

AMBIVALENCE IN VICTORIAN WOMEN'S WRITING: ELLEN WOOD'S  
*EAST LYNNE*, MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON'S *LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET*,  
MARGARET OLIPHANT'S *HESTER*

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

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The simultaneous rise of Victorian women’s movement and the dominance of female authorship and readership in the nineteenth century prompted scholars of Victorian literature to interpret women’s novels as fictional examples of Victorian feminism or anti-feminism. Yet, this study stresses the ambivalent nature of women’s fiction by paying attention to the contradiction between the feminist and subversive content in women’s texts and their anti-feminist and disciplinary treatment. Exemplary underread novels from two opposing literary genres are examined in detail: Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), as representative samples of the sensation genre and Margaret Oliphant’s *Hester* (1883), as an anti-sensational domestic novel. Close readings of these novels and the examination of additional non-fiction writings by Margaret Oliphant demonstrate that (1) Victorian women’s writings cannot be clustered as feminist or anti-feminist, they represent a bifurcated voice due to the disciplinary power that operate on different levels and with varying effects both in the novels (through characterization, plot formation, narrative voice and perspective) and among the texts, the genres and the novelists, (2) the moralizing reading experience can turn into a tool of controlling and disciplining Victorian women

readers (3) although the generic conventions of both the sensation novel and the domestic novel proceed to the disadvantage of the heroine, the ways of disciplining in both genres are different. The sensational narratives display severe and grievous forms of disciplining while the disciplinary power of domestic narratives is subtle, milder and less transparent.

Keywords: Feminism, Anti-feminism, Ambivalence, Underread Fiction, Disciplinary Power

## ÖZ

VİKTORYA DÖNEMİ KADIN YAZARLARDA DUYGU KARMAŞASI:  
ELLEN WOOD'UN *EAST LYNNE*, MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON'UN  
*LADY AUDLEY'NİN SIRRI* VE MARGARET OLIPHANT'IN *HESTER*  
BAŞLIKLİ ROMANLARI

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Viktorya dönemi kadın hareketi ve kadınların dönem edebiyatında yazar, okur ve roman kahramanı olarak ön plana çıkmaya başlamasının eşzamanlı ortaya çıkışı dönemin edebiyatı üzerine çalışan araştırmacılarda kadın yazarların eserlerini feminist ya da anti-feminist olarak sınıflandırma eğilimini tetiklemiştir. Fakat, bu çalışma, kadın eserlerindeki feminist öğelerin anti-feminist ve disiplin edici şekilde ele alınma yollarına bakarak, kadın yazarlardaki duygu karmaşasına odaklanır. Bu bağlamda, dönemin birbirinden oldukça farklı iki roman türü olan sansasyonel roman (*sensation novel*) ve domestik roman (*domestic novel*) türlerinden basıldıkları zamanda çok satan eserler oldukları halde günümüzde genellikle uzmanlar tarafından bilinen üç roman karşılaştırmalı olarak çalışılmaktadır. Sansasyonel roman örnekleri olarak Ellen Wood'un *East Lynne* (1861) ile Mary Elizabeth Braddon'un *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* (1862) ve domestik roman örneği olarak ise Margaret Oliphant'ın *Hester* (1883) başlıklı romanları detaylı incelenir. Bu çalışma, ayrıca, Margaret Oliphant'ın sansasyonel roman eleştirileri ile dönemin kadın hakereti üzerine yazdığı makalelerin feminist okumasını da yapar. Tüm bunlar, öncelikle, Viktorya dönemi kadın edebiyatının feminist ya da anti-feminist olarak sınıflandırılmayacağını gösterir. Aksine,

kadın yazını, romanlar, edebi türler ve yazarların kendileri arasında işleyen iktidar ilişkilerinin de etkisi altında bir tür duygu karmaşası içinde gelişmiştir. İkinci olarak, bu metinler anlatıların zaman zaman ahlaki bir derse dönüşebilen nitelikleri nedeniyle kadın okurlarının duygu ve davranışlarını kontrol etme ve şekillendirme aracına dönüşebilir. Son olarak, iki roman türü de ana kadın kahramanı dezavantajlı bir konuma sürükler fakat kadın karakterler ve okurlar üzerinde iktidar kurma yöntemleri birbirinden farklıdır. Sansasyonel romanlar daha keskin kontrol yöntemleri kullanırken, domestik romanlardaki kontrol mekanizmaları gündelik ilişkiler içine işlemiştir ve çok sert olmayabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Feminizm, Anti-feminizm, Duygu Karmaşası, İhmal Edilmiş Eserler, İktidar

To my son Alaz İhsan Çelik  
who was born to dissertation-writing parents and could still retain a lively spirit



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Considering the outstanding influence of what was then called the Woman Question and the emergence of a respectable number of women novelists in Victorian Britain, it is no surprise that there is a tendency among Victorianists to label Victorian women's writing as feminist or anti-feminist. However, the present study considers such labeling restrictive and is closer to the idea that Victorian women's writings' relation to the Woman Question is more complicated than this. The way women writers handle some major concerns of the Victorian women's movement such as marriage, divorce, women's education and work as well as the way they treat women characters and their conduct in their novels are highly ambivalent. At times they are sympathetic while at other times they sound resistant or unsympathetic. That means, feminist and anti-feminist aspects generally co-exist in women's writing, which is why women's novels vacillate between feminism and anti-feminism. They resist rigid categorizations as ambivalent texts.

The Victorian society can be described as a bifurcated society. The Victorians were living in an age of transition and doubt because of the enormous technological developments, unexpected evolutionary findings, psychological and political studies and discussions. They were rigid, religious and disciplined but it is possible to see signs of resistance especially in the literature of the period. Thus, the literary texts of the Victorian era can be regarded as a battle-field, where the emancipatory discourses meet and compete with the repressive discourses. This can be observed in Victorian women's writing, too, as a result of which they end up being neither feminist nor anti-feminist, but ambivalent. In this respect, this study argues that the ambivalence in women's writings occurs mostly as a result

of the contradiction between the unconventional, feminist undertones in the texts and their anti-feminist, disciplinary treatment. As a result, though literature is an apt place to represent women's agency and resistance, in the end, Victorian women's writing could not help becoming a means of controlling and disciplining fictional women characters, women readers, and also, through reviews, criticisms, and politics of canonization, women novelists, too. Thus, Victorian women's texts can be conceived as the representations of the Victorian disciplinary discourse, which was based on rigid dichotomies such as good and evil, aimed to preach women how to live 'properly,' thus was moralistic, didactic and disciplinary. In this study, these issues will be discussed by studying exemplary novels from two contradictory genres, which are generally labelled as 'woman genres' of the Victorian period: the sensation novel and the domestic novel. The most notable novels by three underrepresented women novelists will thus be examined in detail; Ellen Wood's (1814-1887) *East Lynne* (1861), Mary Elizabeth Braddon's (1835-1915) *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), as representative examples of sensation fiction and Margaret Oliphant's (1828-1897) *Hester* (1883), as an anti-sensational domestic novel.

It is true that the Victorian period was the golden age of the novel as a literary genre and the Victorians used novel writing and literary criticism for various reasons. Writing novels was a way of making money for many people, and it may not be wrong to say that reading novels was the major domestic entertainment. The Victorians were ardent novel-devourers, for which they are still famous. Perhaps for this reason, novels were also considered as vehicles of reflecting social problems, disciplining and controlling avid reading populations. This can explain why, in addition to the growing number of novelists, some politicians, too, ventured to write novels because they considered writing novels as a quicker way of reaching the public and influencing their opinions. Among the novel-writing politicians, for instance, Matthew Lewis (1775-1818), a Member of Parliament in the Georgian period and the writer of the famous Gothic novel *The Monk*, and Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), a Tory politician, a Member of



Parliament and also the Prime Minister (1868), can be thought of as notable examples. As a very important political figure in the Victorian period, Benjamin Disraeli's three novels, *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), *Tancred* (1847) are now grouped under the genre called 'The Condition of England Novel,' which aimed at drawing attention to certain economic, social and political problems of the time. All in all, as the dominant literary genre of the Victorian age, the novel was considered very influential in reflecting social problems and shaping communal thoughts, feelings, and the conduct of reading communities.

In such a literary milieu, it is understandable that in addition to being a domain of resistance, Victorian women's writings and their criticism also became vehicles of controlling and disciplining both women readers and writers of the Victorian era. As such, in this study, women's fiction will be considered as 'discourse,' in the way Michel Foucault understands the term; first, as a scholarly discipline which produces knowledge through fictional representations, and second, as a disciplinary practice which functions as a way of exerting power and enabling social control over readers and writers, influencing their values, opinions, feelings and tastes. As will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters, discipline, as a way of enacting power, can function both through what is written in a literary work and how it is treated in a narrative, and also through what is written about a literary work after it is published, which are, reviews, censors, appreciations, and eventually the politics of canonization. That means, fiction and criticism in the Victorian era were used as vehicles of taming the unconventional women characters as well as women readers and writers of the period. Thus, although writing novels enabled women writers to gain economic independence and be more visible in the public sphere, Victorian women novelists could not help putting signs of feminist consciousness in their fiction while at the same time pushing their novels to a conservative and anti-feminist turn by fostering the rooted conventions of the Victorian patriarchy through normative endings.

The woman-centered nature of women's fiction necessitates putting strong female agency at the core of the narratives; the heroine and what she does, how she feels, her relations and affective experiences with the other characters generally constitute the crux of most of the Victorian novels, including particularly the selected works. The ambivalent nature of the selected novels stems from the fact that by giving the heroine this much centrality and dominance, the novelists sometimes challenge the phallogentric power relations by prioritizing the heroine's unconventional actions, feelings, expectations and ideals, while, at the same time, they reinforce the patriarchal norms and long-rooted power relations by participating in and finally sanctioning the suppressive and sexist thought-systems in diverse ways. This can be observed mostly through the way the characterization, plot, narrative voice and perspective are shaped in the novels.

Thus, the ambivalent nature of the selected novels will be examined basically by looking at the multi-layered power relations that operate (1) between the narrative voice/perspective and the heroines (2) among the women characters in the narratives, (3) among the novelists themselves. While putting exemplary works by Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Margaret Oliphant together in this study, it is intended to illustrate these multi-dimensional power relations through which women, both fictional (the characters) and real (the readers and the novelists), try to control and discipline each other. This will in the end reveal that the women novelists, who are regarded as subversive and unconventional in contemporary feminist scholarship, indeed fostered unprogressive, suppressive, and phallogentric conventions of the Victorian society through what they wrote both in their fiction and about each other's fiction.

In the selected novels from both novelistic genres, the vacillation between feminism and anti-feminism stems from the contradiction between the subversive content and its disciplinary treatment, which, in the end, causes ambivalence. Unconventional, unusual and sometimes shocking feelings, thoughts, actions, roles and positions pertaining to the women characters can be thought of as constituting the feminist content in the novels. However, the anti-feminist

undercurrents and disciplinary treatment of such content in the novels can also be seen in the narrative perspective, in the narrator's voice as well as in her treatment of various women characters, in the representation of women's relations and finally in the way the novels end.

Firstly, it can be said that the narrative point of view and the narrator's treatment of different characters can shape the reader's thoughts and feelings for those characters, creating sympathy for some, while picturing others unsympathetically. This changes depending on women characters' conduct; so while narrating the story, an interpreter narrator may also instruct (either implicitly or explicitly) the upright conduct for Victorian women readers. Therefore, the narrator's various inclusions into the narration (say, for example, interpretations, observations, direct addresses to the reader, and her moralistic voice) can turn the narratives into cautionary tales for women readers, which is exactly where the disciplinary function of these literary texts emerges.

Secondly, the dominance of negative feelings and unfriendly relations among women characters, is also important because this proves that in fiction women are not only oppressed and devalued by men, but they can also be victimized by other women. This study will focus on how women's narratives generate negative feelings on the part of the women characters and how such feelings function to create enmity among the communities of women in the novels. Concisely, the negative emotional reactions of the women characters in the mentioned works cause hostile behaviors. That is, unfriendly emotions such as jealousy, anger, hatred, and rage motivate hostile behaviors and attitudes such as violence (emotional, psychological, and sometimes even physical), contempt, humiliation and caprice, which indicates that women's relations in the novels are based on patriarchal power relations; they are hostile and unhealthy.

Thirdly, the endings are very important in designating the work's attitudes towards diverse social and political matters. Naturally, every fictional narrative has to have a last page which terminates the action in the novel. It is true that

inexhaustible interpretations make it possible to imagine what would have happened after the fictional narrative had stopped at the last sentence of the novel. For instance, though *Jane Eyre* ends with marriage, as most Victorian novels generally do, one can never guess whether Jane and Rochester's marriage is a happy one or not. Also, it is equally impossible to know how Charlotte Brontë would have written about their married life, had she written another novel based on Jane and Rochester's marriage. Still, that Charlotte Brontë finalized Jane's story with marriage can be thought of as a normative ending for a spirited and independent heroine, given the fact that marriage was regarded as an ultimate goal for Victorian women. By marrying off Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë implicitly suggests that marriage is inescapable even for a strong-willed heroine like her. Thus, it can be said that the endings of Victorian women's texts can give an idea about what the writer, intentionally or unintentionally, conveyed to readers.

That is why, the endings of the selected novels are considered very significant in this study and the analysis of the novels will pay special attention to the endings. As the analysis of the novels will better illustrate in the following chapters, the endings of *East Lynne*, *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Hester* make these novels prone to be discussed under what is today named as Victorian anti-feminism. The adulterous heroines of both sensation novels are considered insane and they are punished with death eventually; the heroine of *East Lynne*, Isabel Vane, begs for forgiveness in her deathbed while Lady Audley in Braddon's novel is sent to an asylum in Belgium and later dies there. The conventional heroine of the domestic narrative *Hester* is denied the opportunity of work and independence although throughout the novel she zealously wants to work and be independent economically. Despite the anti-feminist endings, the existence of feminist undertones in these novels cannot be denied after all, yet their treatment and the progression of the narratives can best be explained by nothing but the word 'ambivalence.' Thus, the analysis of the selected works will demonstrate both feminist and anti-feminist tendencies in the novels but will focus more on the ambivalence that reside both in the novels and in some criticism the novels

aroused. Ambivalence in these narratives will be taken as a form of backlash against the rise of the Victorian women's movement, or, in other words, as a conservative reaction of the women writers, who had confused feelings about the movement and its revolutionary spirit.

That the selected novels have been put together as representative examples from two competing genres will reveal that the feminist implications, the anti-feminist twists and the techniques of disciplining of each genre differ markedly. Both genres are thought of as woman genres today because they were dominated by women novelists and appealed more to women readers. Also, both sensation novels and domestic novels represent feminist undercurrents in differing ways and degrees; therefore, the potential threat they pose to the social order through unconventional representations produces varying effects.

In sensation novels this threat can be more extreme because the heroines are very active and unconventional both physically and emotionally; this might be one reason why, the anti-feminist and disciplinary twists in the novels are overt and extreme. The representation of the sensational heroine may look very subversive at the beginning but her punishment at the end is a strong narrative evidence that marks the conservatism of the sensation genre. Thus, though sensation fiction is considered very subversive in contemporary feminist scholarship, this study argues that the moralistic tone of sensational texts and their disciplinary influences are indeed stronger than those of realist fiction. The techniques of the disciplining of the sensation heroine can be seen mostly in the confession scenes, the heroine's confinement and punishment. Also, the negative emotions which overwhelm women's psyche and govern her relations with the other women characters are very influential in controlling and shaping the conduct of the women characters. At some point, these novels turn into cautionary tales for women readers, which at the end aim to discipline them. What is more, the criticism of sensation narratives serves as supplementary disciplinary techniques, which aim to preach women novelists on how they should write.

In domestic novels, the techniques of disciplining are not as transparent as they are in sensation novels, they are rather subtle and concealed. What happens in the novel may look natural and mundane to Victorian readers, but domestic narratives still push the heroine to a disadvantaged position, try to influence readers' opinions, shape their value systems by cherishing certain behaviors and feelings while openly disapproving some others. In sensation narratives confinement happens through the heroine's confinement to a madhouse, in domestic novels the heroine is confined to Victorian houses. The centrality of domestic boundaries, domestic personalities and roles are evocative of this in that they restrict women's capabilities to the indoors. By studying novels from two different woman genres, it is intended to demonstrate that in both cases, women writers use the genres' conventions to the disadvantage of the heroines.

Stressing generic differences is necessary because this will in the end highlight that power relations also operate between writers of domestic fiction and sensation fiction. In addition to the novels themselves, the literary criticism pertaining to these novels are also important in the way that they may sometimes hint at or openly dictate what is possible and not possible to represent in a literary work. Especially regarding women reviewing other women's work, such literary criticism can turn into an arena for a struggle for power in which women novelists try to discipline and control each other's writings. Although the strong female agency in the selected works is praised by feminist literary criticism, these narratives and their criticism suffer from intrinsic sexism, internalized oppression, and unsympathetic treatment of both women characters and women writers due to the multi-layered power relations that operate within the discursive fabric of the novels and some of the criticism that followed their publication.

All in all, the argument in this study is formulated around three essential concerns: (1) Victorian women's writings cannot be categorized as feminist or anti-feminist, they are rather ambivalent due to the power relations that operate on different levels and with varying effects both in the novels (through characterization, plot formation, narrative voice and perspective) and among the

texts, the genres and the novelists, (2) Victorian women's writing became tools of disciplining reading populations and was used as a way of control, (3) although the generic conventions of both the sensation novel and the domestic novel proceed to the disadvantage of the heroine, the ways of disciplining in both genres are different. Though the sensation novel is considered as a very subversive genre for Victorian audiences, the anti-feminist and the disciplinary turns in this genre are more severe than in the domestic novel. This study purports that as the implications of feminism become more obvious and fierce in fictional narratives of the Victorian period, the disciplinary and anti-feminist twists in these narratives become stronger, more influential, dramatic and even fatal.

To understand why Victorian women's narratives oscillate between feminism and anti-feminism, this study will next discuss women writers' ambivalence in relation to Victorian culture. To this end, Chapter 2 "Victorian Cultural Context" will in the first place elucidate the appearance of women writers in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and the focus will eventually move to the nineteenth century. This chapter will additionally focus on the concurrence of the Victorian women's movement and the considerable rise of women novelists in the nineteenth century, which resulted in a tendency to interpret women's narratives in relation to the concerns of the movement. However, as the argument in this study runs, this chapter will also explain why women's texts are neither feminist nor anti-feminist, but they are ambivalent. Because the novels that will be studied here belong to the category of what is named as 'the underrepresented,' or 'the underread,' the changing dimensions of the Victorian canon and the importance of studying formerly neglected works by women will also be addressed.

In this study, important narratological aspects of the selected novels will be discussed from a feminist and Foucauldian perspective. Thus, Chapter 3 titled "Theoretical Framework and Methodology" will first discuss various feminisms in literary criticism and their differences in their treatment of texts by women writers. Also, in this chapter, how writing novels in the Victorian period was used

as a way of control and disciplining will be explained. Michel Foucault's theories on discourse, power and discipline will be used here to highlight that no matter how subversive they may sound, Victorian women were expected to produce novels in the Victorian disciplinary discourse. This section will stress that given the fact that not only the female authorship but also the female readership dominated the publishing industry in the Victorian era, the disciplinary influences of women's texts appealed more to women readers of the period through moralizing and disciplinary novels. The last section of this chapter titled "Methodology," will elucidate how narration and focalization in narrative analysis will be approached in this study.

Chapter 4 "Women's Sensation Novels' Overt Disciplining" will focus on exemplary novels of the sensation genre and offer a detailed analysis of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) respectively. Before making a detailed examination of these novels, this chapter will explain the general features of the sensation novel as a controversial and scandalous woman genre, which is cherished in contemporary feminist scholarship for being very subversive and showing signs of female emancipation. This chapter will stress that the generic qualities of sensation genre and the unconventional depictions of heroines look very radical at first sight, but the anti-feminist and disciplinary twists in these narratives are equally effective and fierce, making them neither feminist nor anti-feminist but rather ambivalent. This chapter will also argue that the more subversive and feminist signs a Victorian novel presents, the more disciplinary and anti-feminist it can be as the narrative proceeds to the end.

Chapter 5 "Subtle Disciplining of the Domestic Novel" will focus on Margaret Oliphant as an anti-sensational domestic novelist, who was a complex figure regarding her approach to feminist issues and representations. This chapter will argue that the ambivalence in Margaret Oliphant's writing reveals itself mostly through the contradiction between her conservative non-fiction writings and her fiction, which represents radical views on women's work, marriage and



status in society. Still, both her fictional and non-fictional writings demonstrate that Margaret Oliphant wrote within the limits of Victorian disciplinary discourse; she tended to control and discipline women sensation novelists through her literary criticism and, what is more, through her fiction, she tended to discipline women characters and women readers. A selection of her articles about the Woman Question and the scathing criticism she directed against the women sensation novelists will be addressed in the first place. In her non-fiction writings, Oliphant was openly against the suffragists, and especially in her criticism of women's sensation novels she held a conservative view and denigrated the representation of transgressive women characters. The discussion of Oliphant's fiction will be restricted to her domestic novel, *Hester* (1883), because she wrote over ninety novels from different genres, and *Hester*, with two women antagonists at the center of the novel, best exemplifies how Margaret Oliphant uses power relations and negative feelings among the women characters to make them discipline and control each other. All of the selected pieces from Oliphant's works are apt examples to illustrate how, as a very prolific writer herself, she approved the dominant power structures, resisted change, and took writing and literature as a way of social control.

## CHAPTER 2

### VICTORIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Though the Victorians never ceased to look forward to a new period of firm convictions and established beliefs, they had to live in the meantime between two worlds, one dead or dying, one struggling but powerless to be born, in an age of doubt.

Walter E Houghton.

*The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870*

Ah, but couldn't Dorothea have written pamphlets? Novels? Couldn't she edited a journal? Couldn't she have done what many other women of her age, women like Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, Catherine Beecher, or Margeret Fuller did?

That too was a reality of her time.

Zelda Austen

"Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot"

#### 2.1 The Golden Epoch of Women Novelists

Many studies on the history of women's writing focus on the Victorian era as the golden age of women novelists. However, the appearance of women in the novel industry does not only pertain to the Victorian era. It should be remembered that the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries witnessed two literary phenomena simultaneously; the emergence of the novel as a literary genre and the appearance of a salient number of women novelists. Indeed, there is a marked hierarchy among these three successive centuries considering the dominance of women novelists.

Women were gradually involved in writing different forms of fiction in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries; they were writing drama, poetry and prose but they became notably visible in novel writing in the nineteenth century. In *Women Writers in English Literature*, Jane Stevenson writes that "[w]omen had been writing romances and novels since the early seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century, more than half of the novels written and published were by

women” (95). However, only a handful of women writers are now remembered from the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries such as Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Penelope Aubin (1679-1738), Eliza Haywood (1693-1756), Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), and of course, Mary Shelley (1797-1851) and Jane Austen (1775-1817) from the early-Victorian period, yet it is the nineteenth century that apparently dominates the writing history by women. Thus, the dominance of women novelists has always been a starting statement for scholarly works on women’s writing in the Victorian era. In her comprehensive study, *Writing Women’s Literary History*, Margaret J.M. Ezell notes the same fact: “The novel is the characteristic genre in what we have seen described as the golden age of women’s writing—the nineteenth century” (32). Although the period before the eighteenth century is considered as the “dark ages of women’s imagination,” women writers were made considerably visible starting from the eighteenth century (17). This exact point prompted Virginia Woolf to raise the following questions in her article titled “Women and Fiction:”

Why, we ask at once, was there no continuous writing done by women before the eighteenth century? Why did they then write almost as habitually as men, and in the course of that writing produce, one after another, some of the classics of English fiction? And why did their art then, and why to some extent does their art still, take the form of fiction? (43)

Although theories of women’s writing generally pose similar questions and offer possible answers, it is not likely to make definite assertions as to why women writers were not very visible before the eighteenth century. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong stresses the impossibility of offering factual answers regarding such questions: “I know of no history of the English novel that can explain why women began to write respectable fiction near the end of the eighteenth century” (7). Ezell, too, comments on the invisibility of women writers before the eighteenth century. In a stronger tone, she draws some conclusions as to what excluded women from the literary history: “The theoretical model of women’s literary history and the construction of women’s literary studies as a field rest upon the assumption that women before 1700 either were effectively silenced or constituted in an evolutionary model of ‘female literature’ an early

‘imitation’ phase, contained and co-opted in patriarchal discourse” (4). One possible explanation regarding why women gradually dominated the novel industry in the Victorian age could be related to the emergence of a strong women’s movement in the same period. Although not many women novelists were involved in the movement, and some even openly refused to be a part of it, they might still have been positively influenced by the demands voiced regarding women’s work, their economic independence, and the amelioration of laws concerning marriage and divorce. This can partially explain why Victorian women novelists and woman-centered fiction proliferated and dominated the literary market in the nineteenth-century.

Armstrong takes the sudden rise of women novelists “as a central event in the history of the novel,” (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 7) and in her article titled “What Feminism Did to Novel Studies” she challenges the dominant male authorship that the former centuries witnessed. She asks: “given as well that more than half the novels written during the eighteenth century were written by women, why assume that the first modern individual was male or that the novel was created by and for men?” (103). Terry Eagleton also marks the same point in his introduction chapter to *The English Novel: An Introduction* and states that the roots of female authorship and readership date back to the eighteenth century: “For many eighteenth century commentators, the answer to the question ‘What is a novel?’ would be: ‘A trashy piece of fiction fit only for servants and females’” (11). Still, the rise of the novel genre was often associated with male pioneers such as Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), Henry Fielding (1707-1754) and Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). In their work titled *Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730: An Anthology*, Paula Backscheider and John J. Richetti argue that the two very critical works on the eighteenth century British novel published successively in the mid-twentieth century, A.D. McKillop’s *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (1956) and Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), are now considered very masculinist in their approach to the rise of the English novel because they openly exclude important works by eighteenth century women writers:

The unspoken masculinist assumptions of both of these influential and powerful books are now embarrassingly apparent, since during the last twenty-five years or so numerous literary historians have begun to complicate the history of the novel in Britain in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by reading beyond and around the works of the male masters on whom McKillop and Watt concentrated exclusively. (ix)

John Richetti, in his *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739*, discusses the exclusion of women from the eighteenth century canon and he argues that the women novelists of the time were not included in the canon because their works lacked the “complexity, density, and authorial singularity of particular novels by Defoe, Fielding, or Richardson” (xx). It should be highlighted, however, that although the works of the eighteenth century women novelists were overshadowed by their male contemporaries, some women were very popular and their works sold just as much as those of the male writers of the time. For example, “[t]he success of Aphra Behn rivalled or even surpassed that of all of her contemporaries except John Dryden by any measure—quality, popularity, longevity,” and, what is more, Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719) “was one of the four best-selling books of the first half of the eighteenth century: only Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* equaled it” (Backscheider and Richetti x). Thus, it can be argued that the exclusion of women from the eighteenth century canon is a problem of scholarship related the novel genre which kept prioritizing the male novelists still in the mid-twentieth century, rather than the lack of women novelists during this period or the deficiencies of the literary qualities of their work.

The writing by women of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries heralded the predominance of women writers in the nineteenth century, which may thus be considered as the golden epoch of women novelists. Literature in nineteenth century Britain is notable not only for the dominance of the novel as the leading literary genre, but also for the emergence of a considerable number of middle-class women writers. It is apt to call them ‘women writers’ in its broad sense without specifying them as novelists or, say, poets, because, as Rosalind

Miles puts, the phrase ‘women writers’ does not apply better to any other literary genre than it does to the novel (2). In his article “The Lady Novelists,” George Henry Lewes expresses the same notion: “Of all departments of literature, Fiction (sic) is the one to which, by nature and by circumstance, women are best adapted. Exceptional women will of course be found competent to the highest success in other departments; but speaking generally, novels are their forte” (133). This is perhaps because lengthy novels were the best way for women writers to represent many faces of material, psychological and emotional realities pertaining to Victorian women’s culture, which was very difficult to achieve in poetry or in drama. Owing to this fact and particularly considering the influence of the novel industry, the nineteenth century is very important in the “construction of a literary history for women writers” (Ezell 38).

Such extraordinary prominence of women in novel writing prompted discussions about why women started writing fiction. In her work titled *A Victorian Album: Some Lady Novelists of the Period*, Lucy Poate Stebbins notes that women write fiction because they “*must* make money, *must* express [themselves], *must* redress a social wrong” (4). As a matter of fact, the incentives that Stebbins succinctly states can be considered true for both male and female writers. However, it should be noted at this point that many women were writing primarily for money and financial incentives have been considered as the main reason for the blossoming of women novelists in the nineteenth century. Among many women novelists who wrote for economic reasons, the two novelists that will be studied in this dissertation, Margaret Oliphant and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, are remarkable examples.

Margaret Oliphant, as an extremely prolific writer of her time, is one of the first names that comes to mind regarding writing for economic reasons. In her introduction to Oliphant’s novel *Phoebe Junior* (1876), Penelope Fitzgerald states: “From the time she was left a widow at the age of thirty-one Mrs. Oliphant never . . . had five pounds which she didn’t earn for herself by writing” (v). Abigail Burnham Bloom also refers to Oliphant when she mentions writing fiction

for money in her introduction to *Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*:

Many women wrote out of economic necessity. Margaret Oliphant nearly became destitute when her husband became ill, necessitating their relocation, and she then undertook supporting the children of her brother. Unfortunately none of her children ever became financially independent, and Oliphant constantly felt compelled to write as many books as she could as quickly as possible. (9)

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, too, wrote to support her family. Andrew Maunder details her case in the following way: “she had to write continually in order to earn enough to support her mother, her partner (the impecunious publisher John Maxwell), their five illegitimate children, and the children of his legal marriage” (49). The same, of course, is true for many women novelists of the time. In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter interprets the extraordinary productivity of women novelists by noting that many women of the time took up writing as a profession because not many jobs were available for them in the market (46-7). For literate women, another working opportunity was becoming a governess, but governesses were living under extremely harsh living conditions, coping with poverty, humiliation, and loneliness, as reflected in many governess novels published in the Victorian period<sup>1</sup>.

The proliferation of women in novel writing has also raised questions about the feminization of the field. Two important studies, one at the beginning, the other towards the end of the twentieth century, exemplify two different approaches to this question. The difference of their approaches can denote the contribution of feminist literary criticism to the revival of the neglected novelists before the nineteenth century. The first one is an important work in the field; G. K. Chesterton’s *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913). For the female existence in the literary market in the two successive centuries, Chesterton argues that literature in the nineteenth century is gendered. He says: “the novel of the nineteenth century was female; as fully as the novel of the eighteenth century was

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the two very well-known Brontë novels, *Agnes Grey* (1847) by Anne Brontë and *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë draw attention to the harsh realities of the governess experience.

male” (104). It is needful to state here that Chesterton published this work as an Edwardian in 1913, without being familiar with the feminist perspective of contemporary approaches to the writings by women of the former centuries. As mentioned earlier, male writers dominated the literary market before the nineteenth century. Many interesting works written by women were then lost, neglected or out of print and the studies on women’s writing focused exclusively on the nineteenth century.

Still, Chesterton’s argument about the gendered nature of the nineteenth century novel can be interpreted as an attempt to highlight the outstanding presence of distinctive women novelists and memorable women characters created by them. Furthermore, in his same work, in the chapter titled “Great Victorian Novelists,” Chesterton again stresses the gendered nature of literature in the Victorian age by writing that the Victorian novel was “peculiarly feminine.” “This is the first fact about the novel, that it is the introduction of a new and rather curious kind of art; and it has been found to be peculiarly feminine, from the first good novel by Fanny Burney to the last good novel by Miss May Sinclair” (93). On the whole, the rise of women novelists and the prominence of women characters can be interpreted as crucial contributions to what Chesterton calls the “femininity” of the Victorian novel.

The second work that stresses the gendered nature of literature is Lyn Pykett’s *The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Women Writing* (1992). In contrast to Chesterton, Pykett considers both centuries feminine, as she explains: “from its beginnings in the eighteenth century, fiction had increasingly been regarded as a feminized form, and this association became even more important in shaping its production and dissemination in the nineteenth century” (22). While Chesterton overlooks women’s fiction before the nineteenth century, Pykett’s interpretation reveals the contribution of feminist literary criticism to the resurrection of the works by women and also to the increase of the academic interests in women’s writing of the former centuries.



Briefly, among many qualities that make the novel “unique” as the dominant literary genre of the time, Chesterton contends that “the most conspicuous is that it is the art in which the conquests of woman are quite beyond controversy” (91). To use his phrase again, “the conquest of woman,” as writers in flesh and blood and as fictional characters in literary texts is a very crucial topic for Victorian literary studies that can be discussed in many different ways. Considering the concurrence of the Victorian women’s movement and the female dominance in the Victorian novel industry, it is not surprising that contemporary scholarship tends to discuss Victorian women’s writing in relation to the feminist movement of the time, so a tendency to categorize women’s texts as feminist or anti-feminist is actually understandable, but it is restrictive too.

## **2.2 Feminism/Anti-feminism Debate**

Regarding early feminist history, one cannot dismiss Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), who struggled a lot for the advancement of women’s status and place in many written pieces she published such as “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters” (1786) and her famous “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” (1792). The efforts of early precursors such as Mary Wollstonecraft turned into a liberal women’s movement in the nineteenth century, which focused mostly on gaining equal rights with men in the public sphere. Especially after the 1860s the impact of the women’s movement intensified and “the issues of education, work, suffrage, divorce, married women’s property and sexual morality were widely debated, and the official orthodoxies hotly contested” (Sanders 5). Among the issues that were discussed during this period, women’s right to vote was perhaps the most fiercely demanded: “During the later Edwardian and early Georgian period in England agitation for woman suffrage had reached unprecedented levels of intensity and public attention” (Gibbs 293). Elizabeth Robins Pennell’s (1855-1936) political play *Votes for Women* was also performed on stage in 1907 at the Royal Court Theatre (293), which additionally marks the fervor about the matter.

Considering the social and political movements in the nineteenth-century, the women's movement was perhaps the most vigorous of all. In *Corrupt Relations: Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Collins, and the Victorian Sexual System*, Richard Barickman et al. write that the campaigns for women's rights were central to many social changes in the nineteenth century: "the movement for widening women's rights was near the center of the social changes that characterize the Victorian period" (2). This influenced contemporary scholarship's approaches to Victorian women's writing, and academic studies on women's texts tended to find echoes of the Woman Question, or in other words, Victorian feminism<sup>2</sup> in women's writing. Likewise, reactions against the women's movement made themselves apparent through conservative images of women in women's texts.

Hilary Schor writes that "[n]o single question mattered more to the Victorian novel than what the nineteenth century considered 'The Woman Question' " (173). As a matter of fact, gender issues occupy a prominent place in Victorian novels written by both sexes. However, the association of women writers with the Woman Question has always been more appealing, given the fact that the women's movement aimed at influencing women's lives and experiences in the first place. That can be one reason why defining prominent Victorian women as feminist or anti-feminist is very common among the contemporary critics who work on nineteenth-century women's writing. The crucial observation of Nicola Diane Thompson supports the same idea: "Twentieth-century critics

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<sup>2</sup> Naming the movement has been a matter of dispute. Though today the Victorian women's movement is termed as 'Victorian feminism' in some sources, back then its concerns and discussions were generally referred to as 'the Woman Question.' "The question of women's proper capacities, duties, and rights was openly and hotly contested enough that the debate had a name: the Woman Question" (Case and Shaw 4). Regarding the use of the word "feminism" in Victorian Britain, Sean Purchase writes that "the term 'feminism' only really became common from around the mid-1890s onwards. The 'woman question', however, had been debated vigorously from at least as early as the late eighteenth century onwards" (213). Still, as this study will also suggest, the Victorian women's movement can anachronistically be considered as Victorian feminism just as diverse forms of backlash against the movement is now called Victorian anti-feminism.

have tended to label women novelists as feminist or anti-feminist, even classifying whole genres or subgenres according to their position on the woman question” (3). Before turning the attention to Victorian women novelists and their affiliations with or reactions to Victorian feminism, it is necessary to mention the prominent Victorian women, who were either fervently involved in the women’s movement and its discussions or remained indifferent to or openly rejected any affiliation at all.

The women’s movement was very strong at that time, and this can explain why contemporary labeling depends mostly on the position Victorian women took regarding the discussions of the Woman Question. This is true both for fiction and non-fiction writers as well as it is for the activists and reformers of the time. In what follows, famous Victorian feminists and anti-feminists will be discussed not for the sake of name-dropping, but because as Valerie Sanders writes in her book *Eve’s Renegades: Victorian Anti-feminist Women Novelists* “like feminism both in the nineteenth century and today, anti-feminism is better known by its personalities than by a consistent set of values to which supporters can subscribe” (6).

Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904) is one of the first names that comes to mind when talking about the Victorian women’s movement. As a “feminist essayist and reformer” (Mitchell 116) of the Victorian period, Frances Power Cobbe fought for change considering diverse gender based issues. Susan Hamilton, in her book titled *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism*, bases her research only on the periodical press of the mid-Victorian period and writes that the established Victorian press gave women an opportunity to express their ideas. Frances Power Cobbe was one of those women, and Hamilton describes Cobbe as a feminist activist in the following quote:

She was involved in the national women’s suffrage campaign, argued for women’s increased educational and employment opportunities, and was a vocal critic of marriage. She worked to improve education for ‘ragged’ or homeless

children and the condition of workhouses. She was instrumental in the passage of the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act, which made domestic violence grounds for legal separation. (1)

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) is another eminent figure as a Victorian essayist and novelist, who is now regarded as one of the precursors of the feminist movement: “her social activism for causes such as improved education for women, divorce reform, universal suffrage, and repelling the Contagious Diseases Acts establish her as an important forerunner to contemporary feminism” (Parker 264).

One should also mention Alice Mona Caird (1854-1932) and Dinah Maria Mulock Craik (1826-1887) as other significant names involved in the feminist debates with their writings. Catherine Golden presents Alice Mona Caird as a “feminist novelist and journalist [who] was once the best-known and most criticized feminist in Britain” (99). Caird was a severe critic of what marriage did to Victorian women because Victorian marriages domesticized and confined women strictly. In the same vein, Dinah Maira Mulock Craik’s then very famous work *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women* (1858) is significant in that through this work Craik criticizes Victorian marriages and the condition of both married and unmarried women: “In *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women*, Craik details her political and philosophical views on women. Paramount was unmarried women’s need for ‘something to do’—for meaningful work with adequate pay, so they could marry for love, responsible parenthood, and a moral and useful life instead of for money and rank” (Hickok 137).

Although she is mostly remembered as a social worker in the field of medical treatment, the renowned nurse and social reformer Florence Nightingale’s (1820-1910) article “Cassandra” was also considered as a “fierce attack on the Victorian bourgeois family” (Peacock 292). In this article, Florence Nightingale criticizes the idle life that Victorian middle-class women were doomed to live. Florence Nightingale’s stance towards Victorian feminism is indeed contested. Valerie Sanders takes her as an anti-feminist but also emphasizes her efforts for

women's employment and changing laws in favour of women (7). Such was the aurora of the period, many women who were also important public figures in diverse walks of life contributed to the debates with various forms of writings; yet still many women also showed contradictory reactions towards the movement.

As opposed to the supporters of feminism in the nineteenth century, prominent women's resistance to the women's movement attracted attention too, and those who reacted against the movement publicly are now referred to as the Victorian anti-feminists. Opponents of the Victorian women's movement revealed themselves mostly in their reaction against the suffragists. Thus, it can be argued that Victorian anti-feminism is most notorious with the “ ‘Appeal against Female Suffrage,’ signed by about 100 women, including Mrs. T. H. Huxley, Mrs. Leslie Stephen, Mrs. Matthew Arnold, Mrs. Walter Bagehot, and Mrs. Arnold Toynbee” (Houghton 352-3). In addition to that, the reformers' demands for women's work and improved marriage and divorce laws were also found precarious by some women.

Valerie Sanders' *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-feminist Women Novelists* (1996) is a very important study about the conservative reactions towards the Victorian women's movement and its repercussions in the literary texts written by women. In her book, Sanders argues that what these women wrote can be taken as representing Victorian anti-feminism in that they express “Victorian women's discomfort with the idea of their own emancipation” (8). According to Sanders, anti-feminism is “a resistance movement against the advancement of women's rights. It tries to halt the development of new liberal attitudes towards the boundaries between the sexes, insisting that there are fundamental differences in sexual characteristics and roles which women should accept” (3). While the Victorian women's movement tried hard to enhance women's place in the public sphere, the anti-feminists had “a conviction that women were designed (whether by ‘God’ or ‘Nature’) to be first and foremost wives and mothers, and that their social and political subordination is the proper corollary of that position” (5). Sanders discusses works by Charlotte Yonge,

Margaret Oliphant, Mrs. Humphry Ward as examples of anti-feminist fictional writing in the Victorian period, revealing their conservatism and restrictive attitudes while delineating their heroines.

Another name Valerie Sanders studies in her work is the novelist and essayist Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-1898), who is very notorious for her writings and speeches against the women's liberation movement; and that is why she is today remembered as a Victorian anti-feminist. Nancy Fix Anderson, in her comprehensive work titled *Woman Against Woman in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton*, describes Eliza Lynn Linton as "an emancipated woman opposed to women's emancipation" (x). Anderson further explains Linton's case with the following words:

Linton established her reputation as a critic of women in her scathing *Saturday Review* articles in the 1860s. For the next thirty years, she attacked with increasing ferocity in her many novels and journal articles, women who sought the right to participate in the political, educational, and occupational life theretofore reserved exclusively for men. (ix)

Laurel Meredith Erickson also highlights Linton's life as an epitome of Victorian anti-feminism: "Eliza Lynn Linton's life was a contradiction. A masculine, independent woman herself, Linton built a career upon vituperative attacks of Victorian feminism as the propagator of masculine, independent, 'unwomanly' women whose very existence destroyed the harmony of natural order" (256-257).

In addition to Linton, Margaret Oliphant is also known as an anti-feminist in some sources. In her non-fiction writings, Margaret Oliphant openly declared that she was against the suffragists, which is the first reason why she is also considered anti-feminist in her approach to the Victorian woman question. In the notorious anti-suffrage letter Oliphant wrote to her publisher John Blackwood, her wording implies that she did not believe in the women's movement because she calls the franchise for women "a mad notion" (Oliphant qtd in Williams "Feminist or Anti-feminist?" 165). Merryn Williams comments that "she thought women's suffrage a 'mad notion' [that] has passed into the literary history, and she has not been admired by feminist critics" (165). It is notable here that echoes of Queen

Victoria's words can be felt in Oliphant's letter as the queen too called the suffragist movement "mad folly" in one of her letters (Reidhead 1581).

As a matter of fact, Margaret Oliphant is a debated name with regards to her reactions towards the feminists of the time. What perplexes critics most is the hardships of her personal life, her role as the breadwinner of a large family and her reactions towards the demands of the women's movement: "Mrs Oliphant was a professional who wrote to support her own and her improvident brother's family. She was no amateur dabbler, and as the breadwinner for five children she might be expected to have had advanced views on the 'woman question'" (Stubbs 40). However, as this study claims, rather than categorizing Oliphant under 'feminism' or 'anti-feminism,' her ambivalent position should be acknowledged, given the fact that in her fiction Margaret Oliphant presents strong, self-sufficient heroines and problematizes issues of women's work, marriage and education while in her essays she portrays a rather conservative picture.

Behind the strong backlash against women's emancipation lay basically moral concerns: "Feminist claims to intellectual equality with man and to the same education and professional opportunity were attacked by liberals—let alone conservatives . . . to prevent what they honestly believed would mean the irreparable loss of a vital moral influence" (Houghton 352). Victorian femininity was sanctioned and glorified in diverse ways in many texts, be it fiction (most notably novels) or non-fiction (essays, conduct books and manuals). Those who reacted against the women's movement were very anxious that it might corrupt the woman's image as 'the angel in the house': "many intelligent women—George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mrs. Lynn Linton, Beatrice Potter Webb, for example—viewed with uneasiness or apprehension any emancipation of their sex which would weaken its moral influence by distracting attention to the outside world or by coarsening the feminine nature itself" (Houghton 352). A closer look at the image of the angel in the house can give a better understanding as to why some women were angry with the Victorian revolutionaries. In her article

“Professions for Women,” Virginia Woolf gives a dainty description of the angelic image of the Victorian woman:

I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace. In those days –the last of Queen Victoria – every house had its angel. (275)

Given that the angel in every Victorian house was supposed to be altruistic, self-sacrificing, honorable, virtuous and cheerfully preoccupied with domestic trivialities all her life, it is understandable as to why Victorian feminism was considered as a big threat to this ideal. Thus, behind the frustration against Victorian feminism, there was this fear of degeneration because as opposed to the angelic figure that Virginia Woolf perfectly and sarcastically depicts, Victorian feminists were critical, they were questioning the patriarchal norms and regulations, and they were demanding change, which would influence large communities of women and finally corrupt the pure and honorable nature of Victorian femininity. The fears about degeneration and corruption revealed itself mainly through the portrayal of the image of woman in fiction because, as Nancy Armstrong writes “one cannot distinguish the production of the new female ideal either from the rise of the novel or from the rise of the new middle classes in England” (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 8). Patricia Stubbs, likewise, states that “it is through literature, and particularly through the novel, that the dominant images of women and their experience in our culture have been most easily and, until recently, most widely elaborated” (ix)

The image of women in fiction was a concern both to non-fiction and fiction writers. Yet, it should be noted that it is easier to categorize nineteenth century women as feminist or anti-feminist, if their non-fiction writings openly involve feminist or anti-feminist content. For instance, as explained, the novelists Eliza Lynn Linton and Margaret Oliphant were among those who kept writing non-fiction too to defend their ideas before the public. However, the same labeling



also included other women writers, who were not openly involved in the discussions concerning the Woman Question, but only kept writing novels.

The feminism/anti-feminism debate influenced writers of fiction most because as Robyn R. Warhol also writes, “the novel was their [women’s] one public opportunity to exert some political or moral influence on the ‘real world’” (23). Thus, whether or not women writers were openly involved in the feminist discussions of the time, they could not escape such categorizations. However, feminist or anti-feminist activists and writers of fiction should be discussed separately. When it is fiction, it is interpretation which categorizes the works unless the writer herself interprets her work publicly. Thus, the problem of categorizing becomes more complicated for fiction writers and their fictional works. That is why, the question as to what makes a fictional text feminist or anti-feminist requires further elaboration.

In the first place, feminist critics draw attention to the difficulty of offering a decisive definition for a feminist text and feminist literary criticism. For example, in *Working With Feminist Criticism*, in the chapter titled “Defining a Feminist Text,” Mary Eagleton highlights the difficulty of making a precise definition of a feminist literary work (32). This is because, as Rita Felski states in her *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, “the variety of feminist positions makes it difficult to establish absolute and unambiguous criteria for determining what constitutes a feminist narrative” (13). Felski additionally writes that “even a definition of feminist literature which emphasizes representation and ideological content . . . offers obvious difficulties, given the pluralistic nature of feminist ideology and its diverse political and cultural manifestations” (12). Still, those who attempt to define feminist literature mostly stress that a feminist work of fiction treats gender as a problem. Felski, for instance, writes that a feminist text “reveal[s] a critical awareness of women’s subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category” (14). Likewise, Pam Morris, in *Literature and Feminism*, writes that a “literary text may . . . provide a more powerful understanding of the ways in which society works to the disadvantage of women” (7). The narrative

line, plotting, story, themes and characterization can tell much about the position of a work of fiction regarding the concerns of the feminist movement. The feminist theoretical approaches generally make use of women's writing of the former centuries in their analysis and it is such strong engagement of feminism and fiction that increased the tendency to read works by women novelists as feminist or anti-feminist. Such being the case, many literary interpretations of nineteenth century women's writing are inclined to discuss women's works according to the narrative evidence the authors put into their work concerning their affiliations with or reactions to the woman question of the time.

As Martin Willis rightly puts, "Victorian literature became one of the key testing grounds for feminist literary criticism in the 1970s" (184). Studies on the canonical women writers of the mid-nineteenth century, the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot, are very apt examples in this respect. Many interpretations of the works of the Brontë sisters (particularly Anne and Charlotte) and George Eliot tend to take them as forerunners of feminism in women's writing because in their novels the woman question appears in diverse forms. Nina Auerbach says: "In mid-Victorian England, Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell venture into an uncharted world in their delineations of governing women whose self-definitions come from their freedom from family" (*Communities of Women* 6). If not purely feminist, critics agree that these writers were writing with a feminist eye.

Considering the Brontë Sisters, Jane Stevenson indicates that "[a]ll three deal intensely with aspects of women's experience" (104). In her detailed elaboration, Stevenson further writes that "Emily Brontë is the least obviously feminist of the three sisters" (105) while, she adds, feminist concerns in Anne Brontë are pretty overt: "*The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* is the only overtly feminist novel produced by any of the three" (106). However, because Anne Brontë was overshadowed by her elder sister Charlotte, who wrote for *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* that "the choice of subject was an entire mistake" and the novel thus "hardly appears to [her] desirable to preserve," it is Charlotte's *Jane*

*Eyre* that gained credit for being the most revolutionary Brontë novel (“Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell” 176-8). Therefore, among all the Brontë novels, *Jane Eyre* is possibly the most cited one when the repercussions of feminism are concerned: “When Charlotte Brontë’s hugely successful *Jane Eyre* (1847) was published, for instance, in the same year as Tennyson’s poem, it was treated as a controversial, impassioned, and for some, ‘distasteful’ piece of proto-feminist writing” (Purchase 216). What is more, Schor says that *Jane Eyre* is now considered an epitome of Victorian feminism: “Most readers of Victorian literature come to their understanding of nineteenth-century feminism and gender relations through one of its most powerful statements: the direct, challenging voice of Charlotte Brontë’s heroine, Jane Eyre” (172).

As for George Eliot, the discussion of feminism is almost inescapable: “She could hardly have created a Maggie Tulliver or a Dorothea Brooke of the 1860s and 70s ...without making her an overt feminist,” writes Jane Stevenson (97). This is because the ‘Woman Question’ occupies a great place in *Middlemarch* (109) and *Silas Marner* is “Eliot’s most feminist novel: the thesis that attending to the daily care of a little child is a medium for spiritual and human growth is a very unusual one” (110). In her article “Women and Fiction,” Virginia Woolf emphasizes the impact of the writer’s sex to what she creates. Woolf writes that even if it cannot be called overt feminism, at least a feminist consciousness, awareness or “resentment” can be felt both in *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch*:

[the novels of women] showed, at least in the nineteenth century, another characteristic which may be traced to the writer’s sex. In *Middlemarch* and in *Jane Eyre* we are conscious not merely of the writer’s character, as we are conscious of the character of Charles Dickens, but we are conscious of a woman’s presense-of someone resenting the treatment of her sex and pleading for its right. This brings into women’s writing an element which is entirely absent from a man’s, unless, indeed, he happens to be a working-man, a Negro, or one who for some other reason is conscious of disability. (47)

While Woolf implies that women writers such as Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot may have witnessed disadvantaged positions that their sex experienced in various fields of life and reflected gender problems in their fiction, there is also a resentment against George Eliot. For example, Jane Stevenson reminds that she

did not openly engage with the women's movement to secure her respected position in the literary circles (97). Zelda Austen, in her article titled "Why Feminist Critics are Angry with George Eliot," resents George Eliot's apathy for the women's movement. Though critics highlight implications of feminist consciousness in her novels by looking mainly at the way she delineated her heroines, Zelda Austen writes differently that "she could have turned the mirror to reflect herself rather than the world out there" (549). Before being one of the most important novelists of the Victorian age, she was working as a journalist, essayist, literary critic and translator. Pointing to these aspects of her life, Zelda Austen further explains the resentment over George Eliot's indifference to Victorian feminism with the following words:

Feminist critics are angry with George Eliot because she did not permit Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* to do what George Eliot did in real life: translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse to marry until she was middle-aged, live an independent existence as a spinster, and finally live openly with a man whom she could not marry. (549)

George Eliot is considered one of the masters of realist fiction, so Zelda Austen's reproof in the second epigraph to this chapter makes sense in that, just like other women novelists of her time, Eliot too did not create a heroine who is involved in the feminist debates though that image of feminist Victorian women "too was a reality of her time" (553).

