora Leigh* is perhaps

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poem would be so identified as it has been, with that question, which was only a collateral object with my intentions in writing" (*BC* 25: 120), but Stone notes that EBB also refers to the work of Bessie Rayner Parkes in her correspondence in a way that indicates her alliance with feminist activists. In a 20 October 1856 letter to Isa Blagden, for example, EBB mentions that "Bessie Parkes is writing very vigorous articles on the woman question, in opposition to M[r] Patmore, poet & husband, who expounds infamous doctrines on the same subject—see 'National Review',—& sends them 'with the author's regards' to M[rs]. Browning– Oh if you heard Bessie Parkes! she & the rest of us militant, foam with rage– But he'll have the best of it as far as I am concerned: inasmuch as I hear he is to review in the North British my poor 'Aurora Leigh,' who has the unfeminine impropriety to express her opinion on various 'abstract subjects,'—which Mr Patmore cant abide, he says" (*BC* 23: 103-4).

[26] The epigraph is from the Eighth Book of *Aurora Leigh*:

> Be sure, no earnest work
> Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,
> Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,
> It is not gathered as a grain of sand
> To enlarge the sum of human action used
> For carrying out God's end. No creature works
> So ill, observe, that therefore he's cashiered.
> The honest earnest man must stand and work;
> The woman also, – otherwise she drops
> At once below the dignity of man,
> Accepting serfdom. (EBB, *Aurora Leigh* VIII.705-15, *WEBB* 3: 230)

The epigraph is missing line 709, "To enlarge the sum of human action used," and in line 711 states "that there" rather than "that therefore."

> the least 'Angelical' poem in the language, and bears the relation to *Psyche* that a chiselled steel corset does to a silk boddice [sic] with lace trimmings. The very hardness of its rhythm, its sturdy wrestlings and grapplings, one after another, with all the sternest problems of our social life—its forked-lightning revelations of character—and finally, the storm of glorified passion with which it closes in darkness (like nothing else we ever read since the mountain-tempest scene in *Childe Harold*)—all this takes us miles away from the received notion of a women's poetry. (Cobbe, "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" 96-97)

As Cobbe puts it, *Aurora Leigh* redefined women's poetry by modelling strength in its content ("its sturdy wrestlings and grapplings . . . with all the sternest problems of our social life"), as well as in its form ("the very hardness of its rhythm") and genre ("its forked-lightning revelations of character" suggesting the verse novel's dramatic power, with the comparison to Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* [1812-18] highlighting the epic conventions of EBB's narrative). For readers of *Aurora Leigh*, then, both in content and form EBB's verse novel was associated with feminist politics. Suffragist Susan B. Anthony even carried a copy of *Aurora Leigh* with her as she travelled across America advocating for women's rights (Stone 32; Reynolds viii).

Yet, as I noted at the beginning of this introduction, most other verse novels that receive critical attention are works by male writers. In Felluga's essay, for instance, EBB is the only woman poet profiled; although he concedes that a number of other works could also be considered verse novels, all the other nineteenth-century contenders he names are by male authors: Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, Tennyson's "Maud" (1855) and *Idylls of the King*, and Patmore's *Angel in the House*. In Markovits's book, which covers at least fifteen

works, only a third of them are by women. Despite the fact that she takes *Aurora Leigh* as her starting point, the majority of the works she studies are by male poets, the exceptions being Fane's *Denzil Place*, George Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868), and the American poet Lucy Larcom's *An Idyl of Work* (1875). Moore, who analyses the works of Tennyson, Clough, Patmore, and EBB, states that her work actually "extricates both *The Angel* and *Aurora Leigh* from critical debates about their relation to the nineteenth-century 'woman question'" (13) in its emphasis on the poems' representations of modern life.[27] As this overview illustrates, verse novels by women poets remain largely unexplored in Victorian studies. Rather than attempting to trace specifically how *Aurora Leigh* was reworked by these poets, this dissertation seeks to recover other verse novels by women poets that followed in the wake of EBB's monumental work. I examine how different kinds of generic combination in the non-canonical works of Augusta Webster, Violet Fane, Emily Pfeiffer, and Emily Hickey relate to the poets' engagement with specific political issues, often in the context of contemporary legislative measures.

Defining the Verse Novel

I began this project with questions of taxonomy (what is a verse novel? What novelistic and poetic conventions does it incorporate? Beyond verse and prose, what characterises poetry and the novel?), so it is important to define what I mean by *verse novel* in relation to other modern critics' definitions of the genre. As Felluga remarks, "the term 'verse novel' is surprisingly difficult to define given the sheer heterogeneity of the examples one can point to in the

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[27] "*Aurora Leigh* does, of course," Moore concedes, "have plenty to say about women's education, bodies, artistic abilities, exploitation and sufferings, social and domestic roles, and relation to men; but," she insists, "to read the poem primarily as a commentary on these issues is, to some extent, to substitute a reductive cultural formation for a highly complex and original work" (53-54).

nineteenth century," as the genre "almost inevitably engages, overlaps or appropriates other poetic subgenres," from sonnet sequence to epic to dramatic monologue ("Verse Novel" 172). According to Addison, "to be classified as a verse novel, a text must be both verse and novel. While verse is mostly easy to recognise by its lineation, the novel in its broadest definition is very difficult to pin down, being extremely versatile and ever-changing" (*Genealogy* 7). Consequently, she suggests that "a rough summary of the novelistic features sought in each text includes substantial length, contemporaneity, verisimilitude, dialogism, characters possessing at least a modicum of interiority, a reasonably unified plot and a fictional world containing a redundancy of mundane objects" (Addison, *Genealogy* 7).

For Markovits, "a plausible definition for the genre runs along these lines: 'a verse-novel is a long narrative poem realistically chronicling bourgeois life within a contemporary setting'" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 2). Yet she also acknowledges that the works she analyses do not all "fit such a definition neatly" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 2), and these parameters do immediately invite more questions: How do we define *realistically*? What is the minimum length that a poem must be to qualify as *long* and therefore a verse novel? As a narrative poem, does a verse novel contain more action than dialogue or lyric introspection? What about verse novels such as *The Ring and the Book*, which is a series of monologues rather than a progressive narrative and does not take place in a contemporary setting but was serialised in multiple volumes in the manner of much prose fiction of the period?

Markovits therefore pares back her classification to some formal characteristics—verse novels "are 'poetry' in the simplest sense that they are lineated" and "all are long (thousands rather than hundreds of lines, although the length varies dramatically)" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 3)—and generic self-consciousness: "all show self-conscious kinship with the novel" (*Victorian*

Verse-Novel 3). For example, she contends that verse novels often demonstrate an association with the novel by incorporating colloquial language "to undermine the distinctions between verse and prose, often in the interests of radical ideological and political agendas" (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 15). This kinship with the novel also manifests in the use of plot devices that demonstrate an intertextual relation to prose fiction. As I noted above, many verse novels revise or resist the marriage plot, but there are also more specific allusions to novels. *Aurora Leigh*, for instance, famously evokes Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)[28]: the fire at Leigh Hall that results in Romney's blindness recalls Rochester's blindness after the fire at Thornfield. Fane's *Denzil Place*, which similarly includes a fire at Farleigh Court in which Geoffrey Denzil is severely injured, is doubly allusive, referring back to both *Aurora Leigh* and *Jane Eyre*.

The shortcoming of these definitions is that, like Henry James in looking for "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*" (1912), they indicate a tendency to look for the novel in the verse novel, taking for granted that the *verse* part of the verse novel is equated with poetry. But, of course, poetry is not reducible merely to verse. Epic poetry, for instance, includes certain conventions,[29] while the dramatic monologue, lyric (and within lyric, the sonnet, for example),

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[28] In a letter to Anna Jameson dated 26 December 1856, EBB herself insisted that she did not remember the scene. In response to Jameson's query about "the likeness to the catastrophe of Jane Eyre," she wrote that "I have sent to the library here for Jane Eyre (but have'nt got it yet) in order to refresh my memory on this point—but, as far as I do recall the facts, the hero was monstrously disfigured & blinded in a fire the particulars of which escape me, & the circumstance of his being hideously scarred is the thing impressed chiefly on the reader's mind: certainly it remains innermost in mine. Now, if you read over again those pages of my poem, you will find that the only injury received by Romney in the fire, was from a blow, & from the emotion produced by the *circumstances* of the fire. Not only, did he *not* lose his eyes in the fire, but he describes the ruin of his house, as no blind man could. He was standing there, a spectator. Afterwards he had a fever, . . and the eyes, the visual nerve, perished . . showing no external stain—perished as Milton's did" (*BC* 23: 164).

[29] For instance, as Tucker explains, epics tell the story of a culture or nation (*Epic* 13-14), and so one of the characteristics that differentiates epic from other kinds of narrative poetry is scope. By scope he means not only length but the sense of the story as expansive and historical, the "cross[ing] [of] a threshold where the reader is identifiably addressed as the member of a collectivity that knows itself as such in historical time" (*Epic* 16). In other words, epic scale is based upon "how extensive an audience interpellation the poem performs" (Tucker, *Epic* 18). Scope is often implied through the numbered books of epics (frequently nine or twelve, but also twenty-four and higher) (Tucker, *Epic* 16), as well as "linear and spatial dimensions; that the poetic line should be long and the page full was a serious matter" (Tucker, *Epic* 17). Some of epic's more "patently conspicuous conventions," which poets consciously used to signal their participation in the genre but which Tucker sees as "secondary characteristics" (*Epic*

and ballad feature other conventions, including different metres, stanzaic structures, and rhyme patterns, as well as different types of relationships between poetic speaker and audience. Poets also often rework forms for ironic and critical purposes, revising conventional formal characteristics to disrupt conventional ideological associations. There is still minimal scholarship that addresses how the conventions of other poetic genres such as the dramatic monologue, the sonnet, the ballad, or verse drama are incorporated into verse novels. My own definition, although it remains fairly broad, provides a slight corrective by not limiting the poetic elements of the genre solely to verse.[30]

My classification of the verse novel, not unlike the ones outlined above, is based on the definition of *genre* as "a particular style or category of works of art," particularly "a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose" (*OED*, "genre," n., 1.b.). This definition sums up how I use the term throughout this dissertation, with the additional understanding that, as genre theorist John Frow explains, genres are historically contingent rather than stable, transhistorical categories (71), and so I refer to the *Victorian* verse novel specifically.[31] Furthermore, I recognise that literary works do not belong to a single genre based

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25) to the genre's aim of establishing cultural cohesion, include "the invocation [to the Muse], the [extended] simile, [and] the descent from heaven or into hell" (*Epic* 25), as well as "the catalogue or inventory" and "the embedded prophecy or flashback" (*Epic* 29).

[30] Although Addison's chapters, arranged chronologically, are organised according to different verse types (such as hexameters, blank verse, and free verse), these entries are primarily descriptive, intended to catalogue the different features of various works. In more depth, Markovits presses the implications of combining narrative and lyric poetry in Victorian verse novels, often noting how works incorporate or resist epic or lyric conventions, but even she suggests that "the narrative portions . . . seem to align naturally with their 'novel' designations, [and] the interpolated lyrics they contain come to stand for their allegiance to 'verse'" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 7).

[31] Similarly, literary and cultural studies scholar Caroline Levine—who asserts in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015) that "genre involves acts of classifying texts" through "an ensemble of characteristics, including styles, themes, and marketing conventions" that "allows both producers and audiences to group texts into certain kinds" (13)—argues that "any attempt to recognize a work's genre is a historically specific and interpretive act" (13). In fact, Levine distinguishes between *genre* and *form* based on historical contingency. Whereas genre is historically contingent, and "any attempt to recognize a work's genre is a historically specific and interpretive act" (Levine 13), she contends that form is characterized by a stability that does not apply to genres, which are constantly reshaped and redefined: "Forms, defined as patternings, shapes, and arrangements, have a different relation to context [than genre]: they can organize both social and literary objects, and they can remain stable over time" (Levine 13). "More stable than genre," forms are "configurations and arrangements [that] organize materials in

on strict adherence to a fixed set of criteria such as formal features or theme, but that "all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to one or more genres, which in turn they may modify" (Frow 1). Generic boundaries are inherently porous, so works may simultaneously belong to multiple genres. Finally, I follow Frow in considering "genre classifications" as "a matter of defining the possible *uses* that texts may have" (25). I therefore provide a fairly broad definition of the verse novel based on flexible criteria related to formal and thematic characteristics—length, generic combination, and modernity—as well as its "purpose" or "use," which I argue is to address specific political issues.

In simplest terms, a verse novel is a long work of narrative verse that combines elements of both the novel and poetry and typically features content more conventionally associated with domestic fiction, often for the purpose of addressing contemporary political issues. Verse novels run hundreds, and more often thousands, of lines (the shortest works in this dissertation fall just shy of a hundred pages). They might include characteristics of the novel such as plot, narrative perspective, omniscient narration, and free indirect speech, and they may incorporate poetic forms such as the sonnet and the ballad (often reworking conventional stanzaic structures, rhymes, and tropes) and experiment with different types of poetic voice and modes of address associated with, for example, lyric and the dramatic monologue. Verse novels are also modern works, preoccupied with the conditions of contemporary life. However, they do not merely, as the *Princeton Encyclopedia* suggests, seek to represent modern life with "the verisimilitude of the realist novel." The modernity of verse novels does not stem solely from an attempt to portray

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distinct and iterable ways no matter what their context or audience," therefore "migrat[ing] across contexts in a way that genres cannot. They also work on different scales, as small as punctuation marks and as vast as multiplot narratives or national boundaries" (Levine 13). The difference between genre and form ultimately, then, is that genres contain forms: "Genres, then, can be defined as customary constellations of elements into historically recognizable groupings of artistic objects, bringing together forms with themes, styles, and situations of reception, while forms are organizations or arrangements that afford repetition and portability across materials and contexts" (Levine 13-14).

the details of contemporary life through setting and dialogue. Although many of them do, this standard would disqualify Browning's *The Ring and the Book* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, works that otherwise fulfil the criteria of the genre. Indeed, as Stone points out, although *Aurora Leigh* is replete with topical references to subjects from women's education to the Irish famine, as well as descriptions of the railway and the urbanity of London, Paris, and Florence (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 142-43), "at a deeper level . . . the intense modernity of *Aurora Leigh* for mid-Victorians sprang less from its topical allusions and contemporary scenes than from the social issues it engaged" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 143). In my view, the modernity of all verse novels manifests in their engagement with specific contemporary socio-political issues, which may be addressed through the strategic use of a historical or mythological setting (as is the case in *The Ring and the Book* and *Idylls of the King*, and, as I argue in chapter 3, in Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew*), but which always occurs through their generic combination. A verse novel is thus not merely a long poem that provides a narrative situated in a contemporary context but rather one that politicises its generic combination of novelistic and poetic elements, mobilising genre to address modern political issues.

The limitation of this definition is that it does not account for the nuances of generic combination by specifying *which* poetic and novelistic genres a verse novel combines or *how* they are combined, whether homogeneously blended or retaining a degree of heterogeneity. However, in *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (2009), David Duff offers productive terminology for analysing different types and degrees of generic combination—rough-mixing and smooth-mixing[32]—that I use throughout the dissertation in an effort to do justice to the

[32] Markovits cites Duff's work several times in her book, but she does so primarily in referring to verse novels that combine lyric and narrative as roughly mixed rather than, as I am doing, invoking Duff's terms to consider more nuanced combinations of genre in both roughly and smoothly mixed works. "As David Duff has argued," she writes in her introduction, "the hybrid poetry of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries tends toward what he calls

particularities of generic combination in each work. Duff explains that, in the early nineteenth century, there was a "shift from a classical poetics of generic separation" that distinguished narrative and mimetic modes in poetry "to a Romantic poetics of generic mixture" (*Romanticism* 162) with less distinct generic classifications. "Smooth-mixing," according to Duff, "is a type of generic combination in which the formal boundaries are dissolved: a synthesis occurs in which heterogeneous elements are transformed and assimilated, creating the aesthetic effect of 'organic unity'" (Duff, *Romanticism* 178). In contrast, "rough-mixing is a type of generic combination in which the formal surfaces of the constituent genres are left intact: heterogeneous elements are juxtaposed rather than integrated, thus creating the aesthetic effect of discontinuity, or 'roughening'" (Duff, *Romanticism* 178). Smoothly mixed works give "the impression of seamless unity," while in roughly mixed works "the joins are visible" (Duff, *Romanticism* 178). But smoothness does not equate simplicity. While *Aurora Leigh*, for example, is smoothly mixed and thus appears to be a unified work (recall EBB's desire that *Aurora Leigh* "hav[e] unity, as a work of art"),[33] it is in fact, as Stone puts it, a "teeming, heterogeneous text" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 137), combining, as I noted above, a *Künstlerroman* with lyric and epic elements, sage discourse, and a narrative voice derived from the dramatic monologue and the first-person novel. Therefore, regardless of whether their surface appearances are rough or smooth, verse novels are

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'smooth-mixing,' the blending of genres within a medium of consistent metrical form (paradigmatically, blank verse). But Victorian verse-novels far more frequently 'rough-mix,' awkwardly but powerfully combining passages of radically distinct verse forms. Most commonly, these works intersperse blank-verse narrative sections with embedded or intercalary songs and short poems" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 6). She also points out that the verse novel needs to be situated within a longer history of generic experimentation in the Romantic period (Markovits, *Victorian Verse-Novel* 18-19). Moore also refers to Duff's work in analysing *The Angel in the House* as a smoothly mixed verse novel, but it is one of several frameworks that she applies in her "cherry-picking operation" of genre theories (163).

[33] Duff does not identify *Aurora Leigh* as an instance of smooth-mixing, but he does list Samuel Taylor Coleridge's conversation poems and blank-verse works such as William Wordsworth's *Prelude* (completed 1805, published 1850) (Duff 179) as examples.

all works of complex, and often defamiliarising, generic combination that, I argue, is related to their politics.

Chapter Outlines

Every chapter of this dissertation relates a verse novel to a contemporary political context, establishing a correspondence between the generic combination in each work and a topical political issue, often with reference to specific legislative measures. Since I seek to establish a correlation between generic combination and politics in the verse novel, my methodological approach differs to some degree in each chapter in accordance with the demands of each work. I consistently analyse poetic form and poetics, but in chapter 1, I draw on narratology, while chapters 2 and 3 incorporate original archival research. Because most of these poets and their works are non-canonical and critically overlooked, each chapter also includes a plot summary and authorial biography to familiarise readers with the plot and formal structure of each work, as well as with the authors themselves.

My focus is on the late Victorian verse novels of four middle- and upper-class women poets who wrote prolifically and experimented widely with genre, including prose fiction. These works challenge assumptions about the longevity of the genre and the number of women who experimented with it, as noted above, and expand our understanding of the definition of the verse novel itself. With the exception of Fane's *Denzil Place*, which has received critical attention from Markovits and other scholars, these works are non-canonical texts that, to my knowledge, have never received sustained analysis. As Markovits argues of *Denzil Place*, these works critique conventional middle- and upper-class domestic ideology and frequently depict marital unhappiness and adultery, but they also crucially expand our understanding of the verse novel in

their engagement with political and social issues through generic combination, demonstrating how women poets after EBB similarly politicised genre to address women's suffrage, adultery, marital rape, and political sovereignty and land use in the Scottish Highlands, as well as socialism and the Irish Question. Indeed, Webster and Pfeiffer were both established women of letters who also wrote about feminist issues in periodical essays that illuminate the politics of their literary works.[34] The works I analyse range from the 1860s to the early 1890s, and the chapters are a series of case studies arranged chronologically, which demonstrate clear lines of continuity and discontinuity. I do not make a claim for a distinct pattern of literary historical development or seek to establish a grand narrative about the progressive development of the genre but, rather, analyse different iterations of form and politics.

Chapter 1 focuses on Augusta Webster's "Lota," a three-part verse novel of 89 pages published in the volume *A Woman Sold and Other Poems* (1867). "Lota" exhibits the influence of *Aurora Leigh* in several ways, notably in its use of blank verse and a *Bildungsroman* plot, as well as in the Italian-English heritage of the titular female character, who, like Aurora, travels to England to stay with relatives after being orphaned in Italy. In contrast to *Aurora Leigh*, however, "Lota" presents the *Bildungsroman* of a male protagonist, Gervase Lester, a supposedly socially and politically progressive member of the landed gentry who falls in love with and proposes to the mysterious Lota Deveril. The major conflict of the plot emerges when

[34] In *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (2009), Linda H. Peterson makes the case that the periodical culture of the early nineteenth century allowed women writers to cultivate professional authorial identities by writing essays and reviews and establishing their authority as critical thinkers: "it was in periodicals that the modern conception of the man and woman of letters emerged: the writer whose critical thinking about culture and society rose above the commonplace" (5). According to Peterson, the factors of "economic success, critical esteem, and lasting reputation" ultimately "determined whether a woman writer might be designated a 'woman of letters'" (6), and although she focuses on authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, and Alice Meynell, Webster and Pfeiffer also fulfil these criteria. Webster published essays in the *Examiner*, which although initially unsigned were collected in the volume *A Housewife's Opinions* (1878) under her name, and she later became the poetry reviewer for the *Athenaeum*. Pfeiffer published several signed essays in the *Contemporary Review*.

Lota reveals that she is already married and estranged from her adulterous husband, Emilio. Gervase pledges to find her husband in the hope that he will discover him deceased and Lota free to remarry. However, he finds Emilio alive and, in a bizarre reversal of his original intention, helps him reconcile with Lota. The verse novel ends with the implication that Gervase will marry his cousin, Evelyn, a conventional "angel-in-the-house" figure. Superficially, the story seems to fulfil the conventional marriage plot, with all the characters happily paired off at the end. However, I argue that Webster's verse novel is a feminist work that, through narrative voice and perspective, highlights the inadequate representation of Lota's voice in the third-person narrative focalised through Gervase. In the context of campaigns for women's suffrage leading up to the Second Reform Act of 1867, "Lota" exposes how a story of male development eclipses one of failed marriage and female disenfranchisement.

Webster's verse novel is an example of "smooth-mixing," offering what appears to be a unified narrative but actually containing a subtle combination of the *Bildungsroman* and the dramatic monologue, closely fused in what Armstrong calls a "double poem." In *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), Armstrong defines the double poem as a work in which two poems exist simultaneously, one expressive and one skeptical (12), the latter an epistemological questioning of the conditions that produce the former. Webster is a poet most well known for her dramatic monologues, the genre that, according to Armstrong, typifies the double poem. I build on Armstrong's theory to argue that "Lota" is a double poem that both tells the story of Gervase's growth and incorporates the irony of the dramatic monologue to make that story an object of critique. I draw on narratologist Gérard Genette's concept of focalisation[35] to

[35] As I explain in chapter 1, focalisation refers to the perspective, usually of the narrator or a character within the narrative, that shapes the narrative by controlling the information available to the reader, "the narrative adopting or seeming to adopt what we ordinarily call the participant's 'vision' or 'point of view'" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 162). The only scholarship I have come across that applies narratology in the study of generic combination in long

demonstrate how analysing the narrative perspective in “Lota” like the subjective utterance in a dramatic monologue produces a feminist critique of the representation of women in a narrative dominated by a male character’s subjectivity. In contrast to many Victorian *Bildungsromane*, “Lota” is not narrated in the first person by its protagonist, but instead by an unnamed omniscient first-person narrator. Yet the narrative is still primarily focalised through Gervase. His subjectivity dominates the narrative through free indirect speech and controls the representation of other characters for most of the verse novel. When the narrative is focalised through Gervase, it seems to follow the conventional *Bildungsroman* plot trajectory toward the fulfillment of the marriage plot. Only when Lota tells her own story in an embedded first-person narrative is the focalisation through Gervase disrupted. Granted direct speech for the first time, Lota offers an account of her personal history previously obscured by Gervase’s perspective. Her alternative story provides a counter-narrative of failed marriage and female disempowerment, a counter-narrative ironically eclipsed by the verse novel’s conclusion, focalised once again through Gervase. As a double poem, “Lota” thus presents two narratives, one of male development and one of female disenfranchisement, ironically to highlight the problem of a single male perspective mediating the portrayal of women’s experiences and demonstrate the importance of women’s opportunity for narrative self-representation. Finally, I argue that “Lota”

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narrative poems is Monique R. Morgan’s *Narrative Means, Lyric Ends: Temporality in the Nineteenth-Century British Long Poem* (2009). However, Morgan does not analyse any of the verse novels that I study in this dissertation. Her book examines the combinations of lyric and narrative in *Don Juan*, *The Prelude*, *Aurora Leigh*, and *The Ring and the Book*, with a particular emphasis on temporality. In her chapter on *Aurora Leigh*, for example, Morgan focuses on time of narration—specifically the shift from the retrospective narration of events in the distant past to the more immediate narration, one resembling journal-writing and characterised by epistolarity, of events in the near past—and the conventional gender associations of these types of narration. She suggests that “Aurora takes on the varied conventions of the (typically feminine) narrator of a diaristic novel, the (typically masculine) retrospective narrator of autobiography, and the (ambivalently gendered) spontaneous lyric poet” in order to “emphasize the aesthetic and ideological limitations of each, arguing for the necessity of the generic hybridity the poem embodies” (20). In Genette’s narratological terms (Morgan does not use this vocabulary), her analysis traces the change from what he refers to as “types of narrating,” from “subsequent narration” to “interpolated” and “simultaneous” narration (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 217). My work differs significantly in its focus on narrative voice and focalisation.

equates voice with representation, particularly the agency to speak and act on one's own behalf, and that this politicisation of voice relates to Webster's middle-class feminist politics, particularly her support for women's suffrage. Webster participated in the failed campaign to include women in the franchise extension being granted to men under the Second Reform Act of 1867, that was passed only months after the publication of Webster's verse novel, and "Lota"'s critique of lack of voice as lack of representation resonates with her contemporaneous political concerns.

In chapter 2, I turn to *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse* (1875), a work of 252 pages that, as a long narrative poem with lyric poems interspersed between its twelve parts, is more roughly mixed than "Lota." Written by poet and socialite Violet Fane (the pseudonym of Mary Montgomerie Singleton, later Lady Currie), *Denzil Place* presents the story of a young woman named Constance Leigh (whose name and orphaned status both evoke *Aurora Leigh*), her arranged marriage to a much older man, Sir John L'Estrange, and her adulterous relationship with their neighbour, Geoffrey Denzil. The narrative, recounted retrospectively by a sympathetic first-person narrator, highlights the banality of Constance's life with her husband. Through a generic combination of lyric and narrative verse, *Denzil Place* evokes sympathy for Constance's adultery by demonstrating how she is trapped in a banal marriage and presents her infidelity as an act of agency, a provocative disruption of the restrictive and mundane existence of an upper-class married woman. In the narrative, the narrator characterises Constance's arranged marriage as bondage and explicitly expresses sympathy for her protagonist, and the lyrics interrupt the narrative at regular intervals with expressions of interiority from an ambiguously positioned speaker. These lyrics, unattributed to a particular voice, compel the reader to identify with the

emotional expression of the lyric subject and, through proximity to the narrative, evoke sympathy for Constance as well.

Denzil Place is the verse novel that has received the most critical attention of all the works I analyse in this dissertation, primarily for its sympathetic account of female adultery. However, scholars have not explored the contemporary social and political context that makes Fane's verse novel such a bold feminist work or the relationship between her politics and the generic combination in *Denzil Place*. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Fane's work—both in its content and its roughly mixed form—rejects contemporary attitudes toward women's adultery, notably the stigma attached to women's extramarital sexual activity in the mid-1870s, after the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) and the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869), laws that reflected contemporary anxieties about the purity of women's bodies and the danger of their sexual autonomy. Fane was not involved (as far as I know) in advocating for political reform, but she did have a personal stake in contemporary discourse about sexual morality, especially adultery, because of her own unhappy marriage to her first husband (from whom she debated applying for a separation) and her multiple and public extra-marital affairs. I incorporate original research from her archives, both unpublished letters and fair copies of poems, to establish how *Denzil Place* was shaped by her personal experience.

Chapter 3 focuses on Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884), which, like *Denzil Place*, is concerned with issues of consent and agency, particularly women's sexual autonomy, and addresses these issues in a roughly mixed generic form. Indeed, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* contains the most overt juxtaposition of genres of all of the works analysed in this dissertation. Boldly combining not just poetry and the novel but 184 pages of verse and prose, Pfeiffer's work presents simultaneously a narrative poem and a

prose frame narrative about the poem, a "rhyme" with the first-person prose account of "how it grew." It begins with the contemporary prose narrative, in which the first-person narrator travels with her husband to the Scottish Isle of Mull, where she writes a poem retelling the sixteenth-century story of the Lady of the Rock, Elizabeth Campbell, and her unwanted marriage to the Maclean Chief of Mull, her resistance to marital rape, and her survival of attempted wife-murder when he strands her on a rock in the Sound of Mull to drown. The narrator's husband then reads the poem aloud to a small audience that offers commentary on each part of the poem as it unfolds. Pfeiffer's work mixes genres and temporalities, weaving them together in a complex metanarrative format that, I argue, critiques conventional Victorian middle-class marital ideology and provides an alternative model of marital union.

The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock is not quite a verse novel. It embeds a poem within a prose narrative rather than integrating novelistic conventions such as plot into a work written in verse (as the other works I analyse in this dissertation do), a distinction that makes *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* more of a para-verse novel than a verse novel proper. However, as Duff points out, "the act of belonging to a genre involves both adoption of and resistance to its conventions" (*Modern Genre Theory* 8) because genres are mutable, unavoidably referential categories that demand contextualisation in relation to other genres and are constantly in the process of redefinition: "Generic codes are both invoked and modified in the act of writing, and it is through contact with the generic that individual identity is established. That is to say, the poet works against as well as within genre; more often than not, within and against several genres simultaneously" (Duff, *Romanticism* viii). According to Derrida in "The Law of Genre" (1980), genre is defined by "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity" (59) because "every text participates in one or several genres" (65). In this sense, although it differs from the verse

novel in its incorporation of prose with verse, Pfeiffer's work also exhibits many characteristics of the genre, clearly influenced by *Aurora Leigh*, *The Princess*, and *The Ring and the Book*, as well as Pfeiffer's own earlier work *Margaret; or, the Motherless*, a verse novel published in 1861 that anticipates *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* in the way it addresses marital bondage and the need for women's autonomy. As in these verse novels, too, the generic combination in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is politicised, conveying through form its critique of conventional Victorian middle-class marital ideology. The Victorian middle-class understanding of marriage was conventionally predicated on the idea of total unity between spouses based on the absorption of the wife's identity into that of her husband (the doctrine of coverture). In the context of contemporaneous arguments for women's enfranchisement, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* rejects the concept of such complete unity—which, as the embedded poem highlights, sanctioned marital rape since a woman was considered her husband's property—in its overt, uneven generic combination and embedded narrative structure. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the roughly mixed prose narrative and poem suggests an alternative model of marriage as a union in which partners are not wholly absorbed into one unit but instead retain individual autonomy, one that gains additional resonance through the work's setting in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. I draw on original archival research, specifically Pfeiffer's unpublished letters to the prominent Scottish professor and nationalist John Stuart Blackie, to demonstrate her connection to Scottish politics. By incorporating two different cases of dispossession—women in marriage and Scotland (the Highlands and Islands in particular) in the United Kingdom—*The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* critiques the idea of unity in which one party, whether individual person or country, is absorbed into another and loses distinction and autonomy.

Finally, chapter 4 takes as its subject Emily Hickey's 90-page verse novel "Michael Villiers, Idealist," published in the volume *Michael Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems* in 1891. Like *Aurora Leigh* and "Lota," Hickey's verse novel is a blank-verse *Bildungsroman*, and it tells the story of Michael Villiers, an Anglo-Irish orphan who is raised by his wealthy upper-class English uncle and inherits the latter's wealth and property in both England and Ireland, but comes to support socialism and Irish nationalism. He falls in love with and marries a young woman named Lucy Vere, and the two commit themselves to working for class equality and Irish land reform and Home Rule, striving to achieve the political ideals referred to in the title of the verse novel.

This work, and this chapter, deviate from the previous ones by focusing neither on the representation of a female character in the verse novel nor on political issues and specific legislative measures related to the "woman question." Yet "Michael Villiers" aligns with the other works in this dissertation in multiple ways. The protagonist, Michael, is highly feminised as a way of emphasising his Irishness (Ireland itself is also feminised, consistently characterised as the motherland, as a way of emphasising its lack of sovereignty, similar to Pfeiffer's representation of Scottish land issues in chapter 3). Furthermore, Hickey, although well known as the co-founder of the Browning Society and editor of the 1884 edition of Browning's verse drama *Strafford*, was heavily influenced by the work of EBB. In an essay about Hickey published in the *Irish Monthly* in 1903, the author of the article includes some reminiscences from the poet in which she cites EBB as an important poetic influence, one whose work "took a great hold of me . . . as a sort of greater, higher, deeper, fuller thing than any other verse I had ever come upon" (M. R. 194). "'If I were asked," she is quoted as stating, "what have been the strongest influences upon me, as regards my art, I should say Elizabeth Barrett Browning in early

days'" (M. R., "Poets I Have Known" 200). The article notes too that, despite the "immense difference in the size of the two poems . . . some readers of *Michael Villiers* have been reminded of 'Aurora Leigh'" (M. R., "Poets I Have Known" 199). Hickey's biographer, furthermore, describes her as "a fervent admirer of the style of poem represented by *Aurora Leigh*" (Dinnis 17). Modern critics in Victorian studies have also noted parallels between *Aurora Leigh* and "Michael Villiers." In his entry on Hickey for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* in 1999, Richard Tobias writes that, "like Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, "Michael Villiers, Idealist" is a novel in verse with lyric interludes" (170), while the introduction to Hickey's work in *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* calls "Michael Villiers" Hickey's "most interesting volume," one "clearly influenced by *Aurora Leigh*" (Leighton and Reynolds 482). In her preface to the Norton edition of *Aurora Leigh*, Reynolds also remarks that "Hickey adapted the verse-novel form in her poem *Michael Villiers: Idealist* . . . to mix public questions about colonial domination and personal questions of individual development" (viii). Hickey's work is therefore highly relevant to my dissertation as a verse novel by a woman poet clearly indebted to *Aurora Leigh*.

Importantly, however, "Michael Villiers" is not just derivative of *Aurora Leigh*. Although it adopts EBB's model of the blank-verse *Bildungsroman* to address social and political issues, one that Webster also takes up in "Lota," Hickey's work—like Webster's—also incorporates different kinds of generic combination related to its engagement with particular political issues. "Michael Villiers" is less smoothly mixed than both *Aurora Leigh* and "Lota," bluntly juxtaposing lyric and dramatic forms to convey its utopian idealism. It is largely episodic, featuring minimal narrative description and action and focusing more on the representation of interiority through conversations, which are roughly mixed with moments of lyric reflection and

embedded songs. I argue that the emphasis on dialogue, reflection, and song rather than narrative action conveys a politics of moderation in Hickey's verse novel. "Michael Villiers" rejects revolutionary action and parliamentary reform, promoting instead an idealistic, discursive approach to addressing the issues of land reform and Home Rule in Ireland. This approach ultimately proves inadequate, as demonstrated by the verse novel's shift to lyric and song, the only way it can imagine a utopian future characterised by class equality and Irish sovereignty.

By focusing on works by four understudied women poets writing in the late nineteenth century, this dissertation expands our understanding of both women's poetry and the verse novel in the Victorian period. It demonstrates that the genre was taken up in multiple ways after *Aurora Leigh* by women poets who, like EBB, addressed urgent and controversial political issues from parliamentary enfranchisement to the Irish Question through inventive and complex generic combinations, participating in and revising the "new class" of poetry that EBB modelled so influentially. This dissertation does not offer a teleological development of genre. Instead, it argues that the verse novel is a capacious, heterogeneous genre worth rediscovering by recovering works through case studies that offer deep, synchronic microhistories of verse novels (and para-verse novels) at particular historical moments. Although I do consider these works diachronically as well, I do not make the claim for a progressive literary history in which these works influence one another in a clear sequence. I identify commonalties among works where they exist, but my main purpose is to expand the canon and definition of the verse novel by contributing, through an eclectic methodological approach combining narratology, historical research, archival work, and formalist analysis, to a more robust study of the genre.

CHAPTER 1

The Verse Novel as Double Poem:

The *Bildungsroman*, Male Focalisation, and the Representation of Women in Augusta Webster's "Lota" (1867)

Augusta Webster's 1867 verse novel, "Lota" (published in the volume *A Woman Sold and Other Poems*), both is and is not about its titular character. Like other verse novels, such as EBB's *Aurora Leigh* and Emily Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist" (published in 1891, the subject of chapter 4), "Lota" is a novel in blank verse that follows a *Bildungsroman* plot, a narrative charting its protagonist's growth from youth to maturity. But it departs from these works, and from prominent fictional *Bildungsromane* such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849-50), all of which tell the stories of their eponymous characters. As Patricia Rigg observes, "Lota" actually follows the development of a young man, Gervase Lester (*Julia Augusta Webster* 119-20). Lota is not the main character; she is, rather, the woman with whom Gervase falls in love. Yet although he proposes to her, they do not marry in the end, and she is ultimately relegated to the periphery of the narrative. So why is the verse novel called "Lota"? The title suggests that there is another story to uncover in Webster's verse novel, one about the woman named but rendered seemingly negligible in the narrative. Co-opted as the title for a story in which its owner is not the subject but merely the male protagonist's temporary object of desire, Lota's name signals the verse novel's preoccupation with issues of representation, specifically the ironic representation of women's experiences in a narrative of male self-development.

This chapter argues that "Lota" politicises narrative voice and focalisation by equating voice with representation, particularly the agency to speak and act on one's own behalf. Unlike many *Bildungsromane* of the period, "Lota" is not narrated in the first person from the perspective of the protagonist. Webster's work deploys a more defamiliarising narrative style. There is a first-person narrator, but it is an unnamed omniscient narrator who is mostly absent from the narrative, interjecting comments only occasionally. For the most part, since Gervase is the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*, his perspective dominates the narrative through free indirect speech,[1] and the narrator's function is to ironise this monopolising consciousness, which affords Lota a limited opportunity for speech—and, by extension, self-representation and agency. As I will outline, "Lota" draws on elements of the dramatic monologue to explore the gendered implications of the male *Bildungsroman*; it evokes irony through narrative focalisation, highlighting the problem of a single male perspective controlling the portrayal of women's experiences.

Webster's verse novel directs its irony at Gervase, revealing not only his lack of perception in interpreting Lota's thoughts and emotions but also his lack of interest in her interiority. By exposing Gervase's selfish and uncaring attitude toward women, and the corresponding gap in the narrative's representation of Lota's experience, the verse novel implies the importance of granting her the chance to speak and convey her own experience. She temporarily gains the opportunity to tell her story in direct speech in the middle of the narrative, but her perspective and voice are subsequently superseded by Gervase's again. This closure on her voice in the narrative corresponds to Webster's concerns about women's lack of voice in

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[1] The narrator signals this free indirect speech at the beginning of the narrative, when it first mentions Gervase's aunt, referring to Mrs. Westland as "his aunt" and adding as an aside, "(I'll call her so as he did)" (Webster, "Lota" 206), an indication that the narrative will incorporate his thoughts and vocabulary.

parliamentary politics. Webster was an ardent supporter of women's enfranchisement, and her verse novel takes on a new resonance when situated in the context of contemporary agitation for suffrage in 1866-67. "Lota" is not an overtly political poem, but I read it as a political work that aligns with Webster's belief (shared by other Victorian feminists) that women's enfranchisement was necessary to ensure the representation of their interests in the political sphere. Lota's narrative self-representation offers an alternative account of her experience to the one Gervase perceives, and, when situated in its broader historical context, Webster's verse novel implies that Lota's narrative representation figures women's political representation.

Of all the poets studied in this dissertation, Webster— a prolific and accomplished poet, novelist, dramatist, essayist, translator, and reviewer who wrote eighteen books and published frequently in periodicals such as the *Athenaeum* and the *Examiner*[2]—has been the most substantially recovered by recent critics. Scholarship on her unfinished sonnet sequence, *Mother and Daughter* (Fluhr, Gregory, Harrington, van Remoortel), verse dramas (Brown, Newey, Olverson, Rigg, Steffes), essays (Flint, Madden), *Athenaeum* reviews (Demoor), narrative verse (O'Brien), and especially her dramatic monologues (Armstrong, Byron, Fletcher, Leighton, Luu, Rigg, Sider, Slinn, Sutphin, Taft, and Tucker), reflects her generic dexterity. A recent special issue of *Victorian Poetry*, which features welcome new scholarship on Webster's understudied verse dramas, essays, and narrative poetry, attests to the robust interest among Victorian scholars

[2] Webster published two poetry volumes, *Blanche Lisle and Other Poems* (1860) and *Lilian Gray* (1864), and a novel, *Lesley's Guardians* (1864), under the pseudonym Cecil Home. The rest of her work was published under her own name and includes two translations of Greek plays, *The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus* (1866) and *The Medea of Euripides* (1868); four verse dramas: *The Auspicious Day* (1872), *Disguises* (1879), *In a Day* (1882), and *The Sentence* (1887); a children's novel, *Daffodil and the Croäxaxicans* (1884); a book of essays, *A Housewife's Opinions* (1879); and seven poetry volumes: *Dramatic Studies* (1866), *A Woman Sold and Other Poems* (1867), *Portraits* (1870), *Yu-Pe-Ya's Lute: A Chinese Tale in English Verse* (1874), *A Book of Rhyme* (1881), *Selections from the Verse of Augusta Webster* (1893), and *Mother & Daughter: An Uncompleted Sonnet-Sequence* (1895), which was published posthumously with an introduction by William Michael Rossetti.

in her work.[3] Yet, with the exception of Patricia Rigg's biography of Webster, which recovers the extent of her literary range and does include a reading of her verse novel, "Lota" remains critically neglected in the Webster canon and in the literary history of the verse novel. It warrants revaluation in both of these contexts, however, as a work that combines novelistic and poetic conventions by inviting the reader to approach its narrative with the same skepticism demanded by the dramatic monologue, the genre for which Webster is most celebrated.

Offering a subtler generic combination than other verse novels such as *Denzil Place* (which combines a blank-verse narrative and intercalary lyrics, as we will see in chapter 2), "Lota" is an example of what David Duff refers to in *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (2009) as smooth-mixing. As explained in the introduction, smoothly mixed works strive for formal unity, so their generic combination is not easily discernible. "Lota" does not juxtapose lyric and narrative poetry or verse and prose (as in Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock and How It Grew*, the subject of chapter 3), but offers an apparently cohesive narrative in the style of *Aurora Leigh*. Yet such an impression of coherence is disrupted by reading "Lota" as a "double poem," which Isobel Armstrong defines as a work in which the speaker's expression of thought and feeling is "not only the *subject*'s utterance but the *object* of analysis and critique" (12). I build on Armstrong's theory to argue that "Lota" is a double poem that tells the subjective story of Gervase's growth and makes that story an object of critique, exposing how that story of male development eclipses one of female disenfranchisement. I use the term *disenfranchisement* here to refer to Lota's lack of agency in her own life and her lack of representation in the narrative. Furthermore, since "Lota" was published in 1867, the same year the amendment to

[3] *Victorian Poetry* 55.1 (2017), ed. Patricia Rigg, features articles by Helen Luu, Caolan Madden, Lee O'Brien, T.D. Olverson, Annmarie Steffes, and Herbert F. Tucker on Webster's verse dramas, essays, dramatic monologues, and narrative poem *Yu-Pe-La's Lute: A Chinese Tale in English Verse* (1874).

extend the parliamentary franchise to women was rejected, *disenfranchisement* is also intended to evoke the continued exclusion of women from the electorate in the verse novel's contemporary political context.

This chapter's first two sections will address the relationship of "Lota" to the Victorian *Bildungsroman*, particularly in terms of narrative focalisation—a narratological term that Gérard Genette defines in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) as the "regulation of narrative information" through the narrator's perspective (162)—in the context of the marriage plot, a fundamental element of the *Bildungsroman*. Because Gervase is the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*, his interiority dominates much of the narrative through free indirect discourse. His consciousness consequently shapes the representation of Lota for most of the verse novel as well, with the exception of the occasional ironic interjections of the first-person narrator and the embedded first-person narrative in Part II (Webster, "Lota" 235-68), when Lota finally gains the chance to speak directly. These shifts in narrative voice ironically highlight that Gervase perceives the events of the story in a markedly different way than Lota and the narrator do. From Gervase's perspective, the narrative seems to follow the conventions of the marriage plot, but when Lota finally gains the chance to speak directly in the first-person embedded narrative in Part II, unmediated by Gervase's perspective, her account is one of failed marriage. Thus, as I will demonstrate, the verse novel explores the gendered implications of the male *Bildungsroman* and, through narrative focalisation, ironically highlights the problem of a single male perspective controlling the portrayal of women's experiences, an irony established by the first-person narrator at the beginning of the narrative.

I will then situate "Lota" within the context of Armstrong's theory of the "double poem" and explain the influence of the dramatic monologue, the quintessential double poem, on

Webster's verse novel. As Armstrong argues, Robert Browning wrote his early dramatic monologues in 1836 in an attempt to develop a democratic poetry (*Victorian Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, chapters 4 and 5). Webster draws on the dramatic monologue's association with radical politics, particularly in relation to the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, for political and cultural critique. Although the narrative seems to present Gervase as a protagonist with progressive gender politics, I draw on Armstrong's theory of the double poem to argue that reading "Lota" as a simultaneously expressive and skeptical narrative exposes Gervase's patriarchal complicity and indicates that his subjective representation of Lota is ironic and needs to be read as an object of critique. Like a dramatic monologue, "Lota" draws attention to the limits of twinned literary and political representation and agency when the perspective of one character controls the narrative. Webster's verse novel thus highlights the importance of voice for self-representation**.**

To further support this argument, the subsequent section of the chapter will analyse the first-person embedded narrative in Part II of Webster's verse novel, in which Lota tells her story of disenfranchisement and failed marriage in direct speech. I argue that this section provides a counter-narrative to the verse novel's supposedly happy ending. This embedded first-person narrative disrupts the rest of the verse novel, so far mostly focalised through Gervase, and offers Lota's own account of her experience in a narrative dominated by his perspective. Finally, the last section of the chapter will locate "Lota" in the context of Webster's feminist politics to demonstrate her verse novel's consonance with her support for women's suffrage, especially in 1867, the year of the Second Reform Act, when the House of Commons rejected the appeal to extend the franchise to women despite a robust feminist campaign by activists such as Webster. The chapter claims that Webster's "smoothly mixed" verse novel draws on conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and the dramatic monologue to present two narratives simultaneously—that of

male development and female disenfranchisement—in order to demonstrate how a male-focused narrative can convey the importance of allowing women to speak for and represent themselves by ironically highlighting their lack of voice and agency.

The *Bildungsroman* and Narrative Focalisation

This dissertation departs from other critical approaches to the verse novel by drawing on scholarship on both poetry and prose fiction to unpack the generic combinations in the works that I analyse. This approach is apt not only because this broad range of criticism supports more nuanced readings of poetic and novelistic conventions, particularly in the case of a "smoothly mixed" verse novel like "Lota," but also because Victorian readers and reviewers often perceived the affinity of verse novels with contemporary prose fiction. In the review of *A Woman Sold and Other Poems* in the *Examiner* (a periodical in which Webster frequently published feminist essays in the 1870s), for example, the reviewer praised "Lota" by emphasising its likeness to the prose novel, remarking that it was Webster's "true vocation to write modern tales in verse" that "manage to pack into small compass as distinct a portraiture of two or three characters as one gets usually in a very good three-volume novel" ("A Woman Sold and Other Poems" 468). And indeed, in addition to the realistic portrayal of the characters that the reviewer observes, the tripartite structure of Webster's verse novel evokes the triple-decker format of the mid-Victorian prose novel rather than, for example, the conventional twelve books of an epic poem. "Lota" also follows the basic plot trajectory of introduction, conflict, and resolution common in three-volume novels[4] and subscribes to the conventional paradigm of the *Bildungsroman*, which is the specific

[4] Part I of "Lota" describes Gervase's growth from youthful heir to philanthropic landowner, then his travel to London and attempted courtship of Lota, and ends on the suspenseful note of Lota's sudden departure from the

focus of this section of the chapter. Consequently, my work unites two approaches: the scholarship of critics who focus principally on prose fiction, such as Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Genette, Kelly Hager, Franco Moretti, and Talia Schaffer, and the work of Victorian poetry scholars.

As critics such as John R. Maynard note, scholars have defined the *Bildungsroman* alternatively as the novel of youth, education, formation, and development (281),[5] and "Lota" can be appropriately classified as such. Although the story does not dwell very long on Gervase's childhood, the events of which are condensed into the first few pages, it does chart his personal and moral growth. An idealistic young squire, Gervase returns from travelling abroad to take over the management of his recently inherited English estate, where he attempts and fails to implement various reforms because of his lack of commitment to the work. He travels to London in disillusionment, where he meets and falls in love with the enigmatic Lota Deveril, who seems (from his perspective) to reciprocate his feelings but rejects his marriage proposal, revealing later that she is already married and estranged from her adulterous husband, Emilio. Convinced that her husband is dead, Gervase searches for him—hoping to confirm that Lota is free to marry again—but instead finds Emilio impoverished and ill. Under Lota's care, Emilio recovers, and the spouses reconcile. The verse novel concludes with their reunion, Gervase's return to his estate, and the implication that he will marry his demure, conventionally feminine cousin Evelyn.

The plot basically adheres to Buckley's formative model in *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974), the first critical work to establish the typical

Westland home. Part II takes up the story a few months into Gervase's unsuccessful search for her and reveals the major conflict of the plot, when Gervase discovers that Lota has left her adulterous husband. Part III then offers the resolution: Lota and Emilio reconcile, and Gervase recognises his love for Evelyn, fulfilling the marriage plot.

[5] As Susan Fraiman explains, the term *Bildungsroman* was first coined by German critics in in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but only popularised in England by the critic Wilhelm Dilthey in 1870 and 1906 (3).

outline of the *Bildungsroman* plot: the protagonist leaves home, gains an education in the city, and, having attained maturity, returns home (17-18). Buckley uses the term *Bildungsroman* as a "synonym for the novel of youth or apprenticeship" (13) and lists the genre's "principal elements" as "childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy" (18). He argues that a work must not eschew more than two or three of these elements to classify as a *Bildungsroman* (18). Although revised by more recent critics such as Moretti, Buckley's paradigm has remained influential, and it is particularly useful here because he discusses the origins of the genre in the context of poetry. Like most scholars, he views Goethe's prose novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (published in German in 1796; translated into English by Thomas Carlyle in 1824) as the "prototype" (Buckley 12) of the *Bildungsroman* and focuses his study primarily on prose fiction, but he initially traces the genre's preoccupations with childhood and education to Romantic poetry (Buckley 1-8). His book begins by discussing the emphasis on progress from youth to maturity in John Keats's *Endymion* (1818), Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, and Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24), and he asserts that such autobiographical narrative poems, especially *The Prelude*, "anticipated," although did not "directly [influence] the Victorian autobiographical novel of youth" (Buckley 8). Situating the *Bildungsroman* within the period's broader trend of increased interest in representing subjectivity, he remarks that in the nineteenth century "there appeared innumerable examples in both verse and prose of . . . a new and unabashedly subjective literature," among which "perhaps the most successful of the autobiographical forms . . . was the Bildungsroman" (Buckley 26-27). Because of his attention to the origins of the *Bildungsroman* in poetry, Buckley's foundational model proves a constructive framework for my work. Although his emphasis on the autobiographical nature of the genre—the

influence of authors' lives on their works—is not applicable to Webster's verse novel, his understanding of the importance of long poems such as *Don Juan* and *The Prelude* (important precursors to the verse novel) to the structure and progression of the *Bildungsroman* establishes the validity of reading verse novels in that generic tradition.

Moretti's theory of the *Bildungsroman* in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987) also maps onto Webster's verse novel, and the deeply ideological nature of his argument, far more political than Buckley's work, informs my reading of "Lota" as an ironic revision of the genre in the context of contemporary feminist politics. Moretti calls the *Bildungsroman* a genre of "compromise" (9) that depicts the integration of the individual into society by resolving the desire for individualism with the pressures of socialisation. He argues that the "self-determination" so privileged in Western society—that is, "the individual's right to choose one's own ethics and idea of 'happiness', to imagine freely and construct one's personal destiny" (Moretti 15)—is at odds with society as a "*system* of social and political relationships" that "demands agreement, homogeneity, consensus" (Moretti 16). In other words, abiding by social norms compromises the individual's right to self-determination, but society requires the cooperation of its citizens to function. So "how," he asks, "is it possible to convince the modern—'free'—individual to willingly limit his freedom?" (Moretti 22) His answer to this paradox is that the individual must assume "the social norms as *one's own*" (16), a solution that the *Bildungsroman* builds into its plot structure: "there is no conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification" because "one's formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one's social integration as a simple *part of a whole*" (Moretti 16). Although Gervase initially abandons his responsibilities as

a landlord when he travels to London, he returns home to reprise those duties in the end, reintegrating himself into the social order.

Most importantly for my analysis of "Lota," Moretti argues that, in the *Bildungsroman,* this socialisation typically occurs through marriage. He accounts for the ubiquity of the marriage plot in the *Bildungsroman* by explaining that marriage is a type of modern "*social contract*" (22) that serves as a mechanism for the individual to commit not only to another person but also to social values and institutions. This "helps us understand," Moretti contends, "why the classical *Bildungsroman* 'must' always conclude with marriages" (22) and why adultery is not a plot point that the *Bildungsroman* can accommodate. "It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake," Moretti explains, "but that 'pact' between the individual and the world, that reciprocal 'consent' which finds in the double 'I do' of the wedding ritual an unsurpassed symbolic condensation" (22). A failed courtship or divorce indicates the failure of the individual's pledged commitment to society and threatens social stability, so the marriage plot is inherently necessary. "Lota" doubly conforms to this conservative marriage-plot ending. Not only does Gervase avoid an adulterous (and potentially bigamous) relationship with Lota and pursue a legitimate union with his cousin instead, but he also helps Lota resolve her marital problems (again, in his view at least) with Emilio, ensuring there are two intact marriages in the end. Moretti's theory is particularly relevant for my reading of "Lota" because he demonstrates that the *Bildungsroman* is defined by a plot in which the fulfilment of a middle-class man's life relies on adhering to social norms, each individual contributing to the preservation of the status quo. The implication of this ideologically conservative narrative pattern for the representation of women is clear: each story of male development necessarily relies on the continued social and political disenfranchisement of women, on their lack of agency in the social and political spheres. As the

protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* in "Lota," Gervase is the instrument of women's ongoing socio-political marginalization and thus the object of the verse novel's irony. Webster's work highlights how Gervase's supposedly progressive individualism is merely affectation, and his actions actually reinforce conventional domestic ideology. Although he claims that he loves Lota, his dedication to reconciling her with Emilio, and his own proposal to Evelyn at the end of the story, indicate that his interest is in upholding the conventions of patriarchal society.

Webster's plot also conforms to the paradigm outlined by Schaffer's *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (2016), which argues that the marriage plot often relies on negotiating a triangulated relationship between the protagonist and two potential love interests, one familiar and one romantic. Although Schaffer's work focuses primarily on prose novels with female protagonists, she remarks that "it is worth noting that the familiar-romantic rivalry was often central to the male Bildungsroman as well. In the most famous works of male development of the nineteenth century . . . the hero's maturation is proven by his ability to choose (or to merit) a marriage" with the right person (17-18). In the formula that Schaffer outlines, there are typically two outcomes: one, the protagonist recognises the unsuitability of the wrong partner in time to marry the right one; or, two, the protagonist mistakenly marries the wrong person first but—as in the case of *David Copperfield*—gets a second chance with the more suitable partner, often after the first spouse dies (Schaffer 18-19). Webster's verse novel ironically incorporates this *Bildungsroman* convention as well, one according to which women are featured merely as the accessories of the male protagonist. Lota is the wrong woman for Gervase—both because of her mercurial personality and the illicit nature of their relationship—and she serves as a foil to the gentle, devoted Evelyn (comparable to Agnes in *David Copperfield*), who has loved him all along. By overcoming his attraction to Lota, Gervase

realises he belongs with his cousin, and he proves his virtue and maturity by choosing a socially legitimate relationship with her (although it is not specified whether she helps him reform his estate). The possible marital failure and transgressive relationship with Lota are plot elements that guide him toward Evelyn. In this sense, "Lota" follows the teleology of the *Bildungsroman* toward the tidy marriage-plot ending so ubiquitous in the genre, but it does so ironically, highlighting the ideological conservatism of the male *Bildungsroman* and drawing attention to the lack of narrative representation and agency afforded to the women in the story.

As a long double poem, then, "Lota" can be read as a conventional *Bildungsroman*, but it invites another reading as well, a feminist reading based on the verse novel's mediation of narrative voice, as I discuss in more detail below, as well as narrative perspective, which I analyse using Genette's more specific narratological term *focalisation*. In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette coins the term *focalisation* as a characteristic of "narrative mood," which he defines as the "regulation of narrative information" (162). By *narrative information* he means the amount of detail provided in the narrative, and by *regulation* he means the mediation of that information from a particular perspective. A work can create the impression of a more authentic world by giving more information about it in the narrative, but it can also control the reader's access to that world, sometimes limiting it to the biased point of view of a particular character. Although Genette's work refers most frequently to prose fiction, predominantly that of Marcel Proust, it is really a study of *narrative* more broadly and accordingly also cites multiple examples from poetry. In his introduction to *Narrative Discourse*, for instance, he explains the three narrative levels—"story," "narrative," and "narrating"—with reference to the epic poetry of Homer's *The Odyssey* (*Narrative Discourse* 25-27), and he later includes examples from *The Iliad* and Virgil's *The Aeneid* in his chapters on narrative order, mood, and voice. He also cites Robert Browning's

verse novel *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) as a principal example of "multiple focalization" (when "the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view" of different characters [*Narrative Discourse* 190]), which demonstrates the applicability of his work to the study of verse novels more broadly.

According to Genette, the amount of detail provided in a narrative can establish a sense of immediacy or distance: the more information readers have, the closer they feel to the story and characters. But the narrative can also control the degree of information available to the reader by presenting the information "according to the capacities of knowledge of one or another participant in the story. . . with the narrative adopting or seeming to adopt what we ordinarily call the participant's 'vision' or 'point of view'" (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 162). This is what Genette refers to as "focalization" (189), when "the narrative seems . . . to take on, with regard to the story, one or another *perspective*" (*Narrative Discourse* 162). Crucially, Genette distinguishes who *speaks* in a narrative from who *perceives*, noting that focalisation is not synonymous with narrative voice and that a story can be narrated from "the focus of perception" of a character who is not the narrator (Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 64). As a result of this "internal focalization," when "the narrator says only what a given character knows" (*Narrative Discourse* 189), the subjectivities of other characters in the narrative become inaccessible (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 201). Narrative focalisation thus functions like the lyric utterance in a dramatic monologue— in both cases, a single character's or speaker's subjectivity controls the representation of feeling or events—and is subject to the same scrutiny.[6]

[6] One of the challenges of writing about verse novels is finding a suitable vocabulary to discuss the particular generic combination of a given work. I borrow the term "utterance" from the critical discourse on the dramatic monologue, which often refers to the "lyric utterance" of the first-person speaker. The narrative in "Lota" is not exactly equivalent to lyric utterance, but I am arguing that the focalisation of the narrative—Gervase's controlling consciousness—is comparable to the solipsism of the lyric speaker that the dramatic monologue satirises. This idea is particularly informed by John Stuart Mill's theory of poetry, which poets such as Robert Browning critiqued, and which the next section of the chapter discusses in detail.