Seemingly, it is the way women writers picture women characters that attracted the attention of the feminist literary critics most. What makes women's texts apt for a feminist reading is that they subtly, and maybe in an unintended way, take a critical stance towards the gender problem, challenge the patriarchal structures and values of the Victorian mindset by putting strong-willed women characters at the center of the narratives. Likewise, the anti-feminist implications in women's texts also reveal themselves through the way women novelists treat women characters as well as their actions and feelings. Thus, it is the ways of studying women characters in women's fiction that is much related to the issue of categorizing women's work.

The centrality and strength of women characters in nineteenth century women's fiction are generally taken as the basics of feminist readings of the period's established canon. A vast amount of scholarly work can be found on feminist readings of women's fiction in the Victorian age and it is almost a truism that most of them focus on strong female characterization in the novels. Most of the studies in the field tend to highlight the signs of feminism which are evident in the characterization of strong women, whose stories, activities, and relations to other characters are at the crux of the novel. Annette Kolodny's words can offer clues about why studying women characters in women's fiction is important for the advance of feminist criticism: "the portrayal of and attitudes toward female characters in a variety of authors . . . helped us to expose the ways in which sexist bias and/or stereotyped formulations of women's roles in society become codified in literary texts" ("Some Notes" 75). Regarding the same matter, Gill Plain and Susan Sellers hold a similar opinion: "In the space of the text woman can be both defamed and defended, and it is here that the most persuasive possibilities can be found for imagining the future of the female subject" (2). Schor, similar to the other names mentioned above, argues that discussing women in women's fiction "will lead us to consider not only the historical status and changing roles of women in the nineteenth century, but the centrality of women's social conditions to plots, forms, and structures of the Victorian novel" (173).

Considering the women-centered literary studies, categorizing the stereotypes and analyzing how women's sphere and roles have been represented in fiction can be regarded as the most widespread way of studying women in the writings by both sexes. George Levine connects this to the domesticity of the Victorian novel: "The Victorian novel built itself . . . most fundamentally on its preoccupation with domesticity, where the lives of women became central and where women, thus, gathered particular authority in the writing" (12). It should be noted once again that this authority pertains both to women writers and the women characters created by them. That is exactly why feminist readings of the nineteenth century women's fiction tend to draw attention to the appearance of

strong women characters to whom the author gave more autonomy, individuality, and power: “The women . . . particularly when written about by women, tend to be stronger, more active, more determining of their own fate than the male protagonists” (Levine 26). Thus, feminist readings of Victorian women’s texts mostly emphasize the centrality of women characters, their actions, and the possibilities they can create for themselves other than what is appropriated for them by Victorian norms.

When it is anti-feminism in fiction, sexist representations of both men and women and various forms of approvals of patriarchal thought systems and structures can be thought of as anti-feminist undercurrents. In fictional narratives, such undercurrents may reveal themselves through the narrative line that works for the disadvantage of women characters. Female characterization is just another criterion in detecting anti-feminist tendencies. Many novelists were thought to be anti-feminist due to the way they pictured and treated their women characters and because they either intentionally reacted against or simply dismissed the concerns of the Victorian woman question from their novels altogether.

Along with Valerie Sanders’ work on Victorian anti-feminism, a recent book titled *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel* (2009) edited by Tamara Wagner backs up Nicola Diane Thompson’s observation that there is a “growing interest in women antifeminists” (174). Just like Sanders, in the introduction chapter titled “Narratives of Antifeminism,” Wagner, too, takes both Eliza Lynn Linton and Margaret Oliphant as Victorian anti-feminists:

Linton, like Oliphant, has long and repeatedly been labeled an antifeminist Victorian woman writer. Both have become equally notorious for their attacks on protofeminist agendas of the time. Their nonfictional writing shows them critical (and often severely so) of changing approaches to womanhood, femininity, and specifically modern women, while their often intensely controversial treatment of prevalent discourses marks them out as active participants in the public sphere. (4)

In addition to Oliphant and Linton, whose names appear in every source on the opponents of Victorian feminism, Tamara Wagner includes long-neglected women writers in her book, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Charlotte Yonge,

Annesley Kenealy, Sarah Grand. Just like Wagner, Thompson also thinks that “novelists such as Margaret Oliphant and Charlotte Yonge . . . have been labeled as antifeminist,” although, she adds, “beneath the overt conservatism of their plot-lines their novels reveal distinctly empathetic identification with the limitations women faced in Victorian society” (4). In a similar approach, Williams makes the following comment about women novelists of the time and their relation to the Victorian woman question:

not all women were struggling against the system. If we look only at novelists, who had greater opportunities than most of their sex to speak their minds, we find Charlotte Yonge declaring her ‘full belief in the inferiority of women,’ Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot refusing to identify with the suffrage movement, and Mrs. Humphrey Ward and Eliza Lynn Linton signing the well-known ‘Appeal Against Female Suffrage’ of 1889. (“Feminist or Anti-feminist?” 167)

The issue of categorizing women’s texts also involves a discussion about the intentionality of writers in putting feminist or anti-feminist content in their fictional works. While a feminist text can be created intentionally as a result of the writer’s affinity with the feminist movement, anti-feminism in fiction does not necessarily have to be intentional because it is embedded in the culture. Not surprisingly, patriarchal structures resist the change that the feminist movement fights for, and thus they can be thought of as anti-feminist in essence. Because the author belongs to the same culture, it is very difficult to escape from the influences of widespread ways of thinking, which is why anti-feminist influences can contaminate every text. Even if the author of a novel defines herself as a feminist, the author’s opinions and what is represented in a work of fiction do not necessarily prove to be congruent because the forces of the culture are very strong in determining how the narrative is shaped. Chris Weedon in *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory* offers the following elaboration about the same issue:

The study of the women’s writing as a feminist project can take many forms depending on the assumptions and perspectives of the reader. It is possible, for example, to look at it in both essentialist and poststructuralist ways and the key difference in these approaches is the significance given to women as authors. Essentialist approaches assume that female authorship of texts is their most crucial aspect and that they are the product of a specifically female experience and aesthetic. In poststructuralist theory authorship does not guarantee meaning,

though the historical context in which the author is located will produce the discourses of the text. (149)

This study is closer to the second way of approaching women's writing stated above and does not intend to categorize women writers as either feminist or anti-feminist. This is because, as Pamela Gilbert also maintains, "Victorian authors are complicated, self-contradictory, smart, resistant to ideology and complicit with it by turns or simultaneously. They are hard to sort into neat little categories, and they also change over time" ("Feminism and the Canon" 22-3). Hence, this study will instead stress the co-existence of feminist and anti-feminist inclinations in the selected works and highlight the contradictions and ambivalence that women authors exhibit in depicting and treating women characters as well as the concerns of Victorian feminism in their fiction, and the following section will explain why.

### **2.3 Why Ambivalent?**

The ambivalence of Victorian women novelists stems first and foremost from the pervasive feeling of uncertainty which marked the entire age. The Victorian era witnessed rapid changes and transitions in many fields of life; the industrial growth was extremely influential but it also triggered many evils such as child labor, inhuman working conditions, poverty and pollution especially in big cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and London. Railways were expanding all over the country but tragic railway accidents and derailments confused the Victorians. This is because, as John Gardiner writes in *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect*, "the whole age was struggling to come to terms with modernity" and "this was an age, after all, that had been fearful of inventions like railway train" (16). It is true that the Victorians were excited, fearful and frustrated about the railways, just as they were for every other innovation and change in their lives. In the following quote Gardiner further comments on the genuine characteristics of the Victorian age, trying to prove how paradoxical they indeed were:

Confidence and uncertainty jostled with one another at every turn. That uncertainty would increase throughout the nineteenth century, so that by the 1890s Britain had an almost split personality: a jangling and colourful jingoism abroad, and a soft, effete decadence at home – the age of bristle-moustached



Kitchener was also the age of long-haired Wilde. In a way both were signals, in their excess, that Victorian self-doubt was beginning to surmount Victorian self-confidence. The twentieth century began not with a clean sheet but with the reaction against the Victorians already underway. (17)

In the same vein, Walter E. Houghton writes that “deconstruction and reconstruction” are the two important aspects of the Victorian period: “As the old order of doctrines and institutions is being attacked or modified or discarded, at one point and then another, a new order is being proposed or inaugurated” (3). That is why, as has been emphasized in the first epigraph to this chapter, the Victorians were living “in an age of doubt” (10).

Feelings of doubt and uncertainty intensify when the concern is a political movement such as feminism, because it not only aims at changing life styles but also targets at changing the rooted thought systems such as patriarchy, which is perhaps the most difficult thing to do. Women novelists of the Victorian era felt confused and ambivalent because they had to be read, published, and also they had to secure a respected place in literary circles just as male writers. Thus, it is no surprise that women had to write within the male tradition even when they aimed to undermine it. As Elaine Showalter wisely puts it “[w]omen’s writing are not...*inside* and *outside* of the male tradition; they are inside two traditions simultaneously” (“Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” 202). Likewise, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, where Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the possibilities of female authorship in a patrilineal literary tradition, they state that Victorian women novelists “managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards” (73). This might sound like a paradox, but the contradictory position of women novelists in the nineteenth century stems from the fact that women writers had to exist and not perish in a literary milieu where male authors and their literary norms ruled. To quote Showalter fully in this respect, “the female literary tradition comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society” (*A Literature of Their Own* 12).

To a large extent, the relationship between women novelists and their society is what creates the central paradox in women's fiction, especially when their approach to the concerns of the women's movement is considered. Thompson interprets this paradox in the following way: "Novels by Victorian women writers tend to be melting pots of ideological conflict and exploration of attitudes toward women's nature and role, full of the dialogic interplay of voices that Bakhtin identifies as central to the novel genre" (4). In *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi takes a similar position: "If patriarchy generates its own all-pervasive ideological structures, it is difficult to see how women in the nineteenth century could manage to develop or maintain a feminist consciousness untainted by the dominant patriarchal structures" (64). These all explain why women novelists of the time could not create a purely feminist literature while the activists of the time were running for equal rights in the public sphere.

To explain why Victorian women novelists held an ambivalent position in their novels, this study additionally argues that the contradictions and paradoxes in women's writing stem from the fact that women were expected to write with a strict sense of duty, or, in other words, with a sharp understanding of morality even when they diverged from picturing patriarchal images of women. Rigidity, a high sense of morality, austerity and discipline characterize the Victorians very well, marking their attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and feelings:

the most enduring and distinctive characteristic of the Victorian age, one finds it in its high sense of moral responsibility. A consideration of this is more important to an understanding of the Victorians than any other factor . . . the Victorians were almost always acting with reference to their all-pervading belief in the moral imperatives of personal responsibility, of duty, and of living for something other than the satisfaction of the immediate needs of the self. (Seaman 6)

For Victorian women, writing was not only necessary for economic or personal fulfillment, but it was also a moral obligation. One reason why Victorian women gained such a role as writers is because they wrote for the market. They might have felt the pressure of the expectations and demands of the publishers and their readership. Thus, it is possible that they felt the urgency to meet those expectations. This can be observed particularly when the conduct literature of the

time is considered. In the nineteenth century, conduct books and manuals for women were not only very popular but it was believed that they were also necessary to teach women the upright manners and the right rules of etiquette. Sarah Stickney Ellis' (1799-1872) books are perhaps the most referred to examples in this genre. To guide Victorian women about their duties and obligations, Mrs. Ellis wrote *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), *The Daughters of England* (1842), *The Wives of England* (1843) and *The Mothers of England* (1843). As the books' titles plainly evoke, these works aimed at training women about their domestic roles and obligations. Richard A. Currie writes that "in addition to conduct books, Ellis sought to advance her views about women and temperance by writing fiction" (175). Fictional works by women of course constituted a different category than the genre of conduct literature. Still, the same instructive discourse can be felt in fictional writings by women, too. Thus, even though women were brave enough to problematize the concerns of Victorian feminism bluntly in their work, they, on the other hand, had to be disciplinary.

This is what happens particularly in women's sensation fiction; female transgressiveness is punished severely, which makes it really difficult to appreciate the subversive aspects of these novels. By punishing the erring heroine, these novels not only discipline the heroine but they also discipline women readers, whose reading experience might influence their feelings and thoughts. In domestic novels, likewise, the confinement in domestic spheres, the denial of alternative opportunities for women characters in public spheres serve for the same purpose. Women writers' ambivalence was thus a consequence of a strict sense of morality, but it was also inevitable because creating an authentic feminist voice in such a society was nearly impossible. After all, Victorian women novelists had to cope with a patriarchal understanding of novel writing; they had to meet the demands of the patriarchal publishing industry to be published in the first place. As Sutherland writes in *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* there was "no Victorian novel . . . which was not materially affected by the publishing

system” (6). That is why, for various reasons which will be explored in the following section, while a handful of Victorian women novelists secured a canonical status, quite a lot of others were pushed to oblivion.

## **2.4 Studying the Underread**

The novels that will be studied in this dissertation are classified in different sources as non-canonical, underread, underrepresented, neglected or minor. Yet, they were very well known in their time as best-sellers. In this section, debates regarding canon formation will be explained briefly, and then the discussion will be narrowed down to the formation of the nineteenth century literary canon. Finally, the reasons that bring Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood and Margaret Oliphant together in this study will be explained.

Jane E. Thomas writes that “the literary canon is a contentious concept” (163). In the first place, it is hardly possible to fix the canonical works. In the second place, it is impossible to name a single authority that can determine what constitutes the canon. In *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, the canon is defined as “an informal institution of literature whose specific inclusions and exclusions, deletions and exceptions are nowhere codified” (“Canon” 27). This makes canon formation a controversial process. For the same reason, in his *Canons and Consequences Reflections and the Ethical Force of Imaginative Ideals*, Charles Altieri emphasizes the contentious nature of the canon:

Canons are not natural facts and do not warrant the kinds of evidence we use in discussing matters of fact. We are not likely to find general laws governing our acts as canon-formers, nor is extended empirical inquiry likely to resolve any essential theoretical issues. Canons are based on both descriptive and normative claims; we cannot escape the problem of judging others’ value statements by our own values. (25)

To shape the literary canon, it is now agreed that many “descriptive and normative claims,” (25) are constituted by diverse institutions, which can be taken as the authorities in determining who reads what. Jane Thomas, for example, thinks that the factors which determine the literary canon are “the product of complex relationships between authorized literary, historical and cultural institutions, such

as literature departments in universities and colleges, and publishers” (163). John Guillory, likewise, emphasizes the effective function of institutions in determining what the literary canon can consist of:

The form of the canon belongs to the process of the reproduction of social relations, but it does not enter this process immediately. The canon does not accrete over time like a pyramid built by invisible hands, nor does it act directly and irresistibly on social relations, like a chemical reagent; in its concrete form as a syllabus or curriculum, the canon is a discursive instrument of “transmission” situated historically within a specific institution of reproduction: the school. (56)

In a very similar way, Weedon puts the stress on the influence of educational systems, publishers and literary critics: “It is in the universities, in state cultural institutions, in publishing, in reviewing, in the awarding of literary prizes and in all branches of education that critical practices are established, reproduced and challenged” (136). Many scholars writing on the construction of the literary canon concur on the influence of various institutions in determining what can be included in the canon. Apparently, educational institutions, publishing industry, and critics can be thought of as the leading determinants.

Canonical works are generally labeled as classics, and defining a classic is another tricky matter. This is crucial because the definition of a classic can also explain why some works are considered canonical while some others are not. In his “Why Read the Classics?” Italo Calvino itemizes a set of definitions to make clear the characteristics of ‘classics’ in literature. One aspect is repeated in all the items he enumerates, which is the fact that classics are often read more than once in one’s lifetime: “The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: ‘I’m rereading...’, never ‘I’m reading’” (3). John Mullan, in *How Novels Work*, offers a similar comment: “The obvious definition of a ‘classic’ (a label still important to publishers of fiction) is a book that readers keep rereading” (2). Also, in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*, Adrian Poole makes the same emphasis while explaining the criteria behind the selection of the twenty-seven writers that are included in the companion. Poole writes: “These twenty-seven writers are those whose work currently seems of most enduring value; they are those whom most readers now are likely to wish to

reread and whom they should therefore read first” (10). At this point one should ask: what are the forces that make the reading public re-read some novels and not others? This can be explained by the “desirability of the novel,” as Jane Smiley puts it. According to Smiley, “the novel has a public life” (105) and “[g]ossip about the novel . . . builds its desirability. After the first copies are distributed, it is virtually impossible for any authorities to stop their spread, and if a controversy enters the public mind, the desirability of the novel grows” (105). Thus, the more controversial a novel is, the more it may sell; yet still, being a best-seller does not guarantee a canonical status, as will be discussed later.

These points can be considered as readers’ contribution to canon formation as demand makers, but it should be highlighted again that readers’ choices can never be independent from the authorities in the field. Thus, what makes a literary work classic is a very complex issue, and as mentioned earlier, the power of literary authorities, editors of much consulted reference books, publishers and educational institutions are influential agents in this process.

The works by Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, William Thackeray, The Brontë Sisters (especially Charlotte and Emily), George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, which are frequently taught in educational institutions, are now considered the Victorian classics. However, defining the Victorian canon is a very arduous task and has caused fierce debates over time. One reason is that, as John Sutherland points out, “when it comes to Victorian novels and Victorian novelists, we just don’t know how many there were” (“The Underread” xi). That is why, it is hard to talk about a consensus about which names constitute the Victorian canon. Still, although there has been considerable changes in the Victorian canon over time, the great names according to many scholars are the same and they recur in almost all taxonomies.

Though she is not considered Victorian, starting with Jane Austen would be fair because she is one of the first names that one remembers speaking of the nineteenth century literary canon. Jane Austen is also important because, as Emily

Auerbach writes, she “is the earliest woman included in the canon of English literature” (“Jane Austen (1775-1817)” 10). Virginia Woolf, in her 1929 dated article “Women and Fiction,” identifies “the four great women novelists” and she starts with Jane Austen. Other women novelists Woolf includes in her list are Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot (45). Neither Anne Brontë nor Elizabeth Gaskell is included in Woolf’s list. Lucy Poate Stebbins’ list of great women writers is very surprising. In her *A Victorian Album* (1946) Stebbins writes that Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and finally, to the surprise of contemporary readers, Margaret Oliphant constitute “the four great writers” of the Victorian age (viii). However, it is now agreed that Margaret Oliphant belongs to the underrepresented women writers and the reasons will be explained in the following pages.

As a significant source regarding the discussions of the Victorian canon, F. R. Leavis’ *The Great Tradition* (1948) opens with the following premise: “The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad” (9). Leavis discusses the last three in separate chapters as the prominent English writers, but the first chapter, which shares the same title with the book, “The Great Tradition,” discusses the changing dynamics of the Victorian canon. Leavis finishes the first chapter by repeating the important names according to him once again, but this time he includes D.H. Lawrence in his list as “the great genius” following Conrad (35). This is how Leavis concludes his list: “Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Conrad, and D. H. Lawrence: the great tradition of the English novel is there” (39). Leavis only includes two women novelists, Jane Austen and George Eliot, to his final list of remarkable English writers. Still, he spares a brief note on the Brontës and surprisingly writes that Charlotte Brontë can be discussed in the minor Victorians list: “It is tempting to retort that there is only one Brontë. Actually, Charlotte, though claiming no part in the great line of English fiction (it is significant that she couldn’t see why any value should be attached to Jane Austen), has a permanent interest of a minor kind” (39). Leavis also includes Emily Brontë in the minor tradition, but still

celebrates her talent by saying that she was “the genius” of the Brontë sisters (39). Leavis does not even mention Anne Brontë anywhere.

Walter Allen’s work, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (1958) is another crucial reference book to be consulted. Allen takes Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot and Mrs. Gaskell as the most notable writers of the Victorian age (139). However, he adds, “they do not form a coherent body and Emily Brontë will prove an exception to all generalizations we care to make about the rest of them” (139). Differences in the categorizations of the canonical writers in various scholarly works prove that, as have been defined earlier, the canon was very unsteady and subjective. It is floating and cannot be fixed.

*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (8<sup>th</sup> ed. 2006) includes five women in the section titled “The Victorian Age:” two poets; Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti, and three novelists; Elizabeth Gaskell, Emily Brontë, George Eliot. This time, Charlotte Brontë and Anne Brontë are excluded. Concisely, Jane Austen, either Charlotte Brontë or Emily Brontë (or sometimes both), Elizabeth Gaskell, and definitely George Eliot are agreed canonical women and they have a long established place in the Victorian canon.

Seemingly, Anne Brontë, the youngest of the Brontë sisters, is a contested name. This is because in the twentieth century her reputation was still suffering from the overshadowing that her elder sister Charlotte started in the early 1850s, and it is with the 1970s feminist movement that her name is resurrected again along with some other women novelists that have been neglected before. Thus, for instance, although many critics before the 1970s did not include Anne Brontë in their list of canonical writers, John Sutherland writes in *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (1989) that “the Brontës comprise a writing family, three of whom rank as major Victorian novelists” (84).

The reasons why some names are indisputably canonical while the reception of others changes over time is much discussed. At this point one should



recall the bestselling canonical writers as well as once-bestselling now non-canonicals ones. Thus, when the bestsellers of different periods and their changing canonical status are considered, the canon discussion gains another dimension: the distinction between serious literature and popular literature. The canonical writers who are thought to have produced serious literature generally become bestsellers of all times. Clive Bloom's study, *Bestsellers Popular Fiction Since 1900*, covers bestselling books published after 1900, but in the first chapter titled "Origins, Problems and Philosophy of the Bestseller," Bloom makes some references to the bestselling canonical writers of the nineteenth century:

It is clear that Jane Austen's works sold many more copies in the twentieth century than in the whole of the nineteenth and certainly in her own lifetime; Dickens sells as many books now as during in his own lifetime and George Eliot still has a readership even if it might be largely academic. These writers remain bestsellers, often outselling modern authors either because of their popularity (boosted by films television serializations, etc.) or because of special circumstances (being required school or college reading). (7)

However, the popular bestsellers which appeal more to the public taste cause intense debates among the literary critics. Charles Dickens can be cited as a key male name in this discussion. Although Dickens is indisputably canonical now, he used to be a debatable figure. The reason was that he was a bestseller writer of his time and he was appealing to the masses. Leavis does not include Dickens in what he calls "the great tradition," in the English novel and he explains why: "That Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics is certain. But the genius was that of a great entertainer, and he had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than his description suggests" (30). Allen, too, stresses the same point about Dickens and writes that he "was the great novelist who was also the great entertainer, the greatest entertainer, probably, in the history of fiction. Much of the misapprehension of him comes from this fact, and from the related fact that, formally, he was a man of little education writing for a public often more poorly educated than himself" (159). While the canonical writers were thought to produce serious literature, Dickens was also entertaining the readers. That is why discussions whether he was producing serious or popular literature caused confusions about him. Yet, Dickens

is a unique case in this discussion because his canonical status is not even contested today. However, the prestige of many women novelists of the Victorian era suffered severely from the distinction between serious literature and popular literature. Many women novelists whose publicity was not even questioned before are now either lost or neglected.

To explain the exclusion of once popular now neglected women writers from the Victorian canon, feminist scholars tend to discuss the dichotomy between serious literature and popular literature as a gendered issue. The strict distinction made between the serious novel and the popular novel, or, in other words, the high culture novel (the realist novel) and the low culture novel (romances, thrillers and sensation novels) is very important in determining the exclusion of countless Victorian women writers from the canon. These are gendered concepts because the former is generally associated with eminent male authors, who are now considered canonical, while the latter is occupied by women practitioners, who lost their readership in time. This is where canon formation takes a gendered turn. The most important exceptions are Elizabeth Gaskell, who was writing social problem novels and secured her place in the high culture tradition and George Eliot, who was definitely in the high culture tradition, not only as a novelist but also as a philosopher and intellectual of the time.

Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortin's *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (1989) is a very important study of the distinction between serious literature and popular literature, and its influences on lost women writers of the late Victorian period. Tuchman and Fortin begin their study by asking the following critical question: "Why does some literature supposedly transcend the ages and so constitute 'culture' while other once-popular books languish in disuse? Why and how does an occupation shift from having a preponderance of female practitioners to being performed mainly by men?" (1). Tuchman and Fortin's observation suggests that after the period of women's predominance in novel writing between 1840 and 1879, men took control of the field between 1880 and 1899, and redefined the notion of a classic: "men of

letters, including critics, actively redefined the nature of a good novel and a great author. They preferred a new form of realism that they associated with ‘manly’ literature—that is, great literature” (8). This resulted in the assumption that popular women’s writing of the time was associated with the low-culture novel, which explains why many women were excluded from the Victorian literary canon. Tuchman and Fortin further explain this with the empty-field phenomenon: “Applied to female-dominated white-collar occupations, the empty field phenomenon implies that when people realize that a job entails social or economic rewards, they may find it desirable” (4-5). Novel writing was becoming a promising area and the outstanding number of women novelists who entered this empty-field caused the feminization of the field. According to Tuchman and Fortin’s argument, this resulted in the emergence of the distinction between the high culture novel and the low culture novel and the latter was associated with womanly writing, while the former was considered manly.

Especially the sensation novelists were extremely influenced by the distinction between the high culture and the low culture traditions. The two sensation novelists that will be studied in the following chapters, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood can be very good examples for once bestselling now underrepresented novelists, who suffered from the marginalization of the popular fiction of the mid-Victorian period. Both Braddon and Wood’s popularity was beyond question in the 1860s, a decade which witnessed what Andrew Radford calls “the sensation craze” (88). Indeed, Pykett notes, “they were two of the best-selling novels of the entire nineteenth century” (*Improper’ Feminine* 166). Marian Shaw says that “*Lady Audley’s Secret* was published in 1862 and reached its eighth edition in three months” (223). Sutherland also confirms the popularity of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and writes that she was the “queen of the circulating libraries and the most consistent of Victorian bestseller novelists” (*The Stanford Companion* 80). Likewise, in her introduction to Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, Elisabeth Jay notes that the novel “was reprinted four times in three-decker form between 19 September 1861 and February 1862, merited a 5,000 run of the one-

volume illustrated edition in 1862, and continued to sell well for the rest of the century” (xxxviii). Regarding both novelists’ popularity in the mid-Victorian period and their exclusion from most of the categorizations of the major Victorian writers, the explanations generally stress the distinction between the serious and the popular. Ann Cvetkovich’s interpretation also makes the same emphasis:

[M]uch of the contemporary scholarship takes for granted the aesthetic distinction between high and low culture made by the Victorians. Many critics of the novel have implicitly or explicitly separated canonical authors, such as Richardson, Austen, Dickens, and Eliot, from the popular novels that influenced them and alongside of which their work was read, in the interest of constructing a high-culture novel tradition. Popular genres, such as the sensation novel, are consigned to second-rate status through a process that often replicates nineteenth-century discourses suspicious of working-class readers, female audiences, and affectively powerful or nonrealist literature. (15)

This also highlights the hierarchical clustering of novels as domestic and sensational as Cvetkovich further comments: “[i]n defining the sensation novel as inferior or second-rate fiction, the critics constructed the category of a high-culture novel whose moral mission was to displace the popular forms that were entertaining and corrupting the mass reading public” (17). The writers of realist fiction also contributed to the marginalization of the writers of popular best sellers. Women novelists who wrote domestic novels looked down on especially women sensation and romance writers. George Eliot and Margaret Oliphant can be noted as two very well-known critics in this regard. For instance, in “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” (1856) George Eliot mocks the common features of the sensation novels written by women and basically criticizes the clichés of representation and recurring themes in what she teasingly calls “Silly Novels.” In the same vein, Margaret Oliphant in two of her articles titled “Sensation Novels,” (1862) and “Novels” (1867) harshly criticizes women sensation novelists and accuses them of presenting immoral and thus unreal women characters. Apparently, women’s criticism of other women also contributed to the overshadowing of once very popular novelists.

Still, this hierarchical categorization of Victorian novels was reversed by the new feminist interest in the popular fiction of the Victorian era. As has been

briefly mentioned before, the feminist movement of the 1970s had a great influence on the resurrection of neglected works by many women novelists, who were mostly the sensation writers:

Since the early 1970s we have witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in women writers across centuries and cultures. Women's texts have been recovered, women's writing has found a publisher's market, courses in women's literature have been created, and some might even argue that curricula are beginning to be transformed by the inclusion of women writers. (Langland *Telling Tales* 92)

In her article titled "Mapping the Future of Victorian Studies," Ruth Robbins takes the feminist interest in popular fiction by women as "the single most important incursion of theory into Victorian literary studies" (210). According to Robbins, "the difference it has made is immeasurable, leading to a radical reformation of the curriculum and, in the 1980s, to a revolution in publishing as the expanded canon required the support of good editions of the 'new' books for students to read" (210). For example, The Virago Press, which publishes the neglected women writers of the past centuries, makes an important contribution in this respect. Having also published Margaret Oliphant's *Phoebe Junior* in 1989, the Virago press defines its aims and incentives on the last page of this edition with the following words:

The first Virago Modern Classic, *Frost in May* by Antonia White, was published in 1978. It launched a list dedicated to the celebration of women writers and to the rediscovery and reprinting of their works. Its aim was, and is, to demonstrate the existence of a female tradition in fiction, and to broaden the sometimes narrow definition of a 'classic' which has often led to the neglect of interesting novels and short stories. Published with new introductions by some of today's best writers, the books are chosen for many reasons: they may be great works of fiction; they may be wonderful period pieces; they may reveal particular aspects of women's lives; they may be classics of comedy or storytelling. (n.p)

In her *Working With Feminist Criticism*, Mary Eagleton writes that Virago and the Women's Press are first remembered in Britain as feminist publishing houses (105). However, she adds, "in 1993 the Women's Research and Resource Centre in London recorded twenty-one feminist publishing houses" (105). This made available many texts by women novelists to contemporary readers and resurrected feminist academic interest in the underread novels.

This interest also triggered an attempt to change the Western canon: “If critics from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had set in motion the establishment of a canon of Victorian women’s writing, then the feminist critiques of the last three decades of the twentieth century began to consolidate it” (Boardman and Jones 6). This is mainly because “feminist literary criticism quickly identified the male-dominated character of the Western canon and proceeded to challenge its selection procedures,” (“Canon” *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* 22) because it was thought that the patriarchal nature of the literary canon “has chosen so few women writers as major figures and it has relegated so many women to obscurity” (“Canon” *A Dictionary of Feminist Theory* 29).

Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood were among those women novelists whose works survived thanks to this feminist publishing project. In their introduction to *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina take Wilkie Collins’ *Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret* as “canonical sensation texts” (xi). In *Disease, Desire, and the Body* Pamela Gilbert writes that “*Lady Audley’s Secret* has been elevated to the level of para-canon, the rest of Braddon’s impressive and worthwhile *oeuvre* is sadly neglected” (7). Lyn Pykett takes *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* as “the alternative canons of female-authored literature” (Afterword 277). Though Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s reputation is secured, Ellen Wood is still less recognized than Braddon. Yet, Wood’s *East Lynne* was also revived:

By the end of the century, Wood’s readership was diminishing, and many of her books were no longer in print. This trend continued for several decades, until both fiction by Wood and essays about her were rarities. In the last three decades, however, interest in feminist criticism and sensation fiction has revived *East Lynne* from obscurity. (Grose 413)

Margaret Oliphant, the third novelist that will be studied in this dissertation, is a complex figure for the discussion of the Victorian canon. Oliphant was very popular both as a novelist and as a literary critic in her time. She was the writer of over ninety novels, many short stories and countless essays

for *Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine*, which was the most significant and popular literary magazine in the Victorian period. Also, Margaret Oliphant is known as “Queen Victoria’s favorite novelist” (Sutherland *Stanford Companion* 477). As R. C. Terry also writes in *Victorian Popular Fiction*, “Queen Victoria read and admired her novels, several times calling her to audience, and at her funeral in 1897 a wreath bore a message of respect and farewell from the monarch” (68). As mentioned earlier, Stebbins includes Oliphant in her great Victorian writers list and also defines her as the “Victorian of the Victorians”: “She was a woman of great ability and of large accomplishments the most inventive and the most versatile novelist of the century, a Victorian of the Victorians” (ix).

However, Oliphant could not find a place in the literary canon of the Victorian period. Many contemporary critics who work on Oliphant cannot help discussing the reasons of her exclusion from the Victorian canon. In his article titled “The Paradoxes of Oliphant’s Reputation,” John Stock Clarke asks the following question: “How was it possible that such a distinguished and individual novelist, celebrated by so many of her contemporaries for her remarkable contribution to English literature, should subsequently be dismissed and ignored, misinterpreted and misjudged, as surely no other important English writer has been?” (45). Critics agree on the idea that it is the extreme productivity of Margaret Oliphant which overshadowed her reputation. “She crippled her talent by overproduction” Clarke says (33). Lewis Melville, too, notes the same, saying that “her amazing literary fecundity was detrimental to her fame” (259). And finally, George Saintsbury’s comment on the same issue is noteworthy as well:

in Mrs. Oliphant’s case we ask, how could any human being, on such a system of production, be expected to produce masterpieces? Scott, I think, once wrote four or nearly four novels in a year: and the process helped to kill him. Mrs. Oliphant did it over and over again, besides alternating the annual dose still more frequently with twos and threes. In her case the process only killed her novels. (286)

However, Clarke thinks that beside the extreme productivity argument, there can be some other reasons explaining her exclusion from the Victorian canon. Clarke notes that she was found “old fashioned and conventional,” by

many twentieth century critics (46). She could not achieve a “consistent perfection of style” and she isolated herself from the literary circles (46). Such factors also contributed to her exclusion. It should not be forgotten that although she started writing at a young age, at some difficult point in her life, Oliphant had to publish novels for financial reasons. The material conditions of her life were miserable compared to the renowned names of the same period such as George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and the legendary Brontës; yet still, a comparison with such names was also inescapable:

Compared unfavorably then as now with such women novelists as George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, Oliphant herself attributed the less-than-satisfactory fate of her literary reputation to pressing material circumstances—widowed early in life, she assumed sole financial responsibility for her family from that time forward—that forced her to become more prolific than she might otherwise have been.

(D’Albertis “Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant” 298)

In her autobiography, Oliphant, too, was aware of the uneven quality of her writing and its connection with the hard conditions of her life. She writes:

In this my resolution which I did make, I was after all, only following my instincts, it being in reality easier to me to keep on with a flowing sail, to keep my household and make a number of people comfortable at the cost of incessant work, and an occasional great crisis of anxiety, than to live the self-restrained life which the greater artist imposes upon himself. (16)

It is clear from her autobiography that Oliphant also felt that her fame would diminish in time. Oliphant’s autobiography reveals that her aspiration to write like George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë was so high that she underestimated the value of her own works. That is, she, too, cannot help comparing her writing to the literary stars of the Victorian age. The following is her comment on Charlotte Brontë:

I was reading of Charlotte Brontë the other day, and could not help comparing myself with the Picture more or less as I read. I don’t suppose my powers are equal to hers—my work to myself looks perfectly pale and colorless beside hers—but yet I have had far more experience and, I think, a fuller conception of life. (10)

George Eliot occupies a large place in Oliphant’s autobiography. “No one even will mention me in the same breath with George Eliot,” writes Oliphant (17) and



at some point she openly asks if she is “a little envious of her” (14). However, Oliphant was aware of the sharp contrast between George Eliot’s life style and the tough conditions of her own life: “How I have been handicapped in life! Should I have done better if I had been kept, like her, in a mental greenhouse and taken care of? This is one of the things it is perfectly impossible to tell” (15). This “mental greenhouse” is a really interesting expression to define George Eliot and the intellectual circle she was enjoying. Here, Oliphant implies that as a childless woman, George Eliot did not have any domestic obligations. Also, the intellectual and romantic relationship she dared to live with George Henry Lewes encouraged and fostered her as a novelist. Such thoughts sound like a lament when she additionally writes that “George Eliot and George Sand make me half inclined to cry over my poor little unappreciated self” (17).

As a matter of fact, such comparisons were inevitable for every woman novelist of the Victorian period. Also, one can talk about other factors which can better explain why some very well-known writers of the period are today underread. The following passage by Thompson explains the matter in a nutshell and can also be applied to all three novelists that will be discussed in the following chapters:

Some of the principal factors at work during the Victorian period which contributed to the eventual exclusion of women writers from the canon include the increasing distinctions being made between popular and serious novels, the view that works by women are subjective and biased, especially in terms of their position on the woman question, and the increasing use of George Eliot as a touchstone against which other women writers would be compared and found wanting. (8)

Considering both male and female novelists of the Victorian period, it is no wonder that George Eliot was one of the most influential novelists of the era. However, it should be underlined that George Eliot and other established canonical names such as the Brontës and Elizabeth Gaskell, the writers of realist domestic fiction, cannot alone represent Victorian women’s writing. Women writers of Victorian popular fiction were very influential and controversial both to the Victorian readers and also to the contemporary readers and critics. Thompson

contends that studying neglected writers is necessary in order to reach a full understanding of the nineteenth century literary landscape:

If we look at literature from the standpoint of cultural studies or from interdisciplinary or sociological perspectives the value of studying the contributions of neglected Victorian women writers becomes readily apparent. Understanding the whole spectrum of women's literary production is crucial if we want to understand the literary landscape of Victorian Britain, to investigate the female literary tradition, and to comprehend women's history. (13)

Likewise, Thomas suggests that reading both the major writers and the marginalized ones can “undermine the singular authority of individual writers and texts” (173). Commenting on such “singular authority” or dominance of the canonical writers, Sutherland also underlines that “[g]eneralizations about ‘the Victorian novel’ (which are common enough in academic discourse) are often hobbled by being restricted to the dozen writers designated as ‘major’ by the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*” (“The Underread” xi). Nonetheless, Sutherland continues, “there remain a daunting number of unread but usefully readable works in the genre that ought—over the next few years as computerized cataloguing makes them accessible—to attract more critical attention than they have in the past” (xii).

This study contends that studying these novelists will also undermine the authority of the former scholarship, which prioritizes the canonical novelists and their works. Feminist criticism's interest in the underrepresented women novelists mostly stressed the feminist aspects, or, as more recent ones tend to do, the anti-feminist undertones in the underrepresented women novelists' work. This study, on the other hand, will emphasize the ambivalence in Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood and Margaret Oliphant. To do this, the analysis of their selected novels will focus on how the novelists create unconventional heroines in the first place and later treat them unsympathetically throughout the narrative.

Three criteria have been followed while deciding on the novels for analysis. First, these novels as case studies exemplify the disciplinary function of literature in different ways, and they target at controlling and taming both the

heroines and women readers. The centrality of women characters is noteworthy because the main story is built around the heroine. Also, the central women characters in the selected narratives are unconventional in different ways. For example, the two sensation novels present bigamously married women characters. Guillory says that “non-canonical works can be seen to express values which are transgressive, subversive, anti-hegemonic,” (20) which is true for the two sensation novels that will be discussed in this study. In the second place, Oliphant’s domestic novel presents two stiff women characters at the crux of the novel, who are depicted as unconventionally strong and one as the head of a bank. However, each novel that will be studied in detail tries to push women characters to a disadvantaged position in the end, appropriating women’s place in accordance with the patriarchal Victorian norms.

The function of women characters’ negative feelings and unfriendly behaviors are also noteworthy at this point. Feelings are very important in a study of the novel genre because as Barbara Hardy writes in *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction*, novel is an “affective form,” (19) which “generates forms of feeling, for writer, characters, and reader” (11). Regarding especially the Victorian novel and its women characters, Ann Cvetkovich, too, emphasizes the significance of feelings: “[w]hether she expresses her feelings or must restrain them, the middle-class woman is in any case constructed as a feeling individual” (2). Thus, the dominance of inimical relations and negative feelings among women characters such as jealousy, hatred, rage, caprice, violence will be given special attention and such feelings will be interpreted as expected consequences of power relations that define and control women’s experiences with other women. Not only are women characters made to hate each other through such negative emotions, they are also made to hate themselves, through feelings such as extreme remorse and guilt, as a result of which the erring women characters are tamed. Such negative emotions in this study will be interpreted as a strategy of disciplining.

Second, novels from two competing genres have been put together; the sensation novel and its “well defined anti-type,” the domestic novel (Sutherland, *Stanford Companion* 192). Regarding contemporary feminist readings, one aspect the sensation novel is celebrated for is the representation of women as transgressors of patriarchal conventions, yet it should be underlined that the plotting in these novels does not always favor women in the end. In contrast, the domestic novel pictures women in domestic spheres as followers of right conventions. However, they are not rewarded at the end, either. By using novels from two different woman genres, it is intended to reveal that techniques of disciplining in each genre differ considerably. Though the sensation genre is considered as a feminist digression among the Victorian novelistic genres, these narratives might end up being more conservative and disciplinary regarding the lessons taught to the reader through characterization, plotting and narrative voice.

Third, the reason why Margaret Oliphant was grouped with two sensation writers was that she was a severe critic of the sensation novel. The women sensation novelists were criticized by many critics, novelists and important religious figures such as Henry Longueville Mansel (1820-1871), who was a renowned reverend and philosopher of the Victorian era. Still, Margaret Oliphant is especially remarkable in her fierce attacks on the sensation novelists, particularly Braddon and Wood. Shaw comments on the same issue about the confrontation of Margaret Oliphant and the sensation writers: “The respectable drudgery of Margaret Oliphant’s career was in marked contrast to the irregular life and spectacular success of a novelist whom Oliphant nominated as the head of the Sensation School, Mary E. Braddon” (223). Such a grouping will also indicate that discipline was in process among women novelists too, and tried to shape what and how women should have written.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

All novels, because they move repeatedly between action and reflection, are simultaneously about private experience and public events. For this reason, morality is a perennial gray area in the novel—characters are always doing things in private that challenge the reader's sense of what is appropriate.

Jane Smiley

*13 Ways of Looking at the Novel*

Victorian women writers have been located in many dichotomies; that is, they have been positioned in various either/or situations. As explored in the previous chapter, they have been categorized either feminist or anti-feminist novelists, clustered as writers of serious (realist, domestic novels) or popular (sensation novels, romances, thrillers) literature, seen as creators of proper or improper images of women characters or womanly themes and finally grouped as canonical or underread. However, as this study will indicate, Victorian women novelists cannot be fixed in either/or situations, they are rather ambivalent in many respects. Women's narratives' complex relation to the concerns of the Victorian feminism is the most distinct point where their ambivalence can be observed.

The feminist theoretical framework that will be focused on in this chapter will thus try to explain the ambivalent nature of women's narratives under three sub-headings, the first being "Taking Women Writers as a Separate Category." Women constitute one component of perhaps the most important dichotomy in patriarchal social structures: man/woman. Thus, especially when the rising female authority in Victorian novel industry is considered, why taking women as a separate category matters needs further explanation. The second sub-heading

titled “How to Treat Texts by Women: Feminist Approaches,” will discuss the variations in approaching a text within the feminist methodology. The last section titled “Literature as Discourse: Victorian Women’s Writing as a Disciplinary Practice,” constitutes the kernel of this study, and will explain the disciplinary nature of women’s narratives by leaning on Michel Foucault’s theories on discourse, power and discipline. This section will illustrate that Victorian women novelists simultaneously rebelled against and submitted to the patriarchal norms because the dominant discourse inevitably shaped their writing, set out publication principles and also manipulated women’s writing through censors, reviews and criticisms. Thus, they ended up being disciplinary and controlling no matter how emancipatory and subversive they intentionally or unintentionally were while writing their novels. Finally, in the last sub-heading, methodology will be expounded.

### **3.1 Taking Women Writers as a Separate Category**

The whole discussion as to whether women writers can be taken as a separate category or not stems from the following plain but utterly paradoxical question: “Is there something unique about women’s writing?” (Kolodny “Some Notes” 76). This is a controversial question because although women have shared experiences due to their sex, they, at the same time, bear many important diversities. Ellen Rooney draws attention to the same controversy by raising the following critical questions in her Introduction to the *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theory*:

What does the feminist critic mean when she says ‘women’? Biologically female persons? Individuals who have been socialized as ‘feminine’? Does that socialization vary when we understand women as always already raced, classed, and sexualized, and by *contradictory* processes, which introduce differences within every construct of identity, so that there is no singular woman reader, or singular white woman reader, or singular black woman reader, or singular lesbian reader? (5)

As Rooney emphasizes, gender-based oppressions can have various roots and additional sources. In addition to sexual differences, race, class and sexual

orientation also play crucial roles in shaping female experiences. Indeed, this is an inescapable influence of postmodernism which “challenged feminist critics to avoid generalizing statements about ‘women’” (Benstock et al. 177). For example, what black women experience can be foreign to white women. Likewise, queer female experiences can differ from heterosexual female experiences in many respects. A black lesbian can be subject to triple oppression because she is oppressed and thus victimized not only because of her sexual identity but also due to her race. Therefore, it is problematic to talk about an all encompassing female experience, as will be explained in detail in the following parts. Still, ‘women’ as a huge category can bring all sorts of gender-based oppressions together, but it is always very significant to pay attention to additional sources of oppressions such as race, class, and sexual identities, if there are any, because they can make women suffer from double or triple victimization. While discussing women writers as a separate group, this study will take ‘Victorian women novelists’ as an umbrella term, which can at least bring Victorian middle-class women novelists together. This is what Anglo-American feminism did in the 1970s, especially while projecting their attention to both canonical and underrepresented texts by Victorian women novelists.

The two major feminist schools, the French School and the Anglo-Americans, whose different orientations in treating texts by women will be explored later in the next section, lay out different approaches to Kolodny’s question “Is there something unique about women’s writing?” (“Some Notes” 76). The French school is concerned with discovering a uniquely feminine mind and spirit in the texts written by women, which would also affect their writing both style-wise and content-wise. This is the exact point through which the French school discusses women writers as a group. Based on psychoanalytic theory, French feminism focuses on discovering a feminine practice of writing and does not pay much attention to the texts by women writers of the past centuries. The complications of defining a feminine writing contribute to the intricacy of the discussions in the field. This is a polemical debate because, as an important name in Anglo-American feminism, Kolodny suggests that “if we insist on discovering

something we can clearly label as a 'feminine mode,' then we are honor-bound, also, to delineate its counterpart, the 'masculine mode'" ("Some Notes" 78).

On the other hand, the focus of the Anglo-American school is to define a female literary tradition by studying women's writing of the former centuries, which can be considered as an effort to take Victorian women novelists as a separate group. Anglo-American feminism treats women writers as a subculture, as an oppressed group and concentrates more on the writings by women novelists with the aim of unearthing a writing history by women. In fact, as a term, "women as minority group" was "first coined by Helen Hacker in 1951," who "argues that women, although the majority, display many of the psychological attributes of a minority group; for example, self-hatred, a tendency to denigrate other group members and an acceptance of the dominant group's stereotyping" ("Minority group, women as" *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* 172). All of these can be observed distinctively in one of the novelists that will be studied at length in Chapter 5, Margaret Oliphant. Her scorn of her own writing can be felt in her autobiography, particularly when she harshly compares her writing with the writings of George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë. Also, notably in two of her articles on the sensation novels of the 1860s, Oliphant disdains women sensation writers, which can be a good example to "a tendency to denigrate other group members" (172). Moreover, all three novelists accept and internalize the "dominant group's stereotyping," (172) even though at the same time they create unconventional and sometimes shockingly assertive female characters.

By examining works by women novelists of the previous centuries, the Anglo-American school aims at contributing to the discovery of a female literary tradition. The nineteenth century is very important in this respect, because it was notably then that women novelists claimed a very important place in novel writing. Some women novelists like Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood, Margaret Oliphant, Rhoda Broughton and Ouida were very famous, whose novels sold a lot throughout the entire century. Yet, they were pushed to oblivion until the 1970s. The advent of Anglo-American feminism in the 1970s put especially



Victorian women novelists to the center of literary studies, enabled their republication gradually, and by the 1990s also encouraged academic studies especially on the neglected women novelists.

While discussing the grounds for what constitutes a separate category of women novelists, this section will focus on two premises (1) the contention that women writers should be considered as a subculture, a minority group (2) that women represent women's experiences better in their fiction, which is a questionable premise. The three very well-known scholarly works written by Anglo-American feminists in the late 1970s are noteworthy and will therefore be explored: *Literary Women* (1976) by Ellen Moers, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) by Elaine Showalter, and *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. As Moi expresses "these three books represent the coming-of-age of Anglo-American feminist criticism" (52). *Literary Women*, according to Moi, "was the first attempt at describing the history of women's writing as a 'rapid and powerful undercurrent'" (53). In the same vein, Doris Grumbach writes that Moers "accomplished an act of literary and cultural synthesis," (908) by focusing on important texts by women writers starting from the late eighteenth century. It should be noted, however, that *Literary Women* received much less critical acclaim than the other two works, *A Literature of Their Own* and *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which were groundbreaking because they traced the backgrounds of female authorship and displayed an influential effort to define the female literary tradition. Apparently, both works have an overt claim to take women writers as a separate group.

In this section, these works will not be reviewed separately but they will be discussed under the thematic unities they are based on. Both *A Literature of Their Own* and *The Madwoman in the Attic* try to define women's literature, and in doing so, they slowly come to the conclusion that, as an oppressed group, women writers constitute a subculture, which is why they can be studied as a group. According to this argument, what women experience as an oppressed group might be an important factor that unites them. In addition to that, both works give

importance to the discussions based on representing women's experiences in fiction. This view suggests that women can better reflect women's experiences and that point is exactly what would bring them together in a separate group. In the 1990s, this contention appeared as the central idea of what later became the standpoint feminism, which will also be explored in the following parts. As mentioned earlier, these are indeed much debated and criticized issues because women do not constitute a homogeneous community, neither do their experiences, feelings, thoughts and texts.

Defining women's fiction and setting a history for women writers have been a very difficult matter. Showalter herself accepts the hardships of the task by accentuating the difficulty of defining the right criteria for discussing women separately: "we have never been sure what unites them as women, or, indeed, whether they share a common heritage connected to their womanhood at all" (*A Literature of Their Own* 3). However, Moi argues that "[i]n a patriarchal society that discriminates against women writers because they are *women*, it is easy enough to justify a discussion of them as a separate group" (82). The most powerful assumption which holds that women writers can be clustered together emphasizes the fact that even though their experiences may vary, women have also shared experiences due to their sex as a result of which they all merge in a subculture.

In the earlier chapters, it has been mentioned that the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of a great number of women novelists, which makes it almost impossible to classify all in one group. That they were great in number is not enough to consider them as the leading group in the literary market. Showalter stresses the same point by noting that "[e]ven if women were entering literary professions in unprecedented numbers, they were perpetually a minority" (*A Literature of Their Own* 39). What she means here is that even though the remarkable rise of women novelists was striking, women writers were oppressed in the male dominant publishing system. It should be highlighted that women as a group may display various reactions towards different issues because their

ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation may differ markedly. Therefore, it is problematic to think that women as a subculture may act, think, feel, behave collectively in the same way. Still, it is true that women were considered and treated like a subculture by patriarchal societies.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar are concerned with how women writers may feel as minority and how this feeling may affect their creativity. They try to situate women writers somewhere in the male-dominant literary history; yet still, they think that women can have a distinct tradition of their own, too: “women writers participate in a quite different literary subculture from that inhabited by male writers, a subculture which has its own distinctive literary traditions, even—though it defines itself *in relation to* the ‘main,’ male-dominated, literary culture—a distinctive history” (50). In the first chapter of *The Madwoman in the Attic* titled “Toward a Feminist Poetics,” Gilbert and Gubar direct their attention to the hardships that women novelists face while creating their work. They elaborate on the difficulty of writing in a patriarchal society, which marks everything, including the use of language, thoughts and value systems. Thus, the following question they raise is pivotal to reserve some space for women novelists in the male-dominated literary tradition: “What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are, as we have seen, both overtly and covertly patriarchal?” (45-6). This is where they further elaborate on the anxiety of authorship that women writers experience. Gilbert and Gubar argue that while literary men experience the anxiety of creation, literary women first face the anxiety of authorship (51). Gilbert and Gubar’s emphasis at the early pages of their book is that it is inevitable for women writers to face the anxiety of authorship because the literary community, just like the other public areas of life in Victorian society, denied space to women writers. It can be thought that such anxieties could unite women writers as a subculture in the male-dominant Victorian society.

Women writers’ relationship to the culture they were living in was an “ambiguous” one, which, as Gilbert and Gubar write, “has not only defined [their]

gender but shaped [their] mind,” too (79). This is one reason why women’s texts display an ambivalent stance on the concerns of the Victorian women’s movement:

If the Queen’s looking glass speaks with the King’s voice, how do its perpetual kingly admonitions affect the Queen’s own voice? Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she ‘talk back’ to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint? We believe these are basic questions feminist literary criticism—both theoretical and practical—must answer. (Gilbert and Gubar 46)

To overcome the anxiety of authorship, nineteenth century women writers developed the strategy of what Gilbert and Gubar call “male impersonation” (65). In other words, some women writers used pseudonyms to be published without bearing the problems that most women writers faced at the time: “the most rebellious of their nineteenth-century descendants attempted to solve the literary problem of being female by presenting themselves as *male*. In effect, such writers protested not that they were ‘as good as’ men but that, as writers, they *were* men” (65). Some women writers, if they did not adopt male pseudonyms, “signaled their acceptance of conventional attitudes by foregrounding their marital status: Mrs Gaskell, Mrs Craik, Mrs Oliphant” (Morris *Literature and Feminism* 66). All in all, women novelists tended to avoid publishing novels as women for fear that they could be undervalued in the first place.

Just like Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* also claims that women constitute a subculture among dominant male writers: “It can, however, be argued that women themselves have constituted a subculture within the framework of a larger society, and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors impinging on each individual” (11). What Showalter means is that other than digging for a coherent voice, stylistic resemblances, recurring themes and patterns in women’s writing, there are some other significant factors which, she believes, must be leading issues in studying women together. To back up the women’s subculture argument which dominates the Anglo-

American literary criticism, Showalter developed distinct major phases that she thinks appeal to all minority groups in literary studies:

In looking at literary subcultures...we can see that they all go through three major phases. First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female*. These are obviously not rigid categories, distinctly separable in time, to which individual writers can be assigned with perfect assurance. The phases overlap; there are feminist elements in feminine writing, and vice versa. (*A Literature of Their Own* 13)

Also, Showalter identifies “the Feminine phase as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the Female phase as 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960” (13). The first phase, the Feminine, appeals more to the scope of this study because the novels that will be studied later in detail fall into this category. What needs to be highlighted is that these are not immutable categories and one can find different features one would not expect to see in a period. For example, feminist implications can appear in a period even when the idea of feminism did not yet appear. However, feminist and anti-feminist features might exist together too and this creates ambivalence. This is what happens in Victorian women’s writing and can be explained by looking at the way the first phase is defined by Showalter, who holds the view that women novelists in the Feminine phase imitated male writers.

As a matter of fact, the argument based on ‘imitation’ is not a new contention. In “The Lady Novelists,” Lewes also wrote about women’s imitation by interpreting this as a weakness in women’s literary tradition: “the literature of women has fallen short of its functions owing to a very natural and a very explicable weakness—it has been too much a literature of imitation. To write as men write is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real

task they have to perform” (132). Although Showalter agrees with what Lewes argued, she does not take this as a weakness. According to Showalter, this was rather a condition that women writers were unable to avoid due to the outside factors:

When G.H. Lewes complained in 1852 that the literature of women was “too much a literature of imitation” and demanded that women should express “what they have really known, felt and suffered,” he was asking for something that Victorian society had made impossible. Feminine novelists had been deprived of the language and the consciousness for such an enterprise, and obviously their deprivation extended beyond Victoria’s reign and into the twentieth century.

*(A Literature of Their Own 27)*

This means that it is almost impossible to avoid imitation especially at the time of the rise of women novelists. Also, it is very difficult to have a different point of view other than the dominant one, because the dominant point of view contaminates everywhere and every text. Similar opinions were voiced by John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Mill stressed the impossibility of developing a literary tradition that pertains to women with the following words: “If women lived in a different country from men and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own” (187). Here, Mill emphasizes the issue of influence on women’s writing. However, Showalter objects to Mill’s argument, just as she did to Lewes’ statements above, and writes that “the lost continent of the female tradition has risen like Atlantis from the sea of English literature. It is now becoming clear that, contrary to Mill’s theory, women have had a literature of their own all along” (*A Literature of Their Own* 10).

Beside the argument which takes women writers as a subculture, another controversial issue that has been discussed very much in feminist literary criticism is the reflection of women’s experiences in the fictional texts written by women. Much has been written about expressing gendered experiences in fiction, and those that pertain to women novelists abound in feminist literary criticism. According to this view, female experiences reside in the texts written by women because it is believed that women novelists can better express and represent the experiences they live as women. This can mean that the life experiences of

women writers can be a reason for studying women as a separate group because women's experience can form a strong connective bond which would make their writing distinct from male writing. As a matter of fact, this is not a new issue in the studies of women's writing. As a nineteenth century critic, Lewes maintained a similar idea:

If, however, instead of regarding literature as the expression of society, we regard it as the expression of emotions, the whims, the caprices, the enthusiasms, the fluctuating idealisms which move each epoch, we shall not be far wrong; and inasmuch as women necessarily take part in these things, they ought to give them their expression. And this leads us to the heart of the question, what does the literature of women mean? It means this: while it is impossible for men to express life otherwise than as they know it—and they can only know it profoundly according to their own experience—the advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience: in other words, a new element. Make what distinctions you please in the social world, it still remains true that men and women have different organizations, consequently different experiences. (131)

This idea still prevails in the twentieth century, as will be seen in Judith Kegan Gardiner's article titled "On Female Identity and Writing by Women:" "women's experience differs from men's in profound and regular ways" (348). Gardiner elaborates on how this difference influenced interpretations of literary works. Whether women can transfer their experiences to the texts they produce is a very controversial discussion first because many female experiences that occur in the private sphere (for example, sexual intercourse, breeding, violence and abuse) could rarely find voice in fiction. Even if such private sphere experiences were detailed in literary texts, they have finally been excluded from the mainstream literature and could not keep their sustainability in the book publishing market. Second, women's experiences are diverse and cannot be reduced to the experiences of the dominant female group (white, middle-class, for example), which would be Eurocentric in the first place. In her article "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak criticizes how this matter appears in one of the best known and widely taught Victorian novels, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Spivak's critique of the novel focuses on how the heroine's story is cherished as a Victorian woman's way to independence while the novel ignores and undervalues another very important oppression that Bertha Mason,

the Jamaican wife of Mr. Rochester, suffers from. Spivak thinks that the novel represents “the imperialist narrativization of history” (244) and hence she finds it really “unfortunate [that] the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axiom of imperialism” (243). She also takes this as an “isolationist admiration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America [which] establishes the high feminist norm” (243).

As a matter of fact, the importance of studies based on women’s experiences has been widely discussed and recognized in the humanities over the past twenty years and that polemical discussion constituted what is today called the standpoint feminism. At this point, it is necessary to go concisely into the basics of standpoint feminism for two reasons. First, because ‘experience-based’ studies lie at the core of the whole debate. Second, standpoint feminism privileges studies by women, on women, and from the perspective of women, which is the point of departure of this study.

In her article “Why Standpoint Matters,” Alison Wylie emphasizes that the standpoint theory is very paradoxical and has stirred diverse discussions: “[s]tandpoint theory may rank as one of the most controversial theories to have been proposed and debated in the twenty-five to thirty year history of second wave feminist thinking about knowledge and science” (340). This controversy stems from the basics of the theory, which are, in two plain words, women-centeredness and being experience-based. As a woman-centered theory, standpoint feminism prioritizes the experiences and standpoint of women: “Feminist standpoint theories . . . can be characterized as advocating research on or about women, which generates knowledge in opposition to dominant (patriarchal) constructions of women’s position and experiences, and so is also research *for* women” (Pilcher and Whelehan 164-65). As a matter of fact, standpoint feminism’s emergence point is a necessity to create a feminist methodology in the humanities. In Sylvia Walby’s words, “[f]eminist standpoint epistemologists assert that we need a new feminist methodology which is closer to women’s own experience” (17). In a similar way, in her article titled “Is There a



Feminist Method?” Sandra Harding draws attention to the importance of using women’s experiences while conducting research on women:

Critics argue that traditional social science has begun its analysis only in men’s experiences. That is, it has asked only the questions about social life that appear problematic from within the social experiences that are characteristic for men (white, Western, bourgeois men, that is). (6)

Harding also stresses that feminist research can be distinctive and unique only when the starting point is set as “the perspective of women’s experiences” (7). Accordingly, Allison M. Jaggar explains why ‘perspective,’ and ‘standpoint,’ are such important keywords for standpoint feminism:

In a society where the production of knowledge is controlled by a certain class, the knowledge produced will reflect the interests and values of that class. In other words, in class societies the prevailing knowledge and science interpret reality from the standpoint of the ruling class. Because the ruling class has an interest in concealing the way in which it dominates and exploits the rest of the population, the interpretation of reality that it represents will be distorted in characteristic ways. In particular, the suffering of the subordinate classes will be ignored, re-described as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved, or inevitable. (56)

Though foregrounding women’s experiences and perspectives is the backbone of standpoint feminism, this is also the first reason why it has been criticized: “their approach in the ‘shared experiences’ of women, apparently undifferentiated by class, ethnicity or sexuality . . . has attracted charges of essentialism or biological determinism” (Pilcher and Whelehan 165). The argument based on expressing women’s experiences in women’s fiction fails at this point. First, it is the variations among women which make it almost impossible to talk about a homogeneous group of women. Therefore, it is equally practically impossible to talk about a unique female experience. Regarding whether women’s experiences can unite women as a group or not, Cixous shares similar concerns: “there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman . . . what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can’t talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another” (876). In the same vein, Mary Poovey thinks that “a feminism that bases its epistemology and practice on women’s experience is simply another deluded humanism, complicit with the

patriarchal institutions it claims to oppose” (52). This is because “ ‘woman’ is only a social construct that has no basis in nature . . . this renders the experience women have of themselves and the meaning of their social relations problematic” (52). Seemingly, patriarchal structures and social relations which mold females as ‘woman’ create various forms of oppressions which are also fostered by additional sources of oppressions (class, race and sexual identity). Thus, those who criticize standpoint feminism agree on the point that it is nearly impossible to talk about a shared female experience and that one should be very careful and sensitive to additional sources of subordinations.

Applying standpoint theory to fiction is problematic, too. First, there are many standpoints to consider; of writers, of characters and of narrators. Although the writer’s personal history does not give much reliable information when analyzing a fictional text, the influence of her gendered identity on her writing and on the way she shapes characters, themes, plot and narrative perspective are important issues to consider. To Pamela Gilbert, this cannot be explained without considering the “author function” that pertains to women writers due to their sex. Though Gilbert states that women writers’ life stories cannot be the only reference point through which women’s texts are evaluated, being women shapes their relation to what they write and how they exist in the literary circles:

One of the most serious failures of feminist criticism as a corpus is its tendency, even today, to focus principally on authorial biography, a practice which unintentionally replicates the traditional sexist tendency to read canonical male-authored texts as self-contained ‘art’ and female-authored texts as simple extensions or reflections of personal experience. However, I am interested in the ‘author function’ associated with these women, a function whose gender, not incidentally dependent on the biological sex of these authors, was implicated in the construction of their readership, their market position, their generic placement, and finally their position outside the ‘canon’—and the construction of the canon itself. Hence, the fact that these are female authors makes, as well as is, a difference. (*Disease, Desire, and the Body* 7)

It is not right to assume that a woman’s standpoint is not tainted by patriarchy, which makes the matter even more complicated. Walby, too, writes that this is so: “it is not clear why women’s everyday experiences should be less contaminated by patriarchal notions than are theories. All knowledge is mediated

via ideas and concepts, and those available are necessarily affected by patriarchal relations” (18). Similarly, Jaggar thinks that as long as women are under domination it does not sound plausible to talk about a stainless standpoint that pertains to them:

the construction of a systematic theoretical alternative to prevailing ways of interpreting the world is an achievement linked inseparably with a transformation of power relations. Only when women are free from domination will they have access to the resources necessary to construct a systematic and fully comprehensive view of the world from the standpoint of women. (64)

Thus, such concerns generate essentialist charges against the effort to consider women as a separate oppressed group: “[t]his question, of whether there is a unity among women and an essential difference between them and men, is part of a wider debate on essentialism in feminist theory” (Walby 14-5). Opposed to essentialist charges, social constructionist theory in gender studies is an apt way to handle these critiques. Social constructionists suggest that social phenomena are constructed, shaped and legitimized through the social interactions of human beings. They claim that rather than biology, the process of becoming a gendered entity is important. It should be noted here that the difference between sex and gender is now considered as one of the basics of the feminist terminology. While sex refers, crudely speaking, to biological givens, gender, Vivien Burr defines, “is the social significance of sex” and “refers to the constellation of characteristics and behaviors which come to be differentially associated with and expected of men and women in a particular society” (*Gender and Social Psychology* 11). The major assumption here is that “there are no ‘essences’ inside things or people that make them what they are,” which is why, social constructionist theory basically focuses on the constructive processes (Burr, *An Introduction* 5). Gender is a category in what this theory calls a constructive process, and gender construction, like every other construction, is influenced by the way people interact with each other, and with the patriarchal structures. Therefore, gender construction becomes a factor that influences the way people construct meanings: “Social constructionism argues that our understanding of the world and each other is socially constructed through our interactions with each other” (Burr *Gender and*

*Social Psychology* 119). For instance, while becoming woman and man, every human being goes through a process which highly influences his/her ways of interpreting the world.

Regarding the same issue, Simone de Beauvoir's very influential statement in her book *The Second Sex* is now read almost like an aphorism in contemporary feminist discourse: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267). Beauvoir's statement becomes really forceful as she emphasizes the process through which female born infants become women and learn to live womanly in accordance with the norms of patriarchy. This is because, as Burr writes, "our ways of understanding the world come not from objective reality but from other people, both past and present. We are born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in our culture already exist" (*An Introduction* 7). This means that Victorian women writers, for example, were born into a male dominant patriarchal society and they could become what they were only on condition that they submitted to and internalized the long-established norms of mainstream ways of thinking. Even though they developed marginal consciousness such as emancipatory signs of feminism in fiction, in the end they yielded to the dominant thought systems, which can explain the co-existence of feminist and anti-feminist tendencies in their writing.

The contentions and controversies explained so far complicate finding a clear and definite answer to what makes a separate group of women writers because it is true that women cannot constitute a coherent, homogeneous group. Still, the opening sentence of this section has stated that women writers are positioned in various dichotomies, and the dichotomy of man/woman is the biggest of all. Speaking of Victorian women writers, it can be said that they constitute a category of their own, especially when the academic concentrations on Victorian women novelists and myriad academic studies, conferences and publications on the field are considered.

Regarding the scope of this study, Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Margaret Oliphant can also be thought of as constituting a small category

because, in the first place, they all suffered from negligence though all were very famous and their work sold very well at their time. That means they are a part of a subculture in Victorian literature, not only as women novelists, but also as underread women novelists. Secondly, they represented diverse middle-class Victorian female experiences by putting signs of feminist consciousness here and there, but ended up being conservative and thus anti-feminist by making disciplinary twists in their narratives. For example, Braddon and Wood as sensation novelists represented women characters as assertive, active and feeling subjects. Those illicit actions and feelings were also a part of Victorian female experiences, which could not find place in many Victorian classics. Margaret Oliphant, though anti-sensationalist and wrote mostly domestic novels, pictured a Victorian woman character in her novel *Hester*, who was craving for economic independence and the antagonist woman character in the same novel, Catherine, is the head of a prominent bank. Seemingly, the representations of women in these novels are extra-ordinary for the Victorians, but the narrative balance has been attained by using techniques of disciplining such as restricting, confining or punishing the heroine in various ways, as will better be examined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. All in all, this study contends that, their then best-selling and contemporary underread status, unconventional representations of women characters, and finally their disciplinary narratives can unite Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood and Margaret Oliphant as a group.

### **3.2 How to Treat Texts by Women: Feminist Approaches**

This section will make an overview of feminist literary criticism to examine the differences of feminist schools in their approaches to the central question in studying women's writing: how to treat texts written by women. To this end, in the first place, different attempts to define various objectives of feminist literary criticism will be explained. Following this, the discussion will be narrowed down to different feminist schools and various orientations they present in approaching the issue of women in fiction. Various feminisms, such as Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Post-colonial or, more specifically, Lesbian feminism, Eco-

feminism, Black feminism, or Third-World feminism as well as their sub-types make it really difficult to bring every gender-based concern together in a broad category of feminism. In other words, it is no longer valid to discuss everything under feminism as a grand narrative. This is especially due to the second wave feminism's interaction with the post-structuralist thinking that has "sought to deconstruct existing metanarratives . . . to develop new theoretical approaches which insist on historical and geographical specificity and no longer claim universal status" (Weedon 172). Still, at least in terms of literary feminisms, it can be said that two schools have been really influential after the late 1960s; the Anglo-Americans and the French school, both of which will be expounded in this section while discussing general tendencies in the feminist readings of the texts written by women.

The aftermath of the second wave feminism witnessed the emergence of feminist literary criticism as an academic interest and practice (Plain and Sellers 2). As a matter of fact, the woman question has always been the most important product of patriarchy, which is why texts written by both men and women contain footprints of different aspects of women's problems for centuries. As Plain and Seller convey, feminist literary criticism's "eventual self-conscious expression was the culmination of centuries of women's writing, of women writing about women's writing, and of women – and men- writing about women's minds, bodies, art and ideas" (2). As a matter of fact, feminist literary criticism has mainly three concerns: women as writers, women as readers, and the image and the treatment of women in fiction written by both sexes. Though it is difficult to decide which one of these focal points gains importance among the others, it can be said that contemporary feminist criticism directed their attention mostly to women as writers, that is "gynocriticism," which is defined in *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* in the following way:

This is the study of women writers and of the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women . . . Feminist literary critics who use the term gynocritics share a 'second wave' approach to literary criticism which concentrates on texts written by women. The 'first wave' feminist critics, known as resisting readers, analyzed the misogyny of books written by men. (116)

In her article titled “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” Elaine Showalter, likewise, identifies “two distinct modes of feminist criticism” (182). She states that “the first mode is ideological; it is concerned with the feminist as *reader*, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and women-as-sign in semiotic systems” (182). The second mode of feminist criticism, according to Showalter, is “the study of women *as writers*” (184). Showalter further conveys that “history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of female literary tradition” can be included in the second mode of feminist criticism (184-5). This study incorporates the two modes: how women writers treated their women characters as well as how they treated each other’s fiction will be explored with the claim that women novelists displayed ambivalent feelings while picturing and treating women. Thus, although at times they were subversive, they indeed benefited from the norms of Victorian patriarchy by producing literature as Victorian disciplinary discourse, which is the subject of the next section.

Feminist literary criticism put centuries of writing by and about women under scrutiny with respect to many different woman-centered issues, which include the representation of female characters, recurring patterns, themes and various literary and stylistic devices used by women writers. Various feminist scholars attempted to define the aims and objectives of feminist criticism in literary studies. This is not an easy task because feminist critics have to include not only authors, male or female, but also publishers and readers in their field of study to demonstrate how intricate the issue of the woman question in fiction is. This intricacy stems from the fact that authors, publishers, ideological agendas of each era, and of course, readers’ responses are interrelated and thus affect the production, reception and sustainability of any work of art. Susan Gubar, in her *Critical Condition of Feminism at the Turn of the Century*, also emphasizes the

multi-faceted concerns of feminist critics by saying that “feminists produced fresh readings that stressed the manner in which the work of art participated in the construction of debilitating or liberating sexual ideologies influencing or influenced by authors, publishers, and readers” (116). These issues are important for this study too, given the fact that the novelists that will be studied in the following chapters have been resurrected from oblivion thanks to the Anglo-American feminist project. Though their readership never diminished in the Victorian period and they could always find publishers because they were popular, later, in the twentieth century, they suffered from the distinction between serious and popular literature and they lost their sustainability.

Though it is difficult to formulate a well-set definition of feminist literary criticism due to the variations among the feminist schools, Kolodny attempts to define what a good feminist literary criticism should do:

A good feminist criticism . . . must first acknowledge that men’s and women’s writing in our culture will inevitably share some common ground. Acknowledging that, the feminist critic may then go on to explore the ways in which this common ground is differently imaged in women’s writing and also note the turf which they do not share. And, after appreciating the variety and variance of women’s experience—as we have always done with men’s—we must then begin exploring and analyzing the variety of literary devices through which different women are finding effective voices. (“Some Notes” 86)

Here, she focuses more on women as writers and the question of what distinguishes women writers from men. In another article, this time Kolodny writes that feminist literary criticism should be “exposing the sexual stereotyping of women in both our literature and our literary criticism and . . . demonstrating the inadequacy of established critical schools and methods to deal fairly or sensitively with works written by women” (“Dancing Through the Minefield” 1). By noting this, Kolodny draws attention to the importance of prioritizing women writers in criticism, which is an apt way of unearthing forgotten literary works by countless neglected women writers. Moreover, she also underlines the most frequent approach in feminist readings of any literary work: deciphering sexist stereotyping and themes.



Stereotyping and sexist male and female characterization are matters of representation that can be seen in the works written by both man and woman. As Toril Moi contends, the problematic representation of women in fiction can be found in literary works by both sexes: “to study ‘images of women’ in fiction is equivalent to studying *false* images of women in fiction written by both sexes. The ‘image’ of women in literature is invariably defined in opposition to the ‘real person’ whom literature somehow never quite manages to convey to the reader” (44-5). For Susan Koppelman Cornillon, too, the representation of women in fiction is either improper or deficient. To quote Cornillon fully: “[w]ith all that attaches itself to female leg-shaving slavery, I have never seen any fictional character either shave or pluck a hair” (117). In the same line with Cornillon’s observation, Moi thinks that “toe-nail clipping and the disposal of sanitary towels also seem neglected as fictional themes” (45). That means, very important life experiences of women are considered as taboo and thus they are missing in fiction. In her article “Sexism and the Double Standard in Literature,” Marcia Lieberman supports what Moi and Cornillon stress about the deficient and improper representation of women in fiction. She therefore proposes that one of the tasks of the feminist critic is to find the backgrounds of widespread depictions of women in fiction:

Feminist criticism is needed to effect a re-examination of sexism as it is found in literature and as it is imposed on literature by critics. The feminist critic will seek to expose the tangle of misconceptions, distortions, and malicious as well as benevolent prejudices which frequently govern the depiction of women in literature, and the response of male critics to female characters and to works by female authors. (328)

What is more, Lieberman continues, feminist criticism should also correct literary misrepresentations by exposing the ideological agendas behind the depiction of women in fiction. She argues that literary products and reader’s perceptions and responses cannot be free from what she calls the “social conventions” of each period, and to her, the task of feminist criticism is to challenge this:

Feminist criticism can expose and overturn the double standard that is manifested in literature and in criticism. Sexism is not only revealed in the overt bias of male critics and authors, but also in the social conventions that shape both the creation

of literature and our response to it. We must establish and at the same time defend feminist criticism, not only to correct literary distortions but also to expose the sources of covert bias, and to free women from the unchallenged assumptions that limit their lives. (339)

The difficulty of making a fixed definition of feminist literary criticism stems from the fact that there are different feminist schools, and they focus on different aspects of women's writing. With the purpose of formulating a concise categorization of feminist schools, Showalter writes that based primarily on discovering the difference of women's writing from men's "theories of women's writing presently make use of four models of difference: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural" ("Wilderness" 186). As mentioned briefly earlier, the last two, "psychoanalytic criticism" and "cultural criticism," are also called French feminism and Anglo-American feminism, respectively. Although the central question of each school changes, what is common to all is that each tries to detect differences of women's writing from men's, which is an attempt to provide a definition of women's writing, and, on a broader scale, of female literary tradition.

The first of the four models, biological criticism, is based on anatomical differences between man and woman with an argument claiming that anatomy of the writer shapes the textuality of what s/he writes. Showalter categorizes this approach under what she calls "phallic and ovarian theories of art," which denied women's existence in art: "Organic biological criticism is the most extreme statement of gender difference, of a text indelibly marked by the body: anatomy is textuality" ("Wilderness" 187). As a matter of fact, such an approach was very influential in the Victorian age due to the arguments based on evolution which were "used to account for women's supposedly inferior brain size, a physiological feature which also allied her to the 'primitive' peoples investigated by Victorian anthropologists" (Pykett *The 'Improper' Feminine* 13). Women's bodies were thought to be fragile and weak, and thus, so were their writings. Showalter also voices the same: "[w]hen the Victorians thought of the woman writer, they immediately thought of the female body and its presumed afflictions and

liabilities . . . there was a strong belief that the female body was in itself an inferior instrument, small, weak” (*A Literature of Their Own* 76). In short, women’s writings were considered inferior because women’s bodies were also considered inferior.

The second model is the linguistic and textual oriented criticism of women’s writing, and as a rule, it is based on the difference of the sexes in the use of language. The following questions can best exemplify the basic concerns of this approach in the analysis of women’s writing: “whether men and women use language differently; whether sex differences in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked” (“Wilderness” 190). Apparently, this critical approach prioritizes the use of language by man and woman and discusses whether there is a marked difference between them.

The third one, psychoanalytically oriented feminist literary criticism, is related to both biological criticism and linguistically oriented criticism. According to this approach, women’s creative force depends on their psyche. Thus, it “locates the difference of women’s writing in the author’s psyche and in the relation of gender to the creative process. It incorporates the biological or linguistic models of gender difference in a theory of the female psyche or self, shaped by the body, by the development of language, and by sex-role socialization” (“Wilderness” 193-194). Psychoanalytically oriented feminist literary criticism is associated with the French school in feminist criticism, and just as others, this one is also concerned more with women as writers. However, as Pykett says, “they have been more interested in developing a feminine writing practice than in re-examining the writing of the past” (*The ‘Improper’ Feminine* 205). Kari Weil also emphasizes the same concern about the French feminism which divorced itself “from the real, social struggles of women, as well as from feminist critics who advocated the reading of female authored works” (155). This exact point is where the Anglo-American and the French schools disagree.

The French school in feminist literary criticism bases its studies mostly on language “as both the ultimate tool of women’s oppression and a potential means for subverting” (Weil 153). Three renowned names are today considered to constitute the French feminist school: Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Ironically, Mary Eagleton draws attention to the fact that though they were brought together under the French school, their place of birth does not retain any affiliation to France at all: “Cixous was born an Algerian Jew, though with French nationality, and of Spanish and German parentage; Kristeva is Bulgarian by birth, Irigaray is a French national but born in Belgium” (“Who’s Who” 13). Still, roughly, what unites them together is that they prioritized the relationship between women’s writing and women’s body. Thus, the emphasis of French feminism is to represent repressed sexuality or everything that is related to the oppressed female body in the texts written by women: “For French feminists, women’s desire is what is most oppressed and repressed by patriarchy, and what most needs to find expression—an all but impossible task since, according to them, language is itself patriarchal” (Weil 153). Writing the female body was so intensely discussed among French Feminists that, as a project, it gained a name: *écriture féminine*, or simply, feminine writing.

The core concern of *écriture féminine* is to develop an exceptional writing through which women can inscribe their bodies in their texts. This is exactly why it is called ‘feminine writing’ and not women’s writing, because the latter sounds like a loose concept and does not create the same connotations as the word ‘feminine’. The emphasis here is to cherish everything that is closely related to femininity, female sexuality and female body. The focus of *écriture féminine* is that women’s writing must be associated primarily with writing women’s bodies. In other words, according to the basic claim of the feminine writing, women must be concerned with writing what has been forbidden to them so far.

In her article “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous encourages women to write and her claim is that it is writing which will free women from the boundaries drawn for them: “To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the

decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (880). It appears that defining what feminine writing stands for both stylistically and content-wise occupies a large place in French feminism. However, later in the same text, Cixous mentions the impossibility of defining feminine writing, yet still, she firmly adds that the feminine writing does exist:

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. (883)

Considering the common point that French feminists make about the link between the female body, the use of language, and producing feminine texts, it is understandable why *écriture féminine* is most likely the first thing that comes to the mind about the French school in feminist criticisms. As Cecile Lindsay puts it, the feminine writing can be a vehicle “for dismantling patriarchal language, and, through language, the social and cultural oppression of women” (47).

Showalter considers the issues discussed under what French Feminists call *écriture féminine* as a utopian ideal by additionally saying that even though this is “a significant theoretical formulation in French feminist criticism . . . it describes a Utopian possibility rather than a literary practice” (“Wilderness” 185). A similar interpretation has also been voiced by Weil:

Feminist literary criticism had focused largely either on revealing the blindness and misogyny of patriarchal representations of women, or on discovering an alternative female-authored tradition. After the advent of French feminism, the focus was neither on the status of women as producers of literature, nor on the representation of women’s experience in literature, but rather on the production of the ‘feminine’ in literature. (154)

To sum up, though their orientations are completely different, both the French school and the Anglo-Americans turned their attention to women as writers. Mary Eagleton writes that for “both sides there are accusations of essentialism: against the French for their idealization of the feminine; against the

Anglo-Americans for their attachment to a fixed, knowable female subject” (“Who’s Who” 13). Indeed, both schools have strengths and limitations. The Anglo-Americans “are politically and materially aware, with a strong sense of history” (12). Yet, they also ignore the diversity of women and the fact that their religious, cultural, ethnic backgrounds complicates life experiences of women. Though considered utopian, French feminists’ concern can appeal to all women, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or cultural background because, after all, women (their bodies and sexuality) are repressed because of belonging to the female sex.

As for studying women’s writing in the Victorian period, Elaine Showalter’s culture oriented model is an appropriate way to interpret the co-existence of feminist and anti-feminist tendencies and women writers’ ambivalences. This is how Showalter explains women’s culture model: “a theory of culture incorporates ideas about women’s body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to social contexts in which they occur” (“Wilderness” 197). The implication here is that women’s writing cannot be read without considering the social and cultural milieu in which women became women as well as they became writers.

There is no doubt that what are meant by social contexts and conditions are male products and that writing itself comes from phallogocentric tradition, in which phallus is thought of as symbolizing male dominance. This means that women’s efforts to create a literature of their own are impeded by the fact that it has to be done in a male-normed culture. Moi supports this idea too: “given that there is no space *outside* patriarchy from which women can speak, how do we explain the existence of a feminist, anti-patriarchal discourse at all?” (81) Showalter further conveys that women’s culture model is an apt way to read women’s fiction with feminist lenses: “How can a cultural model of women’s writing help us to read a women’s text? One implication of this model is that women’s fiction can be read as a double-voiced discourse, containing a ‘dominant’ and a ‘muted’ story” (“Wilderness” 204). This double-voiced discourse is exactly what makes women’s texts ambivalent narratives because, as

Mary Eagleton rightly says, “there is no uncontaminated space, non-ideological, egalitarian, unthreatened by power differentials, in which the story can be fully and honestly told; there is no way of off-loading the inequities of history and starting afresh” (“Who’s Who” 5-6). This is because, as the next section will explain in detail, Victorian women writers had to produce fiction within the domains of the dominant discourse, which was phallogentric, disciplinary and aimed to shape and control images of women in fiction, women readers who were fond of reading fiction and finally women writers themselves. For this reason, this study takes Victorian women’s writing as a disciplinary discourse, as Michel Foucault understands the term, and the next section will explain why.

### **3.3 Literature as Discourse: Victorian Women’s Writing as a Disciplinary Practice**

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) has been classified in diverse ways; as a historian, philosopher, political theorist and his work is read and taught in various disciplines alike. Also, as Foucault himself said, he had “been situated in most of the squares on the political checkboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal etc.” (“Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations” 383). It is hard to classify Foucault’s work and he openly said he never identified himself with any school or movement: “It’s true that I prefer not to identify myself and that I’m amused by the diversity of the ways I’ve been judged and classified” (384).

Michel Foucault’s work can be categorized into three phases. The early phase, which is also referred to as the archaeological phase, was the time when Foucault was concerned mainly with the occurrence of discourses and the ways of producing knowledge using discourses. In this early phase, he published *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Foucault’s attention later shifted from discourse to power, but whenever he did, he discussed those two

concepts in relation to each other. As an important focus of Foucault's opus, the issue of power occupies many of his works and lectures, particularly in what many Foucault scholars define as his middle phase, the genealogical phase, which coincides with the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (1976). In his last phase, he published the second and the third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1984) and many other shorter works about ethics, bio-politics, and the care of the self. Regarding his works' affiliation with the study of literature, Dieter Freundlieb categorizes the work of Foucault as follows:

First, an early archaeological phase, in which Foucault regarded literature as one of a number of 'counter-discourses' partly associated with the experience of madness and opposed to the rigidities of an all-encompassing Reason—literature as an 'Other' of Reason; second, a later archaeological phase, beginning in the late 1960s with the publication of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which Foucault no longer regarded literature as a counter-discourse, but, together with the associated discipline of literary criticism, as one of the many discourses governed by anonymous sets of rules; third, a genealogical phase, when Foucault turned from the analysis of the rules governing discursive formations to the question of such formations as embodiments of ubiquitous power relations concerned with the production and formation of subjects; and finally, a fourth phase, in which Foucault returned to problems of self-formation and subject agency and considered the possibility of an 'aesthetics of existence.' (305)

Foucault's work has been of great interest for literary studies, although he is not referred to as a literary critic and literature was not his main sphere of study. In her book *Discourse*, Sara Mills writes that "although Foucault did analyse some literature, mainly in the form of reviews, literature was certainly not his primary concern, and in his theoretical work he does not produce textual analysis as such" (20). Foucault's explorations especially on the formation of subject, power relations, sexuality and madness have been largely used in literary analysis; and, what is more, literature and cultural studies "are perhaps the areas in which Foucault's work has been most influential" (20). This is because Foucault's concept of 'discourse,' is very important for "literature and textuality in general" (20). In this section, possible frameworks for using Foucault in a literary analysis will be explained by focusing on how literature can be considered as discourse in the Foucauldian sense and used for disciplinary purposes; that is, to create



knowledge through true/false dichotomies, to control and discipline fictional women characters, women readers and through reviews, criticisms and politics of canonization, women novelists, too. Foucault's genealogical phase is relevant to the theoretical base of this study in that those were the times when he directed his attention to power relations, to the exercise of power and the disciplining of the individual and populations. It is significant to note that his explorations were never independent from how he defined 'discourse.'

### 3.3.1 Foucault's Discourse

The term 'discourse' has been a common interest for various disciplines such as mainstream linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural theory and literary criticism. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines discourse as “**1** (*formal*) a long and serious treatment or discussion of a subject in speech or writing: *a discourse on issues of gender and sexuality* **2** (*linguistics*) the use of language in speech and writing in order to produce meaning; language that is studied, usually in order to see how the different parts of a text are connected” (331). Sara Mills states that “the general usage of discourse as having to do with conversation or 'holding forth' on a subject, or giving a speech, has been partly due to the etymology of the word” (2). Mills herself thinks that “discourses are not simple groupings of utterances or statements, but consist of utterances which have meaning, force and effect within a social context” (*Discourse* 13). Discourse as a forceful and effect producing phenomenon is evocative of Michel Foucault's re-formulation of the term, if 'effect' is thought of as referring to the exercise of power as well as the control and subjugation of individual subjects.

Foucault's understanding of discourse is totally different from former linguistic and structuralist understandings of the term. Foucault defines the term discourse in different places throughout his work, yet each time, he uses the term in relation to 'knowledge production' and 'power relations.' For instance, this is how he defines discourse in *The Archeaology of Knowledge*:

Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse,' I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements. (80)

'Statement' is a significant word because, as Mills explains, "discourses are sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think" (*Discourse* 55). Thus, statements can be considered as truth producing units and when they come together they form specific discourses: "Truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it---a regime of truth" (Foucault "The Truth and Power" 317). As the following passage will additionally indicate, Foucault explores the occurrence of discourses in relation to the production of knowledge and power relations:

My problem is rather this: what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth? Or alternatively, what type of power is susceptible of producing discourses of truth that in a society such as ours are endowed with such potent effects? What I mean is this: in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse.  
(*"Two Lectures"* 31)

In *Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and Subject*, Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace also stress that 'the statement' is pivotal to understand Foucault's reconceptualization of discourse because they are "parts of knowledge," they "create effects," and they "should be part of a technique or techniques for the production of human subjects and institutions" (37-38). They further explain Foucault's approach to discourse in the following way:

Foucault thinks of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge. His use of the concept moves it away from something to do with language (in the sense of a linguistic system or grammar) and closer towards the concept of discipline. We use the word ‘discipline’ here in two senses: as referring to *scholarly* disciplines such as science, medicine, psychiatry, sociology and so on; and as referring to disciplinary *institutions* of social control such as the prison, the school, the hospital, the confessional and so on. Fundamentally, then, Foucault’s idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (form of social control and social possibility). (26)

This definition can help to formulate literature as discourse in the way that Foucault understands the term ‘discourse’; a scholarly discipline in the first place, which produces ‘bodies of knowledge,’ and in some specific cases such as the present study, as a disciplinary practice, a way of social control, too.

Firstly, as a scholarly discipline, literature as discourse can be seen as a way of producing knowledge about and for human beings, say, for example, for women readers of the period that this study covers. This might sound problematic, when the fictitious nature of literary texts is considered. Mills points to the same issue with the following words:

The study of discourse does not differentiate between those texts which are designated as literary and those which are designated as non-literary, although discourse theorists are keenly aware of the institutionalised differences that exist between the two sets of texts . . . literary texts have a complex relation to both truth and value, on the one hand being seen as providing a ‘truth’ about the human condition, and yet doing so within a fictional and therefore ‘untrue’ form. (*Discourse* 20)

When taken as discourse, as a discipline, literature can be thought of as a strategy of producing representations about certain human conditions. In realist literature, for example, those representations are most of the time connected to real human conditions of the time that the literary text is produced in. This point is where literature as discourse, as a scholarly discipline, can have plausible grounds. For example, it is known today that the 1860s sensation novelists were inspired mostly by the newspapers of the time, which is why they were called “the newspaper novel,” and “much of the fiction grew up in response to true, albeit sensationalized and scandalous, criminal cases taken from gossipy newspaper reports” (Purchase 188). This can explain how such novels might have produced

representations of certain Victorian ‘truths,’ albeit in an ‘untrue’ form. That means, in the form of fiction, those novels may offer a picture about what might have been going on in sacred Victorian families or how Victorian women could actually feel and act. The emergence of unconventional women characters was thought dangerous in that they created marginal knowledge (possibilities of alternative and illicit lives for women, for example) in the form of fictional representations.

This can be interpreted as the emancipatory aspect of literature. When thought of as an emancipatory discourse, literature can create a chance to voice many issues that might have been difficult or even impossible to voice in real life. Still, even in fictitious narratives, emancipatory discourse can be found dangerous because it contradicts the value and belief systems of society, as is what happened with the 1860s Victorian sensation narratives. That is exactly why the anti-feminist twists in sensation novels occurred to punish transgressive heroines; and in doing this, these novels this time created mainstream discourse, which befit patriarchal Victorian morals. Thus, what happens in sensation narratives can be a good example for the sharp contradiction between the emancipatory discourse and the mainstream discourse. The same contradiction also appeared in domestic novels through the representation of a strong-willed, intelligent heroine, who demands place in the public sphere just as the Victorian males. All in all, when literature is taken as discourse in Foucauldian perspective, the literary text can be seen as a battlefield, where the emancipatory discourse and the mainstream discourse challenge each other. Though there is a power relation between these two contradictory discourses, the narrative “must speak the truth” in the end:

We are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes, and rewards its pursuit. (Foucault “Two Lectures” 31-2)

Secondly, as a disciplinary practice or as a mechanism of social control, some literary works can take the form of cautionary tales written as a moral lesson

for a target readership. For this study, the target readership is middle-class women readers. For example, when the direct addresses to readers at some critical moments of the novels are considered, it can be said that the narrator might have aimed to address women readers and influence their feelings and actions. This is exactly where literature's function as a mechanism of control and discipline can be discussed.

To clarify again, Foucault considers discourses as groupings of statements that are very strong and influential in shaping how individuals think and behave. The characterization, the organization of the plot and the narrative structure of the selected novels could have such effects on Victorian readers. For instance, the way the transgressive heroine is treated and punished in the narrative turns these novels into moralizing stories. Because, as stated earlier, Victorians were very fond of novels and they "did not have to possess literary taste or scholarly interest in order to read fiction. Simply there was no alternative" (Stevenson "The Rationale of Victorian Fiction" 394). That is why, novel reading was seen as a kind of domestic entertainment: "The Victorian household, whether urban or rural, was essentially self-contained, and the growth of prosperity and leisure resulted in an avid demand for domestic entertainment" (394).

The affective power of reading fiction was especially important for women readers. Kate Flint's influential work titled *The Woman Reader* (1993) focuses primarily on the concerns about women's reading. Flint writes that

the woman reader was constructed as a discrete topic throughout the period. These included articles in newspapers and periodicals; medical and psychological texts; advice manuals for young girls, wives, servants, governesses; educational and religious works; autobiographies; letters; journals; fiction; and verse, as well as paintings, photographs, and graphic art. (4)

In *Literature After Feminism*, Rita Felski draws attention to the same issue and says that "books fulfilled a variety of roles for women in Victorian England . . . women in the nineteenth century read for many reasons. They read for instruction and for escapism, they sought pleasure and solace in stories of love, but they also turned to books for a sense of moral purpose and social identity" (30-1).

Apparently, because it had so strong an influence on the Victorians, it is no surprise that the novel gained another function than being just a sort of domestic entertainment; it was also used as a technique of disciplining and exerting power over the individuals.

In this study, this dimension of literature as a mechanism of social control can be traced in how women sensation novelists were criticized because of what and how they wrote. For example, attacks and criticism that came from the writers of the competing genre, the domestic novel, can also be considered as a way of control and discipline, this time, not of women characters or readers but of women writers. Foucault examines a similar issue in his article titled “What is an Author?,” which is perhaps the most influential piece written by him that is referred to in contemporary literary criticism. In this article, Foucault explores “how the author became individualized in a culture like ours” (101). According to Foucault, the figure of the author became important as the texts turned transgressive and a punitive sanction was necessary as a result:

Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors (other than mythical, ‘sacralized’ and ‘sacralizing’ figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive. In our culture (and doubtless in many others) discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act—an act placed in the bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous. (108)

He discusses the controversies of attaching meaning to the author figure in the analysis of literature and proposes the term “author-function” instead, implying that the author is an important function of the narrative discourse. This issue can be observed in what happened to Victorian sensation novelists in the 1860s. As Margaret Oliphant’s reviews and criticism of sensation novels will show in Chapter 5, women sensation writers were criticized harshly because of creating unconventional women characters, who were active and demanding. These criticisms can exemplify why, as Caroline Ramazanoğlu writes, Foucauldian discourse determines “what is possible to speak at a given moment,” and that is why discourses are “powerful” (19). That literature is considered as

discourse can explain how, as a scholarly discipline, it can contribute to the exercise of power, to the control of both readers and writers, and to determine what is possible and appropriate to represent in the literary works of certain periods. While doing this, literary works represent marginal or mainstream representations, attributing to the latter a powerful position.

Another work which emphasizes the disciplinary function of literature is Simon During's *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (1992). During's observations about the role of novels in creating dualities, differences and categories are also important to note, particularly when the representation of conventional and unconventional women characters in Victorian novels is considered. The categorization of populations has been an important concern for Foucault because it is a way of social control where power operates. That is why, representing such categorizations of the good and the evil in fiction is important, especially when literature is thought of as "a moral genre," and "an instrument of social control:"

The novel, in particular, helps consolidate the difference between criminality and non-criminality, while it also took advantage of the difference's residual and circular unsustainability. The novel could play this dual role because, on the one side, it was *a moral genre, an instrument of social control*, while, on the other, it remained an entertainment, designed for domestic, private amusement and, in principle at least, dissociated from the public sphere in which disciplinary 'reform' operated. (158-9 *emphasis added*)

When the emergence of the criminal woman in fiction and how she is treated in the narrative structure of the works are considered, the contribution of literature to social control becomes clear. Disciplining in the novels occurs mostly through the dichotomy of true and false, which are embedded in the literary representations:

In the discourses regulated by the norms of truth—which are those that *primarily* concerned Foucault—it is a matter of investigating the conditions that establish, at any one time, the relation between true and false, which is, on the one hand, intrinsic to the sciences and their history, and, on the other, essential to the ways in which human beings have come to govern themselves and others. (Ranibov and Rose xii)

Literature, as discourse, is also regulated by ‘norms of truth’. These ‘truths,’ though they change from period to period, can shape and control the behaviours, feelings and thoughts of reading populations because discourses “constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious, and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern” (Weedon 105). This is due to the affective power of literature because fictitious narratives interact with readers and the meaning is produced as a result of this interaction. True, some literary texts can either be emancipatory or disciplinary, or it is possible that they can be both. The Victorian best-sellers that will be studied in the following chapters reflect signs of emancipatory (feminist) discourse but they end up being disciplinary (anti-feminist), because of the multi-layered power relations that operate (1) between the narrative voice/perspective and the heroines (2) among women characters in the narratives, (3) among novelists themselves. What further makes them disciplinary is that, as best-sellers, they reached a vast reading community in the Victorian age. That is, once they were published, they began to circulate very strongly among the readers. This is significant in that “in order to have a social effect, a discourse must at least be in circulation” (Weedon 107).

So far, Foucault’s discourse has been explained by relating the issue to literary texts, how they can produce the ‘right’ knowledge through fictitious representations and be disciplinary as a result. In her work *Michel Foucault*, Sara Mills also elaborates on how literary studies can make use of Foucault’s theoretical explorations:

Foucault’s work is useful in analysing literature at a meta-theoretical level (that is, enabling us to describe how it comes about that literature is produced in the way that it is—taught in universities, written about by critics, discussed reverentially by the middle-classes, made to appear to be distinct from popular culture and so on) rather than at an analytical level (that is, enabling us to comment or explain what is going on in literary texts). There are those who consider that it is possible to use Foucault in literary textual analysis but I hope that in this section I will be able to demonstrate that this type of analysis generally uses Foucault’s theoretical work in an analogical way, rather than an analytical way; that is, their aim seems to be to show that these ideas are played out in literature at a thematic level, in ways which show similarities to Foucault’s ideas. (117)



This study will do both. In the first place, as will be explained in the next section, Foucault's approach to power relations and discipline will be used "at a meta-theoretical level;" while exploring the debates on what women writers can write, what criticism they can possibly receive when they write what they write. Also, taking literature as a mechanism of social control and as a way of exercising power falls into this "meta-theoretical level" of analysis when, for instance, the attempts to shape Victorian women readers' feelings and actions as well as the attempts to control what women writers can write are considered. In the second place, however, this study also pays attention to what is happening in the novels at the level of story and plot, because, after all, this is also connected to what women writers of the time were able to create. Thus, Foucault's understanding of power relations and techniques of disciplining are significant issues to explore, before turning to a detailed study of the novels.

### **3.3.2 Foucault's Notion of Power and Discipline**

Michel Foucault's approach to power is very different from "the conventional Marxist or early feminist model of power which sees power simply as a form of oppression or repression" (Mills *Michel Foucault* 36). This is how Foucault defines what he understands from 'power' in his article titled "The Subject and Power:"

The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between 'partners,' individual or collective; it is a way in which some act on others. Which is to say, of course, that there is no such entity as power, with or without a capital letter; global, massive, or diffused; concentrated or distributed. Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures. (137)

According to Foucault, first, power is not something that can be possessed by an authority figure or institution. Regarding Foucauldian power, one should talk about 'relations of power,' instead of 'power' in its abstract sense: "Rather than simply locating power in a centralised impersonal institution, such as the army or the police . . . he is interested in local forms of power and the way that they are negotiated with by individuals or other agencies" (Mills *Michel Foucault* 36). By reminding power's relation to discourses and the production of knowledge,

Foucault dismisses the repressive features of power. Rather, he emphasizes the productive nature of power by writing, in the opening chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, that “power produces knowledge” and “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (27). Foucault also refutes the long-accepted idea that power is something that comes from a superior institution or people, affecting only those who are in less privileged positions. Rather, he proposes that power is everywhere and mostly functions from bottom up:

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (*Power/Knowledge* 98)

When referring to Foucault's power, different scholars pay attention to different features of his re-conceptualisation of power. To name a few, Clare O'Farrell thinks that “the most important feature of Foucault's theories on power is that for him power is *not* a ‘thing’ or a ‘capacity’ which can be owned either by State, social class or particular individuals. Instead it is a *relation* between different individuals and groups and only exists when it is being exercised” (99). McHoul and Grace, likewise, draw attention to the same point by writing that, for Foucault, “we can now talk of systems of power relations, rather than a general concept of ‘power’” (65). Last but not least, Mills also makes a similar emphasis: “his theorising of power forces us to reconceptualise not only power itself but also the role that individuals play in power relations—whether they are simply subjected to oppression or whether they actively play a role in the form of their relations with others and with institutions” (*Michel Foucault* 35).

According to Foucault, the role of the individual is the key to understand how power functions. He writes that “what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or

present actions” (“The Subject and Power” 137). Also, he proposes that the term “conduct” is very important to see how power relations operate:

Perhaps the equivocal nature of the term ‘conduct’ is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. To ‘conduct’ is at the same time to ‘lead’ others (according to mechanisms of coercion that are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities. The exercise of power is a ‘conduct of conducts’ and a management of possibilities. (138)

This point is important in that it relates the discussion to the management of individuals in diverse ways: “it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals” (*Power/Knowledge* 98). Power relations aim at the management of populations and to prove this, Foucault discusses three kinds of power throughout his work: disciplinary power, governmentality, and biopower (O’Farrell 101). Disciplinary power befits the scope of this study most, so the discussion will continue with disciplinary power and its relevance to the present study.

Foucault takes discipline as a technique of exercising power, which, in the end, shapes and controls individuals in diverse ways by appropriating their behaviours, conducts, feelings and desires. In “The Subject and Power,” he explains the “disciplining of societies in Europe” in the following way:

What is to be understood by the disciplining of societies in Europe since the eighteenth century is not, of course, that the individuals who are part of them become more and more obedient, nor that all societies become like barracks, schools, or prisons; rather, it is that an increasingly controlled, more rational, and economic process of adjustment has been sought between productive activities, communication networks, and the play of power relations. (137)

To him, discipline is related to “how to keep someone under surveillance, how to control his conduct, his behaviour, his aptitudes, how to improve his performance, multiply his capacities, how to put him where he is most useful” (Foucault qtd. in O’Farrell 102). Discipline is most effective in the training of bodies because, Foucault says, “the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions, or obligations” (“Docile Bodies” 180). Thus,

discipline, for Foucault, “produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (182). Foucault says discipline cannot be identified solely “with an institution” or “with an apparatus:”

‘Discipline’ may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by ‘specialized’ institutions (the penitentiaries or ‘houses of correction’ of the nineteenth century), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by pre-existing authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power.