Although it features a first-person narrator, as I discuss in the next section, "Lota" is not narrated by Gervase, as in the case of first-person-narrative *Bildungsromane* such as *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-61). But since Gervase is the protagonist, the story *is* narrated mostly from his perspective through free indirect discourse. As Moretti points out, "as a rule, the classical *Bildungsroman* has the reader perceive the text through the eyes of the protagonist," and "the reader's vision hinges then on that of the protagonist: he identifies with the hero, sharing the partiality and individuality of his reactions" (56). The narrative can therefore be compromised through the protagonist's self-deception or lack of understanding, and the reader must attempt to see beyond the protagonist's perspective of events (Moretti 56). In "Lota," Gervase's perspective—with all of its limitations and biases—inflects the representation of events in the narrative, as well as the representation of other characters' thoughts and emotions. Lota's story is not only embedded within Gervase's *Bildungsroman* but largely mediated by his perspective. For most of the verse novel, his subjectivity dominates the narrative to a degree that the narrative functions like the speaker's solipsistic lyric utterance in a dramatic monologue, ironically exposing a problem inherent to the *Bildungsroman*: that the dominant focus on one individual's experience and subjectivity inevitably distorts the experience of other characters. This irony is established at the outset of the verse novel, when the narrator flags the importance of voice and agency by emphasising Gervase's privileged access to it from childhood onward. As a young man at school, the narrator explains, Gervase talked mostly "noble nonsense" (Webster, "Lota" 200), his conversation the equivalent of "noise" (Webster, "Lota" 201). Nonetheless, the narrator states, this "noise / Inures his throat for speeches bye and bye / When he's a statesman or a barrister," or a preacher who "has to try if weary pews will hear / Another sermon yet and keep awake" (Webster, "Lota"

201). The implication here is that Gervase's right to speak is taken as a given, and although he does nothing productive with it, he will nonetheless gain a position of power and influence, one in which he still may exert influence on the lives of others.

As the next sections will demonstrate, reading the verse novel as a double poem—in which the story of Gervase's self-development becomes the object of critique—reveals the hypocrisy of his behaviour toward women and exposes how Gervase's perspective controls the representation of other characters, especially Lota. When the narrative is focalised through him, it seems to follow the conventional *Bildungsroman* plot trajectory toward the fulfillment of the marriage plot and obscures Lota's story of failed marriage. Part II of "Lota," when Lota is granted the opportunity to tell her own story in a first-person embedded narrative, disrupts this focalisation and offers an alternative story of female disenfranchisement and failed marriage. However, this counter-narrative is ironically eclipsed by the verse novel's conclusion, which is focalised once again through Gervase and reframes Lota's narrative so that she seems happily married in the end. Only by reading the verse novel as a double poem does the reader question this ending, in which Lota seems content from Gervase's perspective, as one that decentres Lota's voice and presents his subjective interpretation of her experience. In this reading, I differ from Armstrong, recasting her theory of the double poem by extending the term to include a work that not only is simultaneously expressive and skeptical, but that also contains alternating voices, with Lota's embedded monologue disrupting the coherence of the framing *Bildungsroman* narrative.

Voice and Enfranchisement in the Dramatic Monologue and "Lota"

Webster experimented with the dramatic monologue throughout her career, most notably in the volumes that bookended the publication of *A Woman Sold and Other Poems* (1867): *Dramatic Studies* (1866) and *Portraits* (1870). The dramatic monologue, the quintessential example of Armstrong's double poem, has been associated with political and cultural critique since its emergence (according to twentieth-century critics) in the early nineteenth century, at a time when critics and poets who supported extensive political and social reform sought new forms of poetry that could convey their radical politics. As Joseph Bristow explains, "the language of poetics" was "inextricable from reform" (4) in the early 1830s, particularly after the passing of the 1832 Reform Act (in full, the Act to Amend the Representation of the People in England and Wales), which Carolyn Vellenga Berman argues "reshaped the political landscape of Great Britain" (n.p.). The Reform Act did not result in universal suffrage, nor even a very great extension of the franchise; while it doubled the number of men enfranchised, still only one in six men had the vote, which remained unavailable to the working class. Nonetheless, Berman argues, by "reforming the House of Commons in response to widespread protests . . . the ruling class in Parliament effectively sanctioned a changing political order" to accommodate the rising middle class (n.p.). In this context, according to Bristow, critics debated the function of poetry and the role of the poet and were divided on the question of whether poetry should "embrace politics in the name of social change" or "repudiate social discontent and fix its attention instead on spiritual ideals" (4). Many verse novels fall into the former category: EBB emphasised the potential of poetry to effect social change in *Aurora Leigh*, and all the verse novels analysed in this dissertation address politics in different ways. In Webster's case, "Lota" is informed by the

dramatic monologue's association with radical—that is, reformist—politics in its preoccupations with agency and voice, particularly in granting speech to socially, culturally, and politically marginalised figures.

Armstrong argues that Browning wrote his first dramatic monologues in an effort to develop a radical poetry that did not just advocate for social and political reform in content but also embedded democratic ideals in its very form. According to Armstrong, Browning was influenced by William Johnson Fox, editor of the radical Utilitarian journal the *Monthly Repository*, who believed that poetry should represent the realities of contemporary life and be accessible to people of all classes. He sought to promote modern, democratic poetry that relied on the dialogism of dramatic form,[7] believing that poetry could "[participate] in critique and [create] ideological change" because it was a public form (Armstrong 30). Fox's poetics, articulated in his review of Tennyson's first volume of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) in the *Westminster Review*, were based not on the idea of "complete psychological identification with feeling on the part of either author or reader but on an analytical, detached, dramatic rendering of feeling" that involved "active, critical participation on the part of the audience" (Armstrong 143). Similarly, Browning considered poetry democratic because it invited the participation of readers in its interpretation and was "open to inspection and analysis" (Armstrong 147). His early dramatic monologues emerge out of this attempt to write a dialogic poetry that lent itself to political and cultural critique in the time around the Reform Act of 1832, while later dramatic monologues such as Browning's serialised verse novel, *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69), were written in the context of the Second Reform Act in 1867.

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[7] Armstrong emphasises that, for Fox, "all poetry is dramatic even when it is not dramatic in form. Mental phenomena are externalised as events so that they are the equivalent of a set of incidents which can be publicly examined and mediated. . . . A poem may be dramatic without the existence of literal dialogue, but there *will* be a dialogue constituted by opposition and conflict within thought and feeling" (143).

Armstrong argues that Browning, aligned with Fox's dialogic and democratic theory of poetry, opposed the "poetics of exclusion" (Armstrong 137) of John Stuart Mill, whose essay "What Is Poetry?" (1833)[8] characterised all poetry as "of the nature of soliloquy" (65). Mill, adhering to a Wordsworthian lyric modality, deemed the poetic speaker's utterance private rather than public, "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude," divorced from external experience ("What Is Poetry?" 64). According to Armstrong, Browning's earliest dramatic monologues, "Porphyria" and "Johannes Agricola" (both published in 1836, and later renamed "Porphyria's Lover" and "Johannes Agricola in Meditation"), parody Mill's notion of the completely private utterance by taking the concept to extremes (Armstrong 136-42). Mill outlines a lyric model according to which subjective expression is disconnected from social, political, and cultural context, but Browning's poems dramatise the danger of this solipsism: in "Porphyria," the speaker murders his lover, and in "Johannes Agricola," the Antinomian speaker believes that he need not adhere to moral law.[9] Browning's monologues, Armstrong contends, expose the problems with Mill's poetics by showing how speakers who exist in utter solitude, exempt from the strictures and consequences of the external world, exhibit violent and immoral behaviour.[10] Browning's poems thus "parody expressive lyric," as the "characters so patently talking to themselves force a conscious intervention, force the reader to be aware of his or her exclusion and simultaneously force that awareness into a consciousness of *reading*, understanding the poem as the object of analysis and thus as ideology" (Armstrong 146, 145). The speaker's subjective expression becomes dramatic, an object of critique: hence Browning's

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[8] Published under the pseudonym Antiquus.

[9] According to the *OED*, an Antinomian is "one who maintains that the moral law is not binding upon Christians, under the 'law of grace'" ("antinomian," n.).

[10] In "Johannes Agricola," the speaker insists, "I have God's warrant" (Browning 45) for his actions, while the speaker in "Porphyria," after killing her and receiving no divine retribution, declares, "And yet God has not said a word!" (Browning 44)

own term for the dramatic monologue, the *dramatic lyric*. By transforming a conventionally solitary and exclusive lyric expression into a public utterance that democratically invited the reader's critical participation, Browning produced in the aftermath of the 1832 Reform Act a new type of poetry that could express radical politics through its very form. As Glennis Byron summarises, the development of the dramatic monologue is therefore "now usually seen in terms of a cultural critique of contemporary theories about poetry and a challenge to Romantic representations of the self" (Byron 81). This is a critique "effected primarily by putting the self into context, and thereby putting into question the authority, integrity and autonomy of the isolated lyric voice" (Byron 81) by showing that the self is "the product of a particular set of socio-cultural conditions" (Byron 84). Webster is often compared to Browning for her mastery of the dramatic monologue,[11] and her poems similarly engage in such political and cultural critique, frequently in the context of what Victorians termed "the woman question."

"Lota" does not follow the conventional formula of a first-person utterance addressed to a silent auditor (as the dramatic monologue is often defined), but Webster's work does incorporate the genre's irony. Indeed, the verse novel and dramatic monologue share multiple affinities that make their combination a "smooth" one, in Duff's terms. Both are generic hybrids that emerged as poets sought new literary forms to address the social, cultural, and political upheavals of the period. Furthermore, Stefanie Markovits points out that "the dramatic monologue and the verse-novel are . . . closely affiliated forms, sharing as they do the combination of lyric and narrative

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[11] Angela Leighton, for example, writes that Browning is Webster's "main model" (173). By contrast, Joshua Taft argues that Webster opposes Browning's model of the dramatic monologue in "Skepticism and the Dramatic Monologue: Webster Against Browning," while Patricia Rigg, in "Augusta Webster, Dramatic Forms, and the Religious Aesthetic of Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*," posits that Webster's *Dramatic Studies* in fact influenced Browning's *The Ring and the Book*. But there is no question that Webster knew and responded to Browning's work. She engages with it explicitly in her essay on his 1877 translation of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, "Mr. Browning's Agamemnon of Aeschylus," which was published in the *Examiner* and republished as "A Transcript and a Transcription" in *A Housewife's Opinions*. She considered the translation "a work of genius, if of genius not wholly wisely spent" ("Mr. Browning's Agamemnon" 1490).

modes, subjective and objective perspectives, individualist and social drives, and timeless and historicist orientations" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 36). Finally, although the dramatic monologue has been traditionally defined as a poem in which a first-person speaker addresses a silent auditor, typified in poems such as Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842) and Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1842), as well as monologues by Webster herself, most critics now agree that the genre does not adhere to fixed formal criteria.[12] Rather, as E. Warwick Slinn explains, it is "a lyrical-dramatic-narrative hybrid" that "absorbs an emotional expressiveness from lyrics, a speaker who is not the poet from drama, and elements of mimetic detail and retrospective structuring from narrative" ("Dramatic Monologue" 80-81) but does not combine these elements in a consistent formula, nor impose a common stanzaic structure, in all monologues ("Dramatic Monologue" 82). As Armstrong remarks, "twentieth-century readers . . . have too often codified [the dramatic monologue] in terms of technical features," and "it is preferable to see what this dramatic form enabled the poet to explore" (13). The dramatic monologue genre—and the way it informs the verse novel—is best understood in terms of how the rhetorical relationships among speaker, auditor, and reader enable political and cultural critique. In many cases, the dramatic form enabled poets such as Webster to perform political and cultural critique[13] by exploring

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[12] Noting the lack of critical consensus regarding the suitability of the term *dramatic monologue* itself (instead of *monodrama*, for example), Cornelia Pearsall remarks that titles of poetry collections, including Webster's *Dramatic Studies* and Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics*, often reflect the poets' own attempts at classifying the dramatic monologue. Of Browning's iconic volume *Men and Women* (1855) "the best-known title of a collection made up chiefly of dramatic monologues," and one that "names not the generic form but the subject matter," Pearsall argues that the title establishes "social interaction, and especially gender relations, as constitutive of the form" (70).

[13] My wording here is influenced by Slinn's *Victorian Poetry as Cultural Critique: The Politics of Performative Language* (2003). Drawing on performative theory, Slinn argues that Victorian poetry enacts cultural critique by exposing the ideological structures that produce discourse through "its self-conscious formalism" (1). Victorian poetry "lends itself to analysis in terms of performative theory," he asserts, "insofar as it developed what was regarded at the time as a form of psychological drama, employing terms such as dramatic lyrics, dramatic romances, or monodrama. Particularly in its more experimental guises, Victorian poetry tends to display process as much as product" (*Victorian Poetry* 6), drawing attention to the cultural conditions that engender the discourse in the poem. Slinn's argument is similar to Armstrong's in that he invokes the "double operation of speech acts as both descriptive and constitutive" (*Victorian Poetry* 5) to demonstrate how Victorian poems, especially dramatic monologues, "display performative acts" and consequently "allow readers to observe a dynamic mix of identity,

different subject positions, often through dramatic irony, and giving voice to disenfranchised figures in society, and "Lota" employs both of these strategies to demonstrate the correlation between limited self-representation and lack of agency.

Webster's verse novel also draws on the participatory role of the reader associated with the dramatic monologue. As Armstrong argues, Fox and Browning understood that the role of the reader was crucial to a dramatic monologue's meaning (143-47), and twentieth-century critics have similarly adopted that stance. Robert Langbaum argues in *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1957) that the speaker's utterance in a dramatic monologue often explores extreme states of consciousness and that the act of reading the poem requires the reader to defer judgment and sympathise with speakers who display morbid or deviant tendencies (Langbaum 93). He characterises the genre primarily according to this "tension between sympathy and judgment" (93), attributing to the reader an instrumental role in creating meaning in the poem. According to Langbaum, the reader observes the speaker's address to the silent auditor and perceives moments of unintentional self-revelation, when the speaker reveals something about her or himself inadvertently (Langbaum 85). Armstrong does not pursue Langbaum's point about unintentional self-revelation quite so strongly, but she agrees that, as double poems, dramatic monologues impose demands on readers to regard the speaker's utterance as an object of critique and to examine its rhetoric and form for absences, inconsistencies, and alternative meanings (12-17). Such poems, she argues, "compel a strenuous reading and assume an active reader who will participate in the struggle of the lyric voice, a reader with choices to make, choices which are created by the terms of the poem itself" (17).

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power, and ideology" (*Victorian Poetry* 7). These poems "demonstrate in their enactment (which includes being enacted, read, now) how cultural meaning, individual subjectivity, and social authority are brought into being," making them "inveterately political" (Slinn, *Victorian Poetry* 7).

Slinn, like Armstrong and Langbaum, strongly emphasises both the political aspects of the genre and the reader's role in its politicisation, concurring that "the dramatic monologue is a form that requires the reader's discernment as a participating element" ("Dramatic Monologue" 83). He contends that the reader's simultaneous identification with and judgment of the speaker may produce dramatic irony—that is, "understanding more than the speaker understands," possibly by "realizing discrepancies or ethical lapses, or determining a moment when the implications of meaning confound rhetorical intent" ("Dramatic Monologue" 82). Dramatic monologues thus trouble "the authority (and hence the authenticity) of speaking voices" and "problematize questions about who speaks" (Slinn, "Dramatic Monologue" 84), foregrounding the limits of voice and representation in large part by relying on the reader's role as literary critic.

"Lota" relies consistently on the irony of the dramatic monologue. For instance, the reader is attuned to two separate contexts in which the word "weary" appears in Webster's verse novel. The narrator explains at the beginning of the verse novel that Gervase travels to London because he has grown "too weary of the squires, / Jokes, dinners, wives, and comely girls" (Webster, "Lota" 205) by whom he finds himself surrounded by in the country, which might suggest at first that Gervase wishes to escape the extravagances and moral vacuity of his class and that this desire reflects his social progressiveness. Yet the sentence in which this line appears reads in full as:

> At last he grew too weary of the squires,
> Jokes, dinners, wives, and comely girls; perhaps
> Of the reforms and works on his estate,
> Which always somewhere crooked from his design. (Webster, "Lota" 205)

The second part of the sentence comes across as an afterthought, offered belatedly after the semicolon and beginning with a noncommittal "perhaps," but it is actually a subtle admission in free indirect discourse that what Gervase seeks to escape is not really objectionable company and an overly luxurious lifestyle but his own reform work. The distance between the first and third lines defers the point that really Gervase is "weary . . . / . . . / Of the reforms and works on his estate." The language of weariness reappears just a page later, when the narrative states that English women's manners "wearied him" (Webster, "Lota" 206). Again using free indirect speech, the verse novel here incorporates Gervase's vocabulary, and the repetition of the word in such quick succession signals that his "weariness" is not really disillusionment with social norms but a self-absorption that allows him to abandon something when he tires of it, whether that is politics or women. Thus, although "Lota" does not have a speaker addressing an auditor the way that "Porphyria's Lover" and "Johannes Agricola" do, it does, like these poems, rely consistently on dramatic irony.

Significantly, Byron principally credits women poets with "establishing and refining . . . the use of the monologue for the purposes of social critique" (84). "Once Browning and Tennyson ha[d] used the monologue to challenge Romantic representations of the self," she argues, "they and other poets [went] go on to exploit the form's central dynamic of self and context in various ways" by "offer[ing] different models of the self and different strategic approaches to that self" (Byron 85). But according to Byron, it was predominantly women poets such as Felicia Hemans, EBB, Amy Levy, Adah Isaac Menken, Constance Naden, Emily Pfeiffer, and Webster (a list to which we might also add Mathilde Blind and Dora Greenwell, among others) who deployed "the form to give a voice to marginalised and silenced figures in society" (96). Their poems foregrounded contemporary socio-economic issues more than the

poems of their male counterparts, which were often displaced to historical or mythological settings and tended to focus on their speakers' psychology.[14] By contrast, "even as [women poets] use historical or mythical speakers to distance their monologues," Byron contends, they "usually still, at least indirectly, call forth their own Victorian world" (91) by addressing issues related to Victorian gender ideology such as women's sexuality, prostitution, maternity, and education.[15] For example, EBB's "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848), a monologue published in the context of the American anti-slavery movement, is spoken by an escaped female slave who, in an act of desperation, commits infanticide; the speaker in Levy's "Xantippe" (1881) is Socrates's wife, who deplores her lack of access to education; and both Greenwell's "Christina" (1851) and Pfeiffer's "From Out of the Night" (1882) feature speakers who are fallen women. Thus, although Pearsall argues that the dramatic monologue has, since its emergence, "concerned itself with female subjectivity, including and perhaps especially the modes of consciousness of women whom we do not hear speak" (78)—most famously in Browning's "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess" (1842) as well as in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Jenny" (1870)—the monologues of women poets often do grant speech to women. They emphasise the influence of social, political, and cultural forces on what women say—what they *can* say—and how, to whom, and in what circumstances they say it, enacting the limits of voice, representation, and agency.

Webster's own poems often exploit the first-person utterance of the dramatic monologue to give voice to disenfranchised figures whose historical and cultural contexts would not

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[14] In Browning's poems, she argues, which are typically situated in a historically removed setting, the speaker "is explored primarily as subject to forces within itself, even though these forces are always socially or historically determined," whereas the speaker in Webster's poems is "subject to forces," typically social and economic, "outside itself" (Byron 86).

[15] Byron points out that the critique of these poems was not limited to gender, citing Ellen Johnston (known as "the factory girl") and May Kendall as examples of poets who address class and poverty (96). She also notes that male poets such as Algernon Swinburne and Robert Buchanan produced similarly "polemical monologues" (97).

otherwise afford them the agency and authority to speak. These figures are often women who speak with a radical agency and immediacy about the inequities faced by women in different cultural and historical settings. The speakers in Webster's most famous dramatic monologues range from notorious and maligned female figures of mythology and history such as "Circe" (1870), "Medea in Athens" (1870), and "Jeanne d'Arc" (1866) to marginalised characters of contemporary life such as Eulalie in "A Castaway" (1870), a prostitute who offers an incisive critique of Victorian social mores. As Slinn remarks, Eulalie condemns the complicity of men in a patriarchal society from the position of a woman on the margins of society, offering a sophisticated analysis of the educational and economic inequities that foster the Victorian sexual double standard (*Victorian Poetry* 161). Scholars such as Susan Brown ("Economical Representations: Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Jenny,' Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway,' and the Campaign Against the Contagious Diseases Act") and Christine Sutphin ("Human Tigresses, Fractious Angels, and Nursery Saints: Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and Victorian Discourses on Prostitution and Women's Sexuality") have also related "A Castaway" to the Contagious Diseases Acts passed between 1864 and 1886. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 2, these were measures passed for the health protection of men in the military that allowed a woman to be arrested and forced to undergo a medical examination for venereal disease if a police officer thought she might be a prostitute, a procedure that feminist activists protested against as a violation of women's bodily autonomy. Webster herself does not seem to have been a part of the Ladies' National Association, which was the major feminist group that worked to have the Acts repealed, but she was involved in campaigns for women's suffrage and education throughout the 1860s and 1870s, eventually becoming a member of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and serving on the Executive Committee of the London

School Board. She also published incisive essays in the *Examiner* (to which I will return later in the chapter) on the barriers that women faced when it came to employment and the dire economic circumstances that forced them to marry for survival. Of "A Castaway," Brown argues that "in a world in which Webster had little power directly to eradicate the economic causes of prostitution, she intervenes on the cultural level to represent and demystify those causes" by aligning herself with Eulalie through poetic voice ("Economical Representations" 89). By "giving her voice to the prostitute's cause, Webster promotes aesthetically what she desires politically" ("Economical Representations" 90). Many of Webster's dramatic monologues exploit this strategy of granting direct speech to disenfranchised figures whose causes she supported. In keeping with the dramatic monologue's legacy, she employed the genre to convey radical politics.

Webster also uses direct speech to give voice to female figures in other dramatic forms such as the verse drama. The ironically titled "A Woman Sold," for example—the verse drama published at the beginning of the same volume in which "Lota" appears (two works in which women are "sold" bookending the volume)—addresses the contentious issue of mercenary marriage. Eleanor Vaughan, in love with and betrothed to young, financially unstable Lionel, opts to marry the much older Lord Boycott instead. In narrative form, the decision might seem shallow and greedy, but, as Brown argues in "Determined Heroines: George Eliot, Augusta Webster, and Closet Drama by Victorian Women" (1995), the verse drama form allows Eleanor to express in an "unmediated voice" (101) the familial pressure and economic uncertainty that compel her choice. As in the dramatic monologue, the verse drama's first-person utterance is fundamental to the feminist politics of the work because it grants Eleanor the opportunity to comment explicitly upon women's marginal social and political positions. Webster's work insists

on allowing female characters to speak for themselves as a political and cultural act, recalling the public poetics of Fox and Browning, which, according to Armstrong, emphasised the radical potential of granting speech to marginalised figures.

"Lota" shares the same preoccupation with voice and enfranchisement—specifically the opportunities for speech afforded to women—that Webster's dramatic poems do, but it conveys its point through a different tactic. As explained in the previous section of this chapter, the focalisation of "Lota"'s narrative through Gervase means that his perspective dominates the narrative for the majority of the verse novel, to the exclusion of other characters' subjectivities. Following Armstrong's theory of the double poem, I read the focalisation of the narrative in "Lota" as resembling the solipsistic lyric expression that Mill describes in his poetics essays and that Browning parodies in his dramatic monologues. Similar to the way that Browning creates speakers whose self-absorption is so extreme that it becomes dangerous in order to satirise the danger of Mill's suggested solipsism, "Lota" takes the subjective, controlling consciousness that is so often an element of the *Bildungsroman* as the verse novel's object of irony and critique.

Gervase is a figure with complete political, economic, and social privilege; the opening lines of the verse novel deliberately establish him as a property owner and member of the landed gentry, "Born owner of old acres, an old hall, / And wide old woods" (Webster, "Lota" 199). In the context of contemporary agitation for suffrage leading up to the Reform Act of 1867 (the publication context of "Lota"), which focused largely on attempting to change the electoral requirements related to property ownership, residence, ratepaying, and gender, he is one of the beneficiaries of the existing social and political system. The emphasis on his social status and his failed attempts at reform on his own estate signal that the verse novel satirises an upper-class

man's perspective on social and political inequities by demonstrating his misunderstanding of and complicity in the existing system.

Dramatic monologues similarly employ this strategy of exposing and critiquing problems in society through the speech of complicit speakers. Byron, who argues that Victorian women poets tend to direct the irony and critique in their monologues toward "the systems that produce the speakers [rather] than the speakers themselves," suggests that one of the principal strategies for performing this critique is dramatizing "the speaker's internalisation of the ideology that defines her" (87, 88). She asserts that the speakers in these poems simultaneously express and objectify the social, political, and cultural circumstances that have produced them, citing EBB's "Bertha in the Lane" (1844), Naden's "The Carmelite Nun" (1894), and Webster's own "The Happiest Girl in the World" (1870) as examples of poems that "[inhabit] the conventional in order to expose it" (88). Similarly, Slinn notes of the speaker in Rossetti's "Jenny"—a poem that addresses the issue of prostitution from the perspective of the male customer (rather than from the perspective of the woman herself, as in "A Castaway")—that the "speaker is immersed in the language that he inherits" and perpetuates it unconsciously (*Victorian Poetry* 163). The speaker's supposedly sympathetic attitude toward Jenny's circumstances actually reveals his complicity in the practice of commodifying women's sexuality, and the poem's critique emerges from the reader's perception of that doubleness. In "Lota," Gervase has likewise internalised conventional middle-class domestic values and perpetuates Victorian patriarchal norms, and the narrative exposes the hypocrisy of his behaviour. The verse novel invites the reader to critique Gervase's perspective, specifically the disjunction between his supposedly progressive gender politics and the manner in which he actually reinforces conventional domestic ideology in his behaviour toward Lota and Evelyn, by reading it in terms of the dramatic monologue. Its political critique

emerges through a skeptical reading of a narrative dominated by the perspective of one character. By exposing Gervase's hypocritical attitude toward women and his lack of interest in understanding Lota's experience, the verse novel demonstrates the problem of his controlling perspective and the importance of self-representation in a narrative context and, by extension, a political one.

Before I situate the verse novel's political critique specifically in the context of the Second Reform Act, I will engage in a close reading of "Lota." At the beginning of the verse novel, the narrator establishes how Gervase's childhood shapes his later affectation as a progressive man who does not fit in in upper-middle-class English society, in terms of either his general politics or his attitude toward women. For example, upon his return to England from travelling on the continent, Gervase dines with his neighbours, conservative members of the landed gentry who dismiss his attempts to implement reforms to his estate as a "craze / For newfangled social problems" (Webster, "Lota" 205), and he deems them

> as solid and as savourless
>
> As their traditional entrées…or,
>
> (As he irreverently dared to think),
>
> Their proper-mannered comely wives and girls. (Webster, "Lota" 205)

Apparently, what distinguishes him from these other men of his class is not only his sympathy for social reform but also his distaste for tradition and his lack of interest in the women that conform to that tradition. The parentheses around the third line—emphasising his "irreverence" in "daring" to contemplate such a thought—imply that he believes his supposed dislike of conventional Englishwomen to be subversive. The parenthetical statement here, a short interjection from the narrator, emphasises the irony of the rest of the surrounding passage, which

presents the free indirect speech of Gervase, who imagines himself as progressive. The fact that Gervase then travels to London to escape the stale social rituals and stifling conventionality that he witnesses here, "too weary of the squires, / Jokes, dinners, wives, and comely girls" (Webster, "Lota" 205), suggests that he cannot tolerate an outdated model of femininity according to which women are defined solely by their propriety and beauty. But, as I argue above, the rest of the narrative exposes this stance as affectation rather than genuine feeling.

Gervase's encounters in London further imply that he rejects conventional middle-class gender ideology. He visits a cousin of his mother's, Mrs. Westland, whom he suspects wants him to marry one of her daughters, Evelyn (Webster, "Lota" 205-8). Evelyn is a typical "angel-in-the-house" figure: beautiful, modest, and kind, she so satisfies the Victorian criteria for wifehood that Gervase actually considers "How strange he had not loved her, and in truth / Had found it hard to keep from telling her / He loved her though he did not" (Webster, "Lota" 206). Yet he insists that Evelyn is too conventional, her manners too artificial and contrived, for him to love her. Disillusioned by the subdued behaviour of Englishwomen in a society that intentionally inhibits their freedom and opportunities, he insists that their social training robs them of vitality and personality to the point that they are barely living. Better, he suggests, to bring "some rare white statue" into his home as a figure to confide in rather than an actual woman; "one of these / Our proper well-trained damsels, same and good" would be more lifeless, he claims, than the inanimate sculpture (Webster, "Lota" 207). Even Evelyn, who "is good, / And very fair, and very lofty souled" is nonetheless "spoiled with training, as we spoil / All sweet frank natures of our English girls" (Webster, "Lota" 207), and he insists that women should develop without obstruction rather than be shaped by the rigid, oppressive standards of Victorian gender ideology.

But what might be interpreted as Gervase's opposition to women's oppression and disenfranchisement actually stems from his attraction to European women. He does not really care for Englishwomen's interiority and lived experience—only for his own experiences with them, whom he finds boring after his exposure to the charms of foreign women during his travels. Although Gervase claims to reject conventional English domestic ideology and social customs, his language and actions actually reinforce patriarchal hegemony. "Let *me* have innocent wild carelessness, / And the fresh freedom of a natural growth," he states in reference to "English girls" (Webster, "Lota" 207, italics added); not *them*, but *me*. His objection to the social conditioning of Englishwomen stems solely from his lack of romantic and sexual interest in them. Due to the fact that their models of femininity are "Different from those which wearied him at home," foreign women possess "the sweet of strangeness for him," as he perceives

them to be

> More frankly living, less conventional
> Than the women drudging on at morning calls
> And being civil placidly by rote
> In England. (Webster, "Lota" 206-7)

During his time in Europe, he witnessed the "pleasant woman wiles / Of which most Englishwomen fail," including "the charm / Of bright caprice, subtle simplicities, / Pert bird-like confidence, and kitten ease," and the mercuriality of "southern languorous quiet waking up / Into a flash of fire" (Webster, "Lota" 206). He does not admire the social or sexual agency of European women, nor their freedom to express themselves without restriction or engage in intellectual pursuits, nor does he make any mention of political enfranchisement (like Englishwomen, they were not enfranchised)—nothing that might indicate a progressive concern

with women's rights. Rather, he centres his own desires when he describes being "wearied at home," as I noted above, and fetishizes European women for their exoticism when he recalls their titillating boldness and unpredictable passion. Gervase's education and exposure to other cultures have perhaps engendered in him a distaste for conventional English middle-class domesticity, but it is not a distaste motivated by radical politics or support for women's autonomy. As evidenced by his objectification of women as animals and objects in references to their "Pert bird-like confidence, and kitten ease," and their socialisation as the taming of "wild birds," his dislike stems from his lack of attraction to the passivity and docility of Englishwomen. His rejection of Victorian gender norms is actually rooted in his internalisation of patriarchal ideology, according to which he sees women only in terms of his own relationship to them.

Webster's verse novel further exposes Gervase's internalisation of patriarchal values by demonstrating that, despite the aversion he claims to feel for passive, demure Englishwomen, he enjoys their attentiveness and deference to men when it is directed at him. When he first visits the Westland family, for instance, he regales the four women—his cousins and his aunt—with stories of his travels and revels in their attention. He is "pleased / With the girls' eager questions and the praise / And half-approving blames of his good aunt" (Webster, "Lota" 209), although he "quite forgot to think by rule" that "they would have been the same / To one less liked" (Webster, "Lota" 208), conveniently overlooking the fact that this is an example of Englishwomen's social training in practice. And although much of the story centres on Gervase's love for and pursuit of Lota, he initially prefers Evelyn, the epitome of Victorian femininity, over her. Despite his supposed preference for the passion and unpredictability of European women, at

first he shows no interest in Lota (who has just moved from Italy) because he resents her indifference toward him.

Gervase and Lota first meet when he is visiting the Westland home and enjoying the attention of his aunt and cousins; Lota enters the room but immediately leaves to avoid him. Only at Evelyn's behest does she deign to meet him, and she greets him formally, "In lofty fashion" (Webster, "Lota" 210), rather than with warmth and deference. In response, Gervase simply "bowed and let her be: / She did not please him" (Webster, "Lota" 210). His subsequent reference to her as "a cross-grained sprite / Unsociable perversely, but not shy" (Webster, "Lota" 210) indicates that he resents her willful rejection of social norms. It would be excusable if she were "shy" and lacked the confidence to meet him, the narrative implies, because modesty is a quality that corresponds to conventional ideals of Victorian femininity. But Lota is not shy; she goes against the grain, refusing social interaction deliberately and "perversely." Since the narrative is focalised through Gervase, the language implies Gervase's judgment that such a departure from conventional femininity is aberrant. Lota goes against the common grain of English middle-class femininity by refusing to conform to gendered expectations of decorum and sociability, and it is her unobliging attitude that fails to "please him."

Gervase's hypocrisy regarding Englishwomen is even more obvious when, after facing Lota's contrariness, "his dreaming sense / Was filled with Evelyn, whose fair sweet face / Would come uncalled" (Webster, "Lota" 210). Despite his insistence that he could never love his dutiful, conventional cousin, he is drawn to her after meeting Lota, whom he describes as the "olive that gives zest to generous wine" in comparison to "calm gracious Evelyn" (Webster, "Lota" 210). This metaphor reinforces the idea that he views women in terms of consumption, as objects to be enjoyed or discarded according to his appetite, recalling his earlier comparison of

Englishwomen to bland food and his opinion that Evelyn is "spoiled," ruined by "her training" and no longer fresh enough for him. Lota is the flavourful olive that gives depth and richness to wine, but he retreats before her complexity and instead embraces the comfortable blandness of conventional middle-class Victorian femininity, realigning himself with the conservative neighbours he attempts to distinguish himself from at the beginning of the verse novel. This language also retrospectively amplifies the irony in the narrator's early description of Gervase as merely "A common useful onion" (Webster, "Lota" 203), a description implying that he is not exceptional but entirely commonplace. In the context of Gervase's fixation on comparing women to food, furthermore, the comparison of him to an onion also suggests that he is not only a common man but also one whose layers need to be peeled back to reveal the core of his character, the process of which (a touch of Webster's ironic humour here) may elicit tears.

Gervase's encounters with Lota and Evelyn, therefore, reveal the hypocrisy of his attitude and behaviour toward Englishwomen, and the narrative further reveals his internalisation of patriarchal values when he falls in love with Lota based on a desire to domesticate her. Mystified and maddened by her mercurial and enigmatic nature—"she seemed to him the veriest witch / That ever glamoured men against their wills" (Webster, "Lota" 211)—he finds himself drawn to her by the very fact that she does not demonstrate affection or kindness toward him, and he resolves that she will love him (Webster, "Lota" 211-212). Wary of her skittishness and temper, he initially refrains from making overt advances. After an incident in which she ridicules him for bringing her flowers, however, her aunt reprimands her, and Lota flees in a state of overwhelming emotion. Gervase follows with declarations of affection and proposes. His profession of love here is tellingly possessive: "My darling!," he exclaims, to which she replies, "No, not your darling. Nothing, nothing to you" (Webster, "Lota" 214). Twice he tries to call her

"My wife," but she is silent, and he asks, finally, with some uncertainty, "Not my wife?" (Webster, "Lota" 214). She confirms nothing but promises him an explanation the following day.

And yet, Gervase interprets this deferral as a tacit assent to his proposal, presuming that she is displaying the modesty that middle-class Victorian women were expected to exhibit during a courtship. In addition, he assumes, conditioned by the patriarchal customs of Victorian society, that she has no option but to agree to his proposal due to her economic circumstances. His first statement is a claim, not a question, and although she never confirms that she returns his feelings, he convinces himself that Lota loves him to the point that he even imagines their wedding. He pictures Lota as "his wife / Turning to him, Undine-like," declaring "'Now, love, / My true life begins'" (Webster, "Lota" 215), as though she had been waiting for him to her entire life, and he now defines her existence. His fantasy of her as an undine ("a supernatural female being, imagined as inhabiting the water; a nymph," according to the *OED*), further others her by both dehumanising and disembodying her. This is perhaps the verse novel's most crucial moment of dramatic irony, for even as Gervase imagines their wedding vows, he cannot picture a look of love from Lota. In his fantasy,

he took the hand
That wore his ring and kissed it; and she looked—
But the look was not forthcoming, he had seen
No such grave radiant love in Lota's eyes
As would be then, and could not picture it. (Webster, "Lota" 215)

The em dash represents a blank in his fantasy as his imagination fails him. It is clear that, whether or not Gervase realises it, Lota's reciprocation of his feelings is uncertain, and his love is based on a desire for possession and control. As he continues to imagine their life together, the

language of the narrative suggests that he views her as doll and himself as a kind of puppet-master; he "makes" her do things in his fantasy: "He *made* her cantering on his favourite Ralph," "He *made* her wandering with him in his woods" (Webster, "Lota" 215, italics added), "He *made* her sitting, busy by his side" (Webster, "Lota" 216, italics added). In his imagination, he does not seek to honour the spirited personality that he ostensibly finds so compelling; instead, he becomes fixated upon marrying Lota in order to control her (the word "made" even suggests that he creates or shapes her in a godlike fashion in his mind). This fantasy of their married life exemplifies the dissonance between Gervase's professed beliefs about the evils of the restrictions placed upon women and his actual reinforcement of conventional domestic ideology. In the life he imagines with Lota, he envisions her behaving according to his whims rather than her own will, often in traditional marital roles. The following passage emphasises his desire to dictate not just her behavior but her mind:

> He made her sitting, busy by his side
> With some light stitchery or book of rhymes
> That would not too much keep her thoughts from him,
> In his favourite cosy study, while he worked
> With pen and papers, changing time by time
> A smile or playful word lest she grew tired.
> He made her mistress of his house, or child
> To play with and to tease; queen whom he served,
> Or love's sweet handmaid fondly tending him;
> Sudden as now, or calm for happiness;
> Eager or gentle; frolicsome or grave;

But made her always his, her whole thought his. (Webster, “Lota” 216)

The model of the double poem is particularly germane here, as Gervase’s patriarchal complicity is exposed in the language of the passage—his language, through free indirect speech—and the discrepancy between his avowed progressive gender politics and the conventional domestic idyll he imagines.

Part of the irony here emerges from the fact that the *Bildungsroman*’s focalisation through the protagonist often allows Gervase to control Lota’s interiority through narrative voice; the revelation of his character thus serves as a comment on the genre. The lack of women’s narrative representation and agency inherent in the male *Bildungsroman*, it becomes clear, reflects Gervase’s own ideology. First, in the expressive reading of the poem, Gervase imagines Lota as his long-suffering companion, an idealised angel in the house occupied with simple domestic tasks (chores that he does not need to compete with for her attention) while he tends to more intellectual pursuits. In this fantasy of matrimony, they live in total unity. However, as Armstrong argues, the skeptical reading of the double poem involves an epistemological questioning of the conditions that produce the expressive reading. In a skeptical reading of “Lota,” the fantasy of wifely devotion effaces Lota’s identity and agency. Her individuality is negligible; he imagines her in various iterations, including a wife in charge of their home, an infantilised child-wife he dotes upon, and a loving servant. The common factor of every role is that each defines her in subordinate relation to him, as belonging to him in some way. The specifics of his possession of Lota are irrelevant: she may be “mistress” or “child,” “queen” or “handmaid,” a figure demanding worship or offering servitude, but what underlies all these fanciful scenarios is his predominating desire that she be “his, her whole thought his,” a sentiment reflected in the mediation of her subjectivity through his own for most of the narrative.

It is not enough to imagine dominating her material life, to be the object of her time and attention. He feels compelled also to annex her very interiority by demanding that her mind be completely and permanently fixed upon him, the intentionality of which is foregrounded again by the use of the verb "made": he "*made* her his, her whole thought his" (italics added). The stakes of voice and perspective in "Lota" are especially pronounced in this passage, when Gervase's fantasy makes it clear that the lack of narrative self-representation for Lota—and lack of political self-representation for women more broadly—is not innocuous but a deliberate deprivation of agency in the interest of upholding patriarchal power.

In the lines immediately following the excerpt cited above, Gervase further asserts the authority of his own perspective over Lota's voice. Although he acknowledges that Lota did not verbally state her love for him when he proposed, he proceeds—in spite of his earlier frustration that "He could not read her" (Webster, "Lota" 211)—to interpret her behaviour in a way that suits him despite a lack of evidence to support his belief. "She had told it him that day," he thinks, although "not in words / Nor even looks," and "not by meeting hand / Nor answering lips to kisses, nor coy turn / Of head, nor subtle speaking silence." In fact, she has told him "not / By any note that memory could keep, / Yet," he insists, "she had told him" (Webster, "Lota" 216-17). Even though she does not actually consent to marry him, Gervase imagines a reality that better suits his preferences, convincing himself that Lota must feel the way he wants her to. Although she never articulates this sentiment, he assures himself that "Lota loved him, loved / As if she dared not love him, yet she loved" (Webster, "Lota" 217). He convinces himself that only Lota's insecurity about the disparity in their social statuses prompts her to reject him. She is forced to do household and governess work because her father died destitute, while he is a wealthy member of the landed gentry, and he concludes that Lota would never consent to have a

husband above her in class: "So Gervase *read* her that she was so proud / She'd have no husband seem to stoop to her" (Webster, "Lota" 217, italics added). Attending to the fact that the narrative is focalised through Gervase here highlights the arrogance and entitlement that obscure his understanding of Lota's subjectivity and underpin his assumption that merely pride and willfulness on her part prevent her from admitting her love for him.

He is wrong, of course: the reason for Lota's reticence in expressing her feelings for Gervase is the fact that she is already married, as she reveals in Part II. But even more telling than Gervase's lack of perception in his relationship with Lota is his complete lack of interest in gaining such insight into her motivations and decisions. He cannot perceive the truth of her thoughts and emotions but also does not care to, for "why she was afraid scarce troubled him" (Webster, "Lota" 217). This dismissal of her inner life exhibits his patriarchal complicity. Just as Gervase's fetishization of European women—rather than progressive gender politics—underpins his ostensible rejection of conventional middle-class English domesticity (which, as we have seen, he unconsciously welcomes when he visits the Westlands), his pursuit of Lota is based on the desire to possess and control her. Analysing the focalisation of the narrative as the subjective utterance in a dramatic monologue exposes the hypocrisy of Gervase's behaviour toward women and enables a reading of the verse novel as a feminist critique of the representation of women in a narrative dominated by a male perspective.

As the next section will discuss, Part II of the verse novel offers an alternative perspective in a different narrative voice, when Lota tells her own story in an embedded first-person narrative. Several months after she flees the Westland home, Gervase tracks her down in a village, where she is working as a governess under a different name. When he confronts her, she confesses that she is married and recounts the story of her engagement and marriage,

disrupting the focalisation of the narrative through Gervase and revealing the second narrative, that of female disenfranchisement and failed marriage, in Webster's double poem. Granted direct speech for the first time, Lota offers an account of her personal history that was obscured by the focus on and focalisation through Gervase in the narrative before, and her alternative story demonstrates the importance of women's opportunity for narrative and political self-representation.

"I have learned a wife's love": The Failed-Marriage Plot in "Lota"

As argued above, "Lota" includes many features of the *Bildungsroman*, including the ideologically conservative marriage-plot ending that Moretti sees as fundamental to the genre. Despite the suggestion of possible adultery between Lota and Gervase, Gervase avoids an illicit relationship with Lota and reunites her with Emilio, ensuring that the social order is not disrupted by adultery or divorce. The promise of Gervase's marriage to Evelyn, moreover, indicates his own successful social integration. Webster's incorporation of these *Bildungsroman* conventions is ironic; she treats the mediation of women's experiences through the perspective of the male protagonist as an object of critique through the interjections of the narrator and various instances of dramatic irony. But the verse novel further complicates the seeming coherence of the *Bildungsroman* plot when, in Part II, Lota tells her own story in an embedded first-person narrative and reveals that the marriage plot of Gervase's story exists in tension with a failed-marriage plot of her own.

In this respect, "Lota" is consonant with many verse novels from the period. As Markovits persuasively argues, Victorian verse novels frequently represent unfulfilled

courtships, adultery, and divorce. "A surprisingly large percentage of the period's long narrative poems address matrimonial failure," she observes: there are "courtships that fail to yield weddings (as in [Arthur Hugh] Clough's *Amours de Voyage* [1858] and George Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy* [1868])," as well as "marriages that break apart through adultery" (Markovits 36), such as George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862) and, as my next chapter discusses, Violet Fane's *Denzil Place*. In fact, although she suggests that *Aurora Leigh* and Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* (1854-62) serve as "interesting counter-examples to this tendency" (Markovits 36), *Aurora Leigh* actually also includes instances of failed courtships, notably between Marian and Romney.

But although Markovits notes that "perhaps [the verse novel's] most arresting characteristic . . . is its tendency to disrupt the novelistic conventions of the Victorian marriage plot" (35), often through the device of a failed courtship or adultery plot, these verse novels are, in fact, part of a broader trend in Victorian literature. Hager argues in *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (2010) that the mid-Victorian prose novel was as preoccupied with marital dissolution as with courtship and marriage. Citing examples such as Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) and *Hard Times* (1854), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60), and Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1869), Hager points out that the marriage plot and failed-marriage plot frequently coexist in the same novel to provide a more nuanced account of contemporary marriage. "Often at the same time as it plots a courtship and ends with a wedding," the Victorian prose novel is "dedicated to showing how a marriage unravels, to uncovering the myth of matrimonial bliss, to revealing how many husbands and wives were trying to escape or miserably enduring the wedlock they had so eagerly sought" (Hager 5). These novels eschew the teleology of the marriage plot by

investigating the reality of married life beyond courtship, examining marriage not merely as an experience of joyful closure and certainty but as an event that often leads to unfavourable outcomes. In particular, the novels consider the causes and implications of marital failure for women: "the failed-marriage plot is a woman's plot," Hager contends, that "tends to revolve around a wife leaving her husband" and "concerns itself primarily with the matter of female agency" (8).

Similarly, Webster's verse novel scrutinises the circumstances of Lota's marriage to Emilio to demonstrate women's lack of agency in marriage. The *Bildungsroman* makes the teleological marriage plot integral to the individual's development: the protagonist chooses the partner most suitable to him as a part of his growth, and their marriage signals that he has successfully attained maturity. Yet Lota's failed-marriage plot, embedded within the *Bildungsroman*, reveals that her marriage to Emilio was not a matter of her own choosing and occurred only because of patriarchal authority. Her marriage does not confirm her maturity; it infantilises her and impedes her growth instead, as her father and suitor consider her input negligible and negotiate a transaction in which she is the traded commodity. Recalling the aftermath of the proposal negotiated by her father and fiancé, she remembers her ambivalence about her own feelings but her certitude of Emilio's claim upon her: "I could not tell / If I was glad or sorry to be his, / But felt that I *was* his" (Webster, "Lota" 240). Her passivity in the marriage establishes a dynamic according to which her husband's desires and will supersede hers. Lacking the opportunity to cultivate self-knowledge and make decisions based on her needs and wants leaves her in a state of epistemological uncertainty. Marriage teaches her to prioritise his feelings above her own, so her emotions are reactionary, entirely contingent upon those of her husband. Consequently, when "he seemed so happy" after they become engaged, she "felt /

A joy swell up in me because I was / So much to him" (Webster, "Lota" 240). In contrast to Gervase's *Bildungsroman*, in which he exercises agency to choose Evelyn as his wife, Lota does not get to choose her husband, or even whether she wants to be a wife at all. Her narrative exposes marriage as an institution that deprives women of agency and buttresses patriarchal hegemony.

Lota's narrative affords the opportunity for her to articulate the circumstances of her marriage, as well as her own motivations, thoughts, and feelings, in her own words. For example, when she explains that Emilio blamed her lack of wifely attention for his infidelity, attributing his affairs to "the chill misery you make me here, / Where you'll not love me" (Webster, "Lota" 248), Lota describes her fury:

> I was aflame
>
> With thrice fanned wrath, because he spattered me
>
> With his own mud-blots, flung his sin at me,
>
> Making it *my* sin. (Webster, "Lota" 252)

In a scenario in which a woman such as Evelyn, the epitome of middle-class Victorian femininity, might pardon her husband's wrongs, Lota uses her voice and opportunity for self-representation to condemn Emilio's attempt to transfer accountability for his adultery. While he suggests that they share everything in marriage, including his sins, she describes this attempt to share blame for his unfaithfulness as a violent action that mocks the very foundation of their union.

But Lota emphasises her lack of agency in the marriage more than any other marital circumstance. When the marriage is arranged, she views it in fatalistic terms, believing that "since he loves me, such a one as he, / It is my fate to love him" (Webster, "Lota" 237). The

union is not a matter of choice but of necessity, dictated by her limited resources and agency. Much as Gervase believes that Lota must love him because of his wealth and status, Lota's comment here alludes to the reliance of nineteenth-century women on marriage for economic security, which Webster depicts in an Italian context in this case but recognised as a condition of Englishwomen as well. In a causal rather than a reciprocal relationship, Lota's marriage hinges upon the fact that Emilio chooses her: "*since* he loves me, such a one as he, / It is my fate to love him" (italics added), she states, indicating that her "fate"—by definition an outcome beyond her control— follows inevitably from his decision. The subordination of the clause in her statement emphasises the power structures in which Lota's marriage takes place. The verse novel establishes a parallel between Italy and England in this regard (as do other works of the period do, including *Denzil Place*). As Webster's essay "Matrimony as a Means of Livelihood" (published in the *Examiner* in 1878) would later point out, it

> is to be really deplored . . . the number of women who marry to be married, to be "settled in life," to have a home and be thought a somebody and be taken of and never be called "old maid" and, above all, to never have to pinch and pine and perhaps starve at last in a world for which they have had no sort of preparation. (846)

"Marriage is for them, she states, "a means of livelihood, and any marriage better than none" (846) when faced with the practical reality of limited work and educational opportunities available to women.

Lota's account thus emphasises her lack of agency and self-determination in her marriage, the oppression of which she describes as physically suffocating:

> He seemed to love me—one might almost say
>
> He must have loved me, he so seemed to love—

> But his love was like the heated desert wind
>
> That scorches and that stifles, like the breath
>
> Of lush magnolias when the air is close;
>
> I fainted in it, longed to fly away
>
> To the cool freshness of my former days,
>
> To the mild restful love my father gave. (Webster, "Lota" 240)

Emilio's love for Lota is, to her, an unconfirmed thing that resembles love but is unverifiable. The passage again highlights the problem of trying to access the interiority of others, a theme throughout the verse novel; the language of "seeming"—"He *seemed* to love me," she says, "he *so seemed* to love" (italics added)—indicates Lota's skepticism about his feelings, and the description of her experience suggests that she cannot reconcile his toxic behaviour with that emotion. His behavior is oppressive and unforgiving, burning her skin and smothering her senses to the point that she wants only to be free of it. This monologue, and Lota's use of direct speech in it, affords her the opportunity to establish the truth about her failed marriage to Emilio: that it was unwanted and destructive. Her monologue is a testimonial that clearly articulates that she left her husband of her own volition and has no desire for contact or reconciliation with him. In contrast to the narrative of development and progress in the *Bildungsroman*, in which marriage symbolises the attainment of maturity and provides closure, Lota's marriage is an event that evokes the desire for regression, the return to "the cool freshness" of the time before matrimony. In Moretti's terms, this deviation from the *Bildungsroman* paradigm suggests that Lota desires to escape socialisation and rejects the social norms that she is supposed to internalise to be integrated into society. Finally, what becomes clear as Lota relates her story is the fact that Emilio behaved the very way that Gervase imagines himself behaving in his fantasy of marriage

to Lota. Emilio displays a suffocating affection that borders on obsession and prompts her to retreat defensively from him to preserve some sense of her autonomy. Her description of his possessiveness serves as a proxy critique of Gervase's fantasy in which he "made her always his, her whole thought his," a similarly possessive desire. Lota's monologue implies a repudiation of this possessiveness.

With the end of Lota's monologue, however, the narrative is once more focalised through Gervase, Lota's story subsumed again into the plot of Gervase's life and mediated by his perspective. The verse novel thus departs from the prose novels that Hager describes because it grants only temporary visibility to the failed-marriage plot. For example, although Lota's monologue recalls the embedded narrative of Helen's diary in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by providing direct speech to the victimised married woman, the revelations of the diary in *Tenant* subsequently shape the narrative in a way that Lota's monologue does not.[16] After Helen exposes Huntingdon's horrific behaviour, he and Helen do not reconcile as a happily married couple. Although she nurses him on his deathbed, he does not recover, and she is free to marry Gilbert. In contrast, in "Lota," Emilio recovers from his illness, and he and Lota apparently reconcile. When the narrative is again focalised through Gervase, it revises Lota and Emilio's relationship to suggest that the failed marriage undergoes successful repair.

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[16] "Lota" and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* share several parallels: Lota and Helen Graham both flee unfaithful husbands whose lovers openly flaunt their infidelity (Countess Olympia tells Lota outright about her relationship with Emilio, and Annabella Lowborough is blatant about her affair with Huntingdon to Helen). While living apart from their spouses, Lota and Helen both fall in love with other men—Gervase and Gilbert Markham respectively—who later find out that the women are married. Like "Lota," *Tenant* fulfills the marriage plot but incorporates a failed-marriage plot within it, suggesting that, as Hager argues, the failed-marriage plot "is meant to be read alongside the courtship plot that frames it" and that the "traditional plot is being questioned from the inside out" (29). Inside the marriage plots of both "Lota" and *Tenant* are embedded narratives that question that traditional storyline by allowing the women to recount their failed marriages in their own words: in "Lota," through Lota's monologue to Gervase, and in *Tenant*, through Helen's journal.

After Lota's first-person embedded narrative in Part II, the verse novel once again adopts a male point of view that occludes the representation of her subjectivity. In Part III, after Lota tells Gervase she loves him, the narrative is focalised through him as he embarks on a search to confirm that her husband is deceased and that she can legally marry him. However, he discovers Emilio living in London, penniless and sick. When he returns to deliver the news to Lota, he carries a letter from Emilio begging her to come see him on his deathbed. She is resistant, but Gervase and Evelyn both urge her to go, so she concedes. She ends up caring for the husband that she never wanted to marry and sought desperately to escape, performing "wifely duty to her best" (Webster, "Lota" 285). As Emilio recovers, Lota tells Gervase that in caring for him she is "learning a wife's love" (Webster, "Lota" 285). Rigg interprets this ending favourably, suggesting that the verse novel's conclusion "is quietly satisfying," as "Emilio and Gervaise [sic] . . . both turn from the love best suited to them when it is offered and they both return to that love at the end of the poem" (*Julia Augusta Webster* 120). Yet such a reading dismisses Lota's own perspective, and the phrase "learning a wife's love" suggests a woman who trains herself to survive an unwanted union as a matter of survival. Such an ending is not a resolution but a preservation of the status quo, the conservative ending demanded by the *Bildungsroman*. Lota's monologue thus emphasises the political stakes of self-representation and the vulnerability of a woman's story mediated through a male perspective.

The juxtaposition of the relationships between Gervase and Evelyn and Lota and Emilio is important because it shows the conclusion of the courtship plot in Gervase's *Bildungsroman* and the conclusion of Lota's failed-marriage plot, which is simply the continuation of a marriage that she never wanted and the supposed acceptance of social norms that she had previously rejected. The verse novel concludes several years in the future, in "A little Alpine village"

(Webster, "Lota" 287). Emilio, Lota, and their daughter look toward Italy, and Lota tells Emilio that they will return there someday, "where once / We were not happy" yet this time "be happy there" (Webster, "Lota" 287). Meanwhile, as they look toward the future, Gervase proclaims in the very last line of the verse novel that he and Evelyn have "such happy news!" (Webster, "Lota" 288) to tell his aunt, a clear indication of their marriage to follow. Although one might read the ending as the resolution of Lota and Gervase's marital conflict, Lota tellingly asserts only that "once / We were not happy" and that they "will go one day" to Italy "and be happy there," an ironic allusion to the end of *Aurora Leigh*, when Aurora and Romney are happily reunited in Florence. Lota does not declare that in the present moment, at the end of the verse novel, they *are* happy. Her statement—either a wish or a bluff—predicts a future condition, and the excited response of their daughter obscures what is actually a bleak ending that promises no escape from Lota's failed marriage, only the remote possibility of its improvement.

This ambivalent ending, perceived as a happy ending in the narrative focalised through Gervase, foregrounds the problem of representation in the verse novel. Lota's first-person account presents an important counter-narrative to the third-person narrative of male development, a counter-narrative of women's disenfranchisement that is revised once again by Gervase's controlling consciousness into a story of women's deference by the end. This revisionism of her relationship with Emilio entails an erasure of her own voice and demonstrates the political stakes of representation, which, as the final section of this chapter will explain, resonates with contemporary agitation for women's suffrage.