(“Panopticism” 206)

McHoul and Grace state that “Foucault conducted his analysis of power in two specific apparatuses: criminality and sexuality” (65-6). So does the present study, though within the scope of the fictional narratives selected from two competing woman genres, the sensation novel and the domestic novel. As explained earlier, as a scholarly discipline and as a practice which might have disciplinary effects, literature can be considered as a strategy of disciplining populations, as, for Foucault, “discipline is a set of strategies, procedures and ways of behaving which are associated with certain institutional contexts and then permeate ways of thinking and behaving in general” (Mills *Michel Foucault* 44). The treatment of criminality, sexuality and madness are of vital importance to the exercise of power, so what follows will focus on Foucault’s elaborations on the treatment of marginal personalities in the areas of criminality, sexuality and madness.

Foucault thinks that sexuality was given so much attention because of “one basic concern: to ensure population, to replace labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations” (*The History of Sexuality Vol. I An Introduction* 37). In his “Preface” to *History of Sexuality Vol. II* Foucault additionally writes that his work is an “effort to treat sexuality as the correlation of a domain of knowledge, a type of normativity and a mode of relation to the self” (333) because, he

continues, regulations concerning sexuality serve to “differentiate the permissible from the forbidden, natural from monstrous, normal from pathological, what is decent from what is not” (334). In “We ‘Other Victorians,’” Foucault explores “why sex was associated with sin,” and asks a bunch of questions, which are vital for this study, too: “Why has sexuality been so widely discussed, and what has been said about it? What were the effects of power generated by what was said? What are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested by them? What knowledge (*savoir*) was formed as a result of this linkage?” (299). Concerning sexual matters, Foucault states, “at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a certain frankness was still common,” but in the Victorian period it was “carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction . . . A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parent’s bedroom” (292). Additionally, in “The Repressive Hypothesis,” Foucault elaborates on the legitimate and illegitimate forms of sexuality. He writes that “the division between licit and illicit . . . [was] all centred on matrimonial relations” and such extreme attention to sexuality aimed at constituting “a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative” (317). “Breaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures” (308) is what makes sex a sin that deserves condemnation.

A similar treatment of sexual relations can also be seen in the literature of the time. The domestic novel focused most of its attention on the matrimonial relations and marginalized all other issues that did not do so. Its anti-type, the sensation fiction, was under severe attacks because the issue of adultery was central to most of the sensation narratives. In other words, while domestic novels put matrimonial relations at the core of a conventionally approved story, for sensation narratives, the intricacies of extra-marital relations and adultery constituted the sources of suspense and excitement. This was extra-ordinary for the Victorians because, as Foucault writes, “debauchery (extra-marital relations)

and adultery” is “on the list of grave sins” (*The History of Sexuality Vol 1 An Introduction* 38). The epigraph to this chapter also highlights a similar issue. Though it is a private experience, sexual experiences of individuals can never be independent from public concerns in conservative societies such as the Victorians. That is why, even in fiction, illegitimate forms of sexual behaviours, “challenge the reader’s sense of what is appropriate” (105) and is found dangerous as a result. That is exactly why, as Jane Smiley puts it, morality is “a gray area” in the novel; and hence, the representations of moral issues can be ambivalent.

Still, although transgressive novels revealed the fictitious possibilities of alternative lives for married women who could not divorce their husbands due to legal regulations that made divorce almost impossible, these narratives also obeyed the social, cultural and literary conventions of the time by punishing transgressive heroines for behaving in extremely unconventional ways. This can indicate how resistance and restriction can exist together in fictional narratives, making them apt for both feminist and anti-feminist interpretations. Although the selected sensation novels in this work end in a completely conservative way by punishing the erring heroine (either by confining her to an asylum or by killing her at the end), the criticisms and reactions they received prove that representing such transgressions was itself very radical for the time. This, again, brings the issue back to the disciplinary function of literature as discourse, where a multi-dimensional disciplining can be seen: the author disciplines her creation, the narrative voice disciplines both women characters and women readers, women characters discipline other women characters and finally women writers discipline other women writers.

How such power relations might produce knowledge can be answered by emphasizing the contribution literature makes to the normalisation of dominant values and to the marginalisation of the ‘illicit’ ways of living. Various narrative techniques serve to do this, such as direct address to readers, diving into characters’ thoughts, identification and creating sympathy with certain characters and not with others. In short, the selected sensation novels can be thought of as

apparatuses of exercising power in that they try to regulate and control the conducts and feelings of women readers by representing what would happen to them if they behaved in the way the erring heroine did. Also, domestic novels, as anti-sensational narratives, contribute to the disciplinary function of literature first by standing as the opponent of the scandalous women's narratives which represent scandalous women characters, and second, by valorising conventional and rooted social and cultural values, by representing women characters in domestic settings, by denying them the opportunity to be effective in public spheres and finally by offering happy endings for conventionally approved women characters.

Foucault's elaborations on the division between the mad and the sane should be stressed briefly because this is closely related to the disciplining of individuals. In his early works on madness (*The Birth of the Clinic* and *Madness and Civilization*), Foucault writes the history of the medicalization of madness and explicates the process of the constitution of the madman as a subject. He starts with stating how mad people were treated in the seventeenth century, when they were not isolated from the rest of the society as they are today. In "The Great Confinement," he writes that huge houses of confinement were formed in the seventeenth century basically to make the poor, the idle and the unemployed function in society, not to confine solely the mad people. However, with the birth of the asylum, the treatment of madness changed completely. Different from the houses of confinement in the seventeenth century, the asylum, Foucault says, "must represent the great continuity of social morality. The values of family and work, all the acknowledged virtues, now reign in the asylum" ("The Birth of Asylum" 148). Thus, Foucault observes that "the asylum is a religious domain without religion, a domain of pure morality, of ethical uniformity" (148). Asylum served as a place where different and marginal personalities were confined, and with the birth of asylum, it can be said that the definition of madness and the treatment of mad people also changed. For example, in "Madness and Society," Foucault categorizes human activities into four areas which are; labor, sexuality,

language, and ludic activities (games and festivals) (371). For Foucault, “in all societies there are persons who have behaviors different from others that do not conform to the commonly defined rules in these four areas—in short, what are called ‘marginal individuals’” (371). Thus, these marginal individuals constituted the category of ‘mad people,’ who are involved in debauchery, misconduct, alcoholism, adultery, extra-marital sexuality, homosexuality (“The Birth of Asylum” 149). It can be said that, in Foucault’s work, madness and confinement are treated as the ways of controlling of those, who do not function properly in society.

Such a definition of madness and the way the asylum works evoke the issue of categorizations and divisions as disciplinary techniques. Jana Sawicki writes that “disciplinary practices create the divisions healthy/ill, sane/mad, legal/delinquent, which, by virtue of their authoritative status, can be used as effective means of normalization and social control” (22). This point is where Foucault’s studies on madness make sense in the analysis of particularly sensation narratives because fictitious representations in nineteenth century literature work in the same way, creating divisions between the sane and the mad, the criminal and the legal, the good and the evil. For instance, the sensation novels selected for analysis in this study are apt examples to denote how female madness is used as an explanation or as an excuse for female transgression. Women’s sexuality, criminality and madness are the most influential areas where power operates to shape, subjugate and, if necessary, punish women, which has been a significant concern for feminists, too. Hence, in what follows, the connection between feminism and Foucault’s theories on power and discipline will be explained briefly.

### **3.3.3 Foucault and Feminism**

The affiliation between feminism and Foucault is a debatable issue. On the one hand, his writings on power relations, discipline, sexuality and madness are the areas which inevitably concern feminists, too. For instance, as Weedon notes, “for feminists, the attempt to understand power in all its forms is of central



importance” (120). On the other hand, however, in his works and lectures, Foucault did not focus specifically on the subjection and control of women as a separate oppressed group. However, as has been discussed in the first section of this chapter, though there are different feminisms, they all tend to discuss women as an oppressed group. This is because, though women do not constitute a homogeneous group, women are oppressed first because they are born females. As Jean Grimshaw maintains, “despite Foucault’s own distance from feminism, a number of feminist writers have seen aspects of Foucauldian methods or theory as capable of being usefully appropriated for feminist purposes” (52). Sawicki states that mostly the French feminists, like Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, “suggested that Western cultural discourses are univocally masculinist” and these “‘phallogentric’ discourses offer no place for women to speak except insofar as they speak in ways that men have preordained” (1). This can explain why, as discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter in detail, Victorian women novelists ended up being disciplinary though at times they put feminist insights into their narratives.

In her “Introduction” to *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism*, Caroline Ramazanoğlu explores in what ways feminists can make use of Foucault’s writings. She writes that “his approach to understanding power relations can offer feminists new and productive insights into women’s relations with men and with one another” (2). However, whether Foucault’s reconceptualization of power benefits feminists or not is still discussed by feminist critics. This is because, in his view, power is not owned by a superior partner, and it cannot be defined as a relation between the oppressor and the oppressed, as feminists tend to see the matter: “Feminists have traditionally concentrated on documenting and circumventing the effects of repressive power structures on women, whereas Foucault theorizes the *source* of power” (Molinaro 19). Still, Foucault’s explorations on the control and disciplining of populations are of vital importance for feminist literary criticism. Ramazanoğlu summarizes the affinities and conflicts between feminists and Foucault’s writing in the following way:

Foucault's deconstruction of abstract schemes of power, such as patriarchy or capitalism, led him to emphasise the unstable ways in which power is constantly created. Although he certainly recognized domination—for example, in the prison system—he thought it was a mistake to study it as a system benefiting a particular group, and analyse it from the top down. He conceptualised people's experiences of domination and subordination as 'effects' of power rather than as proceeding from a specific source of power. This view has enabled feminists to look at power relations with new eyes, but, where feminists ground their conceptions of power in women's accounts of their experiences, it also opens up a potential gulf between followers of Foucault and his feminist critics. (5)

Feminists can lean on Foucault's evaluations while seeking reasons and results of the control, subjugation and subordination of women. While doing this, it is inevitable to discuss in what possible ways the relations of power, control of populations, body politics, and normalisation of values affect women. In this study, for example, while exploring how women's narratives can be disciplinary, the multi-dimensional power relations that operate among women will be at the focus. This is where Foucault's power gains importance because "in his view, power is 'everywhere'; it cannot be understood as having any particular source, or as imposed from above, hence it cannot be the possession of any particular social group. It is 'capillary'; it operates from below" (Grimshaw 54). Hence, Shane Phelan's crucial question in her article "Foucault and Feminism" matters a lot at this point: "Can we recognize and trace the effects of power, both as something used upon us and as something that we participate in?" (429). This is also an important question for this study, in that it draws attention to how power operates not only between men and women but also among women, too. This study is woman-centered and focuses on how women themselves participate in patriarchal power relations and victimize their own sex as a result. Thus, this study purports that representations of multi-layered power relations in literary texts by women culminate in the control and disciplining of both fictional women (characters in the novels) and real women (women readers and writers), which is where Foucauldian-inspired feminist perspectives will be most useful.

Foucault centered his studies on real-life experiences while feminist criticisms are most powerful in literary studies, and thus concerned mostly about

the representations by, on and about women. Pam Morris, in her *Literature and Feminism*, emphasizes the importance of representations in understanding what people experience in real life: “We can know our world only because we can represent it to ourselves. Representation is perhaps the most fundamental of all human activities, structuring our consciousness of ourselves and of external reality” (7). She further elaborates on why feminists take literature as a crucial field of study where women’s oppression can be seen and/or corrected:

feminists are interested in literature as an influential cultural practice embodied in powerful institutions. They are concerned to discover how literature as a cultural practice may be involved in producing the meanings and values that lock women into inequality, rather than simply reflecting the already existing reality of women’s lives in literary texts. (8)

This is the same idea behind taking literature as discourse in the Foucauldian way because literature, too, is regulated by what is “possible to speak at a given moment” (Ramazanoğlu 19). Thus, both legitimate and illegitimate representations in fiction and their consequences (censors, criticisms, exclusions from the canon etc.) serve to produce knowledge (the right norms, values, feelings and conduct) which will better be examined in the next chapter on exemplary Victorian sensation narratives written by women.

### **3.4 Methodology**

In his *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), Meyer Howard Abrams identifies four ways of “defining, classifying, and analyzing a work of art” (6). Though Abrams’ categorizations are related primarily to romantic poetry, his approach can also be applied to different literary genres such as the novel. Abrams writes that while interpreting a work of art, a critic may look at (1) the work itself (2) the creator of the work, the artist (3) the universe which the work imitates and (4) finally the audience that interacts with the work of art in different ways and thus are influenced as a result:

Four elements in the total situation of a work of art are discriminated and made salient, by one or another synonym, in almost all theories which aim to be comprehensive. First, there is the *work*, the artistic product itself. And since this is a human product, an artifact, the second common element is the artificer, the

*artist*. Third, the work is taken to have a subject which, directly or deviously, is derived from existing things—to be about, or signify, or reflect something which either is, or bears some relation to, an objective state of affairs. This third element, whether held to consist of people and actions, ideas and feelings, material things and events, or super-sensible essences, has frequently been denoted by that word-of-all-work, ‘nature’; but let us use the more neutral and comprehensive term, *universe*, instead. For the final element we have the *audience*: the listeners, spectators, or readers to whom the work is addressed, or to whose attention, at any rate, it becomes available. (6)

In a relatively more recent work, *How to Study a Novel* (1983), John Peck reiterates Abrams’ explications and adapts them to the novel genre. Again, Peck identifies four ways of approaching a novel: focusing on the author, focusing on the text, interpreting the responses of readers, and studying the world the novel presents (14). In other words, Peck further writes, while studying a novel “character, society, the author’s attitudes or moral view, language, and structure” (50) can be points of interests for a critic.

When an interpreter focuses on the author, Peck writes that he sees the work “as a reflection of the author’s life . . . seeking parallels between incidents in the author’s experience and events in the novel” (14). Abrams explains this approach under what he terms “expressive theories,” and writes that particularly in romantic tradition, poetry is seen as an “overflow, utterance, or projection of the thought and feelings of the poet” (21-2). When it is a novel, Peck likewise adds, “the novel is read as a sort of veiled autobiography” (14).

Also, there is the reader oriented approach, which Abrams classifies under “pragmatic theories,” and further writes that “poetry, by definition, has a purpose—to achieve certain effects in an audience” (14). The same can also be true for novel readers, though Peck differently writes that looking at the reading experience of readers is “the most problematic approach” (15). This is mainly because, according to Peck, “different readers read books for different reasons” and they “derive varying impressions and ideas from the same novel” (15). Also, it is possible that the same reader can get different impressions each time he reads the same work because he is a changing entity after all. The roots of excluding the author and the reader from the analysis of literary texts can be traced to the school

of 'The New Criticism,' especially to William K. Wimsat and Monroe C. Beardsley's seminal articles titled "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and "The Affective Fallacy," (1949) which introduce two different fallacies that literary critics should avoid. In "The Intentional Fallacy," Wimsat and Beardsley allege that the intention of the author, his/her background, experiences and socio-political stance are of no importance in understanding a literary text. In "The Affective Fallacy," this time they argue that the influence of the text on the reader has nothing to do with an objective study of literature and thus such an approach should be avoided. The intent in these articles was to base literary criticism solely on scientific grounds. Looking at the author and the reader while analyzing a fictional narrative may still have limitations because both are changing entities and their thoughts, emotions, affective experiences cannot be fixed.

Apart from focusing on the artist and the audience, one may also look basically at the work of art itself and what it represents. In Abrams' work, the first is grouped under "objective theories," which "regard the work of art in isolation from all [the] external points of reference" (26) while the second is defined as "mimetic orientation—the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe" (8). According to Peck, when novel studies are concerned, these two ways of looking at a novel are more practical:

Taking world first: a novel tells us about life, but this can be subdivided into what it tells us about characters and what it tells us about society, although, of course, it is mainly concerned with the way the two interrelate; it is, however, often productive to focus a discussion on either character or society. (15)

While analyzing the selected novels, the focus in this dissertation will primarily be on the world as represented by the text, which includes representation and treatment of characters, events, values and norms. Authors' intentions and readers' responses will be relied on less; yet still, those dimensions, too, will also be considered from time to time. Studying how Victorian women readers might have been influenced by the novels of the period requires an archival research based largely on the Victorian periodicals, which exceeds the aims and scope of this study. Still, the reader dimension gains importance

especially when stressing the disciplinary function of novel writing in the Victorian period. Thus the reader dimension will be included when the criticism of the sensation novels are discussed because those criticisms tend to highlight those novels' possible influences on Victorian women readers.

As for the author dimension, it can be said that the real author's relationship with the work of art is a complicated matter as much discussed by narrative theorists such as Wayne Booth, who thus developed a savior term called 'the implied author' in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961): "However impersonal [an author] may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes" (71). Also, Booth further writes that the implied author can be regarded as the real author's second self:

Even the novel in which no narrator is dramatized creates an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage-manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently pairing his finger nails. This implied author is always distinct from 'the real man'—whatever we may take him to be—who creates a superior version of himself as he creates his work; any successful novel makes us believe in an 'author' who amounts to a kind of 'second self.'

(Booth "Distance and Point-of-View" 92)

It should be noted that the main question most critics tend to raise about authorial intention is "whether judgments expressed by the narrator correspond with those of the author" (Case and Shaw 92). The concept of 'the implied author' helps a lot at this point because the authorial intention in fictional narratives is nearly impossible to discover. This is because, as Porter Abbott writes, "the real author is a complex, continually changing individual of whom we may never have any secure knowledge" so "we posit an implied author . . . in so far as we are concerned with the authorial intention" (84). However, she adds, "we cannot necessarily rely on the narrator to act as a direct, or even an indirect, representative of the implied author" (84). Thus, as a precarious concept, 'the implied author' has been defined in different ways by various scholars. For example, Case and Shaw think that the purpose of 'the implied author' "is to give us the best possible way of talking about the structure of values that lies behind a given novel. The most basic problem it solves is a tendency to confuse the values

assumed and projected by a novel with the values of its author” (9). They further add that “speaking in terms of the implied author forces one to concentrate on the evidence of the novel’s text, and not, say, on facts we know or think we know about the author” (9). Also, in his *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*, Gregory Currie writes that “the implied author of the narrative is the person . . . whose intended meaning coincides with the narrative’s achieved meaning” (26).

Not every critic considers the implied author as a personified construct. For some, what should matter most is the effect the implied author produces: “The implied author is best viewed as a constructed set of norms and standards against which a narrative can be judged, and not in some vaguely personified form” (Wake 22). For Susan Lanser, similarly, the implied author is “a reading effect,” “a matter of belief.” “If the implied author exists in a text, it exists as inferred and imagined: the implied author is a reading effect. This effect cannot be guaranteed, for the implied author is essentially a matter of belief, existing only when and where readers construct it” (12). Finally, according to Abbott, the implied author is a “sensitivity:”

An implied author is the sensitivity (that combination of feeling, intelligence, knowledge, and opinion) that ‘accounts for’ the narrative . . . Of course, when the real living and breathing author constructs the narrative, much of that real author goes into the implied author. But the implied author is also, like the narrative itself, a kind of construct that among other things serves to anchor the narrative. (84-5)

This concisely means that “the reading effect” (Lanser 12) the novel subtly creates, or, the overall “sensitivity” (Abbott 84) of the text can be interpreted as what the narrative tends to convey to the reader. For a feminist reading in a woman-centered study such as this, the “sensitivity” or “the reading effect” the novel produces is expected to show itself through feminist or anti-feminist undertones. As explained in the Introduction chapter, this study argues that the selected women narratives vacillate between feminism and anti-feminism and they end up being ambivalent due to the contradiction between the feminist content in the novels and their anti-feminist and disciplinary treatment. What

should be underlined at this point is that it is through the narrative voice and focalization that the disciplinary and anti-feminist treatment is generally achieved.

Manfred Jahn writes that if the analysis of fictional texts “were to be divided into just two major parts, the *narration* and *focalization* would be very suitable candidates” (94). Likewise, as Mieke Bal writes, “narrator and focalization together determine what has been called narration” (19). That is why, while analyzing the novels, the attention in this study will be basically on the narrator and focalization and what specific effects they produce.

Mieke Bal takes the narrator as “the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts,” because, as she additionally writes “the identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character” (19). For the lengthy nineteenth-century novels, the narrator is particularly important because as Case and Shaw argue “the key to a full experience of nineteenth-century novels is sensitivity to their narrators” (6). They further define the common features of narrators in the Victorian novel in the following way:

The most common general kind of narrator in nineteenth century fiction is one positioned outside the story –that is, a narrator who does not appear as a character in the story – who reports a range of information unavailable to any one character within the story (and in fact unavailable in principle to any individual in real life), such as the secret thoughts and actions of multiple characters, or scenes said to be taking place simultaneously in widely different locations. (7)

Focusing on the narrators is important mainly because the narrators of the selected novels do more than just relating the story, they also present a value system by offering comments, judgments and observations. Either implicitly or explicitly, they comment on what happens in the novels, express their opinions and judge the characters’ behaviors and feelings. Case and Shaw draw attention to how influential the narrators can be in shaping the reading experience: “We experience the characters and the setting, and we come to understand the larger significance of the novels, through our developing relationship with the voice or voices that tell us these stories” (6). This is important for this study because in the selected



works the strength of female agency (what women characters do and how they feel) is prone to a feminist reading, but the way their feelings and actions are interpreted by the narrator is intrinsically sexist and anti-feminist.

To define the types of narrators, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan uses Gerard Genette's terminology that distinguishes two types of narrators; extradiegetic narrator (third-person), who is "above or superior to the story he narrates" and intradiegetic narrator (first-person), who is "a diegetic character" in the narrative (94). Moreover, the degree of participation in the story is also important; homodiegetic narrators take part in the story, "at least some manifestation of his self" (95) while heterodiegetic narrators do not participate in the story and the fictional world in the novel is presented through the eyes of him. Rimmon-Kenan additionally writes that "the narrative level to which the narrator belongs, the extent of his participation in the story, the degree of perceptability of his role, and finally his reliability are crucial factors in the reader's understanding of and attitude to the story" (94). This marks the influence of narrators in the reception of fictional narratives.

Rimmon-Kenan also distinguishes types of commentaries as interpretation, judgment, and generalizations. Interpretations "often provide information not only about their direct object but also about the interpreter," judgments reveal "the narrator's moral stand," and finally generalizations "apply to a group, a society or humanity at large" (99). All of the selected novels that will be discussed in this study employ extra-heterodiegetic narrators, who are not characters in the narratives but express various forms of commentaries at critical moments in the novel. These are particularly important to note in that the way the narrator offers commentaries gives an idea about the value system of the fictional world represented in the narrative. Based on whether the comments of the narrator are in harmony with the dominant values presented in the work (the implied author), the narrators are classified as reliable or unreliable: "I shall call a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (Booth "Distance

and Point-of-View” 100). In this study, the reliable narrators’ points-of-views coincide with the perspectives of the implied authors. That means, by looking at the consistent position the narrator adopts throughout the novel, it can be assumed that the dominant narrative perspective can give an idea about the perspective of the implied author.

Apart from the narrator (who speaks), paying attention to focalization (who sees) is also crucial while analyzing a fictional narrative because “narration and focalization come out as mutually reinforcing and mutually dependent factors of storytelling” (Jahn 102). Bal writes that “whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision’” (Bal 142). Thus, that the narrator relates the events in a fictional narrative does not necessarily mean that the events are presented through the narrator’s perspective. On the contrary, “focalization need not in every case always remain with the same agent” (Bal 29) and neither narration nor focalization can be neutral (Wake 19).

There are principally two types of focalization: external focalization and internal focalization. Wake defines an external focalizer as operating “outside the story” (20). An external focalization, according to Jahn, is like a camera showing the outside world just as it is: “*External focalization* marks the most drastic reduction of narrative information because it restricts itself to ‘outside views,’ reporting what would be visible and audible to a virtual camera” (98). On the contrary, through an internal focalization “the story’s events are ‘focalized through’ one or more story-internal reflector characters, and narrative information is restricted to data available to their perception, cognition, and thought” (Jahn 98). Types of internal focalization should also be clarified at this point: (1) in *fixed focalization* the events are “exclusively told from the point of view of a single focal character” (2) in *variable focalization* there can be more than one focalizer (3) in *multiple focalization* the “same events are told repeatedly, but each time seen through a different focal character” (98). Narration and focalization are important in that the interpretation and understanding of a fictional narrative can change based on who narrates and who focalizes the story.

In the selected novels, for instance, an external narrator narrates the events through internal focalization. That means, the events can be either narrated through the narrator's perspective or through the point of view of a character. What matters most here is that, as Bal states, "if the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character" (146). In the case of character focalization, which happens quite often in the selected narratives, who sees the events markedly shapes the construction and reception of what is happening in the novel.

These are important considerations for this study because the narrator's sympathy or antipathy, voice, orientation and perspective may serve to shape the readers' perception with respect to characterization and plot. Similar effects can also be attained through focalization because who sees the actions can determine how an event is presented and thus received by the audience. In the selected narratives, as the analysis of the novels will illustrate, the narrator's cautionary and sometimes even didactic voice is additionally assisted by anti-feminist focalizations (focalizing through a misogynist character, for instance), which, on the whole serve to distort the feminist content in the novels.

## CHAPTER 4

### WOMEN'S SENSATION NOVELS' OVERT DISCIPLINING

Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently they have  
led them to hate women, to be their own enemies.

Hélène Cixous  
"The Laugh of the Medusa"

My death will be the only reparation I can offer, for the grief and shame my life has  
brought on all who had the evil fortune to belong to me. You understand I have been a  
great sinner.

*East Lynne*

She hated herself and her beauty.  
*Lady Audley's Secret*

#### 4.1 Why Scandalous, Controversial and Disciplinary?

The 1860s sensation novels are most notable for the female agency they bravely put into the heart of the narratives. These works are apt for feminist readings particularly when ambitious, shocking, and unconventionally active women characters are considered. As Winifred Hughes writes, feminist critics "were inclined to emphasize the sensation novel's transgressiveness in matters of female sexuality and gender roles" ("The Sensation Novel" 276). However, starting especially from the 1990s, "recent criticism has also looked more extensively at the novel's countervailing strains of conservatism" (276). This study considers both readings correct as far as they go, but focuses more on the ambivalent nature of these narratives. As the argument in this study runs, the ambivalence of these narratives stems from the contradiction between the feminist content in these novels and their anti-feminist and disciplinary treatment. Victorian women's writings, including both realist domestic novels and popular fiction, represent Victorian disciplinary discourse in various ways and degrees.

This chapter will demonstrate that the 1860s women's sensation novels became an influential part of Victorian disciplinary discourse and techniques of disciplining in these narratives are stronger, more overt, and deadly than those of domestic fiction. This is because, as has been mentioned earlier, as signs of feminism in Victorian women's writing became stronger, the anti-feminist and disciplinary turns in these narratives took a more acute form. To this end, this chapter will offer an analysis of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), respectively.

In these novels, the plot line gradually unfolds to the disadvantage of the subversive woman character, who is doomed to fall at the end. While directing all attention to the phenomenal deeds of the heroine, the selected novels promote internalized oppression and intrinsic sexism through the authorial narrator's voice and the narrative perspective, which are unfavorable to the heroine. The dominance of inimical relations and negative feelings among women characters such as jealousy, hatred, and rage are worthy of emphasis because such feelings also contribute to the unsympathetic treatment of the heroine and her inevitable fall at the end. In these novels, not only are women characters made to be their own enemies through such evil feelings, they are also prompted to develop self-hatred, through emotions such as penitence and guilt. As the epigraphs to this chapter imply, making women their own enemies and creating negative emotions such as, penitence, suffering and self-hatred will be taken as techniques of the disciplining of both fictional characters and women readers. Before turning to a close examination of the novels, it is necessary to explain the general features of the sensation novel as a genre in order to see what makes them scandalous, controversial and disciplinary.

In *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*, Lyn Pykett writes that the "1860s was the sensation decade; a decade of sensational events and sensational writing" (1). Jennifer Carnell, too, acknowledges the same notion about the said decade: "in the 1860s there was a fascination with sensation in all spheres: art, literature, theatre, actual murders and high profile court trials"

(142). Indeed, such sensational incidents and sensational writings made themselves apparent first through the newspapers of the period. This is important to note because Victorian scholars agree that the roots of sensation fiction can be found in sensational journalism, which is why sensation novels were also called “the newspaper novel” (Purchase 188). In his *Victorian Sensation OR the Spectacular, the Shocking, and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Michael Diamond draws attentions to the flourishing of journalism and its impact on the rising popularity of the sensation novel:

The Victorians had more opportunity than any of their predecessors to enjoy sensations, due principally to the unprecedented development of the press. National sensations were comparatively few until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the removal of ‘taxes on knowledge’ made newspapers affordable for the first time to the less privileged—who were particularly sensation-hungry. In 1853 the tax on newspaper advertising was abolished; 1855 saw the repeal of stamp duty on newspapers, which had hindered their distribution, and in 1861 paper duty was dropped. At about the same time the development of railway transport meant that national newspapers could reach an infinitely wider public. (1-2)

In the same work, Diamond also states that sensation novels bear a resemblance to sensational newspapers of the same period both stylistically and thematically. He adds that this is because there was a growing demand in the market for everything that was scandalous: “Shootings, poisonings, adultery and bigamy all sold newspapers, so it is hardly surprising that novels too should exploit the same themes” (189). This can best be observed, approximately two decades later, in the Whitechapel Murders that took place in the 1888’s London, which is mostly referred to as the Jack the Ripper case. Still unidentified today, the Whitechapel murderer victimized five prostitutes between August and November in 1888. Though both earlier and later Whitechapel women killings are today linked to this case, only the five victims fostered the frenzy for the heinous event in the fall of 1888, which is popularized in the twentieth century through horror movies. Tabloid journalism of the time displayed the chopped up bodies of the victim prostitutes and common readers devoured those newspapers. The Victorians were so craving for scandals that the names of some respectable figures, the novelist Lewis Carrol, the Royal surgeon Sir John Williams and Prince Albert Victor

(Queen Victoria's grandson and an heir to the throne) were also listed among the suspects, perhaps to make the outrageous event even more sensational and shocking. What should be underlined at this point is that if women partook in such scandalous events, this created even more shock and thrill. This is true both for real sensational events such as the murder of Whitechapel prostitutes and for sensation fiction. What follows is Pykett's interpretation about the shocking women in the mid-Victorian press and their relation to the reception of the sensation novel:

Murderous women were especially in the news, most notoriously Madeline Smith, who poisoned her lover by putting arsenic in his cocoa (1857), and Constance Kent the sweet 16-year-old who was accused of stabbing her 4-year-old brother in 1860. The details of all of these cases of bigamy, divorce, and murder were communicated to the ever-widening readership of a rapidly expanding newspaper press by the sensational reporting then enjoying a vogue. Sensational journalism (like sensation fiction) was seen by many as a form of creeping contagion, the means by which the world of the common streets, and the violent or subversive deeds of criminals were carried across the domestic threshold to violate the sanctuary of home. (*The Sensation Novel* 2)

In addition to the influence of sensational journalism, legal changes about Victorian marriages and divorces were also effective in the formulation of the thematic structures of the 1860s sensation novels. Merryn Williams states that "divorce was impossible before 1857 except by a private Act of Parliament, which only the very rich could afford" (*Women in the English Novel* 7). In 1857 the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed and "enabled any man to divorce his wife for adultery, but a woman had to prove adultery aggravated by other circumstances, such as cruelty or desertion. It is unusual for nineteenth-century novelists to show a wife obtaining a divorce" (7). That is why, as Pykett comments, the legal concerns about Victorian marriages and divorces were "frequently articulated in the form of the bigamy plot" in sensation novels (*The Sensation Novel* 45). Such were the cultural, social and historical circumstances under which sensation novels flourished and dominated the circulating libraries in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Explanations of the generic features of sensation fiction generally emphasize the remarkably shocking aspects of sensational narratives. The following excerpt from Pykett succinctly explains the most notable characteristics of the sensation novel and gives an idea of how divergent characterization, mind-blowing themes, and other generic qualities concurrently function in creating sensations:

These exciting and disturbing novels of modern life were remarkable for their devious and dangerous villains, or more usually villainess/heroines, and for their extraordinarily complicated plots usually involving suspense, concealment, disguise and duplicity, fraud, forgery (often of a will or occasionally of a marriage certificate), deception, illegal imprisonment (usually of a young woman), blackmail, bigamy, and even murder or attempted murder. As far as their form was concerned sensation novels were something of a generic hybrid, mixing realism and melodrama, the journalistic with the fantastic, and the domestic with the exotic. ("A Woman's Business" 166-7)

As a matter of fact, the sensation novel is significant as a genre not only because of scandalous events and extra-ordinary characters. The Gothic novel of the late eighteenth century and the Newgate novel of the early nineteenth century also had similar features. However, Winifred Hughes writes that "unlike the Gothic romance of the 1790s or the Newgate novel of the 1830s, from both of which it was partly derived, the sensation novel dispensed with the traditional Italian castles or underworld hideouts to locate its shocking events and characters firmly within the ordinary middle-class home and family" ("The Sensation Novel" 261). Ann Cvetkovich stresses the same significant point and writes that the sensation novel is different from "its precursors because its crimes and mysteries occur, not in foreign countries or wild landscapes, not among the lower classes or the inhabitants of monasteries and convents, but in the stately homes of the aristocracy, whose lives are depicted in realistic detail" (45). In short, it can be said that the sensation novel sensationalized the domestic novel, which is the dominant and respected literary genre of the Victorian era. This is particularly significant because, as Purchase underlines, the middle-class setting in sensation narratives "suggested that terror began at home" (190). Also noting this aspect, Hughes additionally concentrates on the dark sides of human nature which are obscured by the ostensibly respectable middle-class lives or the unquestionable



reputation of Victorian aristocracy: “The most apparently respectable neighbor might turn out to be a serial poisoner; the most angelic of women, at least a bigamist and potentially a cold-blooded killer” (“The Sensation Novel” 261). Thus, just like many other Victorian literary critics, Harrison and Fantina agree that such features of the sensation novel “questioned the sanctity of the family and the stability of middle-class mores” (xii).

What matters most at this point is the unconventional heroine because her representation is closely related to feminist readings of sensation novels. As the myth of ‘the angel in the house’ suggests, the heroine in the Victorian novel is emblematic of altruism, morality, domesticity and sanctity. However, in sensation novels, the heroine is scandalous and shocking mainly because she is represented as an angelic figure at the start of the novel but turns out to be a wrong-doer, a sinner as the novel slowly proceeds: “the woman who looks and (ostensibly) acts like the angel in the house turns out to be a demon in the house, who commits crimes in order to obtain socially sanctioned goals such as a good marriage” (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 50). Hughes also emphasizes the scandalous twists the sensation heroine creates: “At the center of the home, inevitably, there was a woman—wife and mother, the proverbial angel in the house. At the center of the sensation novel was the same woman, who ran the household, often quite efficiently, while dabbling in bigamy, adultery, or murder on the side” (“The Sensation Novel” 262). Such features of women characters, which were hitherto unknown to Victorian readers, were indeed corner stones of the sensation novel. Jessica Cox also highlights this point and writes that “the female villain became a stock character in the sensation novel” (83). Likewise, in *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-century Literature and Art*, Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble stress the graceless nature of the sensation heroine by stating that women in sensation narratives “figure prominently . . . as murderesses, bigamists, swindlers, prostitutes and detectives” (99). In this respect, they add, sensation fiction is “responsible for initiating significant changes in the representation of women in later fiction” (99).

This ‘change’ about the representation of the heroine in fiction is exactly what concerns feminist literary critics, who tended to read women’s sensation novels as a feminist revival in Victorian fiction. For instance, in *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter treats Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* as subversive novels, which will be discussed later in detail. There is no doubt that Showalter is a pioneering figure when feminist readings of sensation novels are considered. Beside Showalter, however, “numerous twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have questioned whether the texts, either intentionally or not, subverted Victorian gender ideologies” (Harrison and Fantina xvi). Such readings are inevitable precisely because the period is notable for the vehement discussions of what was named as the Woman Question. Pykett’s following thoughts stress the connection between the popularity of sensation fiction and the influence of the Woman Question in the 1860s:

The production and consumption of sensation fiction, and its contemporary critical reception were closely linked, not only to general ideas about ‘the feminine’, but also to various aspects of the Woman Question: to debates about women’s legal and political rights, women’s educational and employment aspirations and opportunities, and women’s dissatisfactions with and resistance to traditional marital and familial patterns. (*The Sensation Novel* 41)

Feminist interpretations of sensation fiction emphasize the female agency inherent in the novels. Saverio Tomaiuolo, in his *In Lady Audley’s Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres*, interprets this as “female assertiveness,” which is exactly what concerns feminist critics, who tend to read sensation novels as feminist texts (7). This sounds plausible, because, as Hughes writes “sensational women act for themselves, without waiting for the sanction or assistance of men. That action, for some Victorian critics, was in itself already tantamount to crime” (“The Sensation Novel” 262). That is, sensation narratives picture active women characters who change the situations which do not satisfy them. While changing their lives, these women characters generally find themselves in a dilemma, because the desired change does not occur without getting involved in intrigue. For this reason, as the following passage will

indicate, sensation novels were found “provocative” and “controversial” because, Purchase thinks, they “contained unconventional, highly physical and often adventurous women” (189). He further elaborates:

Far from simply reinscribing the ‘angel in the house’ role assigned to women by Victorian patriarchy, the novels suggested that middle-and upper class women led furtive but impassioned lives in which they were no longer simply the victims of men, but their antagonists. It is in this respect that, time and again, women in sensation fiction break up the cherished Victorian institution of the family; women flee the home, have illicit desires and exciting relationships, they lie, steal, murder and they are generally spectacularly bad mothers. (189)

Diamond considers sensation heroines as “the precursors of the ‘New Woman’ of the 1890s, when the limitations on women’s role in society and in marriage became major themes of women novelists” (217). He adds that in the 1860s, which is known as the sensational decade, “these themes were beginning to surface, nowhere more strongly than in the sensation novel” (217).

Besides feminist readings of sensation novels, there are also opposite approaches, which stress the anti-feminist nature of these narratives. Although the changing nature of the sensation heroine is appreciated and cherished by feminist literary scholars, how she is treated within the narrative and what happens to the heroine at the end are interpreted in a different way by the opposite approach. For example, Saverio Tomaiuolo argues that the sensation novel is “one of the most complex and ambiguous literary phenomena of mid-to-late nineteenth century” (5). Likewise, Maureen Moran asserts that these novels “ambivalently undermine and reinforce mid-Victorian views about stability of identity and social boundaries” (90). The approach of this study is closer to this second way of looking at the sensation novel, with a strong emphasis on the controlling and disciplinary function of these narratives. As the analysis of the novels will illustrate, the moralistic tone of the narrator’s voice and anti-feminist focalizations in these novels aim at disciplining both erring heroines and women readers. Also, the obloquy that women sensation novelists suffered from are so very important because those criticisms were mostly directed against the genre’s most progressive treatment of women’s issues as well as the strains of feminism in the

narratives. That is why, such criticisms will be interpreted as supplementary ways of disciplining, this time targeted at controlling women novelists themselves.

Ellen Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon are generally discussed together as the most famous women sensation novelists of the 1860s. This is because, as Anthony Trollope wrote, “they were women, writing about the sins of women” (107). Ellen Wood published *East Lynne* in 1861, and the following year, in 1862, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* secured a lasting place in the circulating libraries of the Victorian era. Both published in the early 1860s, these novels are taken as “founding texts of the sensation genre,” of course, along with Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 5). However, it should be noted that Wood’s and Braddon’s treatments of similar sensational themes are very distinct from each other. In his book *Wilkie Collins and Other Sensation Novelists Walking the Moral Hospital*, Nicholas Rance argues that Ellen Wood should be taken as a “conservative sensationalist” while Mary Elizabeth Braddon is very “radical” as a sensation novelist (1). However, as Hughes points out, although these two novels are “divergent in their attitudes toward conventional morality,” they indeed “served to open the floodgates for the fictional portrayal of women as criminal or sexually passionate or both” (“The Sensation Novel” 272). For the reasons stated above, the discussion will first start with Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*. Following this, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* will be discussed as a more radical sensation novel, yet, at the same time, more disciplinary, too. This is because, as this study argues, the more feminist features a narrative displays, the more disciplinary it turns out as the novel closes.

#### **4.2 Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861)**

A voluminous novelist of her time, Ellen Wood (1814-1887) is best known today with her sensation novel *East Lynne*, though she wrote over “forty long novels and over 300 short stories . . . owned, contributed to, and edited a monthly periodical, the *Argosy*” (Grose 411). Today, unfortunately, *East Lynne* “is the

only work by Wood currently in print” (413). Ellen Wood was very well known in the Victorian period, but she did not get as much public attention as Mary Elizabeth Braddon did in her life time. This might be because, as Trollope writes, Mrs. Wood “lived quietly and respectably, the only one of the major sensation novelists without scandals and irregularities in private life. She had no literary pretensions and avoided anything like literary circles” (111). In *Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood*, her son Charles W. Wood brought together some articles and reviews of his mother’s novels that were published in the newspapers and periodicals of the time. In the same work, Charles W. Wood also included a comment that was possibly taken from a letter that Mary Howitt, (1799-1888) a renowned Victorian poet, wrote to Ellen Wood. This brief appraisal of Mary Howitt confirms Ellen Wood’s power and position in the Victorian novel industry:

your talent, my dear friend, is all your own. Did I not once tell you that you had only to publish *East Lynne* to become famous? It is only such power as yours that can, like Lord Byron, awake one morning to find itself famous. And your reputation will be lasting. Your books are photographs of real life; your characters are human beings and our personal friends—they can never die. You will be read long after many of us are forgotten. (203)

For Ellen Wood, Marie Riley writes that as a Victorian novelist that is not much read and taught today, she “continues to fascinate modern readers, partly because of her ability to construct a page-turning narrative, but more significantly because her celebration of bourgeois achievement and values appeared to reflect the sensibilities and middle-brow literary tastes of the period” (165). It should be noted that Ellen Wood is just another woman novelist who resists categorizations. This is because, as Grose notes, “her work reveals her to be a wonderful mix of influences: She was a product of conservatism, both religious and domestic; she was also, however, an author who took risks, experimenting with scandalous plots, dark characters, and the hidden realities of Victorian life that many in her society were reluctant to acknowledge” (412). Though Ellen Wood is considered a conservative novelist today, her novel *East Lynne* indeed problematizes women’s status and experiences in the patriarchal Victorian society: “The very fact that the

heroine rejects her traditional home in favor of life with a notorious rake suggests a possible rejection of the ‘Angel in the House’ stereotype” (Grose 412). Still, the heroine is made to repent and suffer throughout *East Lynne*, which is where the affective power and the disciplinary influences of the novel emerge strongly.

A brief summary of *East Lynne* can be helpful at this point, though it is quite difficult to summarize a novel which is over six hundred pages long. The novel consists of parallel plots; the heroine Isabel Vane’s story of elopement with her lover Francis Levison and her later repentance and suffering as a lovelorn woman constitute the major plot. There is also a minor plot of a murder story, which complicates a succinct plot summary of the whole novel. Though the summary will be given without diverging into the intricacies of the murder story, it is very important to note that the murder case in *East Lynne* is indirectly related to Isabel Vane’s story for two reasons. First, because at the end of the novel, the murderer is revealed as Isabel’s lover Francis Levison, for whom she leaves her respected husband, Carlyle Archibald. This climactic moment in the novel is pivotal to note because it turns out as an additional reason for Isabel to repent and suffer more. Second, the minor plot presents another sinner woman, the servant Afy Hallijohn, who is the daughter of the man who has been murdered. Afy is presented as easy-going and flirtatious; she has sexual relationships with men in the town. Still, she is not paid much attention in the novel and she is not punished at all. Gilbert writes that Afy “is laughed at and ultimately given a reasonably happy ending for similar and worse sins than Isabel –but whose class position makes her transgression comic instead of tragic” (“Feminism and Canon” 31). This may prove that even concerning the sins of women, the Victorians were class conscious and as Diamond writes, “the rigid social hierarchy of the Victorian age meant that a sensation was all the greater if the protagonist enjoyed a high rank. In life, in fiction and on the stage, even a wicked baronet always seemed wickeder than a villain without a title” (6).

In the opening pages of *East Lynne*, Ellen Wood introduces Isabel Vane as a stereotypical sensation heroine, who looks perfectly beautiful, angelic and

innocent. The first time her bewitching beauty is seen by Archibald Carlyle, the main male character of the noble class in the novel, is denoted by the narrator with the following words: “Who—what—was it? Mr Carlyle looked, not quite sure whether it was a human being: he almost thought it more like an angel” (*EL* 11). The narrator further delineates the sensational appearance of Isabel Vane from the eyes of Archibald Carlyle. The following description of her is significant because this is the first time in the novel that sensations are aroused:

A light, graceful, girlish form, a face of surpassing beauty, beauty that is rarely seen, save from the imagination of a painter, dark shining curls falling on her neck and shoulders smooth as a child’s, fair delicate arms decorated with pearls, and a flowing dress of costly white lace. Altogether, the vision did indeed look to the lawyer as one from a fairer world than this. (*EL* 11)

In addition to Isabel’s enchanting beauty, her high-rank should also be stressed. Isabel comes from an aristocratic background, but she is left “to the charity of strangers” (*EL* 102) when her father Lord Mount Severn dies. Their estate East Lynne has been purchased by Carlyle before the lord dies, so with the death of her father, Isabel finds herself homeless and penniless. Isabel has to live with the new Lord Mount Severn, Raymond Vane, whose wife Emma is extremely merciless towards her. During the time Isabel stays with the Vane family, Emma tortures her emotionally, psychologically and even physically. When Carlyle proposes to Isabel, she accepts his offer although she does not love him because marriage would liberate her from the miseries she has to live after the death of her father. Little did she know, however, that marrying a man she did not love would confine her psychologically and emotionally. Isabel begins a new life as the mistress of East Lynne after she gets married to Carlyle. Her life is quiet and peaceful but for the complex relationship she has to endure with Carlyle’s half sister Cornelia and their neighbor Barbara Hare. Cornelia does not respect Isabel as the wife of Carlyle and as the mistress of the house; she wants to rule the house herself. It is no surprise that Cornelia’s attitude causes a power conflict between the two. As for Barbara, she is in love with Carlyle, and she has a very close relationship with him because of the murder story that her brother Richard Hare is involved in. Barbara asks for Carlyle’s help each time she hears from

Richard about the murder. Isabel is extremely jealous of Barbara and misinterprets her close contact with Carlyle because she has no idea about what is going on in the murder case.

Isabel is fed up with Cornelia's continuous harassment, she is extremely jealous of Barbara, and her heart is passionately beating for Francis Levison, who is considered a "Victorian stereotype of the seducer" (Rance 67). Under these circumstances, she is captivated by insidious Francis Levison, and elopes with him. Isabel deeply regrets it after she leaves her sacred home, respected husband and three children. She finds herself miserably alone because Levison leaves her unattended with an illegitimate baby by him, and does not even bother marrying her even though he learns that Carlyle later divorced Isabel.

Isabel has to survive alone and she decides to earn a living by working as a governess. She loses her baby by Francis in a railroad accident and makes use of this accident to hide her real identity. The nurse at the hospital thinks Isabel has died so she writes a letter to the new Lord Mount Severn. After Isabel's death has been announced, Carlyle marries Barbara Hare, who has been a rival for Isabel ever since the two met. Disguised as Madame Vine, Isabel ventures to work as a governess at her former husband's house and takes care of her own children she has abandoned. The scar on her face and the spectacles she wears help her hide her real identity although the household feels suspicious at times. This last part of the novel focuses on Isabel's suffering and penitence. She has to endure seeing her former husband happily married to Barbara and her son Wilson's illness and death. Her shame and repentance grow stronger when she learns that Francis Levison, for whom she had left her husband and children, is convicted of murder. Isabel falls severely ill at the end, reveals her true identity in her deathbed, and begs for forgiveness hours before she dies.

Isabel's story is presented as a caution particularly for Victorian women readers and the role of the narrator in creating the warning effect cannot be denied. This is indicative of a power relation between the narrator and the heroine,



the first surely having a powerful and privileged position. As will be discussed later, the narrator of *East Lynne* exerts power over the heroine through comments and judgments that are brimful of hatred. The narrator's cautionary attitude, her moralistic voice and anti-feminist perspective serve to shape the readers' perception regarding Isabel Vane and her story, controlling and disciplining both Isabel Vane by punishing her severely and those who witness her story through the sensational reading experience.

In *East Lynne*, the narrator perfectly fits the general characteristics of third-person narration in the nineteenth century novel. Considering Rimmon-Kenan's terminology, the narrator of *East Lynne* can fall into the category of "extra-heterodiegetic narrator," (94) who is not a character in the story but openly intervenes in the narration and relates the story through her perspective. Moreover, *East Lynne*'s narrator frankly offers her comments on characters' feelings, thoughts and actions; and by doing so, she strongly influences the reading experience, at least that of Victorian readers. It should be stated that the narrator of *East Lynne* has an insightful knowledge on what will happen in the story. Although such narrators are generally called omniscient narrators, Case and Shaw prefer to call them "authorial narrators," as they think that, as a narrative term, omniscient narrator can be misleading for the following reason:

The belief that an author is adopting an omniscient perspective on the narrated world -- a perspective that in real life is presumed to be available only to God -- can also subtly predispose a reader to see 'omniscient' narrators as presumptuous, grandiose, or authoritarian, as interested in 'playing God' in relation to the reader or the narrated world. We would suggest that there is little evidence in the texts of these novels of such ambitions -- that instead narrators are far more likely to remark on their limitations. (7)

*East Lynne*'s narrator can be taken as one of those authorial narrators, who, as Case and Shaw define it, "stand apart from the fictional world, have privileged knowledge of its inner workings, and address the reader rhetorically in ways that invite us to identify them with the voice of the author" (7). This is exactly true for the narrator of *East Lynne*, who has knowledge about the inner thoughts and secret feelings of the characters. The narrator also addresses the reader directly as

an advice giver and tries to shape the way the reader can interpret the story. It is crucial to note that the narrator expresses her feelings and thoughts about the heroine's current emotional state. The conservative perspective of *East Lynne's* narrator is evident and consistent throughout the novel, and the following elaborations will examine how.

Even at the start of the novel, the narrator's voice is unsympathetic towards Isabel Vane, because the narrator already knows what kind of a future Isabel should be expecting. This can be understood from the way the technique of foreshadowing is used in the opening pages of the novel, which indicates that the narrator knows how the story will proceed for the heroine: "Who could connect sorrow with the anticipated brilliant future of Isabel Vane?" (*EL* 11). The early pages of the novel present Isabel Vane as a typical sensation heroine, who has an enchanting beauty and a respected status in society. However, the narrator again intervenes in the enthralling descriptions of her and warns the reader about the evil future that the heroine will have to endure:

Do not cavil at her being thus praised: admire and love her whilst you may, she is worthy of it now, in her innocent girlhood: the time will come when such praise would be misplaced. Could the fate, that was to overtake his child, have been foreseen by the earl, he would have struck her down to death, in his love, as she stood before him, rather than suffer her to enter upon it. (*EL* 13)

The narrator, in this strong statement, emphasizes that although Isabel is praiseworthy at this early moment in the novel, there will come an unfortunate time when she will not deserve respect and honor anymore. Though the narrator connects her fall to her 'fate,' it is not much mentioned later in the novel, but the narrator focuses more on the heroine's wrong-doings. The narrator's voice will get stronger as she relates Isabel's remorse and suffering in the last part of the novel.