"Women should have a voice": Webster's Feminist Politics and the 1867 Reform Act

In both her literary work and public life, Webster was deeply invested in contemporary social and political issues. As noted above, her literary work consistently addressed topical issues related to the "woman question" such as education, work, marriage, and prostitution, and she further supported the causes of women's rights in her public advocacy of women's education and suffrage. Many of the essays Webster published in the *Examiner* (a progressive periodical originally founded by Leigh and John Hunt in 1818 as an organ for radical politics) tackled contemporary women's issues. "University Degrees for Women" (1877), "An Irrepressible Army" (1877), "The Female Voter" (1878), and "Protection for the Working Woman" (1878), for example, addressed issues such as women's enfranchisement, access to education, and right to work.[17]

Webster's articles emphasised the political power of voice. On the subject of enfranchisement, "An Irrepressible Army" describes the unrelenting energy of the suffrage movement as its members prepare to present—for the seventh time—the bill proposing the electoral qualification of unmarried and widowed women. Webster predicts that when women finally do get the vote, "it will come to be admitted that it is, in the long run," not only to the benefit of women that they gain the franchise but "to the advantage of men also that women should have a *voice*" (1611, italics added). In "Protection for the Working Woman," she revisits this point by arguing that governmental intervention in women's lives justifies their enfranchisement. Government ought to be more representative, she insists (by which she means

[17] "University Degrees for Women," *Examiner* (2 Jun. 1877); "An Irrepressible Army," *Examiner* (22 Dec. 1877); and "Protection for the Working Woman," *Examiner* (23 Mar. 1878); A. W., "The Female Voter," *Examiner* (1 Jun. 1878).

government officials should be at least partly elected by women), since it constantly imposes legislative restrictions on women's lives—in this case, their work opportunities—that are not in fact attuned to their interests and do not reflect their desires. "At present it is the blind leading the dumb" ("Protection" 366), she proclaims, with "blind" men ignorant, yet fully in control of, the lives of women who are silenced and "dumb," muted by the existing political system. She highlights the problem of having men attempt to act on behalf of women by identifying the slippage between protection and domination, determining that "there is nothing more difficult than to protect without enslaving" and that patriarchal protection comes at the expense of women's agency: it "threatens to take such formidable power that [women's] lives will be a slavery, not to work, but to laws which forbid them to work" ("Protection" 365). While the legislation regulating women's work—laws passed by men who were elected by men—ostensibly protects women from abuse and excessive labour,[18] she protests that "some women

[18] For example, the Factories Act of 1844 limited the hours of women and young persons working in textile mills to 12 hours a day; the Factories Act of 1847 (the Ten Hour Act) restricted the work days of women and young persons in textile mills to a maximum of 10 hours a day; and the Factories (Health of Women. etc) Act of 1874 determined that women could work a maximum of 56.5 hours a week. Webster's stance corresponded to that of many middle-class feminists at the time, who viewed this protective legislation as a form of oppression, particularly since women were paternalistically classed with "young persons" (children aged 13-18) in the acts. According to Rosemary Feurer, women's rights organisations such as the Women's Protective and Provident League and the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women (both founded in 1859) opposed new amendments to the Factory Acts because they believed that "the provisions of the factory acts that provided for special restrictions on women's labor would institutionalize women's secondary position in the labor force. Concerned with expanding employment opportunities for women and avoiding laws that made gender distinctions, they considered these reform attempts anathema, a hindrance to the economic advancement of their sex" (233). "During the years 1872-74," Feurer explains, "prompted by efforts to pass a Nine Hours Bill and a Shop Hours Regulation Bill, feminists became identified as political opponents of protective labor legislation. Armed with the views developed during the movement's formative years, feminists argued that the bills would devalue women's labor, diminish job opportunities, and serve only the interests of men" (236). In her essay, Webster is likely alluding to the Consolidation Act of 1878, which feminists sought to influence by testifying for the Royal Commission assigned to investigate the issue, but which preserved many of the restrictions they opposed. The commissioners' report of 1876, "most of the recommendations of which were eventually embodied in the Factories and Workshops Consolidation Act of 1878, did not change the basic premises regarding restrictions on women's work as most feminists had hoped. Women were still to be classed with young persons in almost all regulations," and "the commissioners stated that whereas men had shown themselves 'able to take care of themselves' and to diminish hours without state interference, the 'natural position of women in society' rendered it 'unlikely that [trade unions] would ever become common' for women," and thus that state intervention was necessary for their protection (Feurer 243). For the feminists opposed to the Act, its passing was "a major defeat" (Feurer 244). There was a schism in attitudes toward protective legislation by the 1890s, as working-class women found that the middle- and upper-class opposition to

would like a choice" and that a woman who has to work to earn her livelihood "is likely to be able to judge better for herself than all the members of Parliament put together" ("Protection" 365). She figures the issue as one of voice, insisting that for women the right to vote is to have the opportunity to speak for themselves, or at least to have some say in who speaks on their behalf.[19]

Similarly, in "The Female Voter" (reprinted as "Parliamentary Franchise for Women Ratepayers" in *A Housewife's Opinions* in 1879), Webster reprised the issue of the franchise by pointing out that "women for whom enfranchisement is being asked"—that is, property owners and ratepayers—"have a definite and . . . reasonable claim" because "those who put the money in the national purse should all alike have so much share in controlling the spending of it as comes of a *voice* in choosing the national representatives in Parliament" (682, italics added). But although these women assume "their full burden of taxation with the male voters," they are nonetheless "politically helpless" (Webster, "Female Voter" 682). For Webster, as for many feminist contemporaries, there was an indefensible double standard in denying women who met the property qualification a political voice solely based on their gender.

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state intervention did not account for class difference and the needs of working women in the labour market. As Feurer explains, in their view, "while unregulated access to employment meant greater freedom to middle-class women, it condemned working women to intolerable conditions" (258).

[19] In fact, in "The Novel-Making Trade," also published in the *Examiner* (15 Dec. 1877), Webster credits the emergence of the novel with providing a new opportunity for women's work and allowing women to exercise their literary voices in an unprecedented way. "Before this invention women rarely wrote," she states: "As a rule they could not. As a rule, if they could, they might not" ("Novel-Making Trade" 1580). But the novel carved out a significant space in literary culture for women as its "chief manufacturers," producing "the same sort of effect as the introduction of the sewing-machine in the tailoring trade, which is said to have led to the employment of so many female hands" ("Novel-Making Trade" 1580). According to Webster, the novel offered women financial opportunity and autonomy as one of the few occupations in which women could earn a living: the novel "is undeniably a 'woman's sphere'—that is to say a place a woman can fill without any money or any pains having been spent in preparing her for it—and, more than that, unlike 'women's spheres' generally, it is one in which money can be made" ("Novel-Making Trade" 1581). The commercial viability of the novel is thus emancipatory for women, and she proposes that "every conscientious man should make it his duty to read, or at all events to get from his circulating library, not less than one three-volume novel a week" ("Novel-Making Trade" 1581).

In 1878, as she was publishing these essays, Webster was also gathering signatures for a petition being submitted to Parliament in an appeal for extending the franchise to women, even writing to Christina Rossetti to request her support.[20] Leighton explains that, after Webster's move from Cambridge to London in the late 1860s, "she became increasingly involved in the women's suffrage movement" (166). Most of Webster's own papers do not survive to attest to her involvement. However, Leighton notes that "Frances Power Cobbe mentions her as being a member of one of the suffrage committees in the 1860s" and that, as part of that milieu, she may also have known John Stuart Mill (166). By this point, Mill had long since moved beyond writing essays about the solipsism of poetry to become one of the leading political thinkers of the era, publishing works on political economy (*Principles of Political Economy* [1848]) and philosophy (such as *On Liberty* [1859], *Utilitarianism* [1861], and *Considerations on Representative Government* [1861]) and serving as MP for Westminster from 1865 to 1868, during which time he advocated for women's suffrage. He published *The Subjection of Women* in 1869 after losing his seat. Leighton contends that "Webster almost certainly served" on the Women's Suffrage Committee in 1866 (the first of its kind), which was founded in support of Mill's suffrage amendment (Leighton 169). Whether or not Webster knew Mill and other feminist activists personally, her periodical writing demonstrates that she was aligned with the suffrage movement and invested in its success.

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[20] Rossetti declined to sign both for religious reasons and because she protested the exclusion of married women from the bill. Though she admired Webster's poetry and wrote to her that "in contradicting you I am contradicting one I admire" (Letter to Augusta Webster, [?1878], *Letters* 159), she insisted that she could not reconcile suffrage with her Christian beliefs since she adhered to the Bible's distinction between the sexes. Despite conceding that "if female rights are sure to be overborne for lack of female voting influence, then I confess I feel disposed to shoot ahead of my instructresses, and to assert that female *M.P.'s* are only right and reasonable" Letter to Augusta Webster, [?1878], *Letters* 158), Rossetti concluded that "I do not think the present social movements tend on the whole to uphold Xtianity, or that the influence of some of our most prominent and gifted women is exerted in that direction: and thus thinking I cannot aim at 'women's rights'" (Letter to Augusta Webster, [?1878], *Letters* 159).

In the context of Webster's feminist politics, the publication date of "Lota" is significant for its contemporaneity with the Second Reform Act of 1867, when the women's suffrage movement first petitioned for the parliamentary franchise. As historian Jane Rendall explains, although some women advocated for women's suffrage in the 1820s and early 1830s, the Reform Act of 1832 "for the first time defined the voter as 'male'" (121-22) and obstructed women's access to the parliamentary franchise. Subsequently, therefore, even women who would otherwise have qualified for the franchise— single or widowed women who fulfilled the ratepaying or property ownership qualification—were excluded based on their gender.[21] In 1866, after Liberal Party leader Lord Russell presented a Reform Bill to the House of Commons, women's rights activists began to organise. Feminists Barbara Smith Bodichon, Helen Taylor, and John Stuart Mill (at this point an MP in the House of Commons) decided to present a petition in support of extending the franchise to women who were ratepayers or property owners. According to Rendall, "the final petition modestly asked that the House 'consider the expediency of providing for all householders, without distinction of sex, who possess such property or rental qualification as your Honourable House may determine'" (131).[22] Before Mill presented the petition in June 1866, Bodichon, Taylor, and other activists such as Emily Davies and members

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[21] As Rendall explains, married women could not qualify for the franchise on the basis of ratepaying or property ownership: "Single women and widows could own, lease or rent proper, whether a country house or a cottage, on the same terms as men. But under English common law, a married woman's legal existence was subsumed into that of her husband, who assumed legal rights either as owner or as guardian of his wife' s property at marriage. In such a situation the married woman could not legally qualify in a voting system dependent on the ownership of property, nor could she convincingly claim 'independence' as head of household, so widely viewed as an essential attribute of citizenship. Even the law of equity, which allowed married women's property to be protected in a trust, did not give them the customary responsibilities of property" (122).

[22] According to Rendall, the petition's "wording reflected not the desire to enfranchise only 'women of property' but the continuing discussion within the House of Commons as to the appropriate level of enfranchisement for all householders, including tenants" (131). She contends that "the wording of the petition did not deliberately exclude married women" (131).

of the Kensington Society gathered thousands of signatures, aided by many canvassers (Rendall 131), possibly including Webster.

In July (after the Liberal government folded in June), Mill introduced "a motion for a return of the potential number of voters who, fulfilling all other qualifications, were excluded only by sex," and this "motion was agreed" (Rendall 132). Benjamin Disraeli introduced a new Reform Bill to the House of Commons in February 1867, and Mill proposed an amendment in May, "mov[ing] that 'person' be substituted for 'man' in clause 4 of the Reform Bill, which dealt with the occupation qualification for voters in the counties," and addressing "the fallacy of virtual representation, whether of farmer and labourer, or husband and wife, the latter suggested by the records of wife-beating and murder, by the legal treatment of married women and by the absence of educational provision for the daughters of the educated" (Rendall 136). Mill, who contended that the right to vote would be "the acknowledged right to a voice" (Mill, *Hansard* c. 825), refuted the notion that "women do not suffer any practical inconvenience, as women, by not having a vote" because of the assumption that "the interests of all women are safe in the hands of their fathers, husbands, and brothers, who have the same interest with them, and not only know, far better than they do, what is good for them, but care much more for them than they care for themselves" (Mill, *Hansard* c. 825). Pointing out that "this is exactly what is said of all unrepresented classes" (*Hansard* c. 825), Mill challenged the idea that women could rely on their male relatives and husbands to effect change on their behalf, stating that

> I should like to have a Return laid before this House of the number of women who are annually beaten to death, kicked to death, or trampled to death by their male protectors; and, in an opposite column, the amount of the sentences passed in those cases in which the dastardly criminals did not get off altogether. I should also like to have, in a third

> column, the amount of property, the unlawful taking of which was, at the same sessions or assizes, by the same judge, thought worthy of the same amount of punishment. We should then have an arithmetical estimate of the value set by a male legislature and male tribunals on the murder of a woman, often by torture continued through years, which, if there is any shame in us, would make us hang our heads. Sir, before it is affirmed that women do not suffer in their interests, as women, by the denial of a vote, it should be considered whether women have no grievances; whether the laws, and those practices which laws can reach, are in every way as favourable to women as to men. (Mill, *Hansard* c. 826)

Mill also highlighted women's lack of access to education and employment opportunities, pointing out that "hardly any decent educated occupation," except the position of governess, "is open to them" (Mill, *Hansard* c. 827). Citing the example of Elizabeth Garrett's exclusion from the medical profession, he asserted that "no sooner do women show themselves capable of competing with men in any career, than that career . . . is closed to them" (Mill, *Hansard* c. 827), concluding that "this is the sort of care taken of women's interests by the men who so faithfully represent them. This is the way we treat unmarried women" (Mill, *Hansard* c. 828). On the subject of married women, his speech critiqued women's lack of property rights under coverture, and he used this injustice as an example of what could be accomplished by giving women the vote:

> I am sometimes asked what practical grievances I propose to remedy by giving women a vote. I propose, for one thing, to remedy this. I give these instances to prove that women are not the petted children of society which many people seem to think they are . . . and

> are not sufficiently represented by the representation of the men who have not had the heart to do for them this simple and obvious piece of justice. (Mill, *Hansard* c. 828)

His speech closed with the assertion that women had the right to participate in the election of representatives who would act on their behalf, the "right to be consulted; the ordinary chance of placing in the great Council of the nation a few organs of their sentiments—of having . . . a few members who feel specially called on to attend to their interests, and to point out how those interests are affected by the law, or by any proposed changes in it" (Mill, *Hansard* c. 829). Mill received 73 votes in his favour against an opposition of 196 votes (Mill, *Hansard*, c. 843), so when the Reform Act passed in August 1867, it still excluded women. In response, as Patricia Hollis explains, the National Society of Women's Suffrage was founded that year, and women saw some progress in their voting rights in 1869, when the electoral qualifications at the borough level were changed to include unmarried and widowed women ratepayers (30-32).

Although it is dated 1867, "Lota" was published on 29 December 1866,[23] months before the amendment was rejected, when activists still thought that unmarried and widowed female ratepayers might gain the parliamentary franchise. Webster's verse novel was published, therefore, at a point when Webster and other feminists would have been uncertain as to the outcome of their efforts, and "Lota"'s focus on issues of representation emerged out of this context.[24] The male *Bildungsroman*'s effacement of women's voices and autonomy in "Lota"

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[23] An advertisement in the *Reader* from 29 December 1866 lists *A Woman Sold and Other Poems* as one of the volumes "published this day" (1029).

[24] The progress in women's electoral rights is complicated because, as Hollis explains, local governments imposed different rules: "From 1869 single women ratepayers always had the vote for everything; and a few married women ratepayers had the vote for some things, like parishes and poor law boards. But each type of local authority had different qualifications for its candidates, and the result was a bemusing tangle of electoral law. In some cases it was easier for a woman to be a candidate than a voter, in other cases it was not possible to be a candidate at all" (43). This means that there were also inconsistent cases of women voting before and after the amendment was rejected. Rendall explains that, "in spite of the failure of the amendment, it was pointed out in subsequent debates that, in this area as in very many others, the bill had been drafted so hastily that the legal implications were unclear. As George Denman indicated on 29 May 1867, the bill already, technically, included women. Romilly's Act of

reflects contemporary concerns about the necessity of women having voices to advocate for their own rights, re-inscribing the importance of women's enfranchisement by dramatising the outcome of their marginalisation. The association of narrative voice with agency and political representation through the franchise would have been particularly resonant because at this point Britain still followed a system of open voting (the Parliamentary and Municipal Elections Act, which introduced the secret ballot, was passed in 1872), according to which members of the electorate voted orally in public.[25] In this context, to be enfranchised literally meant the right to speak. Webster's verse novel tells the story of Gervase's growth while simultaneously making that story an object of critique, exposing how the plot of male development and marriage eclipses the plot of female disenfranchisement and failed marriage. It is a double poem that engages with issues of representation through narrative focalisation and voice by demonstrating that Lota—whose marriage is arranged by her father and husband and whose captivity in that marriage is ensured by Gervase's intervention—is, like Eleanor Vaughan in the verse drama at the beginning of the volume in which "Lota" appears, a woman sold. Lota's lack of voice in the narrative works as a figure for political disenfranchisement, which would have resonated with the women who campaigned for the franchise but were ultimately disappointed.

1850, which clarified the terms to be used in parliamentary legislation, had very specifically prescribed that the term 'man' should also incorporate women, and that 'male person' should be used in all legislation where the intention was gender-specific. That requirement was ignored, and the term 'man' was used almost throughout" (138). Some women attempted to take advantage of this: Hollis explains that "some five thousand women ratepayers claimed the parliamentary vote in 1867, but this was dismissed by the courts a year later" (7).

[25] In "The Advent of the Secret Ballot in Britain and France, 1798-1914: From Public Assembly to Private Compartment," Malcolm Crook and Tom Crook explain that in Britain, "a society where the vote was traditionally regarded as a 'trust' wielded on behalf of non-electors, voting in public was considered a communal obligation: a very direct means whereby those with the requisite freedom and independence could be held to account by those without" (451). Resistance to the secret ballot was often based on "a political ideal derived from the classical world: namely, that citizenship, if it were to be enacted in an independent, honourable and manly fashion, required publicity" (457). Due to issues of intimidation, bribery, and violence that occurred as a result of public voting, however, the secret ballot—a topic of consideration since the 1830s (Crook and Crook 457)—was finally introduced in 1872.

Following the year of the Second Reform Act, Tucker argues, poems such as Browning's verse novel *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) and Eliot's verse drama *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868), as well as novels including Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), "dismantled narrative authority by distributing it among a variety of delegated tellers and genres" as a means of achieving "the enfranchisement of their reader" ("In the Event of a Second Reform" n.p.). Just as Armstrong argues that the dramatic monologue evolved because poets such as Browning sought to develop a more public and democratic poetry in response to the 1832 Reform Act, these works in 1868 reflected progressive politics by rejecting the idea of a single coherent narrative either told by or focalised through one character and seeking instead to represent democratically a multitude of different and sometimes conflicting stories and perspectives. Whereas "Lota" exposes the problem of a single dominating perspective, these subsequent works attempt to resolve the problem by introducing multiple voices, an approach that we see a trace of in Lota's limited speech but that Webster pursues more intensely in later volumes. Indeed, Tucker contends that Webster's volume *Portraits*, published in 1870, similarly emphasises the importance of attending to the "relativity of perspectives," noting that it was her "plan" to give voice to "a series of illustrious female speakers, each with her story to tell" ("In the Event of a Second Reform" n. p.). Having established the problem of a woman's lack of voice in "Lota," Webster went on to grant voice to many women in brilliant dramatic monologues such as "A Castaway."

This literary work coincided with her ongoing work in the public sphere. She served as an executive member on the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage for a lengthy stretch between 1871 and 1878. After the passing in England and Wales of the Elementary Education Act in 1870 (which allowed all women, including married women, to

stand as candidates for the school boards and unmarried and widowed women ratepayers to vote for school board candidates [Hollis 39]), she served for two terms on the Executive Committee of the London School Board, which "was regarded as the most prestigious and important of all late nineteenth-century local government bodies and could count peers and MPs among its members" (Hollis 39). The importance of the Education Act as an outcome of the Second Reform Act cannot be overstated. As Linda K. Hughes remarks, "passage of the Forster Education Act, which mandated schooling for all children five to twelve years old within their districts under the oversight of Inspectors and School Boards, was inseparable from the Second Reform Bill of 1867" because "MPs voting on the Education Act in 1870 were elected by those enfranchised in 1867" ("1870" 36). It also included the gender-neutral language that Mill's amendment had proposed to include in the Second Reform Act, providing provisions for the education of both boys and girls by referring broadly to *children*.[26]

"Lota" is therefore a double poem that anticipates Webster's later political activism—when she used her own voice for the advancement of women's rights—by exposing the problem of a male perspective mediating the representation of women's experience and voice. I do not claim that her verse novel was not intended to effect political action directly. As Slinn explains, Victorian poems performed political critique by exposing "the conditions and principles that govern[ed] existing institutions and cultural practices," but "marking cultural norms will [not] necessarily lead to consequential action or transformation" (*Victorian Poetry* 29). Poems were not necessarily transformative, in other words, in effecting material change (Slinn, *Victorian*

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[26] In the preface to *The Elementary Education Act, 1870, with Introduction, Notes, and Index, and Appendix Containing the Incorporated Statutes*, W. Cunningham Glen states of the Act that "the object which it will accomplish may be stated in a very few words. It will place an elementary school wherever there is a child to be taught, whether of rich or poor parents: and it will compel every parent and guardian of a child to have it taught, at least, the rudiments of education, and that without reference to any religious creed or persuasion" (n.p.).

Poetry 29). I do not argue, therefore, that "Lota" was Webster's attempt to persuade readers (and Members of Parliament) to support women's suffrage, particularly since her later essays demonstrate that she found a platform for writing openly about politics. Rather, "Lota" was more stealthily and diffusely political, its doubleness compelling readers to participate actively in its interpretation. It does not explicitly address the political issue *du jour*—suffrage—but exposes the cultural conditions underlying it, representing not just the problem but ironically exposing the system that produces it.

CHAPTER 2

Poetic Interruption:

Female Adultery, Narrative Sympathy, and Lyric Address

in Violet Fane's *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse* (1875)[1]

In 1875, Violet Fane[2] published the controversial verse novel *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse*, a sympathetic account of female adultery, to damning reviews. The *Athenaeum* referred to it as "a novel, of a rather objectionable type, told in verse" ("Poetic Studies" 143), the *Examiner* called it "a bad French novel written in bad English verse . . . not a book which 'mothers would put into the hands of their daughters'" ("Minor Notices" 103), and the *Saturday Review* deemed it a "sickly versified story" in which "the author has exerted all her petty and miserable art to mingle virtue and vice," deeming Fane an author "forgetful of her womanhood" ("Denzil Place" 120).[3] As Stefanie Markovits points out, "fictional adultery was rarely depicted as straightforwardly as in *Denzil Place*" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 34), and the accusation that its author was "forgetful of her womanhood" indicates a moral outrage regarding the content of her verse novel that stems from Fane's perceived failure to conform to expectations of conventional

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[1] Research for this chapter was generously supported by the University of Victoria's Hugh Campbell and Marion Alice Small Fund for Scottish Studies Graduate Student Scholarship, 2016-17. In summer 2016, I travelled to Edinburgh to consult material at the National Library of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh for chapter 3, and on the same trip I was also able to travel to Cambridge and Reading and consult the Alexander William Kinglake Letters and Papers at the Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts at the University of Cambridge Library (GBR/0012/MS Add.7633), the Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt at the University of Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, and the Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie (MS 2608) in the University of Reading Special Collections, for this chapter. I am grateful to staff in the Graham Robertson Study Room at the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Manuscripts Reading Room at Cambridge University Library, and Special Collections Services at the University of Reading, who graciously helped me arrange these visits and retrieved materials for me.

[2] According to Helen Small, Fane took her pseudonym from Benjamin Disraeli's 1826 novel *Vivian Grey* (*ODNB*). She also occasionally published under her married names, as Mary Montgomerie Singleton or Mary Montgomerie Currie.

[3] In a review of Fane's volume *The Queen of Fairies* the following year, a critic in the *Academy* also wrote that she "achieved a success of scandal by her audacious romance of *Denzil Place*" ("Book Review" 580).

femininity. Contrary to the reviewer's claim that Fane forgot her womanhood in writing *Denzil Place*, however, this chapter argues that the condition of women is very much at the centre of her verse novel, which represents women's (in this case, upper-class women's) lack of agency in marriage. Like Augusta Webster's "Lota" (1867), discussed in chapter 1, Fane's verse novel addresses failed marriage and adultery to highlight issues of agency and consent. Yet whereas "Lota" circumvents the narrative of a married woman's infidelity, Fane's work not only has her protagonist commit adultery but also represents her affair sympathetically. This chapter argues that *Denzil Place*, published in 1875, responds to the stigma around women's extramarital sexual activity in the aftermath of the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) and the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869), legislative measures that sought to regulate women's sexuality. Through a generic combination of lyric and narrative verse, *Denzil Place* presents Constance's infidelity as an act of agency, a provocative disruption of the restrictive and banal existence of an upper-class married woman.

In contrast to "Lota," which subtly blends the dramatic monologue and the *Bildungsroman* in a smoothly mixed blank-verse narrative, *Denzil Place* overtly juxtaposes lyric and narrative verse in an example of "rough-mixing," a "type of generic combination in which" different literary forms "are juxtaposed rather than integrated," so that "the joins are visible" (Duff 178). The blank-verse narrative tells the story of Constance Leigh, her given name an ironic jab at the social norms that Fane's verse novel rejects, and her surname an allusion to EBB's *Aurora Leigh*. But while *Aurora Leigh* ends with the promise of a happy marriage, *Denzil Place* depicts a woman's life after she has made an unsuitable match. Constance is a young woman whose marriage to a much older man, Sir John L'Estrange, is arranged by her uncaring guardian and who later falls in love with and begins an affair with Geoffrey Denzil, their young

and worldly neighbour. When the affair between Constance and Denzil is discovered, Sir John exiles Constance to Italy. Denzil eventually finds her there, and they resume their relationship until Sir John pardons Constance and asks her to rejoin him in England.[4] She regretfully resolves to return to her husband, but her departure is pre-empted by Sir John's (un)timely death. Constance and Denzil marry and live happily in Italy for two years until Constance dies in childbirth, and Denzil returns to England to raise their daughter. The narrative, told retrospectively from the perspective of a sympathetic first-person narrator, highlights the banality of Constance's life with her husband and presents Constance's infidelity as an act of agency. The sympathy evoked in the narrative is thus both affective and political because the narrative voice frames it in the context of women's subordination in contemporary culture.

Interposed between the twelve parts of the narrative are twelve lyric poems, a structure resembling the third edition of Tennyson's *The Princess* (1850, when the lyrics that appear between the narrative sections were first introduced after the initial 1847 edition).[5] The lyrics interrupt the narrative with expressions of interiority from an ambiguously positioned speaker, an unidentified subject who addresses a similarly unnamed addressee in vague language that gives no indication of setting or historical context but mainly relies on conventional tropes of lyric poetry. The narrative conclusion to the story, situated several years in the future, is followed by a

[4] This pardoning is important because, as A. James Hammerton explains, the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which I discuss in greater detail below, included a law of condonation, according to which "a spouse who explicitly forgave an act of cruelty or adultery, or who implicitly forgave it by cohabiting with the offender afterwards, was deemed to have 'condoned' the offence, thus negating its legal force" (Hammerton 102).

[5] Songs integrated in the narrative itself, such as "Tears, idle tears" and "Now sleeps the crimson petal," were a part of the poem from the start, but Tennyson added the songs that appear between the narrative sections—"As thro' the land at eve we went," "Sweet and low, sweet and low," "The splendour falls on castle walls," "Thy voice is heard through rolling drums" (this one, identified as being sung by Lilia, actually appears at the end of part IV, rather than on a distinct page like the rest of the added lyrics), "Home they brought her warrior dead," and "Ask me no more"—in the third edition, in 1850. Furthermore, in the same way that the lyrics from *The Princess* were later anthologised as separate poems, selections from *Denzil Place* were published separately in Fane's two-volume *Poems* (1892). The eleven selections in *Poems* include ten of the lyrics and one passage from Part IV of the narrative (titled "Snowdrop Immortality").

lyric epilogue in which the author addresses the reader and defends the content of the story. There are also epigraphs at the beginning of each part of the narrative, as well as an epigraph at the beginning of the volume, which thematically frame the narrative content that follows.[6] The typographical placement of the lyrics—which are neither embedded within the narrative nor even on the same page, but which appear in smaller typeface on separate pages between the narrative sections—emphasises the distinction between the narrative and lyric genres, which remain conspicuously heterogeneous. Although Duff does not refer to *Denzil Place* specifically, this combination creates what he refers to as an "aesthetic effect of discontinuity" (*Romanticism* 178).[7] The fact that the lyrics do not arise from and are not subsumed into the poetic narrative indicates that their function goes beyond simply anticipating the story and providing a thematic framework. Unlike the epigraphs, which appear as the headpieces to each book of the story (and are common in Victorian long poems and novels), the lyrics are set apart by their distinct mise en page. Each lyric poem appears on a separate page from the poetic narrative, and the pages of the lyric poems are unpaginated. They are still counted within the continuous pagination of the

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[6] The sources for the epigraphs range widely, with quotations attributed to canonical British literary figures such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, and Tennyson, as well as to less canonical and non-British poets such as Adah Isaac Menken and Alfred de Musset. Most notably, the double epigraph preceding Book V anticipates the consummation of Constance and Denzil's relationship. The first quotation, an extract from one of the lyrics in Tennyson's *The Princess* (indicating Fane's awareness of that work), foreshadows the surrender to desire after futile resistance, when the speaker states, "thy fate and mine are seal'd, / I strove against the stream and all in vain," but "No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield; / Ask me no more." The second epigraph, from Ernest Feydeau, "Ce que les poêtes appellent l'Amour, et les moralistes l'Adultère" [That which the poets call love, and the moralists adultery], balances the quotation from Tennyson—which perhaps on its own might seem merely an allusion to a fall into sin—by suggesting that the rules of Victorian propriety are a matter of arbitrary definition, a slippage of language between love and adultery that depends on perspective.

[7] Hoagwood and Ledbetter provide a more detailed bibliographical description: "Most of the book pages consist of the blank-verse narrative set in the same modern-face Caslon typography as William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858). However, for each of the twelve books of the poem, an untitled lyric, alone on the recto of an unpaginated leaf, and set in much smaller font, precedes the narrative. Atop the first page of each of the twelve books, two epigraphs are set, in the same small font as the intercalary lyrics. Typographically, these verses in small font set off the large roman numeral capitals, the ornamentally enlarged initial capital of the narrative verse, and the two different sizes of capital letters used for the epigraphic attributions. A verse Epilogue ends immediately above an ornamental tailpiece" (139).

volume, but without page numbers and surrounded by plenty of white space, the lyrics appear notably distinct from the narrative sections (see Figures 1 and 2).

The lyrics remain so distinct, I argue, because they draw attention to the limitations of narrative, interrupting the narrative to allow an expression of interiority not afforded by the genre. The expressive feeling of the lyrics would register as contrived in a narrative context: characters would either have to launch into long, unwieldly monologues, or the plot would have to introduce a clichéd device such as a found diary. Moreover, whereas the narrative requires that dialogue and feeling be attributed to specific characters, the lack of referentiality and the ambiguity of the speaker in the lyrics allow these poems to resonate beyond the events of Constance's story. Through their proximity to the narrative, the lyrics can be related to characters and events in the story, and they do amplify the sympathetic nature of their situations, but the speaker is not fixed as Constance or any other character. The poems include expressions of anticipation, love, uncertainty, and sorrow from a speaker in a tumultuous romantic relationship, but the language is ambiguous, and the lyric subject never identified by name or any other contextual detail. The lyrics are deliberately unspecific. In this way, the verse novel is not only about Constance but also representative of women more broadly; although Constance is upper class (as Fane herself was), the lyrics are not specifically related to her experience and are thus more available for readerly identification. While the narrative relates events that have unfolded in the past—in which the reader has no part—the interposed lyrics appeal to the reader outside the narrative context of Constance's story, through both the intensity of the lyrics' emotional expression and the ambiguity of the lyric speaker. The stark juxtaposition of the rough-mixing underscores the fact that, in *Denzil Place*, lyric expression exceeds the boundaries of the narrative genre.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the existing scholarship on *Denzil Place* in Victorian studies to situate my own argument about the interrelation between generic combination and the issue of adultery in Fane's verse novel. The following section will turn to the contemporary social and political context of women's adultery, as well as Fane's personal stake in this context, to demonstrate how Fane frames her adultery plot in terms of consent, specifically the agency to consent to marriage and in marriage. Constance, an orphan whose guardian arranges her marriage to Sir John when she is seventeen, cannot consent to the union (legally, she cannot marry until the age of twenty-one without parental consent, although the age of sexual consent was thirteen[8]) and does not understand the significance of marriage. The emphasis on her lack of consent aligns with feminist discourse of the period. In addition, consent denotes *voluntary* agreement to a set of conditions, but women were often compelled to marry due to limited access to education and employment, as well as the social stigma attached to being unmarried. As nineteenth-century feminists noted, the condition of women therefore largely precluded the possibility of legitimate consent to marriage.

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[8] The age of sexual consent was raised to sixteen with the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885.

This is not living, tho' I move and breathe,
Ah, is there nothing better in the world?
I love to see the lily's cup unfurl'd
To greet the sun,—I love the lake beneath
And all the beauty of these barren days,
But is there nothing better? As I gaze
I seem to dream a mad unmeaning dream
About some fairy thing I have not known,
Sigh on, wild winds! your everlasting moan
Haunts me in summer whilst the thrushes sing
And ev'ry day in ev'ry year, the ring
Of something sad seems floating on the air,
I hear it sighing round me ev'rywhere,
And yet I hope and wait, whilst still I seem
As tho' my soul were drifting down a stream
To meet some unknown, unexpected thing.

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Figure 1: First lyric of *Denzil Place*, which precedes the beginning of the narrative on page 5, as seen in Figure 2. (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh).

DENZIL PLACE.

"This is the place. Stand still, my steed,
Let me review the scene,
And summon from the shadowy past
The forms that once have been."
LONGFELLOW.

"And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent."
BYRON.

I.

THERE, in yon gabled house amongst the oaks
Which shut it off from this, the highway road
That skirts the park towards the village side,
They used to dwell together; he was old,

Figure 2: First page of the narrative of *Denzil Place* (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh).

For example, as feminist legal scholar Mary Lyndon Shanley explains, John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869) refuted

> one of the most fundamental and preciously held assumptions about marriage in the modern era, which is that it was a relationship grounded on the consent of the partners to join their lives. Mill argued to the contrary that the presumed consent of women to marry was not, in any real sense, a free promise, but one socially coerced by the lack of meaningful options. (Shanley, "Marital Slavery and Friendship" 234)

In other words, women could not really consent to something that they were often forced into by social, cultural, and economic circumstances. Women's agency to consent *in* marriage was also severely restricted in that they had no legal right to refuse their husbands sex once they were married. According to the doctrine of coverture, wives' legal identities were absorbed into those of their husbands, and husbands had a legal right to sexual access because the law presupposed that women consented to intercourse upon marriage.[9] But since, as Mill argued, a woman's capacity to consent to marriage was compromised by her social and economic subordination, coverture was based on a faulty premise insofar as many women did not voluntarily commit to marriage but were compelled to marry. In *Denzil Place*, Constance is an upper-class woman compelled to marry because of familial pressure rather than financial need (there is no implication of economic motivation), but the matter of consent still informs Fane's verse novel. In contrast to her lack of choice in marrying Sir John, Constance's participation in the affair with Denzil is a voluntary act.

Constance's adultery is additionally provocative as a representation of sexual agency in a

[9] As Lisa Surridge explains in *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (2005), "under Victorian law, a woman was considered to consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at the time of marriage and was unable to withdraw that consent thereafter," so she could not legally refuse him at any point during their marriage (197).

culture fixated on regulating women's bodies and sexual activity. Particularly after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 entrenched the double standard regarding adultery as a basis for divorce, and the Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, 1869) codified standards for women's conduct that reflected contemporary anxieties about the purity of women's bodies and the danger of their sexual autonomy, women's adultery was highly stigmatised. As the reviews cited above illustrate, Fane's sympathetic representation of Constance's infidelity was highly provocative, and part of its provocation was the banality of Constance's marital circumstances in the story. In chapter 3, I situate Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884) in the context of contemporary feminist agitation and legal reforms regarding marital violence, demonstrating how Pfeiffer critiques the concept of coverture for its permissiveness of marital rape. In *Denzil Place*, however, Fane does not represent marital cruelty; instead, she depicts a woman in a mundane but loveless marriage, showing how even a marriage without cruelty is unjust and raises issues of consent and agency. When Constance later falls in love with and begins an affair with Geoffrey Denzil, the young and worldly owner of the neighbouring estate, her extramarital relationship is the first real choice she makes in a romantic and sexual relationship. Fane's verse novel thus evokes sympathy for Constance's adultery by demonstrating how she is trapped in a banal, loveless marriage and frames her adultery as an act of agency.

In chapter 1, I drew on Webster's feminist essays to contextualise my argument about self-representation in "Lota" in the context of the Second Reform Act of 1867, and in chapter 3, I frame my argument about Pfeiffer by referring to her public advocacy for women's rights, including her articles on women's suffrage. However, unlike Webster and Pfeiffer, Fane was not publicly involved in public feminist activism, so this chapter incorporates biographical evidence

instead. I contextualise my argument with materials such as Fane's satirical representations of marital relationships in published works and unpublished letters that attest to her own unhappy marriage during the time she was writing *Denzil Place*. I draw on her personal papers, including correspondence and literary manuscripts from the Alexander William Kinglake Letters and Papers at the Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts at the University of Cambridge (GBR/0012/MS Add.7633), the Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt at the University of Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, and the Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie (MS 2608) held by the University of Reading Special Collections.

The chapter will demonstrate how the narrative and lyric sections of Fane's verse novel generate sympathy for the condition of women. I mean sympathy both in terms of feeling—a sense of affinity and compassion—and politics. I do not suggest that Fane's verse novel is a call to political action, an attempt to incite social or legal reform, but that the sympathy it inspires is in itself political. First, I analyse the narrative to demonstrate how the first-person narrator, a figure for Fane herself,[10] evokes sympathy for Constance by equating her marriage with bondage (as many contemporary feminists did) and expressing her personal identification with Constance and Denzil's situation. She conveys an intimacy with Constance by referring to her as "my heroine," "my hapless heroine," and "my Constance" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 136, 74, 249), and she intervenes in the narrative with comments, sometimes in the form of parenthetical digressions and sometimes direct addresses to the reader, that frame Constance's adultery as agency.

Next, I turn to the lyric poems interposed between the sections of the narrative, which I argue further politicise the sympathy evoked by *Denzil Place* through the ambiguity of the lyric

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[10] Various moments in the verse novel imply the narrator's authorial status. In the opening line of the epilogue, she describes the act of writing, not just narrating, by emphasising textuality: "lay aside my pen,—my story ends" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 249). She also articulates a concern for the reception of the verse novel's controversial content: "I tremble for my reader's kind good will" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 250).

subject and the triangulated address between the lyric subject, the addressee, and the reader, an address that lyric theory scholar Jonathan Culler identifies as a fundamental characteristic of the genre. As Isobel Armstrong argues in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), Victorian poetry is inherently political because the self-conscious constructedness of the language in works by Victorian poets "draws attention to the nature of words as a medium of representation" (12). For Armstrong, this openness means that Victorian poems are always unstable sites of meaning that can yield expressive and skeptical readings simultaneously, "two concurrent poems in the same words" (12). The Victorian "double poem" foregrounds "the epistemology which governs the construction of the self and its relationships and to the cultural conditions in which those relationships are made" and accordingly "expose[s] relationships of power, for the epistemological reading will explore things of which the expressive reading is unaware and go beyond the experience of the lyric speaker" (Armstrong 13). In chapter 1, I drew on Armstrong's argument for a reading of Webster's "Lota" as an ironic critique of the *Bildungsroman*. I do not read the lyrics in *Denzil Place* as similarly ironic (although they do feature overwrought, somewhat clichéd language at times, which might arguably lend itself to an ironic reading). Nonetheless, the lyrics in Fane's verse novel still "go beyond the experience of the lyric speaker" insofar as they are not just the expressions of a specific speaker but representative of many possible speakers. The ambiguity of the poetic language evokes a political sympathy, then, because the lyrics' emotional appeal is on behalf of an unspecified subject and addressed, according to Culler's theory of triangulated address, to the reader. In this sense, the lyric poems resonate beyond the events of Constance's story. Fane's verse novel thus manages to be both specific and representative, evoking sympathy for Constance's adultery as

well as sympathy for women's lack of agency more broadly in a contemporary social and political context.

Recovering *Denzil Place*

In her own time, Fane was a respected poet who associated with prominent authors such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Oscar Wilde; Blunt recalled her after her death as the woman "who had been . . . the best of our living women poets" (*My Diaries* 120), and Wilde praised her as a writer who could "look at life not merely from the point of view of the poet, but also from the standpoint of the philosopher, the keen observer, the fine social critic" ("Some Literary Notes" 57). Over a career spanning from the 1870s to the 1900s, Fane published fifteen volumes of poetry, prose fiction, essays, a verse drama, and a translation of the memoirs of Marguerite de Valois,[11] as well as poems, essays, and satirical sketches in periodicals such as the *English Illustrated Magazine*, *The Lady's Realm*, the *Monthly Review*, the *National Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Time*, *Woman's World*, and *The World*. With the recovery of women poets in Victorian studies, her work has begun to receive some critical attention in the last fifteen years from critics such as Catherine Addison, Terence Hoagwood, Kathryn Ledbetter, Markovits, and Herbert F. Tucker.

Most of the scholarship on Fane has focused on *Denzil Place*. Of all the verse novels analysed in this dissertation, Fane's has received the most critical attention, mainly with critics

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[11] *From Dawn to Noon* (1872), *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse* (1875), *The Queen of the Fairies* (1876), *Anthony Babington: A Drama* (1877), *The Edwin and Angelina Papers* (1878), *Collected Verses* (1880), *Sophy, or The Adventures of a Savage* (1881), *Thro' Love and War* (1886), *Autumn Songs* (1889), *The Story of Helen Davenant* (1889), *Memoirs of Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre* (1892), *Under Cross and Crescent* (1896), *Betwixt Two Seas: Poems and Ballads Written at Constantinople and Therapia* (1900), *Two Moods of a Man, with Other Papers and Short Stories* (1901), and *Collected Essays* (1902).

recognising its indebtedness to *Aurora Leigh*[12] and seeking to reconcile its combination of narrative and lyric. In their book *"Colour'd Shadows": Contexts in Publishing, Printing, and Reading Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers* (2005), Kathryn Ledbetter and Terence Allan Hoagwood comment astutely on the complex narrative structure of *Denzil Place*, remarking that it shifts between "multiple narrative points of view," from the dominant perspective of the "anonymous narrator" who "tells of the viewpoint of Constance" to the occasional "viewpoint of Geoffrey Denzil" (141). However, they find that the verse novel lacks overall coherence due to its highly "citational style" (Hoagwood and Ledbetter 138), arguing that by "quoting and alluding to dozens of literary works, densely, including often [Fane's] own earlier poems," *Denzil Place* consistently reminds readers—particularly through the different typographical characteristics of the epigraphs, lyrics, and narrative—of its "textual condition" (138, 139). They contend that the lyrics particularly emphasise the verse novel's materiality as a text because although "each of the intercalary lyrics thematically fits the book it precedes," none of them is explicitly connected to the narrative: "None of the lyrics shares characters, action, or setting with the narrative books of the poem, but instead the lyrics ornament the book from without" (Hoagwood and Ledbetter 141). The lyric between Books III and IV, for example, is "detached from any specified voice and affixed between books like a cut-out in a collage," while the lyric that follows Book I features "a voice so alien to the narrators and characters of *Denzil Place* as to suggest the *bricolage* of a literary annual rather than narrative coherence" (Hoagwood and Ledbetter 146, 142).

[12] All the critics who discuss *Denzil Place* make this observation: Hoagwood and Ledbetter contextualise *Denzil Place* as "Fane's twelve-book verse novel in the tradition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*" (138), Tucker calls it "a blank-verse spinoff from *Aurora Leigh*" (*Epic* 491), Addison notes it "is clearly a direct descendent of *Aurora Leigh*" (103), and Markovits points out that the name of Fane's protagonist, Constance Leigh, "signals her author's debt to the single most influential Victorian verse-novel, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 31).

Some critics do not address the importance of the lyrics at all, an omission implying that—in contrast to my own argument that the lyrics are fundamental to the way *Denzil Place* evokes sympathy—the lyric poems are not crucial to the way Fane's verse novel generates meaning. In *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790-1910* (2008), Tucker considers *Denzil Place* as part of his short analysis on the verse novel genre, calling it a "rather risqué flirtation with free-thinking adultery" (491). He does not mention the lyrics at all; rather, he highlights the narrative structure of the verse novel as a characteristic of the prose fiction of the era, noting that "personal development sympathetically narrated from a standpoint outside the developing self was a model . . . for the period's . . . biographies and prose fiction" (490). Addison, who provides a brief overview of *Denzil Place* in her chapter on the Victorian period in *A Genealogy of the Verse Novel* (2017), similarly skims over the lyric poems in her anatomisation of the poetic and novelistic conventions in *Denzil Place*. Instead, she focuses on Fane's use of blank verse, suggesting that "as *Aurora Leigh* does, it exploits the facility of blank verse to make paragraphs flexible in length and in the degree to which the line is foregrounded" and "uses the novelistic capabilities of blank verse to represent characters' discourse in focalisation, direct speech and embedded letters" (103). She notes also that Fane both employs poetic devices such as extended metaphors and "epiphanic moments" (Addison 104) and infuses the story with mundane details of everyday life such as descriptions of household objects, a convention associated with the realist novel (Addison 105). Finally, like Hoagwood and Ledbetter, she remarks that "where *Denzil Place* diverges most strikingly from *Aurora Leigh* is in its narration which, though it also recounts the life and psychological growth of a female protagonist, does so in the third person," with Constance "merely the most important focaliser" rather than "the narrator of her own story" (Addison 105). For Addison, the unnamed narrator of the story, who "makes her presence felt on

regular occasions" (105), presents "a much more knowing, worldly personality than her protagonist, whose dilemmas the narrator is able to perceive from various ironic viewpoints" (105), and adopts a similar tone to that of the narrator in Byron's *Don Juan*, who relates the "self-deceptions of human love" with "sympathetic mockery" (106). She contends that both narrators tell the stories from a distanced position, "as people who have lived on beyond such experiences" (Addison 106) and see the world from a more experienced vantage point than the characters do. Addison's most important observation, however, is that the sympathetic representation of adultery in *Denzil Place* (which she argues that Fane also inherits from *Don Juan*) serves as a commentary on the condition of Victorian women. "The reader . . . is set up to sympathise with the adulterous lovers from the beginning," she notes, and "the fundamental cause of [Constance and Denzil's] relationship is . . . the contemporary treatment of women and girls" (Addison 106). Specifically, she points out, "Constance is treated as a chattel and palmed off into marriage without her understanding of or consent to the institution" (Addison 106), and her extramarital affair thus challenges the system in which she is passed as property from guardian to husband.

Missing in the criticism outlined above is an approach that combines Fane's innovation in generic form, including her use of lyric, with her provocative representation of female adultery, and this is what Markovits provides in her book *The Victorian Verse-Novel: Aspiring to Life* (2017). *Denzil Place*'s "surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of an adulterous relationship" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 31), she argues, is related to the work's genre. As outlined in chapter 1, Markovits relates the emergence of the verse novel genre to contemporary anxieties about the changing status of marriage, particularly the dangers posed by adultery. She points out that "a surprisingly large percentage of the period's long narrative poems address matrimonial failure:

both courtships that fail to yield weddings . . . and marriages that break apart through adultery" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 36) and proposes that the genre's "rise at mid-century points to the need for a new form to address" the "social crisis" of adultery (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 37). She acknowledges Barbara Leckie's argument about the pervasiveness of adultery in prose fiction in *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914* (1999) but contends that, for the most part, "the English prose tradition staked its ground . . . on the courtship plot" and "largely repudiated the adultery plot" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 35, 39). She concedes Leckie's point that "between 1857 and 1914 adultery was . . . everywhere in English print culture," from "parliamentary debates" to "a front-page 'Divorce Court' story in most of the daily newspapers at least twice a week," and was discussed in "literary and cultural interest reviews," as well as portrayed in popular and canonical novels (Leckie 1), but suggests that Leckie "would probably agree that fictional adultery was rarely depicted as straightforwardly as in *Denzil Place*" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 34). Markovits's point is that Fane draws on Arthurian epic rather than prose fiction in her representation of adultery (with Guinevere providing the model for Constance) and thus that poetic convention, not affinity with the novel, accounts for the subversive content in *Denzil Place*.

My argument departs from Markovits's on this detail. In chapter 1, I sought to qualify Markovits's point about the absence of adultery in prose fiction, which I think is somewhat overstated, by drawing on the work of Kelly Hager in *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (2010). Hager points out that the mid-Victorian prose novel represented marital dissolution frequently and often sought to show how marriage, especially for women, could be unfavourable; the failed marriage plot in verse novels thus coincides with a broader trend in Victorian literature. Similarly, although Markovits attempts to

qualify Leckie's argument in relation to *Denzil Place*, Fane actually adopts some of the strategies for representing adultery that Leckie identifies in novels. Leckie argues that novelists, forced to deal with censorship regulations after the Obscene Publications Act of 1857, "developed strategies through which to make adultery visible" nonetheless, notably by making the story focused not on love or passion but on the discovery of the affair: "adultery becomes a question of truth, *and* detection and punishment," typically told as a "domestic detective story" in which the wronged party finds out about their spouse's infidelity and which often features a punitive ending for the adulterer (Leckie 14). While *Denzil Place* represents the adulterous relationship between Constance and Denzil sympathetically, the lovers do struggle with the illicit nature of their relationship. Furthermore, although Fane's verse novel does not take the form of a "domestic detective story," one of the major events of the plot is still the discovery of Constance and Denzil's affair by Sir John's sister, which precipitates Constance's exile to Italy. Constance also dies at the end of the story, though her death in childbirth—after two years married to Denzil—is not depicted as punishment for their affair. *Denzil Place* is thus neither a straightforward love plot nor an entirely moralistic tale.

Rather, as I argue, *Denzil Place* highlights the ways in which Fane's protagonist is confined to a marriage that she did not choose, and it presents adultery as a way for Constance to exert agency in her choice of sexual partner. The verse novel focuses in detail on the love and passion between Constance and Denzil. The first amorous encounter between them, for instance, is described in Book V. Constance goes to the library in the middle of the night and finds Denzil, who travelled to Germany to try to resist succumbing to his love for her, has returned. She faints and awakes to find "her head / Was resting on his breast," and "against her own / His cheek was press'd, and on her mouth she felt / The ardent lips of her too well-belov'd / Kissing her back to

life" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 104). The narrative presents the scene in sensual detail, describing Constance as she attempts to resist her own desire and "strove to thrust away his eager lips, / Feeling his hot breath on her trembling cheek / And in amongst her loosely knotted hair," but is overwhelmed by "the wild beating of his desp'rate heart / Out-throbbing her's [sic]" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 106). I agree with Markovits that, although other literature of the period did depict adultery, the overt representation of Constance and Denzil's illicit sexual relationship (which contemporary reviewers found so brazen and objectionable) is part of what makes Fane's work important and distinctive. But there is also an ironic register to the description of the meeting in the library. Although the encounter is ostensibly the culmination of Constance's desires for Denzil, she is strangely passive in the scene. So overwhelmed by emotion that she faints (a clichéd trope of feminine sensibility), she does not initiate the interaction, and the hyperbolic language in the passage foregrounds Denzil's erotic experience rather than Constance's. The narrative emphasises his "ardent lips," "his eager lips," "his hot breath" and "his desp'rate heart" that beats wildly, to the point that it is "Out-throbbing" her own. For Denzil, the experience is more highly charged than for Constance, whose responses are subdued by comparison. The boldness of the scene emerges not only from its depiction of illicit sexuality but also from its implication that Constance's desire is still not adequately represented, suggesting perhaps that the sexual encounter is still not entirely fulfilling for her and that, even in committing adultery, women's choices are limited.

Markovits's most important point is that *Denzil Place*'s combination of the novel and poetic forms is particularly suited to the sympathetic portrayal of a plot about violating the bonds of marriage: an "adulterated" form, as she puts it, for an adultery plot (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 39). In contrast to Hoagwood and Ledbetter's reading of the lyrics as belonging to an unspecified

voice unrelated to the narrative context of the verse novel, Markovits contends that "all the lyrics, with the exception of the last, recording Denzil's response to Constance's death, can be attributed to Constance's voice," with each lyric a "discrete moment" that "looks backward or forward to an instant that has been integrated into the surrounding narrative sections" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 44). The effect of the narrative and lyric combination in Fane's verse novel, according to Markovits, is a "hybrid temporality" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 59) that establishes a tension between two different types of experience of love: "the contest between the sense of love as lyric ecstasy . . . and the sense of love as durational" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 56). The narrative compels the story to move forward but the lyric poems interposed among the narrative sections "exhibit significant nostalgia for lyric stasis" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 56)—that is, the desire to arrest narrative progress and transcend time. Overall, Markovits provides to date the most nuanced critical reading of *Denzil Place* to date. However, although she situates *Denzil Place* within the context of late Victorian debates about divorce—which she points out often centred on adultery because it was perceived as committing "the most grievous of assaults on the sanctity of marriage" and was "frequently cited as the grounds for a petition for divorce" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 34)—her work does not fully situate Fane's verse novel in the context of contemporary attitudes toward women's adultery to demonstrate how the form of the verse novel intervenes in this discourse.

In the next section, I address that omission by recovering, in relation to Fane and *Denzil Place*, the social and legal implications of a woman's adultery in the mid-1870s, when women's bodies and sexual activity were a point of social and political fixation. Adultery was considered a far greater marital crime for women than for men, who could not divorce their husbands on the sole basis of adultery and then remarry, nor leave them and avoid social stigmatisation.

Legislation such as the Contagious Diseases Acts, furthermore—which was motivated by a fear that the sexually contaminated female body posed a threat to social order—sought to police women's sexual activity. *Denzil Place* provocatively foregrounds women's sexual agency, highlighting the banal life of a woman who does not suffer cruelty but is unhappy in her marriage and representing adultery as an act to be sympathised with, committed by a woman with no way of respectably extricating herself from her situation. As I will show, *Denzil Place* generates sympathy for Constance through its generic combination. In the narrative, the narrator establishes Constance's arranged marriage to Sir John as bondage and explicitly identifies with her as protagonist, while the lyrics interrupt the narrative at regular intervals with expressions of interiority from an ambiguous speaker and compel the reader to pause on and identify with the emotional state of the lyric subject.

The Perception of Female Adultery in the 1870s

The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which created the first civil divorce court in England, was a watershed moment for nineteenth-century marital reform**,** but the Act also entrenched a sexual double standard when it came to adultery. As Shanley explains in *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895* (1989), before the Act was passed, the only options for ending a marriage were through the difficult and expensive procedures of ecclesiastical annulment and private Act of Parliament. Ecclesiastical courts could award "a divorce *a mensa et thoro* (divorce from bed and board)," the equivalent of a legal separation, which "was granted only for adultery, extreme cruelty, or desertion" and did not permit remarriage, or "a divorce *a vinculo matrimonii* (divorce from the bonds of marriage)," an

annulment, which constituted "an absolute dissolution of the marriage bond" and allowed remarriage (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 36). The latter was awarded only in cases when the marriage was deemed "invalid due to age, mental incompetence, sexual impotence, or fraud," criteria that rendered the marriage void (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 36). Otherwise, Shanley explains, the only way to end a marriage and have the option of remarrying was by obtaining a civil divorce through a private act of Parliament, which required wealth and social connections (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 36). As A. James Hammerton notes in *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (1992), "absolute divorce" was an option "restricted to the wealthy minority able to finance a private act of Parliament" (96). According to historian Allen Horstman, only 190 marriages were dissolved by Parliament between 1801 and 1857 (32).

With a few exceptions, women were precluded from applying for parliamentary divorce because the only basis for divorce was a wife's adultery. According to Shanley, the applicant had to first attain a divorce *a mensa et thoro* from the ecclesiastical courts, then successfully sue for "'criminal conversation' by proving his wife's adultery with the accused" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 36). At that point, "after success in these two proceedings . . . a plaintiff [could] present a bill for parliamentary divorce" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 36-37). A suit for criminal conversation "could only be initiated by men, not women," however, because it was specifically "a civil action by the husband against his wife's alleged lover" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 24). The process, according to which "a husband charged another man with adultery with his wife, and," if he proved the alleged lover guilty, "recovered 'damages,'" was one that "reflected the notion that a husband in some manner owned his wife's affection and sexual services, that she was his property, but a wife did not have a

similar legal claim on her husband" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 24). Of the 190 marriages dissolved between 1801 and 1857, only four were granted to women, and only on the basis of adultery compounded by bigamy or incest (Horstman 20-24; Hager, "Chipping Away at Coverture" n.p.). Successfully petitioning for a parliamentary divorce was very difficult for men and nearly impossible for women.

With the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act and the creation of a civil divorce court, divorce became more accessible, but the grounds for divorce still differed for men and women. A man could obtain a divorce *a vincula* (which would completely sever the marriage and allow him to remarry) by proving his wife's infidelity, but a woman had to prove aggravated adultery. As Hammerton explains, "the new Divorce Court permitted absolute divorce, but enshrined the double standard of morality in law by allowing relief to a husband for his wife's adultery alone while requiring a wife to prove aggravated adultery, which required a compounding offence such as cruelty, desertion, incest, or bigamy" (96). Furthermore, if a woman left her husband "without first obtaining a divorce, she was guilty of desertion and forfeited all claim to a share of his property (even that which she might have brought to the marriage) and to custody of their children" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 9), an issue that had come under intense public scrutiny with the notorious case of Caroline Norton. After being accused of adultery by her abusive husband and being denied access to her children when she left him, Norton campaigned for reform to divorce, custody, and property laws. Through publications such as *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill…* (1839) and *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (1855), Norton was influential in the passing of the Infants Custody Act of 1839 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.

A woman's adultery was considered a severe enough infraction on its own to merit the husband's divorce because it violated the principle of a husband's ownership over his wife's body and threatened the system of patrilineage since a husband could not be certain that he had fathered his heirs. As I discuss below (and as chapter 3 of this dissertation discusses in more detail), Victorian marriage was predicated on the doctrine of coverture, which "dictated that when a woman married, her legal personality was subsumed in that of her husband" and she "was in many ways regarded as the property of her husband" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 8). A woman's adultery challenged conventional middle-class marital ideology and was perceived as a threat to the institution of marriage**,** as well as to property and patrimony. Therefore, while the Matrimonial Causes Act made divorce more accessible by putting it under the jurisdiction of the civil courts rather than the ecclesiastic courts, a crucial reform, it also, as Shanley remarks, "sanctioned and perpetuated a patriarchal understanding of the marriage bond" (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 48), establishing female adultery as the greatest violation of matrimony and making it far more difficult for women than for men to extricate themselves from

marriage.[13] The Matrimonial Causes Act undeniably improved access to divorce,[14] but by allowing husbands to petition for divorce solely on the basis of adultery and requiring wives to prove aggravated adultery—that is, adultery compounded by additional crimes such as bigamy, incest, cruelty, or desertion—it also preserved a sexual double standard that remained in place until the twentieth century.[15]

Contemporary attitudes about sexual morality also resulted in the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, which were enacted to protect men in the military from contracting venereal diseases when they had sex with prostitutes. The Acts granted police the authority to stop any woman they suspected of being a prostitute, subject her to a medical exam to determine if she was infected, and arrest her if she resisted. As Shanley explains, "if a woman refused to submit to the exam, she could be taken before a magistrate who could force the examination to take place," and "if she was found to be diseased, the woman

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[13] I focus here on the law itself, but Hammerton makes the important point that "for all its importance as an indicator of general attitudes, the rigidity of the law tells us little about the practice of the courts" (97), noting that studying the history of judicial decisions reveals that judicial attitudes toward matrimonial cruelty changed as the courts became open to more people, particularly women. As Horstman explains, far more women applied for divorces than reformers predicted: "In the first year of the new court wives filed 97 of the 253 petitions" for divorce; "rather than suing for a judicial separation after the husbands' adulteries," they "added a charge of cruelty and sought a divorce instead" (86). And the numbers did not decline for the rest of the century, as "women continued to represent about 40 per cent of petitioners for divorce throughout the rest of Victoria's reign" (Horstman 90). According to Hammerton, these women's suits impacted the evolution of the law itself: "wives who accused their husbands of cruelty eventually influenced judges to liberalize the law and others to debate it" (57). As they saw more cases, judges began to expand their definitions of cruelty, influenced by "the increased frequency and intensity with which middle-class wives brought their complaints of both violent and non-violent cruelty to the court" (Hammerton 101). This "increased frequency doubtless stemmed from easier access and comparative cheapness in the new court; the reformed divorce law opened facilities to a much wider cross-section of the middle class, and even to some beneath the middle class," Hammerton explains, "but there was also a widening in the kind of complaints brought by wives, which might suggest that companionate ideas were undermining their willingness to tolerate meekly their husbands' abuse of authority, even when the abuse was non-violent. By a slow process, with much vacillation and assertion of the legitimacy of patriarchal authority, [the first presidents of the Divorce Court, Sir] Cresswell and [Lord] Penzance came to share the views of many petitioning wives about what constituted actionable cruelty" (102). "Judges shifted their focus in dealing with legal cruelty from the nature of the offence to its effect on the victim" (Hammerton 57) and expanded their interpretation of cruelty to include non-violent acts.

[14] However, as Hammerton explains, separation did not become an easier option with the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act: "divorce from bed and board, without right of remarriage, re-labelled 'judicial separation', continued to be administered by the new court in virtually unaltered form" (96).

[15] According to Hammerton, "no significant changes were made to the legislation until 1923 when the double standard was abolished and 1937 when grounds other than adultery were admitted for a divorce decree" (96-97).

could be detained in a hospital for up to six months," all while "le[aving] [her] male customers untouched" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 82, 80). The campaign to repeal the Acts, ongoing throughout the 1870s and early 1880s and finally successful in 1886, "addressed the issue of women's sexual subordination to men both in society as a whole and in marriage" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 82). Feminists pointed out that the Acts were "a gross violation of women's civil liberties, since a woman could be apprehended on the mere suspicion of being a prostitute" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 83). Moreover, "the Acts, perhaps more clearly than other legislation, revealed the multifaceted nature of women's subordination to men" because they demonstrated the fact that men were in control of policing a crisis that they had themselves caused but for which they took no accountability (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 83):

> Many women were driven to prostitution because they could not earn money (or not enough money to support themselves and a child) by other means. The military forces, which sought access to 'clean' women, were all male, as was the Parliament which so readily enacted their proposals. The medical profession, which provided the intellectual rationale for the Acts as well as the examining doctors, was almost entirely male. (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 83)

Taking for granted the legitimacy of men's desire and sexual activity, the Acts disregarded women's right to bodily autonomy.

Furthermore, as Shanley remarks, "the notion that male lust legitimated state regulation of prostitution had implications for marriage as well" because "at the same time that a wife could be divorced for a single act of adultery, the state was attempting to insure that any man, including her husband, could engage in illegitimate sexual relations without adverse effects on

his health" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 84). Because of this danger, feminists such as John Stuart Mill and Josephine Butler considered "the Contagious Diseases Acts not only a threat to 'fallen women' or those likely to be mistaken as such, but to *all* women" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 85). Both social attitudes and legislative measures from the period, therefore, reflected and intensified a sexual double standard that *Denzil Place* rejects.[16]

Fane had a personal stake in contemporary discourse about sexual morality, particularly adultery. Biographical entries on Fane mention her unhappy marriage and multiple affairs, but my research in her unpublished archives at the University of Cambridge, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the University of Reading yielded new details about this aspect of her life and its influence on *Denzil Place*, based on manuscript correspondence previously overlooked by critics. In a July 1878 letter to the historian Alexander William Kinglake, Fane described *Denzil Place* as a volume that "came . . . from my heart of hearts" (Letter to Alexander William Kinglake, July 1878, Add 7633/7/101, Alexander William Kinglake Letters and Papers, Department of Archives and Modern Manuscripts, Cambridge University Library),[17] a remark suggesting that her verse novel was inspired in part by her personal experience, and the plot does share parallels with circumstances of Fane's life. According to Small's entry on Fane in the *ODNB*, Fane, an upper-class woman (her grandparents, who raised her for the first part of her life, were "Sir Charles Montolieu Lamb, second baronet, of Beauport, Sussex," and Lady Mary Montgomerie, "daughter and heir of Archibald Montgomerie, eleventh earl of Eglinton"), married her first husband, Henry Sydenham Singleton, only after her lover Clare Vyner refused

[16] Contemporary feminists did not condone or promote adultery, as Shanley points out: "In assailing the double standard of morality which assigned women to the category of either wife or prostitute, feminists did not intend to imply that all women should be as sexually active as prostitutes or Victorian men," but rather, "urged men to rise to the standard of sexual control expected of respectable women" (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 86).

[17] Presumably, she is responding to his praise of her volume, but I could not trace that letter in his correspondence at Cambridge University Library, nor in Fane's at the University of Reading. Based on the correspondence in Kinglake's papers, the two became friends.

to marry her. She carried on multiple public affairs—with Vyner, Sir Philip Currie (whom she married in 1894, after Singleton's death), and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt—during the years of her unhappy marriage to Singleton. Most notably, an unpublished 1874 letter in her papers at the University of Reading, one I have never seen cited before its inclusion here, indicates that she was considering applying for a legal separation from her husband just a year before the publication of *Denzil Place*. The letter, from a Lord Rendlesham,[18] cautions her against taking such action and invokes the inevitable damage to her reputation caused by the stigma of separation. Ostensibly with her best interests in mind, Rendlesham advises in the letter, "my own opinion is that if a separation can be avoided so much the better for you. You are young & pretty, he is old or of a certain age & perhaps not quite attractive; therefore notwithstanding anything your friends might say for you, I know well what the verdict of the world would be" (Letter to Mary Montgomerie Singleton, 21 July 1874, MS 2608/1/1/42-45, University of Reading). Singleton, he insists,

> does not seem to me to ask very much from you; only to be a little more amiable, kind & good natured to him. Though he says you have locked him out of your bedroom for five years yet he does not hold out any wish for the unlocking of those doors. He not unreasonably I think says you ought not to go to the seaside by yourself & leave him with the children at all events without letting him know where you have gone to; again though this is a very trivial matter you might give up writing your poetry at dinner with a steel

[18] Lord Rendlesham is Baron Rendlesham, the title for Frederick William Brook Thellusson. According to *Debrett's Peerage and Baronetage* (1890), he served as the MP for Suffolk Eastern from 1874 to 1885. The biographical connection between Rendlesham and Fane is not completely clear, but they may have been related through marriage. He married Lady Egidia Montgomerie, daughter of the thirteenth Earl of Eglinton, in 1861 (*Debrett's* 601), who, as far as I can tell, was Fane's third cousin. He addresses her as "Minnie" at the beginning of the letter, indicating their familiarity.

pen. (Letter to Mary Montgomerie Singleton, 21 July 1874, MS 2608/1/1/42-45, University of Reading)

Fane's use of a pen as a tool of rebellion against her husband stands out here. It may be that he found it a vulgar breach of etiquette for her to use a pen at dinner, or perhaps that steel pens caused more noise than quill pens did, but it also suggests that her writing poetry was a point of contention between them and a way that she asserted agency in their domestic life (particularly if one imagines that she was writing *Denzil Place* at this time).

Rendlesham suggests too that she "let him go out to dinner with you & have some at home without that Bete noir Curry" and counsels that circumstances between her and her husband might improve if she "gave up wearing a necklace given you by Vyner to which he objects" (Letter to Mary Montgomerie Singleton, 21 July 1874, MS 2608/1/1/42-45, University of Reading). His comments insinuate that Fane was not particularly interested in performing the role of dutiful, loyal wife to pacify her husband and that she carried on her affairs openly, parading her lovers in front of him. His description implies that her actions bordered on taunting, that not only did she deny her husband access to her company and body, but that she also flaunted her indiscretions by repeatedly bringing the "black beast" Curry (a reference to the man who would become her second husband in 1895, Sir Philip Henry Wodehouse Currie, later Baron Currie) into their home and constantly wearing a token given to her by her first lover. Rendlesham concludes by reminding her that "I know that once you are separated from your husband the world treats you in a very different manner to what it does as long as you stick to him, though you do not live comfortably together" (Letter to Mary Montgomerie Singleton, 21 July 1874, MS 2608/1/1/42-45, University of Reading), a statement that attests to the way that, even if a woman managed to secure a separation from her husband, she would still face social

judgment. Fane, who would not have been able to remarry had she gained the separation, remained married to Singleton, but she did not end her extramarital relationships, and she applied an incisive critical eye to upper-class marriage in her writing.

The sexual freedom of women was thus a resonant issue in her personal life that found representation in her literary work, in what Ledbetter describes as "personal, often tragically sad complaints about limitations for women with love and marriage" ("Time" 144). According to Small in the *ODNB*, Vyner was the subject of the passionate lyrics in Fane's first poetry volume in 1872, *From Dawn to Noon*, and she later satirised marriage in *The Edwin and Angelina Papers* (1878), a series of sketches about the pretenses and entanglements of courtship, marriage, and adultery in British society, which were published in the *World*, a society newspaper, and "proved scandalous because of the widespread belief that Fane was lampooning those involved in her own love life" (Brown, Clements, and Grundy, *Orlando*, "Violet Fane entry"). My research in her archives, particularly her understudied correspondence with Blunt, suggest that this was the case. In the sketches, Fane loosely represents herself as the poet Angelina, Singleton as the antagonistic Edwin, and Philip Currie as her lover, D'Arcy, and she uses the same names in her unpublished letters to Blunt (Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, MS 1122-87, passim, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).[19] The biographical component of her work has been overlooked in scholarship, but it offers insights into Fane's life that provide important context for

[19] Her letters (Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, MS 1122-30, 1136, 1140-41, 1144, 1147, 1150, 1154, 1157-58, 1166, 1174, 1179-80, 1184, 1187, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) are often signed "Angelina," and she sometimes refer to her husband as "Edwin." Blunt's unpublished memoir, *Alms to Oblivion* (also held at the Fitzwilliam Museum) also adopts these names—Angelina, Edwin, and D'Arcy—to refer to Fane, Singleton, and Currie. For example, *Alms to Oblivion* contains an unpublished sonnet from Fane, "Far from the busy turmoil of the street" (n.d., MS poem, MS 15-1976 in MS 43-1975, Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Fitzwilliam Museum), which Blunt includes in its manuscript form and transcribes himself in the memoir, with this introductory note: "Calling at Buckingham road I found a letter from Angelina containing violets and another sonnet. She is at Hazely, her country place, spending a week in retirement and finishing her novel" (*Alms to Oblivion, 1875-1880*, vol. IV, 331, MS 43-1975, Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Fitzwilliam Museum).

her work. One of the sketches in *The Edwin and Angelina Papers*, "A Marriage à la Mode" (published first in the *World* on 11 April 1877), addresses Angelina's "bitter experiences of conjugal incompatibility" in her marriage with Edwin (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 37) and attributes her affair with D'Arcy, as well as Edwin's own affairs—since "he, too, has his irons in the fire" (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 44)—to irreconcilable spousal discord.

The *Papers* provide important context for *Denzil Place*. I am not suggesting that Fane is directly representing herself, her husband, or one of her lovers in the characters of her verse novel. Fane actually pokes fun at this conflation of poet and speaker and of lover and poetic addressee in *The Edwin and Angelina Papers*. In "Angelina as an Author," the narrator, commenting on the recent publication of Angelina's first book of poetry, asserts that her husband "might suppose (for husbands are always so ridiculous) that some of these lyrics, although addressed merely to a creation of the poet's brain, were inspired by the presence or remembrance of D'Arcy" (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 203).[20] However, the *Papers* do demonstrate Fane's tendency to take self-consciously the material of her own life as a source of inspiration for her literary work and exemplify her capacity for sharp feminist analysis. As the next section will demonstrate, *Denzil Place*—emerging out of the personal context of Fane's unhappy marriage and the broader context of contemporary marriage law, according to which women could not end a marriage except under extreme circumstances—presents a story of female adultery and evokes sympathy for the protagonist by emphasising her position as a woman trapped in marriage.

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[20] In a non-satirical capacity, she also writes in a letter to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt that "to be really a creator I think one ought to look a little beyond one's own heart with its' [sic] regrets & longings – tho' it is very tempting to write of what one feels so keenly" (Letter to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 6 October 1875, MS 1123-1976, 4ff. 6pp, Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Fitzwilliam Museum).

"A lovely slave in chains": Marital Bondage and Narrative Sympathy

Denzil Place represents marriage as a state of bondage, which, as I discussed in chapter 1 and revisit in more detail in chapter 3, was a common metaphor in Victorian feminist discourse. Indeed, the rhetorical strategy of comparing women's subjugation in marriage to slavery predated the nineteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist tract *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), for example, asserts that women are taught deference to their parents as children and that, "thus taught slavishly to submit to their parents, they are prepared for the slavery of marriage" (188), later stating that "when . . . I call women slaves, I mean in a political and civil sense" (202). According to literary critic Anne K. Mellor, Wollstonecraft here refers to the "legal construction of the British wife as a slave" under coverture (Mellor 236), and, as Mellor points out, the same analogy is invoked in her posthumously published novel *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria* (1798), in which Maria, the protagonist, asks, "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (Wollstonecraft 253)

This rhetoric remained pervasive in the writing of Victorian feminists. John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869) famously compared wives to slaves: "the wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called. She vows a lifelong obedience to him at the altar, and is held to it all through her life by law" (503). Mill identified the difficulty of a woman gaining a divorce as a fundamental part of this subjected state; after providing an overview of her limited rights within marriage (including property ownership and custody of infants), he remarks in *Subjection* that not only is "this is her legal state," but that "from this state she has no means of withdrawing herself. If she leaves her husband, she can take nothing with her, neither her children nor anything which is rightfully her

own" (505), her only recourse a "legal separation by a decree of a court of justice," which, "until lately, the courts of justice would only give at an expense which made it inaccessible to any one out of the higher ranks (*Subjection* 505) and which remains limited to "cases of desertion, or of the extreme of cruelty" (*Subjection* 505). And although Mill does not pursue the issue of divorce and remarriage in detail, he does assert that a woman's lack of opportunity to divorce and remarry reinforces her subordination: "to those to whom nothing but servitude is allowed, the free choice of servitude is the only, though a most insufficient, alleviation. Its refusal completes the assimilation of the wife to the slave" (*Subjection* 505). In "Wife-torture in England," published in the *Contemporary Review* in April 1878, a few years after the publication of *Denzil Place*, Frances Power Cobbe declared that "the whole relation between the sexes" in the working class "is very little better than one of master and slave" (137). In her book on Cobbe's feminist periodical writing, Susan Hamilton explains that these "imperialist tropes are conceptually foundational to Victorian feminism from the 1860s on" (128).[21] Fane's work differs in that she does not compare women to black slaves in America or to women in harems in India, and her verse novel is additionally unusual in employing the trope of enslavement not to condemn marital violence or lack of property or child custody rights but to suggest that all marriages—

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[21] Hamilton notes that "the representation of marriage as a form of slavery was a central rhetorical and conceptual framework" in Victorian feminist critiques of marriage (125). According to Hamilton, in the Victorian period "a massive collection of feminist periodical writings, pamphlets and oratory . . . rel[ied] upon the 'women of the East' and the fettered black slave to articulate its demands for British women" (126). As chapter 3 will show, the periodical writings of Emily Pfeiffer invoke the same trope. The comparison of white British women to slaves is, of course, a false equivalency and, as Hamilton points out, relies on an imperialist construction of the Other that erases difference among black slaves in America, women in India, and Indigenous women. In "Wife-torture in England," for example, "the ease with which [Cobbe] moves from the figure of the black slave to the helot, and so on to questions of caste and polygamy, signals the easy associations at work in her writing to unite these historically and culturally distinct figures under the generalised category of Other" (Hamilton 127). "For Victorian feminist communities," Hamilton argues, "the particular strength of the analogy of the female black slave is its ability to voice a feminist critique of sexual intimacy between men and women. . . . Enslaved women's sexual vulnerability becomes a sign of what is understood but largely unarticulated in feminist communities: the inability of the free white woman to own her own body in marriage. For the Victorian feminist, such a sign also implicitly points to the desire to argue for an understanding of sexual and bodily integrity that includes women's sexual expression" (141).

even upper-class, non-abusive ones—were based on conditions that subjugated women and needed to be changed.

In *Denzil Place*, Constance is an orphan whose indifferent guardian arranges her marriage to Sir John when she is seventeen, “Her woman’s soul, as yet an unfledg’d thing” (Fane, *Denzil Place* 6), and does not understand the implications of marriage. Constance recalls that when Sir John asked her to live at Farleigh Court, she did not understand that he was proposing marriage: she “stood / Bewilder’d at his words, tho’ guessing nought / Of their intended meaning,” and, subsequently, during the wedding ceremony, she went through the motions “(all ignorant of what they meant, / These marriage vows, either to bind or break)” (Fane, *Denzil Place* 92, 93). The emphasis on the fact that marriage was imposed upon her without her full understanding or consent delegitimises the union and frames her infidelity to her husband, a banal “ultra-Tory” who represents a general resistance to progress and reform in his fear of “The Hydra-headed monster call’d ‘Reform’” (Fane, *Denzil Place* 7). Sir John is a negligent landlord, who is forced to “build anew / Some cottages he thought were good enough” by “a meddling man” from London, who points out that his tenants could have avoided a fever if he “Had mov’d more with the times” and rebuilt them earlier (Fane, *Denzil Place* 8, 9). He and his conservative friends in London have “lagg’d behind / The wheels of Progress” (Fane, *Denzil Place* 12), and the narrator describes him as

true

And honest in that most dishonest cause—

The war against the liberty of man,—

The war against the liberty of thought,—

The war against the poor the rich have made,— (Fane, *Denzil Place* 12-13)

He seeks to uphold his own economic status through the preservation of a feudal order, and his conservative politics—the opposition he expresses to economic and political emancipation of the poor, for instance—position him as a figure opposed to political reform. He is not a villainous or cruel figure, and he does not explicitly express an opinion on the condition of women, but he typifies traditional upper-class English patriarchal values, and Constance's adultery challenges the conservative politics that he represents. At the beginning of the verse novel, the narrative establishes stagnation as the defining feature of Constance's milieu: the neighbours, "mouldy human vegetables" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 8) carry on "dreary lives" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 7), possess "small ambitions," and follow "a narrow creed" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 8). Constance meets Denzil as she is starting to experience dissatisfaction in her marriage, "just about the time / When she was wearied with Sir John's complaints / Against the railways and Democracy" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 34), and their relationship largely blooms because of their shared politics. They become "chosen friends" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 53) through their collaborative implementation of reforms on Denzil's estate (Fane, *Denzil Place* 36-37). In choosing Denzil, then, Constance aligns herself with progressive democratic politics and challenges the ideology of conventional upper-class marriage.

Furthermore, in line with a long rhetorical tradition of feminists who viewed women's legal status in marriage as bondage (as noted above), the narrative in *Denzil Place* characterises Constance's married state as a state of captivity and subordination, most strikingly by comparing her to Italy. After Sir John discovers Constance's affair with Denzil, he sends her away, and she travels to Italy. Upon her arrival, the narrator compares her to the country as it was before independence:

Constance had sought this land which, like herself,

Was bless'd (or cursed) by Heaven with the dow'r—

'The fatal dow'r of Beauty,' but alas

For her, altho' resembling Italy

In being born to this fair heritage—

E'en more unfortunate than that sweet land

She groan'd in faster fetters;—all in vain

For *her* Italia's liberators rose,

Mazzini, Garibaldi, and Cavour,

Breaking a bondage less inveterate

Than was her own; weighing upon the heart

The burden of a fatal servitude

Defies emancipation;—thus she sigh'd

A lovely slave in chains— (Fane, *Denzil Place* 134-35)

The narrative's reference to Italy's "fatal dow'r of Beauty" evokes poems such as Felicia Hemans's translation of a well-known sonnet by the patriotic Italian poet Vincenzo da Filicaja and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which also incorporates Filijaca's poem. Hemans published her sonnet in 1818 in her volume *Translations from Camoens, and Other Poets, with Original Poetry*, and it opens with the lines "Italia! thou, by lavish Nature graced / With ill-starr'd beauty, which to thee hath been / A fatal dowry" (Hemans 27). In Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (also published in 1818), stanza XLII begins

Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast

The fatal gift of beauty, which became

A funeral dower of present woes and past,

On thy sweet brow is sorrow plough'd by shame,

And annals graved in characters of flame. (Byron 138, lines 370-74)

All of the poems evoke the common trope that Italy's beauty was what led to her enslavement, that her natural splendour was the fatal dowry that resulted in her "marriage" to (i.e., occupation by) a foreign nation.

As Alison Chapman explains in her *BRANCH* article on the Risorgimento, Italy was highly feminised in the nineteenth century by British writers, who "troped her as a beautiful, neglected, tragic woman" in "a variety of genres, especially poetry, travel writing, romantic novels and journalism" ("On *Il Risorgimento*" n.p.). Particularly after the translation of Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* into French (1807) and English (1833), which "identif[ied] Italy as a tragic victim with the struggles of woman's independence in the early nineteenth century . . . women writers in particular found *Corinne*'s association of the Italy and the feminine both seductive and problematic," and "the Risorgimento . . . became incorporated into the notion of Englishness, civic identity, and indeed the Woman Question, as women writers appropriated the discourse of political and cultural resurgence to articulate their own struggles in Victorian Britain" (Chapman, "On *Il Risorgimento*" n.p). Hilary Fraser echoes this point, noting that nineteenth-century "women, in particular, appeared to respond to and identify, especially personally, with a nation that in this period had come to seem paradigmatic of the struggle for freedom and self-determination" ("Italy," n.p). In some cases, they used the condition of women as a figure for Italy, drawing a connection between women's rights and the fight for Italian independence from foreign domination. For example, as Esther Schor demonstrates, writers such as Theodosia Garrow Trollope and Cobbe, influenced by marital reform in Britain, "both allegoris[d] the new Kingdom of Italy," established in 1860, "as a marriage between *la bella*

Italia and the King of Savoy, Vittorio Emanuel II" (91). According to Schor, "the ideal of 'companionate marriage', a marriage entered into at the pleasure of the couple and not their parents, a marriage whose goal was lifelong companionship rather than the soldering of family fortunes, had been gaining momentum among the aristocracy and the upper middle classes since the mid-eighteenth century," and consequently, "both writers emphasise the agency of the bride *Italia* in entering into the unity of marriage" (Schor 92) in their representations of the political union.[22]

Fane draws on this rhetoric in the passage above, but rather than establishing a parallel between women and Italy based on their mutual struggle for liberation and their newfound agency, she deploys the analogy for the purpose of juxtaposition by asserting that Constance's situation resembles that of pre-independence Italy, of a land in chains. Whereas Italy has gained freedom through the efforts of revolutionaries such as Mazzini and Garibaldi, Constance remains oppressed. She is held in "faster fetters" than Italy was, whose "bondage"—its occupation by French and Austrian powers—was "less inveterate" than her subordination in marriage, in which she has little political agency and remains in effect "A lovely slave in chains."

Denzil Place perhaps most strongly emphasises the restrictiveness of marriage by metatextually commenting on the plotting of the verse novel, highlighting that the finality of marriage necessitates fatality in a narrative context. The narrator explicitly acknowledges that Sir John's death is necessary for Constance and Denzil to be together. Just at the point in the story when Constance is going to leave Denzil and return to England to be with her husband out of guilt, they learn that he has died, and the narrator alludes to the facts that he is an insurmountable obstacle between them and that, for narrative necessity, he needs to be eliminated. As she puts it,

[22] The dates of the events in *Denzil Place* are not specified, but they seem to take place after Italian unification, perhaps shortly after Rome was named the capital in 1871.

because of bungling human laws,

He stands for ever, whilst he lives and breathes

As an insuperable obstacle,

Marring the moments of that luckless pair

Whose vast capacity for happiness

He blights unwittingly. (Fane, *Denzil Place* 228)

Only once he is deceased are Constance and Denzil free to marry; consequently, the narrator, although "ashamed I could not sorrow more" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 229) at his death, affirms that it is necessary for Constance and Denzil's happiness.

Furthermore, the narrator—a figure for Fane herself—does not moralise about Constance's infidelity. When she describes Constance's growing feelings for Denzil, she cautions against "the moral whirlwind" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 52) and inevitable societal backlash that would result from their relationship (Fane, *Denzil Place* 51-53). Similarly, when Constance and Denzil reunite in Italy, the narrator addresses the reader as a "pretty prude," a proxy for the British public (including the poetry-reading and novel-reading public and reviewers), whose offended propriety she predicts: "Ah, reader, thou / Who with thy chaste and disapproving eye / May'st deign to read this simple history," the narrator states, "Let not the voice of thine immaculate heart / Go forth to judge my hapless heroine" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 160). Anticipating a scandalised readership, the narrator pre-emptively defends Constance as merely an unfortunate rather than deviant person, in part by appealing to the universality of Constance's situation, insisting that "lovers of all ages, kingdoms, climes" are the same and that throughout history "mortals liv'd and lov'd / And sinn'd, as now they live and love and sin" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 113, 114). She even expresses her own desire for the kind of love that Constance and Denzil

share, claiming that she would be willing to exchange a long life alone for a transient but intense passion:

> Oh, for but half a year of such a dream
>
> How willingly would I exchange the rest—
>
> Those future years of loveless solitude[23]
>
> Which Heaven may predestine me to live! (Fane, *Denzil Place* 221)

The narrative section in *Denzil Place* thus offers a provocative disruption of the banality of married life and frames Constance's adultery as a sympathetic act of agency through the narrator's identification with her.

In the following section, I argue that the rough-mixing of Fane's verse novel further politicises the sympathy it evokes. It is crucial to the meaning of the lyrics that they are not embedded within the narrative because their disjunction—highlighted by their mise en page—allows the lyric subject in the poems to remain unfixed. In contrast to critics such as Markovits, who see the lyrics as the expressions of interiority of either Constance or Denzil, I argue that the lyric speakers are ambiguous. They can be read as the expressions of these characters, but they are equally available for interpretation as the expressions of the author or of the reader or of an unnamed subject. Whereas narrative demands that thoughts and dialogue be assigned to specific

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[23] This line also draws on the trope of the successful poetess popularised by Felicia Hemans and Leticia Elizabeth Landon (L. E. L.). Barrett Browning refers to this trope in the Fifth Book of *Aurora Leigh*, when Aurora is living and working in London and, apostrophising God, states,

> thou hast knowledge, only thou,
> How dreary 't is for women to sit still
> On winter nights by solitary fires
> And hear the nations praising them far off,
> Too far! ay, praising our quick sense of love,
> Our very heart of passionate womanhood,
> Which could not beat so in the verse without
> Being present also in the unkissed lips
> And eyes undried because there's none to ask
> The reason they grew moist. (V.438-47, *WEBB* 3: 130)

characters, lyric can be less referential and less fixed. In this sense, the verse novel manages to be both specific and representative through the details of Constance's story and the openness of the lyrics, which resonate beyond the events of Constance's story. The rough-mixing of *Denzil Place* thus draws attention to the limitations of narrative, with the lyrics exceeding what the narrative can represent. The narrative depicts events that have unfolded in the past, in which the reader has no part, but the lyrics appeal to the reader outside the scope of Constance's story, through the triangulated address to the reader that Culler identifies as fundamental to the lyric genre, as well as the formlessness of the lyrics and the ambiguity of the lyric speaker. Fane's verse novel is thus about Constance but also about women more broadly, and the sympathy it evokes is both affective and political.

Politicised Lyric: Formlessness, Ambiguity, and Triangulated Address

As critics such as Markovits note, the twelve lyrics in *Denzil Place* can sometimes be linked to specific events in the narrative plot. The first lyric, for example, which precedes the beginning of the narrative, anticipates the description of Constance in the first book of the narrative, when the narrator explains that her early marriage to Sir John stalled the development of her life, "Her years, so few, so pure, so soon arrang'd / Into this unemotional, dull, shape" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 18). The line "This is not living, tho' I move and breathe" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.) in the lyric anticipates the poetic narrative's description of Constance's muted and mechanical existence during the first three years of her marriage to Sir John, her "lifeless life" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 7) before she meets Denzil.[24] Similarly, the fifth lyric anticipates the narrative events of Denzil's

[24] See Hoagwood and Ledbetter, who argue that the first lyric "presents an analogy to Constance's upcoming and catastrophic meeting with Geoffrey Denzil, soon to be narrated in the book, but not in Constance's voice, with

sudden return to Denzil Place from his travels on the Continent, as well as the consummation of Constance and Denzil's relationship, and Denzil's departure to the Continent once again. The lyric subject describes being left behind, doomed to be forgotten by her lover while she remains loyal, asserting that "so be you false, or so you be true, / The seal of your kiss on my soul is set" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.), and the kiss manifests in the narrative when Constance faints upon seeing Denzil appear in the middle of the night and wakens to his kiss. The lyrics can thus serve a proleptic function.

More importantly, however, the lyric poems are interruptive, and they not only interrupt the narrative but contain internal generic interruptions as well. The lyrics do not follow a particular pattern but often gesture at, then deviate from, conventional forms of the sonnet, disrupting the genre through a wide range of variations in length, rhyme scheme, and stanzaic structure**.** The first poem is sixteen lines long, with an unusual rhyme scheme (abbaccdeeffggddg), a revision of the conventional English sonnet (abab cdcd efef bgbg)[25] that recalls George Meredith's sixteen-line sonnets in his 1862 verse novel about adultery, "Modern Love" (although Meredith's follow an abbacddceffeghhg rhyme scheme). The second lyric is a poem in five stanzas, four cinquains (rhyme scheme ababa) and a final ten-line stanza (ababaabbba); the third poem is again five stanzas, cinquains with refrain at the end (ababC); the fourth is a poem in 21 lines (abcabcdefdefghighighi); the fifth is four quatrains, again a revision of the conventional English sonnet; and the sixth is a 32-line poem composed of eight quatrains with an abab rhyme scheme, a double sixteen-line sonnet. The seventh is a poem in 43 lines,

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reference to Constance, nor in the narrator's voice. The lyric shares the emotional theme only by analogy. Like its isolation on the leaf, this difference in voice and specific subject calls attention chiefly to the portability of the theme among discrete verbal embodiments" (141).

[25] Conventionally, the Petrarchan sonnet is often structured in an octave and a sestet (in various rhyme schemes, including a common rhyme scheme of abbaabba cdecde), while the English (or Shakespearean) sonnet form, also fourteen lines, is often structured as three quatrains and a couplet with a conventional abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme.

which is not separated into quatrains but follows for the most part an abab rhyme scheme; the eighth is a poem of 51 lines, two sonnets framing 23 irregularly rhyming lines; and the ninth poem abruptly shortens to eight lines, two quatrains with a refrain at the end (abaA abaA). The tenth poem consists of two nine-line and one ten-line stanza, with no regular rhyme scheme aside from the refrain in the second and last lines of each stanza; the eleventh lyric is composed of ten cinquains (abaab); and the final lyric is 28 lines long, another double sonnet structured completely in quatrains (rhyme scheme abba) rather than quatrains and couplets. Differing broadly in length and stanzaic structure, the poems invoke but do not adhere to fixed forms. Their formlessness suggests that, just as these expressions of interiority are not easily accommodated in narrative, fixed forms of lyric also constrain such expression.

The politics of Fane's lyrics emerges from this formlessness, as well as the ambiguity of the lyric subject and the context of the lyric address. The speaker in the lyrics remains an unspecified "I," and both the historical setting and personal circumstances of the poems are nebulous. In contrast to many dramatic monologues, for example, there are no referential details situating Fane's poems specifically in the nineteenth century, nor are there linguistic characteristics that suggest the speaker's identity. For example, the first lyric is unmoored from any single specific voice. Beginning with the statement "This is not living, tho' I move and breathe" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.), the poem conveys stasis and anticipation, establishing the speaker's state as one of active waiting, but it is non-referential. In a strategy common in many of the lyrics, the antecedent for the demonstrative pronoun in the first line, "this," the very first word of the lyric, is missing. While presumably the speaker refers to her own life, which she describes as mere physical animation ("I move and breathe") in contrast to being truly alive, the conditions that prompt this negative proclamation remain unknown. "This" points to the source

of the speaker's lack of fulfilment, but the missing antecedent voids it of reference. Instead, the poem offers a vague affective expression of the lyric subject's weary disillusionment and despair, punctuated by the resignation of the plaintive rhetorical question that immediately follows the poem's opening statement, "Ah, is there nothing better in the world?" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)

For the reader, the subject of the poem remains obscure—what is "this"? "Better in the world" than what?—but the poem's politics rests on this openness. The lack of representational fixity means that the poem is available for multiple interpretations and invites the reader's identification and sympathy. Like Constance in the narrative part of the verse novel, the lyric speaker strains against the confines of a banal life. "I love to see the lily's cup unfurl'd / To greet the sun," she concedes, and "I love the lake beneath / And all the beauty of these barren days," but, she wonders, "is there nothing better?" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)There is beauty in her life, but it is a "barren" existence. The description of the natural world's constancy—the reliable diurnal and seasonal cycles of flowers and the sun, complemented by the unchanging lake—and the questioning in the poem indicates the speaker's restlessness against the bounds of a passive life of observation, which manifests in the poem's form through its uneven rhyme scheme and the enjambment of many of its lines, which gain momentum as they run over and lend the poem a hurried quality. The form matches the speaker's wandering imagination about life's unknown possibilities and her fragmented sense of self:

As I gaze

I seem to dream a mad unmeaning dream

About some fairy thing I have not known,

Sigh on, wild winds! your everlasting moan

> Haunts me in summer while the thrushes sing
>
> And ev'ry day in ev'ry year, the ring
>
> Of something sad seems floating on the air,
>
> I hear it sighing round me ev'rywhere. (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)

The ambiguous syntax of "As I gaze / I seem" yields two possible readings. The direction of the speaker's gaze is undetermined, so she could be looking outward, possibly at the landscape she describes in the preceding lines, or she could be figuring herself as disembodied to convey a feeling of self-division and uncertainty. Either way, an element of disconnection permeates the poem. The lyric subject expresses uncertainty about her perception of the external world, reality possibly blurring into reverie as she "seem[s] to dream" a dream of uncertain significance, or she watches herself as though from outside her body and can only describe how she "seem[s]," her inner life inaccessible even to herself. The internal rhyme in the second line of this excerpt intensifies the indeterminacy in the poem, the repeated sound in "seem," "dream," "unmeaning," and "dream" creating a slippage between the meaning of the words and heightening the sense of the speaker's remove from her own interiority. Indeed, the ambiguity of the language and the syntax allows these two meanings to exist simultaneously in the poem, which not only expresses the speaker's affective state to evoke the reader's sympathy but also struggles with the problem of defining the self in the world.

The precariousness of the speaker's sense of interiority is not resolved by the end of the poem. The banality of the known, everyday world shifts from barren to overdetermined with meaning, as the sounds of wind and the thrushes' song serve as vehicles of sadness overwhelming the lyric subject, and although the poem concludes on a note of expectation—"And yet I hope and wait" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)—that expectation exists in tension with

persistent uncertainty: "whilst still I seem / As tho' my soul were drifting down a stream / To meet some unknown, unexpected thing" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.), the speaker again figuring herself as disembodied, her body waiting while her soul travels. Crucially, the lack of referentiality and vagueness of the lyric evoke a political sympathy because the speaker is ambiguous. Since the speaker is not specified, the poem's emotional appeal is not made on behalf of a single figure, and the sympathy evoked is not limited to that individual figure. Rather, the poem evokes sympathy for all subjects who might take on the speaking position in the lyric. The poem does not definitively convey Constance's fragmented sense of self, nor Fane's; it is more broadly representative, applicable to a range of potential speakers and open for the reader to identify with.

The lyrics also perform a rhetorical function; they are "expressed in terms intended to persuade or impress" (*OED*, "rhetorical," adj., 1.a.), as public, political addresses rather than private utterances. In *Theory of the Lyric* (2015), Culler's major work outlining a transhistorical understanding of the lyric genre, he argues that "triangulated address—address to the reader by means of address to something or someone else . . . is the root-form of presentation for lyric" (186). Direct address to the audience is not typically the model for lyric, he argues, noting that "the lyric address to a 'you' is fundamental to lyric . . . but it does not signal direct address to the audience" (Culler 199). Rather, lyric address is most often indirect; the poem directly addresses an addressee such as a lover (named or unnamed), an abstraction such as Love, or an object, but actually targets the reader through that addressee.[26] Of the three patterns of address in the Western lyric tradition he describes (direct address to the reader, address to a beloved, and

[26] I follow Culler's terms in using *addressee* "for whomever or whatever is designated by the pronouns of address" and *audience* "for the presumed beneficiaries of lyric communication—most often listeners or readers" (Culler 187).

apostrophe to an object[27]), "one of the most characteristic structures of lyric," he explains, "is the triangulation whereby a speaker ostensibly addresses a beloved, as a way of speaking indirectly to the audience" (Culler 201), and this is the case for most of the lyrics in *Denzil Place*. For example, the third lyric, addressed to an unnamed "you," is structured around the repeated refrain of "Give it me back!" as the speaker beseeches her addressee to return to her all the things that he has stolen, among them her "heart that seem'd so free," her "unsuspecting trust in all mankind," her "fearlessness of changes that might be" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.). In the end, however, the poem turns on an abrupt reversal as the speaker recants and exclaims "Nay,—keep it all, I yield you all the rest—" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.). The fourth lyric begins "Oh, love" and consistently addresses the addressee as "thou," the fifth lyric addresses "my fair false love" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.), the sixth starts with the exclamation "Dearest!," and the seventh lyric presents the speaker's address to a lost, presumably deceased, lover: "On, lost and lov'd, and gone before!" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.), The ninth lyric, the shortest in the volume, does not name an addressee but begins by establishing that the lyric subject has addressed someone in the past: "I said 'Ah, give me this! I shall not care / 'What after-storms may beat, come blast and hail—'" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.). The tenth lyric begins with "You," and in the twelfth lyric the lyric subject begins with the invocation "Ah, my own love!" Some of the lyrics feature apostrophic addresses to an abstract concept or the natural world. The first lyric apostrophizes the "wild winds," and the eighth lyric addresses the "little stars." In the eleventh poem, the lyric subject addresses first her heart—"To my heart I waking, say / 'This must be Love'" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)—then Night and Day as she reflects on the private passion enjoyed at night

[27] I also follow Culler's model in distinguishing *address* from *apostrophe*, the latter of which he notes "includes address to individuals, but it especially denotes address to what is not an actual listener: abstractions, inanimate objects, or persons absent or dead" (212).

and the public expressions of affection displayed in the day (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.). The majority of the lyrics operate according to a relational rather than confessional model of lyric.

Importantly, Culler distinguishes this relational model from a confessional model of lyric, and he invokes the poetics of Wordsworth and Mill to make this distinction. In contrast to the confessional model of lyric famously outlined by John Stuart Mill,[28] Culler contends that a lyric poem is not characterised primarily by the private expression of personal feeling or reflection. Rather, he asserts that the address to someone or something is always a rhetorical event (Culler 188). The love poems of the Western lyric tradition were not, for the most part, "communications of lovers which are later recognized and assembled as poems, but compositions by poets for an audience other than a particular lover, where address is a rhetorical strategy of triangulated address" (Culler 206). In other words, even if the poet did not have a specific person in mind as the addressee of the poem, these poems were intended for publication and therefore imagine the reader as their audience (Culler 207).[29] Triangulated address establishes a relationship between the lyric subject and the reader; the reader does not merely overhear or observe the expression of the lyric subject, a one-sided experience from an external standpoint. In spite of theories such as Wordsworth's and Mill's, then, which define lyric as a private utterance, lyric is in fact inherently a public and political mode of address. In *Denzil Place*, readers are the audience for the lyric subject's emotional appeal, which compels them to identify and sympathise with the lyric subject and, by extension, the narrative about adultery that the lyric poems interrupt.

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[28] As discussed in chapter 1, Mill, influenced by Wordsworth's theory of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Coleridge and Wordsworth 175), defined poetry—which he equates with lyric—as "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude" and described poetic utterance as not heard but "*over*heard" ["What Is Poetry?" 64] by the reader.

[29] Even Mill, as Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins point out, distinguishes "between discursive modes of direct and indirect address" (Jackson and Prins 3), between eloquence as "*heard*" and poetry as "*overheard*" (Mill, "What Is Poetry?" 64), and even "the solitude of the lyric poet" that Mill describes "is a solitude we witness, a solitude exhibited in public" (Jackson and Prins 4).

The fourth lyric, for example, evokes sympathy by characterising love as a demonic entity that besets the lyric subject:

> Oh, love! thou who shelt'rest some
> 'Neath thy wings so white and warm
> Wherefore on a bat-like wing[30]
> All disguisèd did'st thou come
> In so terrible a form? (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)

The lyric subject then compares love (addressing either a beloved or love itself) to "a demon of the air," "a sorrow and a sin," and "a tempter and a snare" (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.). The tone of the poem is distressed, even slightly accusatory, as the speaker laments the fact that love, a mercurial and selective force, appears not as a protective and benevolent being in this case but as a creature of night, all but blind, a "terrible" manifestation of the feeling. While the poem is directly addressed to "love," it is indirectly addressed to the reader—the audience of the poem—and makes a rhetorical appeal to that audience, evoking pathos by compelling readers to imagine themselves in that emotional state. In spite of theories such as Wordsworth's and Mill's, then, which define lyric as a private utterance, lyric is in fact inherently a public and political mode of address.

Particularly in the Victorian period, as Matthew Rowlinson and Marion Thain note, lyric was a predominantly print genre. As Rowlinson explains, "innumerable lyrics had previously

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[30] The bat imagery is striking here, in part because it is not a common one in Victorian poetry. The most well-known bat poem of the late nineteenth century is Rosamund Marriott Watson's "Vespertilia" (1895). As Virginia Blain explains in her note to that poem in *Victorian Women Poets: An Annotated Anthology*, "vespertilia is literally the (female) bat," and "the bat's dual nature as a winged mammal has been reflected in many of its symbolic associations. When portrayed as a fallen angel, the Devil is often depicted with bat's wings. While the bat could suggest vigilance in classical culture, in the Odyssey, the souls of the dead are described as fluttering around Hell, emitting bat-like cries. . . . The mythical vampire bat is traditionally regarded as a dead person returned to life, usually a criminal or heretic" (273n).

entered print" before the Victorian era, "but only in the nineteenth century does print become for lyric the hegemonic medium, with the result . . . that all lyric production takes place with a view to print" (59); "for Victorian poets, lyric appears as a genre newly totalized in print" (60). Similarly, Thain contends that "lyric had become a poetic genre in which the aural (and the manuscript) incarnation was now combined with and mediated through print as the mode of transmission that subsumed all others" (159) (a statement she qualifies by asserting that "it is important to note that this is not a claim for print providing textual stability" [159]). Eric Griffiths remarks in *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (1989) that "in literature shaped by the printing-press, writer and reader do not 'properly' face each other. But this sense of a lost community, felt as a form of death by some writers when their voice fails to be manifest in print, is the germ of a further community and a new life; it prompts the reader to interpret and resuscitate" (61). Although the idealised notion of the poet's lyric voice is lost by the nineteenth century, then, the capacity to revive it exists with the reader in a dialogic writer-reader relationship.

As all of these critics establish, then, the nineteenth-century lyric is not a private utterance but involves an element of public address in the exchange between the lyric subject and the addressee and audience. They can produce, therefore, not just sympathetic affect but also political effect, as Fane's poems do by interrupting the progress of the narrative and compelling the reader into experiencing the feelings that the lyric subject expresses, whether the bliss of love, the agony of separation, or the pain of loss. For instance, the sixth lyric of the verse novel begins with the lyric subject's address to her lover:

> Dearest! if we had never met
>
> Happier perchance had been my fate,

Maybe the tear-drops would have wet

My cheek less often than of late. (Fane, *Denzil Place* n.p.)

As I discovered in my research in Fane's archives at the University of Reading, this poem is the core lyric of the verse novel—and, in fact, probably the germ of the entire verse novel. It is a slightly revised version of an undated poem titled simply "To . . . . ." (Figure 3), a fair copy of which is included in a notebook from the years 1858 to 1871 held in Fane's papers at the University of Reading.[31] To my knowledge, no other critic has noted the stanzaic structure of the poem, but what the fair copy version of the lyric makes clear is that the poem is actually two sixteen-line sonnets,[32] as indicated by the line of periods separating the fourth and fifth stanzas. It also follows a rhyme scheme associated with the English sonnet (conventionally abab cdcd efef gg) but substitutes an extra quatrain for the rhyming couplet that conventionally concludes the sonnet. This generic choice and structure are crucial because in pairing the two sonnets, Fane also preserves the "two-part division of thought" associated with the Petrarchan sonnet (Brogan, Lewin, Scott, and Zillman 1319) by presenting the *volta* in the second sonnet. In the first sonnet, the speaker addresses her lover and contemplates how life might have unfolded differently had they not pursued an illicit relationship that forces her to disguise her feelings and present a false persona in public, conceding that she might have been happier had they never met: "Perchance my smile had been sincere / My gaiety no outward thing" (Currie, MS 2608/5/1, Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie, University of Reading Special Collections), had she not "learned to heave a sigh / And wear an ever-galling mask!" (MS 2608/5/1, Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie,

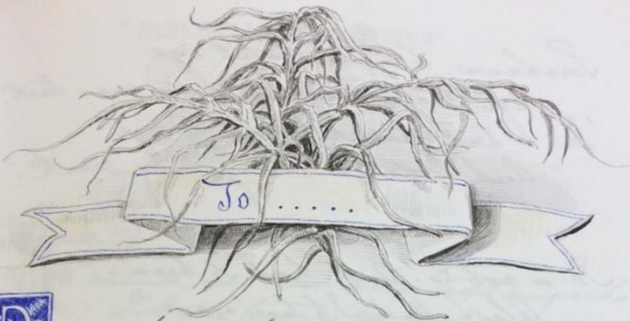
[31] Like Tennyson's monodrama *Maud* (1855), which Christopher Ricks argues developed from the lyric "Oh! That 'twere possible," written in 1833-34 (Ricks 511), *Denzil Place* is predated by a lyric poem that Fane then placed at the centre of the verse novel.

[32] Since the fair copy of Fane's poem is undated, it is hard to know if she is modelling the sixteen-line form of the sonnet on Meredith's sonnet form in "Modern Love." There is another poem in the notebook dated 1862, so it is possible that she composed it after Meredith's verse novel was published.

University of Reading Special Collections) Yet, the second sonnet presents the turn of the poem, insisting that “Alas! Had I to live again / I would not sacrifice my love / To save my soul an endless pain!” (Currie, MS 2608/5/1, Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie, University of Reading Special Collections), and the line “I would not sacrifice my love” gains particular emphasis by disrupting the rhyme scheme of the stanza—the only line in the poem to do so. The rhyme of *again* and *pain*, furthermore, underscores the speaker’s willingness to recommit to “endless pain” if she were “to live again,” indicating that the poem is not merely a retrospective and regretful reflection on disappointed love but an assertion of the value of love despite the pain and sorrow it brings. Despite all the hardship endured, the speaker asserts that life without her lover is meaningless, concluding,

> Yet would I die, if near thy heart
>
> I could but breathe my latest vow,
>
> And kiss away on thy dear lips
>
> The life I do not value now! (MS 2608/5/1, Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie, University of Reading Special Collections)

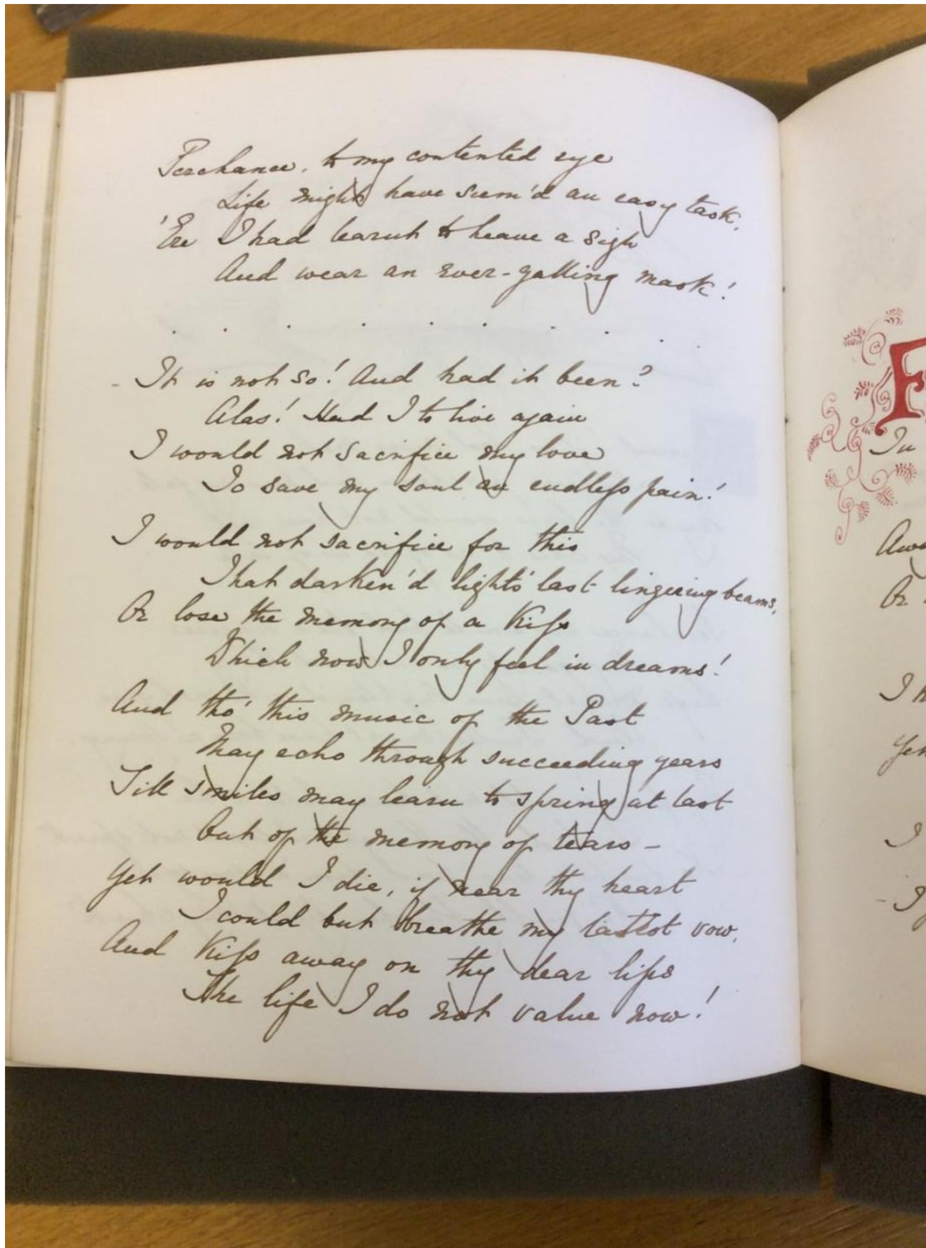
The lyric is addressed to the beloved but is also indirectly addressed to readers. The poem appeals to readers by exhibiting the subject’s intense internal struggle as she measures whether love warrants having to “wear an ever-galling mask” in public and ultimately concludes that love was worth the hardship.



Dearest! if we had never met
Happier perchance, had been my fate—
May be the tears would not have wet
My cheek as often as of late.

Perchance my smile had been sincere
My gaiety no outward thing,
Life might have brighten'd with each year
And Winter might have been as Spring.

My face would not have told a lie
To hide the thoughts I dared not speak.
No furtive tear had dim'd my eye
No guilty blushes dyed my cheek—



Perchance, to my contented eye
Life might have seem'd an easy task,
'Ere I had learnt to heave a sigh
And wear an ever-galling mask!

. . . .

- It is not so! And had it been?
Alas! Had I to live again
I would not sacrifice thy love
To save my soul an endless pain!

I would not sacrifice for this
That darken'd light's last lingering beams,
Or lose the memory of a kiss
Which now I only feel in dreams!

And tho' this music of the Past
May echo through succeeding years
Till smiles may learn to spring at last
Out of the memory of tears -
Yet would I die, if near thy heart
I could but breathe my lastest vow,
And kiss away on thy dear lips
The life I do not value now!

Figure 3: Fair copy of a poem titled "To. . . . ." in a notebook with fair copies of poems written by Violet Fane during the years 1858-1871. MS 2608/5/1, Papers of Mary Montgomerie Currie, University of Reading Special Collections, Reading.

The lyrics are political, therefore, because they rely on a relational model of lyric, according to which the expression in the poem is not a private utterance but a public address. The poems are intended to affect readers through an effective emotional appeal, compelling them to

identify and sympathise with the lyric subject and, by extension, the story of adultery that the lyric poems regularly interrupt.

Conclusion: Looking Back on *Denzil Place*

The sympathetic representation of adultery in *Denzil Place* thus relies on its combination of narrative and lyric genres. In the narrative, which evokes the contemporary social and legal context of female adultery in the period, the first-person speaker identifies with and expresses sympathy for Constance and Denzil's situation. The narrative frames Constance's adultery as an act of agency through the sympathetic narrative voice, and the lyric poems interrupt the narrative and draw the reader into a relational exchange with the lyric subject and the addressee. Whereas readers follow the narrative from a fairly removed perspective—it is a story of past events in which they have no part, allowing them to evaluate the events from a distance—the lyrics involve readers and compel them to share the moment of emotional intensity. Through the combination of narrative and lyric, the verse novel evokes political sympathy for a female adulterer by depicting the social reality of a woman who commits adultery in the mid-nineteenth century and by interposing lyric poems that target readers with an emotional appeal.

This chapter began by citing the contemporary reviews that condemned *Denzil Place*, particularly the *Saturday Review*'s accusation that she was "forgetful of her womanhood" in writing and publishing the verse novel. Fane predicted such criticism: the epilogue of *Denzil Place* reiterates the work's anti-didactic tone, advising her audience that "You search in vain for moral or advice" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 250), and she seems to anticipate a negative critical response in her assertion that "I tremble for my reader's kind good will, / And hang a bashful

head" (Fane, *Denzil Place* 250). However, she found the volume defensible even later. The beginning of her correspondence to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt reveals the degree to which the review in the *Saturday Review*—which I cited in the introduction to this chapter—affected her. In response to what was likely his first letter to her, she writes that "I was very much flattered & pleased by your kind letter which was forwarded to me here, & which, coming as it did after the very vicious attack upon my poor book seemed like balm to my wounded spirit" (Letter to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 5 Aug. 1875, MS 1122-1976, 2ff. 4pp, Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Fitzwilliam Museum).[33] She was clearly bothered by the criticism, but a later letter to Blunt suggests that poets ought to ignore reviews and hope that their work will receive accolades in time: "I am convinced however that one ought to pay very little attention to what the reviews say – but to persevere & in time the poet will be recognised as one" (Letter to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 8 Oct. 1875, MS 1124-1976, 2ff. 1ss. 6pp, Archive of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Fitzwilliam Museum).

However, Fane revisits the review of *Denzil Place* in her series of satirical society sketches, *The Edwin and Angelina Papers*, in order to defend her work. In the sketch "Angelina as an Author," Fane fictionalises the writing and publication of *Denzil Place*[34] and takes the opportunity to address the accusation in the *Saturday Review* that she was "forgetful of her womanhood" by establishing that the boldness of *Denzil Place* was not careless but deliberate. Angelina does not censor her work, despite initial consideration that it ought perhaps to be subject to "some slight Bowdlerisation" before it is released "to an unreflecting public" because

[33] She acknowledges to Blunt that "of course my book has heaps of faults" but protests that "I think the review of it was a little too exaggerated, & not quite just" (Letter from Violet Fane to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 5 Aug. 1875, MS 1122-1976, Fitzwilliam Museum).

[34] It includes, for example, "'An Apology' in blank-verse at the end" (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 201), and although "it contains above seventy short lyrics" (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 201), it follows a pattern of development that resembles that of Constance in *Denzil Place*.

she had been told “that women usually wrote insipidly . . . and she determined that, at any rate, her book should not be insipid or sink to the level of mere *prettiness*” (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 202-3). When it is rejected by multiple publishers, Angelina assures herself that “the opinions” in the book “were too advanced and emancipated” and “the tone of the whole work was too much ahead of the age” (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 208).[35] As much as Fane is to some degree self-consciously satirising herself as well as the volume’s readership and reviewers, the sketch also indicates that Fane stood by the radical and controversial representation of female adultery in *Denzil Place* and that she understood it as a provocative work fundamentally about progressive politics. Fane’s verse novel thus represents conventional upper-class marriage as bondage and depicts adultery sympathetically, relying on its rough-mixing of lyric and narrative to generate sympathy for its adulterous protagonist.

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[35] “Breaking a Butterfly,” a later sketch in the *Papers*, is a continuation of this thread and an even more overt response to the *Saturday Review*’s negative review of *Denzil Place*. Angelina receives a negative review in a periodical called the *Friday Flagellator* that is a nearly exact reproduction of the review of *Denzil Place* that appeared in the *Saturday Review*. The version that Fane writes is, however, even more severe: while the original review states that “she might have filled three volumes of a novel with her story, and have secured for herself as many writers of her class” but that “in the form in which the story has appeared it may spread its insidious poison in quarters where it will be unsuspectingly received” (“Denzil Place” 120), the critic of Angelina’s volume of poems writes that “she might have filled three volumes of a novel with her vile and detestable trash” and “this insidious poison may spread its foul malaria in quarters where it will be unsuspectingly received” (Fane, *Edwin and Angelina Papers* 263).

CHAPTER 3

"Duality in union": Generic Combination and Anglo-Scottish Union as Marital Models in Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884)[1]

As its title suggests, Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884) is both a poem and a story regarding the making of that poem. In a bold combination of verse and prose, Pfeiffer weaves together a narrative poem with a narrative *about* the poem, a "rhyme" with the first-person prose account of "how it grew." In the contemporary prose narrative, the poet-narrator travels with her husband to the Isle of Mull, in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland, to write a poem based on a local legend. She visits the seat of the Maclean Clan at Duart Castle and composes a ballad retelling the sixteenth-century story of the Lady of the Rock, Elizabeth Campbell, and her unwanted marriage to the Maclean Chief of Mull, her resistance to marital rape, and her survival of attempted wife-murder when he strands her on a rock in the Sound of Mull to drown. The narrator's husband then reads the poem aloud to their hosts and fellow guests at nearby Duart Farm, and their small audience offers commentary on each part (or "fitte"[2]) of the poem as it unfolds. As I will show, the story of the Lady of the Rock is one of feminist resistance to patriarchal violence and marital bondage, and the complicated

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[1] Research for this chapter was generously supported by the University of Victoria's Hugh Campbell and Marion Alice Small Fund for Scottish Studies Graduate Student Scholarships for 2015-16 and 2016-17, which allowed me to travel to Edinburgh and consult archives at the National Library of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh. I am also grateful to librarians from the Special Collections Reading Room at the National Library of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh, who graciously answered my inquiries before and during these trips and who retrieved the materials for me while I was there. Finally, I want to thank Heather Dean, Associate Director of Special Collections at the University of Victoria, for procuring a copy of Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* for UVic Libraries.