However, at this point, it is necessary to look at how the narrator presents women's relations and feelings, which indirectly contribute to the fall of the heroine. The hostile relations and negative emotions among women characters are important because the crucial moments in *East Lynne* are triggered due to

these unfriendly relations and nasty feelings such as jealousy and hatred. What women experience with other women in the novel is given importance to in this study because the doom of the heroine is in part due to her affective experiences with other women characters, not merely due to her transgression as a woman. To this end, at this point, women's relations and feelings will be dwelled upon and this will eventually carry the analysis to the climactic scene of the novel. By looking at the climactic scene, a more elaborate analysis can be offered about the unsympathetic treatment of the heroine and also about the process which will lead to her eventual doom.

The observation of Cvetkovich about women's relations in *East Lynne* is noteworthy here. She writes that "throughout the novel, the fiercest battles occur between women; Isabel's enemies are Barbara and Miss Corny, her rivals for Mr. Carlyle's affections. Dependent on the protection and support of men, women are more susceptible to the fears of exclusion and isolation that foster jealousy" (110). Cvetkovich, in her observation, talks about the three women characters that the backbone of the novel depends on: the heroine Isabel Vane, her rival Barbara Hare and Carlyle's half-sister Cornelia, who is also referred to as Miss Corny in the novel. In this study, however, Emma Vane, the wife of the new earl, will also be included in the analysis although she is a minor character. The relation between Isabel Vane and Emma Vane is significant because the enmity between these two women is the main reason why Isabel marries Carlyle.

Before Carlyle and Isabel marry, the narrator prepares the background to make the reader convinced that theirs is not a love marriage and Isabel marries Carlyle out of necessity. It is repeated many times in the novel that after her father's death, Isabel had no money to support herself and no home to live in. In the following extract, the new earl explains to Carlyle how serious the current situation of Isabel is:

She has not a shilling; literally not a shilling in her possession. I put the question to her—what money there was in the house when the earl died. Twenty or twenty-five pounds, she answered, which she had since given to Mason, who required it for housekeeping purposes. If the girl wants a yard of ribbon for herself, she had not the pence to pay for it. (*EL* 100)

As explained briefly in the summary, Isabel goes to Castle Marning under such tough circumstances, to live with the new earl and his wife Emma. Emma's venomous relationship with Isabel is of particular importance, because it can be emblematic of the way Ellen Wood treats women's relations throughout the novel. In *East Lynne* when the two women are together in the same room, the antagonism between them cannot go unnoticed. Emma is indeed a minor character and does not occupy a very important place in the novel. However, she can represent the most extreme form of antagonism among women characters and the following short extracts about her can confirm this. Emma's despotic conduct after the arrival of Isabel is interpreted by the narrator, who, in the first place, offers generalizations about the feelings and conduct of women: "When women, liable to intemperate fits of passion, give the reins to them, they neither know nor care what they say. Lady Mount Severn broke into a torrent of reproach and abuse, most degrading and unjustifiable" (*EL* 114). Here, the voice of the narrator is typical of patriarchal dualisms which confine women to the realm of emotions. A further implication of this extract can be that women are indeed governed only by their emotions and they can be quite hurtful towards each other. Considering the dominance of negative emotions among women in *East Lynne*, the overall impression one can get is that women characters in the novel are governed by evil emotions. Given the fact that women's writing in the Victorian period serves to strengthen the Victorian disciplinary discourse, it can be concluded that negative and unhealthy emotions that govern women's relations in these narratives can function as a way of women disciplining their own sex by attempting to control and mold each other's feelings and conduct.

In *East Lynne*, the dominant feeling among women characters is envy. This will be clear when the relationship between the two central women characters in the novel, Isabel and Barbara, is discussed in the following pages.

However, the impact of jealousy among women is first presented through the relationship between Emma and Isabel. Emma is extremely jealous of Isabel because of no obvious reason other than Isabel's being young and beautiful. "She, an earl's daughter, so much better born than Emma Mount Severn, to be thus insultingly accused in the other's mad jealousy," observes the narrator (*EL* 114). One day, as again the narrator explains, Emma cannot help violating the courtesy that would be expected from an earl's wife and she "turned white with rage, forgot her manners, and, raising her right hand, struck Isabel a stringing blow upon the left cheek" (*EL* 114). This critical moment of physical violence is noteworthy because it can aptly be taken as the most severe example of the hostility among women characters. Again, although Emma is a minor character, her attitude towards Isabel deserves emphasis because it is due to her that Isabel finds herself married to a man she does not love. Thus, when Carlyle asks her hand in marriage, Isabel considers him first as a "haven of refuge":

She had stood there by Mr Carlyle's side, conversing confidentially with him, esteeming him greatly, feeling as if he were her truest friend on earth, clinging to him in her heart as to a powerful haven of refuge, loving him almost as she would love a brother, suffering her hand to remain in his. *But to be his wife!* – the idea had never presented itself to her in any shape until this moment, and her first emotion was one of entire opposition, her first movement to express it, as she essayed to withdraw herself and her hand away from him. (*EL* 119)

This passage underlines the fact that Isabel does not love Carlyle, she only considers his proposal as an escape from the tortures of Emma Vane: "to be removed for ever from the bitter dependence on Lady Mount Severn—East Lynne would, after that, have seemed what she had called it, Eden" (*EL* 121). The idea of the Victorian home as shelter is evocative of John Ruskin's definition of home in his *Sesame and Lilies*: "This is the true nature of home—it is a place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home" (Ruskin qtd. in Houghton 343). Thus, it can be said that Isabel is not looking for a husband, but she is searching for a home, as defined by Ruskin, thus she agrees to be the wife of Archibald Carlyle.

From this moment on, Isabel will strive to survive in East Lynne, while also managing her contestation with two other women; Cornelia Carlyle and Barbara Hare. Pykett sees Cornelia and Barbara as “two sharply juxtaposed images of the domestic power,” each, of course, develops her own way of gaining a powerful status in the domestic sphere (*The Sensation Novel* 63). For instance, again as Pykett observes, Cornelia represents the Victorian stereotype of “the tyrannical, shrewish old maid” while Barbara can perfectly be considered as “the epitome of modern domestic competence” (63). Such character qualities are important to note because these two women play crucial roles in Isabel’s life. As opposed to Cornelia and Barbara, Isabel represents the Victorian ideal of femininity: “Isabel Vane is precisely the passive, dependent, refined, innocent, childlike woman of the domestic, feminine ideal” (65). In addition to their character traits, these women characters’ affective responses towards each other are also significant. As said before, it is hard to name any women characters in *East Lynne*, who manage to develop a sisterly relationship. This is especially true for Isabel, Barbara and Cornelia, the main women characters of the novel.

The complex relationships among these women depend generally on negative emotions they direct against each other. It is in part due to such unfriendly relations and feelings that Isabel ventures to leave her home, which is why her emotional experience with other women necessitates a further discussion. After Isabel settles down in East Lynne, she is relieved from the contemptuous treatments of Emma. However, Ellen Wood replaces Emma’s place with another enemy for Isabel, Carlyle’s half-sister Cornelia, whose “parsimonious stiffness,” (109) as Cvetkovich puts it, creates another unbearable challenge to her. Even Carlyle is aware of the risks of putting these two women together in the same house as the following passage will evince: “Oh, his was a true heart; he fervently intended to cherish this fair flower he had won: but alas! It was just possible he might miss the way, unless he could emancipate himself from his sister’s thralldom” (*EL* 142). Beside Cornelia, Isabel’s greatest rival is Barbara, who will unknowingly incite jealous feelings in Isabel’s heart.

As mentioned earlier, the dominant emotional experience among these three women shows itself mainly through jealousy, which plays a crucial role in pushing the narrative to its climax. The main reason for this is that Carlyle, as the central male character of the novel, is the center of attraction for all. Ellen Wood, through the narrator's voice, lays stress on how powerful the feeling of jealousy can be: "There never was a passion in this world, there never will be one, so fantastic, so delusive, so powerful as jealousy" (*EL* 182). In this novel, jealousy can govern women's actions as the following examples will illustrate.

The feeling of jealousy can have understandable causes for Barbara, who is extremely jealous of Isabel for the obvious reason that Carlyle prefers to marry Isabel and not her. There are many moments in the novel when the narrator presents Barbara as a woman who is suffering from envious feelings. One example among many can be the following passage: "Leaning over the entrance-gate of their house, between the grove of dark trees, was Barbara Hare. She had heard the hour of Lady Isabel's departure named; and, woman-like, *rival*-like—for in that light had Barbara's fanciful and jealous heart grown to regard Lady Isabel—posted herself there, to watch for it" (*EL* 109). As for Cornelia, she is jealous of Isabel for different reasons:

'Are you sure you are not jealous?' asked Barbara, some uncontrollable impulse prompting her to say it.

'Perhaps I am,' returned Miss Carlyle, with asperity. 'Perhaps, had you brought up a lad as I have brought up Archibald, and loved nothing else in the world, far or near, you would be jealous, when you found him discarding you with contemptuous indifference, and taking a young wife to his bosom, to be more to him than you had been. (*EL* 135)

In addition to Cornelia and Barbara's emotional reactions, Isabel's jealousy of Barbara is also important. Before she is lured to escape with her seducer Francis Levison, Isabel's envious feelings for Barbara are stressed more than her passionate feelings for Francis Levison. Ellen Wood devotes a long space in the novel depicting how Isabel grows suspicious about her husband and Barbara having a secret love affair as well as her envious feelings that are naturally provoked by such groundless suspicions. This can be considered a

narrative strategy, which attempts to ignore Isabel's sexual desires for another man and foregrounds other reasons for her leaving her husband, children and the sacred home that has been a shelter to her.

As mentioned before in the summary of the novel, Carlyle and Barbara start to see each other more often than before to discuss the developments of the murder case that Barbara's brother Richard is wrongly accused of. Their frequent meetings and secret conversations have been misinterpreted by Isabel, who gradually gets suspicious about her husband's absences:

Another thing that was going on fast to bad, instead of to good, was the jealousy of Lady Isabel. How could it be otherwise, kept up, as it was, by Barbara's frequent meetings with Mr Carlyle, and by Captain Levison's comments and false insinuations regarding them? Discontented with herself and with everybody about her, Isabel was living now in a state of excitement; a dangerous resentment against her husband working in her heart. (*EL* 252)

Isabel cannot control her suspicions and as the narrator further explains "this unhappy jealousy, this distrust of her husband, appeared to have altered Lady Isabel's very nature" (*EL* 259). Her uneasy feelings about Barbara and Carlyle are repeated through many episodes in the novel. As a matter of fact, the narrator tries to convince the reader that the feeling of jealousy conquers Isabel and she thus becomes obsessed with the wrong idea that her husband is deceiving her. At the same time, however, Isabel is passionately in love with Francis Levison and she is trying so hard to suppress her illicit feelings:

She was aware that a sensation all too warm, a feeling of attraction towards Francis Levison, was working within her; not a voluntary one; she could no more repress it than she could repress her own sense of being; and mixed with it, was the stern voice of conscience, overwhelming her with the most lively terror.

(*EL* 211-12)

It could be said that Isabel is indeed struggling with two disturbing feelings; first, as a married woman, she is in love with someone else, and second, she gets suspicious of her husband's discreet activities. However, her heart that beats for Francis is less stressed than her suspicions about her husband. The following



passage shows how the narrator lays the stress on Isabel's jealousy which influences her decisions:

A jealous woman is mad; an outraged woman is doubly mad; and the ill-fated Lady Isabel truly believed that every sacred feeling which ought to exist between man and wife, was betrayed by Mr Carlyle.

[Francis Levison] 'Be avenged on that false hound, Isabel. He was never worthy of you. Leave your life of misery, and come home to happiness.'

In her bitter distress and wrath, she broke into a storm of sobs. Were they caused by passion against her husband, or by these bold and shameless words? Alas! alas! Francis Levison applied himself to soothe her with all the sweet and dangerous sophistry of his crafty nature. (EL 271)

In the last part of this passage, the narrator also questions the ambiguous nature of Isabel's emotional state. Whether she is crying because of her disillusionment in marriage and her frustration with her husband or because of how she secretly feels about Francis Levison, is hard to tell. However, in her goodbye letter to Carlyle, Isabel does not even mention the name of Francis as her lover. She solely puts the blame on Carlyle:

When years go on, and my children ask where their mother is, and why she left them, tell them that you, their father, goaded her to it. If they inquire *what* she is, tell them also, if you so will; but tell them at the same time that you outraged and betrayed her, driving her to the very depth of desperation, ere she quitted them in despair. (EL 280)

At this point, it is important to highlight that long elaborations on Isabel's jealousy and what she writes in her goodbye letter to Carlyle function to veil the fact that she in fact escapes with Francis because her heart is passionately beating for him. That is why, as said previously, the treatment of Isabel's emotional experiences with other women serves as a narrative strategy, which makes the novel conservative and not radical, although the heroine actually goes after her heart. Here, a critical digression into the contemporary readings of *East Lynne* is necessary because the reception of the novel by feminist critics stresses both radical and conservative aspects inherent in this climactic scene, where the aristocratic heroine Isabel leaves her home and respected husband, and goes after her lover.

What makes *East Lynne* attractive for feminist critics is the way adultery is treated in the novel. In *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914*, Barbara Leckie considers adultery as “the most bourgeois of transgressions” and she further adds that “adultery was never remote from middle-class concerns in Victorian England” (1). For the readers of sensation novels, adultery was itself very shocking, let alone adulterous women. For some feminist critics who work on Victorian women’s narratives, the existence of adulterous women in fiction is itself very radical. Cvetkovich underlines the same about Victorian critics, who “were especially vehement about the sensation novel’s dangerous portrayal of women whose sexuality and affects are uncontrolled. The figure of the criminal and sexualized woman, by violating the standards of feminine propriety, also threatened the social order” (46). Showalter, for example, can fall into this category of feminist critics who interpret women’s sensation novels as a feminist revival in Victorian women’s writing:

The sensationalists made crime and violence domestic, modern, and sub-urban; but their secrets were not simply solutions to mysteries and crimes; they were the secrets of women’s dislike of their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. These women novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction to suit their own imaginative impulses, by expressing a wide range of suppressed female emotions, and by tapping and satisfying fantasies of protest and escape. (158-9)

Thus, it can be suggested that no matter what happens to Isabel at the end of the novel, her illicit feelings, her transgression, and her attempt to change her unhappy life are themselves very crucial contributions to the changing image of woman in fiction. Emma Liggins, likewise, thinks that in sensation novels “the signalling of women’s discontent remains high on the agenda, as one of the covert messages is that the ‘glad sensation of security’ experienced by the married woman cannot accommodate her sexual impulses, rendering home life unfulfilling” (61). Feminist critics generally observe the radical nature of the climactic scene of the novel when they cherish *East Lynne* and its heroine Isabel Vane. However, particularly when the last part of the novel is considered, Wood’s conservatism is noteworthy as well, which carries the novel into an anti-feminist realm. The strains of feminism in the narrative are treated in such a disciplinary

way that the novel's ending exemplifies Victorian anti-feminism. Pykett makes a similar observation about *East Lynne* and marks the novel's ambivalence:

Isabel Vane is precisely the passive, dependent, refined, innocent, childlike woman of the domestic, feminine ideal. It is these characteristics that make her simultaneously and paradoxically both a victim and a villainess. The reader who sees this paradox will see that there are questions to be asked about this ideal, and about the constraints that govern women's lives. There is more than one way to read even the conservative sensation novel. (*The Sensation Novel* 65-6)

Pykett is right in stressing that diverse ways of approaching sensation novels are possible. Although this study agrees with certain points made by feminist critics who tend to take these novels as feminist texts, its focus is more on the opposite aspects. So far, unfriendly relations and negative feelings among women characters have been emphasized as crucial contributors to the fall of the heroine, which is why these points have been interpreted as techniques of disciplining the heroine. In what follows, the discussion will focus on the last part of the novel, where the transgressor heroine is inevitably doomed to suffer. Her penitence and pain grow so intense that they create a kind of death drive in the psyche of the heroine, as the second epigraph to this chapter implies (*EL* 321). Such feelings will thus be interpreted as destructive feelings, creating self-hatred on the part of the heroine, aimed at "disciplining of the self by the self" (Mills *Michel Foucault* 43). At this point of the discussion, the functions of negative emotions such as regret and suffering will be elaborated on by directing the attention more to the position of the narrator. Particularly in the last part of the novel, the heroine's feelings are related through the narrator's voice, which sounds conservative, moralistic, and, especially when she addresses the reader, very didactic.

The narrator of *East Lynne* plays a crucial role in highlighting Isabel's remorse and suffering in the third part of the novel. As a matter of fact, the story is told mainly from Isabel's point of view but it should be noted here that the conservative voice of the narrator is overwhelmingly dominant in this last part. In the first place, as the following quotation will indicate, the narrator persistently

emphasizes Isabel's guilt and penitence when she talks about Isabel's emotional experience after she leaves home:

Never had she experienced a moment's calm, or peace, or happiness, since the fatal night of quitting her home . . . The very hour of her departure she awoke to what she had done: the guilt, whose aspect had been shunned in the prospective, assumed at once its true, frightful colour, the blackness of darkness; and a lively remorse, a never dying anguish, took possession of her soul for ever. (EL 283)

Here, the narrator is focalizing from Isabel's perspective. Thus, the reader is given a detailed picture of how terribly bad the transgressive woman may feel after she has sinned. The narrator accentuates the irrevocable feeling of pain while also telling that such strong feelings cannot be compensated for and will dominate the sinner until she dies. What Isabel does is of course a fatal mistake in the eyes of Victorian readers, a fact which is emphasized openly in many different places by the narrator. The following passage is especially famous, for the narrator addresses this directly to women readers:

Oh, reader, believe me! Lady—wife—mother! Should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake. Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them: pray for patience; pray for strength to resist the demon that would urge you so to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death. (EL 283)

The narrator is openly preaching here and her conservative voice only functions as a caution for women readers who might fall into a similar trap. The narrator draws a moral from the story of Isabel, lest the reader might lose herself in the scandalous nature of the novel and overlook the moral lesson. Although Isabel's story is scandalous and sensational, as Hughes rightly states, "the seduction of Lady Isabel Carlyle, scandalous as it might appear in potential, is never permitted to become anything more than an object lesson for erring wives" (*The Maniac in the Cellar* 113). The conservative voice of the narrator is influential in making Isabel's story an "object lesson," and Cvetkovich also confirms the same idea by pointing out that the narrator "always preaches submission and acceptance, rather than challenging the underlying economic structures that force women to marry in

the first place” (108). This is a good place to remember the premise that takes Victorian women’s novels as disciplinary discourses, because, as the above passages exemplify, these narratives both produce ‘the right norms’ through fictional representations and thus function as a mechanism of social control. This can also be observed in the following quote, where the narrator sounds as if she were in a conversation with women readers particularly when she asks rhetorical questions about the current position of Isabel Vane and offers predictable answers at the same time:

The facts of her *hideous* case stood before her, naked and bare. She had *willfully abandoned* her husband, her children, her home; she had cast away her good name and her position; and she had *deliberately offended God*. What was she gained in return? *What was she? A poor outcast*; one of those *whom men pity*, and whom women shrink from; a *miserable, friendless creature*, who had henceforth to earn the bread she, and the other life dependent on her, must eat, the clothes they must wear, the roof that must cover them, the fuel they must burn. (EL 296)

Again, this passage is focalized from Isabel’s point of view, to stress how miserable Isabel feels and how the feeling of remorse powerfully functions as a kind of training of the female self. Especially the italicized words and phrases are significant as they highlight that the heroine has “willfully” made a deadly mistake and thus she has to endure the social stigma as a “poor outcast,” “miserable, friendless creature” (297). Here is another set of questions raised by the narrator to invite women readers to answer in the expected proper way: “She had sat till she could sit no longer; her very heart-strings were wrung. And she might not rise up in defense of herself. Defence? Did she not deserve more, ten thousand times more reproach than had met her ears now?” (EL 396). Seemingly, Isabel herself thinks that she indeed deserves more reproach, which is put in the narrative when she is made to witness the peaceful and happy moments of Carlyle and Barbara: “He [Carlyle] did not perceive that any one was present, and he bent his head and fondly kissed his wife. Isabel’s jealous eyes were turned upon them. She saw Barbara’s passionate, lingering kiss in return, she heard her fervent, whispering greeting” (EL 411). Many such moments occur in *East Lynne* only to make Isabel regret and suffer more. Jeanne Fahnestock interprets such scenes by writing that Isabel is “tormented by sexual jealousy as she witnesses the

endearments between the husband she now loves and his second wife. No blatant bigamy novel ever achieved anything quite so intense as the voyeurism of *East Lynne*” (53-4).

In the last part of the novel, Isabel also suffers as a mother. As a matter of fact, Isabel’s intense feelings for her sick son push her back to East Lynne, because she wants to take care of him herself. Rance states that as an adulterous heroine, she “is condemned to offer up fruitless prayers on behalf of her dying child” (75), who does not even recognize her as his real mother. However, there is a sharp contrast between Isabel’s reaction to the death of her first son from Carlyle and the death of the illegitimate infant from Francis Levison. Gail Walker interprets Isabel’s suffering as a mother in terms of this contrast:

Motherhood is the social reward of the virtuous wife, becomes the source of the fallen Isabel’s greatest suffering, for not only does she lose the children of her marriage, but she must also undergo the humiliation of bearing out of wedlock a child who is the visible evidence of her shame: when that child dies her response is relief and remorse rather than grief. (28)

Here, again, Isabel is portrayed as a validation of patriarchal values even in her reaction to the death of her baby by Francis Levison.

The representation of regret and pain is a significant issue in *East Lynne* and many scholars emphasize the function of putting such strong emotions so intensely at the heart of the novel. In the first place, Cvetkovich’s interpretation of the image of the suffering woman is noteworthy. She writes that the suffering woman is indeed an invention of nineteenth-century culture: “It could be said that the nineteenth-century novel in general, faced with the mystery of female identity, looked inside women and discovered there a world of psychic pain and repressed feelings” (98). Cvetkovich further asserts that such “psychic pain provides evidence of the effects of disciplinary rather than overt power; the middle-class woman provides a central example of how power operates in covert ways by producing particular kinds of subjectivity” (9). It has been said previously that Isabel’s story stands as a moral lesson for women readers of the Victorian era. In this respect, Cvetkovich’s argument about the disciplinary power of suffering

makes sense. This is not only true for the fictional character who is made to suffer in the narrative but also true for women readers who witness the heroine's painful experience with the guidance of a strong narrative voice. In this respect, the narrative disciplines both the erring heroine and women readers, who witness her dramatic experiences.

According to Diamond, the painful experience of the heroine was what made *East Lynne* a bestseller: "The greatest selling point of the novel was not the murder, the adultery or the train crash, but the painful experiences which the reader, especially the woman reader, shares with the heroine" (203). For twentieth century readers, of course, this is too much pain. In her article titled "A Lady to the End: A Case of Isabel Vane," Jeanne Elliott draws attention to the idea that the influential power of such painful experiences can only be comprehended by the Victorian audience: "For Lady Isabel the punishment is social ostracism, the loss of her children, forfeiture of her good name, misery, humiliation, and death. After her elopement with Levison, she undergoes a kind of ostracism which is difficult for the modern reader to comprehend. She cannot visit England except in disguise" (342). So much pain of course kills Isabel at the end of the novel. In the following passage, Hughes tells about the painful process which inevitably causes Isabel's death:

At every turn Lady Isabel is subjected to agonizing torments: she is reminded, in low tones, of the story of her own disgrace; she suffers through the death of her son William, unrecognized as his mother; she realizes the depths of her own shame when Francis Levison is convicted of murder. In the end it kills her: this is clearly the only proper response for someone in her situation, remorseful but socially irretrievable. If the author admitted any possibility of her being reinstated as a wife and mother, her plight would lose its terrible poignancy. (*The Maniac in the Cellar* 115)

The heroine's death in *East Lynne* is actually considered as the only plausible solution for Victorian audiences, because, "sexual transgression is equivalent to death, since she dies socially when she falls into disgrace" (Cvetkovich 102). Likewise, Nina Auerbach in her article "The Rise of the Fallen Woman," writes that "Victorian conventions ordain that a woman's fall ends in death" (30). What Isabel said on her deathbed is significant because she attempts

to explain what she did by saying that she was mad: “I never knew a moment’s peace after the mad act I was guilty of, in quitting you . . . I was mad, I was mad! I could not have done it in anything but madness” (EL 614). Isabel’s final sentences are important in that madness is used as the only explanation for those who violated the social mores in Victorian society. If she did all with a sane mind, of course, then she would have to accept and explain her sexual desire for Francis Levison, which would be far too radical for Victorian readers. Using the idea of female madness as a strategy of explaining female transgression will occupy a larger space while discussing Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* in the following section. For *East Lynne*, Ellen Wood briefly mentions madness as an excuse for Isabel’s misdeeds, because Isabel already accepts her position as a sinner, and tries to compensate for what she has done by submission, suffering and self-hatred.

The Christian message in *East Lynne* is noteworthy as one last point about how the novel ends. The last scene of the novel depicts Barbara and Carlyle’s peaceful moments while at the same time Ellen Wood does not miss the chance of giving one last lesson to women readers through the voice of Carlyle: “Oh, Barbara, never forget—never forget that the only way to ensure peace in the end, is, to strive always to be doing right, unselfishly, under God” (EL 624). The impression one can get from Carlyle’s words is that women are advised to be selfless, obey the Christian rules of Victorian society, and suppress all their passions and desires. The following interpretation of Cvetkovich also justifies the same idea: “By enabling the wishful fantasy that Isabel might have been happy ‘if only’ she had not left her husband, the novel effaces the more pervasive problem of women’s confinement to marriage, and the impossibility of escaping it” (103). Again, this implies Foucauldian discipline, which aims at controlling arbitrary sexuality that does not benefit patriarchal family. Equally important is the “sublimation of immediate desires and emotions,” as is seen in the way illicit emotions are treated in *East Lynne* (Mills *Michel Foucault* 43).



In contrast to Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's portrayal of the adulterous heroine in *Lady Audley's Secret* is extraordinarily provocative. That is why, when first published in 1862, *Lady Audley's Secret* outshone *East Lynne*'s popularity: "*East Lynne*'s qualified daring in demanding sympathy for the repentant adulteress was almost immediately eclipsed by the appearance of M. E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*" (Hughes "The Sensation Novel" 270). It should also be stressed that, comparatively speaking, the merits of Braddon's novel as a sensation novel are beyond Wood's *East Lynne*. This is mainly because *Lady Audley's Secret* is psychologically a far more impressive novel as it avoids the emotional melodrama and didactic crudity of *East Lynne*.

The interpretation of *East Lynne* focused mostly on the functions of unfriendly relations, negative emotions among women characters, and the conservative voice of the narrator in the anti-feminist and disciplinary treatment of the heroine. *Lady Audley's Secret* portrays a more challenging adulterous heroine, whose class background, motives, attitudes as a wife and as a mother are completely different from the heroine of *East Lynne*. As will be discussed in the following section, the aggressive, assertive and ungovernable nature of the adulterous heroine of Braddon's masterpiece is cherished by contemporary feminist scholars. However, the way she is pushed to a disadvantaged position throughout the narrative and the final punishment she gets will be interpreted as an anti-feminist turn, which is stronger than that of Wood's *East Lynne*. This is because, as this study asserts, feminist and anti-feminist aspects co-exist in women's fiction but as the signs of feminism get stronger, the anti-feminist resolutions become fiercer. In the following analysis, this will be examined by looking at the narrative perspective, the function of female madness and asylum in *Lady Audley's Secret*.

#### **4.3 Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862)**

Both the professional and personal life of Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) aroused controversies in the Victorian period because both were full of

unorthodox events. Before becoming a best-selling novelist, Braddon “went on to stage in 1857, using the name ‘Mary Seyton’” (Maunder 49). This was in itself unusual for a woman in the nineteenth century, but her controversial personality gained fame not as an actress. Particularly in the 1860s, as she gradually became the authoress of scandalous books such as *Three Times Dead* (1860), *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), *Aurora Floyd* (1863), *Eleanor’s Victory* (1863), *The Doctor’s Wife* (1864), Braddon became famous. Maunder writes that “it is difficult to be exact about the number of novels but from *Three Times Dead* (1860) to *Mary* (1916), there are at least seventy-seven, as well as plays, poems, and children’s stories” (49). Still, as Robert Lee Wolff notes, “unfortunately for her reputation, Miss Braddon all her life remained ‘the author of *Lady Audley’s Secret*.’ Even today, when she is remembered at all, she is still associated with her artless and somewhat trashy first great success” (8). Braddon’s personal life was also scandalous for Victorians, as she had an extra-marital relationship with her publisher John Maxwell, who was already married to a woman in a madhouse. The repercussions of such a controversial real life experience in her novel *Lady Audley’s Secret* are noteworthy and will be discussed thoroughly later.

*Lady Audley’s Secret* opens with elaborate descriptions of the Audley Court, which is depicted as secure and precarious at the same time. The narrator says the place “had been a convent, the quiet nuns had walked hand in hand,” (*LAS* 1) yet in the following pages she also mentions that “in such a house there were secret chambers,” (*LAS* 3) and nearby the fish-pond there is a convenient place “for secret meetings or for stolen interviews; a place in which a conspiracy might have been planned” (*LAS* 3). Such descriptive details are typical of sensation novels and they function to prepare the reader for the shocking twists of the story, whose sensational heroine Lucy Graham<sup>3</sup> is welcomed to the Audley

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<sup>3</sup> A brief note about the heroine’s names is necessary here. The heroine’s real name is Helen Maldon. After she marries her first husband George Talboys, she becomes Helen Talboys. When her first husband George leaves for Australia to seek his fortune for an uncertain time, she decides to start a new life and disguises herself as Lucy Graham. At the time of the narration, she has already bigamously married her second husband Sir Michael Audley so when the novel opens she is introduced to the reader as Lucy Audley (Lady Audley). That is why, she will be referred to as Lady Audley in this study.

Court as the wife of Sir Michael Audley, “one of the noblest men in Christendom” (LAS 219).

Just like *East Lynne*’s Isabel Vane, Lady Audley is also portrayed as an angelic woman, who has an enchanting beauty: “Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that magic power of fascination by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile. Everybody loved, admired, and praised her” (LAS 6). Different from Isabel Vane, Lady Audley does not come from an aristocratic background. When the novel starts, Lady Audley has already married Sir Michael Audley, who is indeed an old suitor for her; his daughter Alicia Audley is close to Lady Audley in age. It is openly told in the novel that she accepts his proposal because of the social and economic advantages the marriage would bring into her life: “It was a tacitly understood thing . . . that whenever Sir Michael proposed, the governess would quietly accept him; and, indeed, the simple Dawsons would have thought it something more than madness in a penniless girl to reject such an offer” (LAS 9). When Sir Michael proposes to Lady Audley, she honestly offers the following speech, which evinces the austere conditions of her past life:

From my very babyhood I have never seen anything but poverty. My father was a gentlemen; clever, accomplished, generous, handsome—but poor. My mother—But do not let me speak of her. Poverty, poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations, deprivations! You cannot tell; you, who are amongst those for whom life is so smooth and easy; you can never guess what is endured by such as we. Do not ask too much of me, then. I cannot be disinterested; I cannot be blind to the advantages of such an alliance. I cannot, I cannot! (LAS 10-11)

These are important details to note in that they reflect the motives behind Lady Audley’s marriage to Sir Michael Audley. Though they can be read as a criticism directed against the corrupt nature of Victorian marriages, this passage also highlights the mitigating circumstances of Lady Audley’s bigamous second marriage. This is because her first husband George Talboys abandons her with no explanation, though with good intentions of becoming rich in Australia and coming back to take better care of his family. Not having heard from George for a long time, Lady Audley finds herself in a quagmire with a baby boy. Hence,

though bigamous, marriage looks like her only alternative to live humanly and with dignity.

When Lady Audley moves to Audley Court, she faces a problematic relationship with Sir Michael's daughter Alicia, but because she is a very self-confident woman, her experience with Alicia does not bother her. Just as in *East Lynne*, the construction of women's relations are based on power relations in *Lady Audley's Secret* and women characters tend to dislike and distrust each other. However, as opposed to *East Lynne*, the intrigue in this novel is incited by a misogynist male character, Sir Michael's nephew Robert Audley. Robert comes to the Audley Court accompanied by a close friend of his, George Talboys, who has just come from Australia only to face his (now late) wife Helen Talboy's<sup>4</sup> death. Lady Audley learns that Robert Audley and her first husband George Talboys are visiting the Audley Court; she feels alarmed, finds excuses and avoids seeing the visitors. When Sir Michael and Lady Audley are away in London, Alicia shows Robert Audley and George Talboys a secret passage that takes them to Lady Audley's room. There, they see a picture of her, painted by a Pre-Raphaelite<sup>5</sup> artist, which makes George Talboys melancholic, contemplative and depressed. Back from London, Lady Audley finds a glove in her room and understands that Robert and George have been to her place. The following day, George Talboys is last seen with Lady Audley in the garden and he disappears after that. Robert Audley feels very uneasy and grows suspicious about the sudden disappearance of his friend George. He is determined to make every effort to find out what has really happened to him and devotes all his time to the detection of George Talboys' fate.

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Talboys is now Lady Audley, the new wife of Sir Michael Audley.

<sup>5</sup> Sean Purchase writes that Pre-Raphaelite paintings "are characterized by their vividness, clarity, their often brilliant color" (109) and such paintings are preoccupied with "sensuous, rose-lipped, tragic-looking women" (152). That Lady Audley's portrait is painted in Pre-Raphaelite style is an important detail as it implies that George Talboys can recognize his *late* wife easily even though he catches a glimpse of her painting in dim light.

A considerable part of the novel is devoted to Robert Audley's meticulous search. Finally, Robert discovers the shocking reality about Lady Audley by means of what he calls "the theory of circumstantial evidence" <sup>6</sup>(*LAS* 119). He is now sure that Lady Audley is indeed Helen Talboys, who faked her death, disguised herself as Lucy Graham, left her son behind and married Sir Michael Audley for money, security and status. Robert also thinks that she killed her first husband George Talboys after seeing George with him in the Audley Court. He then confronts Lady Audley and forces her to confess everything. Sir Michael Audley is called in and Helen/Lucy "falls on her knees" (*LAS* 347) and confesses the realities of her past life. This confession scene is important in that here Helen says that she has done everything because she is mad. Meanwhile, it appears that George Talboys is not dead and he has managed to rescue himself from Helen's attempted murder. Even though the physician Dr. Alwyn Mosgrave thinks that Lady Audley is not actually mad, he considers her very dangerous (*LAS* 379). She is sent to an asylum in Belgium and dies there.

Considering the adulterous heroines of sensation fiction, accusations of madness and death might be thought of as inevitable endings, which is true for both novels discussed in this chapter. However, each novel's approach to the wrong-doings of a sinful woman differs. As stated earlier, *East Lynne* is considered conservative when compared to *Lady Audley's Secret* in that it focuses more on the heroine's suffering and penitence. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon's portrayal of the adulterous heroine is far too radical in that the heroine does not repent; she only suffers because her plan does not work in the end. This difference is what makes *Lady Audley's Secret* more controversial and thus apt for feminist interpretations. Still, especially the idea of madness and confinement to an asylum are important details to note because as Foucault observed "the asylum

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<sup>6</sup> These evidences are important because they contribute to the unraveling of events and slowly push the heroine to her tragic end. Robert's description of the "circumstantial evidence" can give an idea about how Robert discovered the reality about Lady Audley. Robert says that a circumstantial evidence can be "a scrap of paper; a shred of some torn garment; the button off a coat; a word dropped incautiously from the over-cautious lips of guilt; the fragment of a letter; the shutting or opening of a door; a shadow on a window-blind; the accuracy of a moment; a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal" (*LAS* 119-20).

is a religious domain without religion, a domain of pure morality, of ethical uniformity [and] must represent the great continuity of social morality. The values of family and work, all the acknowledged virtues, now reign in the asylum” (“Great Confinement” 148). Thus, disciplinary and anti-feminist aspects of *Lady Audley’s Secret* lie basically in the way the novel treats female madness and uses the idea of confinement as a punishment.

Just like *East Lynne*’s narrator, the narrator of *Lady Audley’s Secret* can be defined as “extra-heterodiegetic,” who is an outsider but offers her comments at crucial moments in the novel (Rimmon-Kennan 94). Also, it should be noted that because the misogynist character Robert Audley’s “perspective controls the narrative” (Cvetkovich 55), the narrative perspective is very unsympathetic not only to the heroine, but to the female sex as a whole. That is why, the anti-feminist focalization, the statements and generalizations made about the female sex, and finally the punishment of the heroine will be taken as techniques of disciplining in the novel.

The representation of Braddon’s heroine is significant because feminist readings of *Lady Audley’s Secret* generally underline the contradiction between how perfect the heroine looks and what terrible things she does. For many literary scholars that will be referred to hereafter, this contradiction is what makes Braddon’s novel a subversive narrative. Considering the sensation novel, Pykett writes that “one of the genre’s most distinctive features was the way in which it displayed women and made a spectacle of femininity, whether of the passive, angelic variety, or in the form of the *femme fatale*” (*The Sensation Novel* 6-7). As a matter of fact, Lady Audley definitely falls in the second category; however, at the same time, Braddon describes her as a child-woman whose fascinating beauty is hard to escape one’s notice. That is, Braddon combines contradictory features in the character of Lady Audley and makes this idea apparent through the voice of the main male character, Robert Audley: “I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty” (*LAS* 141). The shocking effect of the paradox between the heroine’s appearance and her

criminality attracted the attention of many scholars, who have discussed the unconventional nature of the heroine. Not surprisingly, the secret criminal personality of a woman character can be much more shocking if she is depicted in the following way in the opening chapters of the novel: “The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley’s fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness” (*LAS* 52). Such flawless descriptions of heroines are typical of sensation novels of the period, yet it should be noted that in *Lady Audley’s Secret* the heroine’s enthralling beauty is over-emphasized.

Such over-emphasis on the heroine’s bewitching beauty can have different functions in the novel. First, it can increase the effect of shock and thrill on the part of Victorian readers: “*Lady Audley’s Secret* pleases, thrills, shocks and undermines its readers with the fact that this personification is simpering, charitable, childlike, genteel femininity is, in fact, a cold, calculating, resourceful woman, who abandons her child and is capable of murder, all in the interests of self-preservation” (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 53). Second, it can defamiliarize and subvert the image of the middle-class angelic woman in respected Victorian houses. Patrick Brantlinger interprets the function of the contradiction between how the heroine looks and what she does by saying that “the plots of sensation novels lead to the unmasking of extreme evil behind fair appearances. In doing so, they threatened their first readers’ cherished assumptions about women, marriage, and the fair appearances of the Victorian scene” (11). In the same vein, Katherine Montwieler sees Lucy’s role as the “child-wife” of Sir Michael Audley as a “performance,” and further argues that this is “crucial to the subversive message of the book” (50). As “the beautiful face of transgression,” Lady Audley’s representation actually undermines Victorian myths about womanhood (Saxey xiii).

Apart from her bewitching appearance, Lady Audley is also pictured as a woman who is very strong, determined, and thus reigns over the domestic sphere.

In *East Lynne*, Isabel Vane cannot even participate in running the house as the mistress; she is very fragile, timid, and vulnerable. Lady Audley is just the opposite, and beside her criminality, her assertiveness makes itself apparent first through the way she controls the house. Her power in the house is first felt through the voice of the narrator. In the following brief quote, the narrator denotes how the power dynamics in the domestic sphere change after Lady Audley settles in the Audley court: “Miss Alicia’s day was over; and now when she asked anything of the housekeeper, the housekeeper would tell her that she would speak to *my lady*, or she would consult my lady, and if my lady pleased it should be done” (LAS 4). Another example for her dominance in the domestic sphere can be the tea-making scene, which is narrated from the perspective of Robert Audley. In the following passage, Robert Audley watches Lady Audley as she prepares tea for him. Here, Lady Audley is presented as an epitome of domestic perfection:

She looked very pretty and innocent, seated behind the graceful group of delicate opal china and glittering silver. Surely a pretty woman never looks prettier than when making tea. The most feminine and most domestic of all occupations imparts a magic harmony to her every movement, a witchery to her every glance. The floating mists from the boiling liquid in which she infuses the soothing herbs, whose secrets are known to her alone, envelop her in a cloud of scented vapour, through which she seems a social fairy, weaving potent spells with Gunpowder and Bohea. At the tea-table she reigns omnipotent, unapproachable. (LAS 222)

As it appears in the above quote, Lady Audley perfectly meets the expectations of Victorian middle-class values as the mistress of the house. Hughes interprets the perfection behind Lady Audley’s personality by ironically writing that she “has no objection to conventional middle-class values of domesticity and respectability; in fact she commits bigamy in order to get them, and murder in order to keep them” (*The Maniac in the Cellar* 127). In the same vein, Lynn Vockuil suggests that Lady Audley

claims the promises of privacy that shaped middle-class women's lives but exploits those privacies for her own ends rather than the self-sacrificial ends glorified by middle-class culture. Her charming manners are portrayed as criminal not only because they cynically demystify the uses of women's interiority but also because they so effectively mask her cynicism. (625)



In short, all interpretations of the paradox between the heroine's appearance and her actions agree on the perception that sensational descriptions of the heroine are too perfect to be true and behind such perfection there can be shocking secrets.

In addition to the implications of sensational descriptions, feminist interpretations of *Lady Audley's Secret* generally stress the aggressive nature and the criminality of the heroine. To mention a few, in *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, Pamela Gilbert states that it is the portrayal of aggressive female characters which "current critics identify as the subversive feminist appeal" of Braddon's best-selling sensation novels (79). Also, in *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel*, Anthea Trodd calls such heroines "the criminal angel in the house" (9) and adds that how they behave "offered a dramatic way of formulating concerns about women's relations to the domestic environment, and about the dependence, dissatisfaction and dissimulation variously associated with her role" (9). Likewise, Virginia Morris, in *Double Jeopardy Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction*, suggests that female criminality in the Victorian novel shows "women rebelling against their male-dominated lives and breaking away from restraints –familial and economic—which demeaned them" (24). Similar concerns which lead Lady Audley to criminality can easily be felt in the novel, particularly when she explains the details of her miserable life before she changes her identity. In the following letter she writes to her alcoholic father, Lady Audley briefly tells her dissatisfactions and disappointments in life:

I am weary of my life here, and wish, if I can, to find a new one. I go out into the world, dissevered from every link which binds me to the hateful past, to seek another home and another fortune. Forgive me if I have been fretful, capricious, changeable. You should forgive me, for you know *why* I have been so. You know the *secret* which is the key to my life. HELEN TALBOYS (*LAS* 250).

What makes Lady Audley particularly extraordinary is that, as opposed to Isabel Vane in *East Lynne*, she does not regret but only feels sorry as she cannot reach her aspirations and all her criminal attempts to live a prosperous life fail in the end. The following dialogue takes place between Robert Audley and Lady

Audley in the chapter titled “Buried Alive,” which implies that the erroneous heroine is doomed to be buried alive in an asylum, where she later dies:

“Live here and repent; nobody will assail you, nobody will torment you. I only say to you, repent!”

“I cannot!” cried my lady, pushing her hair fiercely from her white forehead, and fixing her dilated eyes upon Robert Audley, “I cannot! Has my beauty brought me to this? Have I plotted and schemed to shield myself, and lain awake in the long deadly nights trembling to think of my dangers, for this? I had better have given up at once, since this was to be the end.” (LAS 391)

It has been told earlier that in *East Lynne*, penitence and extreme suffering mark the novel’s treatment of the heroine, and they basically function as a punishment and disciplining mechanism for her. In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as the above dialogue illustrates, the heroine does not repent. However, she is doomed to hate herself for failing to reach her ambitions. The narrator observes and denotes her emotional state in the following way:

She plucked at the feathery golden curls as if she would have torn them from her head. It had served her so little after all, that gloriously glittering hair; that beautiful nimbus of yellow light that had contrasted so exquisitely with the melting azure of her eyes. She hated herself and her beauty. (LAS 392)

One last point about the unconventional nature of Lady Audley is her indifference to her child as a mother. While Isabel Vane in *East Lynne* is most remembered as a suffering mother, who witnesses her son’s death, Lady Audley, on the contrary, is courageous enough to say that she did not even love her son: “People pitied me; and I hated them for their pity. I did not love the child; for he had been left a burden upon my hands” (LAS 353). However, Lady Audley’s keeping of mementoes of her son, locks of his hair, can prove her love and longing as a mother, who leaves her son behind to set up a new life. Still, Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* is unconventional in the way that it does not present Lady Audley as a suffering mother unlike the way Ellen Wood pictures Isabel Vane in *East Lynne*.

So far, it has been mentioned that feminist readings of *Lady Audley’s Secret* cherish the paradox between the heroine’s appearance and her phenomenal

actions, her subversive nature, criminality and unconventional traits. Still, just like *East Lynne*, *Lady Audley's Secret* can also be interpreted in various ways. Beside feminists' appreciation of the novel briefly outlined above, there are opposite views, which tend to read the novel as an anti-feminist narrative. For instance, in her article "Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Secret: An Antifeminist Amongst The New Women," Kate Mattacks refutes feminist readings of Braddon's novels and claims that the "complexities of her sensation fiction" make it hard to call Braddon a feminist novelist (219). The emphasis of feminist readings of Braddon's fiction is understandable, as they basically cherish the existence of criminal women in fiction. However, as Cvetkovich maintains, female criminality cannot be "intrinsically subversive; it can be deployed both to challenge and to reinforce ideologies of gender and affect" (55). What this study suggests is that beside female criminality in the Victorian novel, how the criminal woman character is treated throughout the narrative should also be a point of interest, which marks the novel's disciplinary function, hence, also its ambivalence.

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon is very unfavorable towards the heroine in that, as Virginia Morris writes, "she switches the protagonist of the novel from Lucy to Robert Audley partway through the story," and, what is more, "the narrator's original sympathy for Lucy gives way to open antagonism" (98). As a matter of fact, it is not only the heroine that is treated unjustly; in *Lady Audley's Secret* the narrative perspective is very unsympathetic and sometimes even hostile to the female sex as a whole. This is because the story is mostly told from the perspective of Robert Audley, who, as will be quoted in the following parts, openly declares that he hates women (*LAS* 207).

In fact, before Robert Audley, the narrator of the novel frequently stresses the negative feelings and unfriendly relations among women characters. One striking example can be the following passage from the first chapter of the novel, where the narrator expresses how the heroine's marriage to Sir Michael Audley might arouse envy and hatred in other women: "The truth was that Lady Audley had, in becoming the wife of Sir Michael, made one of those apparently

advantageous matches which are apt to draw upon a woman the envy and hatred of her sex” (*LAS* 5). In addition to the main women characters, Braddon puts many minor women characters briefly in the narrative, particularly when they will have a function. That means, when women characters appear on the scene, they somehow contribute to the doom of the heroine. This can best be confirmed with the words of Robert Audley, who elaborates on the “infamy” of the female sex (*LAS* 237). In the following excerpt, Robert Audley visits the school where Lady Audley once worked as a governess. There, he questions the other women and finds out that they are very willing to reveal the intricacies of Lady Audley’s mysterious life. The following quote denotes how Robert Audley thinks about women:

‘How pitiless these women are to each other,’ he thought while the teacher was absent. ‘This one knows intuitively that there is some danger to the other lurking beneath my questions. She sniffs the coming trouble to her fellow female creature, and rejoices in it, and would take any pains to help me. What a world it is, and how these women take life out of our hands. Helen Maldon, Lady Audley, Clara Talboys, and now Miss Tonks—all womankind from beginning to end.’ (*LAS* 237)

Robert Audley’s contempt and disgust for women can be felt here. Moreover, this quote also stresses the mistrust and hatred among women as observed by Robert. It should be reminded at this point that he has been introduced as a misogynist character earlier, who controls the narrative perspective in the novel. As mentioned in the Methodology section, the character focalization can function to give privilege to one character as the events are presented through his eyes (Bal 146). Throughout the novel, the narrator frequently dives into the inner world of Robert Audley and discloses his sexist thoughts. Considering the way Robert addresses the female sex, the most notable misogynist example is the one where he ironically explicates that women are indeed the stronger sex:

To call them the weaker sex is to utter a hideous mockery. They are the stronger sex, the noisier, the more persevering, the most self-assertive sex. They want freedom of opinion, variety of occupation, do they? Let them have it. Let them be lawyers, doctors, preachers, teachers, soldiers, legislators—anything they like—but let them be quiet—if they can. (*LAS* 207)

The details of this passage make clear that Braddon touches on the demands of the woman's movement of the time through the inner voice of a misogynist male character, Robert Audley. Braddon, in this part, might be thought of as suggesting that woman should be elevated to the positions which are only available to men at the time of the novel's publication. However, later she suggests that women should be silenced, which might be interpreted as a backlash against the outspoken precursors of Victorian feminism. Even though the female sex is presented as the stronger sex in this quote, the sarcastic tone can be felt, and it would be a mistake to consider these statements genuinely progressive or frankly feminist. A significant point to note at this point is that, in an article she wrote in 1909, Braddon sounds still reactionary against the gains of the Victorian women's movement:

Well women have everything now. Schools, University, golf, cricket, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion. They can be Socialists, Deists, Buddhists, Theosophists, Bernard Shawists, just whatever they like. The world is theirs in a century that ought to be called the Golden Age of Womanhood; and there is small chance of a new John Knox to lift his voice against the monstrous regiment of women. ("The Woman I Remember" qtd. in Mattacks 217)

This quote reveals Braddon's ambivalence at a later age in her life, thus, it is no surprise that the anti-feminist perspective of Robert Audley in the narrative reigns throughout *Lady Audley's Secret*, which she wrote approximately forty years earlier. For example, in the later parts of the novel, Robert Audley sounds even more vengeful towards the female sex. As the following section will indicate, women are presented in an evil way, causing only damage and destruction to the good ones. What is more, in contrast to the above quotation in which Braddon sarcastically calls women "the stronger sex," in the following quote men are considered as women's superiors:

‘I hate women,’ he thought savagely. ‘They’re bold, brazen, abominable creatures, invented for the annoyance and destruction of their superiors. Look at the business of poor George’s! It’s all woman’s work from one end to the other. He marries a woman, and his father casts him off, penniless and professionless. He hears of the woman’s death and he breaks his heart—his good, honest, manly heart, worth a million of the treacherous lumps of self-interest and mercenary

calculation which beat in women's breasts. He goes to a woman's house and is never seen again.' (LAS 207-8)

What should be noted at this point is that although the heroine is the real victim of the economic and social structures of Victorian society, in this quote, her first husband George is presented as the victim in the hands of his crafty wife. It should be remembered, however, that George abandons her in the middle of the night, leaves for Australia for a few years without ever writing to her. He might well have been dead and she had no resources as a poor mother, who had to live with a pathetic alcoholic father. Regarding these details, it can be said that *Lady Audley's Secret* presents all the restrictions Victorian women faced. Yet, the novel also privileges and victimizes male characters while trying to control and discipline the females. This can best be observed in the narrator's distance to the women characters and sympathy for the men in the novel. For instance, although these quotes show the thoughts of Robert Audley, because they are focalized from his point of view, they are narrated as the observations of the narrator, who knows and shares his feelings and thoughts. As the following excerpt will indicate, the narrator's sympathy for Robert Audley makes itself apparent through the way she shares his feelings:

I do not say that Robert Audley was a coward, but I will admit that a shiver of horror, something akin to fear, chilled him to the heart, as he remembered the horrible things that have been done by women, since that day upon which Eve was created to be Adam's companion and help-mate in the garden of Eden. What if this woman's hellish power of dissimulation should be stronger than the truth, and crush him? (LAS 274)

Evocative of 'the original sin,' this quote underlines the morally corrupt human nature, which is liable to commit sin. As a matter of fact, Robert Audley has enough reasons to be afraid of Lady Audley because it is true that she is represented as an aggressive and assertive woman. This makes itself particularly evident in the following part, where Robert confronts Lady Audley, who strikes him back by uttering a threat against him:

*I will kill you first. Why have you tormented me so? Why could you not let me alone? What harm had I ever done you that you should make yourself my persecutor, and dog my steps, and watch my looks, and play the spy upon me? Do you want to drive me mad? Do you know what it is to wrestle with a madwoman?*  
(LAS 275)

Having seen the heroine presenting herself as a madwoman in this quote, this can be the right place to continue with how the issue of female madness and asylum function in the novel. It is true that in front of the male characters, Lady Audley calls herself mad in the first place just before she confesses the realities of her life. She addresses the following passage to Robert Audley after he forces her to confess:

You have conquered--a MADWOMAN! . . . When you say that I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie. I killed him because I AM MAD! Because my intellect is a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity; because when George Talboys goaded me, as you have goaded me; and reproached me, and threatened me; my mind, never properly balanced, utterly lost its balance; and *I was mad!* (LAS 346)

In this confession scene, the main stress is on the hereditary madness Lady Audley possibly inherited from her mother, who also inherited madness from her mother. This is how Lady Audley explains her mother's madness, which also influenced herself: "Her madness was a hereditary disease transmitted to her from her mother, who had died mad. She, my mother, had been, or had appeared, sane up to the hour of my birth; but from that hour her intellect had decayed, until she had become what I saw her . . . the only inheritance I had to expect from my mother was—insanity" (LAS 350). So this means that in Lady Audley's family three generations of women were mad and they all ended up in mental hospitals.