[2] The *OED* has alternative spellings for this word but defines it as "a part or section of a poem or song; a canto" ("fit | fytte," n., 1.).

metanarrative format offers both a critique of conventional Victorian middle-class marital ideology and an alternative model of marital union.

Pfeiffer has attracted some scholarly attention with the ongoing recovery of women poets in the last several decades, but her importance as a prolific and innovative poet and a woman of letters has still not been fully recovered. The pioneering recovery work of Virginia Blain and Kathleen Hickok, for example, highlights the feminist commentary and generic experimentation that characterise Pfeiffer's work but does not provide a sustained analysis of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. In "Women Poets and the Challenge of Genre" (2001), Blain refers to *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* in a broader discussion of the relationship between gender and generic experimentation in Victorian women's poetry, while Hickok, in "Why Is this Woman Still Missing?" (1999), offers an author-centred survey of Pfeiffer's literary output to justify her inclusion in the Victorian canon. More recently, Catherine Brennan and T. D. Olverson have addressed Pfeiffer's representations of Welsh and Hellenic cultures in *Angers, Fantasies and Ghostly Fears: Nineteenth-Century Women from Wales and English-Language Poetry* (2003)[3] and *Women Writers and the Dark Side of Late-Victorian Hellenism* (2010), further contributing to an understanding of Pfeiffer's feminist politics by examining her use of different cultural, historical, and mythic frameworks to address contemporary socio-political issues. Herbert F. Tucker's work on epic in British literature, *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910* (2008), briefly analyses Pfeiffer's ventures into that genre, and Karen Dieleman offers a close reading of

[3] Pfeiffer was born in Wales but lived most of her life in England, and she seems to have identified as English. In a letter to John Stuart Blackie, she describes herself as "only Welsh by blood & not by breeding": presumably in response to Blackie's request for donations to help establish a Celtic chair at the University of Edinburgh, Pfeiffer writes, "I who am only Welsh by blood & not by breeding, & have but few Welsh friends, will nevertheless do what I can to inlist [*sic*] those few in the good cause" (Letter to J. S. Blackie, n.d., MS 2643, ff. 123-24, J. S. Blackie Papers, National Library of Scotland). However, as I discuss in more detail later in the chapter, Brennan argues that Pfeiffer retained a connection to her Welsh heritage that influenced her works *Glan-Alârch* (1877) and *The Wynnes of Wynhavod* (1881).

Pfeiffer's sonnets in the context of evolutionary theory in "Evolution and the Struggle of Love in Emily Pfeiffer's Sonnets" (2016). But *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, arguably Pfeiffer's most notable work for its politics and structural complexity, remains largely overlooked as a work of remarkable interrelated generic experimentation and feminist critique.[4] The critical turn to the ballad in nineteenth-century studies, exemplified by the recent special issues on the ballad in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* (edited by Michael C. Cohen) and *Victorian Poetry* (edited by Letitia Henville), makes particularly timely a revaluation of Pfeiffer's work.

The embedded structure of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* emulates that of Tennyson's verse novel *The Princess* (1847),[5] which also features a contemporary frame narrative that provides the scene of narration for a historical poem, the reading of which is periodically interrupted by interjections from the speakers' listeners. The story of the Lady of the Rock also recalls the content of the embedded narrative in *The Princess*, namely Ida's attempt to resist the machinations of a patriarchal feudal society by refusing to marry. Yet, although its narrative structure, politics, and poetics resonate with echoes of *The Princess* (as well as of *Aurora Leigh* and *The Ring and the Book*, as the chapter discusses in more detail below), Pfeiffer's work is not really a verse novel. It does not incorporate novelistic conventions such as plot into a work written in verse; rather, it embeds a poem in a prose narrative, and this distinction situates *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* as contiguous to the verse novel genre rather than within it. In fact, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* might well be a singular case of generic combination in its incorporation of prose narrative, ballad, and lyric. But literary genres

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[4] This oversight is particularly curious since Pfeiffer consistently revisited the ballad genre throughout her career and published a volume of travel writing, *Flying Leaves from East and West* (1885), the year after the publication of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. See Hickok, "Why Is this Woman Still Missing?" and Olverson, "'A World without Woman in Any True Sense: Gender and Hellenism in Emily Pfeiffer's *Flying Leaves from East and West*."

[5] *The Princess* was first published in 1847; the lyrics interposed between the narrative parts were added in the third edition in 1850.

are defined by difference as well as similarity, so Pfeiffer's work is valuable in a study of the verse novel because it helps define the genre from the outside.

Pfeiffer's work rejects conventional generic boundaries in an audacious combination of verse and prose that the *Westminster Review* deemed an "unnatural union of poetry and prose" ("Belles Lettres" 297), and the distribution of the prose narrative and the ballad is also highly uneven. In a volume of nearly two hundred pages, the prose narrative accounts for the first ninety-eight pages; only at this point, more than halfway through the book, does the ballad finally begin. The latter half of the volume then interweaves poem with prose narrative as the narrator's husband reads the ballad, and the listeners react with commentary and criticism on its content and form. Within the poem itself, there is also a subtle slippage between ballad and lyric, as Pfeiffer imports elements of stanzaic structure and rhyme scheme from the sonnet (a point I revisit in more detail later in the chapter). This approximation of a lyric form calls attention to the fact that the titular "rhyme" of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is inconsistent and, moreover, that its inconsistency is very much the point.

Altogether, the unevenness of the prose narrative and poem and the variability of the ballad's stanzas challenge a holistic interpretation of Pfeiffer's work. However, recognising her indebtedness to the verse novel genre and situating *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* within this literary history—as a para-verse novel of sorts, part of a broader trend of generic innovation in the Victorian period—provides a framework for interpreting the correspondence between Pfeiffer's generic experimentation and her theme. Like that of the verse novels analysed so far, the generic combination in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is related to its politics, in this case conveying the work's critique of conventional Victorian middle-class marital ideology. The Victorian middle-class understanding of marriage was conventionally predicated on the idea of

total unity between wife and husband, the absorption of a wife's identity into that of her husband as they became "one flesh." *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* rejects such complete cohesion in its overt, uneven generic combination and embedded narrative structure, and the juxtaposition of its distinct parts suggests an alternative model of marriage that maintains difference in union.

In keeping with the metatextual impulses of other Victorian verse novels such as *Aurora Leigh*, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* offers its own organising metaphor for understanding the generic combination of poem and prose narrative. In the first book of *Aurora Leigh*, EBB presents the image of pouring new wine into old skins as a metaphor for poetic renewal:

Oft, the ancient forms
Will thrill, indeed, in carrying the young blood.
The wine-skins, now and then, a little warped,
Will crack even, as the new wine gurgles in.
Spare the old bottles! – spill not the new wine. (I.998-1002, *WEBB* 3: 26)

Filling the wine-skins with "young blood" imbues them with new vitality, "thrill" suggesting that the skins come alive a sudden shock of stimulation, and the image works as a figure for EBB's bold combination of genres—"the ancient forms"—with her representation of modern life in *Aurora Leigh* itself. *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* does not offer the same image of an ancient form revivified by new content; rather, the narrator introduces a metaphor of weaving as a figure for literary composition that signals Pfeiffer's own combination of prose and poetry. It carries an echo of the resuscitative poetics in *The Ring and the Book*, in which Browning's narrator reconstructs the story of a seventeenth-century murder trial by combining facts of the old yellow book with the alloy of his poetic fancy,[6] but Pfeiffer's metaphor also differs from

[6] "This was it from, my fancy with those facts,
I used to tell the tale, turned gay to grave,

Browning's. Whereas an alloy is a blended product in which its ingredients are synthesised completely, typically to create a stronger metal (or literary genre), the different threads of a woven product remain visible and are not combined to compensate for the weakness of any of its parts. Emphasising process rather than product, Pfeiffer describes weaving together past and present, fact and fancy. She revivifies the past by "passing from fact to fact" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 50-51) and "unconsciously supplying the missing links" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 51), "the warp" of her "fancy . . . weaving upon the woof of fact" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 58). Stimulated by the ghostly voices she hears "sobbing, sighing, whispering" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 41) in Castle Duart, she applies her imagination to the information she obtains from "a little-known book by one calling himself a 'senachie'[7] of the Clan Maclean," in addition to "other curious sources of information" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 2) to construct the story of the Lady of the Rock. She describes the composition of the poem as a process of weaving, taking "up in my mind all the various threads of the strange narrative" and "weaving them into a connected whole" (*Rhyme* 42). This trope applies to the generic combination of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* in its entirety, particularly since Pfeiffer uses a metaphor of domestic labour that aligns her poetics with women's work and

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But lacked a listener seldom; such alloy
Such substance of me interfused the gold
Which, wrought into a shapely ring therewith,
Hammered and filed, fingered and favoured, last
Lay ready for the renovating wash
O' the water." (Browning, *The Ring and the Book* I. 679-86)

[7] According to the *OED*, *sennachie* is a term "in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands" for "one professionally occupied in the study and transmission of traditional history, genealogy, and legend; now chiefly *Sc.* a Gaelic teller of legendary romances" (*OED*, "sennachie," n.). The volume the narrator refers to, by a sennachie "writing of the clan in 1830" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 40), is presumably a Maclean genealogy titled *An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan Maclean, from Its First Settlement at Castle Duart, in the Isle of Mull, to the Present Period*, by a Seneachie (1838). I owe the discovery of this volume to Dorothy McMillan, who points out in "Unromantic Caledon: Representing Scotland in *The Family Legend*, *Metrical Legends*, and *Witchcraft*" that the genealogy refers to *The Family Legend* (78) and introduces the story of the Lady of the Rock with this reference: "A circumstance in the life of this worthless chief of Macleans, though already rendered sufficiently familiar, as having been made the subject of a modern dramatic piece, *The Family Legend*, is rather in its proper place by being recorded here" (*An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan Maclean* 28). I discuss *The Family Legend* in detail later in the chapter.

evokes classical allusions to women who weave stories, such as Penelope and Arachne. In its weaving of prose and poetry, Pfeiffer's work subscribes to the model of generic combination that David Duff refers to as "rough-mixing," a combination characterised by juxtaposition rather than synthesis that yields literary works in which "the joins are visible" rather than seamlessly unified (Duff, *Romanticism* 178). Pfeiffer's generic combination is not the "smooth-mixing" that we see in Browning's verse novel (or Webster's, as discussed in chapter 1) but, maintaining the distinctness of its prose and verse parts, has more in common with Fane's juxtaposition of lyric and narrative verse in *Denzil Place*. Emphasising the method of their joining, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* weaves together the "various threads" of the prose narrative and the poem into one work while retaining their distinctness in a generic model of difference within union.

This chapter makes two main claims. First, I argue that Pfeiffer's work offers a feminist critique of late nineteenth-century marital ideology and marital rape in the context of contemporaneous arguments for women's enfranchisement. Elizabeth's resistance to marital rape works as a rejection of Victorian marital customs, particularly the doctrine of coverture, and exemplifies the importance of women's autonomy. By embedding a historical ballad in a contemporary frame narrative, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* collapses the distance between the sixteenth-century Scottish Highlands and nineteenth-century Britain to highlight the lack of progress regarding women's rights in the Victorian period. Second, I contend that Pfeiffer offers an alternative model for marriage, a corrective to the conventional Victorian middle-class conception of total unity, through the volume's generic combination. Together, the roughly mixed genres convey Pfeiffer's argument about the need for women's autonomy. The poem is composed by a woman poet and then narrated by her husband, so the feminist critique of Victorian marital relations emerges through a joint effort, a product of their two voices; however,

the narrative voice of the work as a whole remains distinctly that of the female narrator.[8] The combination of genres, joined but distinct, offers a paradigm for Pfeiffer's alternative model of marriage: a union in which partners are not wholly absorbed into one unit but instead retain individual autonomy.

The chapter will first situate *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* in the literary context of the ballad revival and contemporary associations of both the ballad and the Scottish Highlands and Islands with cultural primitivism. I will subsequently outline Pfeiffer's feminist politics and analyse the critique of marital rape in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* by drawing on nineteenth-century feminist discourse. I contend that the depiction of attempted marital rape in the ballad, a genre associated with cultural primitivism, positions marital rape—which remained legal in the nineteenth century—as a primitive act incongruous with modern values. I will then discuss the setting of Pfeiffer's work in the context of representations of the Highlands in contemporary ballads and travel writing. I argue that the political status of late nineteenth-century Scotland in the United Kingdom adds an additional resonance to Pfeiffer's alternative model of marriage. Scotland was figured by nineteenth-century critics as a feminised country wedded to masculinised Britain in the United Kingdom, and its sovereignty as a nation was restricted as a result of this political union. In the 1880s, when *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* was published, the Scottish were protesting this subjugation and seeking to reclaim sovereignty on issues such as land use. The setting reinforces Pfeiffer's ideal model of marriage as a union in which parties still retain individual autonomy. By incorporating two different cases of dispossession—women in marriage and Scotland (the Highlands and Islands in particular) in the United Kingdom—*The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* problematizes the idea of unity in

[8] It thus contrasts with Tennyson's *The Princess*, which combines male voices narrating the story and female voices singing in between the narrative sections, but which is ultimately controlled by a sole unnamed male narrator.

which one party, whether individual person or country, is subsumed into another and loses distinction and autonomy. This chapter will demonstrate how the combination of the poem and the prose narrative in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is itself a metaphorical literary marriage, one in which the ballad and prose narrative remain distinct but are joined through acts of narration, conveying Pfeiffer's ideal of marriage as a relationship of unity with difference.

The Ballad and Historical Displacement

As part of its complex generic combination, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* incorporates the ballad, a genre that underwent a major revival in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the publications of antiquarian collections of traditional folk ballads,[9] broadside ballads, and new literary ballads all flourished. Critics have often distinguished among folk ballads, broadside ballads, and literary ballads by associating folk ballads with orality and a disappearing rural tradition and broadside ballads with print and urban modernity, and then defining literary ballads as original works by single authors that draw on conventions of both folk and broadside ballads (the literary ballad then splintering into additional categories such as "lyrical ballad" and "Pre-Raphaelite ballad"). The diversity of ballads was important for Pfeiffer, who consistently revisited the ballad throughout her career and experimented with variations upon the genre.[10]

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[9] Notable folk ballad collections published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries include Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3), and F. J. Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-98). Specifically Scottish ballad collections proliferated as well, including Robert Burns's *Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany: A Collection of Scots Songs* (1723-37), David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, etc.* (1769), James Hogg's *The Jacobite Relics of Scotland: Being the Songs, Airs, and Legends, of the Adherents to the House of Stuart* (1819-21), and William Motherwell's *Minstrelsy Ancient and Modern* (1827).

[10] Hickok characterises Pfeiffer's ballad "Childe Rupert, the White Ermingarde, and the Red Ladye," from *Poems* (1876), for example, as Pre-Raphaelite in content and style (Hickok 373, 378-9), while Lee Christine O'Brien classifies "The Witch's Last Ride," a late poem from Pfeiffer's last volume, *Flowers of the Night* (1889), as a lyrical ballad (O'Brien, *Romance of the Lyric* 211). Pfeiffer's ballad "The Gulf," originally published in *Poems*,

Nineteenth-century poetry scholars such as Henville and Meredith McGill have both recently commented on the shortcomings of these subgenre definitions[11]; however, while recognising that there is no completely stable or definitive standard of the ballad, basic definitions of its subcategories still prove useful for analysing Pfeiffer's generic experimentation with the ballad in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. Cultural and political associations underpinning the ballad inform the critique of Victorian marital ideology in this chapter, so this section will briefly summarise some of the conventional characteristics associated with these subgenres, situate Pfeiffer's work within the ballad revival, and explain how *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* draws particularly on the nineteenth-century association of the genre with cultural primitivism to characterise marital rape as a primitive act with no place in the modern Victorian world. By weaving a historical ballad—one in which marital rape is repudiated as an assault on a woman's bodily autonomy—within a contemporary frame narrative, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*

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was collected in an American collection called *The Book of Latter-Day Ballads* (1888), which placed it alongside ballads by major poets including EBB, Robert Browning, William Morris, Christina Rossetti, and Tennyson.

[11] Henville notes that the nineteenth-century ballad was "a broad, loose category" ("Introduction" 411) that encompassed many poems that did not strictly adhere to conventional ballad standards, and McGill contends that "ballads have proved famously difficult to define" because the genre is characterised above all by its longevity and capaciousness (156). As McGill points out, ballads have been common in literature from the medieval period onward and have historically traversed boundaries of rural folk culture and mass commercial culture, as well as oral and print media (McGill 168), and broadsides date back to the early modern period (McGill 161-64). Folk ballads and broadsides therefore existed alongside one another long before the ballad collectors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sought to preserve "authentic" folk ballads. Moreover, traditional ballads were often translated into print and broadsides often disseminated orally through recitation and song, especially in street performances (Dugaw 115; McGill 162n12). The ballad's relative ubiquity across cultures and languages only exacerbates the problem of adequately defining such a broad genre. McGill notes that Anglo-American criticism privileges rhyme and stanzaic structure in classifying the ballad, for example, but ballads are not stanzaic in all literary traditions, so alternative definitions exist based on plot and narrative style (158). According to these criteria, "ballads are narrative poems distinguished by their concision, episodic structure, objective or neutral tone, and dense patterns of repetition and refrain" (McGill 158). In fact, as McGill reminds us, F. J. Child's influential multi-volume collection of English and Scottish ballads was based on the "exhaustive comparison of ballad variants across European traditions" and took as its organising principle not poetic form but "instead divergences in plot and minute differences in narrative detail" (159). This alternative definition even applies to works such as the prose poems in *fin-de-siècle* poet Nora Hopper's aestheticist volume *Ballads in Prose* (1894), which also characterises the ballad by content rather than verse form.

critiques the fact that husbands still possessed the right to sexual access in the nineteenth century and highlights women's ongoing legal and political subjection in Victorian Britain.

According to Dianne Dugaw, a scholar of eighteenth-century popular ballads and folklore and author of the most recent entry on the ballad in the authoritative *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the term *ballad* has since the eighteenth century—when many of these volumes were published—referred broadly to a narrative song organised in stanzas (114), characterised by additional features such as a tendency to open *in media res*, unfold episodically, and feature third-person narration, parallelism, and repetition, with refrains and incremental repetition common methods of advancing the plot (Dugaw 115). Dugaw also characterises traditional folk ballads by their tendencies to present tragic stories situated in feudal medieval societies that rely on formulaic characters and events and frequently include elements of supernaturalism (115-16). Finally, McGill explains that traditional ballads were often considered authentic expressions "of folk sensibility" (158), not attributed to a single author but viewed rather as "anonymous or collective works of art" (158) that were transmitted orally. The print medium was, in contrast, associated with broadside ballads, which were printed single-sided and inexpensively on large broadside sheets of paper, and they were sold and read aloud or sung in the street. The style of these poems, according to Dugaw, also tended to be more "expository" than folk ballads, often presenting journalistic first-person narratives of criminal events in urban settings (116). Ellen O'Brien argues that broadside ballads developed a frequently topical and "remarkably public poetics" in their representation of historical and contemporary cases of violent crimes such as infanticide, rape, and murder, as well as their circulation in the streets (29).

Finally, new literary ballads inspired by and based on traditional folk ballads emerged throughout the nineteenth century, particularly after the publication of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth's revolutionary *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, which sought to radically alter the current state of poetry. According to Wordsworth's preface in the second edition (1800), the volume was intended to serve as a corrective to the debased literary tastes of the day by foregoing archaic and artificial poetic language, representing the feeling associated with "the incidents of common life," and seeking "to imitate, and . . . adopt the very language of men" (Coleridge and Wordsworth 174, 177). Part of what "distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day," according to Wordsworth, was "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling" (Coleridge and Wordsworth 176). As Dugaw explains, the ballad's narrative action traditionally distinguished it from lyric (114), and the new generic hybrid of the lyrical ballad transformed the genre by reconfiguring the relationship between action and feeling in the traditional ballad and privileging emotion over the action typically associated with it as a narrative form.

In the wake of this poetic revolution, ballads continued to flourish in the Victorian period. They emerged as part of the early Medieval Revival, with poems such as Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832, 1842) and EBB's "The Romaunt of the Page" (1844), then with the mid- and late-century Pre-Raphaelitism of poets such as William Morris, Christina Rossetti, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (in, for example, the volumes *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* [1858], *Goblin Market and Other Poems* [1862], and *Ballads and Sonnets* [1881]). The trend continued well through to the end of the century, with poems such as Rosamund Marriott Watson's "Ballad of the Bird-Bride" in *The Bird-Bride: A Volume of Ballads and Sonnets* (1889) and "The Ballad of the Were-Wolf" in *A Summer Night* (1891) and volumes including Robert

Louis Stevenson's *Ballads* (1890), Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), and Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898). Over this period, ballads also varied widely in their politics. In addition to the radical experiments initiated by Coleridge and Wordsworth and carried on by Victorian poets, many ballads were conservative and imperialistic, as Meredith Martin notes of the poems in Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) in her article "'Imperfectly Civilized': Ballads, Nations, and Histories of Form" (2015). Others, such as the works in Algernon Charles Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866), were highly controversial for their overt sensuality; the review of the volume in the *Athenaeum* (4 August 1866), for example, called Swinburne "unclean for the mere sake of uncleanness" (137) and the volume one in which "pure thinking is treated with scorn, and sensuality paraded as the end of life" (138).

In *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, Pfeiffer's use of weaving as a trope for composition evokes "The Lady of Shalott," and the word "rhyme" in the title of the volume suggests the influence of ballads such as Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) and EBB's "Rhyme of the Duchess May" (1844).[12] The *Westminster Review*, furthermore, asserted that in Pfeiffer's ballad "there is an echo here and there of the great ballads of D. G. Rossetti" ("Belles Lettres" 297). And although she deviates from conventional formal features of the ballad (her stanzas loosely follow a rhyme scheme of abcb but often exceed the conventional

[12] Pfeiffer's work shows several parallels with EBB's ballad, including a Scottish setting, a female protagonist who resists male violence, and a blending of medievalism and modernity. According to Marjorie Stone, "The Rhyme of the Duchess May" "adapts situations and scenes from the old Scottish ballad 'Edom o'Gordon,'" in which "the hero . . . is not the brutal border-raider referred to in the title, but the fiercely loyal wife of a Scottish lord who takes a stand on the castle walls and valiantly resists Gordon and his men in her husband's absence" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 129). As Stone notes, "in their representation of strong, transgressive women and their paradoxical combination of the medieval and the modern, Barrett Browning's ballads contributed to the nineteenth-century ballad tradition" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 132) by revising conventional plots featuring chivalric conceptions of femininity. Her poems, Stone points out, were influential for Pre-Raphaelite poets (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 132).

quatrain of the "ballad stanza," shifting from sestets to septets to octaves),[13] her critique of conventional middle-class marital ideology and marital rape relies on a combination of the folk ballad and the broadside ballad. Her daring representation of attempted marital rape and wife-murder evokes the topicality and public poetics of broadside ballads, but her poem is aligned with the folk tradition in several ways as well: its opening *in media res*; scenario of thwarted love, political conflict, and violence; use of dialogue; slight supernaturalism[14]; and formulaic description of noble characters, who are often referred to with epithets (the "red Maclean," the "flower of ladies, Elizabeth").[15] When the narrator's husband reads the poem aloud to a small audience, his recital also alludes to the oral and communal transmission associated with the popular ballad. This oral performance raises the question of why the narrator does not read the poem aloud herself but has her husband recite it, a point to which I will return later in the chapter. Most importantly, the ballad serves Pfeiffer's feminist politics; by addressing marital rape in a poetic genre associated with cultural primitivism, Pfeiffer frames marital rape as primitive as well, highlighting how unacceptable it is in the modern era.

As is the case with the other verse novels analysed in this dissertation, the generic

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[13] Scholarship on Anglo-American ballads tends to rely on the criteria of conventional stanzaic form and metre: quatrains with alternating lines of tetrameter and trimeter and a rhyme scheme of abcb (McGill 158). As Henville sums up neatly, "there is a set of generic conventions usually associated with the ballad—it is composed of lines of three or four stresses, it is a narrative, it focuses on action rather than interiority, it has a repeated or an incremental refrain, it has simple language, its speaker is a detached observer" ("Introduction" 413). However, as she points out, "most poems that were called 'ballads' by nineteenth-century poets did not contain all of these features" (Henville "Introduction" 413), and this is the case in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. Pfeiffer's stanzas all begin with an unrhymed line and conclude with a rhyming couplet, but the rhyme scheme otherwise may fluctuate depending on the number of lines in the stanza.

[14] After a raid, Maclean brings a mistress to the castle, and she hopes to replace Elizabeth as chatelaine of the household. She makes a wax figure of Elizabeth, which she curses with a spell that recalls the witches in *Macbeth*: "'Dwindle and dwine in shade and shine,' / . . . 'till all of thine be mine'" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 144). Maclean finds her with the wax doll, and they devise their plan to have Elizabeth killed.

[15] As far as I can tell, Susan MacArthur's song in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is not a pre-existing ballad (from a published ballad collection, for example) but one that Pfeiffer composed for the volume. Its style resembles that of a popular ballad. It features Highland dialect and includes a refrain, a conventional feature of the folk tradition. Susan's inheritance of it—she tells the narrator that she learned it from her mother, who heard it performed by a merchant selling copies in the street—reflects the historical transmission of ballads.

combination and feminist politics in Pfeiffer's work are interrelated. *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* addresses a topical issue—marital rape, which became a focus of feminist attention in the 1880s—but it displaces the issue to the distant past in the pre-modern context of the folk ballad and the historical setting of the story. This point is crucial. While Pfeiffer might seem to distance and thus depoliticise the issue of marital rape by situating it in the historically removed context of the folk ballad, her feminist critique actually relies on the nineteenth-century associations of both the folk ballad and the Scottish Highlands and Islands with cultural primitivism. Prefaces to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarian ballad collections frequently categorised the ballad as the form of representation of a primitive culture; for example, in Walter Scott's essay "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry," which he added as a prefatory essay to the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in 1830 for the publication of *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*, he remarks that there is a "general taste and propensity of nations in their early state, to cultivate some species of rude poetry" (1). Susan Oliver explains in *Scott, Byron, and the Poetics of Cultural Encounter* (2005) that "by the last decades of the eighteenth century, when Scott was thinking about and beginning to collect ballads, 'cultural primitivism' had become one of the most fashionable features of the literary world," in large part because many antiquarian ballad collectors, including Scott, were Tories who sought to recapture a lost feudal past, "s[eeking] to retrieve and preserve cultural memories of codes of honour, particularly the binding communal loyalties that were latterly believed to have been lost when feudal structures decayed and disintegrated to be replaced by individualism" (33). According to McGill, folk ballads were considered "primitive survivals of preliterary cultures" that could "rejuvenate a literature grown too effete, too ornamental, or too self-referential" (158), and collectors such as Percy, Scott, and Child perceived the orality of traditional ballads as a sign of

authenticity and an antidote to the corrupting influence of modern commercial print (McGill 161-62).[16] Whereas those ballad collectors idealised the past as the site of traditional values lost to the modern world, however, Pfeiffer was fixated on the present, and her poem uses a pre-modern setting to challenge the idea of progress in Victorian Britain.

Moreover, in contrast to Scott's ballads in the *Minstrelsy*, which take place on the borders between the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland (the latter of which, as Oliver argues, Scott associated with progress and Britishness[17]), Pfeiffer's work represents the Highlands and Islands, a setting associated with bardic culture[18] and primitivism. As Katie Trumpener explains

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[16] However, these collectors also exercised a great deal of editorial control over the poems they included in their volumes, sometimes editing out dialects and introducing their own amendments. As ballad and folklore scholar David Atkinson points out, the sources for Percy's *Reliques* "were subject to extensive collation and synthesis, alterations of spelling and punctuation, and, in varying degrees, Percy's own 'improvements' or 'sophistications'" (126). Furthermore, in spite of criticism that Percy's method received, "Scott's editorial method" in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* "was still essentially . . . one of collation and emendation of all the manuscript texts that he happened to have on hand from his various sources" (Atkinson 127). As Atkinson explains, Scott added some of his own words, lines, and even stanzas to complete poems that existed as fragments, and he sometimes edited poems to, in his view, improve the rhyme or other formal features (127). Finally, although Mary Ellen Brown points out in *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece: The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (2011) that Child attempted to preserve all the variants of the ballads he collected, "for a popular ballad was not one stable and enduring text but rather a fluid and variable phenomenon," she also concedes that Child still organised them chronologically and according to his own aesthetic criteria, so he did still impose an editorial arrangement upon them (71). Similarly, Atkinson notes that Child collated texts and made emendations to poems like Scott did, and the fact that the variants he included were "appended to a clear reading text" meant that Child's approach still "privilege[d] one set of readings . . . at the expense of all those collated in the apparatus" (137). He argues that this method can, "for the general reader in particular, suppress an awareness of the intrinsic variability and instability of texts" (Atkinson 137).

[17] Scott supported Scotland's place in the British Union, and Oliver argues that "from the beginning of his writing career, Scott, as a Tory Unionist, consistently sought to promote the Scottish Borders as a region that could serve as a focus for British national identity, particularly in times of war" (4). She points out that the *Minstrelsy* was "published just over half a century after the defeat of the mainly Highland Jacobite army at Culloden, but at a time when invasion by France was once more feared and urban Jacobinism considered by the establishment to be a very present threat to the stability of civil society" (12). As a result, she contends, the ballads emphasise "British national identity in the face of the threat of invasion from France" by "building a literary lineage rooted in the Borders and supportive of Scotland within the British Union, its Establishment and grounded civil and social institutions" (12).

[18] According to Trumpener, the Highlands became associated with bardic culture after the publication of James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems. She explains that, in *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland ad Translated from the Galic or Erse Language* (1759), "Macpherson claimed to have translated third-century Gaelic compositions, passed down, as Edinburgh rhetorician Hugh Blair explained, by oral tradition, transmitted 'from race to race' by a bardic succession. Scottish Enlightenment literati hailed the first translations as a great, lost patrimony" (75). He subsequently published *The Poems of Ossian*, and the poems were enthusiastically received in Scotland because by "invoking and mourning an epic past, *Ossian*'s auld sangs seemed designed to reanimate a Scottish nationalism and an oral tradition on the wane since the 'spirit-breaking '45.' Enthusiastically received in Scotland and retranslated, with enormous resonance, into many European languages, the poems met with a more suspicious reception in Ireland and England, for they supplied genealogical evidence for new, nationally

in *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (1997), the Jacobite Uprising of 1745-46 “was followed by brutal British military reprisals, the occupation and disarming of the Highlands, and a wave of repressive legal sanctions against clan culture,” which resulted in “large-scale collapse of the social and economic infrastructure” (71).[19] Concurrently, however, “the Scottish Lowlands began to experience unprecedented material prosperity . . . and an intellectual, literary, and architectural renaissance,” and “the Enlightenment formulation of a new four-stage model of sociological development was one response to Scotland’s widening social and economic disparities, transforming the Highlands and the Lowlands into nonsynchronous and separate stages of an impersonal, apparently inevitable evolutionary process” (Trumpener 72). This stadial theory of history enabled the perception that the Highlands and Islands were, as Peter Womack puts it in *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands* (1989), at “an *early stage of society*” (22) in comparison to the Lowlands and England. Thus began the romanticisation of the Highlands and Islands, a process that, according to Womack,

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gratifying theories about the original settlement of the British Isles, demonstrating the Highland origin of the kings of Ireland” and that “Irish literature was thus of Scottish origin as well” (Trumpener 75). The poems turned out to have been written by Macpherson himself, but they remained nonetheless a potent cultural influence. As Trumpener explains, “Macpherson’s *Ossian* had turned the Highlands into one enormous echo chamber, evoking an emphatically oral world” in which even “the landscape itself . . . echoed with the remembered voices of the past” (70-71), and Pfeiffer’s work registers this sense of a landscape haunted by the past in the ghostly voices “sobbing, sighing, whispering” in Castle Duart (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 41) that inspire her to write the poem. The narrator is also, in bardic fashion, a peripatetic figure who composes poetry as she travels around the island.

[19] Peter Womack makes this point more forcefully: “As soon as the Forty-five was over,” he states, “the Scottish Highlands became the target of a legislative programme designed to efface their historical distinctiveness. The military challenge had been destroyed at Culloden; now the aim was to pre-empt any possible revival by making the area as much as possible like the rest of Britain” by systematically outlawing “the carrying of weapons” and “the wearing of Highland dress” and by centralising judicial procedures and education (Womack 4). Furthermore, “in 1747 heritable jurisdictions were abolished, thus ‘rendering the Union more complete’ by imposing on Scotland the state monopoly in the administration of justice which already obtained in England. The estates of the rebels were forfeited to the Crown, and in 1752 the Annexing Act arranged for the management of these lands on enlightened capitalist principles which would, it was hoped, diffuse an ethos of rational self-interest in place of what the House of Lords agreed in calling an ‘enthusiastical clannish spirit’. Education was to be centralised too: the Disarming Act tried to license Highland schools in such a way as to place children everywhere under the influence of the established Kirk, whose presbyterianism made it solidly anti-Jacobite, and whose language of instruction was English” (Womack 4). All of this, Womack explains, was viewed as a process of civilization and assimilation into the Union.

"can be regarded as complete by 1810-11, when a flurry of publications, including most notably Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* [1810], both depended on and confirmed a settled cultural construction of the Highlands as a 'romantic country'" (2) consigned to a distant past.[20] Trumpener suggests, in fact, that "*Ossian*'s success, in depicting "a figure whom blindness and age have rendered at once venerable and feeble, "might be attributed in part to the reassurance it provides of the obsolescence of Highland clan culture, so recently a military threat to London and now forcibly dismantled under British military occupation" (8). The Highlands became a site of nostalgia, a point I revisit later in the chapter in discussing representations of the Highlands and Islands in contemporary travel writing.

Pfeiffer's embedded ballad in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* evokes this romantic perception of the Highlands and Islands as a place of the past. In *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, the narrator presents a story from a culture in the remote past, "a time in which . . . the annals of this part of Scotland were as wild and bloody as they could have been in the earliest dawn of civilisation" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 3). However, whereas a poem such as Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* represents the Highlands as a barbaric culture of the past in order to juxtapose it against a modern, civilised Britain,[21] Pfeiffer's poem sets up a comparison between the "wild" Highlands of the past and Victorian Britain, drawing a parallel between the culture in the poem

[20] As Lee Erickson notes, *The Lady of the Lake* was "perhaps the most popular poem of the period"; it "sold over twenty thousand copies in six months alone, going through a quarto edition of 2,050 copies and four octavo editions of 3,000, 3,250, 6,000, and 6,000 copies" (23).

[21] As Oliver explains, in *The Lady of the Lake* "the images of savagery that introduce the clansmen as they row into view are such that they are primitivized from the outset, appearing to come from another epoch," and the Highland chief Roderick Dhu "is devoid of any of the chivalric principles necessary to take his people into the modern, civilized world" (89). It is not a representation of "the Highlanders as morally 'bad' characters," she notes, but a representation of "society at its different stages. . . . As always with Scott, morality lies in the triumph of providential progress rather than the mere destruction of evil. There are virtues that Roderick Dhu possesses that render his eventual defeat in single combat with the King and his inevitable, subsequent death – representative of the death of the Highland clan system – tragic, and which are of a kind that Scott suggests modern society needs to acknowledge" (90-91). Nonetheless, "Scott's primitivizing and orientalization of these Highlanders casts them as a people who cannot progress beyond a certain point, even when they are brought into communication with those of a more developed culture" (Oliver 91).

and the poet-narrator's supposedly more advanced modern society in order to comment upon the condition of modern women in Britain. As I will demonstrate, the poem in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* collapses the historical distance between the two cultures to illustrate the lack of progress regarding the condition of women in the Victorian period and highlight, in addition, the disenfranchisement of the Highlands in the 1880s as a result of British rule.

An "unhappy story of marital tyranny": Pfeiffer's Feminist Politics and Marital Rape

Pfeiffer was, like Augusta Webster, an ardent supporter of women's rights, and issues related to the "woman question" dominate her work, including *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. After her death in 1890, her obituary in the *Academy* described this deep investment in feminist issues as her life's legacy. Not only was Pfeiffer a writer whose "mind was . . . open to receive the impulses of thought and feeling which are most characteristic of our self-conscious age," suggesting the contemporary resonance of her writing; she was also "inspired by sympathy for the sufferings of her sisters" to participate "in all movements for the social and economical regeneration of her sex" ("Obituary: Emily Pfeiffer" 80). When she died, she left a fund to help promote the higher education of women. According to Jessica Hinings, the trustees of the Pfeiffer Bequest donated £2,000 to constructing Aberdare Hall for female students at the University College of South Wales (now Cardiff University), which opened in 1895 (*ODNB*). It also provided funding for the books in the library in Masson Hall, the women's residence at the University of Edinburgh, which opened in 1897. The library was named the Pfeiffer Room.[22]

[22] As the Pfeiffer Bequest at the University of Edinburgh states, "a brass plate inscribed with the words Pfeiffer Room was put on the door of the room used as a library in the original house bought by the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women, at 31 George Square, which became Masson Hall. This plate was brought from George Square when the Hall moved to South Lauder Road" (Pfeiffer Bequest, EUA GD58/16).

Pfeiffer's preoccupation with "the sufferings of her sisters" is also evident in the work she produced over the course of a career that yielded ten volumes and numerous periodical publications. Writing prolifically across genres, including lyric, dramatic monologue, ballad, verse drama, and both fiction and non-fiction prose,[23] she offered incisive critiques of Victorian attitudes toward gender and sexuality—including the "fallen woman" and women's lack of rights in marriage—and expressed avid support for women's education, employment, and enfranchisement. The poems "From Out of the Night" (1882) and "Outlawed: A Rhyme for the Time" (1884), for example, sympathetically address prostitution and women's right to custody of their infants,[24] while the volume *Women and Work* (1888) advocates improvements to women's education and employment opportunities. In this last work, Pfeiffer makes the case for extending women's political and economic opportunities beyond the domestic sphere by allowing them to gain a proper education and work in a wider range of professions. She systematically refutes the

[23] Her earliest work is a poetry album with illustrations, *The Holly Branch, an Album for 1843*, followed by *Valisneria; or A Midsummer's Day Dream: A Tale in Prose* (1857). Her other volumes include *Margaret; or, the Motherless* (1861); *Gerard's Monument, and Other Poems* (1873); *Poems* (1876); *Glân-Alarch: His Silence and Song* (1877); *Quarterman's Grace, and Other Poems* (1879); *Sonnets & Songs* (1880); a drama, *The Wynnes of Wynhavod* (first published in 1881, then collected in *Under the Aspens* [1882]); *Under the Aspens: Lyrical and Dramatic* (1882); *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* (1884); *Flying Leaves from East and West* (1885); *Women and Work* (1888); and *Flowers of the Night* (1889). She published in periodicals such as *Cornhill Magazine*, the *Contemporary Review*, and *Fraser's Magazine* and mentions "some 16 or 18 sonnets published in the 'Spectator'" in a letter to John Stuart Blackie's wife (Letter to Mrs. Blackie, 6 Feb. [1874], MS 2631, ff. 97-102, J. S. Blackie Papers, National Library of Scotland).

[24] As Mary Lyndon Shanley explains, a father had absolute right to child custody under early nineteenth-century common law, which meant that he could prevent his wife from seeing their children while they were still married, if they divorced, and even after his death (if he named someone other than the mother the children's testamentary guardian), but legislation gradually changed (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 131). According to Shanley, the Custody Act of 1839 granted mothers the right to apply for custody of children under seven and for access to children under sixteen, then the Infant Custody Act of 1873 amended the law so that mothers could appeal for custody or access to children under sixteen (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 137, 139). Subsequently, Shanley explains, MP James Bryce introduced the Guardianship of Infants Bill in 1884, which initially proposed equal custody rights for parents within marriage, but this clause was removed after backlash in the House, and it was never passed into law (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 144-49). The Bryce Bill was the occasion for Pfeiffer's 1884 poem "A Rhyme for the Time" (fittingly, an excerpt from this poem serves as the epigraph to the chapter on infant custody in Shanley's book *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895*). Eventually, the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886 gave women separated from their husbands and widows the "right to name testamentary guardians or to have a court award custody after a legal separation" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 131).

outdated perspective of "the man as the providence of the woman," denouncing it as "out of keeping with the stern realism of the age" and promoting instead "the widening of the sphere of labour for which the sounder education, technical and other, of the women of all ranks is fitting them" (Pfeiffer, *Women* 11).[25]

Much earlier in Pfeiffer's career, the verse novel *Margaret; or, the Motherless* (1861) challenged conventional Victorian middle-class marital ideology by tackling the stigma of divorce. *Margaret* is an important precursor to *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*; it anticipates Pfeiffer's later work in its description of patriarchal domination and marital bondage,[26] insistence upon the need for women's agency in marriage, and example of an alternative model of ideal marriage. The plot of *Margaret* is a simple one: Margaret, the eponymous English heroine, makes an unfortunate marriage to a tyrannical German prince that ultimately ends when he divorces her (under German law) as a punitive measure for her lack of submission to his authority as husband.[27] She returns to England in shame but ultimately finds love and remarries.

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[25] "From Out of the Night" was published in the volume *Under the Aspens: Lyrical and Dramatic* (1882), and "Outlawed" was published first as "A Rhyme for the Time" in the *Contemporary Review* in June 1884, then republished as "Outlawed: A Rhyme for the Time" in the volume *Flowers of the Night* (1889).

[26] Both Margaret and the narrator consistently refer to her marriage as a "chain" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 54, 82). C.f. Mona Caird, "Marriage," which was published in the *Westminster Review* in August 1888: "In most cases, the chain of marriage chafes the flesh, if it does not make a serious wound" (282).

[27] His decision to divorce her comes after an argument during a dinner party in which she defends Britain's involvement in the Crimean War against his criticism. He seeks to publicly castigate and dominate her in front of their guests for "sid[ing] against me in this strife / Of adverse interests" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 77), even attempting to force her to read her private diary aloud. She refuses, asserting her agency by burning the pages and stating, "You force me, Albrecht, thus to teach / That there are worlds beyond your reach" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 87). Subsequently, she explains (in first-person narration) that

> The hand has fall'n! my Phantom fears,
> My fevered thoughts, my prophet tears,—
> The spectral bodings of a mind
> O'erwrought,—gave truer counsel yet
> Than that forced calm which sternly set
> All fears at nought; so bold, so blind,
> It had forgot that in this land
> Two wayward hearts might loose the band
> Which held them. I have heard all now:
> He has been here; our nuptial vow
> Is to be rent by law asunder,—

The work was published in 1861, but the story takes place sometime during the Crimean War (1853-56), predating the English Divorce Act of 1857. Before the 1857 Act, as chapter 2 explains, married couples could only secure divorces in England through the ecclesiastical courts or by appealing to the House of Lords for a private Act of Parliament (Schor 91; Shanley 9). By comparison, divorce was more accessible in Germany.[28] By displacing its heroine to Germany, Pfeiffer's verse novel juxtaposes English and German marital law, defamiliarising English marriage and exposing it as an institution not governed by natural law but shaped by social, political, and cultural factors.

Margaret would have also served as a topical reminder that, even after the Divorce Act, women were more disadvantaged than men by divorce laws. *Margaret* reflects this difference: even though Margaret does not herself seek the divorce, the verse novel emphasises the negative consequences she faces as a result of being divorced. Margaret may be free from marital bondage, her hand "Snatched from its manacles," but the social stigma of divorce plagues her when she returns to England, where she must "drag in shame and pain / Along the world a broken chain" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 89). Pfeiffer's verse novel, therefore, illustrates the legal and social barriers that women faced in challenging Victorian middle-class marital ideology. It also

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His is the hand,—and this the thunder!" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 88-89).

The legal justification for their divorce is not explicitly stated, but the verse novel clearly attributes the estrangement and eventual dissolution of their marriage to her resistance to his authority and characterises the divorce as punishment for that lack of obedience. In this context, divorce is highly stigmatised; as Margaret prepares to return to England, she anticipates that her "place will be / Not where in spotless honour stand / Her maids and matrons" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 89).

[28] Lynn Abrams points out that in the majority of nineteenth-century Germany there was a "relative ease of access to an official separation or divorce . . . in contrast with much of the rest of Europe" (269). By mid-century, according to Roderick Phillips, Prussian law allowed couples to sue for divorce (which had been legal in some Prussian states since the Reformation) on eleven grounds, including adultery, desertion, "refusal of sexual intercourse," madness, "violence, attempted murder, or repeated and unfounded defamatory accusations," and "insurmountable aversion or the mutual consent to separate, where there were no children of the marriage (or, in exceptional circumstances, where there were children" (Phillips 428-29). While German divorce law became much more restrictive with the passing of a new civil code in 1900, it was considered liberal by British and French standards in the 1850s: a British MP, Baron von Gerlach, even referred to the Prussian law as an example of too-liberal legislation when Parliament was debating the divorce bill in 1857 (Phillips 429-31).

introduces an alternative ideal to this marital model. When Margaret falls in love after her return to England, she fears her new lover's response to the news of her divorce; however, he dismisses her previous relationship as a false union, insisting that it did not meet the true standard of marriage: "Duality in union—man and wife" (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 158). Pfeiffer expresses this concept of marriage as "duality in union"—two distinct parts combined but not completely absorbed— in *Margaret* first, but, as this chapter will demonstrate, she embeds it more fundamentally at the level of genre and form in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*.

Pfeiffer's works addressed not only women's sexuality, infant custody rights, education, employment, and rights in marriage, but also women's suffrage, of which she was a strong supporter. Her periodical articles "Woman's Claim" and "The Suffrage for Women," published in the *Contemporary Review* in February 1881 and March 1885 respectively, both advocate extending the franchise to women. In "Woman's Claim," Pfeiffer argues that improving the condition of women relies upon women's self-representation. Women, she asserts, "demand to join their judgment to the opinions of men on questions of social policy," for they are "dissatisfied not only with what has been done, and with what has been left undone for them" but also with the fact that, despite their increasing visibility in the public sphere, they go on "without a voice in the Government to which they are accountable" ("Woman's Claim" 268, 270). Concluding that "the place of a people in the scale of human development is determined by the condition of its women" ("Woman's Claim" 277), she argues that reforming women's rights is vital to the advances of society. According to Shanley, feminists in the mid- to late nineteenth century increasingly perceived suffrage and marital reform as interdependent causes, emphasising the connection "between women's legal insubordination to their husbands in marriage and their lack of the vote" (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 47). Advocates for

women's rights understood that "women could not be full citizens as long as they were subordinate to their husbands, and they could not be their husbands' true companions and partners in marriage while they were their political inferiors" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 47). The critique of women's subjugation in marriage in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*—contemporaneous with Pfeiffer's periodical essays—can be understood, then, in the context of contemporary feminist politics as a critique of women's disenfranchisement and an argument for suffrage.

The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock introduces the issue of married women's disenfranchisement by depicting Elizabeth's lack of autonomy in an "unhappy story of marital tyranny" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 41). Pfeiffer makes a major feminist intervention in Victorian literature by identifying the source of that tyranny as marital rape, a subject not widely represented in nineteenth-century novels and poems. Gail Savage lists several prose novels that engage with the issue of conjugal rights, including Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (43), while Lisa Surridge cites Mona Caird's *The Wing of Azrael* (1889) as a bold late Victorian critique of marital rape (187-215). But aside from Pfeiffer's volume, the only poetic work of the period to address marital rape (as far as I know) is Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, which, as Charles LaPorte notes in *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (2011), mentions it only obliquely (258n37). In this way, Pfeiffer's work is distinct in Victorian poetry—and, along with the novels above, in Victorian literature more broadly—in establishing sexual violence within marriage as a violation of women's rights. The subject of marital rape in Pfeiffer's work also distinguishes it from other literary adaptations of the story of the Lady of the Rock, including those of Scottish dramatist Joanna Baillie's *The Family Legend; A Tragedy* (1810) and Scottish poet Thomas Campbell's "Glenara" (1809).

A comparison of Pfeiffer's work to these earlier adaptations illustrates that the marital rape in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* was a detail of Pfeiffer's invention. The narrator of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* mentions both *The Family Legend* and "Glenara," but she does so to deny having read either Baillie's drama or "Campbell's ballad" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 43). The allusions to Baillie's and Campbell's works indicate Pfeiffer's awareness of both, however, and *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* shares some characteristics with these two predecessors that suggest she may have consulted them as source material. Baillie's five-act play was produced by Walter Scott at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh, and its second edition included both a preface by Scott and an epilogue by Scottish novelist Henry Mackenzie. The second edition of what Baillie referred to as her "Highland Play" (xi) offers a background to the story, which she attributes to a source provided by the Honourable Mrs. Damer, "as a legend long preserved in the family of her maternal ancestors" (v). According to this document ("a copy of which," Baillie states, "I have now upon my table" [vi]), the fifteenth-century Campbells of Argyll and the Macleans of Mull attempted to reconcile their longstanding conflict through the marital union of the Lord of Argyll's daughter, Helen, with the Maclean chief. The two had a son, but this attempt to establish peace only served to exacerbate the animosity between the two clans. To prevent Campbell blood from tainting the clan's lineage, Maclean's men forced him to choose between their abandoning him as a leader and his sanctioning the death of his wife and child (Baillie vi): "The strange, unnatural union of two bloods / Adverse and hostile," they tell him in the play, "most abhorred is" (Baillie 38). According to Baillie's introduction, Maclean reluctantly conceded, and his clansmen marooned Helen upon the rock in the Sound of Mull. Fishermen rescued her, however, and returned her, near-dead, to her father. The Earl of Argyll hid Helen when Maclean arrived to announce her death, which he falsely attributed to natural

causes, and at the funereal banquet Helen appeared to reveal his treachery. When Maclean fled, Helen's brother, the Lord of Lorne, killed him (Baillie vi-vii). Helen's child, meanwhile, was saved and returned to her care, and she married the man to whom "'her father had formerly refused her hand, disposing of her, as a bond of union, to unite the warring clans of Argyll and Maclean'" (Baillie viii). While there are clear parallels in the stories of Baillie and Pfeiffer's works, then, the plot of Baillie's drama does not feature marital rape.

As in the case of *The Family Legend*, Pfeiffer's work draws on the same plot as Campbell's poem but differs substantially in plot and poetic form. Campbell's "Glenara" is a short poem of eight quatrains published in the volume *Gertrude of Wyoming; A Pennsylvanian Tale and Other Poems* in 1809. According to the editorial note in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell* (1851), however, Campbell apparently wrote the poem in 1797 and was inspired by the story of Maclean of Duart (named Glenara in the poem), who, "having determined to get rid of his wife, 'Ellen of Lorn,' had her treacherously conveyed to a rock in the sea, where she was left to perish by the rising tide" (Hill 108). She is rescued and delivered home (the poem does not specify who rescues her), and the unsuspecting Maclean arrives, falsely aggrieved, to inform her family of her death. He "was suffered to go through the solemn mockery of a funeral," until "when the bier rested at the 'grey stone of her cairn,' on examination of the coffin by her kinsmen, it was found to contain stones, rubbish, &c" (Hill 108). His deceit exposed, "Maclean was instantly sacrificed by the Clan Dougal and thrown into the ready-made grave" (Hill 108). In contrast to Campbell's short poem, Pfeiffer's lengthy work features an extended plot, which describes Elizabeth and Maclean's marriage, their arrival at Mull, their ongoing stalemate about conjugal rights, Maclean's affair, his attempt to murder Elizabeth, her rescue, and finally her confrontation of him, when she reveals she survived and mercifully spares his life. Whereas

Pfeiffer's long narrative depicts a rising conflict, Campbell's poem represents a short episode in the story: the scene of Elizabeth's fake funeral, when her family exposes Maclean's treachery and kills him as punishment. The plot details also differ: in "Glenara," the Campbell clan kills Maclean for his crime of attempted wife-murder, and, crucially, the poem does not feature any mention of marital rape.

The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock departs significantly from Baillie's play and Campbell's poem, but it does exhibit certain similarities to these works that are notable in order to emphasise the deviations Pfeiffer makes. The main plot of the poem in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*—Elizabeth's political marriage to Maclean and her near-death on the rock—is the same, although the names differ (Maclean and Elizabeth are Glenara and Ellen in Campbell's poem, and Duart and Helen in Baillie's play). Elizabeth also has a lover from her own clan in all three works, one who speaks against Maclean in "Glenara" and attempts to rescue her in both *The Family Legend* and *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. All three works feature references to "pibroch" (ceremonial Scottish bagpipe music) to establish mood: "The pibroch of Macrimmon Môr" in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 157) recalls the "martial pibrochs, play'd, in better days" in *The Family Legend* (Baillie 9) and "yon pibroch sound sad in the gale" that accompanies the funeral party arriving at Ellen's home in "Glenara" (Campbell 107). Most notably, Baillie, Campbell, and Pfeiffer all attribute Maclean's motivation for condemning his wife to death to barbarousness and cowardice. "Glenara," by far the shortest work, represents only the scene of Ellen's staged funeral and thus does not provide much contextualisation regarding Glenara's motive for attempting to murder his wife (particularly since it was unaccompanied by an explanatory note in its original publication form). By depicting him as an unrepentant figure who tries to cover up his crime and referring to him as a "rude chieftain" and

a “barbarous chief” (Campbell 107, 108), the poem suggests that barbarism is at the root of his transgression. By contrast, Baillie renders Maclean (referred to as Duart in the play) as a man devoted to his wife but possessed of a “soft, unsteady, yielding nature” (10), whose decision to murder Helen is the result of his cowardly acquiescence to the will of his clansmen. In *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, the narrator describes Maclean in a similar fashion, as both “savage and—rare distinction in a Highland chief—cowardly” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 13), “a man to be qualified only by his likeness to brutes: dogged as a hound, cunning as a cat, savage as a wolf, and timid as a hare” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 48). Presumably referring to the “senachie’s book” that is her primary source material, the narrator pronounces that “in the case of Lachlan Cattenach Maclean the testimony is direct, and coming to us from many sources, meets always in one final conclusion: The man was a tyrant and a poltroon” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 43).

Despite such similarities, however, the genre and feminist critique of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* distinguish it dramatically from these literary antecedents. Elizabeth is foregrounded as a character in Pfeiffer’s work in a way that she is not in “Glenara,” in which Ellen does appear at all, and in *The Family Legend*, in which Helen’s role is eclipsed by all the male characters: Maclean and his men, Sir Hubert De Grey (her lover), John of Lorne (her brother), and the Duke of Argyll, her father. Particularly in Baillie’s work, the conflict of the story is cultural and political, a clash between the two clans rather than the personal intramarital conflict that Pfeiffer depicts, which aligns it more with the domestic novel (illustrating once again its affinity with the verse novel genre). Unlike in *The Family Legend*, furthermore, Elizabeth does not have a child in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. This is an important detail. In Baillie’s drama, the matter of conjugal duty is elided, and Helen and Duart’s child is the only evidence that this part of the marital contract has been fulfilled. The issue of conjugal rights is

taken for granted and never referred to as a violation of the wife's bodily autonomy. Pfeiffer, by contrast, does not gloss over conjugal duty as a circumstance of marriage but makes it the focal issue of the plot. Sexual consent, rather than the clan loyalty so important in *The Family Legend*, is the central conflict of the ballad in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. Pfeiffer repurposes the story of the Lady of the Rock with a feminist agenda, politicising the legend in the context of the topical issues of marital rape and suffrage to comment upon contemporary Victorian politics.

Besides *The Family Legend* and "Glenara," the only other source that Pfeiffer credits is the "senachie's book," as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. However, this volume does not provide a basis for her representation of marital rape either. According to that source, Elizabeth, sister to the Earl of Argyle, was betrothed to a member of her own clan but forced to marry Maclean out of political obligation, a union intended to broker peace between the two clans. Its account of the story corresponds to the ones in Baillie, Campbell, and Pfeiffer's works already outlined, and, indeed, most of the events Pfeiffer relates in the ballad seem to parallel this historical version. Despite the fact that it is a Maclean genealogy, Maclean is still vilified in the sennachie's account, which records that Lachlan Cattanach Maclean became chief of the clan in 1513 and that his "natural violence of temper and neglected education led to acts of the most savage cruelty" (*An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan Maclean* 25). Maclean is also referred to as a "worthless chief" who victimised Elizabeth Campbell: "scarcely had two years elapsed ere he evinced the most brutal hatred against his amiable wife, and to such a length that nothing seemed to satisfy the tyrant but her final destruction" (*An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan Maclean* 30, 28).

On the subject of Maclean's motivation for murder, however, the sennachie states merely that Maclean attempted to drown Elizabeth upon the Lady's Rock because he desired another

woman, and "the only hope he had of obtaining her was by getting rid of his present lady" (*An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan Maclean* 28). In *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, the narrator reflects upon this rationale with dissatisfaction. While the attempted wife-murder had been documented in the sennachie's book and revisited in Baillie and Campbell's works, the narrator insists that "in recording the outward act," history "had left [the motives] to be divined" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 43). Dubious that Maclean was as monstrous and Elizabeth as passively blameless—attacked entirely without provocation—as other accounts claim, she determines that "the cause which led to her condemnation by Maclean must be looked for elsewhere than upon the surface, may be supposed to have resided in some disturbance of the hidden relations of life, in some secret irritant or intolerable wound to pride, in discouragement it might be to nascent passion" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 46). Not unlike Browning's narrator in *The Ring and the Book*, who seeks to understand the different subjectivities of the participants in the murder trial, Pfeiffer's narrator seeks to uncover the motivation for Maclean's violent act. She concludes that his actions must have been a "counter-current" to "the violated feeling of the woman" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 47) that stemmed from the circumstances of their marriage. In Pfeiffer's telling, Elizabeth had been traded without desire or volition to a man she did not want to marry and so refused to honour their bond as a true marriage, viewing it as a false and empty union secured only for political stability. *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* thus repurposes the legend of the Lady of the Rock as a story of marital strife arising from Elizabeth's resistance to her husband's patriarchal authority—that is, his conjugal rights—and it reframes conjugal duty in terms of marital rape.

To address the issue of marital rape, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* collapses the historical distance of the ballad for contemporary critique of the modern condition of women, a

strategy that Pfeiffer used in other poems as well. Brennan suggests that Pfeiffer's tendency to draw on "the distant past as literary resource" in her work "may constitute an escapism on her part from contemporary tensions and power struggles" (149). Olverson, however, sees a strategic use of historical and mythic frameworks to comment on the contemporary status of women, contending that the historical and mythological female figures provided "literary counterparts to [Pfeiffer's] own frustrated desires for social and political equality" and that this representation "corresponds with the passionate debates about the social and political roles of women in the late nineteenth century" (85, 89). Similarly, although it is situated in a historically removed context, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* grapples with nineteenth-century critiques of marriage centred upon the concept of coverture. Upon marriage, a woman became subject to her husband's authority and retained only minimal rights to her property or the custody of her children until reforms such as the Infant Custody Acts of 1839, 1873, and 1886 and the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. As Shanley explains, in most respects, women were no longer considered autonomous individuals: "her legal personality was subsumed in that of her husband" (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 8), which limited her parental rights, as well as her capacity to sign contracts, make a will, or own property (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 8-9).[29] Coverture was a powerful ideological concept, Maeve E. Doggett argues, predicated upon the potent "fiction of marital unity" (35), the Victorian ideal that equated marriage with a union of absolute harmony. But while the idea of husband and wife as "one person in law" ostensibly

[29] Any property that a woman owned at the time of marriage or that came into her possession after marriage was legally her husband's. Doggett points out that "changes occurred even before the marriage was solemnised. Merely becoming engaged affected a woman's property rights. An engaged woman could not dispose of any of her property without the knowledge and consent of her intended husband, for this would be to deprive him of property which he had expected to acquire when he proposed. Any such disposition could be set aside as a legal fraud" (36). However, these rules applied primarily to middle-class and working-class women. A wealthy woman could receive trusts and bequests, typically from her father or brother. Because courts of equity—rather than common law courts—dealt with these estates, the property was not considered her husband's but her "separate estate" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 25).

protected women (Doggett explains that in *Commentaries on the Law of England*, Sir William Blackstone defined the term *coverture* as based on the idea of a wife, "a *feme-covert*," living under the "wing, protection, and *cover*" of her husband, [qtd. Doggett 35]), it entrenched patriarchal power by establishing "that women should be subordinate to men" (Doggett 35) in "a relationship which, in the nineteenth century, was still essentially feudal in nature" (Doggett 57). The profound economic and political disenfranchisement of married women as a result of their legal non-existence in Victorian common law prompted feminists such as Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Frances Power Cobbe to publicly criticise the doctrine of coverture. In "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minor" (published in *Fraser's Magazine* in December 1868), Cobbe explains that "by the common law of England a married woman has not legal existence, so far as property is concerned, independently of her husband" because "the husband and wife are assumed to be one person, and that person is the husband" (111).[30]

In fact, not only was a wife not entitled to own property, but she herself *was* her husband's property, a concept that Pfeiffer takes up in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. In the poem, Elizabeth is married to Maclean in order to unite two warring clans, the Campbells and the Macleans. Although she is already betrothed, her brother promises her—"Who once had ridden more free than free" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 102)—to a brutal man who sees her as property. Echoing the language of marriage as bondage and purchase, analysed already in Pfeiffer's *Margaret* and,

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[30] As Cheri Larsen Hoeckley points out in "Anomalous Ownership: Copyright, Coverture, and *Aurora Leigh*," the issue of coverture is also relevant to *Aurora Leigh*. Hoeckly situates EBB's verse novel in the context of her "participation in copyright debates together with her support of the Married Women's Property Movement" (138). She argues that *Aurora Leigh* highlights the way coverture made the roles of author and wife incompatible in the Victorian literary market because writers were understood as the creators and owners of their work, but marriage nullified a woman's right to ownership of property, including her literary property: "Victorian wives had no grounds from which to argue their right to literary property. Under the legal condition of coverture, the husband, not the wife, owned her body, and therefore any physical or intellectual fruit of it. . . . Under Victorian law, a writing wife's independent status in the literary marketplace was obviated by her prior dependent status in the family; she could not be independent anywhere" (Hoeckley 142).

as I discussed in chapter 2, present also in other feminist writing of the period (such as Mona Caird's "Marriage" [1888], which calls marriage a "form of woman-purchase" [280]), the narrator states,

> And so it fell that the deep Argyle
>   Had a bargain he would make,
> And his sister must be the seal of it,
>   Should it burn her heart or break.
> Thus he married her to the slow, the dull,
> Red-bearded tyrant, the chief of Mull. (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 102)

The ironic rhyme here of "make" and "break" emphasises that the political contracts of patriarchal societies, which rely on women as objects of exchange to preserve that structure, signify women's emotional, psychological, and possibly physical destruction.[31] Similarly, Elizabeth tells her lover when he appears in disguise to rescue her that "It has not been laid upon any man, / But on me to suffer and save the clan" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 104), and while "man" and "clan" suggests an equation between the two (as does "dull" and "Mull"), the couplet's rhyme ironically subverts this notion to suggest that, instead, the clan's survival and prosperity depend on her in spite of a social organisation that privileges men. The invalidation of Elizabeth's will and "substitution of one man for another" indicate that she is merely a commodity to be traded, recalling contemporary critiques of women as property by critics such as Cobbe, who declares in "Wife-torture in England" (published in the *Contemporary Review* in 1878) that the "notion that

[31] This strategy recalls EBB's use of medieval settings to critique Victorian gender ideology. According to Stone, EBB's "ballads of the 1830s and 40s . . . [employ] the starker power structures of medieval society to foreground the status of women as objects in a male economy of social exchange, and to unmask the subtler preservation of gender inequities in contemporary Victorian ideology" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* 108-9).

a man's wife is his PROPERTY, in the sense in which a horse is his property . . . is the fatal root of incalculable evil and misery" (138).

One such evil, as I have already stated, was the legality of marital rape. Since a woman was her husband's property according to Victorian common law, she could not refuse him sexual intercourse because this was understood to be his conjugal right (Doggett 45-46; Hammerton 88; Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 156).[32] Furthermore, according to Surridge, "under Victorian law, a woman was considered to consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at the time of marriage and was unable to withdraw that consent thereafter," so she could not legally refuse to have sex with him at any point during their marriage (197). Moreover, women could not divorce their husbands for marital rape because "sexual access was taken to be part of the marriage contract, and marital rape was not legally cognizable" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 156).[33] Only by making appeals on the basis of sexual cruelty did married women have any recourse,[34] and wives did petition for separation and divorce based on charges that

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[32] According to Savage, Victorian legal authorities typically cited Sir Matthew Hale's *The History of the Pleas of the Crown* (1736) as the first source to articulate the marital rape exemption; it states that "'the husband cannot be guilty of rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot contract'" (qtd. in Savage 44).

[33] In fact, "a woman who left her husband because he forced her to have sexual relations with him was guilty of desertion and could lose all rights to maintenance and custody" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 156). If a woman did desert her husband, he could appeal to the Divorce Court for an order of "restitution of conjugal rights," which compelled "an errant spouse to return to the marital bed and board, and disobedience of it was punishable by imprisonment until the guilty spouse promised to comply with the writ" (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 158). Parliament eliminated the penalty of imprisonment with the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1884, but according to the Act spouses were still considered guilty of desertion if they failed to comply by returning home (Shanley 158, 179). In that case, the plaintiff did not have to wait for two years to file for a separation (as the Divorce Act stated) but could apply right away and possibly receive maintenance and child custody (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 179). The action for restitution of conjugal rights was not eliminated until 1970 (Shanley *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 184). In 1880, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy opposed the definition of rape in the proposed Criminal Code ("'the act of a man, not under the age of 14 years, having carnal knowledge of a woman, *who is not his wife,* without her consent'" [qtd. Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 184). The bill did not pass, but she subsequently tried—unsuccessfully—to get MPs to introduce a bill to eliminate the marital exemption in rape law (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 184-85).

[34] A woman could file for divorce by charging her husband with adultery and either incest, bigamy, or cruelty. Legislation regarding cruelty in particular changed over the course of the century. After the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, a battered wife could attain a separation from the magistrates' court if her husband was convicted of aggravated assault, and the court determined her life was in danger. The Act only gave her the right to apply for a

included "excessive and unreasonable sexual demands, sodomy, the imposition of birth control, or the transmission of venereal disease" (Savage 44), as well as any act that endangered the woman's health (such as sex during pregnancy or too soon after giving birth) or caused her degradation (oral sex, for example) (Savage 45-48). In divorce or separation suits, wives could charge—or, in cases when husbands appealed for restitution of conjugal rights, they could mount a defense—on the basis that their husbands' assertions of conjugal rights constituted cruelty (Savage 44-45).[35] However, although the marital exemption in rape law (which existed in Britain until the 1990s [Savage 44]) did not completely preclude wives from pursuing legal action against their husbands, "such recourse was" not only contingent upon access to the Divorce Court but also "limited by social norms that generally enjoined the sexual submission of wives to husbands and stigmatized those wives who tried to challenge their husbands or bring their

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separation, however; it did not give her the right to leave her husband. If the court did not grant her the separation, she would be considered guilty of desertion. Only in 1895, with the Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act, could a woman first leave her husband because of cruelty, then apply for separation (Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law* 174-75). As Hammerton explains, the definition of cruelty changed during the nineteenth century. While late eighteenth-century courts considered "extreme violence" to constitute legal cruelty, by 1869 the Divorce Court reclassified cruelty to include acts aside from physical assault, including verbal attacks, particularly as judges came to weigh acts based on their impact on victims (Hammerton 97-105). With the passing of the Summary Jurisdiction Act, when "the legislature permitted women to obtain separation, maintenance and custody orders from magistrates' courts on the ground of 'persistent cruelty'," Hammerton explains that "it adopted the definition already developed in the Divorce Court, including threats to bodily or mental health. For years afterwards magistrates had to grapple with their own subjective interpretations of 'persistent cruelty', and the later Royal Commission on Divorce, conscious of inconsistency, urged that it be expanded to include 'grave insults and offensive conduct, though not amounting to actual physical violence'" (107).

[35] According to the cases that Savage examines, from 1858-1905 the Divorce Court saw cases in which cruelty was variously defined as forced intercourse, forced intercourse with people outside of the marriage, intercourse during menstruation, nudity, masturbation, bestiality (Savage 46-48), and physical assault with "sexual overtones" (Savage 49). See Hammerton: "The area we still know least about is that of sexual cruelty . . . marital rape *per se* was not an offence in criminal or divorce law; only violence associated with it might be successfully pleaded to sustain a charge of cruelty. But other frequently cited grievances hint at the unstated sub-text of sexual tensions. The fact that so many assaults were described as having taken place in bed, with no explanation of precipitating arguments, suggests an obvious sexual battleground, where women might resist but run a high risk of becoming physical victims" (Hammerton 88). For example, "charges of forcible sodomy, which was a marital offence, and could be supported by medical evidence, appeared where marital rape could not, and were calculated to outrage judges against a crime 'so heinous and so contrary to experience'" (Hammerton 88-89).

grievances to court in seeking divorces or separations or protection from their husbands" (Savage 53).

Pfeiffer's periodical articles do not specifically mention marital rape, but they do participate in the contemporary discourse on domestic violence made most famous, perhaps, by Cobbe's "Wife-torture in England," particularly since Pfeiffer's essays were published just a few years later in the same magazine. In "The Suffrage for Women" (1885), Pfeiffer acknowledges the important advancements regarding divorce and property rights, but she reminds readers of their very recent establishment: "As women, we cannot, we ought not to forget, that it is not yet a quarter of a century since the earnings of a deserted wife and mother have been secured to her" (Pfeiffer, "Suffrage" 434). She similarly qualifies this progress in her earlier essay "Woman's Claim" (1881) in her description of "the too-tardily effected, and still very imperfect regulations in regard to the property of wives" (267), particularly the fact that after divorce "the legal tie maintaining the community of property—by which is meant *its absorption by the man*," a reference to coverture, "has been held intact" (267, my emphasis). She stresses the urgency of contemporary problems still faced by women, citing the issue of child custody as the worst but pointing out also "that even now the protection the weaker sex receives from brutal violence is disgracefully inadequate" (Pfeiffer, "The Suffrage" 434). These articles, published contemporaneously with *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, illustrate the degree to which these issues preoccupied Pfeiffer at the time of its writing.

In *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, Pfeiffer foregrounds the problem of ownership as the basis of marital union by staging Elizabeth's first resistance to marital rape on her wedding night. When Maclean enters their nuptial chamber, Elizabeth resists his sexual advances, contending that their bond is merely a political agreement and not a true marriage with

corresponding conjugal entitlements: “You shall have your due and no more of me / Than a contract’s seal and warrantry” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 122). But Maclean scorns her protest and insists that “with iron hand” he will assert his “right” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 122), advancing upon Elizabeth, who, like “a hind at bay” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 122) “shrunk as into the granite wall” and “parried his rude embrace” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 123). When Elizabeth, “the bartered bride,” asks “I that am come as a hostage here, / Would you use me as a thrall?,” Maclean replies that “by limb and life, / I’ll use you as my wedded wife” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 100, 122**)**. The language of “use,” and his easy exchange of the term “wife” for “thrall,” highlights what Victorian feminists considered the essentially synonymous nature of the terms slave and wife according to the concept of coverture. It also vividly recalls John Stuart Mill’s *Subjection of Women* (1869), in which he not only compares wives to slaves but claims that a wife suffers even more than a slave on one count: whereas a female slave can “refuse to her master the last familiarity,” a wife cannot: “however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to . . . 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” (504).[36]

But this scene in the poem is also Elizabeth’s first act of feminist resistance. Elizabeth draws a dagger that she wears around her neck and faces her husband, supposedly her protector, as an assailant. The dirk, “Couched as a lance in rest,” is sheathed in a scabbard designed as “a golden dragon in jewelled mail” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 118), and the imagery of the armoured dragon

[36] As I noted in chapter 2, the metaphor of marriage as slavery was a common one in feminist rhetoric even predating the nineteenth century. Mill’s assertion that female slaves were in some sense better off than British wives in being able to refuse sexual intercourse—to my knowledge, a false claim made here to emphasise the unjust circumstances of married women—demonstrates the problematic nature of reducing the condition of slavery to a trope for rhetorical effect, even though Mill himself asserts that “I am far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves” (504).

suggests Elizabeth's knightly and virtuous stand against an immoral, even criminal, enemy. She is "ready to give as to take of death" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 123) and successfully repels him:

> Twice already that tyrant chief
>
> Had seen th' accusing steel
>
> Cleaving the way to his savage heart
>
> In a victim's last appeal. (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 124)

Rather than a husband with the indisputable right to Elizabeth's body, Maclean is figured here as a foe and attacker and Elizabeth as a victim desperately staving off assault. He retreats but clearly figures her as prey for future attempts: "'I will stalk this maid, / As we stalk the Highland deer,'" stating that "'She is yet too wild . . . and deep / To be taken waking or asleep'" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 124). Maclean views Elizabeth as a creature to be domesticated, to be forced into subservience, and the fact that he would "take" her regardless of her waking or sleeping state if it were possible indicates that consent is inconsequential.

This confrontation exposes their marriage as an adversarial relationship in which the husband attempts to assert mastery, and the wife resists his bondage. Maclean continues to seek sexual gratification from her (he pursues her "For dalliance in lady's bower" [Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 133], for example) and threatens still to subdue her ("'we tame the wildest tercelet / That ever we let live'" [Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 134], he tells her), but always the dagger stands as a symbol of her resistance. Even as he later pleads out of desire ("And once in his dire extremity / He sued her upon his knees" [Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 138]), she refuses to submit and the dirk remains the representation of her opposition against the man who ostensibly ought to be her protector:

> For bulwark and for last defence
>
> She had the strength of steel:

The sword betwixt them was a sign,

  The dagger was a seal;

And each fine hair that wound about

The dagger's hilt, a watchful scout. (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 138)

The weapons that serve as the personified agents of Elizabeth's constant vigilance against her husband underscore the martial nature of their relationship and the inevitable violence of any physical exchange between them due to Elizabeth's refusal to capitulate to Maclean's patriarchal authority. Even when Maclean takes a mistress and they plan Elizabeth's murder together (his mistress motivated by jealousy of Elizabeth's position [Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 143-6]), it is clear when Maclean strands Elizabeth upon the rock that her death is a punishment for refusing to yield to him. Maclean tells her as they approach the rock that "There one in love with death . . . / Might have white sheets for a marriage-bed" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 160), signifying that her staunchly defended virginity has resulted in her death sentence. Overall, the poem illustrates that in an early modern setting the role of a wife is essentially one of bondage, wherein a wife has no right to refuse her husband, and Elizabeth's resistance is therefore punishable by death in her husband's eyes. The correspondence between early modern and nineteenth-century contexts illustrates the slow progress of legal reform in Victorian Britain, where, although women could sometimes secure divorces by charging their husbands with cruelty for sexual assault, marital rape was not legally a crime.

On a formal level, Pfeiffer's stanzaic form also emphasises the violence that Maclean enacts upon Elizabeth. The poem in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* typically features sestets, and sometimes septets or octaves, which combine a four-line rhyme scheme (which, despite the lack of formal uniformity in ballads I refer to above, critics still often associate with ballads)

with a rhyming couplet in an abcbdd rhyme scheme. Pfeiffer, an accomplished sonneteer, gestures here at both Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet forms, the former of which is structured in an octave and a sestet (in various rhyme schemes, including a common rhyme scheme of abbaabba cdecde), while the latter, also fourteen lines, is structured as three quatrains and a couplet with a conventional abab cdcd efef gg rhyme scheme. The poem in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* invokes but never adheres to conventional structures of the sonnet, a formal deviation that emphasises Pfeiffer's thematic deviation from a lyric tradition associated with love and courtship, a departure that aligns with Pfeiffer's representation of marital violence rather than love and courtship.

The C line in Pfeiffer's stanzas stands out in particular because it has no paired rhyming line, nor do the C lines rhyme across stanzas. While the A line lacks a rhyme pair as well, it is less noticeable at the beginning of the stanza, whereas the C line disrupts the rhyming lines with no rhyme pair of its own to balance it out. The C line in the rhyme pattern thus introduces an iterative dissonance to the poem. The rhyming couplet in Pfeiffer's stanzas also delays the narrative momentum of the stanza, conveying a gravity or finality to the final two lines. The additional length of the occasional septet or octave also provides the opportunity to extend the B rhyme of the conventional ballad stanza and delay the couplet, increasing its effect. In the fifth fitte of the ballad, for example, the sexual assault against which Elizabeth has been vigilantly guarding throughout the poem occurs. Before he and his men abandon her on the rock to her drown at high tide, Maclean brutally embraces her, and the metre, enjambment, and abcbbbdd rhyme scheme of the stanza's eight lines, convey the violence of his assault:

> He stood with his bride on that trampled shore—
>
> They two, and they alone—

> And with brackish kisses he pressed and pressed
>
> As one who would make his own
>
> Her shuddering lips; then he cast her down
>
> As a man might cast a stone,
>
> And the rock that was all that was left of the world
>
> Seemed sinking with that light weight so hurled. (*Rhyme* 162)

The poem's irregular metre, including the short trimeter of the second line—which, along with the bracketing dashes, sets the line apart and stresses the vulnerability of Elizabeth's position—lends the scene intensity and instability. The enjambment of the following three lines builds momentum, leading to the strong caesura bifurcating the fifth line, the semicolon that marks the sudden shift from Maclean's assault of Elizabeth, when he takes "Her shuddering lips," to his abrupt disposal of her, when he "cast her down." Most notably, however, the B rhyme of the stanza is extended from typically a single, isolated line in a conventional ballad quatrain to four lines in this octave, with "alone" / "own" / "down" / "stone." The eye rhyme of the third line—"down"—also stresses the dissonance of the situation unfolding in the stanza. A series of rhyming lines might imply harmony and order (e.g., wife / life), but in this case there is only the appearance of harmony because the third line does not rhyme except for the internal identical rhyme of "pressed" and "pressed." It disrupts the stanza, introducing a subtle disorder that enacts the discord in Elizabeth and Maclean's marriage. The repetitive sound of the end consonant *n* ("alo*n*e" / "ow*n*" / "dow*n*" / "sto*n*e"), furthermore, carries a strong negative connotation that, in its evocation of words such as "no" and "end," emphasises this dissonance and suggests finality. The couplet that follows picks up on this evocation of "end" as well. The rhyme establishes a parallel between the "world," which has narrowed to the rock upon which Elizabeth is "hurled,"

and this violence is equated with the ending of the world itself, the "d" sound of the end consonants ("hurle*d*" / "worl*d*") suggesting the finality of her death as a result of this assault.

In the fifth fitte, furthermore, Pfeiffer invokes Tennyson's ballad "The Lady of Shalott" (1832, 1842) through rhyme and imagery. One of the Victorian era's most famous ballads, "The Lady of Shalott" is a poem about female passivity and death, and Pfeiffer's allusion to it effectively emphasises, through juxtaposition, Elizabeth's agency and survival. "The Lady of Shalott" begins with the Lady seated at her loom, facing a mirror, with her back to the window. She perceives the outside world only in the mirror, with the threat of an unknown curse to fall upon her if she ceases to weave and looks out the window upon Camelot. When she hears Sir Lancelot's song and sees him in the mirror, however, she does just that: "She left the web, she left the loom, / She made three paces through the room" (Tennyson, "Lady of Shalott," lines 109-10), and when she looks out of the window, the mirror cracks, and the curse descends upon her. The Lady leaves her bower and departs in a boat for Camelot, "singing her last song" as she goes (Tennyson, "Lady of Shalott" 143), and when the boat reaches Camelot, and Lancelot looks upon her, she is dead. *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* exploits an allusion to the Lady's doomed fate, and to the couplet above in particular, to great effect: Elizabeth is seated at her loom by her bower window when Maclean enters the room; at his behest, she leaves and follows him down to the shore:

> She left her wheel, she left her bower,
>
> She followed the false Maclean,
>
> The piper piped them to the shore,
>
> He piped a doleful strain:
>
> The pibroch of Macrimmon Môr:

"The way you go you'll come no more." (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 157)

The first line of this passage, "She left her wheel, she left her bower," echoes the famous line in "The Lady of Shalott," "She left the web, she left the loom." The syntactical arrangement of the two lines—two independent clauses separated by a comma—emphasises the parallelism of Elizabeth's situation to that of the Lady of Shalott, suggesting that the Lady's death after descending from her tower and following a man foreshadows Elizabeth's own.[37] The funereal bagpipe music that accompanies Elizabeth to the shore, then, is a death song that anticipates the events that unfold next, when Maclean maroons her on the rock.

The earlier allusion to "The Lady of Shalott," through the narrator's metapoetic metaphor of weaving, gains extra significance at this point in the poem. The poet-narrator weaves the poem within the tower in Duart Castle, literally inhabiting the same space as Elizabeth and metaphorically the same space as the Lady of Shalott, and whereas the Lady of Shalott dies in Tennyson's poem, Pfeiffer repurposes this famous scene of canonical Victorian poetry and rewrites it as a moment of feminist agency. As Isobel Armstrong writes, "fusing the many myths of the weaving lady, from Arachne to Penelope, with the myths of reflection carried by Narcissus and Echo," Tennyson's ballad is "a poem of longing for sexual love, change and transformation, which is denied change. The lady is a doomed victim, and dies a sacrificial death, failing to come

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[37] The image of a woman in a tower is also familiar from Tennyson's "Mariana" and from Pfeiffer's *Margaret; or, the Motherless*, which describes Margaret alone and enclosed in the tower of the castle where she lives with her husband:

> In the tower by times a lady wander'd,
> Pacing up and down, and to and fro;
> Paus'd before the window oft and pondered,
> Seeming rest or peace no more to know
> Than the spirits of the winds which blow
> Through the open fretwork of the stone,
> In a melancholy broken tone. (Pfeiffer, *Margaret* 42)

Margaret writes her poetry in this setting, and the image of the woman poet writing in the tower also anticipates the narrator's composition of her ballad in the bower of Duart Castle in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock.*

into sexuality and language" (83). Although the Lady writes her name on the prow of her boat and sings a song as she floats to her death—final expressions of subjectivity and voice—Armstrong points out that her swan song is ambiguous, possibly "triumph or defeat" (86) and that ultimately, even though she writes her name, "she is struggling with the need to represent herself but constantly deprived of this capacity," particularly when she dies and "Lancelot speaks *for* her at the end of the poem" (86). In contrast, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* offers an unequivocal moment of agency, transformation, and triumph for Elizabeth. Not only does she survive the death sentence imposed upon her by her husband, but she also recovers the virtue and self-sovereignty that he claimed as his patriarchal right. When Elizabeth is stranded on the rock, she claims it as "a throne," the authority of her claim emphasised in the assonance and consonance of "throne" with "own," and calls on the ocean waves to purify "this lothèd stain on me" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 164). By establishing her sovereignty upon the rock and surviving the battering of the waves, another assault, Elizabeth reasserts autonomy over her body. Although initially after Maclean deserts her, "she wept for ruth of her maiden truth" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 164), she is washed and purified by the sea (Come, ocean, and with your bitter brine / Sweeten these ravished lips of mine!" [Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 164]), which elsewhere in the fitte is linked to the notion of liberty in the rhyme of "free" and "sea" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 158, 166). This experience negates Maclean's assault: "she lay there washed as for the grave, / And purer than virgin snow" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 167).

Only after she has spiritually rescued herself is Elizabeth rescued by one of Maclean's men and returned to her clansmen. When Maclean arrives in false mourning to announce her death to the Campbell Clan, there is a reversal of patriarchal order. Elizabeth stands in the position of power, which she exercises by extending him a mercy that she commands the rest of

her clan to respect: "I stand here victor: let no man dare / To take from the vanquished the life I spare!" (Pfeiffer *Rhyme* 178). She has acted on her own behalf and saved herself. Moreover, she not only declares her autonomy over her own body but also asserts her right to voice in the political sphere and acts as a political agent by deciding his sentence. She subsequently declares to her brother that she will marry only the man of her choosing, her original betrothed,[38] and the ballad ends with a recapitulation and a revision of an image introduced in its very first line. The poem opens with the line "Rose-red for the banner of love," which is subverted almost immediately by a line several stanzas later, "Rose-red is the banner of love, / But this bride is pale, snow-pale" (Pfeiffer *Rhyme* 99, 100), the contrasting imagery of which establishes of Elizabeth's situation as a marriage without love. In comparison, the last line of the ballad declares, with a pun on "rose" as both the flower and a conjugation of the verb *rising*, that "*Love*'s banner at last rose red, rose red" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 180, italics added).

Pfeiffer's poem thus boldly represents a woman's resistance to sexual violation in marriage, and *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* connects the subject of marital rape to the broader issue of women's political autonomy. As an issue of consent, marital rape relates to coverture and thus to the principal right that feminist activists sought in petitioning for the vote, that of voice. Not only was a woman in the late nineteenth century legally compelled to fulfil her husband's conjugal rights, but the limitations of her political participation obstructed her capacity to reform such laws. Single women and widows could vote and run in local and school board elections after the Municipal Franchise Act of 1869[39] and the creation of the school boards with the Elementary Education Act in 1870, but not in parliamentary elections (Hollis 31).

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[38] The poem does not clearly state how her marriage to Maclean will be dissolved; the implication is that it was never valid in the first place, and, of course, it was unconsummated.

[39] Records show that women did vote in parish elections prior to this act, however. See Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (2013), ch. 4.

Married women, however, could not vote at the borough level even if they owned property: according to Patricia Hollis, "the Act of 1869 was not to override the common law principle of coverture which subsumed a married woman's rights in those of her husband," and "the courts held that, on marriage, the woman ratepayer voluntarily opted out of the 1869 Act" (32-33). Even as single and widowed women gained electoral rights, then, a married woman was restricted from such civic participation. With some exceptions,[40] she did not have a distinct legal existence from her husband and was expected to rely upon him to represent her—*their* joint—interests. The conflict rather than convergence of interest was clear to Victorian feminists such as Pfeiffer, who argued that "it is not in the nature of things that the wrongs which press the most poignantly upon women's hearts can be adequately gauged by the other sex" ("Suffrage for Women" 421) and that suffrage was necessary because women served as the best advocates and champions of their own interests.[41] In response to the anti-suffrage objection "that women are in no need of a means for making their own wants heard, being sufficiently represented by their natural protectors," Pfeiffer countered that "it might seem hard of belief that any one acquainted with the long history of female suffering and wrong could be sincere in occupying this position" ("Suffrage for Women" 420) since men had so far not accomplished much in the cause of women's rights, particularly in England, "where, notwithstanding that our champions have so early won freedom for themselves, the cruelty of the law in relation to women has made us a by-word among the nations" ("Suffrage for Women" 420).

[40] Women could assert their separate identities by testifying against their husbands in court, for example, in cases of domestic abuse.

[41] Similarly, Cobbe argues in "Wife-torture in England" that nothing has been done to address domestic violence from a legislative standpoint because women cannot put pressure on the government: "Were women to obtain the franchise to-morrow," she insists, "it is morally certain that a Bill for the Protection of Wives would pass through the legislature before a Session was over" (156-57).

In this vein, the narrator of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* comments on the political necessity of women's art in the prose narrative. After her husband finishes reading the second fitte of her ballad, the Swiss pedlar brings up the issue of critical reception, remarking that she "'has set her pen to work on a perilous subject as addressed to your 'Philister' English public'" and predicting a critical backlash based on a moralistic condemnation of the impropriety of a woman writing about such contentious subject matter (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 127). At this juncture, in spite of her "faith in poetic truth," she narrates that she "rather shrunk from the prose commentary" (a self-reflexive gesture toward the prose frame of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* itself, which in this very scene features such metapoetic commentary on the ballad), but she reasserts almost immediately a conviction in the work's politics (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 128). A woman poet, she contends, must risk censure:

> The pedlar was perhaps right, there was trouble in the wind; but whoever aspires to wings must be free, free of the air, free of the sun; on no other condition can the art cultivated be robust or even sane. I had written of what, as a woman, I could feel as possibly no man could; if there was a toll to pay in taking that path, I would pay it, bringing this small sacrifice to the cause of freedom, as many a woman in this generation has brought a greater. (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 131)

In this way, she explicitly connects her poem to feminist politics, identifying the role of the woman artist as instrumental in giving voice to women's experiences with an affinity and insight inaccessible to men and aligning herself with other women of the age who strived for emancipation.

While the sixteenth-century context of Pfeiffer's poem might seem to displace the issue of marital rape from a modern situation, then, the fact that the prose narrative and the ballad

share the same geographical location collapses the temporal distance and makes the issue more immediate.[42] Castle Duart, a historical ruin "in an advanced stage of decay" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 35) that endures in a contemporary context, establishes the connection between past and present and emphasises that archaic customs, like ruins, persist in the late Victorian period, when "in the matter of legal justice the woman is still to a great extent an outlaw" (Pfeiffer, "Suffrage for Women" 420). The topical critique of women's rights in the nineteenth century emerges from this temporal collapse: the poem depicts a marital relationship that subscribed to Victorian-era principles of coverture, which dictated that women had no sexual and political autonomy, at "a date when no great advance had been made upon this first movement of civilisation" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 40) and implies by extension that the Victorian legal doctrine is similarly antiquated and uncivilised. Maclean desires Elizabeth's subjection only because her resistance threatens his patriarchal status: "there was one, and one only, whom [his will] failed to subjugate; and that one was the woman who called him lord" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 53). But while the narrative vilifies Maclean, emphasising that his savage nature drives him to dominate his wife, it does not demonise him entirely: though cowardly and tyrannical, he is still "a man, and not a monster" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 43). He is not an exceptionally monstrous figure; he is, rather, representational because the act of sexual violence that he attempts to commit was one sanctioned by the late Victorian legal system, which dictated that married women could not legally refuse sexual

[42] In comparison, Tennyson's *Princess* distances the story of Ida by situating it in a mythic, historically unspecific setting. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remarks, the "myth of the origin of modern female subordination is presented firmly *as* myth, in a deliberately a-chronic space of 'Persian' fairy tale" (119). At the same time, she notes, the frame narrative also "seems to compel the reader to search for ways of reinserting the myth into the history" (Sedgwick 119), and that myth—which "ends with one of the age's definitive articulations of the cult of the angel in the house" (Sedgwick 120)—naturalises the conventional Victorian ideology of aristocratic and bourgeois femininity. In this sense, Tennyson's verse novel manages both to displace the feminist narrative of female education and autonomy to a mythic setting, dehistoricising the topical issue of women's education in the 1840s, and yet also use the narrative's conservative conclusion, when Ida gives up her feminist pursuits, to justify contemporary gender relations.

intercourse with their husbands. Elizabeth's resistance is thus not only a rejection of her brutal husband and assertion of bodily autonomy but also a subversion of the persisting injustice of patriarchal culture in the 1880s. Elizabeth's situation corresponds to the circumstances of Victorian women, and her defiance of her husband and assertion of self-autonomy functions as a feminist statement on contemporary politics.

Political Union as Marital Union: Scotland in the United Kingdom

As the *Westminster Review* noted, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* features not just a ballad but "a *Scottish* ballad" ("Belles Lettres" 297, italics added), a detail that suggests a connection between the poem's genre and setting. This section of the chapter argues that *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* gains an additional meaning from the Scottish setting of both the prose narrative and the ballad, amplifying its critique of marital unity by evoking Scotland's place in the Union and establishing a parallel based on the fact that both marriage and such political union involve relationships of disproportionate power. The narrator justifies the volume's setting in Mull by explaining that she is visiting the site of the poem's story; however, she pays attention not only to the historical ruins that feature in the legend but also to the island's modern ruins—the rural depopulation and agricultural failure in the aftermath of the Highland Clearances in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when landlords displaced many tenant farmers from their lands, forcing them to relocate or emigrate. Brooke McLaughlin Mitchell explains that crofters were forced off of their land for several reasons: landlords reclaimed property for sheep pastures and deer-stalking reserves, the latter as a result of the rise in Highland tourism, and encouraged emigration during the potato famine in the 1840s and 1850s in an attempt to preserve

resources (210). According to Mitchell, most historians "agree that 'The Clearances' . . . continued in some form until the Crofters' Act of 1886" (210), and issues of land ownership and occupation dominated Scottish-English politics.

These political issues may seem unrelated to the feminist concerns of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, but I contend that the details of the contemporary Scottish setting reinforce the volume's critique of marital unity. As Matthew Campbell explains, the union of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland in the United Kingdom was figured in the nineteenth century by cultural critics such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold as a marriage in which Teutonic culture was masculinised and Celtic culture was feminised: "For Renan, and later Matthew Arnold, modern-day France and the United Kingdom are the result of an intermarriage of the feminine Celt and the masculine Saxon" ("Poetry in the Four Nations" 446). Renan's "La poèsie des races celtiques" (1854), for example, states that "if it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals, we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race . . . is an essentially feminine race" (8).[43] Arnold, following Renan, remarks in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* that "no doubt the sensibility of the Celtic nature, its nervous exaltation, have something feminine in them, and the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy" (108). When the narrator sympathetically represents the dispossession of the Highlanders in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, she evokes sympathy for the inhabitants of a nation figured as the wife in a political union understood as a marriage.

In order to establish the importance of the Scottish setting for the marital critique in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, I will first briefly situate Pfeiffer's work in the context of

[43] Renan's essay was published first in *Revue des deux mondes* in February 1854, then translated by William G. Hutchinson and published as "Poetry of the Celtic Races" in *The Poetry of the Celtic Races, and Other Studies by Ernest Renan* in 1896.

contemporary travel writing and literary ballads about the Highlands and Islands, which romanticised the Highlands in a way that Pfeiffer rejected. *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* evokes the vogue for tourism and travel writing about the Scottish Highlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, evident in the publication of works such as Samuel Johnson's *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775); Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1774); William Gilpin's *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1776, on Several Parts of Great Britain, Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland* (1789); and John Stoddart's *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners in Scotland during the Years 1799 and 1800* (1801). As Brian Murray explains, travel writing exploded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a result of significant innovations in technologies of transportation and the increasing mobility of the middle class and women, and both travellers' accounts and tourist guidebooks—such as John Murray's successful series of *Handbooks for Travellers* (including multiple editions of a handbook for Scotland, which was first issued in 1867; a fifth edition was published in 1884), became popular (Murray, "Introduction" 2-13). According to Glenn Hooper, travel to the Highlands became much easier in the aftermath of the Jacobite Uprisings (in, for example, 1689 and 1745) and the Clearances that followed. Britain secured military control of the Highlands by mapping and developing infrastructure in the region, Hooper explains, while new roads and bridges improved travellers' access, and the displacement of crofters enabled the construction of inns on seized land (Hooper, *Travel Writing and Ireland* 14-15). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, then, "travellers to Scotland increased significantly as the country appeared contained, politically pacified and, more importantly, embraced with greater coherence than before" (Hooper, "Isles" 12). According to Hooper, not only could tourists travel there more easily but—influenced by Edmund Burke's

aesthetic theory of the sublime, which extolled the beauty of remote and severe landscapes—tourists gravitated toward the mountains and crags of the Scottish Highlands and Islands (Hooper, *Travel Writing and Ireland* 42; Hooper, "Isles" 11).

The aestheticisation of the Highlands went hand in hand with its depoliticisation, as I discussed earlier in the chapter: since Highland culture was no longer perceived as threatening, it was romanticised, and its romanticisation—achieved through the construction of a cultural identity associated with a lost heroic past—reinforced its present conciliated position within the union of the United Kingdom. As Eric G. E. Zuelow explains, for example, when Walter Scott planned for the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822, he promoted a safe and palatable image of Scotland by fostering the nostalgia and romanticisation associated with the Highlands:

> he drew heavily upon a process of romanticising Highlanders that started soon after the Jacobite uprising of 1745/46. Construction of Highland roadways, Ossianic poems, creation of Highland regiments in the British army (most notably the Black Watch), evolution of new pan-European attitudes toward mountains, Robert Burns's poetry and Scott's own romantic novels all served to convert Highlanders from barbaric brutes into clean-living strongmen (in the eyes of outsiders). Once seen as violent, now they were held to be romantic examples of the noble savage, something to be celebrated rather than reviled. (Zuelow 36-37)

Scott cultivated an image of Scotland that relied on Highland customs such as tartan, as part of his effort to unify Scottishness (Highland and Lowland) and Britishness (Zuelow 37-38). Furthermore, literary work contributed hugely to the romanticisation of Scotland, largely due to a phenomenon that critics such as Nicola J. Watson call "literary tourism." Watson explains that the highly romanticised descriptions of the Highlands in Scott's immensely popular poems and

novels enraptured readers to the point that any trip to Scotland in the nineteenth century was "tinged by the possibility of travelling and reading Scotland with reference to the works of Scott, which had in their totality set out to digest Scottish history, Scottish landscape, and Scottish manners, and in so doing, remade Scotland for an emergent nineteenth-century tourist sensibility" (134). These literary tourists (which eventually included even Queen Victoria) sought out the places identified in Scott's poetry and fiction as a way of amplifying literary experience (135-36). Loch Katrine became a particularly popular destination as the setting of *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) (Watson 135-36), as Pfeiffer's own 1876 poem "On Loch Katrine, (The Realm of the Scottish Prospero)," published in *Poems*, testifies in the subtitle's reference to Scott. However, although Pfeiffer was undoubtedly influenced by Scott, she did not adopt his political and poetic strategy. *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* does not displace its Highland story to a romanticised past; while the poet-narrator does compose a historical ballad not unlike Scott's work, the metanarrative of its composition complicates its representation of the setting and time period.

There are other literary precedents to Pfeiffer's work that engage with the contemporary political situation in the Highlands, including Arthur Hugh Clough's 1848 verse novel *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* and, much earlier in the century, Wordsworth's series of literary ballads set in the Highlands. According to Steve Newman, who refers to the poems as Wordsworth's "Scottish sequence" (169-84), the series "Poems Written During a Tour in Scotland" was published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) and includes the literary ballads "The Solitary Reaper," "To a Highland Girl," "Glen-Almain," and "Rob Roy's Grave," all poems that foreground the interactions of English tourists with a disappearing Highland culture (Newman 169). Wordsworth's poems figure the Highlands as inaccessible and other; in "The Solitary

Reaper" and "To a Highland Girl," for example, the barrier is language, while "Glen-Almain" and "Rob Roy's Grave" reflect on the absence of the mythological figure Ossian and the folk hero Rob Roy. After travelling to the Highlands with her husband in the 1870s (Blain 85), Pfeiffer wrote her own constellation of Scottish poems, including "Martha Mary Melville" (1873), "Among the Hebrides" (1876), "A Symphony of Sonnets: In Ear of Cluny Water" (1884), "The Highland Widow's Lament" (1889), "Lines to Cluny Water" (1889), and, of course, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. These poems suggest the persistent influence of her experience in Scotland on Pfeiffer and her poetry throughout the 1870s and 1880s, and some of these poems, like Wordsworth's, romanticise the Highland landscape and people. However, whereas Wordsworth's poems emphasise the otherness of the Highlands, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* seeks to establish a likeness between the situation of women in marriage and the situation of Scotland in the Union.

In fact, Pfeiffer's long narrative poem *Glan-Alârch: His Silence and Song* (1877) and verse drama, *The Wynnes of Wynhavod* (1881), both set in Wales, similarly engage with the marginalised position of a Celtic nation in the United Kingdom. According to Brennan, although Pfeiffer moved to England as a child, she retained a connection to her Welsh heritage, and these works illustrate the poet's persistent "interest in life at the Celtic margins of British culture" (158). *Glan-Alârch* and *The Wynnes of Wynhavod*, Brennan contends, offer vexed representations of English power in Wales after the Acts of Union in 1536 and 1542, though they are "reformist rather than revolutionary" critiques (169). Significantly, while *Glan-Alârch* is "an overtly racist piece which vilifies the English as a breed, and may be read as an attempt to goad the Welsh into violent struggle against colonial oppression," *The Wynnes of Wynhavod* offers a more moderate effort "to reconcile the Welsh to 'marriage' with England" (Brennan 160, 168),

as I argue is the case in Pfeiffer's representation of Scotland in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*.

Specifically, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is embedded in ongoing debates about land use in the Highlands in the 1880s, when the Crofters' Movement sought reparations for the events of the Clearances. Pfeiffer's awareness of Scottish politics (and her sustained fascination with Scotland overall) was fostered by her friendship with the prominent Scottish professor, poet, and nationalist John Stuart Blackie, with whom she corresponded throughout the 1870s and 1880s. The bulk of Pfeiffer's surviving, and unpublished, letters, in fact, are addressed to Blackie and his wife, and they allude to Blackie's professional guidance regarding her literary career and their personal intimacy as friends. The correspondence includes drafts of Pfeiffer's poems, requests for criticism, comments on poetry she was reading (including Blackie's) and invitations to visit her and her husband in London.[44] In the earliest dated extant letter from Pfeiffer to Blackie (30 Jul. 1872), she thanks him for an introduction to Mr. Appleton (presumably Charles Edward Appleton, the founder of the periodical the *Academy*): "I write to acknowledge your note of introduction to Mr Appleton, of which he has already made use" (Letter to J. S. Blackie, MS 2630, ff. 239-40, J. S. Blackie Papers, National Library of Scotland). Pfeiffer published an article and thirteen poems in the *Academy*,[45] which, in addition to the fact that the periodical also published an obituary of her after her death, suggests the importance of this professional

[44] National Library of Scotland, J. S. Blackie Papers, Acc. 12307, MSS. 2630, f. 239-240; 2631, ff. 97-102; 2631, ff. 115-16; MS 2631, f. 119; MS 2631, f. 207; MS 2632, ff. 192-93; MS 2634, ff. 67-68; MS 2634, ff. 96-97; MS 2634, ff. 114-15; MS 2634, ff. 132-33; MS 2636, ff. 229-31; MS 2636, ff. 239-40; MS 2637, ff. 45-46; MS 2637, ff. 94-95; MS 2643, ff. 121-22; MS 2643, ff. 123-24. I consulted these letters on a research trip in August 2015.

[45] "The Sculptures from Olympia" (10 Mar. 1883); "A Translation from Heine. Für Die Mouche" (10 Jun. 1882); "The Soudan" (5 Apr. 1884); "On Two Pictures of G. F. Watts, R. A. (10 May 1884); "Two Sonnets" (3 Jan. 1885); "Gordon. The Unrequitable." (21 Feb. 1885); "Wearihead" (5 Sept. 1885); "Sonnet. Suggested by E. Burne Jones's Picture of 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid'" (13 Jun. 1885); "Sonnets. A Protest." (6 Feb. 1886); "Hope" (29 May 1886); "Two Alexanders" (11 Sept. 1886); "A Translation from Heine" (11 Dec. 1886); "Sonnet. On the Picture of Christ, supporting a Little Child, one of the Subjects of 'His Kingdom.' By Frederick Goodall, R. A." (5 Feb. 1887); and "A Prayer to Athena" (10 Nov. 1888).

connection initiated by Blackie. An 1874 letter from Pfeiffer to Mrs. Blackie includes drafts of two poems that she requests Blackie send to the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*: "To Everild" and "Shadows in Sunshine," the former of which was published ultimately in the periodical *Evening Hours* in 1876 and then in *Poems* (1876) (Letter to Mrs. Blackie, 6 Feb. [1874], MS 2631, J. S. Blackie Papers, National Library of Scotland). Finally, Pfeiffer's opening description of "tarrying in Oban" in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* (1) recalls the fact that Blackie had a house there, which her letters also mention.[46] In the same letter to Mrs. Blackie, for example, Pfeiffer expresses regret that she and her husband did not have the opportunity to see the them over Christmas and insists that "if we find ourselves again in the Highlands of Scotland (as we were last year) we shall not neglect your kind invitation to call on you at Oban" (Letter to Mrs. Blackie. 6 Feb. [1874], MS 2631, ff. 97-102, J. S. Blackie Papers, National Library of Scotland).[47]

The opening pages of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* confirm that Pfeiffer's work not only emerged out of the context of the ballad revival and increasing tourism to the Scotland Islands and Highlands but was also influenced by Blackie in particular. The narrator explicitly credits Blackie with the idea of writing a poem about the Lady of the Rock: "Duart Castle, and the low, black, almost sunken rock which lies betwixt it and Lismore Lighthouse," she states, "had ever since I first beheld them, on a summer holiday long years ago, possessed a peculiar

[46] In a letter from Pfeiffer to Blackie, for instance, she writes, "only one summer have we had the pleasure of seeing you at Mayfield," the Pfeiffers' home, "and yet we have both said, many times already, that we feel there is something at fault with the season that it has not brought you to sit with us under the shade of the aspens, and sing your Scotch songs; we heartily hope you will be coming next year. I am not entirely sure we shall not surprise you in Scotland before that, – but nothing as regards our autumn 'manoeuvres' is yet settled" (Letter to J. S. Blackie, 30 Jul. 1872, MS 2630, ff. 239-40, J. S. Blackie Papers, National Library of Scotland).

[47] Blackie, in turn, held Pfeiffer's poetry in high regard. In his prose fiction work *Altavona: Fact and Fiction from My Life in the Highlands* (1882), the main character declares that although his young cousin, an aspiring poet, writes pleasing enough poetry, "the authoress has no notion of contesting the supremacy of the female poetic throne with Mrs. Browning or Mrs. Emily Pfeiffer" (Blackie 23), illustrating that Blackie equated her with a canonical poet often referred to as Britain's greatest poetess.

interest for me, as having been the scenes of a highly dramatic story, the yet unexhausted capacity of which for poetic treatment, had lately been pointed out to me by my friend Professor Blackie," whom she acknowledges for recommending the sennachie's book as source material (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 2). This reference is important because the travelogue structure of Pfeiffer's work is also influenced by Blackie's work. Blackie condemned the depopulation and desolation caused by the Clearances and advocated for land reform in non-fiction and fiction prose works such as *Language and Literature of the Scottish Highlands* (1876), *Altavona: Fact and Fiction from My Life in the Highlands* (1882), and *The Scottish Highlanders and the Land Laws: An Historico-Economical Enquiry* (1885). His earlier poetic works also address these issues and inform Pfeiffer's work. Blackie's "Braemar Ballads," for example (from *Lays and Legends of Ancient Greece and Other Poems* [1857]), and his volume *Lays of the Highlands and Islands* (1872) are poems based on Blackie's own travels around Scotland, which crucially do not romanticise the landscape at all, and Pfeiffer's work models the unromantic and sympathetic representation of the Highlands in these poems.

Blackie's poems demonstrate a deep anxiety about the disappearing culture of the Highlands. The lengthy preface to *Lays of the Highlands and Islands*, titled "A Talk with the Tourists," encourages travel to Scotland by proclaiming to the reader that the book is "well suited for your migratory needs and vagabond habits" and offers an overview of the trajectory mapped by the volume to acquaint "Fellow Wanderers" with the geographical terrain covered, a clear implication of the importance of place to poem (xiii). However, the purpose is not to idealise the country of Scotland but to attend to its many tragedies and grievances. The poems in the volume are organised according to different regions, including Iona, Skye, Argyllshire, Oban, and Aberdeenshire, and often describe the area's iconic scenery or recount historical events that

unfolded there. The Argyllshire section, for example, features a ballad about the Glencoe Massacre (1692), when British soldiers colluded with members of the Campbell Clan to kill MacDonald clansmen for failing to sign an oath of allegiance to King William of Orange after the Jacobite Uprising of 1689. The Aberdeenshire poems include one of the earlier "Braemar Ballads" and, like that cluster of poems, are critical of the treatment of Highland crofters during and after the Clearances. In "The Highlander's Lament," an old man returns to his home in Braemar to find it completely desolate, his clansmen all forced out, and he condemns the landlords for forcing crofters off the land: "The Highland glen to Highland men may be a home no more" (Blackie, *Lays* 168). Similarly, in one of the poems about Mull, "The Ruined Clachan," the speaker describes walking through the hills of Tobermory and spotting "A clump of cottages in ruin" (Blackie, *Lays* 48). In response, he curses landlords who keep the land for sheep pastures and deer forests, "And leave the green and sheltered glens / All houseless, tenantless, and lonely" (Blackie, *Lays* 49).

Stuart Wallace explains that Blackie's dedication to land reform was incited when he spent the summer of 1856 at Braemar in Aberdeenshire and "noticed deserted cottages on one of his walks composing poems" which prompted him to "wr[ite] to *The Times* on 'deer-stalking and depopulation' in October" (265), and the narrator in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* performs a trek around Mull that is similarly eye-opening and sympathetic. Even before they reach Mull, for example, the narrator and her husband meet a retired soldier in Oban who explains that he originates from the island but has been displaced from his family's land due to modern landlords' restrictions on land use. He describes Mull as a place of once abundant fertility, where "most any seed would grow . . . that you put into the ground" but where now the land goes untilled: "it was little that the soil of Mull was given to work upon in these latter days; the land

went all out of cultivation" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 5). Whereas once "a score of families, with a due proportion of strong men among them, might have lived and thriven," he tells them, now "you'd often enough find only a skeleton of an old woman, who had chosen rather to haunt the graves where the most of her kin lay buried, than to emigrate with the remnant that the wars had spared to her youth, and the famine to her old age" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 5). When they reach the island themselves, the narrator and her husband find the soldier's account confirmed. From their viewpoint at Duart Castle, the narrator states that "our eyes wandered over a rather desolate view of depopulated Mull" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 37-38), where "immediately below and about us was the farm of Archie Cumming, poor-looking, scarcely enclosed grazing-land, fields of turnips of doubtful promise, and of oats slowly ripening to the harvest" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 38). Witnessing that Mull indeed "is very lonely of human presence, and in view of the scantiness of its population," the narrator and her husband recall the soldier in Oban "who longed to labour its idle soil, and to taste of its unbreathed air" and feel "less inclined than ever to acquiesce in a system which kept it so unproductive" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 65). The narrator's observations here suggest her sympathy with a disappearing Highland culture.

As this early episode of the prose narrative illustrates, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* evokes contemporary debates about land use in the Highlands after the Clearances.[48] In Mull, as Eric Richards explains, there occurred "all manner of clearances. James Forsyth cleared Dervaig in 1857, and Treshnish was cleared in 1862," and "there had been particular events at Calgary half a century earlier, at Mishnish in 1842" (366). According to Richards, there was also "a vigorous evictor in the years of the famine" named F. W. Clarke (366). As Susan Brown notes in her article about Mathilde Blind's *The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances*, the

[48] Mathilde Blind, another non-Scottish poet influenced by her travels in the Highlands, would condemn the Clearances more explicitly in *The Heather on Fire: A Tale of the Highland Clearances* (1886) just two years later.

early 1880s were a time of particular political upheaval in Scotland after the 1840s famine provoked a second bout of Clearances, and the combination of a rise in Scottish nationalism, economic depression in crofting areas, and the concurrent debates about land use in Ireland "marked the beginning of the 'Crofters' War'" in 1881, which escalated after the lack of resolution offered by a Royal Commission inquiry into the issue (Brown, "'A still and mute-born vision'" 126). The year of publication of Pfeiffer's work coincided with the publication of the Napier Report, "a detailed and thorough exposé of the problems of the Highland economy" (Richards 382), and with the "renewed agitation and civil disobedience by crofters and their urban allies, which met with military intervention on the Isle of Skye late in 1884" (Brown, "'A still and mute-born vision'" 126) and preceded the Crofters' Holdings Act that "received royal assent" in 1886 (Brown, "'A still and mute-born vision'" 127).

When the narrator and her husband reach Mull, they visit the cottages of old Niel Lamond and Susan MacArthur, two of the last residents in the mostly unoccupied region between Craigienure and Duart who raise the issue of depopulation on Mull. Niel explains that "ten families . . . ten families of farmers, more or less well to do, had dwelt between the spot where we stood and that where the road takes off from the highway to Auchnacraig, and where, as we had observed, not so much as the ruin of a human habitation was now to be seen" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 67). "Mull was not then as it is to-day," he tells them: "there were sons and daughters in those uprooted homesteads, strong men and bonny maids as you could find in all Scotland" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 67). The narrator indicates that they have come across this story of depopulation before: "It was," she states, "the old story of the men trodden out by the deer," a reference to the clearing of land for the practice of deer-stalking popularised earlier in the century, a story that "met us wherever we went, and appeared a somewhat ironical rendering of the law of the

survival of the fittest" (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 67). Like Niel Lamond, Susan reflects on what Mull used to be, when "there was a roof on Duart Tower . . . and a floor for dancing," before "there came a dishonest factor, and no one living at the Hall, and he sold the timber and put it in his own pocket," depriving the people of the Hall as a social and cultural centre (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 73). As the *OED* notes, one of the definitions of a factor is, in a primarily Scottish context, "a manager of a landed estate for the owner; a land steward; an agent for a landlord" ("factor," n., 3.a.), and Susan's story is therefore another tale of predatory landlordism exploiting the land and resources of the Highlanders and leaving them with very little. Like Blackie's poems, Pfeiffer's work does not romanticise the experience of travelling through the Highlands but attends to the injustices suffered by the people there.

This discussion of travel in Scotland may seem like a long detour that distracts from the poem and its feminist critique of marital rape, but that is precisely how Pfeiffer's volume is itself set up. The main crux of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is this very issue: how does the prose narrative relate to the poem? Why are the composition of the poem and the travel to and around Mull important to the meaning of the volume as a whole? I contend that the dispossession of Highlanders in the aftermath of the Union and the Clearances reinforces Pfeiffer's feminist statement in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. As I have already established, debates about land use and Home Rule in Wales, Ireland, and Scotland emerged out of a political context that paralleled contemporary marital relations. In fact, other political unions were figured in terms of marriage as well, as Esther Schor illustrates in her analysis of Theodosia Garrow Trollope and Cobbe's representations of Italian Unification as a metaphorical marriage, both of which they see as "acts of union." According to Schor, as I discussed in chapter 2, in the context of ongoing marital reform in Britain and the increasingly popular concept of companionate marriage,

Trollope and Cobbe "both allegorise the new Kingdom of Italy as a marriage between *la bella Italia* and the King of Savoy, Vittorio Emanuel II" (91) in ways that foreground female agency (92). In the case of *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, the trope of marriage emphasises the potential loss of agency in union for women and Scotland. The feminisation of Celtic culture in the metaphorical marriage of the United Kingdom establishes a parallel between middle-class women and the nations of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland as the subjugated parties in their respective marriages, the former seeking marital reform and the latter political sovereignty and land rights. The parallel between the two issues relies on the analogy of political union as marriage, and, in bringing together these two cases of dispossession, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* critiques the idea of a unity that entails one party's total absorption into another and corresponding loss of individual identity and autonomy.

Generic Combination as Marital Union: Collaborative Narration and Rough-Mixing

The combination of the ballad and prose narrative in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* provides a generic model, one of unity with difference, which serves as a model for marriage. According to Philippa Levine, in the nineteenth century, "the criticisms of marriage which feminists made arose, for the most part, not out of a disenchantment with the institution of marriage or intimate relations between men and women" but "through a dissatisfaction with the existing marital status quo" (141). This assessment is true of Pfeiffer, whose critique in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* does not show a disillusionment with marriage, like the work of other late-century feminist such as Mona Caird, but points to the need for marital reform. In "Woman's Claim," Pfeiffer insists that marriage is fundamental to the progress of humanity but defines the ideal model of

marriage as “something more than a partnership—it is ideally a union” (267). Specifically, it is a union that maintains difference, and the model of that union manifests in two ways in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. The first is in the generic combination of the work, of poem with prose. The poem and the travelogue do not blend into a work of seamless organicist unity but are, rather, interwoven in an example of “rough-mixing.” Two genres, one in verse, the other in prose, and each governed by its own set of conventions, co-exist and operate in conjunction in this work, with the heterogeneity of each retained.

The representation of the narrator’s relationship with her husband offers the second model of ideal unity in the volume. The narrator’s husband adds his voice to her work by reading her ballad aloud, and he critiques conventional Victorian middle-class domestic ideology in a confrontation with the pedlar in the prose narrative. He condemns “the man’s idea of woman” as “a creature who makes life easy; one whose knees are prompt to bend in unmotived adoration, who is complaisant to a point which in men is deemed infamy” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 150) and rejects the outdated argument regarding women’s exclusion from politics and their confinement to the domestic sphere, ostensibly for their own benefit. Instead, the narrator’s husband acknowledges that men want to keep women isolated and to limit their social and political involvement in order to perpetuate a patriarchal system: “The outside world is severely just; we would have our women to keep at home, out of the sun, out of the light, and the knowledge that must tell against ourselves” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 150). “It is easier,” he says, “to darken the window than to clean the house” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 150)—that is, to dismantle and restructure patriarchal society. He reprises the discourse of cultural progress, stating that the development of society depends on women for moral improvement: “if the moral standard of the race is lower than it should be at this time of day, and lower for men than for women, it is to women that we must look to raise it”

(Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 150). Moreover, this moral improvement—and the corresponding social and cultural changes it implies—is, to him, the province of the woman *poet*: “Who among men have done most to this end?” he asks: “The poets. It is by the travail of the poets of all ages that the conscience of humanity has been formed. They have done nobly, but they have not done all. We want women-poets to lend a hand to the work” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 150). In a sentence that anticipates Pfeiffer’s later feminist essay *Women and Work*, he advises, “let the wise ones seek in woman’s work for the note of woman’s power” (Pfeiffer, *Rhyme* 148). The ideal model of marriage is therefore established as one of union with difference, conveyed through the collaborative narration of the poem and the spouses’ shared position on the issue of women’s roles in society, including the value of women’s poetry. The spouses’ voices are distinct and heterogeneous but work together in narrating and expressing the work’s politics.