How female madness is treated in the novel and why it occupies so large a place particularly in the last part is discussed by many critics. Such discussions are significant because they also question the ending of the novel. Virginia Morris, for example, raises the following questions concerning how the novel ends: "As a killer . . . she is a failure: neither man dies. So why does Braddon punish her? Why does Lucy Audley die in an insane asylum? And why, for many

readers, does she get what she deserves?" (94-5). Hughes' answer for this question is that this is actually a generic feature of sensation novels:

In order to provide some justification for the erratic behavior of their murderers, bigamists, and adulteresses, the sensation novelists are driven to exploit the irrational elements of the psyche, the obscure and unreasonable motivations that in the twentieth century are associated with the subconscious. Inner forces, as powerful and uncontrollable as face, claim equal numbers of victims. Evil or antisocial action is no longer the direct result and expression of evil character, as in conventional melodrama, but derives from combinations of circumstance, weakness, insanity, impulse, 'sensation' at its most basic. (*The Maniac in the Cellar* 58)

Many scholars agree on the idea that female madness is used in novels as a plausible explanation for female transgression. Sean Purchase, for instance, stresses that madness is associated with moral corruption (189). Such association is particularly used for female criminals, or in general terms, for wrong-doers, which gives the impression that the erratic behaviors of women cannot be explained by anything other than madness. Saxey shares a similar opinion and states that, "this association of women and madness could be used to pathologise undesirable behaviour" (xvi). Likewise, Catherine Wells-Cole interprets the function of female madness in *Lady Audley's Secret* as an example of the unsympathetic treatment of the heroine. She further writes that Braddon uses madness as an excuse to explain the heroine's mistakes:

Partly due to Braddon's consistently detached and ironic treatment of her central character, Lady Audley never wins the reader's full sympathy. Yet, the circumstances of her life, as we come to know them, would have given her ample reason to turn to bigamy, if not actually to murder. Almost as if she fears to be subversive, by excusing the actions of a deserted woman who takes her life into her own hands, Braddon adds madness as the key to Lady Audley's actions and her final secret. (vi)

Indeed, this is in part due to the double-bind of the author, who both presents her heroine's impossible social dilemma and exploits cultural bias towards beautiful young women at the same time.

In her interpretation of Lady Audley's madness, Showalter diverges from other scholars since she reads Braddon's novel as a subversive and therefore feminist text. According to her, "as every woman reader must have sensed, Lady



Audley's real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative" (*A Literature of their Own* 167). This point is very significant in that it reminds us of the statements of Dr. Alwyn Mosgrave in the novel, who is a "physician, experienced in cases of mania" (*LAS* 368). Dr. Mosgrave's words are crucial because in the first place he thinks that Lady Audley is not mad at all. Having listened to Robert Audley as he tells the story of Lady Audley, Dr. Mosgrave explains how he conceives what he has heard:

She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left it in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and possession. There is no madness there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that. (*LAS* 377)

Having a male character, a man of science, making such wise observations is worth appreciating. Later, however, after having a brief conversation with Lady Audley, Dr. Mosgrave is confused and offers the following ambiguous diagnosis about her psychological state:

‘I have talked to the lady,’ he said quietly, ‘and we understand each other very well. There is latent insanity! Insanity which might never appear; or which might appear only once or twice in a life-time. It would be *dementia* in its worst phase perhaps: acute mania; but its duration would be very brief, and it would only arise under extreme mental pressure. The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous.’ (*LAS* 379)

In this speech, Dr. Mosgrave's words exemplify the anxieties of Victorian society about erroneous women; they can be quite dangerous, particularly since they will resort to anything (Lady Audley attempts even arson and murder) to achieve their ends. That is exactly why they must be confined to an asylum. Karen Tatum interprets the dangerous nature of the heroine by accentuating that she does what she does powerfully, independently, and without any help just to reach her aspirations (146). Tatum also thinks that Lady Audley uses the idea of madness to cover her criminality, which is what makes her dangerous: "Being a woman who intelligently concocts schemes of self-preservation and usurps the masculine

construction of women's madness for her own advantage is precisely what makes Lady Audley dangerous" (146). That she is 'dangerous' implies that she does not submit to what Victorian society can offer her as a low-class woman and she develops her own ways of achieving a better life only to get punished at the end. As a punishment, she is confined to a madhouse, gets sick and dies there, while the narrator closes the novel in the following way, assuring happy ending for those who are left behind: "I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace" (LAS 446-7). The ending of Braddon's novel is similar to Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* in that both women novelists punish the erroneous heroine severely, as a lesson for Victorian women readers. Still, the wrong-doings of women characters are treated differently in *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*. While Ellen Wood makes her heroine suffer under unbearable emotional burdens, for Mary Elizabeth Braddon the heroine's punishment takes the form of confinement because her heroine does not repent or writhe under emotional distress. That is why, for Lady Audley, accusations of mental instability and confinement are inescapable. In *East Lynne*, the heroine herself claims that she left her husband and eloped with another man because she was mad and that she "could not have done it in anything but madness" (614). In *Lady Audley's Secret*, likewise, the heroine confesses all she did and says that she did what she did because she was mad (346). Different from *East Lynne*, where the heroine dies in pain, in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the heroine faces double punishment; first, she is sent to an asylum and she dies there after two years. This might be indicative of the function of asylum as a place where moral values reign, because contrary to the heroine of *East Lynne*, Lady Audley does not repent in the novel.

One last point should be noted as to why Braddon puts female madness at the center of *Lady Audley's Secret*. Tomaiuolo suggests that autobiographical influences can be observed in the way Braddon treats female madness and the function of the asylum in her novel. Two women who indirectly took place in

Braddon's life might have served as models for the representation of the mad woman in her work.

The first case concerns Braddon's personal life, which was as scandalous as her novels for she had a "stable, sentimental and editorial relationship with John Maxwell" (Tomaiuolo 11). Hughes draws attention to the connection between Braddon's life experiences and the plots of her novels: "As Braddon's reviewers maliciously hinted, her scandalous plots were not so far removed from her life; she had a secret of her own in her liaison with the publisher John Maxwell and their five illegitimate children. Maxwell's legal wife, confined to a lunatic asylum, was all too real" ("The Sensation Novel" 271). John Maxwell was in the business of publishing and he was also editing periodicals. When he met Braddon, Maxwell was already married to Mary Ann Crowley, who was diagnosed with "puerperal insanity," thus had to spend the rest of her life in an asylum (Tomaiuolo 11). This detail is worthy of emphasis because the same mental illness also marks Lady Audley's and her mother's life in *Lady Audley's Secret* (11). Tomaiuolo interprets this connection by writing that "through Lady Audley's final incarceration Braddon was in part trying to exorcise her own personal ghost, in the figure of John Maxwell's 'mad wife'" (13).

The second case concerns the dedication page of *Lady Audley's Secret*. Tomaiuolo discusses the dedication page of the novel as an example of a paratext, which can shape the interpretation of a literary work. Braddon dedicates *Lady Audley's Secret* to her literary mentor Edward Bulwer Lytton<sup>7</sup>, who had a tormented relationship with his wife Rosina Wheeler. Mrs. Wheeler was also a novelist, who is underread today. The couple had a problematic relationship, which made itself apparent in what is today called the Hertford scandal. When Bulwer Lytton was offered "a cabinet post in Derby-Disraeli government," he

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<sup>7</sup> On the dedication page of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon writes in capital letters: "DEDICATED TO THE RIGHT HON. SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART MP, DC.L., & C., & C., IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LITERARY ADVICE MOST GENEROUSLY GIVEN TO THE AUTHOR" (LAS n.p.)

went to Hertford to deliver a public speech (1). However, the event turned into a scandal when Rosina Wheeler showed up in Hertford unplanned, interrupted Edward Bulwer Lytton's talk and delivered her own speech to defame him (2). Rosina was known to be a very outspoken and assertive woman for her time, which can explain why she was deliberately (and wrongly) accused of madness and confined to an asylum after the Hertford scandal. Tomaiuolo interprets the connection between Rosina Wheeler's story and the dedication page of *Lady Audley's Secret* in the following words:

First, this dedication suggests that Braddon owes him much in terms of 'literary advice'. Moreover, Braddon's words inform Edward Bulwer Lytton that the book is written *for him* and addressed *to him* in multiple ways. It follows that the similarities between Lady Audley's attitudes and vicissitudes (in particular her imprisonment in the Belgian asylum) and Rosina Wheeler's story suggest an approach to *Lady Audley's Secret* as a fictional alternative rewriting of Lady Lytton's incarceration. In what will be her first successful novel Braddon, so to speak, pays her literary debt to Bulwer Lytton and, at the same time, offers him Lady Audley's death in an asylum as a sort of fictional gift and a surrogate solution to his battle with Rosina, giving an alternative epilogue to his wife's 'improper' behaviour. (13)

Having considered the background story between Edward Bulwer Lytton and Rosina Wheeler, it is plausible to read the implications of the dedication page of *Lady Audley's Secret* as a deliberate beginning. It is true that Braddon accepts Bulwer Lytton as her literary mentor, which can give the impression that in the first place she pays her tribute to him through the dedication page of her masterpiece. Still, while interpreting the dedication page of the novel, one cannot remain blind to what happened to Rosina Wheeler, who ended up in an asylum probably as a punishment for her misconduct. Just like Dr. Mosgrave's resolution about Lady Audley, this can be because Rosina Wheeler was indeed not mad, but she was very dangerous in the eyes of the Victorians.

To summarize, although Lady Audley is appreciated as a provocative, self-confident and assertive woman character, the way she is treated throughout the text and what she has to face at the end can mark the novel's ambivalence and disciplinary aspects. As a matter of fact, this ambivalence is underlined for both sensation novelists discussed in this chapter. While analyzing *East Lynne* and

*Lady Audley's Secret*, this chapter focused on the world as represented by the novels, which covers the representation and the treatment of various characters, their conduct as well as some values and norms of the Victorian period. Both novels picture feminist representations of women characters (regarding especially their conduct and feelings) with anti-feminist and disciplinary treatments. The narrative voice and perspective in the novels by both novelists represent unsympathetic treatment of the unconventional heroine. For Wood, Grose writes that "She was not a prominent member of Victorian literary circles, nor was she a vocal advocate of women's rights. However, her works reveal that even when she did not overtly defy prescriptions of gender and morality in her fiction, she certainly did explore options far beyond those advocated in conduct books" (412). For Braddon, too, there is an inclination to take her both as a feminist and an anti-feminist. This study additionally contends that feminist and anti-feminist aspects co-exist in Braddon and Wood's novels, mainly to create the effect of discipline.

Though this study does not aim to decipher the authorial intention in these works, it can be deduced that 'the implied author,' that is, "the structure of values that lies behind a given novel" (Case and Shaw 9) exemplify Victorian disciplinary discourse. As noted earlier in the Methodology section, the implied author is not always taken as a personified narrative construct. Susan Lanser says it is "a reading effect", "a matter of belief" (12) and for Abbott it is a "sensibility" (84). Hence, it can be argued that "the reading effect" for these sensation narratives is controlling and disciplinary. Still, at the time of their publication, these narratives were also considered emancipatory, their affective powers were feared; thus, they incited fierce criticisms among the literary circles.

#### **4.4 Criticism**

The period saw fierce discussions about the nature and power of sensation narratives and the criticism had three focusses. First, sensation novels were considered 'low literature,' which were easy to write and easy to read. It should be underlined that, as Reynolds and Humble observe, such criticism came mostly from realist novelists of the time, who were thought to produce 'high literature.'

“many of the most heated objections to the sensation novel emanate from other novelists: writers of realist novels. For them, the notion of the novel as a moral and social barometer, and thus a worthy exemplar for young women was hard—and comparatively recently won” (105). Seemingly, the concern of this view was that through immoral feelings and behaviors, the sensational heroine might corrupt high notions promoted by realist novels. This also indicates the power relation between the genres, which causes popular fiction to be deemed inferior, and later, also to suffer from negligence. This can be read as a kind of silencing and suppressing the unconventional and subversive aspects of these narratives.

Second, criticisms of sensation novels targeted the subversive nature of the narratives. For instance, unconventional representations of women characters and how they behaved in the novels were interpreted as assaults on the sanctities of Victorian morals. This is because, as Smiley writes, Victorian novelists “explored all sorts of moral and political ideas, but the one they kept returning to, the one most central to the novel, was the question of female virtue, which is simultaneously the most apparently personal, the most socially and politically explosive, and the most inflammatory” (122). The content of sensation novels, their extra-ordinary characterization and shocking themes incited Victorian anxieties and fears about the nature of the feminine as well as the nature of the sacred Victorian families. This is first because the backbone of the sensation novel can be thought of as the secrets of the Victorian family and “their plots habitually reveal and exploit the fear that the respectable Victorian family had some dark secret at its core” (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 10).

As a matter of fact, in the novels, sensation heroines behave improperly because of the economic and social problems that they have to face. Because they are not competent to cope with the deficiencies of their lives, they develop alternative strategies and this can explain why, as Cvetkovich expresses, “characters such as Lady Audley or Isabel Vane were declared untrue to life; authors were accused of making bigamy, adultery, murder, and vice seem rampant” (21). The reception of the novels starting from the 1860s were all

concerned with the progressive aspects of the narratives. Both *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, just like many other sensation novels of the same period, evoked echoes of what were discussed under the Woman Question:

Sensation novels reproduce and negotiate broader cultural anxieties about the nature and status of respectable femininity and the domestic ideal at a time when women and other reformers were clamoring for a widening of women's legal rights and educational and employment opportunities. Both implicitly and explicitly these novels raise questions about gender identity, and they both work with and rework prevailing gender stereotypes, such as the 'fast woman' the 'Girl of the Period', the 'Angel in the House', the 'manly man' and the feminized male who lacks a clear social role. (Pykett *The Sensation Novel* 10)

Women writers' private lives were also a matter of dispute. Among all the sensation writers, Mary Elizabeth Braddon was the one who had to bear criticisms directed not only against what she wrote, but also against how she preferred to live her life. In the following extract, Michael Sadleir sums up Braddon's tough experiences as one of the most popular women novelists of her time:

No novelists of her century won a wider or more lasting popularity; none knew better than she what is meant by "writing for one's life"; few were subject to anything approaching the obloquy which she suffered from critics and moralists. As a dogged, courageous and finally triumphant bread-winner she may be paralleled with Frances Trollope and with Margaret Oliphant; but as an innocent victim of contemporary prejudice, and as a pariah cruelly baited by her kind, she stands alone. (69)

As a matter of fact, the private lives of famous sensation novelists of both sexes were a matter of concern for Victorian critics and readers. In the following quote, for example, Harrison and Fantina point to the unusual life styles of many sensation writers:

To Victorian reviewers, the authors' private lives provided fuel for their criticism of social improprieties they found within the novels. Several of the sensation authors lived their adult lives outside of the parameters of the Victorian nuclear family. For example, Collins's first common-law wife, Caroline Graves, finally chose to leave him and marry another man. Collins gamely attended the wedding, then took up with another woman, Martha Rudd, who bore their three children out of wedlock. When Graves's marriage failed, Collins, apparently without a second thought, took her back and proceeded to support two households. Reade, although employed by Magdalen College at Oxford in a position that mandated celibacy, had fathered an illegitimate son with one woman and lived unmarried with another, the actress Laura Seymour, for over two decades. (xv)

However, Harrison and Fantina add that none of the sensation writers of the time received so harsh criticism as Mary Elizabeth Braddon had to bear (xv). Braddon was severely criticized not only as a novelist who found fame with the scandalous plots she put into her novels, she was also criticized as a woman who was herself involved in a bigamous relationship with her editor, John Maxwell. Such details are crucial to note because, as Robert Lee Wolff writes in *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, “These attacks on the sensation-novel and on MEB [Mary Elizabeth Braddon] form a little-known and significant chapter of Victorian literary criticism. They also constituted an agonizing episode in her life” (188). In the following quote, Tomaiuolo summarizes the details of Braddon’s relationship with John Maxwell:

Braddon and Maxwell had two children of their own . . . ‘the author of *Lady Audley’s Secret*’ was actually looking after Maxwell’s and Mary Ann’s other children. De facto, Maxwell led, like Lucy Graham, a bigamous life. Only ten years later, when their family had ten children, would Maxwell and Braddon be legally married on 2 October 1874, less than a month after Mary Ann’s death at the age of forty-eight, on 5 September. (11)

Critics of the time could not avoid mentioning that “as a specialist in literary bigamy, she was herself involved in a liaison with a married man” (Wolff 108). Seemingly, scandalous details of Braddon’s private life were denounced as the vicious source of her best-selling fiction. Carnell also highlights this by saying that the literary critics of the period “implicitly suggested that the immorality of her fiction stemmed from deficiencies in her own life” (170). It is interesting that George Eliot was also having an illicit relationship with George Henry Lewes starting from the early 1850s, but this never influenced the literary criticism of her work. When *Adam Bede* was published in 1859 as a novel by George Eliot, the reception was outstanding and the publisher John Blackwood was anxious about the novelist’s real identity:

Few people were in on the secret, although Charles Dickens had guessed that the writer was a woman. Blackwood was concerned that the revelation that George Eliot was the unmarried ‘Mrs Lewes’ would affect the excellent sales of *Adam Bede*. It did not; indeed, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert admired the book so



much that they commissioned E.H. Corbould to paint two scenes from it; the paintings still form part of The Royal Collection. (Adams 15)

Though she was disowned by her beloved brother Isaac Evans, George Eliot did not suffer from extreme social stigma. This can be because she was also known as an intellectual of the time and her work represents the best examples of the dominant literary genre of the period, the realist domestic novel.

Third, and perhaps the most important of all, is that the criticisms of the sensation novels confirmed the anxieties regarding the affective power of these narratives. As Lytton Strachey said in his talk titled “Art and Indecency,” (1921) the judgment of a work of art “is not a judgment on the work of art itself, but simply on its effect” (254). This can be applied to the 1860s sensation novels, because although it is true that they were considered cheap fiction, which can be taken as an “attack on the work of art itself,” the criticism of sensation novels was more on the effects of these narratives, particularly on Victorian women readers: “These novels were considered dangerous, not only because of the characters and plots they portrayed, but because of the reading practices they fostered—shared reading across classes and women reading about something other than love, manners, and religion” (Gilbert “Feminism and Canon” 28). This is basically because such scandalous novels mostly appealed to avid women readers: “Women more than men were novel readers and the sensation novel, often written by women, was innovative in its portrayal of strong-minded females” (Diamond 5). Emma Liggins and Daniel Duffy’s definition of a typical novel reader is important to note: “Reviewers of popular fiction assumed that the typical reader was a young, sexually ignorant middle-class woman, which is why they were frequently outraged at the ways in which readers might be encouraged to adopt certain attitudes or to identify with supposedly transgressive characters” (xx-xxi). Considering the widespread idea that the heroine in the novels should “provide a behavioral model for the instruction of the young female reader,” the discussions about the affectability of women readers are understandable (Reynolds and Humble 104). In her book *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914*, Kate Flint interprets the subversive nature of sensation narratives by emphasizing how the reception of

such novels might have influenced women readers: “In many ways, this fiction’s most disruptive potential lay not on the emphasis which it placed on woman’s capacity to express powerful, emotional reactions, but in the degree to which it made its woman readers consider their positions within their own homes and within society” (276).

Still, although these novels picture women characters who are very active both physically and emotionally, they also show the right Victorian ways to live by punishing the heroines for how they feel and behave, which suggests that feminist and anti-feminist aspects co-exist in these ambivalent novels. Narrative punishments are disciplinary not just for the erring heroine but also for women readers, who read their stories. In this regard, these novels represent literature as discourse in a Foucauldian sense in that they produce knowledge through fictional representations and also function as a mechanism of control. These aspects indicate how influential the Victorian disciplinary discourse was in shaping the reception and sustainability of fictional works in the Victorian era by attempting to control and discipline both fictional women in the fictional world of novels and also real Victorian women, who wrote and read these novels. It is true that the Victorian novel was woman-centered given the fact that Victorian women dominated the publishing industry regarding both the production and consumption of lengthy novels. Still, Victorian novels generally proceed to the disadvantage of the heroine. Though women’s sensation novels are considered subversive for Victorian audiences, the disciplinary function of sensational narratives is more severe than that of domestic novels in that these novels present more overt narrative evidences regarding the disciplinary function of fiction in the Victorian period. Realist domestic narratives, safer and more conventional, were also produced in the Victorian disciplinary discourse; and they, too, contributed to the production and circulation of right discourses through fictional representations. The next chapter will discuss this by examining the contradictions of the work of Margaret Oliphant, who was an anti-sensational, domestic novelist.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUBTLE DISCIPLINING OF THE DOMESTIC NOVEL

A high compliment to me, no doubt; but women, you know, according to the best authorities, never admire each other. . .the faintest idea of imitating or attempting to rival the author of 'Adam Bede' never entered my mind.  
*Blackwood's Magazine* MS 4172 n.d.<sup>8</sup>

It is a shame to women so to write; and it is a shame to the women who read and accept as a true representation of themselves and their ways the equivocal talk and fleshly inclination herein attributed to them. It may be done in carelessness. It may be done in that mere desire for something startling which the monotony of ordinary life is apt to produce; but it is debasing to everybody concerned.  
*Blackwood's Magazine* "Novels" 1867

Catherine's eyes, in spite of herself, turned from Emma's insignificance to the fine indignant figure of the girl whom (she said to herself) she could not endure, with the most curious mixture of curiosity, and interest, and rivalry. She, Catherine Vernon, the rival of a trifling creature of nineteen.  
*Hester*

#### 5.1 Margaret Oliphant and the Domestic Novel

As opposed to severe forms of disciplining and grievous punishments that can be seen in sensation narratives such as social stigmatization, confinement and the death of transgressive heroines, domestic novels contain less transparent ways of control and disciplining. This is in part due to the fact that these narratives conformed to the conventions of domestic realism and avoided unconventional and shocking representations of women and subversive treatment of womanly themes such as marriage, divorce and sexual morality. In this chapter, this will be examined by studying a selection of writings by Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897), who used to be very famous as a domestic novelist and literary critic in the Victorian period. Considering both her fictional and non-fictional writings, it can

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Oliphant's letter to John Blackwood has been qtd. from Merryn Williams' *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* 43.

be argued that Margaret Oliphant displayed an ambivalent stance regarding the Woman Question of the time and she espoused the disciplinary function of Victorian novel-writing and novel-reading both through her criticism of women sensation novelists of the 1860s and also through her fiction.

As will be explored thoroughly in the next section, in her non-fiction writings, Margaret Oliphant denies feminist aspirations and accuses other women writers, who portray active, assertive and controversial sensational women characters. In her fiction she portrays strong heroines in powerful economic and local positions, though. For example, her novel *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) presents a clever and intelligent heroine as the leader of social life in town and *Phoebe Junior* (1876) is radical and critical in its treatment of marriage, women's education and work. In *Hester* (1883), Oliphant creates two strong women characters; one of them, Catherine Vernon, is presented as a financial genius as the head of a bank while the eponymous younger heroine develops ambivalent feelings for Catherine due to her aspirations for the economic and social strength that Catherine enjoys. These examples can explain Margaret Oliphant's disdain of sensation heroines in that she favoured strong-minded and rational heroines rather than those women characters who attracted the reader's attention with their beauty and sensational acts. However, though Oliphant tended to create strong-willed and rational women characters in her fiction, she, in the end, denied them the opportunity to be in better positions in the public sphere and most of the time she confined her heroines to domestic settings. By drawing attention to Oliphant's both non-fictional and fictional writing, this chapter will elucidate how power operates among women novelists and genres of the Victorian period only to make them control and discipline each other. To this end, after introducing Margaret Oliphant briefly, this section will explain the conventional generic features of the domestic novel to indicate that the disciplinary power of domestic narratives is less transparent than that of sensation narratives because signs of feminism in these novels are not as subversive as they are in sensational works.

Margaret Oliphant was a Scottish Victorian, who was perhaps one of the most prolific women writers of the Victorian era. Today, Victorian specialists

refer to Margaret Oliphant not only as a woman novelist but also as a notable literary critic, reviewer, essayist and biographer. In her long life-span, Oliphant produced over ninety novels of various genres, dozens of short stories, a considerable number of non-fiction works including literary criticism, biographies and her own autobiography. Also, she was a consistent contributor to the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* between 1854 and 1897, until her death. That is why, Ann Rigney introduces her as “an old fashioned ‘woman of letters’ in that she practiced in a variety of genres and was a regular, highly feared reviewer of all kinds of writing in the periodical press” (85). Her *Blackwood's* writings embraced short stories, serialised novels, reviews, literary criticism and diverse articles on the political and social agenda of the time.

Margaret Oliphant's literary oeuvre encompasses works from various genres; historical novels, church novels, domestic fiction, romances, and supernatural tales. Oliphant published her first novel *Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland* in 1849, when she was twenty-two years old. Her first novel, along with a few other works that followed it, *Caleb Field* (1851), *Merkland* (1851), *Adam Graeme* (1852), *Katie Stewart* (1853), dealt with elements of Scottish culture and life. Margaret Oliphant gained great success with *Chronicles of Carlingford*, a series of church novels, which were published anonymously. The series included her best remembered works today; *Salem Chapel*<sup>9</sup> (1863), *The Rector and the Doctor's Family* (1863), *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), and *Phoebe Junior: A Last Chronicle of Carlingford* (1876). Contemporary critics agree that *Chronicles of Carlingford* “represents the peak of her achievement” (Terry 74). *Chronicles of Carlingford* was so appreciated that the authorship was “attributed to George Eliot who, having

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<sup>9</sup> In some sources, *Salem Chapel* is considered as a sensation novel. For example, Andrew Radford in *Victorian Sensation Fiction* writes that “[t]hough not immune to employing sensational effects in her own novels,” in *Salem Chapel* (1862) Margaret Oliphant presents “components of bigamy, hidden illegitimacy, madness and murder” (86). Actually, this is very ironic when Margaret Oliphant is thought of as the severest critic of the sensation novel. Pamela K. Gilbert interprets *Salem Chapel's* association with the sensation genre in the following words: “So much for the antifeminism (and antisensationalism) of that admirably (or horribly) domestic novelist and critic, Mrs. Oliphant” (“Feminism and the Canon” 31). Because the main plot in *Salem Chapel* is about a church movement with a male character at the center, this novel will not be discussed in detail in this study.

already issued *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, and *Romola*, was then at the zenith of her fame” (Melville 261). The confusion about the writer of the novel forced George Eliot to announce publicly that she was not the writer (Shattock 231). Margaret Oliphant, too, felt that she had to defend herself against this confusion of authorship and she uttered the words in what constitutes the first epigraph to this chapter. This is significant in that it confirms Oliphant’s ambivalent status even as a popular novelist in her time. Following the Carlingford novels, Oliphant published various other works but “she never achieved a single memorable work according to aesthetic criteria fine-tuned to appreciate restraint in an artist such as George Eliot” (D’Albertis “The Domestic Drone” 813).

*Phoebe Junior* is the last influential Carlingford novel; yet before it was published, Oliphant wrote many novels such as *Agnes* (1865), *Madonna Mary* (1867), *Brownlows* (1868), *John, A Love Story* (1870). After the last novel of the Carlingford series, Oliphant published mostly domestic novels, among which *The Ladies Lindores* (1883), *Hester* (1883), *Sir Tom* (1884), *A Country Gentleman and His Family* (1886), *Joyce* (1888) and *Kirsteen* (1890) are the most remarkable. It is still debated as to which novel is her masterpiece. While in her *The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant: A Subversive View of Traditional Themes*, Margaret Rubik is certain that it is *Miss Marjoribanks* (62), Merryn Williams thinks that *Kirsteen* is Oliphant’s masterpiece (*A Critical Biography* 159).

Margaret Oliphant practiced in various genres but domestic novels dominate her massive oeuvre. Though critics agree that the Brontë Sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot are today considered the women masters of the domestic novel, Margaret Oliphant suits this study better for three reasons. First, just like Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood, Margaret Oliphant, too, falls into the category of ‘the underread’ as a once best-selling novelist. Second, the contradiction between her fictional representations in her novels and her non-fictional writings proves her ambivalence towards the concerns of the Victorian feminism. Third, as the harshest critic of women sensation novelists of the 1860s,

her criticism and her fiction exemplify the disciplinary power of the Victorian novel and literary criticism as well as the power conflict between novelists and genres.

The domestic novel and the sensation novel are considered as competing novelistic genres of the Victorian age, though the former had superiority and thus dominance. This is because, as Monica Correa Fryckstedt writes, the need to glorify and prioritize domestic narratives intensified especially after the 1860s with the flourishing of sensation novels: “As the sensation novel mania swept across England in the 1860s introducing heroines who were bigamists, liars, flirts, and adulteresses, it became even more urgent for domestic novelists to glorify the purity of the wife” (2). As its name also suggests, domestic novel is generally set in domestic settings and takes “its incidents from daily life and depicting middle-class characters” (10). Though generally there is a love theme at the center of domestic narratives, the main emphasis is “on submission to the will of God, fulfillment of duty, self-sacrifice, and endurance” (9). This evokes the dichotomy between “duty and love” and “in the struggle between duty and love, duty was always presented as the right course of action” (14). The representation of domestic heroines is important in this respect, because they are the ones who are to choose the right path by following acceptable Victorian norms and conventions. Patricia Stubbs defines the domestic heroine as “gentle and subversive,” whose story “was expected to articulate and demonstrate the belief that a woman can reach happiness through her relationships” (26). Thus, it is of great importance for the domestic heroine to set up approvable relationships so that she can be “fulfilled in her domestic role” (26).

The generic features of Victorian domestic novel are emblematic of Victorian disciplinary discourse, albeit in subtle ways. This is because, as has been the case with the 1860s sensation narratives, Fryckstedt notes that “most novel readers were women, and the lesson taught aimed at upholding the prescribed code of behavior for women” (14). Given that the “salient characteristic of domestic fiction was its moral message,” (14) of course, with a

strong emphasis on virtues such as altruism, prudence, and sticking to the right duties, these narratives' strong influence on women readers is understandable. The disciplinary power of domestic narratives is not as overt as it is in sensational texts because, in the first place, domestic heroines are not controversial and transgressive as sensation heroines. Domestic texts tend to control and discipline women readers by cherishing the representation of conventional heroines as well as by rewarding them with happy endings. Regarding Foucauldian discipline, the regulation of behaviours and conducts as well as the control of emotions and desires are very significant in domestic narratives because this makes individuals function properly in patriarchal social structures. By picturing such disciplined and controlled heroines, domestic narratives aim at presenting an ideal for Victorian women readers:

Frequently constructed as an illustration of a passage of Scripture, domestic novels instilled precepts such as 'Thy will be done,' 'Do unto others,' 'Bear thy burdens,' and 'Do thy duty,' lessons primarily directed at the impressionable minds of young women readers for whom it was particularly important to learn submission, endurance, and resignation in order to conform to the womanly ideal. (Fryckstedt 14)

All in all, as the conventional and thus dominant literary genre of the Victorian age, the domestic novel has subtle ways of disciplining domestic heroines and readers of domestic fiction. Though it is unlikely to see extreme punishments as frequently happens in sensational texts, domestic narratives aim at molding females' desires and conducts so as to make women decently function in Victorian society as ideal wives and mothers. Margaret Oliphant's novel *Hester* is an apt text to exemplify this, but before studying the novel thoroughly, it is necessary to examine Oliphant's non-fiction writings closely to understand her ambivalence as a writer as well as her contribution to the disciplinary function of Victorian literature and literary criticism.

## **5.2 Oliphant's Contested Status in Feminist Victorian Studies**

Critics are divided in their reading and labelling Margaret Oliphant as feminist or anti-feminist. For instance, Merryn Williams' *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* (1986) and Margaret Rubik's *The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant: A*



*Subversive View of Traditional Themes* (1994) try hard to recuperate Margaret Oliphant's notorious reputation as a Victorian anti-feminist, while more recent works such as Valerie Sanders' *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (1996) and Tamara Wagner's (ed.) *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (2009) still discuss her works under the category of anti-feminist Victorians. All in all, Victorian studies scholars who write on Margaret Oliphant's life and writings in various respects, generally tend to take similar stances regarding her approaches to the Victorian women's movement; if they don't openly label Margaret Oliphant as anti-feminist, they accentuate her intricacies and ambivalence. Although in her non-fiction writings Margaret Oliphant explicitly expressed her opposition to the demands of Victorian feminism, her fiction can sometimes be surprisingly subversive and prone to feminist readings in different respects. This study stresses the co-existence of feminist and anti-feminist features in Oliphant's writing, which is a result of the fact that she tended to affirm Victorian disciplinary discourse in her writings.

Oliphant wrote various short pieces for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. While writing about how some Victorian women writers also appeared as "the most daring of social commentators," in Victorian periodicals and newspapers, Marion Shaw emphasized that Margaret Oliphant was one of those women writers because she wrote with "a greater political awareness and sense of the potential alternatives" (203). From her non-fictional writings and literary criticism it can be seen that she found it unnecessary to support the suffragist movement and she refused to sympathise with the revolutionary representations of unconventional women characters in the well-sold fiction of the Victorian period. This is perhaps because she was a Tory novelist, who felt closer to the conservative and traditional involvements. On the other hand, however, she was also influenced by John Stuart Mill, a liberal, who published influential pieces in the Victorian era such as *The Subjection of Women* and *On Liberty*. Elsie B. Michie also writes about the complex nature of Oliphant's political involvements and its

repercussions in her novels: “In Oliphant’s case we have a writer who identified herself with the Tory position and the Tory periodical with which she worked her entire professional life, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, but who also actively engaged with Mill’s liberal arguments” (143). It should be highlighted that she was living in an age of transition so it is understandable that her position regarding many social and political issues was changing, too.

Influential excerpts from Oliphant’s articles will be exemplified and discussed briefly, and this will be followed by a discussion of a selection of her literary reviews, which, likewise, mark her unsympathetic feelings for the revolutionary topics and unconventional representations in fiction. Perhaps due to her often cited reviews of the 1860s sensation novels, Margaret Oliphant is remembered as “one of the sensation novel’s harshest critics and certainly no ally to feminist advances” (Leckie 115). Her literary criticism indicates that Margaret Oliphant treated unconventional representations of women in fiction quite unsympathetically and she even disapprovingly hinted that they were the result of the feminist movement of the time. Discussing Oliphant’s thoughts about other literary works of the same period is particularly important in that her readings of other novels may reveal how she tried to attain a powerful position by harshly criticizing other novelists, preaching to them the right ways of writing and thus using literature as a way of control and disciplining of writers and readers. Just like “[c]onservative Benjamin Disraeli . . . who claimed novels as the best channel for influencing public opinion,” (Taylor 78) Margaret Oliphant, too, believed in the power of novels on novel-reading communities.

### **5.2.1 Articles on the Woman Question**

As a political and social issue, the Woman Question was so strong in the mid to late nineteenth century that thinkers, intellectuals, commentators and writers of both sexes were feeding the discursive atmosphere of the period with their articles about the top agenda of the movement. Margaret Oliphant was one of those writers and her articles about the woman issue stand as proof of her

conservatism and her prudent stance today. Margaret Oliphant wrote six non-fiction articles regarding the issue of women: “The Laws Concerning Women” (1856), “The Condition of Women” (1858), “The Great Unrepresented” (1866), “Mill on *the Subjection of Women*” (1869), “The Grievances of Women” (1880), “The Anti-Marriage League” (1896). This study will not offer a close reading of all of these articles but will examine some striking passages from some of them to demonstrate that Margaret Oliphant saw Victorian women’s movement as a threat and she adhered to the patriarchal disciplinary discourse, which produced the ‘right’ knowledge for Victorian women.

In “The Laws Concerning Women,” (1856) Margaret Oliphant stresses the complementary nature of man and woman and does not accept the inferior position of her sex. In this article, if not anti-feminist, she sounds very naive, especially when she writes that “[t]here is no man in existence so utterly separated from one-half of his fellow-creatures as to be able to legislate against them in the interests of his own sex” (380). She even implies that there is no antagonism between the two sexes: “to make such an antagonism between men and women is against all reason and all nature” (380) and that woman’s subordination is the invention of those who raised the woman question: “It is a mere trick of words to say that the woman loses her existence, and is absorbed in her husband” (381). Margaret Oliphant here denies women’s issues which were problematized by the feminists of her time; this ignorance shows her preference to remain blind to the need for change.

In “The Condition of Women,” (1858) Oliphant focuses more on the condition of working women. She stresses her disbelief in the equality between the sexes because, according to her, man and woman have been created with distinct qualities and they can best function in the places and positions that are determined for them. Oliphant normalizes the patriarchal values in this article and as the following quote will additionally indicate, she even implies that fighting for equality is pointless:

Equality is the mightiest of humbugs—there is no such thing in existence; and the idea of opening the professions and occupations and governments of men to women, seems to us the vainest as well as the vulgarest of chimeras. God has ordained visibly, by all the arrangements of nature and of providence, one sphere and kind of work for a man and another for a woman. He has given them different constitutions, different organisations a perfectly distinct and unmistakable identity. (145)

Margaret Oliphant openly writes that demanding women's work in the public sphere is a futile endeavour, and that women can only function in the domestic spheres which have been religiously, historically, and traditionally appropriated for them for ages. Such a strategy of the denial of marginal knowledge and the normalisation of the mainstream ideology evokes Foucauldian discipline; it determines and organizes the proper spaces for man and woman, governs their activity and behavior, normalises long-rooted values and norms, and finally controls and examines their ways of living.

Oliphant's article titled "The Great Unrepresented," (1866) "was written in opposition to J.S. Mill's intention to enfranchise" (Shaw 221). In this article, Oliphant writes that women should not seek other opportunities for work: "We are content with that place in the world's economy which God has given us . . . and Mr Mill must pardon us if we decline to seek another place" (qtd. in Shaw 221). As a working woman herself, her attitude towards this issue can hardly be explained by anything but a resistance to Victorian feminism. By opposing the then marginal discourses produced by the Victorian women's rights campaigns, Margaret Oliphant showed that she preferred to support the mainstream discourses concerning Victorian women.

Those who take Margaret Oliphant as a Victorian anti-feminist today not only focus on her conservative perspective and her open attacks on the forerunners of early feminism, but they also stress her anti-suffragist stance. Oliphant did not even think that women should be discussed as a separate group, so fighting for women's votes was also pointless. Everytime Oliphant wrote on the Woman Question, she accentuated that man and woman complete each other and she denied that women were oppressed: "[w]omen themselves are chiefly to blame for the strange and humiliating notion that they are a sect, a party, an

oppressed nationality as it were, and not an integral part of the race” (“New Books” 174). Margaret Oliphant openly declared that she was against the suffragette movement in a letter she wrote to her publisher John Blackwood about John Stuart Mill’s attempt to secure women the right to vote: “I send you a little paper I have just finished about Stuart Mill and his mad notion of the franchise for women . . . Probably you will find it too respectful to Mr Mill, but I can’t for my part find any satisfaction in simply jeering at a man who may do a foolish thing in his life but yet he is a great philosopher” (qtd. in Williams “Feminist or Antifeminist?” 165). Merryn Williams thinks that Oliphant’s statements about women’s right to vote had a great influence on designating her anti-feminist status today (“Feminist or Antifeminist?” 165). In the following quote, Rubik implies that Oliphant had little chance to behave otherwise because she had to ensure to be published in the first place: “All the same, Oliphant’s reputation is largely based on the conservative image of women presented in a few very early novels and articles, in which she felt obliged to voice her publisher’s reactionary beliefs and, like so many women writers of the century, to consolidate her own social position by paying lip service to traditional notions of womanhood” (*The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant* 145-6).

However, it should be noted that, in time, Oliphant accepted women’s subordinated position. In her 1880 dated article titled “The Grievances of Women,” she sounded more progressive and accepted the hardships of being a woman:

Most of us of a reasonable age prefer to keep our sense of injury, our consciousness of injustice, dormant, but it exists in all classes. It has been handed down to us from our mothers, it descends from us to our daughters. We know that we have a great many things to suffer, from which our partners in the work of life are exempt, and we know also that neither for these extra pangs do we receive sympathy, nor for our work do we receive the credit which is our due. But whenever such questions are brought under public discussion we are bewildered to find how little these inequalities in our lot are comprehended, and how doubly injurious is the estimate formed of us by our husbands, our brothers, and our sons. (qtd. in Williams *A Critical Biography* 150)

Merryn Williams writes that in her articles, Oliphant was “on the whole critical of the women’s rights movement. However, her views had always been more complicated than simple anti-feminism, and a few years after the article on Mill they changed” (*A Critical Biography* 107). Throughout her work, Williams tries hard to emphasize the changing face of Margaret Oliphant and thus a review of her work *Margaret Oliphant: A Critical Biography* states that the book “is strongest when it does justice to Oliphant’s views of the ‘woman question’ and the ‘sex question’” (Schor 516). It is true that Margaret Oliphant had to find a publisher as the sole provider of a large family, which she could not dare to risk by supporting Victorian feminists. Slight changes in Oliphant’s writing on the issue of women can be explained by looking at the tough details of her personal life. Due to the emotional and economic crisis that she experienced, she herself suffered from sexual inequality both as a breadwinner and a domestic worker who sacrificed her time, energy and talent for the good of her dependents. This can perhaps explain why she later sounded more sympathetic towards the concerns of the Victorian women’s movement.

Critics such as Merryn Williams and Margaret Rubik tried to save Margaret Oliphant’s reputation as an anti-feminist writer by mentioning her more progressive writing, but the rest of the Victorian scholarship accentuates her conservatism and her oppositions to the women’s movement. This is actually inevitable, given the fact that Margaret Oliphant was famous as a frequently published essayist and she did not evade putting her resentment about the women’s movement into words whenever it was possible. Oliphant was earning her life as a novelist and just like other women novelists of the same period such as George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, she did not openly support the women’s movement. However, while the canonical names were mostly silent about the issue, Margaret Oliphant openly voiced her opposition through virulent speeches. In this study, rather than labeling Margaret Oliphant as either feminist or anti-feminist, her affinity with the disciplinary tone of Victorian writing is highlighted, which indeed marks the entire century. Margaret Oliphant’s

disciplinary tone gets even more acute in her criticisms of the 1860s' women sensation novelists.

### **5.2.2 Articles on Sensation Novels**

In addition to her social and political commentaries, Margaret Oliphant wrote numerous literary reviews. Today, she is best known with her trenchant criticisms of the 1860s literary craze, the sensation novel. Two of her articles published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* will be discussed here as notable examples of her literary criticism: "Sensation novels" (1862) and "Novels" (1867). In the first place, the study of these articles will expound Margaret Oliphant's thoughts on the then canonical male novelists, Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, and their novels. Also, in the second place, these articles will present Oliphant's approach to the then famous women sensation novelists; Ellen Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. It is striking to note that while Oliphant tends to praise the literary talents of Collins and Dickens, she denigrates women novelists and even goes so far as to say the words quoted in the second epigraph to this chapter. Moreover, these reviews will reveal her reactions to the representation of unconventional topics, women characters and romantic relations in fiction.

Finally, and of great importance to this study is the way these criticisms turn into a power conflict between women novelists of the period. In Chapter 3, literature's function as discourse in Foucauldian sense has been explained in detail. When literature is taken as discourse, firstly, it is regarded as a scholarly discipline, which produces knowledge. Secondly, literature is considered as a disciplinary practice, as a way of control. This can be observed in the criticisms directed against the women sensation novelists of the 1860s, whose scandalous works were double charged because they were created by women writers and written mostly for women readers. Margaret Oliphant's reviews will prove how her discourse served the marginalization of these women novelists because she highlighted the excellence of the realist novel and disdained the works by women sensation writers. Thus, her criticism will be interpreted as a way of exercising

power, because in her reviews she expressed her discomfort with sensational writings by women writers, who did not belong to the domestic tradition. By openly commenting on what is possible and not possible to write in novels, she tried to delimit and shape what constituted literary marginalities for the 1860s Victorian world of letters.

Margaret Oliphant begins her article “Sensation Novels” (1862) with a remark on the sensation genre as a rising phenomenon and she compares sensation novels with its dominant rival, the domestic novel: “It is a fact that the well-known old stories of readers sitting up all night over a novel had begun to grow faint in the public recollection. Domestic histories, however virtuous and charming, do not often attain that result” (565). Indeed, as page-turning novels, sensation narratives brought such sleepless nights for Victorian readers while domestic novels, which Oliphant describes as “virtuous and charming” did not always produce such effects. It is crucial to highlight Oliphant’s wording at this point; she presents two genres as opponents and by describing the domestic novel as “virtuous” she actually implies that the other is not. Oliphant describes sensation novels as “a class of books abounding in sensation; but the effect is invariably attained by violent and illegitimate means, as fantastic in themselves as they are contradictory to actual life” (565). Apparently, Oliphant finds sensation narratives unrealistic, or, in a way, not plausible. She denies immoral representations of Victorian women in fiction as well as similar ‘immoral’ actualities that were happening in real life. Her point of criticism highlights the strength of realism in the Victorian period because, as Lionel Stevenson writes in “The Rationale of Victorian Fiction,” the nineteenth century

was a pragmatic age, exposed to scientific modes of thought, eager for facts and solid information, with lingering traces of the Puritan suspicion that all fiction was an insidious form of lying. Hence the novelists were obliged to prove that their representation of experience was accurate and informative. (396)

When taken as discourse, as a scholarly discipline, literature can be thought of as one of the strategies of producing representations about certain human conditions. In realist literature, for example, those representations are



taken from real human conditions of the time that literary texts are produced in. This point is where literature as discourse can have plausible grounds because it creates knowledge, though in fictitious ways. Oliphant attacks sensation novels for not being realist and also for being immoral and corrupt. Margaret Oliphant thinks that sensational effects in sensation novels are “violent and illegitimate” but what she overlooks is the fact that these novels were indeed called “the newspaper novels” at the time of their publication because, as mentioned in detail in the previous chapter, the subject matters were generally inspired by scandalous newspaper reports (Carnell 188). This can explain how such novels might have produced representations of certain Victorian ‘truths,’ albeit in an ‘untrue’ form. That means, in the form of fiction, those novels may offer an idea about what might have been going on in the sacred Victorian families or how women can actually feel and act. The emergence of unconventional women characters was thought dangerous in that they created marginal knowledge (possibilities of alternative and illicit lives for women, for example) for women readers of the time. Thus, it can be assumed that what was happening in these novels was actually happening in real life, too.

What should be stressed here is that although Margaret Oliphant accepted and even enjoyed sensational effects in male sensation novelists, she did not actually feel the same for women novelists. Lyn Pykett in her *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone* interpreted Oliphant’s case as an example for the “unhealthy relationship between women writers”:

Sensation novels were, in the main, (or so it was thought), written by wicked women, about wayward girls and wicked women, for consumption by women whose waywardness and potential for wickedness was signaled by the very fact that they read such material. This unhealthy relationship between women writers, readers and fictional subjects was castigated by Margaret Oliphant, who conducted a one-woman campaign against the genre. (40)

This being said, the following evaluations will first focus on Oliphant’s reviews of male sensation novelists and continue with her reactions to women sensation novelists and their works, which will in the end exemplify what Pykett defines as

an “unhealthy relationship between women writers, readers and fictional subjects” (40).

In “Sensation Novels,” Margaret Oliphant devotes a long space to Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* (1859) and Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861). When writing on these novels, she tends to focus mostly on the literary qualities of the narratives and praises the novelists’ talents. In the first place, Margaret Oliphant thinks that Wilkie Collins is the leading name in the sensation genre:

amid all these precursors in the field, Mr. Wilkie Collins takes up an entirely original position . . . shows no love of mystery for mystery’s sake: he wastes neither wickedness nor passion . . . His effects are produced by common human acts, performed by recognizable human agents, whose motives are never inscrutable, and whose line of conduct is always more or less consistent. (566)

Margaret Oliphant stresses that even though he was writing sensation fiction, Wilkie Collins’ novel was realist and the characters could be found in everyday life. The same is also true for Charles Dickens, as Oliphant further writes that “Mr Dickens was one of the first popular writers who brought pictures of what is called common life into fashion” (574). Speaking of Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, she adds, “[t]he book . . . has high qualities of its own, and belongs to a class which possibly never might have come into existence but for the labours of Mr Dickens” (580). Although Oliphant offers lighter suggestions for some narrative aspects of these novels, generally, she tends to glorify Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and their novels, perhaps due to the fact that they were male novelists, who were closer to the realist tradition.