Overall, Pfeiffer’s work critiques marital rape—in itself, already a significant feminist intervention in Victorian literature—and uses the issue of marital rape, legal under the doctrine of coverture, to critique the idea of total unity fundamental to conventional Victorian middle-class marital and political ideology. The setting in the Highlands and Islands, dispossessed in the political union of the United Kingdom, reinforces the problem of conceptualising union as a relationship in which one party, whether individual person or country, is subsumed into another and loses distinction and autonomy. Rejecting the notion that a wife’s voice and existence should be absorbed into that of her husband, Pfeiffer’s “roughly mixed” work offers an alternative model for marriage in which the identities of a wife and husband are complementary but distinct. The juxtaposition of the poem and prose narrative and the collaborative narration of the woman poet and her husband typify Pfeiffer’s ideal of difference within union, earlier expressed in *Margaret; or, the Motherless* as “duality in union.” In itself a literary marriage, the volume

presents an alternative paradigm of marriage in which spouses retain autonomy, and, in the context of contemporary feminist politics, this model of marital equality also works as an argument for women's enfranchisement. In the way that *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* conveys its politics through generic combination, it is indebted to and belongs within the literary history of the verse novel genre.

CHAPTER 4

A Verse Novel in Dialogue:

Dramatic Form, Embedded Song, and the Irish Question

in Emily Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist" (1891)

This final chapter turns to Irish poet Emily Henrietta Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist," the lead poem in her volume *Michael Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems* (1891). Her verse novel disproves the theory outlined by Dino Felluga (which I referred to in the introduction) that the genre disappeared in the 1870s, demonstrating instead—along with other verse novels such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's 1893 *Griselda*—the genre's longevity in the nineteenth century. Moreover, "Michael Villiers" is a successor to those works in the literary history I have been tracing in this dissertation. In its generic experimentation with lyric and dramatic forms and its engagement with the subjects of class inequality and the Irish Question, "Michael Villiers" suggests that Hickey viewed generic combination, as EBB, Webster, Fane, and Pfeiffer did, as a productive way of engaging with contemporary social and political issues. As I explained in the introduction, Victorian and modern critics have consistently detected the influence of *Aurora Leigh* on Hickey's work, but despite the critical recognition of its generic inheritance, "Michael Villiers" remains largely overlooked in Victorian studies scholarship. Perhaps even more than the previous chapters, then, this chapter recovers the work of a critically neglected woman poet and demonstrates that "Michael Villiers" belongs to a line of verse novels by women poets in which genre and politics are closely interrelated. As its title indicates, "Michael Villiers, Idealist" centres on the socio-political idealism of its eponymous character, an Anglo-Irish member of the landed gentry who supports socialism and Irish land reform and

Home Rule, and, as this chapter will show, that idealism is articulated through the verse novel's combination of *Bildungsroman*, dialogue, and song.

Although "Michael Villiers" does not focus on the representation of a female character nor engage with specific legislation related to women's rights, it nonetheless aligns with the other works discussed in this dissertation in its connection of the verse novel with politics. Moreover, Hickey boldly assumes her right to speak about politics, a feminist act in itself. However, "Michael Villiers" also does something different than these earlier verse novels, and this departure accounts in part for its inclusion here as well. I have consistently used the vocabulary provided by David Duff's *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* in this dissertation to describe the varied types of generic combination that appear in verse novels. Webster's "Lota" (1867) is "smoothly mixed," "a type of generic combination in which the formal boundaries are dissolved" to create "the impression of seamless unity" (178), and Fane and Pfeiffer's works are "roughly mixed," overtly juxtaposing lyric and narrative (in Fane's case) and verse and prose (in Pfeiffer's). "Michael Villiers," however, lies somewhere in between. On the one hand, it is a blank-verse *Bildungsroman* in fourteen parts (which I will hereafter refer to as Book I, Book II, etc.), in the vein of *Aurora Leigh* and "Lota." Webster herself astutely observed in her *Athenaeum* review of "Michael Villiers" that Hickey "has given herself for task the setting forth and, so far as may be, the solving, of social and political problems," and "for mechanism she uses the biography of Michael Villiers" ("Recent Verse" 14),[1] her choice of the term *mechanism* suggesting Hickey's deliberate use of genre to engage with socio-political problems. As established in chapter 1, the *Bildungsroman* follows the growth of the protagonist from youth to maturity, a maturity marked by his integration into society, and Michael's story of self-growth

[1] The review is unsigned, but see the list of Webster's reviews in Patricia Rigg's biography of Webster, *Julia Augusta Webster: Victorian Aestheticism and the Woman Writer* (291).

does provide the narrative structure in the verse novel. The orphaned son of an English nobleman and an Irish peasant woman, he is raised by his benevolent and wealthy English uncle, Sir William Villiers, and becomes heir to two estates, Villiers Keep in England and Lisnagh Castle in Ireland, yet he learns to question the reasons for his wealth and status and to criticise the class system in England and Ireland, recognising the distribution of wealth and property as the United Kingdom's "grim problem" (Hickey, "Michael" 19). He becomes part of a socialist community in London, where he falls in love with a young woman named Lucy Vere, whom he eventually marries, and the two commit to divesting themselves of their wealth and working to combat social inequality.

On the other hand, unlike the other *Bildungsromane* listed above, "Michael Villiers" contains very little narrative description and action; it follows an episodic structure and provides minimal contextual information such as details about time, place, and even characters' names. Instead, it consists mainly of conversations between Michael and other characters in the story, interspersed with moments of reflection and songs. In a formal structure that evokes verse drama, "Michael Villiers" foregrounds dialogue over narrative description and a detailed plot, focusing instead on the representation of interiority through conversation. Of its 90 pages, approximately 53 are comprised of exchanges in direct speech, including the entirety of several books (for example, Books VII, IX, and XIII). In the anthology *Victorian Women Poets* (1995), editors Leighton and Reynolds note that "the most interesting sections of this discursive poem are the *discussions* about Irish poverty and Home Rule, which challengingly point out the connections between political and psychological domination in a colonial context" (482, italics added). Hickey's contemporaries made similar observations. In the memoir *Emily Hickey, Poet, Essayist—Pilgrim: A Memoir* (1927), biographer Enid Dinnis (a friend of Hickey's) calls

"Michael Villiers" "an essay in blank verse . . . in which the Home Rule Question, then at its height, and the social problem in England, come under *discussion*" (35, italics added). A reviewer in the *Speaker* noted that "the growth of Michael's opinions is described in *conversations* which contain many fine images, pregnant thoughts, and glowing passages of indignation at injustice" ("Nine Muses" 389, italics added), while a critic in *Atalanta* initially categorised Hickey's work as "a novel in verse," then qualified it as "rather, a conversation-poem," one in which, despite its length, "the characters seem too shadowy, and there is too much discussion in proportion to narrative" ("Some Recent English Poets. Part III" 713) for it to be a verse novel. Victorian poetry critic Herbert F. Tucker suggests in *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910* (2008) that the dramatic form of "Michael Villiers" serves as a vehicle for Hickey to sermonise through her protagonist, contending that "*Michael Villiers* was written, one suspects, for the sake of the hero's speeches renouncing the privileges of his birth, reproving conservatism and nihilism, and espousing as the remedy for Irish ills expanded educational opportunity under Christian socialist auspices" (491). However, I argue that this conversational form is related to the work's idealistic proposal that gradual political and social change can be achieved through dialogue rather than through revolutionary action or parliamentary reform.

This chapter will first provide an overview of the critical reception of Hickey's work as well as background context concerning her interest in socialism and Irish politics, including her association with the Irish Renaissance. In this section, I account for the shift from my focus on the feminist politics in Webster, Fane, and Pfeiffer's works—their respective engagements with issues such as suffrage, adultery, and marital rape—to my focus on class and nationalist politics in "Michael Villiers." As I have already noted, Hickey is the least well known of the poets I study in this dissertation, and while we do know that she was an advocate for women's education

(before she converted to Catholicism, as I discuss in the conclusion), the extent of her feminist politics is difficult to pinpoint. According to Dinnis, Hickey developed an interest in social issues after she moved from Ireland to London in the 1860s, when "the movement in aid of the position of the woman worker was then in its infancy" (Dinnis 21), including advocacy for women's higher education. Dinnis credits her experience working in this environment with instilling in Hickey a "taste for social work" (21-22) and a "zeal for higher education as a cure of the woman worker's ills" (22), one that had a corresponding impact upon her poetry (21-23). According to the *ODNB*, Hickey took a position as a lecturer under headmistress Frances Mary Buss at the North London Collegiate School for Ladies in 1878, where she taught for eighteen years (Weaver McCue).[2] During this time, according to Natalie Joy Woodall in *Catholic Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (2001), Hickey also worked for the Charity Organisation Society, "composed of women desirous of improving the lot of working women through access to higher education" (155). Her involvement in providing education to working-class women presumably influenced the character of Lucy Vere in "Michael Villiers," who goes "among a set of working girls, / Rough, rude, unchaste in word if not in deed" (Hickey, "Michael" 49), as part of her social work, although the nature of her work is not specified.

Gender and politics are noticeably intertwined in "Michael Villiers" beyond the character of Lucy. Michael is a feminised character whose affinity to his Irish mother inspires his passion

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[2] The details of Hickey's educational background are unclear. According to Catherine Weaver McCue's entry on Hickey in the *ODNB*, "she studied with Andrew Lang and, via correspondence, earned a first-class honours certificate from Cambridge," but the entry on Hickey in the *Orlando* database states that she attended "lectures at University College, London, where she earned her Cambridge Certificate" (Brown, Clements, and Grundy, "Emily Hickey entry"). I have not been able to find a record of her attendance at either institution. In the entry on Buss in the *ODNB*, Elizabeth Coutts explains that in 1845 Buss's mother established a private school, where Buss taught; in 1850, the school was renamed the North London Collegiate School for Ladies, and Buss became headmistress. It was "the first public day school for girls," which Buss "presented . . . as being principally concerned with the education of girls intending to become governesses," intended to ensure that women could support themselves economically (Coutts, *ODNB*).

for social reform, particularly for the Irish cause. The narrative emphasises that he physically resembles his mother: "Michael had the mother's strain; her eyes / With some unspoken question in their depths" (Hickey, "Michael" 16). He also inherits "The Irish music of her voice; her hands / Of delicate shape, stronger in muscle and nerve" (Hickey, "Michael" 16-17). This resemblance implies that feminine characteristics account for his political consciousness, particularly since it is not merely physical characteristics or feminine sentimentality that she bequeaths to him but, more importantly, a "Keltic quickness" (Hickey, "Michael" 17), a perceptiveness and willingness to recognise the truth of unjust circumstances, so that as an adult "He vext his very soul with questioning / If the fair thing were truth indeed or no" (Hickey, "Michael" 17) and confronts the structural inequities that underpin his privileged social and economic status. Michael—and Michael's Irishness—are thus feminised.

There are several possible interpretations of this feminisation, among them that Hickey is suggesting the importance of women's influence in social and political movements[3] or that Ireland—strongly emphasised here as the motherland—has a marginalised position in the United Kingdom not unlike the marginalised position of women (as I argue about the representation of the Scottish Highlands in Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* in chapter 3). Furthermore, Hickey's work is feminist because she goes a step beyond asserting a woman's right to have a voice on women's issues—as I contend Webster, Fane, and Pfeiffer did—and directly comments upon nationalist and class politics. This section of the chapter will situate

[3] "Michael Villiers" establishes early on the connection between patriarchy and colonialism by describing Michael's father's and uncle's anticipation of his birth: "They always talked about the boy to come, / As if there were no chance he proved a girl!" The narrator states, "The man-child must be first at Villiers Keep, / The brothers said, the maid-child by-and-by—" (Hickey, "Michael" 7). This insistence on the male successor suggests that patrilineal heritage is fundamental to English aristocracy and rule, whereas maternal influence is in fact crucial to Michael's development of social consciousness and deviation from that inheritance.

"Michael Villiers" within the context of what we do know about her association with socialism and Irish nationalism, the issues she addresses directly in her verse novel.

In the following section, I will argue that her verse novel imagines a utopian world of class equality and Irish sovereignty and conveys its idealism through medieval language and imagery and through genre, first in dramatic form, then in song. Accordingly, the next section of the chapter will turn to genre and analyse the relation of Hickey's work to the dramatic poetry, particularly the verse and closet drama, of the late nineteenth century. I contend that "Michael Villiers" draws on conventions of verse drama and closet drama—notably Robert Browning's direct engagement with politics in *Strafford* (1836), the 1884 edition of which Hickey edited, and the emphasis on direct speech and debate in closet drama by women poets such as Augusta Webster (whom I discussed in chapter 1)—to address class inequality and the Irish Question. As I will argue, Hickey's emphasis on dialogue rather than narrative action conveys a moderate position on both of these issues. With the limited information available on Hickey, it is difficult to determine if her politics were ever more radical than the moderate position that "Michael Villiers" suggests.[4] However, in 1891, following years of violent agitation by the Land League and Fenian Brotherhood, Hickey's verse novel denounces revolutionary action and promotes an idealistic, dialogue-based approach to addressing the issues of land reform and Home Rule in Ireland. The verse novel concludes by showing the minor success of Michael's discursive approach in effecting gradual reform.

[4] Hickey may have strategically adopted a moderate position because women poets faced potential backlash for publicly taking a stance on controversial political issues. For example, as Alison Chapman points out in *Networking the Nation: British and American Women's Poetry and Italy, 1840-1870* (2015), EBB faced severe condemnation from the British press for her volume *Poems before Congress* (1860), which openly criticised British policy on the Risorgimento. She received highly negative reviews for her position and subsequently published her poetry almost exclusively in American periodicals (Chapman, *Networking* 226). Hickey, who started publishing in British periodicals just a few years later, would have registered this criticism of her primary poetic influence.

Finally, the chapter analyses the lyrics and embedded songs in "Michael Villiers," arguing that Hickey's verse novel, faced with the limits of political idealism, turns to lyric and song—in which the medievalism that runs through her work is most pronounced—to allow the characters to imagine future utopian possibilities by drawing on an idealised past. In the conclusion, I consider how the publication and circulation of the book *Michael Villiers, Idealist* serves as a kind of political action in its own right by disseminating Michael's idealistic views to Hickey's readership, in a way solving the problem of inaction that Michael confronts in the verse novel.

Hickey in Literary History

Hickey is probably the least well-known poet included in this study, her place in literary history secured primarily as a footnote to Robert Browning's career: she co-founded the Browning Society with F. J. Furnivall in 1881 and published an edition of Browning's verse drama *Strafford* in 1884, work that led to a friendship with the poet himself.[5] But Hickey was a prolific and acclaimed author in her own right who was actively involved in late nineteenth-century literary culture. She socialised with fellow writers such as Alexandra Sutherland Orr (Browning's biographer) and Emily Pfeiffer (Dinnis 26-27, 37-38), and she published a large

[5] Some of Browning's letters to Hickey have been digitized by *The Browning Letters* project directed by Baylor University (http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/ab-letters): Letter to Emily Henrietta Hickey, 3 Aug. 1883, 83146-00 (original held by the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, TX); Letter to Emily Henrietta Hickey, 8 Dec. 1883, 83182-00 (original held by the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University); Letter to Emily Henrietta Hickey, 18 Dec. 1883, 83014-00 (original held by the Wellesley College, Margaret Clapp Library, Special Collections, Wellesley, MA); Letter to Emily Henrietta Hickey, 29 Oct. 1884, 84233-00 (original held by the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University); Letter to Emily Henrietta Hickey, 25 Dec. 1887, 87268-00 (original held by the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University). These letters include notes about annotations and edits for *Strafford*, which Hickey was editing. *The Brownings' Correspondence Online Edition* lists another seventeen letters from Browning to Hickey. Three of his letters are reprinted in the article "Poets I Have Known: Emily Hickey," published in the *Irish Monthly* in 1903.

body of poetry (including sonnets, ballads, translations, and dramatic monologues) and prose (both fiction and non-fiction). According to Dinnis, Hickey's introduction to London literary society in the 1860s came through the publisher Alexander Macmillan, who invited her to travel from Ireland and stay with his family (20). Hickey's earliest poems, "Told in the Firelight" and "A Dead Worker," were published in the *Cornhill* and *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1866,[6] and she later published poems and prose in periodicals such as the *Academy*, *Atalanta*, the *Athenaeum*, *Good Words*, *Leisure Hour*, *Longman's Magazine*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Merry England*, and the *Sunday at Home*. She published at least seven poetry volumes—*Michael Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems*; *A Sculptor and Other Poems* (1881); *Verse-Tales, Lyrics, and Translations* (1889); *Poems* (1896); *Our Lady of May and Other Poems* (1902); *Later Poems* (1913); *Jesukin and Other Christmastide Poems* (1924)—and a novel, *Lois* (1908).

Yet despite her considerable body of writing and her participation in literary societies—evidence of her thoughtful engagement as a critic and her interest in shaping literary taste—Hickey's work has received little attention from modern critics. The inclusion of her poetry in Alfred H. Miles's eighth volume of *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* (1892)[7] and Edmund Clarence Stedman's *A Victorian Anthology, 1837-1895* (1895),[8] two of the era's major anthologies of poetry, indicate that she received some acclaim in her life, but scholarship on her is minimal. Aside from her inclusion in Leighton and Reynolds's *Victorian Women Poets*, Lucy Collins's *Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology 1870-1970* (2012), and *Catholic Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, which features an entry on her written by

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[6] The poems in the *Cornhill* are sometimes unsigned, so I owe the attribution of "Told in the Firelight" to the essay by Matthew Russell (signed M. R.) in the *Irish Monthly* called "Poets I Have Known" (194).

[7] Hickey also contributed the editorial note on Harriet Eleanor Hamilton King in the seventh volume of *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* (1892).

[8] "A Sea Story," originally published in *Verse-Tales, Lyrics, and Translations* (1889), and "Beloved, It Is Morn," originally published in *A Sculptor and Other Poems* (1881).

Woodall, critical work on Hickey is mostly limited to the work of F. Elizabeth Gray, Patricia Pulham, and Tucker. In *Christian and Lyric Tradition in Victorian Women's Poetry* (2010), Gray discusses Hickey's conversion to Catholicism and analyses her devotional tracts and poetry, particularly her Marian focus in her later poetry. More recently, Pulham includes Hickey in her discussion of the significance of classical sculpture in poetry by nineteenth-century women writers such as Felicia Hemans and EBB. Highlighting the popularity of the Pygmalion myth in Victorian society, specifically its "reinforcement of ideal femininity, purity, and passivity concomitant with prevailing social mores," Pulham notes that "a number of women poets on both sides of the Atlantic revised and rewrote the myth," particularly the figure of Galatea, "for subversive ends" (n.p.). Pulham considers two poems from Hickey's first volume, *A Sculptor and Other Poems* (1881), "A Sonnet" and the title poem, "A Sculptor," arguing that Hickey reworks the Pygmalion myth by refusing to reduce the female subjects of the poems to passive objects and foregrounding instead the male sculptors' lack of artistry as they fail to capture an impossible feminine ideal in their statues.

Although scholars have begun to reappraise Hickey's work, and despite Miles's insistence in *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century* that "the most important . . . of Miss Hickey's works is 'Michael Villiers, Idealist'" (8: 241),[9] her verse novel remains mostly overlooked. The exceptions are Leighton and Reynolds's *Victorian Women Poets*, which

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[9] According to Miles, Hickey's representations of social life fuel "the deeper aspirations . . . in natures instinct with the passion and pity of justice" and challenge "those who excuse their preference for mere art and grace over thought and aim, by hinting that in poetry these are incompatible with each other" (8: 241) by demonstrating how poetry can be suited to thoughtful engagement with social and political issues. Interestingly, Miles's comments seem to have been repeated in a 1903 article on Hickey by the editor of the *Irish Monthly*, Matthew Russell. He disagrees with the review in *Atalanta* and states that "I am more inclined to agree with another critic who regards ['Michael Villiers'] as the noblest and most important of Miss Hickey's works" (M. R. 198), "a work in which the sterner tragedies of social life, and the deeper aspirations stirred by them . . . find full and fervent expression" and one in which "such questions as the rights and wrongs of Ireland, the wages of match-box makers, and the ownership of the soil, are touched with courage and frankness" (M. R. 199).

includes both the entirety of Book V (in which Michael most directly addresses the Irish Question) and a short introduction about "Michael Villiers" that establishes its importance, and Tucker's *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse 1790-1910*, which briefly situates Hickey's work in the context of late-century verse novels as an example of how they focus on representing new types of marital relationships. Just as "one feels Robert Browning working towards modern reconception of sexual relations" in poems such as *Fifine at the Fair* (1872) and *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873), Tucker observes, "variants of the union between new man and new woman emplotted . . . late-century verse-novels" such as Violet Fane's *Denzil Place* (as seen in chapter 2) and "Michael Villiers" (*Epic* 491). Rightly highlighting the importance of Michael's relationship with Lucy as a fundamental part of the story, Tucker notes that in Hickey's work "the plot structure . . . centers on Villiers's love life . . . across a lifespan framed at one end by his *in utero* dedication to the spirit of humanitarian love (canto I) and at the other by a nuptial prospect that is nudged towards hierogamy by optimistic prophecies of social reform (canto 10)" (*Epic* 491). Tucker does not make an explicit connection between Hickey's verse novel and *Aurora Leigh*, but his point is a useful one for considering the indebtedness of "Michael Villiers" to EBB's verse novel, particularly the way that Michael and Lucy's relationship recalls Aurora and Romney's. Initially divided by Michael's inability to reconcile love with his commitment to social reform, Lucy (herself a socialist) and Michael eventually marry and pledge to work together for that ideal, much as Aurora and Romney reunite at the end of *Aurora Leigh*.

However, there is also an element of dismissal in Tucker's evaluation of "Michael Villiers." He views it as a derivative work that "reads like a streamlined abstract of *Robert Elsmere* (Mrs Humphry Ward's *roman à thèse* from a few years earlier)[10] or like a politically

[10] Mary Augusta Ward (née Arnold) was the niece of the poet and critic Matthew Arnold. *Robert Elsmere* (1888), her novel about Christian socialism, was a bestseller and critically acclaimed.

corrected digest of Allingham's *Laurence Bloomfield*, whose concern for social justice in Ireland on sound principles Hickey's poem devoutly shares" (*Epic* 491). And, indeed, there are similarities. Years before the publication of Hickey's work, Irish poet William Allingham had made the Irish Question the subject of his own verse novel, *Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland: A Modern Poem* (serialised in *Fraser's Magazine* 1862-63), which also addresses England's oppression of Ireland through the story of an eponymous Anglo-Irish landlord, "Irish born and English bred" (Allingham 6). Furthermore, like *Laurence Bloomfield*, "Michael Villiers" does not endorse political revolution but advocates gradual reform.

Nonetheless, Hickey's verse novel differs significantly from Allingham's in form and addresses the Irish Question thirty years later from a different perspective. As Linda K. Hughes argues, *Laurence Bloomfield* represents the ills suffered by Irish tenants under English landlordism, but it "ultimately endorses reform of the extant power structure, not revolution and home rule" ("Poetics of Empire and Resistance" 103). Laurence returns to his Irish estate after travelling abroad to take over his duties as landlord, but he finds his tenants have been mistreated in his absence by his agent and are, as Markovits notes, "primed to rebellion" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 206).[11] Whereas Allingham settles on supporting Unionism and merely trying to improve landlord-tenant relationships, Hickey's verse novel has a broader utopian vision. Michael vocalises his support for Ireland's freedom and ultimately returns the land of his Irish estate to the tenants, a small-scale version of restoring Irish sovereignty that implicitly endorses Home Rule. The dramatic form of Hickey's work reflects Michael's belief that change can be effected

[11] Although Markovits does not associate Allingham's verse novel with Hickey's (nor mention Hickey at all), she points out that the central four chapters do not focus on Laurence, the eponymous protagonist. Instead, the narrative focuses on the Dorans, a family of farmers on Laurence's land. "For this portion of the poem," Markovits notes, "we see our 'hero' only in inefficacious glimpses, as when he gives money for a poor girl's funeral only to have her father squander it on drink. The poem thus formally mimics its concern for absenteeism; Laurence may be back in Ireland, but he is not yet fully committed to his situation" (*Victorian Verse-Novel* 207). This is resolved in the end, when Laurence takes over managing his own estate.

through dialogue, while the lyrics and songs embedded in "Michael Villiers" provide a way of imagining a more just future even as that discursive approach fails to realise the reforms he advocates. To dismiss "Michael Villiers" as merely a shorter version of *Laurence Bloomfield* elides Hickey's political engagement and overlooks the interrelation between form and politics in her verse novel.

Hickey's political engagement in "Michael Villiers" stems from her involvement with the Irish Renaissance. As Matthew Campbell explains in his essay "Poetry in the Four Nations" (in reference to the nations of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales that comprised the United Kingdom, as discussed in chapter 3), "the inability of the British government to solve its Irish problem throughout Victoria's reign was to coincide with a remarkable renaissance of Irish writing in English, a renaissance founded both on the nineteenth century's general interest in nationalism and on its specific interest in the Celtic" (447). Hickey's work, particularly "Michael Villiers," was part of this revival. Although she spent most of her adult life in England, she seems to have retained a strong sense of identity as an Irishwoman;[12] she was a member of the Irish Literary Society (established in 1891, the same year "Michael Villiers" was published),[13] and published frequently in the nationalist periodical the *Irish Monthly*, "a significant journal in the development of the Irish Literary Revival," according to Declan O'Keefe (174), which

[12] In "Our Poets: Emily Hickey," published in the *Irish Monthly* in 1892 primarily as a review essay of "Michael Villiers," the author suggests that the politics of Hickey's verse novel were influenced by her grandfather, William Hickey, a reverend who published essays on agricultural and social topics, including poverty and landlord-tenant relationships, in pamphlets and as articles in periodicals such as *Chamber's Journal* and the *Irish Penny Journal* ("Our Poets" 96). In her biography of Hickey, Dinnis suggests that Hickey "was to learn in England to be an Irishwoman," whereas before "the conception of Ireland in a national sense had never so much as occurred to her" (19). According to Dinnis, late in her life, "one of the last requests that Emily Hickey made of a friend who was visiting Ireland was to bring her back a flag of the newly-formed Free State" (19).

[13] W. P. Ryan's *The Irish Literary Revival: Its History, Pioneers and Possibilities* (1894) mentions Hickey as one of the "several lady members [who] have zealously served the Irish Literary Society" (115) and remarks that "those who have not read 'The Sculptor' or 'Michael Villiers, Idealist' have still to travel over some pleasant poetic courses, and to walk with one who has taken a high and serious view of life" (116).

published authors such as Aubrey de Vere, Rosa Mulholland, Katharine Tynan,[14] Oscar Wilde, and W. B. Yeats.[15] In fact, even before she published in the *Irish Monthly*, Hickey was profiled in it as one of "Our Poets," a review series in the journal in 1892. Reviewing "Michael Villiers," the author describes Hickey as a writer who "shows an intense devotion to her native country and a warm sympathy with our people" ("Our Poets" 98), classifying her as a poet "of whom Ireland may be proud" and to whom "a high place must be assigned" in the ranks of "the contemporary writers of English verse" and ("Our Poets" 102). Her work—and the reception of her work—demonstrates a consistent association with Irish nationalism.

According to Dinnis, Hickey's socialism was inspired by her own social work with working-class women, as noted above, but it was also influenced by her friend Roden Berkeley Wriothesley Noel, a Christian socialist poet whose poetry and politics significantly influenced her. She even reviewed his work in an article for the *Irish Monthly*, "Roden Noel and His Poetry," in 1895, in which she explains that Noel was descended from an aristocratic family but was a self-described political radical. This "Radicalism," according to Hickey, "was the outcome of an affluent sympathy, a burning desire to see the righting of wrongs which he believed were the result of defects in the social system" ("Roden Noel and His Poetry" 189-90). The character of Michael is most likely based on Noel: Dinnis describes Noel as "one of the social reformers of a day of a very mild Socialism," whose "slogan was, 'Justice, not "charity," for the poor,'" and who "had placed himself fervidly on the side of Labour" (33), characteristics that find parallels

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[14] Hickey's association with Tynan also suggests that she was associated with the aestheticist movement. In her memoir, Tynan, aestheticist poet and novelist, refers to an encounter with Hickey at a garden party held by New Woman writer Mona Caird in 1889, describing Hickey as "the founder of the Browning Society and herself a poet of achievement" dressed "in a wonderful Liberty garment of pale green, one of those beautiful aesthetic dresses which in that dead and gone year made vivid splashes of colour in the West End streets of London" (300). Dinnis describes a portrait of Hickey from this period—"a pen-picture drawn of her at this period by one of her interviewers, clad in a leaf-green Liberty frock and large velvet picture-hat" (37)—that echoes this description, and she also remarks that in the 1880s and 1890s "the circle which cultivated Art and Beauty found Emily Hickey in its midst" (Dinnis 37).

[15] By my calculations, between 1895 and 1923 Hickey published in the journal over forty times.

in Michael's statement that "I hate the very name philanthropist" and his call to "do Justice" instead (Hickey, "Michael" 32, 34). In addition, Michael is figured in the poem as "a knight of God" (Hickey, "Michael" 51) fighting for the cause of the downtrodden, which also recalls Hickey's impression of Noel. In her volume *Verse-Tales, Lyrics, and Translations*, Hickey dedicated a poem to him called "To the Honourable Roden Noel" in which she describes him as a "knight in Christ's high chivalry" and "*Knight of God*" (79, 81, italics added). Dinnis suggests that the publication of *Verse-Tales, Lyrics, and Translations* marks a point in Hickey's career when "her horizon was widening and the sacred cause of Art was finding a rival in the yet more sacred cause of Humanity," noting that "the two Causes were wedded in the work of the poet who was the strongest influence in her life at this period. This was the Hon. Roden Noel" (33). Contrary to Tucker's suggestion that Hickey's work is derivative of Ward or Allingham's, then, the politics of "Michael Villiers" reflect her own investment in Irish nationalism and socialism. Hickey's family history and cultural heritage, her direct experience with social work (as discussed above), and the influence of Noel's socialist thought on her own politics form the basis of the idealism in "Michael Villiers." As the next section will address, Hickey's verse novel imagines a future in which class inequality is eliminated and Irish Home Rule achieved, looking to a medieval past as a way of envisioning an ideal future.

Idealism and Utopianism in "Michael Villiers"

In the prefatory poem to "Michael Villiers," Hickey announces "Michael Villiers"'s indebtedness to major utopian works by Plato, Thomas More, and Francis Bacon and establishes the attempt to achieve an ideal political system as the subject of her own work:

> They had their visions of the perfect State,
>
> Large Plato wisdom-lipt, and the quick-souled More,
>
> And Bacon, who knew the spell whereby to soar
>
> From knowledge into power. (Hickey, "Michael Villers" n.p.)

Indeed, her verse novel emerged out of a late nineteenth-century context in which a considerable amount of utopian fiction (but, as far as I can determine, not poetry) was published. According to Matthew Beaumont's *Utopia, Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England, 1870-1900* (2005), "around and *à propos* of utopia, there is a veritable discursive explosion at the end of the Victorian period," particularly in fiction: "In the final thirty years of the nineteenth-century, hundreds of novels and short stories – each one prophesying a future society from whose imaginary standpoint the present state of affairs seemed manifestly unsatisfactory – were printed in Britain and the United States" (1). Some of the most prominent novels include Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), the American writer Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891). Beaumont attributes "the proliferation of literary utopias in the late-Victorian period" to "the peculiar socio-economic conditions in which they were produced" (3). As he explains, "the early 1870s heralded an epoch of economic uncertainty and political instability" (3-4):

> The so-called 'Great Depression', from the mid-1870s to the mid-1890s, exposing the decline of Britain's industrial supremacy, fissured the confidence of the middle class in the capitalist system. The apparition of the spectre of communism, the most ominous of the utopian futures on offer at the time, reinforced this effect. The Parisian Communards' experiment with proletarian democracy in 1871 momentarily dramatised the possibility of an historical alternative to capitalism. And, during the riots and industrial unrest in

> England during the later 1880s, when the 'New Unionism' and the nascent socialist movement were in their ascendancy, memories of the Commune rematerialised. In this climate, there was a widespread sense, across the political spectrum, that some sort of systematic social transformation was afoot. (Beaumont 4)

In the late nineteenth century, then, utopian discourse provided a way of responding to "uncertain political conditions" (Beaumont 4) and the uncertain future those conditions might shape.

To my knowledge, no other late Victorian utopian works address the place of Ireland in the United Kingdom as one of these political uncertainties (nor do any earlier literary utopias). However, the Irish Question was a major issue that caused trepidation among politicians and the public who believed that Home Rule threatened the stability of the Union (as I discuss in more detail later in the chapter), while Irish nationalists hoped that political independence was imminent. Thus, when Hickey invokes a tradition of political utopian writing in the prefatory poem to "Michael Villiers," her use of utopian discourse aligns with late nineteenth-century novels that imagine a utopian future in response to contemporary political uncertainty. In full, the poem reads,

> They had their visions of the perfect State,
>   Large Plato wisdom-lipt, and the quick-souled More,
>   And Bacon, who knew the spell whereby to soar
> From knowledge into power; the good, the great,
> The sons of many an age, early and late,
>   Have dreamed their dreams, and gone to seek the store
>   Their dreams had shadowed, on some unknown shore.

Where sight on faith, where good on hope may wait.

Not with their dreams content, nor satisfied

With visions of their visions, glimpses caught

Reflected from the glory of their thought;

The greater we, because they lived and died,

We seek the Ideal too, that will not hide

Her face for aye when Love and Truth have sought. (Hickey, "Michael Villers" n.p.)

The poem skims over major philosophers in a long tradition of Western utopian thought from Greek antiquity to Early Modern England, invoking Plato, More, and Bacon as great political idealists of history who "had their visions of the perfect State" (in Plato's *Republic* [c. 375 BCE], More's *Utopia* [1516], and Bacon's *The New Atlantis* [1627] respectively). As literary scholar Michael Robertson explains in *The Last Utopians: Four Late Nineteenth-Century Visionaries and their Legacy* (2018), Plato, More, and Bacon all devised versions of a better world based on reconfigured political, economic, and social structures or dedication to scientific and technological innovation.[16] Their evocation at the beginning of "Michael Villiers" implies that

[16] As Robertson explains, More, who coined the term *utopia*, was writing during "a time . . . of massive economic upheaval, with mercantile capitalism overturning the feudal order," when England witnessed "rising rents for land, changes in the wool industry, and rural enclosure" (21) that "result[ed] in homelessness, unemployment, and poverty on a massive scale" (22). Whereas in "the classical and medieval eras, poverty had been seen as inevitable and ineradicable," Robertson contends, "with the dissolution of the feudal order came new intellectual, as well as economic and social, possibilities, and for the first time it was possible to imagine that a world without want might actually be achieved," and "*Utopia* stands as one of the first and greatest expressions of the modern conception of social justice" (25). It also begins with a poem in which More "points to a . . . predecessor," stating that "'Plato's *Republic* now I claim / To match, or beat at its own game'" (Robertson 22). According to Robertson, "*The Republic* (ca. 375 BCE) is not exactly a utopian work; in essence, it's a philosophical inquiry into the nature of justice. However, in parts of *The Republic* Plato speculates about an ideal state. Most famously, he advances the ideas of the philosopher-king and of a ruling class of 'Guardians.' The Guardians, who include both women and men, live together in community without either private property or conventional family structures—concepts that would be central to modern utopian literature. Plato's egalitarianism, however, is limited to an aristocratic elite. The subordinate classes live quite differently from the Guardians, and everyone in the Republic grows up being taught what Plato calls a 'noble lie,' or 'magnificent myth,' that all people, far from being created equal, are composed of

the protagonist of Hickey's verse novel is their modern heir and will seek his own version of an ideal state. In particular, the conclusion that we are "greater . . . because they lived and died" and that the "Ideal . . . will not hide / Her face for aye when Love and Truth have sought" suggests that society has progressed closer to attaining the ideal state over the course of history and that it will not remain elusive forever ("aye" signifying *for always*). Rather, as long as love and truth are the values that motivate the search, the ideal will eventually be achieved. Yet at the same time that the poem seems to gesture toward a Whig theory of progressive history, Hickey's choice of the sonnet for the poem, a form often associated with unattainable love, also acknowledges the possible unattainability of that ideal. The prefatory poem also recalls Hickey's earlier lyric "Utopia" (first published in *Good Words* in 1889 and republished as the fourteenth poem in the volume *Michael Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems*),[17] which begins with the question "Where is the land of Utopia / The good, the fair?" (Hickey, "Utopia" 153). It imagines a place "Where they ever seek the ideal," (Hickey, "Utopia" 153), "All of the folk . . . / Are free of the sod," and "They know no fetters of slavedom, / No tyrant's nod" (Hickey, "Utopia" 154),

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either gold, silver, or iron and bronze" (23). Finally, More's work depicting "an ideal society that is simple, egalitarian, and static was challenged by Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), a brief and unfinished work that was published after Bacon's death and that proved to be highly influential. Bacon's work departs significantly from the utopian tradition established by More. Following the traveler's tale convention, *New Atlantis* is narrated by a sailor who happens upon the unknown island of Bensalem. Bacon, however, was uninterested in issues of social equality. Bensalem is fully as hierarchical as Europe, distinguished only by the virtue of its rulers and their subjects' unquestioning submission to authority. Bacon's primary interest lies in Bensalem's most distinctive institution, known as Salomon's House. . . . Salomon's House . . . is the prototype of a scientific research institute. Bacon was interested in the dynamic possibilities of the emerging scientific method, and *New Atlantis* can be seen as an origin point of technological utopianism, the belief that science and engineering can create a better world" (26).

[17] Hickey's volume does not place "Utopia" in close proximity to "Michael Villiers" in a way that establishes their direct connection, but the poems are nonetheless thematically related. Not only does the publication of "Utopia" in 1889 confirm that Hickey was reflecting on the concept of an ideal state even before she published "Michael Villiers," but it also, particularly in the last stanza's rhyme of *prayer*, *fair,* and *nowhere*, suggests her awareness of the endeavour's potential futility. In particular, the word nowhere recalls the etymology of the word *utopia*, which, as Michael Robertson explains, was coined by More as a pun on the notion of a desirable place that does not exist. According to Robertson, whereas "in the popular imagination it signifies an impossibly perfect ideal—*no place* . . . More's neologism is a bilingual pun; *utopia* is a Latinization not only of the Greek *ou-topos*, no place, but also of *eu-topos*, good place" (Robertson 6). In other words, "utopia is not necessarily a fantasy of perfection, and utopianism can be seen simply as *the envisioning of a transformed, better world*" (Robertson 6).

a scenario that anticipates the critique of landlordism and Home Rule in "Michael Villiers." Yet the poem also concedes that this ideal may be nowhere to be found. Variations of the same question conclude both the first and last stanzas of the poem: at the beginning, the speaker asks, "is that wonderful country, / Indeed, nowhere?" (Hickey, "Utopia" 153) and reiterates at the end,

> When shall the sight of that country
>
> Crown wish and prayer?
>
> Oh! shall we ever find it,
>
> The dear, the fair?
>
> Or is the land of Utopia,
>
> Indeed, nowhere? (Hickey, "Utopia" 158)

But although Hickey invokes a tradition of utopian writing, and although her verse novel is utopian insofar as it centres on Michael's vision of an ideal society, "Michael Villiers" is not utopian in the way that Beaumont defines a literary utopia, as a work "prophesying a future society from whose imaginary standpoint the present state of affairs seemed manifestly unsatisfactory" (1). In contrast to More and Bacon's works, for example, which both recount the discovery of an ideal society on a remote island, "Michael Villiers" does not invent an alternative perfect society that exists in the future or in a different geographic location; instead, it espouses the transformation of the existing state. Unlike utopias such as Morris's *News from Nowhere*, Hickey's work does not involve any device such as time travel that allows her protagonist (and the reader) to glimpse the perfect society of the future and see his own historical moment from a future vantage point; rather, Michael stays rooted in the late nineteenth century. "Michael Villiers" identifies the conditions of the ideal state—Irish independence and class equality—but does not describe that society as it exists in the future, and this is the crux of the problem in

Hickey's verse novel: Michael, an idealist—so, philosophically speaking, a character for whom "reality is ultimately in some sense mental or mind-dependent" and "the objects of knowledge or perception are ideas . . . more generally" (*OED*, "idealism," n., 1.) rather than materialist—cannot determine how to create the ideal state that he imagines. In this sense, his utopian world remains unrealised: nowhere in view except, to a limited extent, in the dialogue that the verse novel itself models as an approach to achieving that ideal future.

Michael's idealism also accounts for the medievalism in "Michael Villiers." As historian Charles Dellheim explains, medievalism (which he defines as "the appeal to, and the appeal of, the styles, symbols, and survivals of the Middle Ages" [39]) "had no single significance or use in nineteenth-century Britain" (39). According to Dellheim, "it is assumed too readily that medievalism was simply a conservative revolt against modernity" (41), when in fact both conservative and liberal Victorians across classes "invoked the Middle Ages to criticize their own times" (47).[18] On the one hand, "conservative medievalists were enraptured by a 'dream of order'" that they perceived in the supposedly stable social order of feudalism; on the other hand, "their liberal counterparts were inspired by a vision of liberty" that they associated with the medieval period (Dellheim 49). Although these liberal thinkers acknowledged "the despotic elements of medieval law and government, they" nonetheless "cultivated an image of the 'free' Middle Ages," typified by "the face-to-face democracy practiced in the 'village community'" (Dellheim 49). Robertson, who builds on Dellheim's work, similarly argues that many conservative and liberal Victorians gravitated to medievalism. For the former, who "celebrated

[18] Dellheim argues that several factors "united these medievalist social critics": "First of all, they were opponents of laissez-faire capitalism, economic individualism, utilitarianism, and the belief of progress through technology. In the medieval world they found alternatives to modern art, religion, and society. Second, they projected contemporary ideals into the Middle Ages. Clothing ideological commitments in historic dress lent the authority of the past to their endeavors. Finally, and most important, their discourse was based on a common set of myths and symbols—the manor, the monastery, the knight, the craftsman, and the Gothic style" (46).

the seemingly stable social hierarchy of the feudal past" (Robertson 82), medievalism provided an escape from the upheaval of modern life; it "served as a comforting alternative to modernity, a refuge and escape from the radical changes of the industrializing nineteenth century" (82). The latter looked to its customs as a preferable alternative to the exploitation of the worker and increasing economic stratification, as well as the destruction of nature as a result of industrial pollution and urban sprawl. As Robertson explains, Morris's novel *News from Nowhere*, for instance (serialised in the *Commonweal* in 1890), looked to the Middle Ages to craft a utopian future that resolves the problem of alienated labour and makes work a source of personal fulfilment and joy. In the utopian world of *News from Nowhere* (a version of the small democratic community that Morris associated with the Middle Ages), people do not work for money, there is no private property, and everyone is equal. It is a complete reconfiguration of social and economic structures based on idealised characteristics of medieval society.[19]

[19] His protagonist, William Guest, a socialist living in the late nineteenth century, travels to the twenty-first century. He discovers that Britain has been transformed into an idyllic agrarian society in which there is no class difference, no crime, and no individual property ownership, and people work for the pleasure of it. As Robertson argues, Morris "rejected central Victorian beliefs—not only religious belief but also the belief in progress, the embrace of technology, and the divisions between work and leisure, art and design, literature and politics, intellectuals and workers" (80). In *News from Nowhere*, Morris "transformed what was often a nostalgic turning aside from present realities into a critique of capitalism, and he imagined a postindustrial future in which unalienated artisans produced works of beauty while living in a pastoral landscape where labor was indistinguishable from play" (Robertson 5). According to Robertson, Morris rejected the Whig progressive theory of history according to which "the Middle Ages, a time of gross ignorance and brutal violence, had been succeeded by the glories of the Renaissance, which was succeeded by the Age of Enlightenment, which gave way to the nineteenth century—an era of scientific and technological achievements, increased wealth, rapid growth of political democracy, and unsurpassed levels of education, refinement, and taste" (102). Rather, Morris saw the shift from the Middle Ages to the Victorian era as a process of decline:

> In his view, the nineteenth century was notable not for its supposed achievements but for the ugliness of its cities and the destruction of the countryside, for the misery of the mass of industrial workers juxtaposed to the vulgar luxury of the rich. In the Middle Ages, by contrast, the worker was a craftsman—which is to say, an artist—who was free to produce items of beauty. His work was a joy to him, and he lived in a simple and beautiful house, worshipped in a grand and beautiful church, and was surrounded by beautiful, handmade objects. Morris did not deny the tyranny and violence of the Middle Ages, but he argued that the violence was occasional, while the work—creative and satisfying—was ongoing. (Robertson 102)

"In [Morris's] ideal society, craftsmanship would take precedence over the division of labor," and machines would "be utilized to perform society's most distasteful tasks, leaving workers free to perform meaningful labor, by which he meant the production of objects of utility and beauty" (Robertson 110).

Hickey's verse novel does not propose the same radical remaking of society that Morris's novel does, but it shares similar political and social objectives, notably the elimination of class difference and the redistribution of land. "Michael Villiers," like other utopian writing, looks back to characteristics that Victorians associated with medieval life, such as fellowship and community, to imagine a better future. This medievalism manifests most obviously in Michael and Lucy's relationship. The verse novel incorporates archaic language into their dialogue ("nay" and "spake," for example [Hickey, "Michael" 49]) and characterises both Michael and Lucy as knights, importing values associated with chivalry, such as duty and protection of the people, into the representation of their attempts at reform in the Victorian period. When Michael first meets Lucy, the narrative ascribes her a "stately frame / Which well had worn the armour of the knight / Who did such gallant deeds at Joyous Gard" (Hickey, "Michael" 49). Annie Guilfoy, one of their friends in the socialist community in London, then compares Lucy to Britomart (Hickey, "Michael" 49), the female knight in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), a comparison that Michael repeats later in the story (Hickey, "Michael" 57).

The allusions to Joyous Gard, Lancelot's castle in Arthurian myth (in, for instance, Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* [1485]) and to Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* arguably indicate a nostalgia for the past, but their function is primarily to characterise Lucy as a chivalric figure who serves the people with courage and valour in the work that she does among the poor. The formal way in which Lucy and Michael often address each other, as Childe Michael and Burd Lucy, similarly characterises both figures as chivalric figures who will battle for their ideal world together. The two consistently refer to one another as *comrade*, a term common among contemporary socialists that conveys a sense of fellowship and lack of social hierarchy,[20] and

[20] According to the *OED*, it was "used by socialists and communists as a prefix to the surname, to avoid such titles as 'Mr.' Hence, a (fellow-) socialist or communist" ("comrade," n.,f.).

their use of *childe* and *burd* suggests a similar significance. *Childe* refers to "a young man of noble or gentle birth," with the additional meaning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of "a young noble in line for knighthood." It was a term used "frequently as a title (either preceding or [in early use] following a proper name), in ballads, etc." (*OED*, n., 3.),[21] while *burd* is a term known perhaps most famously from the ballad "Fair Helen of Kirconnel," a poem about a young woman who sacrifices her life for that of her lover that appears in Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3).[22] However, while in later usage *burd* meant primarily "young lady, maiden" (*OED*, n.), in older usage it signified "the female counterpart of *berne*" (*OED*, "burd," n.), which means "a warrior, a hero, a man of valour" (*OED*, "berne," n.), and its use in "Michael Villiers" reflects Michael's perception of Lucy as a fellow soldier in the quest to achieve their utopian society.

The dramatic shape to the narrative in "Michael Villiers," a collection of extended dialogues that grants mostly direct, unmediated speech to all the characters (a contrast in particular to Webster's "Lota," which highlights the problems of representation that arise from lack of self-representation through direct speech), reflects the idealistic position that social and political reform can be effected gradually through dialogue. Through dialogue with different people, including his uncle, his conservative friends, and his lover, Lucy, Michael manages to persuade interlocutors with opposing viewpoints to see social issues from his perspective. The

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[21] Among the most famous nineteenth-century uses of *Childe* were Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18) and Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855).

[22] The second stanza of the second part of "Fair Helen" reads:

> Curst be the heart, that thought the thought,
> And curst the hand, that fired the shot,
> When in my arms burd Helen dropt,
> And died to succour me! (Scott, *Minstrelsy* 94)

According to the biography by Enid Dinnis, Hickey became an avid reader of Scott when she attended boarding school, where "big books which contained the great old ballads were get-at-able," and "the poetry of Sir Walter Scott was learnt by heart" (Dinnis 16).

fact that these characters are fairly one-dimensional, serving for the most part as superficial conservative types against whom Michael can argue, lends some credence to Tucker's point above about Hickey's sermonising, although the characters' articulation of their respective politics in direct speech also implies that private dialogue among close acquaintances is the arena in which one can effect social and political change. Michael's minor successes with this discursive approach (successes that the verse novel substantiates through the dramatic format, which is more objective than a narrative focalised through a specific character) suggest that dialogue can, to an extent, motivate moderate reform. However, crucially, while the private conversations among these characters may motivate the desire to effect change, dialogue in "Michael Villiers" remains an essentially ineffectual exercise *because* it is private. Michael's discursive approach to reform takes politics out of the public sphere; in this model, change is private and interiorised and does not necessarily produce any substantial material effect. In contrast to the other works studied in this dissertation, which make private, domestic matters public and political, Hickey's verse novel withdraws nationalist and class politics from a public to a private context. Although Michael implements some reforms on his own estates, he never solves the problem of effective large-scale political action. He is explicit about avoiding political revolution and rejects the prospect of engaging in parliamentary politics, but he fails to find a viable alternative. As Michael tells Lucy in Book VIII, "I know not now at all what I must do, / Nor how I may be called upon to act" (Hickey, "Michael" 57). He tells her what he *wants* to do, expressing a passionate desire to be an active worker in the socialist movement:

> The very easiest path for me to take
>
> Would be to live and labour with my hands,
>
> And have the wages of my toil and sweat,

> And share them with my fellow-men, and be
>
> Among them even as one that serveth, not
>
> As one that lordeth it; and take my part
>
> In the world's fellowship of suffering. (Hickey, "Michael" 58)

"I would I might be poor instead of rich," he elaborates, "I would I had no rights to give away, / Seeing my rights are based on others' wrongs" (Hickey, "Michael" 58). But, in a typical liberal dilemma, he remains uncertain as to his course of action: "I would, if I could see / It were the right of rights for me to do" (Hickey, "Michael" 58), he tells her, "Go naked with my brothers of the State / Unsocial to the very inmost core. / And yet I know not if I may do thus" (Hickey, "Michael" 59). Even at this late point in the narrative, Michael is static, uncertain how to implement his ideals in a material way and clearly frustrated by his own inaction.[23] By the end of the verse novel, he manages to effect small-scale change, but only by using his wealth and status, the very privileges he deplores. Consequently, unable to translate his principles into large-scale action in order to realise his vision of an ideal state, he turns to lyric, particularly song, to imagine the utopian world that he cannot achieve.

The relationship between Hickey's politics and form also departs significantly from that of the other verse novels in this dissertation. In "Lota," Webster draws on conventions of the dramatic monologue and employs focalisation to foreground the stakes of narrative—and by extension, political—representation, while Fane interposes lyrics between narrative parts in *Denzil Place* to generate sympathy for her adulterous female protagonist, and Pfeiffer combines

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[23] As Stefanie Markovits explains, the problem of how to effect political action lay at the heart of other Victorian verse novels as well. In *The Crisis of Action in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (2006), Markovits argues that the problem of effective action, often in the context of specific historical events, was at the centre of works such as Arthur Hugh Clough's *Amours de Voyage* (written in 1849, published in 1858), one of the earliest verse novels of the period. Clough was a political radical who struggled to find a way of producing effective change in the world, and *Amours* takes place in Rome during the French siege in 1849, when, as Markovits explains, the failure of the revolution in 1848 would have been "a recent reminder of the uncertainties of revolutionary action" (*Crisis* 62).

verse and prose in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* to signify the importance of difference within union in a marital context. Hickey's politicisation of form differs particularly in the way that she foregoes narrative action and description. Like "Lota," "Michael Villiers" follows the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, beginning with Michael's birth, then following his development as an individual, and concluding with his marriage to Lucy and integration into society (although importantly, the conservative middle-class society in which Gervase is complicit is one that Michael is helping to reform). However, Hickey does not describe the events of Michael's life in great detail after Book I; rather, his conversations with others demonstrate his growth as an individual. This emphasis on discursive exchange instead of narrative incident conveys the work's idealistic support of gradual reform through dialogue rather than revolutionary action. The next section of the chapter will further contextualise the political valence of Hickey's use of dramatic form.

Dramatic Form in Late Victorian Poetry

The dramatic form of "Michael Villiers" corresponds to a vogue for dramatic works in the late nineteenth century, including verse dramas by Michael Field, Emily Pfeiffer, Tennyson, and Augusta Webster; poems in dialogue by Alfred Austin and John Davidson; and essays in dialogue by Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde. However, unlike works such as Wilde's "Decay of Lying" and "The Critic as Artist" (both published in 1891, the same year as "Michael Villiers"), which follow a pseudo-Socratic model wherein one character—serving as a stand-in for Wilde himself—leads another character through a series of questions in order to reach a pre-determined conclusion, Hickey's verse novel represents dialogue in a more exploratory way. Whereas

Wilde's dialogues are structured as lectures rather than open-ended discussions,[24] there is no such hierarchal relationship in "Michael Villiers": Michael is not an authority figure who educes responses from a pupil but a character who seeks to persuade his family and friends of his beliefs. In the dialogues of Oscar Wilde, one character (such as Cyril in "The Decay of Lying") functions principally as an auditor, often merely reacting to what the main character, who serves as a figure for Wilde himself (Vivian in "The Decay of Lying"), says and asking questions as a prompt. In contrast, the conversations in "Michael Villiers" are more democratic, following a debate structure in which one character presents a position on a given issue—in Michael's case, often in a speech that spans multiple pages—and then the other character responds. In this way, the verse novel gives space to both sides of the issue at hand, demonstrating how Michael productively engages with the opinions of others in an effort to persuade them of his position and sometimes to clarify his own ideas.

Hickey's interest in drama is evident in her scholarly attention to the works of Shakespeare—she was a member of the Shakespeare Society and wrote studies of *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*[25]—and Robert Browning, whom she referred to as "our greatest living poet" ("On the Use of Trochaic Pentameter" 436) and whose verse drama *Strafford* she edited and annotated in 1884. She also wrote dramatic poems such as "Autographs" (published in *Michael Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems* as the poem immediately following "Michael Villiers"), a dramatic monologue structured as a series of sonnets in which the female speaker describes being approached by a man who wished to purchase her letters from her late beloved, a poet. She

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[24] As Bruce Bashford explains in *Oscar Wilde: The Critic as Humanist* (1999), "what Wilde seeks in employing the dialogue form is the opportunity to present a rhetor who reasons about opposed positions but whose governing aim is not to persuade his audience" (70). In this way, Bashford explains, Wilde's dialogues are not Socratic because neither speaker is trying to persuade the other of his opinion, nor guide the other to formulate his own opinion, and ultimately his characters "maintain throughout their dialogues the opinions they begin with" (70).

[25] For example, "King Lear: A Study." *Irish Monthly* (Jul. 1903): 361-72 and "Romeo and Juliet: A Study." *Irish Monthly* (Feb. 1905): 61-72.

refuses, and after he leaves, she burns the letters before she herself dies. A narrative proem precedes the monologue to give context (the poem was inspired by the recent sale of a love letter written by Keats to Fanny Brawn), but the emphasis is strongly on the speaker, Margaret's, passionate repudiation of the buyer's economic interest in her personal correspondence. Although she is starving, living impoverished in Kensington, she refuses to sell the letters, preferring "to die / For the soul's chastity" (Hickey, "Autographs" 104). In addition to Hickey's critical and editorial work on drama, her experimentation with the dramatic monologue further demonstrates her interest in the capacity of dramatic form to represent interiority—and address social and economic disenfranchisement—through direct speech.

In her entry on verse drama in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (2002), Adrienne Scullion defines Victorian verse drama as a "quixotic genre . . . full of static scenes, of monotonous, repetitive and undramatic speeches, of events reported but not seen," a genre "preoccupied not with the choice between action and character but with the relation between the two" (187, 189). She focuses on Browning's *Strafford*, first performed in 1836 and published in 1837, which she views as an exemplary Victorian play. *Strafford*—a play about Thomas Wentworth, an English nobleman who was a supporter of King Charles I in the years before the Civil War and became Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1632, then the first Earl of Strafford in 1640 before his execution in 1641—was a play that Browning described as "'Action in Character, rather than Character in Action'" (qtd. Scullion 187). As Scullion points out, "the focus of the action in *Strafford* is not the externalization of the political conflict on stage but the psychological trajectory of its principal characters" (191). "Michael Villiers" resembles *Strafford* in de-emphasising action and focusing on character development—particular the self-development of its protagonist—through dialogue. *Strafford*, and later "Michael Villiers," invert

the priorities of classical drama, which, according to Aristotle, should be on the unfolding of events: in *Poetics*, he states that, in tragedy, "the most important element is the construction of the plot. Tragedy is a representation not of persons but of action and life. . . . The point is action, not character" (24). Instead, Browning and Hickey's works centre on the representation of characters' values and motives rather than action.

Strafford is also, Scullion points out, "a history play that directly engages contemporary debates about systems of government and democracy," one notably preoccupied "with issues of political representation and the role of the individual in relation to collective decision making, Parliaments and assemblies," themes that spoke to a Victorian audience "already debating constitutional government and issues of representation in terms of suffrage, trade unionism and other forms of collective action" (Scullion 191). In all, it is "a political play that values modernizing democracy and the integrity of representative government" (Scullion 191). For Hickey, concerned with issues of class disenfranchisement and self-government in Ireland, Browning's engagement with politics in *Strafford* served as a model for her own work.

Yet whereas *Strafford* was a play at least intended for performance (although staged only five times [Scullion 187]), "Michael Villiers" shows affinities with closet drama—that is, drama not intended for the stage. Catherine Burroughs, a scholar of closet dramas by Romantic women writers such as Joanna Baillie, defines the closet drama simply as "a play written solely to be read" (215); similarly, in her work on the closet dramas of George Eliot and Augusta Webster, Susan Brown classifies closet drama as work "on the boundary between poetry and drama," which privileges dialogue in its form but is not intended for performance on stage: it is "a drama that, either by intention or default, finds its performance in the minds of readers within their 'closets' or private rooms" ("Determined Heroines" 89). The closet drama does not rely on

physical action in the space on stage to advance its plot; in fact, Burroughs contends that in closet drama,

> the performance of rhetorical moves often takes precedence over bodily movement (including exits and entrances) to the point where speech-making is *the* central action; monologues and soliloquies dominate, and, when dialogue appears, it often resembles stichomythia. Interiority is privileged. Rarely does a closet play contain scenes among more than three characters, since the focus is usually an argument or a debate, the action being the working out of a philosophical problem or the advocacy of a moral position. (219)

According to Burroughs, this focus on debate often served the purpose of "edification" (227) for Romantic women writers such as Ann Wilson and Charlotte Smith because the emphasis on dialogue allowed the playwright to concentrate on persuading readers of a particular argumentative stance by "encourag[ing] readers to study [the text's] arguments, ideas and rhetorical moves" (Burroughs 230). Brown offers a consonant view in her discussion of mid-Victorian closet drama by women poets such as Eliot and Webster, whose plays *Armgart* (1871) and "A Woman Sold" (1867) also privilege dialogue over plot, exploring social constructions of gender "within a contemporary setting and through topical debates" (90). As Brown points out, these dramas are "not heavily plotted," and "the conflict is embodied in the dialogue among the small cast of characters" (92). Furthermore, since these dramas feature minor stage directions (92), "reader[s] . . . negotiate the mutivoicedness of the text without commentary or guidance" (92), and this dialogism is one of the major advantages of the dramatic form because female characters are all granted "a dramatized, unmediated voice in the text" (Brown, "Determined Heroines" 101).