In her objections to the sensation genre, Margaret Oliphant criticizes the women sensation novelists and always foregrounds the dichotomy between the sensation novel and the domestic novel, taking realist narratives as the only reference point through which other narratives can be evaluated. For instance, she writes that “the more we perceive the perfectly legitimate nature of the means used to produce the sensation, the more striking does that sensation become” (566). The word “legitimate” is the key to understand her approach to the effects of the sensation novel. Oliphant does not consider what is happening in most

sensation narratives as true representations of real Victorian experiences. According to her, most of them do not even reflect Victorian lives. Thus, while exalting Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, she accentuates the writer's ability to create "legitimate" sensations:

We cannot object to the means by which he startles and thrills his readers; everything is legitimate, natural and possible; all the exaggerations of excitement are carefully eschewed, and there is almost as little that is objectionable in this highly-wrought sensation-novel, as if it had been a domestic history of the most gentle and unexciting kind. (566)

What she means by "legitimate" sensation can be guessed by looking at the following quote where she additionally writes that "the distinguishing feature of Mr Wilkie Collins' success is that he ignores all these arbitrary sensations, and has boldly undertaken to produce effects as startling by the simplest expedients of life" (566). It seems that Margaret Oliphant opposes "legitimate" sensation to "arbitrary" sensations. While she approves of and appreciates the first one (legitimate), she openly disapproves of the second (arbitrary), which can be equaled to bodily sensations, excessive emotions and passions. Thus, Margaret Oliphant accepts milder forms of creating sensations but protests against what she considers as excessive ways, which are ironically mostly seen in women's sensation novels. She thinks that the way emotions and passions are used in fiction can be really dangerous because this is the only way of creating sensations in literary texts:

The rise of a Sensation School of art in any department is a thing to be watched with jealous eyes; but nowhere is it so dangerous as in fiction, where the artist cannot resort to a daring physical plunge, as on the stage, or to a blaze of palpable colour, as in the picture-gallery, but must take the passions and emotions of life to make his effects withal. (568)

To Margaret Oliphant, wild emotions and passions are most dangerous if they pertain to women characters written by women novelists. For instance, she thinks that Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* is a "dangerous and foolish work," (567) because at the center of the novel stands a sinner woman, who gains the interest and sympathy of readers:

We have just laid down a clever novel, called 'East Lynne,' which some inscrutable breath of popular liking has blown into momentary celebrity. It is occupied with the story of a woman who permitted herself in passion and folly, to be seduced from her husband. From first to last it is she alone in whom the reader feels any interest. Her virtuous rival we should like to bundle to the door and be rid of, anyhow. The Magdalen herself, who is only moderately interesting while she is good, becomes, as soon as she is a Magdalen, doubly a heroine. It is evident that nohow, except by her wickedness and sufferings, could she have gained so strong a hold upon our sympathies. This is dangerous and foolish work, as well as false, both to Art and Nature. Nothing can be more wrong and fatal than to represent the flames of vice as a purifying fiery ordeal, through which the penitent is to come elevated and sublimed. ("Sensation Novels" 567)

Again, Oliphant compares the sensation heroine Isabel Vane with her domestic rival, Barbara Hare, whom she describes as "virtuous" but implies at the same time that she is presented as subordinate to the story of the wicked woman character. That the reader is interested in the sinner woman character and not in the virtuous concerns Margaret Oliphant most in this evaluation. Michael Diamond states that, in her interpretation of *East Lynne*, Margaret Oliphant "disapproved of wicked or morally flawed characters being depicted sympathetically" and her reaction is based on the fact that "Lady Isabel only becomes interesting after she has sinned" (203). Also, by saying that the novel is "false, both to Art and Nature," again, Oliphant ignores middle-class realities and takes such representations as an assault on the middle-class mores: "If Oliphant's ideal middle-class family is rooted in the cornerstone of womanly purity, then the equivocal and imprudent protagonists of the sensation novel not only compromise the worthy practice of reading fiction generally, but also scoff at the entire social and moral fabric of mid-Victorian Britain" (Radford 70).

Such unconventional representations of women in fiction are found dangerous mainly because of the patriarchal perspectives which consider "women-as-sign in semiotic system" (Showalter "Wilderness" 182). That means, what women do, how they act, feel and behave are attributed great importance in patriarchal societies. Margaret Oliphant's reviews of women's sensation novels can be good examples to this perspective, because whenever she criticizes the representation of vicious women and wicked female experiences in novels, she

points to the representative obligations of women novelists. She denies that wicked representations can in some cases be true to life and she makes this more clear in her second article titled “Novels” (1867), where her brief references to Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s works, Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, and also to an anonymous work titled “The Story of Elizabeth” prove that she feels really uneasy about how women novelists present women characters and romantic relations in their novels.

In her article titled “Novels,” while again speaking of *East Lynne*, Margaret Oliphant first mentions that the novel becomes “a great success without any particular reason” (170). This time, she writes especially about the last volume of the novel where the heroine Isabel Vane, whose sins and transgressions have been detailed in the first and the second volumes, “returns to her former home under the guise of the poor governess” (170). As the following excerpt will make clear, what concerns Oliphant is that, particularly in the last part of the novel, the complete attention is given to the sinner heroine and readers do not really bother about her virtuous rival: “there is not a reader who does not feel disposed to turn her virtuous successor to the door, and reinstate the suffering heroine, to the glorious confusion of all morality. These are not desirable issues of the art of story-telling” (170). Her conclusive statement about the ‘right’ nature of fiction is important because, first, as the writer of mostly domestic novels and as a notable reviewer, Oliphant is speaking from a powerful position in these articles. Second, by commenting on what is desirable and not desirable in literary texts, she tries to support and preserve the conventional literary styles and suppress the signs of feminist revival in fiction. Such an attitude serves to marginalize the texts that make visible what Oliphant considers as undesirable and immoral issues in literary works.

In “Novels,” Margaret Oliphant devotes a long space to an anonymous book titled “The Story of Elizabeth.” Although the writer of this novel is still unknown today, Oliphant’s interpretation of the novel’s heroine is crucial to note because she comments on the heroine again by comparing her to domestic

heroines. This is how she sees the heroine: “Elizabeth is naughty to an extent which no heroine of our acquaintance has yet attempted; she is cross, she is disobedient, she is sullen and perverse; and even, perhaps the most unpardonable sin of all, she is untidy” (171). As a contrast to Elizabeth, Margaret Oliphant presents a cherished description of a domestic heroine, and her sympathetic attitude can easily be felt: “[t]he good girl of domestic life, the angel of ordinary novels, has nothing in common with this creature of glowing flesh and blood, who storms and cries at everything that comes in her way, and keeps up no appearances, and is bent only upon being happy” (172). What Oliphant overlooks here is that sensation heroines aim at being happy but on their way to happiness they do things which, in real life, can cause criminality. Oliphant interprets this as selfishness while still dwelling on the characteristics of sensation heroines: “in one way a selfish girl, thinking how to be happy and nothing else; never attempting to be good, and seeing happiness only in its vulgar aspect, as a matter of drives, theatres, and attendant admirers” (176). What Oliphant perhaps means by “vulgar aspects” and “a matter of drives” are the illegitimate feelings, extra-marital relations and sexuality, which, in women’s sensation novels, are reflected through the affective experiences of women characters.

That is why, by insinuating this time Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novels, Margaret Oliphant writes that “[w]hat is held up to us as the story of the feminine soul as it really exists underneath its conventional coverings, is a very fleshy and unlovely record” (174). The desiring and self-expressive heroines represent what Oliphant calls “fleshy and unlovely record” and she continues with the following descriptions of the sensation heroines:

Women driven wild with love for the man who leads them on to desperation before he accords that word of encouragement which carries them into the seventh heaven . . . women who marry their grooms in fits of sexual passion . . . who give and receive burning kisses and frantic embraces, and live in a voluptuous dream, either waiting for or brooding over the inevitable lover – such are the heroines who have been imported into modern fiction.

(Oliphant qtd. in Williams 107).

This time Margaret Oliphant's criticisms target Braddon's heroines; Lady Audley, whom she finds "fleshy and unlovely" and Aurora Floyd<sup>10</sup> who, Oliphant writes, marries the family's groom "in fits of sexual passion" (107). While criticizing the appearance of such sensation heroines in fiction written by women, Margaret Oliphant comments on how and what women writers can write. "It is a shame to women so to write; and it is a shame to the women who read and accept as a true representation of themselves," (174) writes she, accusing not only women writers who produce such sensational texts but also women readers who crave and devour them. Thus, through her criticism, she attempts to judge, correct and discipline both writers and readers of sensation fiction.

As has been explained so far, in her reviews, Margaret Oliphant deals with the representative qualities of women's sensation novels in a rigid way and she always reminds the moral obligations of women novelists due to their gender. As a matter of fact, this is not new to Oliphant. Patricia Ingham writes that when *Jane Eyre* was first published in 1847, rumors arose as to the gender of the writer because reviewers "found matters such as the brutality, attempted bigamy, and an unmarried woman's passion for a married man in *Jane Eyre* easier to accept from a male author" (26-7). Margaret Oliphant's interpretation of *Jane Eyre* is also notable at this point in the sense that she says the love plot in the novel offers an allusion to the women's rights movement of the time: "Nobody perceived that it was the new generation nailing its colours to its mast. No one would understand that this furious love-making was but a wild declaration of the 'Rights of Woman' in a new aspect" ("From an Unsigned Article" 312). This is important because it seems that Margaret Oliphant finds *Jane Eyre* dangerous as a propaganda of the feminist movement of the period. According to Valerie Sanders, such sharp wording in Oliphant's reviews is the consequence of "her lifelong performance of a masculine professional role as fulltime novelist and reviewer" and she further adds:

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<sup>10</sup> *Aurora Floyd* is another sensation novel published in 1863 by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, only a year after the publication of *Lady Audley's Secret*. The eponymous heroine of the novel is again involved in a bigamous relationship and murder.

It is rarely clear whether she writes her criticism of other novelists as a reviewer who is male or female-identified: whether she sees the woman writer as ‘the Other’, or as an aspect of herself. This ambiguous stance, highly characteristic of all Oliphant’s writing, blurs the distinction between what might be seen as a pro-feminist position, and an anti-feminist one, in her response to the key women writers of the age. (41)

Seemingly, even for realist writers, the appearance of such scandalous subjects in their works brought together unfavourable reception. For women sensation novelists, such a reception created an extra burden because the generic qualities of the sensation genre were themselves very shocking, let alone the fact that they were written by women. Terry Eagleton writes in his *The English Novel: An Introduction* that “[f]or some Victorians, it was bad enough having to read about bigamy, social climbing, grotesque physical violence and interracial marriage without the additional outrage of knowing that a woman’s delicate mind lay behind these scandalous subjects” (126). Likewise, Carnell states that the fact “that women writers were choosing to write about such things, and make the participants the central characters was found by many critics to be shocking” (167). That could be one reason why Margaret Oliphant finds it embarrassing for women writers to produce such sensational women characters and topics.

Ann Cvetkovich interprets Oliphant’s criticisms by writing that “Mrs. Oliphant, herself a novelist, was perhaps anxious that the sensation novel not be taken as representative of what women writers are capable of producing, and furthermore that the presence of women authors not be seen as simply the result of marketplace demand” (19). Cvetkovich has a different point, alluding to the dichotomy of low and high literature regarding the Victorian novel. Not seen as serious as the realist domestic novel, sensation narratives were generally associated with women’s authorship and readership. Though Cvetkovich thinks that Oliphant’s resentment can be related to the association of women writers with popular literature, Oliphant’s concerns indicate that she was extremely serious regarding the effects produced by such sensational texts. Hence, though sensation narratives were not considered serious literature, it is ironic that the critical reception of such novels show they were read and criticized seriously. This is due



to the representative and affective power of the novel genre in the Victorian period, which is where the disciplinary function of novel-writing and novel-reading emerge.

By writing that women should feel ashamed because of creating such novels, Margaret Oliphant implies that writing this way is indeed a matter of misconduct for women. This is important because by commenting explicitly on what and how women writers should write, Oliphant exerts power over their 'action' of writing. To remember Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power again, the role of the individual is the key in describing how disciplinary power functions. He writes in "The Subject and Power" that power relations operate in the actions of individuals as power "acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions" (137). Margaret Oliphant's direct interference in what women can write can be regarded as "an action upon action" which aims at correcting what mainstream literary trends, as well as Oliphant herself, too, consider disreputable, evil and illicit. Moreover, the term "conduct" is very important to understand how power relations operate. Foucault argues that "the equivocal nature of the term 'conduct' is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations . . . the exercise of power is a 'conduct of conducts' and a management of possibilities" (138). Thus, criticisms directed against marginal discourses of sensation narratives can be taken as a kind of disciplinary power, which aims at the management of women writers, what they write, and how this would influence Victorian women readers.

As explained earlier, as a scholarly discipline and as a practice which might have disciplinary effects, literature and literary criticism can be considered as strategies of disciplining populations, because, for Foucault, discipline aims at molding the feelings, thoughts, and conduct of individuals. This can be applied to controversial literary texts, too, because such fictional narratives can be influential in shaping the ways of living of reading populations. As the analysis of the selected sensation novels in the previous chapter and Margaret Oliphant's reviews discussed in this chapter show, discipline can function both through what is written in a literary work (its subject matter, characterization, treatment of the

good and the evil characters etc.), and also through what is written about the work after it is published. Margaret Oliphant wrote these reviews particularly as a reaction to the unconventional aspects of women's sensation narratives. She wrote from a powerful position and with a disciplinary intention as a rigid critic, which is why her discourse in these reviews can be considered as an example to Victorian disciplinary discourse.

### **5.2.3 *Hester* (1883) as an Anti-sensational Domestic Novel**

In this section, Margaret Oliphant's *Hester* will be discussed as an example for the disciplinary power of the domestic novel. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ambivalent nature of Oliphant's writing stems from the contradiction between her conservative non-fiction writings and her rather progressive representations of women in her fiction. However, no matter how strong-minded and rational women characters she creates in her novels, Oliphant uses milder forms of disciplinary techniques such as limiting women's opportunities in the public sphere and confining women to the roles defined for them in the private sphere. Hence, this chapter will illustrate that domestic narratives' ways of disciplining are different from those of sensation narratives. Sensation narratives use overt and extreme ways of punishment for extreme violations of Victorian moral codes such as sexual misconduct, adultery, bigamy and murder. In domestic narratives, the heroine generally behaves modestly and she is compliant with the rules of conduct. Her transgressions take a milder form, so does her disciplining.

*Hester* was first published with a subheading that reads: 'A Story of Contemporary Life,' but this subheading is excluded in today's Oxford Edition (2003). Using alternate headings in novels was common in the Victorian period and George Eliot's *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* has perhaps been the most famous of all. While George Eliot depicts provincial lives in an imaginary town called Middlemarch in her masterpiece, Margaret Oliphant, in *Hester*, implies that her novel diverges from other novels in the way that it depicts 'contemporary,' or, as the word is defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner's*

*Dictionary* “modern” life (247). This is important in that it highlights the progressive aspects of the novel with a single working woman, Catherine Vernon, at the center of the narrative as the head of a bank. It should be noted, however, that no matter how controversial this may sound for a domestic narrative, the novel is mostly set within the boundaries of domestic settings with middle-class characters, whose daily life, relations and feelings shape the plot structure of the novel.

Contrary to the eventful narratives of the sensation genre, the domestic novel is more unruffled with respect to the organization of plot. Not to say that domestic novels are dry and uneventful, but they can in no way compete with scandalous sensation narratives in that respect. Therefore, while a study of the treatment of the heroine and what she does (generally her unconventional behaviors, wrong-doings and transgressions) is easy in sensation novels, domestic novels can sometimes be unfit for such studies. Margaret Oliphant’s *Hester* is one of those novels. What makes *Hester* apt for analysis among Oliphant’s other novels is that the novel puts two strong women characters, Catherine Vernon and Hester Vernon, at the center. While Catherine has succeeded in attaining a space in the male sphere as a professional woman, the eponymous heroine Hester is presented as an aspiring young girl, whose abilities and desires to be independent are curtailed as the narrative proceeds to the end. As will be explored thoroughly in what follows, Catherine is depicted as a masculine patriarch in the novel, who hinders Hester’s way to economic independence. Also, the novel focuses on negative feelings, inimical relations and power struggle between these two women antagonists. Power relations and discipline in *Hester* define and control women’s experiences with other women and the novel very well exemplifies Margaret Oliphant’s ambivalence in her treatment of strong women characters as well as her treatment of marriage and women’s work. These are the reasons why Margaret Oliphant’s *Hester* exemplifies the co-existence of feminism and anti-feminism as an ambivalent and disciplinary domestic narrative.

*Hester* is narrated through the voice of an authorial narrator, who tells the story in the third person with an all-knowing vision. Focalization does not remain with the same agent, it changes and gives the reader a chance to see the events from different perspectives. This is important to note, especially when the events are narrated from Catherine Vernon's point of view because the reader is given the perspective of a woman on other women. The early chapters of the novel give information about the history of the Vernon family and tell briefly about the two former generations preceding the story time Vernons. As cousins, John Vernon and Catherine Vernon are expected to make an inbred marriage to keep the Vernon money in the family, which fails to happen because John Vernon prefers to marry Mrs. John Vernon from a low-middle class family. Hester Vernon is born into this marriage. Catherine Vernon remains single, does not interfere with the banking business and keeps all the money she has for many years. John Vernon works as the head of the bank until he goes abroad suddenly and does not ever show up again when he is needed to save the bank from an approaching financial crisis. This is the turning point for Catherine Vernon, who saves the Banking House of the Vernons from ruin and becomes a highly respected figure in the town of Redborough as the head of the bank for many years to come. However, as Wendy Jones writes, "Catherine's bitterness at romantic disappointment leaves her cynical and disdainful of others," (172) which completely marks her relations with other characters in the novel.

Catherine chooses two male successors as managers and partners from the family, Edward Vernon and Harry Vernon, who would later replace her in the bank. She also buys a huge house for a special purpose, which arouses great curiosity in the town. It soon turns out that she organizes this house called the Vernonry to shelter her relatives, who live their lives in constant thankfulness to Catherine. Among the pensioners, there are two important names; Mrs. John Vernon, the wife of the late John Vernon who ruined the bank, and their daughter Hester. Catherine herself lives in another house, the Grange, with Edward, who is her favorite, but she pays regular visits to the Vernonry to amuse herself with her

pensioners. Presenting this social milieu is important in that by looking at Catherine's relations with Edward, Harry, Hester and all the other dependents living in her pension, it can be seen that she is a patronizing figure for all and her benevolence makes her more dominant and powerful.

Catherine's relation with Hester is crucial to stress because both represent strong female characterization. A woman character running a bank for years is something which both Victorian and contemporary readers do not expect to see in a Victorian novel. Also, if there is such a figure in a Victorian novel, all other characters are expected to bow to her authority and dominance. However, in this novel, Hester does not accept Catherine's superiority until the very end. Hester's resistance to Catherine is presented as the central emotional and psychological conflict, which intensifies due to the growing intimacy between Hester and Edward. Even the possibility of a love affair between the two irritates Catherine.

The climax of the novel brings critical revelations as well as a strong emotional and psychological downfall for Catherine. She has to face Edward's infidelity because he risks the bank's money secretly and wants to elope with Hester, yet she nobly refuses his offer. Hester learns that it was her father John Vernon who ruined the bank before Catherine saved it. Eavesdropping on their dialogue in the garden, Catherine understands that the bank is in great danger again because of her confidant Edward, who runs away taking the midnight train, never to appear again. After this climactic scene everything between Hester and Catherine gets better because Hester submits to Catherine's authority, ironically at a time when Catherine begins to lose her financial power and influence. In the last chapters of the novel, Hester turns into a precious and reliable helping hand for Catherine. For the second time in her life, Catherine saves the bank, but this time she makes a big sacrifice by selling her house, the Grange. She is now obliged to move to the Vernonry, to live with her dependants but she dies before she has to move in. The novel ends leaving two choices for Hester to marry and the last sentence of the novel asks: "What can a young woman desire more than to have such a possibility of choice?" (*Hester* 456). Before discussing the implications of

such an ending, the tensions, emotional exchanges and power relations between the two central women characters will be studied as examples for the disciplinary power of a domestic narrative.

Studies on Margaret Oliphant's novels agree on one point as to the characterisation; she tended to create weak male characters and considerably stronger females. Emphasizing the subversive aspects of Margaret Oliphant's novels, Rubik writes that "Oliphant refuses to project her fantasies of social advancement, money and power onto her male characters" (*The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant* 122). Instead, it is generally women characters who are attributed greater economic positions, intelligence, social power and influence. Also, D'Albertis writes that "[t]here is no wise, omnipotent patriarch to be found in the fiction; rather, unsentimental portraits abound of weak-willed husbands, fathers, and brothers supported by independently minded, eminently capable women" ("Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant" 303). This contradiction is often explained with Oliphant's real life experiences regarding the men in her family because "[t]he behaviours of brothers and later sons no doubt contributed to her disillusion" (Terry 69). In her *A Victorian Album*, where she praises the literary talents of Margaret Oliphant, Lucy Poate Stebbins emphasizes a similar point by elaborating on how the men in Oliphant's family turned into failures in many respects: "As a young woman her acquaintance with men was largely limited to her own relations; her grandfather had been so bad that his wife had left him, her father was a saturnine block, Frank was weak, charming Willie a sinner, and, when she married, her husband could not support her" (161). Oliphant's beloved sons, Cyril Francis and Francis Romano (Cecco) can be added to this list because as a devoted mother she showed an extra effort to send them to a very prestigious school, Eton College, only to witness their idleness and early deaths both in their mid-thirties. Stebbins further interprets Oliphant's disappointments with the men in her family as "a great defect" in her fiction because as a novelist she "could never believe in a hero" (160).

Women characters in her fiction are generally portrayed as stronger and capable in many respects. Inclined to stress the subversive and feminist elements in Margaret Oliphant's writing, Rubik draws attention to the portrayal of women characters in two different pieces she has written on the novels of Margaret Oliphant. In her article titled "The Subversion of Literary Clichés in Oliphant's Fiction," she asserts that Oliphant's "portrayal of women, in particular, is one of the most subversive aspects of her writing" as she "consistently describes women as the stronger, cleverer, and more active sex" (51). Also, pointing this time especially to Catherine Vernon in *Hester*, Rubik writes that women in Oliphant's fiction "are not ingenuously ignorant, but always know exactly what they want; they are not shy and helpless, but confident and sure of themselves; they are not passive, but active; they are not emotional, but calculating and capable of solving problems rationally" (*The Novels of Mrs. Oliphant* 115). However, just as putting transgressive and assertive women characters in sensation novels is not enough to categorize these novels as feminist texts, the same is also true for domestic novels, which sometimes create strong professional, clever and intelligent women characters. In both cases, what matters more is the way these women characters are treated in the narrative process as well as the way they treat each other in the story.

Margaret Oliphant's *Hester* is a good novel to work on female characterisation as the novel puts not one but two tough and assertive women characters at the center of the narrative. Aunt Catherine Vernon and Hester Vernon are presented as antagonists despite the considerable age difference between them. Catherine is in her sixties when she first meets the heroine of the novel, Hester, who is only fourteen at the time the narration starts. Though the differences regarding their age and social position may give the impression that they cannot be rivals in the first place, the resemblance of their personalities creates a fierce struggle for power throughout the novel. Linda Peterson calls this "the natural antipathy of two strong, like-minded women," (79) which is felt in the entire aura of the novel though this changes in the closing chapters.

Looking at the details of their relations is important to see the power conflict between these two women because as Sara Mills writes, the Foucauldian understanding of “power operates within everyday relations between people and institutions” (*Michel Foucault* 33). As mentioned earlier, Foucault himself draws attention to the importance of ‘conduct’ to see how power operates in relations. Thus, the conduct of both Catherine and Hester can be interpreted as strategies of enacting power on each other, which is not recouped by the apparently privileged Catherine, but rather circulates through their daily interactions. While dwelling on how the issues of relations among women characters, women’s work and marriage are treated, the elaborations in this chapter will revolve mostly around the relationship between Catherine and Hester.

What determines Catherine’s strength and influence in the novel is the fact that she is a professional woman, who has “a head for business” (*Hester* 297). To remind again, Catherine bravely saves the bank from ruin and becomes the head of it for several years. Her lofty depictions in the opening chapters of the novel give the impression that she serves like a “living patroness” (23) for the inhabitants of the town:

Miss Vernon’s was a reign of great benevolence, of great liberty, but of great firmness too. As she got older she became almost the most important person in Redborough. The people spoke of her, as they sometimes do of a very popular man, by her Christmas name. Catherine Vernon did this and that, they said. Catherine Vernon was the first thought when anything was wanted either by the poor who needed help, or the philanthropist who wanted to give it. (23)

As the most prominent figure in the town, Catherine Vernon’s “name was put to everything. Catherine Street, Catherine Square, Catherine places without number” (23). This denotes that Catherine has visibility and power in the public sphere, which is indeed unusual regarding the representation of women in Victorian novels. Perhaps this is what Oliphant implied when she called her novel “A Story of Contemporary Life.” She might have hinted at the appearance of contemporary, or, ‘modern’ woman in the public sphere as working and independent individuals. Besides the fact that Catherine rescued the bank, what reinforces Catherine’s influence more is her cynical benevolence, which contributes a lot to her dominance and influence in the town. She buys and organizes a huge house for



her relatives, who live in idleness and thus are totally dependant upon her. Those who live in the Vernonry as pensioners never genuinely love her and Catherine, likewise, is actually never cordially benevolent. She uses this as just another reason to feel superior and powerful:

Catherine Vernon, according to their picture of her, was a woman who, being richer than they, helped them all with an ostentatious benevolence, which was her justification for humiliating them whenever she had a chance, and treating them at all times as her inferiors and pensioners. (58)

Looking at these passages, Catherine's helpfulness can hardly be defined as charity because, in calling her help "ostentatious benevolence," the narrator, too, implies that power also operates in so-called kindness and determines her relation with her dependants. This can also be felt in the way Catherine's relations with her pensioners are narrated in the novel, especially when her distant feelings and gestures are considered. For instance, if there is one gesture to be identified with aunt Catherine, it is laughing: "Catherine only laughed; it was her habitual comment" (171). Certainly, this is an evil laugh, aiming at humiliating the other: "the laughter was great deal more bitter than any tears" (284). Such scenes abound in the novel so the narrator sounds sarcastic and mean when attributing to Catherine a superior position. Such a tone makes it really difficult to sympathise with Catherine Vernon, even though she is powerful, influential and extraordinary as the head of the bank in the town. The narrator defines her relationship with the dependants as follows:

the discontented dependants . . . received everything without a touch of human feeling, without gratitude or kindness, and the always half-contemptuous patroness . . . gave with not much more virtue, with a disdainful magnanimity, asking nothing from her pensioners but that they would amuse her with their follies. (70-1)

The ambivalence of Margaret Oliphant towards working women can be felt in the way she delineates Catherine; though she is powerful and superior to every other character in the novel, including the males, her superiority is explained with masculine traits. For example, the narrator talks about her as "a woman so much superior to her sex," who has a "masculine understanding" (424). Catherine is the only working woman in the novel but she is not presented as a

precursor for the heroine, who wants to work and be self-sufficient. Also noteworthy, it is Catherine who discourages Hester's cry for work and curtails her further opportunities. Linda Peterson rightly states "Catherine's achievement is masculine in a more subtle sense . . . It deals with power, power that originates in money and extends its grasp over the lives of other characters" (79). Such is the ambivalent figure of a strong woman character as Catherine Vernon, which is why it is understandable that feminist readings can be uncertain as to how to approach her. To have a better understanding of the ambivalence behind the presentation of a superior woman, it is necessary to have a look at her relation with the other strong woman in the novel, Hester.

As a critic and novelist, Margaret Oliphant does not really favour making her heroines beautiful and charming; what she respects most is the virtuous representations of heroines. Indeed, this is what Victorian domestic novelists did; they presented the delusion of 'the angel in the house,' who has a higher mission than being beautiful as she represents Victorian middle-class morals. Margaret Oliphant followed a similar path in her fictional writing. From her criticism of the sensation novels, it can be deduced that the heroine in a novel should be emblematic of what Victorian patriarchy considers as the correct middle-class values. In *Hester*, the heroine is unconventional, yet in different aspects from sensation heroines. Hester is clever, intelligent, mature, and she wants to be free and self-sufficient. She does not fit the conventional traits of sensation heroines:

Seeing that her mouth was too large, and her nose too short, and her eyebrows too marked, she concluded that she was not pretty, and regretted it, though in her circumstances it mattered very little . . . she was never likely to produce the effect which the heroines in novels –even though comparatively plain – did produce. (*Hester* 90)

Hester is depicted as rational and strong-minded, her main interest is not to catch a good suitor; she wants to work and be independent. Thus, "[s]he never went to balls, nor met in society gangs of suitors contending for her smile; she did not believe in such things, and she thought she despised them" (90). As the following passage will additionally stress, while framing the general trends in creating

heroines in the Victorian novel, the narrator implies what kind of influences such heroines generally arouse and also adds that Hester has nothing to do with stirring such heroinesque effects:

The heroine in a novel is generally the point of everybody's admiration in the ball-room, and to look at the perfection of the waltz which she and her lover enjoy so deeply, the whole assemblage stands still. But nothing of this kind occurred in Hester's case. As she had so little experience, the chances are that she was by no means the best dancer in the room. (224)

Also, although she is only fourteen at the start of the novel, Hester feels older and mature as she says "I never was very little since I can remember" (35). Thus, perhaps because Hester considers herself an equal to Aunt Catherine, she behaves bravely and is very confident of what she is doing in their first encounter.

The event which incites a tense relationship between Catherine and Hester is no doubt their first encounter. The narrator introduces this scene as a triggering moment: "It cannot be denied that the first encounter was hostile on both sides" (35). Curious to meet the wife of her cousin John Vernon, Catherine pays a visit to the Vernonry, where her pensioners live, only to be refused to enter her own house. It is Hester who does not allow Catherine to enter their room because it is late at night, her mother Mrs. John Vernon is sleeping and Catherine has come without informing them beforehand. As the following quotation will indicate, this scene is an indication of the power conflict between them: "They were relations, which justified the want of ceremony; but, perhaps, if they had not been poor, and she had not been their benefactor, she would scarcely, in so very easy a way, with a shawl over her cap, and at an hour adopted for visits, have made the first call upon them" (32). As a patronising and dominant personality, Catherine Vernon has never had such a reaction before and the fourteen-year-old Hester Vernon, the daughter of John Vernon who ruined the bank, should be the last person in the town who can reject her in such a defying manner. While picturing this scene, the narrator focalizes through Catherine's eyes, so we get to know how she feels:

Few people opposed her or met her with suspicion, much less hostility; and the aspect of this girl standing in the doorway, defending it, as it were, preventing her from entering, was half comic, half exasperating. Keeping her out of her own house! It was one of the drawbacks of her easy beneficence . . . that she felt a little too distinctly that it was her own house, which, seeing she had given it to Mrs John, was an ungenerosity in the midst of her generosity. (36)

As a typical reaction seen throughout the novel, Catherine forces an insulting laugh which makes Hester feel very humiliated: “When her visitor laughed again, Hester felt a flush of hot anger, like a flame, going over her. To be ludicrous is the last thing a girl can bear: but even for that she would not give in” (36). This event initiates the power conflict and enmity between Catherine and Hester, who are, as the narrator makes clear “antagonists already, as much as if they had been on terms of equality” (37). Starting from this moment, the scenes that bring Hester and Catherine together in the novel can be taken as examples of a Foucauldian power relation because, for Foucault, “power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (*The History of Sexuality* 94). Penetrating into their everyday encounters, attitudes, gestures, and caprices, the power conflict between Catherine and Hester takes the form of a continuous emotional and psychological battle. According to Catherine, Hester does not behave in accordance with her social place; she is far too young to be this proud and confident, and in the second place, she is poor and dependent upon Catherine. Also, for Catherine, Hester is unruly, undisciplined and untamed. This can be understood from the way she talks to Edward about Hester: “I have just had a meeting with a little spitfire, a little tiger-cat . . . ‘The little firebrand!’ . . . ‘the little spitfire! facing me on my own ground, defying me, Catherine Vernon, in the very Vernonry, my own creation! . . . The little wild cat! She felt in every nerve of her that we were in opposition, she and I” (39-41).

Hester is young, poor and Catherine’s dependent, but still, she is Catherine’s equal in terms of her strong personality, which is why, as the third epigraph to this chapter proves, Catherine considers Hester as a rival while she

does not even care about what other women characters in the novel are doing (257). Hester is too proud to spend her life feeling grateful to Catherine, who shelters them for nothing but to feel superior all the time. What marks the power relation between these two women is actually Hester's stubborn manners, which can be interpreted as a kind of resistance. If, for instance, Hester accepted Catherine's authority and behaved accordingly, that would not be called a power conflict. Because, as Foucault says, a relation of power requires resistance and reciprocity, which completely fits the situation of Catherine and Hester: "where there is power, there is resistance and yet this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*The History of Sexuality* 95). Hester's resistance to Catherine's authority can be felt in many instances but one good example is the moment when she refuses to go to Catherine's invitation to the Grange, while the other pensioners only feel flattered to be invited. The narrator again focalizes through Catherine's point of view because she is annoyed with Hester's confidence and her wayward attitude:

Hester! That proud, troublesome creature—she would never give in, who put on the airs of a princess in the Grange drawing-room, and declined to go to supper—she with the spirit of a revolutionary, and the temper of a demon—(no, no, this was perhaps too bad—temper of a—Vernon, Catherine said to herself with a laugh). (*Hester* 124)

Hester, likewise, is not fond of Catherine. Actually, from some of her speeches, it can be inferred that Hester has ambivalent feelings for Catherine; she both despises her and aspires to be like her: "I got her by heart. I shall either love her or hate her. I have not made up my mind which" (49). Behind Hester's aspiration to be like Catherine, the story of her saving the bank and becoming the head of it has a great influence: "I should like to step in when ruin was coming and prop it up on my shoulders as she did, and meet the danger, and overcome it" (306). What is noteworthy in Hester's personality is that she has enough reasons to be self-assured; she does not consider marriage as the unique aim in her life just as other young women characters in the novel do, she feels she has a capacity to be like Catherine, she is clever, intelligent and strong-willed. Earning her life is not Hester's primary motivation for work; in the first place, she wants to feel

accomplished and she has a “vain desire to have it in her power to do something . . . a desire which many a young mind has felt as well as Hester; to have that golden opportunity—the occasion to do a heroic deed, to save some one, to venture your own life, to escape the bonds of every day, and once have a chance of showing what was in you” (300).

Hester’s negative feelings for Catherine are mainly because of Catherine’s disrespectful and humiliating manners: “I have no reason to like Catherine. Yes, I will say her name; why shouldn’t I? She has not liked me. I was only a child, and if I was saucy she might have forgiven me, all these years. But she has taken the trouble on the contrary to humiliate me, to make me feel that I am nobody, which was unworthy” (226-7). Catherine shelters them for nothing, and she uses her benevolence as a strategy of exercising power. Hester, clever enough to be aware of what she is subjected to, does not want to yield to her power: “The moment I am within Catherine Vernon’s house I am all wrong. I feel like a beggar, a poor relation, a dependent upon her charity; and she has no charity for me” (289). Apparently, what makes Hester not like Catherine is how Catherine makes her feel about herself. This can be read as a criticism of benevolence as a form of power and also as an encouragement to women who should stand on their own feet and be independent.

Indeed, Hester attempted to set herself and her mother free from Catherine’s subtle domination when she was only fourteen years old; she wanted to work as a governess, earn her money and live elsewhere. She was confident of herself because she had grown up abroad and knew many languages: “You know I always said I should give lessons. We will get two nice little rooms somewhere, much nicer than these. If she is such a hard woman, I don’t want to be obliged to her. Oh mother, mother, don’t cry! I can take care of you” (42-3). Later, when her mother thought Hester needed a governess herself, Hester proudly said that she did not want to learn but she wanted to teach: “I can speak French, and Italian, and German. I want to open a *cours*; don’t you think I might open a *cours*? I know that I could teach, for I am so fond of it, and I want something to do” (65).

However, her mother Mrs. John Vernon and Aunt Catherine firmly objected to the idea and Edward Vernon said “ladies in this country have nothing to do with business—by the way, I am forgetting Aunt Catherine” (47). Hester’s mother objected to this idea because she thought Hester’s becoming a teacher would dishonor them (72). This is because, as the daughter of the late John Vernon, the former head of the bank, their family used to be the richest family in the town and Hester’s venture to working life would show that they were no more respectable and honorable in the town. Catherine’s objection is really ironic because as a professional woman who has been in business for many years, she denies such a privilege to Hester:

‘I am here,’ Miss Vernon had said, ‘to take care of our family. The bank, and the money it brings in, are not for me alone. I am ready to supply all that is wanted, as reason directs, and I cannot give my sanction to any members of the family descending out of the position in which, by the hard work of our forefathers, they were born. Women have never worked for their living in our family, and so far as I can help it, they never shall. (72)

In a way, Catherine rips herself from her female identity. She excludes herself from those women, who were regarded fragile, vulnerable and in need of care and control. Catherine represents herself as an all-knowing authoritarian figure, who rules the lives of others and whose lives and livelihoods depend on her benefaction. This proves Margaret Oliphant’s ambivalence regarding the representation of strong women in fiction. The image of a successful working woman in the novel is not enough for a feminist appreciation; what matters more is how she is pictured throughout the narrative. In *Hester*, Catherine Vernon is openly praised for her success in business but she is also presented like an exception because no other women in the novel work. Dependants living in the Vernonry spend their time with gossip and they look forward to an invitation from aunt Catherine. Harry’s sister Ellen’s only activity is throwing weekly tea parties and Emma Ashton, a distant relative, is obsessed with finding a proper suitor. Hester is the only one who has a desire to be an independent and self-accomplished woman but her attempt to work is curtailed by Catherine.

According to Wendy Jones, the attitude of Catherine is very typical of a male patriarch, which is why Hester's feelings for her are complex:

Hester's feelings about Catherine are ambivalent because Catherine inhabits a doubly gendered subjectivity. As head of the Vernon family, she becomes its patriarch (definitely not its matriarch). The novel emphasizes her masculine role and qualities; she articulates and practices the patriarchal values to keep Hester imprisoned, and these include her paternalistic charity as well as her refusal to let Hester work, despite her own example. (174)

Moreover, Linda Peterson comments on the same issue as a shortcoming on the side of the novelist:

The frustration that ensues from such consenting—especially if a girl has, like Hester, a capacity for business—preoccupies Oliphant for much of the novel. Yet despite her attack on social conventions that restrict women's actions, Oliphant seems unable (or unwilling) to devise a literary solution that would break with the traditional focus of the female *bildungsroman* and move her heroine into the world of work. (78)

As a matter of fact, this attitude of Catherine can be taken as a way of controlling and disciplining Hester, whom she finds wild, unruly and arrogant as a girl of fourteen. Catherine's disciplinary conduct works and, as the narrator denotes, in five years time Hester changes: "These years made a great deal of difference in Hester. She was at the same time younger and older at nineteen than at fourteen. She was less self-confident, less sure of her own powers to conduct everything" (*Hester* 70). This can mean that she is tamed and disciplined as Catherine subtly desired. Catherine's case as a professional woman is presented as an exception so she cannot be a pioneer for the younger generations.

It is no surprise that Catherine Vernon, the only working woman in the novel, has never married, which is another matter that deserves critical attention. Throughout the novel, Hester has three chances to marry although she never cries for a suitor. It is Harry Vernon who first asks her hand early in the novel and following this, Margaret Oliphant spends a few successive chapters to reflect what each character thinks on this marriage proposal. Reflecting different characters' thoughts is important to stress divergent perspectives regarding the issue of marriage. First, Hester's mother Mrs. John Vernon is thrilled with the idea of



Hester's marriage to Harry Vernon, which would redeem their social and economic status. So, in the first place, Mrs. John Vernon is thinking about "the many advantages of the match; money, comfort, good position, good connection, everything that can be wished for in marriage, and with no personal defects to be glossed over by these advantageous, but a fine young man, a husband any girl might be proud of" (*Hester* 97). Mrs. John Vernon sees this marriage as a way of social climbing and so does Catherine Vernon. However, Catherine also begrudges it because she does not want her rival Hester to gain status through this marriage and be her equal: "the thought that Hester would be thus immediately placed on a sort of equality with herself, and Mrs. John reinstated, vexed her. It was a mean sentiment, but she could not help it. It vexed her in spite of herself" (125). As for Hester, she first hears of Harry's intentions from her mother. She is really surprised at the idea of the proposal but she also thinks it is humiliating. This is how Hester thinks before Harry comes and talks to her openly: "That a man should be invited into her presence with that thought, that she should be put forward, taken into society in order to be seen with that view. Heaven and Earth! Was it possible that a woman should avow such possibilities and yet live?" (107). What is more noteworthy is that, as a proud girl who never thinks of marriage as an advantage for herself, Hester refuses Harry's hand in marriage and instead says: "It is teaching I have always wanted, never a companion's place" (135).

The other two male characters in the novel, Edward Vernon and Roland Ashton, are also Hester's suitors for marriage. Both men like her, but it is Edward Vernon whom Hester falls for. Jones thinks that "[i]t is not accidental that Edward becomes Hester's lover; it is because he is Catherine's chosen 'mate' (son, live-in companion, protégé), that he is the object of Hester's desire" (173). Being closer to Edward and gaining Edward as a lover become Hester's sole strategy in her power struggle with Catherine because "[for] Hester, winning Edward thus means the ultimate triumph over her rival" (Jones 173). Still, as has been mentioned earlier, Edward's confiding scene cannot be considered as a sincere, romantic revelation. This is because he wants to elope with Hester after he has ruined the

bank, but Hester makes an ethical choice, refuses his offer. This can be taken as Margaret Oliphant's delineation of a moral domestic heroine, who is struck between duty and love and suppresses her feelings to follow the right path under any circumstance. As a man between two women antagonists, Edward has a twofold function in the novel. In the first place, he unknowingly strengthens the enmity and power conflict between Catherine and Hester. In the second place, ironically, he brings the two women together as companions and allies after he ruins the bank. This climactic moment in the novel indicates Hester's submission to Catherine, who asks Hester's help to save the bank again.

Hereafter, the relation between Catherine and Hester evolves into a womanly intimacy. Hester thinks Catherine is the strongest person around, who is "able to do everything" and "stands like a tower" (433), but Catherine, again refuses to be a role model for Hester, and encourages Hester to marry instead:

'They tell me you wanted to do something like what I had done. . . . A few years work and you would be an excellent man of business; but it can't be.

'Why cannot it be? You did it. I should not be afraid.

'I was old. I was past my youth. All that sort of thing was over for me. It could be in one way—if you could make up your mind to marry Harry'

'I could not—I could not! I will never marry.'

...

'I would marry,' she cried, 'if I were you! I would wipe out every recollection'  
(454)

Shortly after this scene, Catherine dies and in the last paragraph of the novel, Hester is left between two possibilities of marriage: "all that can be said for her is that there are two men whom she may choose between, and marry either if she please—good men both, who will never wring her heart" (456). Regarding such an ending, Peterson thinks that Margaret Oliphant is "unable to imagine closure without marriage. Perhaps she felt neither satisfied with the traditional feminine plot of marriage and motherhood, nor comfortable with the masculine pattern of quest and self-fulfillment, and so ended in the only way possible—with a

question” (81). Peterson’s argument is acceptable because it may look like a blurred conclusion as Hester is left with a question to ponder. Still, there is one thing clear; reaching independence through work is again taken away from Hester, she is encouraged to marry by Catherine, who represents authority, autonomy and independence. This contradiction, on the whole, marks the novel’s conservatism.

All in all, the clash of Catherine and Hester can represent the clash of public and private, the first being a male realm occupied, in this novel, by a woman, who is pictured as a masculine patriarch, while the latter is certainly a female domain, where the heroine Hester is confined. This is where the ambivalence of the novel appears. As a novelist who criticized the 1860s women’s sensation narratives for their ‘immoral’ representation of women characters, Margaret Oliphant, in *Hester*, pictures rational and strong-minded women characters. Reading *Hester* with a feminist lense is possible given the fact that the novel presents a successful professional woman and a rational, clever and strong young heroine, who aspires to be like her. Yet it is equally possible to see the novel as an anti-feminist narrative especially when how Hester’s excitement and zest for being independent is inhibited by Catherine. Hester’s disciplining is her confinement to home with marriage rising as the best opportunity for her to do. An alternative feminist ending could be that Hester could have replaced Catherine’s place in the bank, which would be too progressive for a novelist like Margaret Oliphant.

In *Hester*, feminist and anti-feminist aspects co-exist, which marks the novel’s ambivalence and disciplinary features, as has been the case with sensation narratives discussed in the previous chapter. In order for a text to be disciplinary, there have to be transgressions in the first place. For women’s sensation novels these transgressions are more related to what women characters do in private spheres. In domestic narratives, women characters’ transgressions are generally related to their demands in public spheres. To exemplify from *Hester*, that the heroine demands a place in the public sphere as a working and independent woman is considered as a transgression by the other more powerful woman

character, who is herself self-sufficient as a working woman. Thus, Margaret Oliphant's *Hester* is a good example of women disciplining other women.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

The simultaneous appearance and strength of the Victorian women's movement and the dominance of women in Victorian fiction as writers, readers and fictional characters prompted scholars of Victorian literature to read women's novels as fictional examples of Victorian feminism or anti-feminism. In spite of what is often written about Victorian women's writings' being feminist or anti-feminist, the present study has suggested that Victorian women's texts are ambivalent regarding their relation to the concerns of the Woman Question because they can be thought of as representing what this study called Victorian disciplinary discourse, which aimed to produce and circulate the 'right' norms, values, feelings, tastes and conduct through fictional representations, reviews, literary criticism and politics of canonization. This study has stressed that the ambivalent nature of women's fiction stems from the contradiction between the subversive content in women's fiction and their anti-feminist and disciplinary treatment throughout the narrative.

In the Victorian period, the novel industry was considered as the most powerful and influential vehicle of reaching populations, given that the Victorians were ardent novel readers. Women's interest in novels both as readers and writers is noteworthy and novel-writing in Victorian society enabled women writers to experiment on the emancipatory discourses through fiction. Yet, the novel industry also functioned as a way of controlling and disciplining especially women by attempting to alter and shape their behaviors and affective experiences with men and with each other. This study has sought to demonstrate that this disciplining did not only pertain to fictional characters or readers, but also to women writers, who at times suffered from severe criticisms because of writing transgressive texts. Hence, multi-layered power relations that operate to discipline

women characters, women readers and women writers have been explored by looking at representative examples of two different and popular woman genres of the Victorian period: the domestic novel and the sensation novel.

Victorian women writers practiced in a variety of genres but they were most visible as domestic novelists or sensation novelists. The domestic novel was the dominant and superior literary genre of the Victorian period while popular novels such as sensation narratives were more demanded and in circulation in the circulating libraries of the Victorian era; yet still, neither can represent Victorian women's writing by itself. That is why, this study has set out to examine the ambivalent nature and the disciplinary function of Victorian women's texts by studying examples from two different woman genres; the sensation novel and the domestic novel, claiming that the former displayed severe and grievous forms of disciplining while the disciplinary power of the latter is subtle, milder and less transparent.

Chapter 2 has explored the Victorian Cultural Context by examining the rise of the Victorian women's movement and Victorian women novelists, which has demonstrated the centrality of the woman issue in the Victorian Britain. Drawing attention to the simultaneous rise of these two phenomena, this chapter has discussed how the issue of labeling women's narratives as feminist or anti-feminist worked in the Victorian literary studies. By exemplifying both canonical and underread novels' relation to the Victorian Woman Question, this chapter has revealed that no woman novelist could escape such categorizations, though the novelists themselves tended to deny any connection to the women's movement of the period.

The woman-centered nature of this study necessitated a discussion as to why Victorian women novelists should be discussed together as a group, which has been explored in the first heading of Chapter 3. It has been concluded that hardships of getting published, keeping their sustainability as respected professional writers in the phallogentric tradition of Victorian novel industry forced women writers to write with a moral responsibility. Male novelists, for instance, did not feel the pressure to set the right models for male readers while

women novelists' writing had a moral function of setting the 'right' models of behaviors for women readers. The second section of this chapter has reviewed different feminist approaches to women's writing that tend to focus on women as writers, women as readers and the representation of woman in fiction. This study is interested in all these dimensions, given that the disciplinary power of novel-writing and novel-reading affect fictional women characters, women readers and women writers. Also, in this chapter, the disciplinary power of Victorian women's writing has been explained with reference to Michel Foucault's theories on discourse and power. This section has argued that when taken as discourse in the Foucauldian perspective, literature is considered as a 'discipline,' which produces knowledge through representations and also as a technique of disciplining, which aims to shape and control individuals and populations through the reading experience. In this study, the co-existence of feminist and anti-feminist aspects in women's fiction is explained by the disciplinary nature of novel-writing in the Victorian period. This is because no matter how emancipatory and subversive women novelists ventured to be, they could not help turning disciplinary and thus anti-feminist due to the moral obligations attached to them as women writers.

As woman centered narratives, both sensation and domestic novels that have been studied in this dissertation represent signs of feminist consciousness. No matter how controversial they may look at first sight, the novelists of both genres wrote within the Victorian disciplinary discourse. Thus, they displayed disciplinary power in various ways and degress by pushing women characters to disadvantaged positions, controlling and shaping their feelings and conduct. The analysis of the novels has proved that female transgressions in sensation and domestic novels take different forms, so do the techniques of disciplining and the control of the heroines. In sensation narratives women characters are punished generally because of what they do in the private sphere. They commit bigamy or display sexual misconduct, which are unpardonable for the rigorous Victorians. In domestic novels, the heroine is more rational and strong-minded. She demands visibility and power in the public sphere but she is denied any place after all.

In sensation narratives, stricter disciplinary techniques such as social stigmatization, confining the heroine to a madhouse and killing the heroine are used as punishments. Thus, the treatment of female criminality, sexuality and madness are very important in the exercise of the disciplinary power in sensation novels, which has been discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4 through the close readings of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. The analysis of the novels has demonstrated that both novels delineate physically and emotionally active women characters but they also guide readers by pointing to the virtuous ways of living. As opposed to sensation narratives that punish heroines with severe forms of punishment mentioned above, disciplining in domestic narratives was difficult for Victorian readers to notice because, after all, the heroine was generally given a happy resolution in safe domestic settings, which has been the subject of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 has discussed a variety of writings by Margaret Oliphant to expound that although in her non-fiction writings she displayed a conservative approach to the woman issue, her fiction was more progressive yet still disciplinary. Again, the discussion of Oliphant's reviews of the 1860s sensation narratives has indicated how the disciplinary function of the Victorian novel and literary criticism functioned to delimit, restrict, and hence, discipline Victorian women novelists, who did not follow the conventions of the realist domestic fiction. The last section of this chapter has discussed Oliphant's novel *Hester*, as an anti-type of sensation narratives that Oliphant herself criticized harshly. This novel illustrates how milder forms of disciplinary power operate between two women antagonists in their daily interactions, conversations, gestures and responses to each other. Also, the discussion in this section has underlined Oliphant's contradictory treatment of women's work and marriage in that she pictures a successful professional woman character in her novel as the head of a family and a bank, who exercises power over the younger heroine and finally denies her the opportunity to work and be independent. Considering Margaret Oliphant's personal life as a professional writer who had to earn a living by



writing, it is ironic that in her fiction she denied women characters the same opportunity to be in better positions in the public sphere.

The present study has contributed to the field of Victorian studies by discussing Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Margaret Oliphant together and comparatively as once best-selling novelists of two contradictory woman genres of the Victorian period. It is hoped that the conjunction of their selected novels and additional non-fictional writings by Margaret Oliphant have provided striking insights considering (1) the double-voiced and bifurcated nature of Victorian women's writing (2) how the disciplinary power operates to control and discipline the women characters and readers as well as the novelists themselves. All in all, the analysis of the selected writings have highlighted that women in the Victorian period tended to produce novels within the Victorian disciplinary discourse due to the pressure caused by the expectations of the novel industry and their readership. Thus, although at times they put signs of feminist consciousness in their writings, they also contributed to the production and circulation of the right discourses, which was expected to ensure the sustainability of Victorian morals. Still, it should be underlined that by representing different female experiences both in public and private spheres through various forms of female transgressions, these novels also enabled Victorian women readers to discover alternative life styles and to sustain their hopes about other possibilities of existence in the patriarchal Victorian society. This is possibly why they were very popular particularly among women readers and remained best-sellers throughout the nineteenth century.