Hickey's work draws on elements of nineteenth-century women's closet drama by structuring her work as a series of conversations characterised by long speeches, but she injects this form with the emphasis on politics seen in Browning's *Strafford*. "Michael Villiers" does not share the focus on the representation of women's subjectivity that Brown identifies in the mid-Victorian closet drama of Eliot and Webster, but it does employ the same rhetorical strategy of presenting the direct speech of characters—primarily Michael—engaged in spirited debates about contemporary social and political issues. The verse novel provides little contextualisation of events and minimal description of setting (even the exact locations of the estates in Ireland and England are ambiguous) or action, so that some of the books lack situational context (Book VII, for example, begins in the middle of a conversation, with no sense given either of the setting, or the name of Michael's conversant). Inspired by Browning's engagement with democratic politics and issues of parliamentary representation in *Strafford*, Hickey's work draws on the even greater dialogism of closet drama to present arguments for—and anticipate arguments against—Irish Home Rule and socialism.

"The question of the hour": The Irish Question and Socialism

"Michael Villiers" was published when the question of Home Rule in Ireland was at its peak. According to Dinnis, when Hickey wrote "Michael Villiers," "the Irish Question—the question of the hour—had gripped her, along with the problem of the social conditions of the poor in England" (34), and "the question of Home Rule was viewed by her with the eyes of a nationalist" (Dinnis 35). There had been agitation in Ireland to repeal the Act of Union[26] in the decades

[26] Following the 1798 Irish Rebellion, the Act of Union was signed in 1800 (to take effect in 1801), "one intention" of which "was to attempt to bring together the administration of the four nations in forms which were

immediately after its passing, but the Irish Question gained urgency after the Great Famine in the 1840s, a catastrophe for which many people in Ireland blamed the British government,[27] and the issue of land proprietorship and tenant rights became a particular point of fixation, one that prompted intense agrarian agitation and violence as tenants refused to pay rent and protested evictions.

According to prominent Irish historian R. F. Foster in *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (1989), this focus on tenant rights arose after a series of evictions of tenant farmers around mid-century. As Foster explains, as a result of economic decline from 1815 to 1830, agricultural practices shifted from land cultivation to pasture farming, which significantly affected the distribution of land to tenant farmers, particularly smallholders, as smaller holdings were cleared and consolidated into bigger ones. "As long eighteenth-century leases fell in, renewals were made on short and insecure tenancies; land clearance, and maximization of profit, became the priority" (333), Foster asserts, and "by the 1830s rent arrears were mounting up, and so were evictions" (333), the majority of which occurred during the Great Famine (1845-49). Between 1847 and 1850, apparently 50, 000 evictions occurred (Foster 374), and although this number dropped (40,000 evictions were apparently recorded between 1851 and 1880) (Foster 374), the

more than just coercive" (Campbell, "Poetry in the Four Nations" 447). As historian D. G. Boyce explains, this resulted in greater administrative centralisation, including Ireland's "direct (and substantial) representation at Westminster" and the union of Ireland's "established Church . . . with that of England" (3). According to Boyce, "once these arrangements were made the hope and expectation was that Ireland, like Scotland and Wales, would cease to trouble – or at least would cease to trouble England" (3).

[27] As leading Irish studies scholar Declan Kiberd explains in *Inventing Ireland* (1995), "through the earlier years of hunger, the British held to their *laissez-faire* economic theories and ships carried large quantities of grain from the starving island. Arguments raged (and still do) as to the degree of British culpability, but Irish public opinion was inflamed. While some landlords behaved with great callousness towards their ruined tenantry, others were heroic in generosity and in organizing counter-measures: but pervading all was a sense that this was the final betrayal by England" (21).

vulnerability of tenants remained a point of attention, and "the image of the ruthlessly clearing landlord remained in the mind of the public" (Foster 374).[28]

Tenant rights were often defined according to the three Fs: "free sale, fair rent and fixity of tenure" (Foster 380). "The notion of 'free sale' relates to the supposed 'Ulster' custom of selling the 'interest' in a holding to an incoming tenant," but actually "customary rights of this kind . . . occurred all over Ireland, and were apparently coming under threat in 1850 as a result of post-Famine dislocations and the crisis in grain prices" (Foster 380). In addition, "connected with the sale of 'interest' in a rented holding was another intrinsic Tenant Right: the right to compensation for improvements made to the property" (Foster 380). This concept of tenants' rights, Foster points out,

> carried two implications, one moral and one economic. The moral implication was that the tenant had a certain *right* in the property, above and beyond the right conveyed by paying rent – since it outlasted the period for which rent was paid. This was often held to reflect the general Irish historical sense that the land was the people's before it was the landlords'. The economic implication is equally significant: if payments were made by incoming tenants, often at a surprisingly high level, in order to occupy a holding for which they would then pay rent, it must have been worth their while to do so. In other words, the formal rent must have been pegged at a lower level than the land could have borne: the incoming payment (like 'key-money' for a rent-controlled flat nowadays) making up the difference. (380)

[28] Foster is careful to point out that "the evidence seems to be against [eviction] being as regular an occurrence as often claimed" (334). He notes that "statistics were always problematic, raising difficulties of definition as well as actual occurrence; even where an eviction took place, as opposed to a notice merely being served, the tenant was often reinstalled as caretaker. Statisticians also misleadingly included the subtenants of an evicted tenant among those ejected, though they actually stayed *in situ*. There were individual *causes célèbres*, like the Derryveagh evictions of forty-seven families in 1861, which probably reflected particular local conditions," but landlords also tried to avoid evictions because of the bad publicity they would receive (374).

According to Foster, *fair rent*[29] ultimately referred to "rents fixed by tribunal" (380-81) rather than by a landlord, while fixity of tenure protected tenants from eviction as long as they paid their rent.

The first Land Act was passed in 1870, which "cautiously introduced some principles of tenant protection – about one and a half of the '3 F's'" (Foster 396). Although "the 'Ulster Custom', of recognizing the outgoing occupant's investment in his holding, was legalized where it existed," and "tenants were to be compensated for improvements they had made, if they were evicted," this was a fairly ineffective measure, since, as Foster remarks, "improving tenants were *not* the kind of tenants who were evicted" (Foster 396). In addition, "there was no central provision for rent control," and "those who had to vacate on the expiry of a lease were not protected" (Foster 397). In fact, although "only 17.7 per cent [of agricultural holdings were] on terminable leases" at the time of the Act, "many landlords responded by forcing tenants to accept restrictive leases, putting them beyond the Act's provisions" (Foster 397). The passing of the Second Land Act in 1881was far more substantial; it granted the three Fs,[30] and the Purchase of Land Act in 1885, according to political historian Paul Bew, "provided the first workable scheme to facilitate purchase by tenants of their farms" (343). These measures all went some way to addressing the land problem. However, historian Philip Bull argues that "the consequences of the

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[29] Foster explains that *fair rent* "was impossible to define" because "'Griffith's valuation', often taken by the tenants as the standard, was known to be pitched well below a realistic economic level; it was calculated when prices were abnormally low, and had never been intended as a rental guide" (380). (According to Paul Bew, Griffith's valuation was an assessment of Irish land value conducted by Sir Richard Griffith in the mid-nineteenth century that was invoked as the basis for rent by tenant farmers into the 1880s [320].) Furthermore, *fair rent* also differed in areas where "'Ulster custom' money was paid" (Foster 380). Rents in these areas "were obviously low enough to make the saleable interest an attractive proposition; in fact, in areas where the practice prevailed, even those without leases could expect incoming payments (which could reach eight to ten pounds per acre in east Ulster). Thus they had effective security of tenure, which might otherwise be held to mean simply unbreakable leases" (Foster 380).

[30] As Bew explains, after the 1881 Land Act was passed, the "new legislation . . . gave full recognition to tenant right throughout Ireland and established a new tribunal, a land court, to fix 'fair rents,'" "offering real promise of rent reductions of 20 or 25 per cent" (328, 331).

long struggle over the land . . . had implications well beyond those immediately associated with the issue itself" (140), namely that "the land issue . . . became largely a metaphor" for "Irish nationality" (141). By the mid-1880s, the focus of the Irish Question became centered primarily on the issue of self-government.

According to historian D. G. Boyce, with the Third Reform Act of 1884, "the Irish electorate increased in size from 4.4 per cent to 16 per cent of the population," leading to the win of 85 seats for the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), which was led by Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell and strongly in favour of Home Rule (Boyce 28). Gladstone, whose view on Irish self-government had changed from opposition to support over the decades, seemed close to making Home Rule a reality by the late 1880s. He presented a bill for Irish Home Rule in 1886[31] that was defeated, but the question of Home Rule remained a subject of political attention and tension over the next several years. According to Boyce, in late 1889, as the Liberals were on the cusp of winning the next general election, Gladstone and Parnell were revising a new Home Rule bill to propose, but it fell through when Parnell was named as the co-respondent in a divorce case in December, effectively ending his political career (Boyce 38-39). In 1891, when "Michael Villiers, Idealist" was published, the issue of Home Rule remained unresolved.

Hickey's verse novel establishes its sympathy with Irish nationalism at the beginning of the story. Book I situates the narrative in the context of Michael's family history, which is rooted in English colonialism, beginning with a description of Sir William, Michael's bachelor uncle and guardian, who raises Michael after the death of his parents and names him "heir to all his money and his lands" (Hickey, "Michael" 5). These lands include both Villiers Keep, the family estate in England, as well as Lisnagh Castle, a centuries-old castle in Ireland. The narrative

[31] According to Bew, Gladstone's "object was to establish an Irish legislature, although large imperial issues were to be reserved to the Westminster Parliament" (348).

establishes that although Sir William is a benevolent lord, he is also "Of somewhat narrow mind" (Hickey, "Michael" 5) and does not consider the historical circumstances or moral implications of his proprietorship of those lands. Specifically, regarding Lisnagh Castle,

> William Villiers thought not how that house
> Of his was based upon a nation's wrong,
> Its walls cemented with a folk's despair,
> Its fields manured with a people's blood. (Hickey, "Michael" 9)

The narrative not only attributes the family's ownership to British sovereignty but suggests that the house was built literally at the cost of Irish lives, its walls constructed by their labour and imbued with their misery and its very foundation resting upon fields fertilised by the blood of Irish people. Additionally, Sir William is a landlord who takes all the profits from the farms on his land but leaves the management of the property to a merciless agent: "Even as his sires before him always did," he "left the soil beneath the pitiless hand / Of one who ruled it with an iron rule" (Hickey, "Michael" 9). He is not villainous but negligent; he typifies the problems of property ownership and absentee landlordism against which organisations such as the Irish National Land League were agitating and which politicians such as Parnell and Gladstone were attempting to address in the Land Acts.

In contrast to his uncle, who has no connection to Ireland aside from the property he owns there, Michael has a strong Irish heritage. Although his father, Sir William's brother, is English, Michael was born in Ireland to an Irish mother, establishing Ireland as his mother's land and motherland, his true homeland (similar to *Aurora Leigh*, in which Aurora's mother is Italian). Visiting Ireland yearly, he cultivates relationships with all the people in the village and

all the tenants on his family's land: he "knew each one among the villagers" (Hickey, "Michael" 20), and

He knew each one

Of all the tenantry, and was his friend

As far as might be; seeing he was set

Away from them by birth and circumstance. (Hickey, "Michael" 20-21)

Hickey's verse novel thus explicitly establishes, at the outset, its protagonist's alignment with the Irish in the bloody colonial history that has left them economically and politically disenfranchised. But the timing of its publication also offers a context for considering how the politics and form of "Michael Villiers" are interconnected. At a historical moment when hopes for self-government had so recently been disappointed and violent agitation against the land-tenure system and for Home Rule was a potential problem, "Michael Villiers" models a discursive approach to promote gradual reform rather than violent revolution, an approach that ultimately circumscribes large-scale action.

Violent agitation had been a problem throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, which accounted partly for Gladstone's commitment to tenant rights reform and to establishing some degree of self-government in Ireland, as well as for his relative success in implementing some reforms. As Boyce explains, Gladstone initially encountered parliamentary and public resistance to his reform efforts, but the bombings carried out in British cities in 1867 by the Fenian Brotherhood, "an Irish secret society whose aim was the destruction of British rule in Ireland by force of arms" (Boyce 19),[32] convinced both government officials and the British

[32] The Fenians were, according to Campbell, "named after the warriors who followed Fionn mac Cumhaill – Macpherson's Fingal – in the Ossianic cycle" ("Poetry in the Four Nations" 447).

public of the necessity of reform (Boyce 19-20).[33] Violent unrest persisted into the 1870s and 1880s, however. According to Bew, after the Land League was formed in 1879, its members initially participated in mass demonstrations to protest evictions,[34] but this collective action eventually escalated to violence and assassinations as well (316). Bew notes that such incidents spiked from 863 in 1879 to 2,590 in 1880, a year in which seven murders occurred (321), with an additional eleven between October 1880 and September 1881 (Bew 332), and fourteen more between October 1881 and March 1882 (Bew 332).[35] In 1882, the Phoenix Park assassinations—the murders of the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Frederick Cavendish, and his under-secretary, Thomas Burke, by a nationalist group called the Invincibles—demonstrated the high stakes of finding a solution to the land issue, which prompted Parnell and Gladstone to work together on parliamentary reform (Bew 336). Yet even their alliance did not put an end to violence; although the Land League was dissolved in 1882, neo-Fenian revolutionary activity persisted. "Irish-American extremists . . . established a 'Skirmishing Fund' to promote dynamite explosions in England" (Bew 338). "In the period from 1881 to 1885," Bew explains, explosions took place at the Tower of London, Scotland Yard, and the Houses of Parliament, and at railways and underground stations," and there was also "a serious attempt . . . to blow up London Bridge" in 1884 (Bew 338). Additionally, in 1886, Unionist support in the northern province of Ulster resulted in "anti-Home Rule and anti-police riots" in Belfast, which "claimed the lives of at least

[33] As Boyce explains, "the Fenian panic of 1867 was not the cause of Gladstone's decision to reform the Irish Church system," but he "believed that the British public and parliament were more disposed to take seriously an Irish policy after the Fenians than before" (20).

[34] Bew explains that thousands, sometimes an entire village, turned out to resist evictions, and that the Land League also funded legal action on behalf of tenants at risk of eviction, "utilizing the elements of Gladstone's 1870 Land Act designed to protect smallholders threatened with eviction" (316).

[35] In response, the British government passed the Coercion Act in 1881, pushed by Chief Secretary of Ireland W. E. Forster, which "practically suspended the Habeas Corpus Act" and allowed the government to arrest and hold anyone suspected of involvement with agrarian agitation without formally charging them (Bew 323), including Parnell (who advised a rent strike when the bill was introduced).

thirty-one people, more than the combined total of all the Irish rebellions of the nineteenth century" (Bew 351). Finally, in 1887, two nationalists were killed by police in Mitchelstown, in Cork County, during a protest organised by the Plan of Campaign (Bew 354). These events all contributed to the urgency of finding a peaceful resolution to the land and sovereignty issues in Ireland. In fact, Parnell, the leader of the Home Rule movement, was once affiliated with the Land League but not in favour of its revolutionary tactics, believing that parliamentary action was the way to effect change in Ireland.[36]

The exact date of the setting for Hickey's verse novel is unclear—it does not mention political figures such as Gladstone and Parnell nor refer to specific historical events (although allusions to the issue of rent and the fact that Michael's tenants "shoot behind no hedge on his estate" and do not "hough the cattle, nor burn them in their byres" [Hickey, "Michael" 74] suggests that at the very least it takes place in the midst of agrarian violence). Yet in 1891, when Hickey published "Michael Villiers," Parnell had been disgraced and parliamentary action was at a standstill. At this point, when violent action was again a real possibility, Hickey's verse novel advocated a moderate approach by modelling how change can occur through dialogue.

The verse novel positions Michael, like Romney in *Aurora Leigh*, as an explicitly anti-revolutionary socialist. In Book VI, he travels to London and becomes affiliated with a socialist community comprised of members who are "No socialists of [t]he fire-and-thunder faith / Which thinks that streams of blood will wash the world," but, rather, "socialists who recognized in truth / And word and deed the brotherhood of man" and dedicated their lives to working for the good

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[36] As Bew explains, "Parnell never accepted the revolutionary premisses of his neo-Fenian allies. He believed in the possibility of a major land reform; he aspired to satisfy the tenantry on terms which were not disadvantageous to the landlords"—indeed, he was a landlord himself—with "the whole process to be subsidized by a generous contribution from the British taxpayer. He wanted to bring the younger and more progressive landlords into the Home Rule movement so as to give it sufficient social cachet to convince British legislators in London: a cachet that was absent in 1880. But he was not able to set the limits of a popular agitation: his advocacy of the boycott and other forms of social ostracism did not satisfy his most militant supporters" (322).

of that brotherhood (Hickey, "Michael" 45). The verse novel promotes the idea that "true socialism" (Hickey, "Michael" 45) does not include violence, and Michael adopts a discursive approach to addressing class inequality, land reform, and Home Rule. In Book V, for example, he passionately articulates his position on Irish politics in an argument with his college friend Gordon Moore. Gordon, despite also having been born in Ireland, abhors the country and its people. Michael mounts a spirited defense of both in response to his friend's characterization of Irish people as "A set of dirty, lazy priest-rid loons," who "grub on half-boiled roots and buttermilk, / And swill the fiery stuff that makes 'em mad / To fight and break each other's empty heads" (Hickey, "Michael" 36). Referring to the Irish as "a savage brood / The Vikings should have slaughtered long ago," and "The English yet must tame" (Hickey, "Michael" 36), Gordon repeats demeaning Victorian prejudices of the Irish as hot-blooded alcoholics who lack work ethic and procreate beyond their means, an uncivilised people who have proven their inability to govern themselves and their need for British rule.

Michael, in turn, refutes such stereotypes and describes the Irish instead as "A folk that has not had a chance to be / A nation," conquered by the English "Ere its own day had come for clan and clan / To be one people" (Hickey, "Michael" 38). In a lengthy speech that runs for four pages, Michael asserts that the condition of the Irish people is that of "A folk with all its own laws flung to ground, / Trampled beneath a strange law's heavy heel, / A better law, you say, but not its own," and one that came only as the result of violence and death, as

> all the land was watered with their blood,—
>
> Their stript dead bodies lay upon the hills,
>
> Which looked i' the distance, like a pasture-land
>
> Whereon there swarmed a flock of night-lulled sheep. (Hickey, "Michael" 38).

According to Hickey's note at the end of the volume, Michael refers here to the Battle of Aughrim, a 1691 battle in the Williamite War between the Jacobites and the army of King William III (she cites Emily Lawless's *The Story of Ireland* [1888] as her source).[37] He points out the double standard of labelling the Irish people as savages in revisionist retellings of Anglo-Irish conflict when the English, despite committing the same acts of violence, retain a reputation of civility: "when they slew / And burned in vengeance, they were savages / And we were always men and Englishmen!" (Hickey, "Michael" 38).

The dramatic format allows Michael to retell the violent history of English rule in Ireland in direct speech, to describe English colonialism in genocidal terms not only in the literal slaughter of Irishmen but also in the destruction of Irish culture and to affirm the need to redress such wrongs. He enumerates the ills that the Irish people have suffered at the hands of the supposedly more civilised English: the loss of their native language, persecution of Catholics, seizure of their land for redistribution among English landlords, and obstruction of attempts at reform. "Each effort made to right their land against," he states, "The bitter winds of evil chance annulled" (Hickey, "Michael" 39). Michael, in line with contemporary emphasis on the land question, foregrounds the issue of absentee landlordism, the fact that English landlords care only to extract profit from tenants (who suffered an economic depression following the Great Famine) and visit Ireland solely when they want to further exploit the land by hunting:

> Her industries made one mere ruin-heap;
>
> Her acres gript by men who only cared

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[37] Hickey's note reads, "after the battle of Aughrim, 'an eyewitness who looked from the hill the next day said that the country for miles around was whitened with the naked bodies of the slain. It looked, he remarked with grim vividness, like an immense pasture covered with flocks of sheep!' Ireland, in 'The Story of the Nations' series" (Hickey, *Michael Villiers, Idealist* 191). The quotation is taken from page 294 of Lawless's *The Story of Ireland*.

> To wring their rent, unwitting what it cost,
>
> And only saw the houses and the lands
>
> He owned across Saint George's Channel, when
>
> The time of year to beat the coverts came. (Hickey, "Michael" 39)

Finally, Michael also criticises Moore's hypocritical tendency to aestheticise the Irish landscape and people while ignoring the practical reality of their lives. "You hate your native land," he tells his friend, "Except for tickling your aesthetic sense / With her brave mountains, and her quick sea's breath" (Hickey, "Michael" 40). Gordon can maintain a casual indifference to famine in his homeland, for instance, by donating a guinea to alleviate hunger in Ireland while joking about the need to civilise and Christianise the "mere heathens" (Hickey, "Michael" 41). As Leighton and Reynolds note, Michael's speech is "particularly interesting for its hard-headed analysis of the links between colonial domination and poverty, both material and psychological" (482). The dramatic form of Hickey's verse novel allows Michael to articulate his political views in direct speech. He addresses the Irish Question through dialogue, confronting his friend's belief in the legitimacy of British rule and his complicity in the perpetuation of Irish stereotypes in order to debate and repudiate his views, demonstrating instead that colonialism in Ireland has resulted in economic devastation and loss of cultural heritage. Moore is admittedly a one-dimensional character whose function here is to allow Michael to voice his beliefs, but the emphasis on dialogue implies that conversation itself is what is important. The lack of narrative contextualisation (as readers, we have no idea when or where this conversation takes place nor the events that prompted it) makes discussion the most prominent action in the verse novel. Michael desires change, but he does not advocate revolution, nor does he pursue parliamentary

action, refusing to run as an MP: “I touch no Irish politics” (Hickey, “Michael” 74).[38] The bare dramatic format of “Michael Villiers” suggests that Michael’s idealism rests on the belief that dialogue can effect change, that rhetorical persuasion is the method by which he can persuade people around him to change their politics. However, as the final two sections argue, the degree to which he succeeds is limited, and ultimately he turns to song to imagine the utopian future that he cannot create.

“He has made me see my duty better”: Dialogue as a Limited Form of Action

Ultimately, Hickey’s verse novel suggests the moderate effectiveness of Michael’s discursive approach in effecting change. Over the course of the verse novel, Michael conducts conversations not only about the Irish Question but also about the class inequality that he observes in England on his family’s estate. Even as a child, he questions the legitimacy of the economic privilege related to his social class, asking Sir William “why do rich folk hunt and fish and ride, / And go to balls, and poor folk work all day?” (Hickey, “Michael” 17). A working-class man “works the whole day long whene’er he can, / And sometimes has not any work to do, / And then he has no money,” he points out to his uncle, whereas “Uncle Will, / You’ve lots of money and you do not work; / I should so like to know the reason why” (Hickey, “Michael” 18). According to Sir William, social hierarchies are natural and necessary. “These things are all ordained, my lad,” he tells Michael: “There must be rich and poor in every land” (Hickey, “Michael” 18) because all classes have their duties, the poor to work and the rich the

[38] In the historical context of the verse novel’s publication, Michael’s refusal to run as an MP may relate to the disappointment of Parnell’s supporters when the Home Rule bill fell through because of his involvement in the O’Shea divorce case.

responsibility to care for the poor. Even "If every man had equal share to-day / In all the wealth that England's owner of," Sir William insists, that wealth would still naturally redistribute according to the intrinsic class order: "A year hence one man would be twice as rich, / Another in the workhouse" (Hickey, "Michael" 18).

Unconvinced by his uncle's response that social hierarchy—and thus their place among the leisure class—is natural and necessary, Michael continues to question the class system, and Book IV features another lengthy conversation that comprises over seven pages of the verse novel. Michael responds to a similar argument made by his friend Arthur Grey, who echoes Sir William in arguing that class order is inherent in nature: "Dame Nature makes an aristocracy," he tells Michael, "There's no democracy with her, my friend" (Hickey, "Michael" 35). Paradoxically, however, Arthur first implies that there are no barriers that prevent exceptional working-class people from taking advantage of the free market ("All things are free to all in this free land" [Hickey, "Michael" 27], he states). Michael refutes this position by pointing out that social and economic factors make this prospect a near impossibility. To illustrate the flaws in Arthur's thinking, Michael offers the match girl (whose representation is possibly influenced by the high-profile Bryant and May Match Girls' Strike in the East End of London in 1888) as an example of a worker impeded not by legal but financial circumstances. While there is no law preventing her from leaving her low-paying job, he concedes, the cost of doing so would be not just her livelihood but her life, for "if she do not work, she starves" (Hickey, "Michael" 29).[39]

[39] According to Lowell J. Satre, match-workers made approximately 8s per week (11) and were prone to a condition called "phossy jaw," necrosis of the jaw and teeth, which was caused by exposure to the white phosphorus in which the matches were dipped (9). The strike, which protested the low wages and the fines that women faced for striking, contributed to the establishment of unions such as the Matchgirls' Union and helped improve workers' rights.

The exchange here allows the two characters to lay out both sides of the argument and emphasises Michael's efforts to effect change through debate.

Late in the verse novel, Sir William testifies to the effectiveness of Michael's conversational approach. In a monologue in Book IX, he addresses an unknown, silent auditor in an undetermined context (an evocation of the dramatic monologue genre that foregrounds the importance of a character's expression of direct speech). Sir William concedes that Michael has convinced him of the necessity of altering his behaviour as a landlord: "He has made me see my duty better, sir, / Than I had seen it, I'm ashamed to own," for "Ere his keen eyes had looked into the ways / Of my good agent and the hand he played / In that poor God-forgotten country"—a reference to Sir William's property manager in Ireland—"I knew not, no, nor cared; I know and care / A little now; it's owing to the boy" (Hickey, "Michael" 65). The timespan of Sir William's personal evolution is unspecified, but he explicitly identifies his conversations with Michael as the cause of his newfound social consciousness, emphasising the importance of gradual change through dialogue. He unequivocally credits his new social consciousness to Michael's influence, expressing that he understands Michael's viewpoint and recognises the validity of attempting to see things from another person's perspective: "Look through his eyes, you'll see a trifle more / Than through the eyes of men like you and me: / And to see more is not so bad a thing" (Hickey, "Michael" 66). The implication is that dialogue will effect gradual change, a position that corresponds to a Whig theory of progressive history. The change suggested here is not substantial; Sir William's comments merely imply that his attitude has shifted from indifference to relative sympathy and that some material conditions for the tenants have been improved. There is nothing to indicate that the landlord-tenant system itself is radically altered or that tenants are any closer to proprietorship over their land. In other words, the economic and class

hierarchies that Michael wants to reform remain in place, demonstrating that his idealistic approach to effecting change through dialogue is only moderately successful.

By the end of the verse novel, Michael seems to have figured out how to act on a small scale as well. In Book XII, a friend of Michael's attests to the latter's attempt to transform his words into action, relating that, in what seems to be the context of the Land War, Michael's "tenants pay their rents, the rents he'll take / With more than just abatement for the loss of crops and cattle, and badness of the times" (Hickey, "Michael" 74). Because Michael is willing to adjust the rent rates of his tenants in recognition of their economic difficulties, his tenants "shoot behind no hedge on his estate— / . . . / Nor hough the cattle, nor burn them in their byres" (Hickey, "Michael" 74). Such references to hamstringing cattle (according to the *OED*, one meaning of *hough* is "to disable by cutting the sinew or tendons of the hough . . . to hamstring" ["hough," v., 1.]) and burning cow-houses allude to the practices of the Land League, who would carry out acts like these as a form of protest against landlords.[40] The fact that Michael seems to be exempt from this kind of retaliation demonstrates that his willingness to reduce the rent rather than evict his tenants, an attempt to translate his idealism into action, has resulted in positive change. Moreover, in the penultimate book of the verse novel, Michael announces to his friend Arthur Grey his intention to return the Irish land he has inherited after his uncle's recent death to the tenants, freehold:

> the house and lands my uncle owned
> On that dear soil where dear my mother sleeps,
> I give them over to the Irish folk,

[40] When the Land Act of 1870 proved unsuccessful, the issue of land became even more prominent, escalating in the Land War of 1879-82, during which parliament again failed to pass a bill that adequately protected the rights of tenants (the House of Lords rejected a Compensation for Disturbance Bill in 1880 [Bew 318]), and, as discussed above, violent agitation by the Irish National Land League protesting the existing land-tenure system followed.

To use them in the way that all must need,

Whatever be their faith and politics. (Hickey, “Michael” 80)

Although there is not considerable attention paid to education in the dialogue throughout the verse novel, Michael devotes the estate itself to education: “Lisnagh Castle, lands and tenements, / Will be the William Villiers College” (Hickey, “Michael” 80). He also commits Villiers Keep to helping the poor, insisting that he and Lucy will surrender their higher social status in favour of attempting to create a socialist haven in the spirit of the house of God in Heaven:

For Villiers Keep; we think the Keep will be

A help and comfort unto some of those

Who need such help and comfort; châtelaine

And lord we shall not be, but two that seek

To make the home-light they are blest withal

Shine for a few at least of such as wait

Weary and footsore till the day shall see

The opening of the many-mansioned home. (Hickey, “Michael” 81)

His commitment to restoring the land in Ireland to his tenants and working for economic, social, and political reform for the disenfranchised working class has additional implications about how to conduct action for political reform. His declaration of intent—which comes at the conclusion of the work and looks beyond the parameters of the story to an action that will not be represented within the boundaries of this narrative—conveys a broader political message about the necessity of working toward reform through dialogue and consultation, slowly and as part of a collective, in contrast to the alternative of radical revolution, which Michael opposes as antithetical to true socialism. Yet Michael’s dream of an ideal world remains abstract because he does not know

how to realise that vision. Michael manages to effect only small-scale change. He transforms his own estate and uses his own resources (much as Romney tries to do in *Aurora Leigh*) to improve the lives of others, but how to achieve large-scale change remains an elusive goal. As the next section will address, the only way that the verse novel can imagine such change is through lyric, particularly song.

"For uttering what I cannot say unrimed": Embedded Songs and Imagined Futures

So far in this chapter, I have focused on the dramatic form of "Michael Villiers," arguing that the use of dialogue models the way that Michael develops his politics through debate and attempts to effect moderate change by engaging people in dialogue. In this section, I turn to the embedded songs in the verse novel to consider the function of the lyric form in contrast to that of the dramatic form. There are four lyrics in "Michael Villiers," two of which are explicitly identified as songs and one of which responds to a song in the same stanzaic form and which I therefore read as a song. The first is a patriotic song in Book VII that addresses Ireland as the motherland; the second is a song that Michael writes for Lucy to tell her they cannot be together because he fears it will compromise their important social work; and the third is Lucy's response, in which she is able to imagine and reassure Michael of their future together. These songs recall poems in Tennyson's *The Princess* (introduced in the third edition, 1850) that are similarly embedded in the narrative such as "O, Swallow, Swallow," "Tears, Idle Tears," and "Come Down, O Maid."

As lyric poetry critic Elizabeth Helsinger points out in *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2015), other Victorian works that combine song with other forms of verse or with prose include Algernon Charles Swinburne's novel *Lesbia Brandon (*1868) and

epic poem *Tristram of Lyonnesse* (1882), as well as Tennyson's monodrama "Maud" (1855) and narrative cycle *Idylls of the King* (1859-85). These songs, she argues, are interruptive, their function being to introduce "a contrasting mode of thought and perception to bear on the action of the longer work, suggesting a fundamental difference between what song does and what language in more narrative or discursive modes can effect" (Helsinger 42). Songs can disrupt time, for instance: in Tennyson's "The Lotus Eaters" (1832), for example, "part of song's power . . . is to suspend time, or to set in motion a wholly different perception of its presence and relation to past and future" (Helsinger 43). Helsinger detects a self-estrangement in the way that the singers sing about the memories of their lives but do not seek to recapture those lives, "curiously detached from selves they have not completely forgotten" (44). Song might also revive the past, as when one of Ida's handmaidens sings "Tears, Idle Tears" in *The Princess* (1850). As Helsinger observes, the bygone days described in the lyrics are resuscitated through the song, and so long as the song continues, it estranges the singer and listeners from the present moment because "music immerses us in an apparently unending moment; it makes the past present" (Helsinger 44). The power of the song thus can be to estrange and disrupt the narrative as a way of commenting upon it.

Crucially, Helsinger argues that the inclusion of a song poem in Victorian poetry can also be a way of reimagining social relations. Tennyson, she contends, "first turned to the classical idyl to imagine the reordering of human relationships around song. Against a backdrop of seriously disturbed class relationships in rural England during the 1820s and 1830s, he brought together two or more male friends who exchange songs" in poems such as "Audley Court," written in 1838 and published in 1842, and *The Princess*, published in 1847 and revised in 1850 (Helsinger 51). In the short poem "Audley Court," the narrator and his friend Francis, a farmer's

son, discuss a variety of issues over a picnic, including "the corn-laws, where we split" (Tennyson, "Audley" 195), and then trade songs ("He sang his song, and I replied with mine"), the poem then finishing with the reconciliatory line "we were glad at heart" (Tennyson, "Audley" 196, 197). In *The Princess*, seven male college students, visiting the estate of one of their friends, tell a story in which they each contribute a part, and their female companions sing in between the sections of the narrative. According to Helsinger, in these social interactions,

> The gift of song, or rather singing for and among friends, comments obliquely on contemporary social discord (both class and gender) while it models a possible if utopian solution. For Tennyson the exchange of song enacts the generosity that is currently missing from social relations (especially hierarchal relationships of landowner and labourer, husband and wife) but characterizes friendship and companionate marriage. (51)

Part of the generosity of song, for Helsinger, stems from the context of its production and its legacy as a shared cultural form. "Embedded songs may be offered as traditional or folk songs of anonymous authorship and collective production and reproduction," as the production of two or more people working together to make music, "or as the overheard, remembered, or repeated songs of other singers, the performances of other occasions" (Helsinger 55). In many cases of embedded songs, then—although we know them to have been written by the authors of the larger work in which they are embedded (by Scott or Tennyson or Hickey, etc.)—the origin of the song and the identity of the original singer are unknown or unattributed in the context of the narrative. The songs are therefore not necessarily attached to a single individual voice but to many voices: "they are indeed not the exclusive expression of any single voice, but rather impersonal, or perhaps more accurately, multi-personal, multiply voiced and revoiced," "presented as not only

verbally but socially generated and generative performances" that belong to many singers (Helsinger 55). As shared cultural artifacts, songs are an egalitarian form of communication: they belong to everyone and can be sung by anyone. Collectively produced and owned, they serve as an ideal form for reimagining social relations.

I have discussed the juxtaposition of lyric with other forms of verse or prose in the chapters on *Denzil Place* and *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*. However, while the lyric poems in *Denzil Place* are not embedded within the narrative but serve as poems that thematically inflect our reading of the narrative, and the ballad in *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* is read rather than sung, the lyrics in Hickey's verse novel are explicitly embedded in the narrative as sung poems. In "Michael Villiers," the embedded songs offer space for imaginative possibility, for characters—particularly Michael—to imagine an ideal future. There are three songs incorporated in "Michael Villiers," and their difference from the main narrative is emphasised typographically. As Helsinger notes of works by poets such as Swinburne and Tennyson, embedded songs are often "set off by font or by quotations marks, indentation, or a surround of white space on a page" (53) and visually stand out from the rest of the text. In Hickey's verse novel, the songs are heavily indented and surrounded by more white space than is the rest of the text, enclosed in quotation marks, and are in rhymed stanzas (in contrast to the blank verse of the rest of the verse novel). The first song comprises almost the entirety of Book VII, and it is a patriotic song in eight sestets (rhyme abcbdb) that envisions a future of Irish independence. In response to the statement of a young, unnamed man that "The world has grown too wise for patriotism," Michael counters, "Perhaps! then let us be behind our time; / A whit more foolish than our fellows are; / And love the land that bore us best of all!" (Hickey, "Michael" 46). It is unclear if only Michael sings, or if he is joined by other singers, but the first

two stanzas both begin with the question "What do we owe our country," a query that immediately invites the listener to imagine the future, to consider what action Ireland can expect from her countrymen on her behalf. The third stanza then states that

> Our mother-land that bare us,
>   Her face is set
> Steadfastly toward the winning
>   Of freedom yet;
> Her heart is strong, though her eyelids
>   With tears be wet. (Hickey, "Michael" 47)

The song personifies Ireland as looking toward the future, her anticipation of imminent liberty emphasised by the rhyme of "set" and "yet," her face determinedly fixed upon what is yet to come. The freedom she looks toward is the "Freedom to work for the people / Whose kin we are," as well as the "Freedom to be lawmakers / To make, not mar," and, finally, the "Freedom to be lawkeepers, / With never a bar" (Hickey, "Michael" 47). The song aspires to a unity that transcends politics and is based on a feeling of fellowship: "What is a sect or a party / To those who love?" the song asks in the sixth stanza, proposing "Let us"— the "us" grouping together the singers and listeners within the narrative, as well as the readers of the verse novel—"take hands, O brothers, / And surely prove, / True hearts, mankind's and country's, / Nothing shall move" (Hickey, "Michael" 48). The song imagines an ideal future in which national boundaries and social hierarchies are dissolved, where everyone works for one another in the spirit of unity, "Each of us servant of others, / Servant of all" (Hickey, "Michael" 48). The position of the song underlines the centrality of this dream to the work as a whole: placed in the middle of the verse novel, in the seventh of fourteen books, the song imagines a utopian future for Ireland that the

characters do not know how to reach and that seems attainable only in song. The ambiguity of the singer, furthermore—the uncertainty about whether Michael sings alone or as part of a group—means that the song is not attributable to one voice but is representative of the verse novel as a whole. As Michael's idealistic discursive approach to effecting change proves limited, song is the only way to radically imagine a utopian future.[41]

The second embedded song in the verse novel allows Michael to imagine how he might reconcile romantic love and his desire to effect change. In Book VIII, Michael—convinced that marriage will compromise both his and Lucy's respective efforts to dedicate themselves to social reform—struggles to tell Lucy that they cannot marry. Yet ordinary speech cannot accommodate what he needs to express, so he resorts to song: "Burd Lucy," he tells her, "I have made a little song, / For uttering what I cannot say unrimed" (Hickey, "Michael" 53). In four quatrains of abab rhyme, Michael sings their story to her as a ballad:

> 'Burd Lucy and Childe Michael,
>
> Two comrades true were they;
>
> Childe Michael loved Burd Lucy
>
> For ever and a day.
>
> 'Alas! alas! Childe Michael
>
> Had fallen on evil times,
>
> To reap an evil sowing
>
> Of blunders and of crimes. (Hickey, "Michael" 54)

[41] The association of song with radical politics and the working-class predates Hickey in works such as Eliza Cook's "A Song: To 'The People' of England," published in the *London Journal* in 1848 in support of the Chartist petition, the Chartist poet Ernest Jones's *Chartist Songs and Fugitive Pieces* (1848) and *Songs for Democracy* (1855), and William Morris's *Chants for Socialists* (1885).

He concludes:

> 'And so it was, Childe Michael,
>   Who loved his comrade so,
> Must face his life in loneness,
>   And let Burd Lucy go.
>
> 'There was but fear and trouble,
>   (God send it soon surcease!)
> No time to build fair houses,
>   To marry and increase.
>
> 'No time for aught but striving,
>   With fasting and with prayer,
> Against the powers of evil,
>   All strong to do and dare.
>
> 'Some day, some day, hereafter,
>   When calmer grows the weather,
> Two friends that here were parted
>   May meet and walk together.' (Hickey, "Michael" 54-55)

Lucy replies with a "rime" also, and although this one is not sung aloud—Michael reads it in a letter—it follows the same stanzaic structure and rhyme as Michael's song (with one extra stanza), suggesting that it too should be read as a song. Indeed, the first stanza is identical

because in this song Lucy rewrites the future that Michael imagines in a more optimistic way. Whereas Michael sees only the "evil times" (Hickey, "Michael" 54) that necessitate their separation and "loneness" (Hickey, "Michael" 54) and can only imagine their relationship in a far-off future when the crises they face are over—"When calmer grows the weather" (Hickey, "Michael" 55)—Lucy revises Michael's song by imagining their future instead as an immediate one in which "They drank from common pewter" and "ate from common delf," in a home with "some great fairness, / Love being there himself" (Hickey, "Michael" 55). More importantly, she counters the notion that they must work alone, imagining instead that marriage and reform work can be complementary. However, even though she comforts him that this future is closer than he believes, she still draws on medieval imagery and language. In the absence of practical ideas for achieving the ideal world that Michael and Lucy aspire to, Hickey's verse novel draws here on the rhetorical strategy of invoking an idealised medieval past to imagine a better future (important, as noted above, in the works of writers such as William Morris). Drawing on medieval balladic language, she concludes her rime with an image of their union that envisions them fighting together for good in the future:

> Upon the hilts cross-shapen
>   Burd Lucy laid her hand,
> And sware to help Childe Michael
>   To battle for his land. (Hickey, "Michael" 56)

With the rhyme of "hand" and "land," Lucy seems to be both offering her hand in marriage and pledging her hand—that is, her aid—to work for Michael's Irish cause, the mention of land here evoking the reference to Ireland as the motherland in the earlier song. These songs thus build on

the song from Book VII, which imagines a utopian future for Ireland, by imagining Lucy and Michael fighting for that future together.

Finally, “Michael Villiers” ends with a poem that, although not identified explicitly as a song in the way the other embedded poems are, similarly imagines the shaping of a future ideal world. Book XIV is comprised solely of a dramatic lyric in which Michael addresses Lucy:

‘Burd Lucy, who have put your hand in mine,
And laid that head of yours upon my breast;
Burd Lucy, who have crowned me on the brows
With a fair crown which once I feared to wear;
We stand together, my beloved, we two,
And front the future with unfearing eyes.
We have not solved the mystery of our world,
But yet have seen the heaving of its breast
With the great love which throbs for aye beneath:
And we trust God and man, and we go on
To live out what we think to be the truth.
We who believe in man, ay, and in men;
We who would work as if upon our work
Hung the supremest issue; and would wait
As if our patience had the key of heaven.
We who have clasped this faith unto our hearts,
God never wastes, but only spends; although
Man’s eyes unpurged discern not use from waste.

And, for the day which we believe will be,

We love and work for that; and go in faith

That He who comes will come, whate'er the time.

'The world that's gravid with a truth may go

Centuries of centuries ere her travailing;

Or, in the twinkling of an eye, her throes

May come upon her, and the child be born.' (Hickey, "Michael" 93-94)

Like Aurora and Romney at the end of *Aurora Leigh*, Michael here looks toward an ideal world that he and Lucy will shape together. Specifically, the poem imagines something that has so far been unattainable in the verse novel—large-scale action—by looking both toward the commitment they will share equally as a married couple and toward a shift in genre. In its review of *Michaal Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems*, the *National Observer* pointed out that the ending of Hickey's verse novel "somehow recalls Browning's 'O lyric love'" ("Minor Verse" 412), his address to the late EBB in his 1868-69 verse novel, *The Ring and the Book*. The reviewer seems unable to pinpoint the nature of the resemblance between Hickey's final words in "Michael Villiers" and Browning's in *The Ring and the Book* ("it *somehow* recalls"), but I contend that the function of the address in each poem is the same: the invocation of the muse. In *The Ring and the Book*—a work that Hickey would have known well—Browning's address to his wife occurs in Book I (line 1391), following epic convention by placing the invocation of the muse at the beginning of the poem. However, Hickey's positioning of the invocation to the muse at the end of her verse novel suggests that the action Michael has not been able to effect in the verse novel is still imminent and will manifest on an epic scale. The possibility of Lucy's presence as an

auditor, in contrast to EBB as an absent addressee in *The Ring and the Book*, further emphasises the future orientation of Michael's lyric address. The poem is, like the earlier songs, an imaginative moment, in this case one that looks toward an epic narrative, promising a resolution to the problem of action confronted in "Michael Villiers" while cleverly sidestepping having to represent what that action will be.

Conclusion: Public Political Poetics

"Michael Villiers" is an important work in the history of the Victorian verse novel, one combining lyric and dramatic forms to address contemporary social and political issues. How then to account for its omission from literary history? Its absence may be due in part to Hickey herself. As Richard Tobias explains in his entry on Hickey in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and Collins reiterates in her introduction to *Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology 1870-1970*, Hickey converted to Catholicism in 1901 and renounced her first three volumes of poetry, including *Michael Villiers, Idealist and Other Poems*, after her conversion (Tobias 171, Collins 25). I do not know what kind of impact Hickey's verse novel had on readers aside from the reviews that I have cited throughout this chapter, but, according to Dinnis, it was "by the author's own hand that the *Michael Villiers* volume was destined to end its career" (36). According to Tobias, "Hickey tried to suppress the poem because one line in it expresses doubt as to the divinity of Christ," but he emphasises that the issue "is larger than the single line: Villiers believes that human efforts can solve human problems," and "such secularism was anathema to Hickey's later religious convictions" (170). The volume was thus "consigned to oblivion," an act that Hickey apparently later regretted (Dinnis 36).

In the entry on Hickey in *Catholic Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, Woodall observes that although Hickey's poetry had long addressed religious themes, it took on a reduced scope after her conversion: "religious motifs are located throughout the texts Hickey produced before and after her conversion," but "the difference between the two periods is that her focus shifts from one that seeks answers within the context of a generalized Christianity to another that has found them in the narrow confines of Catholic dogma" (156). "Her pre-conversion secular love poems, biographical and critical articles, and short stories," Woodall explains, "were replaced by an effort to locate Catholicism in every topic she addressed," including identifying "Catholic influences on English literature in several articles" and showing "that authors known not to be members of the faith, such as Shakespeare and Milton, nevertheless employed ideas and motifs derived from a Catholic heritage" (157). Many critics, then and now, consider this emphasis on Catholicism to have essentially ended Hickey's career in mainstream literary culture. Collins, for example, states that "her later poems are greatly weakened by their lack of originality and their tendency towards assertion" (25), and Hickey seems to have recognized that the religious focus of her work would marginalise her as an author. According to Woodall, she surrendered what popular and critical success she had gained because "she truly believed she was doing God's work by devoting her skills and talents to the Church" at a point "when Catholics still existed on the fringes of 'polite society' in England" (159).

Yet although Hickey later disavowed "Michael Villiers" due to her religious views, the book in which it appears is nonetheless a work that presents a public political poetics in the vein of *Aurora Leigh*. Whereas the story in "Michael Villiers" is structured around private conversations, with little action occurring (Michael does not actually become involved in

parliamentary politics, for example), the publication of the volume was a deliberate act that disseminated its political ideas to the public, and its dramatic form served—and still serves—as an invitation for readers to engage in the dialogue it presents. Particularly since the verse novel is the title work of the book, the volume introduces potential readers to Michael as the idealist figure whose opinions they will read and to which they will respond. The verse novel models a discursive approach to effecting gradual reform on a local level, but it does not resolve the question of how to implement large-scale change. Only at the end, with a gesture toward an epic narrative to come, does Hickey suggest that effective action will occur, but she avoids indicating what that action will look like. Michael commits to action on a parochial scale by resolving to change the way that his own land is owned and managed, but the verse novel does not explain how his and Lucy's work will continue to effect change on a larger scale—how, even, their ideas will gain a larger platform. In one way, therefore, Hickey neatly circumvents having to solve the problem of action that she presents; however, in another way, the publication of the book is the action, the way that the idealistic political views that Michael espouses make their way into the world.

CODA

This dissertation began with a simple question: after EBB published *Aurora Leigh*, the verse novel she referred to as a "poem of a new class," in 1856, who were her female successors in the genre? Because of its importance in the history of the verse novel and the history of women's writing, *Aurora Leigh* has overshadowed the works of other female verse novelists in Victorian studies scholarship. This dissertation has sought to correct this underrepresentation by recovering neglected verse novels written by women poets in the late nineteenth century. By focusing on non-canonical verse novels by understudied late Victorian women writers, my work makes two significant contributions to scholarship: one, it illustrates the longevity of the verse novel in the nineteenth century, disproving the claim made by critics such as Natasha Moore who contend that the genre "die[d] out" (Moore 199) after the late 1860s or early 1870s; and two, it demonstrates how the innovative generic experiments of late-century women poets intersect with politics. Building on the research of earlier feminist scholars in the field, I have produced four case studies that show how Webster, Fane, Pfeiffer, and Hickey combined different poetic and novelistic genres in different ways—through smooth- or rough-mixing—to address political issues. Like *Aurora Leigh*, "Lota," *Denzil Place*, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, and "Michael Villiers" are all feminist works that politicise genre. Webster, Fane, and Pfeiffer address women's political, social, and legal marginalisation, while Hickey asserts a woman's right to speak about class and nationalist politics. My dissertation recovers a previously unrecognised part of literary history by revealing the social and political critiques performed by the different kinds of generic combinations in their verse novels and demonstrates that not only

did the verse novel survive well past the 1870s but it also served as an important literary genre for late Victorian women poets.

Chapter 1 argued that “Lota” smoothly mixes the *Bildungsroman* and the dramatic monologue in a “double poem,” Isobel Armstrong’s term for a work in which two poems exist simultaneously, one expressive and one skeptical, the latter making the former an object of critique. “Lota” both tells the story of Gervase’s growth and incorporates the irony of the dramatic monologue to question how that story is shaped by Gervase’s subjectivity. When the narrative is focalised through Gervase, “Lota” appears to follow the conventional arc of the *Bildungsroman* toward the closure of the marriage plot, but this trajectory is disrupted by Lota’s embedded first-person narrative in Part II, in which she tells her own story for the first time and provides a counter-narrative of failed marriage and female disenfranchisement. “Lota” thus ironises the story of male development, illustrating how it not only exists alongside but also perpetuates the story of female disenfranchisement. “Lota” equates voice with representation, particularly the agency to speak and act on one’s own behalf, and I relate this politicisation of voice to Webster’s middle-class feminist politics, specifically her involvement in the contemporary campaign to extend the franchise to women in the Second Reform Act. By highlighting the problem of a single male perspective mediating the portrayal of women’s experiences, Webster’s verse novel demonstrates the importance of women’s narrative—and by extension, political—self-representation.

Chapter 2 argued that *Denzil Place: A Story in Verse* evokes sympathy for the adultery of its female protagonist through its rough-mixing of lyric and narrative verse. In the narrative, the first-person narrator sympathetically describes Constance’s arranged marriage as bondage and presents her infidelity as an act of agency, a disruption of the banal life of an upper-class married

woman. The lyrics that interrupt the narrative, unattributed to a particular voice, compel the reader to identify with the emotional expression of the lyric subject and, through proximity to the narrative, also evoke sympathy for Constance. Fane, herself an unhappily married woman who had multiple affairs, challenges the stigma associated with women's extramarital sexual activity in the mid-1870s, particularly after the passing of legislation such as the Matrimonial Causes Act and the Contagious Diseases Acts, by highlighting issues of agency and consent.

Chapter 3 argued that Emily Pfeiffer's *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock, and How It Grew* mixes verse and prose in a complex frame narrative that critiques conventional Victorian middle-class marital ideology and provides an alternative model of marital union. In its overt, uneven generic combination and embedded narrative structure, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* rejects the concept of complete unity in marriage. According to the doctrine of coverture, a woman was considered her husband's property, so under the law marital rape was not a crime, as Pfeiffer's embedded poem underscores. In the context of contemporary arguments for women's enfranchisement, *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock* emphasises the importance of women's autonomy. Its roughly mixed prose narrative and embedded ballad also present a different model of marriage: a union in which spouses retain individual agency rather than being absorbed into one unit. By invoking two cases of dispossession, women in marriage and Scotland (the Highlands and Islands in particular) in the United Kingdom, Pfeiffer's work critiques the idea of unity in which a person or country is absorbed into another and loses distinction and autonomy.

Finally, chapter 4 argued that Emily Hickey's "Michael Villiers, Idealist," less smoothly mixed than "Lota," is an episodic, minimally descriptive narrative that combines lyric and dramatic forms to convey its utopian idealism about issues of class inequality and Irish Home Rule. Like *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock,* "Michael Villiers" addresses a broader political

scope than “Lota” and *Denzil Place* by going beyond the issues faced by middle-class woman and commenting upon class relations and national politics. Rejecting revolutionary action and parliamentary reform, “Michael Villiers” instead advocates a discursive, politically moderate approach to solving these problems, one the verse novel models through its emphasis on dialogue. This approach ultimately turns out to be inadequate, and the verse novel shifts from dialogue to lyric and song to imagine a utopian future characterised by class equality and Irish sovereignty. The last book of the verse novel alludes to an imminent epic narrative in which the large-scale action that Michael has so far not managed to effect will occur, never specifying what it will be.

The open-ended conclusion of Hickey’s verse novel invites us to think about what happens to the genre itself after the publication of “Michael Villiers, Idealist” in 1891. The chronological arrangement of my case studies risks suggesting that Hickey’s verse novel is simply a deferred endpoint for the genre, with the end of the dissertation giving a false sense of closure to its literary history. In fact, there is no such endpoint for the verse novel. In the years just after the publication of “Michael Villiers,” Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (who, as I mentioned in chapter 2, had a long-time affair with Violet Fane and whose correspondence with her includes references to *Denzil Place*) published two verse novels of his own, *Esther* (1892) and *Griselda: A Society Novel in Rhymed Verse* (1893). The latter, which is about an upper-class woman’s disastrous affair as observed by her unnamed male friend, the first-person narrator, features an epigraph from George Meredith’s 1862 verse novel, “Modern Love,” that indicates its generic self-consciousness. There are, in addition, multiple twentieth-century works in the genre, including Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology* (1916), May Sinclair’s *The Dark Night* (1924), Mina Loy’s “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” (1925), Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Opus 7*

(1931), Alice Duer Miller's *Forsaking All Others* (1931) and *White Cliffs* (1940), Sarah Miles's *Lettice Delmer: A Novel in Verse* (1958), H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt* (1961), Vladimir Nabakov's *Pale Fire* (1962), James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1982), Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), Anthony Burgess's *Byrne* (1995), and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (1998) and *Red Doc>* (2013), among others.[1] The number of works, as well as their critical success, indicates that verse novels are no longer poems of a new class, but those of an established one.

By focusing on the works of Webster, Fane, Pfeiffer, and Hickey, this dissertation expands the critical understanding of both women's poetry and the verse novel in the Victorian period, illustrating that women poets experimented with the genre to address specific political issues. It does not suggest a teleological development of genre according to which these works influenced one another chronologically. Rather, I have sought to revise and diversify the canon of the verse novel, and I would continue to do so in future research. One way of extending this study would be to include other nineteenth-century British verse novels, such as Laura Ormiston Chant's "Verona" (1877), to examine more comprehensively how women poets' liberal and conservative politics relate to the generic combination in their verse novels in the Victorian period. "Verona" (1877) tells the story of a young woman who separates from her fiancé over a disagreement about whether they should raise her cousin's orphaned children. It combines, like Tennyson's *The Princess* and *Denzil Place*, a blank-verse narrative with embedded lyrics, and although Verona, the eponymous protagonist, is an "angel in the house," the verse novel also reflects Chant's feminist politics. According to the *ODNB*, she was a founding member of the

[1] It is also popular genre for modern children's and young adult literature, a trend that has received critical attention in a recent special issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, a journal focusing on children's literature. Volume 42.2 (April 2018) of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, edited by Michelle Ann Abate, features seven articles on verse novels in children's and young adult fiction.

National Society for the Promotion of Women's Suffrage (Levine, "Chant [*née* Dibbin, Laura Ormiston), and like *Denzil Place*, *Margaret; or, the Motherless*, and *The Rhyme of the Lady of the Rock*, "Verona" rejects the idea of marriage as a state of bondage in which women are subservient to their husbands: Verona and Adrian are reunited only when he recognises the injustice of women's social, economic, and political subordination.

Another way of expanding the dissertation would be to turn to the twentieth-century verse novels by women poets such as May Sinclair, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and H. D., generically experimental works that incorporate literary techniques associated with the advent of modernism and often address feminist issues. Sinclair's *The Dark Night*, for example, is a free-verse narrative that, according to Jane Dowson in "*The Dark Night*: 'The Novel into Some Other Form'" (2006), "is worth investigating for its sustained combination of lyricism and imagistic condensation" (139)[2] and the way it "investigates the harm that men and women cause each other in relation to the constitution of marriage and their attempts to break from repressive social conditions" (139). Similar to the way that the case studies in this dissertation relate verse novels to specific political contexts, Dowson suggests that the adultery plot in *The Dark Night* "reflects contemporary debates surrounding the 1923 Matrimonial Causes Bill and other legislation" (145).[3] The conclusion of *The Dark Night* also echoes the endings of *Jane Eyre* and *Aurora Leigh*, when the protagonist, Elizabeth, is reunited with her adulterous husband, now blind. Warner's *Opus 7* is a 32-page verse novel (in the *Collected Poems*) written in couplets that tells the story of an impoverished old woman, Rebecca, who, after the First World War, entrepreneurially starts a flower-selling business to fund her gin-drinking. Like *Denzil Place*, it

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[2] She also notes its "complex psychological realism" (Dowson 151).

[3] As Dowson explains, "for the first time, the terms for divorce, on the grounds of adultery, were the same for women as for men, a decision that could change the balance of power around desire, as Sinclair surely realized" (145).

features an unnamed first-person narrator who is a character in the diegetic universe of the verse novel, and it concludes with the narrator's reflection on her personal experience with the protagonist. Finally, in "Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. as Epic Poets" (1986), Susan Stanford Friedman compares H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt* to EBB's *Aurora Leigh*, finding "striking narrative intertextualities" (203) between them in their disruption of a male epic tradition. "Fusing aspects of the novel and the lyric with the epic," she contends, "Barrett Browning and H. D. developed a strategy that allowed them to revise epic conventions at the same time that they consciously situated themselves within it" (206).[4] As these works illustrate, remaining focused on the nineteenth century and looking forward to the twentieth century are both promising directions for my future research on women's verse novels, which will continue to contribute to Victorian poetry studies by expanding the canon of female verse novelists and thus revising our understanding of both the genre and women's poetry.

[4] In more detail, Friedman argues that "as for Barrett Browning, the contemporary novel was an important source for H. D.'s adaptation of epic narrative convention. She greatly admired many contemporary novelists—particularly Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Henry James, James Joyce, William Faulkner, Conrad Aiken, and Dorothy Richardson. Moreover, in her extensive prose canon of the 1920s and 1930s, H. D. developed her own techniques of interior monologue, shifting points of view, non-chronological sequencing, montage, superimposition of space and time, lyric prose, unifying motifs, and mythic mirroring. Her narrative technique in *Helen in Egypt* borrows more from the modernist prose she was reading and writing than it does from quest (anti)narratives such as *The Cantos*. She retained the language of her lyric—particularly the concentrated, image-centered poetic discourse of Imagism. But she set her Imagist craft within a narrative context based in the modernist novel" (215).

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