Two limitations have been encountered in the process of writing this dissertation. The three novelists that have been studied were very productive in their lifetime, and this productivity caused their being charged as writers of cheap popular fiction. Especially Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Margaret Oliphant's close engagements with the periodical press of the Victorian age is noteworthy as well, yet their massive oeuvre makes impossible a study that covers all pieces written by them. This is the first limitation that has been faced; hence, only

representative works that are in print today have been used. Second, because the reader dimension has been stressed at different points, it would be interesting to see some concrete evidence, if there is any, as to how ordinary women readers responded to these novels, which requires an elaborate archival research. Thus, the reader dimension has been examined through the didactic narrative evidences the novels present and also through Margaret Oliphant's literary criticism that mention the affective power of reading and writing fiction.

Considering feminist studies, the woman-centered nature of this study has demonstrated that stressing women's subordination, oppression, silencing and invisibility only as a consequence of male supremacy in patriarchal structures is a weak perception because women, too, play crucial roles in the subordination and disciplining of their own sex. The dominance of negative feelings and nasty relations among the fictional women characters created by women novelists and likewise affective experiences among the women writers themselves are indicative of this. Foucauldian inspired power analysis is useful in feminist literary studies to better see how 'power' is everywhere and functions as an invisible force that shapes the acquisition of the 'right' conduct, emotions and tastes. Woman-centered studies such as this can help to demonstrate that women, too, internally participate in, benefit from and strengthen the operation of disciplinary power in the formation of female subjects.

This study has focused on three underread texts that were re-printed and began to be read and taught in Western higher institutions, especially in the States, starting from the 1980s. This is a significant contribution of Anglo-American feminism to English studies especially in the American higher institutions. Still, it may not be wrong to argue that Victorian studies in Turkey is limited to reading and teaching a handful of canonical works as required readings both at undergraduate and graduate levels. As a touchstone work that reveals the plenitude and variety of Victorian women writers, *Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (2000) brings together ninety-three women writers, most of whose works are not even in print

today. Though feminist publishing houses such as Virago Press, Pandora Press, The Feminist Press and The Women's Press etc. have made a great effort in the re-printing and circulation of novels by neglected women writers, many works by countless women novelists are still in oblivion. Whether the Victorian canon will be enlarged in time including the still neglected women novelists is hard to predict. Yet, both feminist studies and Victorian studies should urge concentrations on the unjustly underrepresented literary texts by women, which would unearth the diversity of women's writing of the past centuries.

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## APPENDIX A

### CURRICULUM VITAE

**Seda COŞAR ÇELİK**

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#### EDUCATION

- 2014** Ph.D., English Literature, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.
- 2006** M.S., Gender and Women's Studies, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.
- 2003** B.A., Department of American Culture and Literature, Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, Turkey.

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2006-present** Research Assistant, Dept. of Foreign Language Education, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

#### PUBLICATIONS

“‘No More Paki, Me a Muslim’ Prioritizing Religious Identity as a Backlash against Hybridization Politics: *The Black Album* by Hanif Lureishi.” *Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> METU British Novelists Conference: Hanif Kureishi and His Work*. 2010. Middle East Technical University. Ankara, Turkey.

“What is Pleasurable in Jane Austen’s Fiction.” Joint Paper with Buket Doğan. *18<sup>th</sup> METU British Novelists Conference: Jane Austen and Her Work*. 2011. Middle East Technical University. Ankara, Turkey.

## UNPUBLISHED CONFERENCE PAPERS

“The Reflections of the Ottoman-Turkish Feminism in the Literary Works of Nezihe Muhittin.” *Women’s Writing and Reading Conference: Past and Present, Local and Global*. 4-6 May 2007. University of Alberta. Edmonton, Canada.

“*Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* as a Parody of Detective Fiction and Detectives.” *3<sup>rd</sup> International IDEA Conference Studies in English*. 16-18 April 2008. Ege University. İzmir, Turkey.

“Competing Discourses: Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*.” *Midwestern Conference on Literature, Language, and Media*. 20-21 March 2009. Northern Illinois University. DeKalb, Illinois, USA.

“Twisting Utopia into Dystopia: Hanif Kureishi’s *The Body*.” *Bodies in Motion Graduate Student Conference*. 28 March 2009. University of Rhode Island. Kingston, USA.

“Femme Fatale in the House: *Lady Audley’s Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon.” *1<sup>st</sup> Global Conference-Villains and Villainy*. 19-21 September 2009. Oxford, United Kingdom.

“A Reader’s Response to the *Catcher in the Rye*: Mark David Chapman’s Case.” *5<sup>th</sup> International IDEA Conference Studies in English*. 14-16 April 2010. Atılım University. Ankara, Turkey.

“Anne Brontë’s neglected status in the Victorian Canon and a Feminist Reappraisal of Her Novels” *METU British Novelists Conference: The Brontë Sisters and Their Work*. 12-13 December 2013. Middle East Technical University. Ankara, Turkey.

“Margaret Oliphant’s Overproduction and Anxiety of Writing: A Study of Her Autobiography” *8<sup>th</sup> International IDEA Conference: Studies in English*. 16-18 April 2014. Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla, Turkey.

## APPENDIX B

### TURKISH SUMMARY

#### **VİKTORYA DÖNEMİ KADIN YAZARLARDA DUYGU KARMAŞASI: ELLEN WOOD'UN *EAST LYNNE*, MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON'UN *LADY AUDLEY'NIN SIRRI* VE MARGARET OLIPHANT'IN *HESTER* BAŞLIKLİ ROMANLARI**

Viktorya dönemi İngiltere'sinde son derece hararetli tartışmalara yol açan kadın hareketi ile hatırı sayılır sayıda kadın yazarın eş zamanlı olarak ortaya çıkışı düşünüldüğünde, dönem edebiyatı üzerine çalışan araştırmacıların kadın eserlerini feminist ya da anti-feminist olarak sınıflandırmaya çalışmaları anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Lakin, bu çalışma bu tip sınıflandırmaları sınırlayıcı bulur ve kadın yazınının dönemin kadın meselesi ile olan ilişkisinin çok daha karmaşık olduğu görüşündedir. Kadın yazarların kadın hareketinin temel meseleleri olan evlilik, boşanma, kadınların eğitimi, çalışması ve oy hakkı gibi konuları makale türü yazılarında ve kurgusal metinlerde ele alış biçimlerindeki çelişkiler ile metinlerdeki kurgusal kadın karakterlere olan yaklaşımları bir tür duygu karmaşasına işaret eder. Kadın yazarların kadın hareketinin dile getirdiği sorunlara romanlarında kimi zaman dikkat çekip sempati ile yaklaşırken kimi zaman da bu sorunları görmezden gelme ya da ataerkil, cinsiyetçi ve baskıcı yapıyı destekleyici söylemler geliştirme eğilimi içine girdikleri gözlemlenebilir. Bu da demek olur ki kadın yazınında feminist ve anti-feminist öğeler bir arada bulunabilir ve kadınlar tarafından yazılmış eserler feminist ve anti-feminist eğilimler arasında sendeleme eğilimi gösterebilir.

Viktorya dönemi İngiltere'si evrim teorisinin ortaya konulduğu, sosyal, politik hareketliliğin ve tartışmaların oldukça hararetli olduğu, muazzam teknolojik değişikliklere tanıklık etmiş bir dönem olduğu için toplumun her türlü yeniliğe ve değişime verdiği tepkilerde çelişkiler, ayrılıklar, fikir ve duygu

karmaşaları sezilebilir. Bu tip tereddütler ve yeniliklere şüpheyile yaklaşma durumu aslında dönemde her alana damgasını vurmuş genel bir ruh halidir. Hızlı değişiklikleri deneyimleyen ve bir geçiş dönemi olarak adlandırılan Viktorya dönemi toplumu demiryollarının ülkenin dört bir yanına yayılmasının heyecanı ve avantajlarını yaşarken bir yandan da son derece trajik demiryolu kazaları, hızlı sanayileşmenin bir getirisi olarak yoksulluk, çevre kirliliği, çocuk işçiliği, insanlık dışı çalışma şartları ile de mücadele ediyordu. Dolayısıyla teknolojik yenilikler, toplumsal olaylar ve politik tartışmalar insanları heyecanlandırırsa da tüm bunlar aynı oranda korkutuyor ve toplumun tereddüte düşmesine neden oluyordu.

Viktorya dönemi toplumu genellikle katı, tutucu, ataerkil değerlere sıkı sıkıya bağlı, dindar ve otoriter bir toplum olarak tanımlanır. Fakat, özellikle dönemin edebi eserlerine bakıldığında, yerleşmiş değerlere ve yaşam biçimlerine karşı çıkış belirtilerini görmek de mümkündür. Bu nedenle, dönemin edebiyat eserleri birbirine zıt olan özgürlükçü ve baskılayıcı söylemlerin bir arada var olup çekiştiği metinler olarak görülebilir. Bu durum Viktorya dönemi kadın yazarları tarafından yazılmış metinlerde de gözlemlenebilir, zira dönemin kadın eserlerini feminist ya da anti-feminist değil de duygu karmaşası içinde sendeleyeyen çelişkili metinler olarak değerlendirmek daha doğrudur. Bunun bir sebebi de dönemin kadın yazarlarının bilinçli ya da bilinçsiz bir şekilde yazılarında kadın sorununa değinmeye meyilli olmalarına rağmen bir yandan da basım yayın dünyasının beklentilerini karşılayacak şekilde bir görev bilinci ile yazmaya çalışmalarıdır.

Bu çalışma kadın eserlerindeki duygu karmaşasının metinlerdeki dönemin yerleşmiş düşünce ve değerlerine aykırı feminist içerik ve temsillerin zaman zaman anti-feminist biçimlerde ele alınmasından kaynaklandığını ileri sürer. Bir diğer deyişle, edebiyat metinleri kadınların baskıcı söylemlere direnç gösterebildiği, alternatif yaşam biçimlerini resmedebildikleri ve seslerini duyurabildikleri alanlar olsa da, dönemin kadın yazını anlatı içinde kullanılan kontrol mekanizmaları ve cezalandırma yöntemleri ile kadın karakterleri, ahlaki ders verme yoluyla kadın okurları ve edebiyat eleştirisi aracılığı ile de kadın yazarları şekillendirme, kontrol ve disiplin etme aracına dönüşebilir. Bu

nedenledir ki Viktorya dönemi kadınları tarafından yazılan kimi kurgusal metinler ve eleştirel yazılar keskin iyi-kötü karşıtlığına dayanan, özellikle kadın okurlara dönemin ‘münasip’ yaşama şekillerini salık vermeyi amaçlayan, ahlakçı ve içinde zaman zaman da öğretici söylemleri barındıran metinler olarak görülebilir.

Bu bağlamda, dönemin birbirinden oldukça farklı iki roman türü olan sansasyonel roman (*sensation novel*) ve domestik roman (*domestic novel*) türlerinden basıldıkları zamanda çok tutulan ve çok satan eserler oldukları halde günümüzde isimleri genellikle sadece uzmanlar tarafından bilinen üç roman karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmektedir. Sansasyonel roman örnekleri olarak Ellen Wood’un (1814-1887) *East Lynne* (1861) ile Mary Elizabeth Braddon’un (1835-1915) *Lady Audley’nin Sırrı* (1862) ve domestik roman örneği olarak da Margaret Oliphant’ın (1828-1897) *Hester* (1883) başlıklı romanları detaylı inceleme için seçilmiştir. Bu üç romancının ortak özelliği dönemlerinin en üretken ve bilinen kadın yazarları içinde sayılmalarına rağmen 20. yüzyılın başından itibaren isimlerinin yavaş yavaş unutulmuş, romanlarının da yıllar içinde baskılarının tükenmiş olmasıdır. 1980’lerin Anglo-Amerikan feminist edebiyat akımının bir katkısı olarak geçmiş yüzyılların unutulmuş kadın eserlerinin tekrar canlandırılması bu yazarların kimi eserlerinin yeniden okur ile buluşmasına vesile olmuştur. Fakat, gene de, bu romanlarcıların ve daha nicelerinin isimleri sıradan okurlar tarafından değil de genellikle akademik ilgi alanları nedeniyle dönem araştırmacıları tarafından bilinir.

Sansasyonel roman türünde yazan Ellen Wood kendi döneminde ve günümüzde en iyi *East Lynne* romanı ile hatırlanır. Bu roman hem gerçekçi hem de melodramatik öğeleri içinde barındırdığı için gerek Viktorya döneminde gerekse 20. yüzyılın başlarında sahneye de uyarlanmıştır. Romanın sahne uyarlaması en az romanın kendisi kadar rağbet görmüş ve son derece popüler olmuştur. Aynı türde yazan Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood’dan da ünlü bir yazardır ve hatta Braddon’ın Viktorya dönemi boyunca en çok anılan yazarlardan biri olduğunu söylemek hiç de yanlış olmaz. Bunun nedenlerinden biri yazarın yazdığı sansasyonel romanların yanı sıra kendi özel hayatının da benzer şekillerde

sansasyonel olmasıdır. Mary Elizabeth Braddon'ın akıl hastanesinde yatan bir kadın ile zaten evli olan editör John Maxwell ile olan evlilik dışı ilişkisi romanlarının git gide popüler olduğu dönemlerde hem basım yayın dünyasında hem de okur kitleleri arasında çok yankı uyandırmıştır. Bu nedenle, Braddon sadece romanlarında yazdıklarından dolayı değil, kendi yaşam tarzından dolayı da çok sert eleştirilere maruz kalmıştır. Margaret Oliphant da gene üretkenliği ile bilinen bir yazardır. Doksanın üzerinde kurgusal metin, biyografiler, kısa öyküler yazmış ve bunu yanı sıra da hayatı boyunca dönemin en önemli süreli yayınlarından biri sayılan *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* için muhtelif konularda makaleler, kitap tanıtımları ve eleştiriler yazmıştır.

Viktorya döneminde gerek sansasyonel gerekse domestik roman türünde kadın yazarlar erkeklere nazaran daha baskındır ve romanlar ağırlıklı olarak kadın okurlara yönelik yazılmışlardır. İki farklı türden bahsedilen romanlara ek olarak bu çalışma Margaret Oliphant'ın sansasyonel roman eleştirileri ile dönemin kadın hakereti üzerine yazdığı makalelerin feminist okumasını da yapar. Tüm bunlar, öncelikle, Viktorya dönemi kadın edebiyatının feminist ya da anti-feminist olarak sınıflandırılmayacağını gösterir. Aksine, bu çalışma dönemin kadın yazınının, romanlar, edebi türler ve hatta yazarların kendileri arasında işleyen kontrol ve disiplin edici iktidar ilişkilerinin de etkisi altında bir tür duygu karmaşası içinde gelişmiş olduğuna işaret eder. İkinci olarak, bu metinler anlatıların öğretici ve zaman zaman ahlaki bir derse de dönüşebilen nitelikleri nedeniyle Viktorya dönemi kadın okurların duygu, davranış ve zevklerini yani kısaca yaşam biçimlerini kontrol etme ve şekillendirme aracına dönüşebilir. Son olarak, sansasyonel ve domestik romanların tür özellikleri birbirinden farklı olsa bile iki roman türü de ana kadın karakteri anlatı içinde dezavantajlı bir konuma sürükler, fakat iki türün de kadın karakterler ve okurlar üzerinde iktidar kurma yöntemleri birbirinden farklıdır. Sansasyonel romanlar daha keskin kontrol yöntemleri kullanırken, domestik romanlardaki kontrol mekanizmaları gündelik ilişkiler içine işlemiştir, çok belirgin ve sert olmayabilir.

Viktorya dönemi bir edebiyat türü olarak romanın altın çağı olarak bilinir. Bu nedenledir ki roman yazma ve edebiyat eleştirisi çok farklı sebepler için kullanılmıştır. Öncelikle, günümüzde tanınan ya da tanınmayan bir çok yazar ekonomik sebeplerle roman yazmışlardır. Bunun yanı sıra, evi kutsal sayan, evde çok zaman geçiren ve romanlara düşkünlükleri ile bilinen dönemin özellikle orta-sınıf tabakası için roman okumanın en temel vakit geçirme ve eğlenme yöntemi sayıldığını da hatırlatmak gerekir. Belki de bu sebepten romanlar ayrıca toplumsal sorunların dile getirildiği, okur kitlelerinin yaşam tarzlarının, duygularının, zevklerinin ve davranış modellerinin romanlardaki temsiller aracılığı ile belli kalıplara sokulmaya çalışıldığı bir araca da dönüşmüştür. Bu durum sayısız romancının yanı sıra Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) gibi bazı ünlü siyasetçilerin neden roman yazmaya giriştiklerini de açıklayabilir. Kısaca, Viktorya döneminde bir edebi tür olarak roman ve eleştirisinin topluma daha kısa ve kolay yoldan ulaşip okur kitlelerinin duygu, düşünce ve yaşam tarzlarını yönetme aracı olarak görüldüğünü söylemek hiç yanlış olmaz.

Bu durum kadın yazarları erkek yazarlardan daha çok etkilemiştir. Dönemin ahlak anlayışı genellikle özel ya da kamusal alanda yaşanan kadın deneyimleri üzerinden tartışıldığı için kadınlar tarafından yazılan metinlerin niteliği, içeriği ve kadın okurlara verebileceği mesajlar edebiyat çevrelerindeki en önemli tartışma konularından biri olmuştur. Bu durumdan en çok aykırı içerikleri ile bilinen sansasyonel romanlar etkilenmiştir. Sansasyonel romanlar zina, çift evlilikler, evlilik dışı ilişkiler, cinayet, şiddet gibi toplumun kurgusal metinlerde genellikle örtük şekillerde ve imalarla görmeye alıştığı konuları dönem için oldukça aykırı biçimlerde ve aşık yollardan konu eder. Dolayısıyla bu metinler kadın okurların ahlakını bozmakla suçlandığı gibi, yazarlarının da ahlaki bozukluk içinde olmakla birebir suçlandığı görülmüştür. Örneğin, günümüzde, Margaret Oliphant sansasyonel romanları bu bakımdan eleştiren en sert edebiyat eleştirmeni olarak görülür. Tüm bunlar roman yazmanın, özellikle kadınlar için, sadece bir para kazanma yöntemi ya da sanatsal bir faaliyet olmadığını, aynı zamanda ahlaki bir yükümlülük olarak da görüldüğüne işaret eder. Dolayısıyla Viktorya dönemi

kadın yazarlarına, kadın okurların romanlardan nasıl etkileneceğini de hesaba katarak romanlarında yarattıkları kadın karakterlerin davranışları, duyguları, seçimleri, hal ve hareketleri aracılığı ile kadın okurlara örnek olmak ve yol göstermek gibi bir ahlaki misyon da yüklenmiştir.

Böyle hararetli tartışmaların yaşandığı bir ortamda, kadın yazınının ve edebiyat eleştirisinin alternatif yaşam tarzlarını resmetmeye yarayan bir direnme alanı olmasının yanı sıra kadın okurları ve yazarları kontrol ve disiplin etme aracı olarak da kullanılması oldukça anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmada, Viktorya dönemi kadın edebiyatı Michel Foucault'nun bahsettiği şekliyle bir söylem (*discourse*) olarak ele alınır. Şöyle ki dönemin edebiyatı kurgusal temsiller üzerinden bilgi üreten akademik bir disiplin olarak görülür. Bunun yanı sıra, kurgusal karakterler, okurlar ve yazarlar üzerinde disiplin edici bir iktidar kurma yöntemi olarak da ele alınır. Bir çeşit iktidar kurma aracı olarak disiplin bu çalışmada hem edebi metinlerin içeriği ve bu içeriğin anlatı içinde nasıl ele alındığı hem de edebi metinlerin basım ve neşrinin ardından edebiyat eleştirisi yoluyla nasıl yorumlandığı ve muamele gördüğü üzerinden incelenir.

Viktorya dönemi edebiyatında kadın eserleri çoğu zaman kadın merkezlidir. Bir başka şekilde ifade etmek gerekirse, olay örgüsü kadın karakterin başından geçenleri, onun duygularını, deneyimlerini, seçimlerini ve yaşantısını merkeze alır. Kadın karakterlerin ve zaman zaman geleneklere aykırı düşen yaşantılarının romanlarda bu denli ön plana çıkması roman yazarlarının kurgusal metinlerdeki temsiller ve imgeler yoluyla ataerkil yapılara ve düşünce biçimlerine bir tehdit oluşturduğunu düşündürebilir. Fakat, aynı zamanda, aykırı davranışları, duyguları ve yerleşmiş değer yargılarına tehdit oluşturan hareketleri yüzünden cezalandırılan kadın karakterlerin öyküleri cinsiyetçi, ayrımcı ve baskıcı düşünce yapısını da destekler bir hal alır. Bu durum, roman kişilerinin oluşturulması, hikaye ve olay örgüsünün kurgulanması ile anlatıcının duruşu ve çeşitli karakterlere göre değişebilen tavrında da gözlemlenebilir. Bu çalışma detaylı okumaları yapılan romanlardaki duygu karmaşasının temelinde metinlerdeki aykırı içeriklerin geleneksel ve anti-feminist yöntemlerle ele alınmasından



kaynaklanan çelişkinin yattığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda, romanların kadın sorununu ve ataerkil toplum içindeki kadın deneyimlerini ele alış biçimindeki muğlaklık (1) romanın anlatıcısı ile kadın karakterler arasındaki (2) metin içindeki tüm kadın karakterler arasındaki (3) yazarların kendileri arasındaki çok katmanlı iktidar ilişkilerinin incelenmesi aracılığı ile ele alınacaktır. Bu tip çok boyutlu güç ilişkilerinin incelenmesi Viktorya dönemi kadın edebiyatında gerek kurgusal kadın karakterler gerekse kadın yazarların kendileri arasındaki olumsuz duygulara ve çekişmelere dikkat çekmesi ve dolayısıyla kadınların birbirini ataerkil sistemin beklentileri doğrultusunda nasıl kontrol edip şekillendirmeye çalıştığını göstermesi açısından önemlidir. Bu, ayrıca, günümüz feminist edebiyat eleştirisinde aykırı ve geleneklere karşı olduğu düşünülen kimi kadın yazarların aslında hem kendi romanlarında yazdıkları ile hem de diğer kadın romancıların romanları hakkında yazdıkları aracılığı ile dönemin kadınlarının gerek özel gerekse kamusal alandaki çeşitli yaşantılarını kısıtlayan baskıcı ve tutucu adetleri alttan alta desteklediğini de gösterir.

Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon ve Margaret Oliphant'ın detaylı okumalarının yapıldığı üç romanda da feminist eğilimler kendini alışılmadık, geleneklere aykırı ve hatta kimi zaman okuru oldukça şaşırtan, dehşete düşüren duygular, düşünceler ve davranışlar ile gösterir. Sansasyonel romanlarda evli kadın karakterin kalbinin sesini dinleyerek çocuklarını da geride bırakıp aşık olduğu adamla kaçması, konumunu koruma adına cinayet işlemesi ya da cinayete teşebbüs etmesi gibi Viktorya dönemi toplumu için son derece aykırı, şaşkınlık ve heyecan verici olay örgüsü çağdaş feminist edebi tartışmalarda dönemin baskıcı yapısı da düşünüldüğünde takdir edilmiştir. Domestik romanlarda ise kadın karakterler akıllı, zeki, kendilerine güvenli ve rasyonel oluşları ile dikkat çekerler. Domestik romanlardaki kadın karakterler dönemin ataerkil yaşam şekli düşünüldüğünde kendilerine tam olarak yetemeseler de en azından böyle bir çaba içinde olmaları ve kamusal alanda çalışan kadınlar olarak erkeklerle eşit pozisyon talep etmeleri önemli detaylardır. Bu konuların hiç değilse kurgusal metinlerde ele alınması romanlardaki feminist eğilimler olarak yorumlanabilir. Fakat bu tip

aykırı içeriklerin anti-feminist şekillerde ele alınıyor olması da dikkatten kaçmamalıdır. Romanlardaki dönemin yerleşmiş değerlerine aykırı, feminist içerik ile bunların anti-feminist ele alınış şekilleri arasındaki çelişkiyi fark etmenin en iyi yolu roman anlatıcısının olayları ve karakterleri görme ve aktarma biçimlerine, kadınlar arası ilişkilerin resmedilme yollarına ve son olarak da romanların bitiş şekline bakmakla olur.

İlk olarak, anlatıdaki perspektif ve anlatıcının değişik karakterlerden bahsederkenki tutumunun okurun roman kişileri hakkındaki duygu ve düşüncelerini etkilediği söylenebilir. Şöyle ki, anlatıcının farklı karakterlere yakınlığı veya uzaklığı, onlara sempati ile yaklaşıp yaklaşmadığı okurun da o karakter hakkındaki yargılarının şekillenmesinde etkili olur. Viktorya dönemi romanlarında anlatıcının konumu çok önemlidir. Bu nedenledir ki dönem edebiyatı üzerine yapılan çalışmalarda roman anlatıcısının konumu, sesi ve hikayeyi aktarma biçimlerine özellikle dikkat çekildiği görülebilir. Çünkü, dönem romanında anlatıcı çoğu zaman sadece hikayeyi anlatmakla kalmaz, zaman zaman olay örgüsü hakkında açıkça ya da ima yoluyla yorumlarda bulunur, karakterlerin duygu ve davranışlarını değerlendirir, yargılar ve doğru-yanlış ayrımı üzerinden okura ders vermeye çalışır. Bu şekilde olayların ve karakterlerin davranış biçimlerinin okur tarafından nasıl yorumlandığında da anlatıcının büyük etkisi olmuş olur. Anlatıcının anlatıya çeşitli yollardan dahil olması, örneğin yorumları, gözlemleri, uyarıları ve zaman zaman okura direk hitap ediyor olması edebiyatın okur kitlelerinin yaşam tarzlarını kontrol etmeye yarayan bir araç olarak kullanılabilir olmasına çok güzel bir örnektir.

Örnek vermek gerekirse, sansasyonel roman dendiğinde ilk akla gelen eserlerden biri olan Ellen Wood'un *East Lynne* başlıklı romanında aşık olduğu adam için evini, saygın eşini ve üç çocuğunu terk eden Isabel Vane'in evden kaçtıktan sonra başından geçen hazin öyküyü anlatırken anlatıcı bir noktada "Ey okur, inan bana! Kadın, Eş, Anne!" (283) diyerek aslında açıkça hangi yaşta ve konumda olursa olsun dönemin kadın okurlarına seslenmektedir. Açıktan açığa okura yöneltilmiş bu şekilde bir hitap evden kaçıp evlilik dışı ilişki yaşayan ana

kadın karakter Isabel'in öyküsünü adeta bir ibret öyküsüne dönüştürmektedir. Benzer bir şekilde, Mary Elizabeth Braddon'un Viktorya döneminin belki de en çok satan birkaç eserinden biri olan *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* başlıklı romanı kendisini ve bebeğini bir gece ansızın bıkarıp zengin olabilme hayaliyle Avustralya'ya altın aramaya giden kocasının ardından katlanmak zorunda bırakıldığı kötü yaşam koşullarıyla baş etmek yerine kimliğini değiştirip zengin ve kendisinden yaşça büyük bir aristokrat ile ikinci evliliğini yapan kadın karakterin yeni hayatına tutunma ve nihayetinde çöküş öyküsünü anlatır. Bu romanda da anlatıcı kadınlardan nefret ettiğini açıkça söylemekte hiçbir beis görmeyen ve anlatı boyunca Lady Audley'nin (Lucy) gerçek kimliğini ortaya çıkarmaya çalışan erkek karaktere yakınlığını açıkça belli ederek çift evlilik gibi son derece çetrefil bir durum içinde var olmaya çalışan baş kadın karakteri yeren, yargılayan imalarda bulunur. Bu ve benzeri örnekler dönemin edebiyatının romanlardaki kadın karakterin başına gelenler aracılığı ile kadın okurlara ders vererek onların yaşam tarzlarını kontrol ve disiplin etmeye çalışmasına çok yerinde örneklerdir.

İkinci olarak, romanlardaki kadın karakterler arasındaki olumsuz duygular ve samimiyetsiz, hatta kimi zaman düşmanca da olabilen ilişkilerin hakimiyeti kurgusal metinlerde kadınların sadece erkekler tarafında ezilip hor görülmediğini, aynı zamanda birbirlerini de benzer şekillerde bastırıp ezebildiklerini gösterir. Bu tezde üzerine çalışılan romanlarda kadın karakterler arasındaki olumsuz duyguların kadınlar arası düşmanlığı nasıl tetiklediği ve güçlendirdiğinden de bahsedilir. Kadın karakterlerin diğer kadın karakterlere karşı verdiği duygusal tepkiler kadınların kendi cinslerine karşı düşmanlık beslemesine neden olmaktadır. Bir başka deyişle kıskançlık, nefret, hırs, çekememezlik gibi son derece hasmane duygular kadınlar arasında düşmanca ilişkileri ve duygusal, psikolojik ve hatta zaman zaman da fiziksel şiddeti körükler. Bu da çalışılan romanlardaki kadınlar arası ilişkilerin ataerkil iktidar ilişkilerinden beslendiğini ve dolayısıyla son derece düşmanca ve sağlıksız olduğunu gösterir.

Örneğin, çalışılan her iki sansasyonel romanda da kadınlar arası negatif duygular ve iktidar ilişkileri kadınların birbirlerinin çöküşüne zemin hazırladığı

türdendir. *East Lynne* başlıklı romanda, ana kadın karakter olan Isabel Vane'in iyi geçinebildiği, zor ve yalnız zamanlarında destek aldığı tek bir kadın karakter olmadığı gibi, romanın ilk sayfalarından itibaren diğer kadın karakterlerin sadece güzel ve alımlı olduğu için kendisine karşı olan husumeti açıkça hissedilebilir. *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* başlıklı bir diğer sansasyonel romanda da kadın düşmanı olduğu açıkça belli olan Robert Audley'nin kadınlar ve birbirleriyle olan bağları hakkında yaptığı cinsiyetçi genellemeler ve yorumlar kadınlar arası ilişkilerin özünde husumetin olduğunu ileri sürer niteliktedir. Benzer bir şekilde, domestik roman örneği olarak çalışılan *Hester* başlıklı romandaki ana çatışma iki kadın karakter arasındaki iktidar mücadelesinden kaynaklanır. Vernon ailesine ait olan bankayı yöneten Catherine Vernon ile onun gibi ekonomik özgürlüğü, itibarı ve saygınlığı olan, sözü dinlenen bir kadın olmaya öykünen on dokuz yaşındaki Hester Vernon arasındaki sevgi-nefret ilişkisi, gündelik ilişkilerinin içinde birbirlerini hor görme ya da görmezden gelme üzerine kurulu güç ilişkileri de kadın karakterler arasındaki negatif ilişkilere örnek verilebilir. Kısaca söylemek gerekirse, detaylı okuması yapılan üç romanda da kadınlar diğer kadınları çeşitli yöntemler ile kontrol ve disiplin etmeye çalışırlar.

Kadınların birbirlerine yönelttikleri olumsuz duyguların yanı sıra aykırılıklarından, yani yaptıkları yanlışlar ya da işledikleri günahlardan dolayı kendi içlerinde yaşadıkları nedamet, vicdan, kendini yetersiz görme ya da kendinden nefret etme gibi olumsuz duygulardan da bahsetmek gerekir. Çalışılan sansasyonel romanlardaki olay örgüsü ana kadın karakterin geleneklere aykırı tavır ve davranışları etrafında gelişir. Dolayısıyla, diğer karakterlerin ve anlatıcının 'günahkar' görülen ana kadın karakter hakkında ne düşündüğü kadar, ana kadın karakterin kendisi ve yaptıkları hakkında ne hissettiği de çok önemlidir. *East Lynne*'de, örneğin, Isabel Vane sevgilisi ile evden kaçışından çok kısa bir süre sonra çok pişman olur ve romanın son cildinin sadece Isabel'in ızdırabı ve nedameti üzerine odaklandığını söylemek hiç yanlış olmaz. Acı çekme ve pişmanlık duyma duyguları üzerine bu kadar gidilmesi gene kurgusal kadın karakterin yaşadıkları üzerinden kadın okurlara gerçek hayatta benzer şekillerde

davranırlarsa bu şekillerde hissedebileceklerinin salık veriliyor olmasından kaynaklanır. Dolayısıyla kadınlar arasındaki ilişkileri belirleyen ve kadın karakterleri esir alan bu tip negatif duygular kadın okurlara kendilerini sakınmaları gereken aykırılıklara karşı uyarı niteliği kazanır.

Bundan farklı olarak *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* başlıklı romanda kimliğini gizleyerek yaptığı çift evlilik ile bu yasak evlilikten elde ettiği yüksek sınıfsal konum ve ekonomik avantajları koruma adına ana kadın karakterin ilk eşini öldürmeye teşebbüsü, gerçekleri ortaya çıkarmaya çalışan erkek karakterin kaldığı evi kundaklamaya çalışması gibi Viktorya dönemi toplumu tarafından kabul edilmesi oldukça çok zor eylemler sonrasında hiç nedamet getirmemesi özellikle vurgulanması gereken bir noktadır. Bu nedenledir ki *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* romanındaki feminist ışıltıların daha kuvvetli olduğu söylenir ve roman zamanı için çok radikal bulunmuş, şiddetli eleştirilere maruz kalmıştır. Fakat, bu romanda kadın karakterin kendisine yönelttiği negatif hisler karakterin kendisinden nefret etmeye başlaması ile kendini gösterir. Kendine yabancılaşma ve kendinden nefret etme *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* başlıklı romanda tamamıyla ana kadın karakterin iyi bir hayat idame ettirme adına yaptıklarının ortaya çıkması üzerine kendini kötü hissetmesinden kaynaklanmaktadır.

Domestik roman türünde yazar Margaret Oliphant'ın *Hester* başlıklı romanda ise romanla aynı ismi taşıyan genç kadın karakterin öykündüğü Catherine Vernon gibi yaşamasına izin verilmediği ve ekonomik özgürlük talebi son derece ironik bir şekilde Catherine tarafından reddedildiği için zamanla kendinden daha az emin olmaya başlaması da kontrol mekanizmalarının işleyişine iyi bir örnektir. Catherine Vernon'un bir banka yöneticisi olarak var olması romanda bir istisna olarak sunulur. Catherine kadınsı yanlarından sıyrılmış erkeksi bir kadın olarak resmedilir. Oliphant'ın *Hester* romanında kamusal alanda yer talep eden, etkin olmaya çalışan, kendine güvenen ve ekonomik özgürlük talep eden genç kadın karakterin önünün kesilmesi de domestik roman türünde disiplin ve kontrol mekanizmalarının nasıl işlediğine iyi bir örnektir. Tüm bunlar negatif

duygular aracılığı ile kadınların ataerkil düşünce ve davranış kalıplarını içselleştirerek kendi kendilerini disiplin etmeye yönelmeleri olarak yorumlanır.

Üçüncü olarak, romanların bitiş şekilleri de romanın kadın meselelerine olan tutumunun belirlenmesinde oldukça önemlidir. Her roman son cümlesiyle romandaki olay örgüsünü sonlandırmış gibi görünse de romanın nasıl bittiği, kurgusal karakterlere neler olmuş olabileceğine dair sayısız yorum yapmak mümkündür. Fakat, gene de, roman kahramanlarının başına gelenler ve öykülerinin sonlandırılış şekli okura verilmek istenen mesaj açısından çok önemlidir. Örnek vermek gerekirse, hem basıldığı dönemde hem de günümüzde çok okunan ve eğitim kurumları müfredatlarında sıklıkla yer alan Charlotte Brontë'nin *Jane Eyre* başlıklı romanı feminist edebiyat kuramcıları tarafından 19. yüzyıl feminizminin edebiyat metinlerine yansımalarının en iyi örneklerinden biri olarak gösterilir. Romanda Jane Eyre özgürlüğüne düşkün, kendini çok iyi ifade edebilen, kendine güvenen, eğitilmiş bir kadın karakter olarak resmedilmiş olsa da sonunda evlendiriliyor olması romanın özellikle kadın okurlara evliliğin kadınlar için nihai amaç ve sonuç olduğu düşüncesini ilettiğini gösterir. Dolayısıyla romanların sonlandırılış şekilleri yazarın bilinçli ya da bilinçsiz bir şekilde okura iletmek istediği mesaj hakkında bir fikir verebilir.

Bu çalışmada detaylı incelenen romanların sonları da bu bağlamda çok önemlidir ve roman analizleri romanların kapanış şekillerine çok önem verir. Sansasyonel romanlardaki kadın karakterlerin hareketleri ve yaşam biçimleri dönemin değer yargıları düşünüldüğünde oldukça aykırı olduğundan, romanların sonlarında kadın karakterlerin bu aykırılığın bedelini ödeyecek şekillerde cezalandırılmaları hiç de şaşırtıcı değildir. Çalışılan her iki sansasyonel romanda da ana kadın karakter öncelikle deli olmakla suçlanır çünkü ataerkil normlara aykırı duyguları, tavırları, eylemleri, yani kısaca, işledikleri 'suçlar' Viktorya dönemi toplumu için delilikten başka bir şeyler açıklanabilecek gibi değildir. *East Lynne*'de Isabel Vane tüm yaptıklarını aklı başında değilken yaptığını ileri sürerken, *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı*'nda Lady Audley'nin deli olup olmadığı erkek karakterler arasında adeta bir tartışma konusuna dönüşmüştür. Lucy'nin akıl

sağlığını test etmek için çağırılan doktor Mosgrave ilk etapta kafası karışmış olsa da nihayetinde Lucy'nin deli değilse bile son derece tehlikeli olduğu sonucuna varır. Fakat bir noktada Lucy de yaptığı her şeyi deli olduğu için yaptığını ileri sürer ve deliliğin kendi ailesinde anne tarafından aktarılan bir hastalık olduğunu açıklar. Fakat Lucy'nin deliliğinin gerçekçi olup olmadığı ya da karakterin bunu da bir strateji olarak kullanıp kullanmadığı tartışılan bir konudur. Neticede, her iki romanda da kadın deliliği kadınların yaptıkları yanlışları açıklamak için adeta bir mazeret olarak görülürken alttan alta aklı başında hiçbir kadın bu şekilde davranamaz mesajı verilmektedir. Buna ek olarak her iki romanda da kadın karakterler romanın sonunda ızdırap içinde ölürlür. *East Lynne*'de Isabel Vane pişmanlık içinde acı çekerken hasta düşer. Hasta yatağında yaptıklarını itiraf edip eski kocasından af diledikten sonra ölür. *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı*'nda ise Lucy önce Belçika'da bir akıl hastanesine kapatılır ve sonradan orada öldüğü haberi gelir. Burada *East Lynne*'deki Isabel'in yaptıklarından dolayı pişmanlık ve vicdan azabı ile mücadele edip hasta düşüp ölmesi ile *Lady Audley'nin Sırrı* romanındaki Lucy'nin tımarhaneye kapatılması üzerinde durmak gerekir. Lucy'nin kimliğini gizleyip çift evlilik yapması, cinayete teşebbüs etmesi gibi aykırılıklarının ortaya çıkmasının ardından pişmanlık duymuyor olması ve aksine hala son derece cesur bir şekilde başı dik resmedilmesi bile başlı başına önemli bir detaydır. Muhtemelen bu yüzdendir ki bu davranışlarını bir şekilde meşrulaştırma yöntemi olarak Lucy'ye deli olduğu teşhisinin konması, akıl hastanesine kapatılması ve ölüm haberinin sonradan gelmesi romanın sonu için daha uygun görülmüştür.

Domestik roman örneği olan *Hester*'da ise, otoritesi romandaki erkek karakterler de dahil olmak üzere tüm karakterler tarafından kabul edilen, sözü dinlenen ve herkes tarafından itibar gören Catherine'e boyun eğmemeyi seçen, aksine, roman boyunca çalışıp kendi kendine yeten bir birey olma hayali kuran Hester, ironik bir şekilde, romandaki ekonomik özgürlüğe sahip tek kadın karakter olan Catherine tarafından engellenir. Roman boyunca birbirine çok uzak duran ve iktidar mücadelesi veren Catherine ve Hester romanın sonuna doğru birbirlerine yakınlaşmış olsa da Hester'ın romanın sonundaki hali, ilk sayfalarda okura

tanıtıldığı gibi iddialı, kendine güvenli, kamusal alanda kendine yer ve itibar edinmeye çalışan bir kadın görünümünden oldukça uzaktır. Catherine Hester’in çalışmasını engellediği gibi, ona evlenmesini salık verir. Romanın sonunda Hester’in kendi hayatını nasıl şekillendireceği belirsizliğini korumaktadır. Fakat gene de, anlatıcının romanın son cümlesinde Hester’in evlenmek için iki talibi olduğunu hatırlattığını söylemekte fayda var.

Her iki roman türünden seçilen metinlerin analizleri göstermiştir ki feminist akımlar ve imalar romanlarda çeşitlilik ve farklılık gösterebilir. Aynı şekilde, aykırı içeriklerin anti-feminist ele alınış biçimleri ve disiplin edici etkiler de feminist aykırılıkların derecesi oranında kuvvetlenir ve daha keskin bir hal alır. Çünkü, daha önce de söylendiği gibi, her iki roman türü de kadın merkezlidir; daha çok kadınlar tarafından yazılmış, kadınların deneyimlerine odaklanmış ve kadın okurlara daha çok hitap etmiştir. Dolayısıyla, roman okumanın kadın okurlar üzerindeki etkileri de düşünüldüğünde, bu romanların aykırı içeriklerinin toplumsal düzene karşı bir tehdit oluşturduğunun düşünülmesi anlaşılabilir bir durumdur. Belki de bu sebepten kadın yazarlar romanlardaki aykırılıkları kontrol ve disiplin etme yoluyla dönemin basın yayın dünyası içinde adlarını duyurabilme, kitaplarının basılabilmesini garantileme ve unutulmama adına bir denge kurmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu denge kurulurken kadın karakterlerin aykırılıklarının ‘düzeltilmesi’ gerekmektedir ve bu nedenle bu metinler feminist eğilimlerin ataerkil ve anti-feminist bakış açısı ile karşılaştığı ve çekiştiği alanlara dönüşmüştür.

Farklı türlerden romanların tartışılmasının başlıca sebebi romanlardaki feminist aykırılıklar oranında anti-feminist ve disiplin edici iktidar ilişkilerinin roman kişileri arasındaki hakimiyetinin de arttığını göstermektir. Çalışılan her iki roman türünde de kadınlara dair aykırılıklar (yani aykırı hisler, davranışlar, tutumlar, arzu ve hevesler) farklı şekillerde cezalandırılır, ya da, daha yumuşak bir ifade kullanmak gerekirse, dönemin değerlerine aykırı eğilimlerin önlerinin kesildiği söylenebilir. Sansasyonel romanlarda kadın karakterler işledikleri suçlar nedeniyle delilikle itham edilme, akıl hastanesine kapatılma ve nihayetinde ölüm



ile cezalandırılma gibi daha sert yollarla cezalandırılırken, domestik romanlarda kadın karakterin kontrol edilmesi daha çok özel alana kapatılma ve kamusal alandaki faaliyetlerinin, görünürlüklerinin kısıtlanması ve evliliğe mahkûm edilmeleri yoluyla olur. Gerek sansasyonel gerekse domestik romanlar kurgusal betimlemeler ve edebiyat eleştirisi yolu ile doğru normları, değerleri, duygu ve davranış modellerini üretme ve yaymaya destek olur. Roman analizleri göstermiştir ki her şekilde iki roman türü de hem feminist hem anti-feminist öğeleri içererek bir duygu karmaşası yaratır.

Sansasyonel ve domestik romanları bir arada tartışmak, ayrıca, Viktorya dönemi edebiyatında edebi türler ve yazarlar arasındaki hiyerarşik ilişkiyi göstermek açısından da önemlidir. Bu bağlamda Margaret Oliphant’a odaklanılan bölümde yazarın *Hester* başlıklı romanının yanı sıra kadın meselesine dair yazdığı çeşitli makaleler ve sansasyonel roman eleştirisi yaptığı iki makalesi de incelenir. Burada amaç yazarın edebi eserlerinde daha özgürlükçü kadın imgeleri yarattığı halde kurgusal olmayan metinlerde kadın sorununa dair daha temkinli bir tavır takındığını göstermektir. Margaret Oliphant kimi çalışmalarda Viktorya döneminde feminist harekete karşı kadınlar arasında gösterilir. Bunun başlıca sebebi yazarın kadınların oy hakkı kazanmalarına bir makalesinde açıkça karşı çıkmasıdır. Oliphant daha sonra bu tavrını yumuşatmış olsa da daha çok bu karşı çıkışı ile hatırlanır. Sansasyonel roman eleştirilerinde ise Margaret Oliphant açıkça Ellen Wood ile Mary Elizabeth Braddon’a sert eleştirilerde bulunur. Bunun başlıca sebebi bu romanlarda kadın imgesinin ahlak dışı ve Margaret Oliphant’a göre ayrıca ‘gerçek dışı’ şekillerde temsil ediliyor olmasıdır. Oliphant bu tip romanlar yazdıkları için kadın yazarların ve bu romanları hevesle okuyan kadınların utanmaları gerektiğini söyleyecek kadar ileri gider (“Novels” n.p). Bu çalışmada bu eleştiriler açıkça, kadın yazarların birbirleri hakkında yazdıkları yolu ile birbirlerini disiplin etme çabaları olarak yorumlanır.

Bu tez farklı roman türlerinde yazan ve zamanlarının en çok satan romancıları olan Ellen Wood, Mary Elizabeth Braddon ve Margaret Oliphant’ı birlikte ve karşılaştırmalı olarak çalışarak Viktorya dönemi edebiyat

arařtırmalarına bir katkıda bulunmuřtur. Yařadıkları d nemlerde olduk a  retken olan her    romancıdan detaylı okuma i in se ilen eserler ile Margaret Oliphant'ın gerek kadın hareketine dair yazdıđı makaleler gerekse sansasyonel roman yazan kadın yazarlara y nelik eleřtirilerinin incelenmesi g stermiřtir ki (1) Viktorya d nemi kadın yazını tek y nl  deđildir, kolayca sınıflandırılmaz, d nemin sosyal olaylarına ve yeniliklerine y nelik takınılan tavırda  eliřkiler ve duygu karmařası g ze  arpar (2) kadın yazarların hakim olduđu, daha  ok kadın okurlara y nelik yazılan ve kadın karakterlerin merkezde olduđu bu metinlerde disiplin edici iktidar iliřkileri anlatı i indeki aykırılıkları cezalandırma y ntemleri ile kadın karakterleri, bu  yk leri bir ibret  yk s  gibi yansıtarak okuma deneyimi yolu ile kadın okurları ve son olarak da edebiyat eleřtirisi yolu ile de kadın yazarları kontrol etmeye, řekillendirmeye  alıřır ve onları d nemin hakim ataerkil normlarına ayak uydurmaya zorlar. Bir bařka deyiřle, Viktorya d neminde kadın yazarlar d nemin roman yayınlama esasları d ř n ld đ nde ve ayrıca okurların da beklentilerini karřılamak adına disiplin edici s ylemler i inde roman  retmek durumunda kalmıřlardır. Bu nedenle romanlarda feminist bilincin de bir iřareti olarak zaman zaman feminist temalar, temsiller ve s ylemler g ze  arpıyor olsa da bu romanlar d nemin deđerleri d ř n ld đ nde cinsiyet i ve ataerkil s ylemlerin  retilmesine ve dolařıma girmesine de hizmet vermiřlerdir. Fakat, gene de, bu metinler gerek  zel gerekse kamusal alanda yařanabilecek  eřitli kadın deneyimlerini ve aykırılıkları resmederek kadın okurlarda alternatif yařam tarzlarına dair bir farkındalık uyandırmıř ve  ođu kadının i ine dođduđu ve yařamak zorunda bırakıldıđı ataerkil cendereden kurtulabilmeleri i in bir umut da vermiřtir. Bu romanların Viktorya d nemi boyunca en  ok satan romanlar i inde olması bu řekilde de a ıklanabilir.

Bu  alıřmanın kadın merkezli oluřu,  zellikle feminist arařtırmalar d ř n ld đ nde, kadınların bastırılma, susturulma ve ikincil konuma itilmesinin sadece ataerkil yapılar i indeki erkek egemenliđinden kaynaklanmadıđını, kadınların da hemcinslerinin kontrol edilmesi ve dezavantajlı konumlara itilmesinde etkin olduklarını g sterir. Kadın romancılar tarafından yaratılan kadın

karakterler arasındaki duygusal etkileşimlerde negatif duyguların ve deneyimlerin ön plana çıkarılması ve kadın yazarların da benzer nahoş duygu ve deneyimleri kendi meslektaşları ile yaşamış olmaları da bu görüşü destekler. Bunu daha iyi anlamak için iktidar mücadelelerinin insanların gündelik etkileşimleri içine sindiğini, onların ataerkil yapılarca onaylanan hal, hareket, duygu, görüş ve zevklere sahip olmasına yardımcı olduğunu ile süren Foucault'nun iktidar anlayışına bakmak faydalı olur. Bu çalışma gibi kadın merkezli çalışmalar kadınların da disiplin edici güç ilişkilerinde ataerkil yapıların talep ettiği şekillerde yer aldığını ve bu yolla da ataerkil yapıları ve yaşam tarzlarını beslediğini ve güçlendirdiğini gösterir.

Bu çalışmada çalışılan romanlar 1980'lerin Anglo-Amerikan feminist edebiyat akımının bir projesi olarak yeniden basılmış ve özellikle Amerika'da yüksek öğrenim kurumlarında okutulmaya başlanmıştır. Bu, Anglo-Amerikan feminist akımın kadın yazınına en önemli katkılarından biri olarak kabul edilebilir. Fakat, Türkiye'deki Viktorya dönemi çalışmalarının üniversitelerin gerek lisans gerekse lisansüstü programlarında okuma listelerine alınan bir avuç klasik metinden öteye gitmediğini ileri sürmek yanlış olmaz. 2000 yılında basılmış olan *Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl İngiliz Kadın Yazarları: Bir Kaynak Kitap) dönem içinde etkin bir şekilde yazmış olan doksan üç kadın yazara dair kısa biyografik bilgileri bir araya getiren temel kitaplardan biri olarak görülebilir. Kitapta adı geçen yazarlarının çoğu günümüzde tanınmamakta ve çeşitli türlerde yazdıkları edebi metinlerin baskısı bulunmamaktadır. Virago, Pandora, The Feminist Press, The Women's Press gibi feminist yayınevleri unutulmuş, ihmal edilmiş kadın eserlerinin basımına, tanıtılmasına ve yaygınlaştırılmasına oldukça büyük katkıda bulunmuş olsa da kadınlar tarafından yazılmış çeşitli edebiyat türlerinde bir çok eser hala gün ışığına kavuşmuş değildir. Viktorya dönemi edebiyatı klasik eserlerinin günümüzde hala ihmal edilmiş yazarlar tarafından yazılmış metinleri de dahil edecek şekilde genişleyip genişlemeyeceğini bugünden ön görmek zordur. Hem Viktorya dönemi üzerine yapılan çalışmaların hem de

feminist arařtırmaların ihmal edilmiř kadın eserleri üzerine arařtırmaları teřvik etmesi gemiř zamanların kadın eserlerinin eřitlilięinin gn yzne ıkması aısından ok nemlidir.

**APPENDIX C**  
**TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU**

**ENSTİTÜ**

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enformatik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>

**YAZARIN**

Soyadı : Coşar Çelik  
Adı : Seda  
Bölümü : İngiliz Edebiyatı

**TEZİN ADI** (İngilizce) : AMBIVALENCE IN VICTORIAN WOMEN'S  
WRITING: ELLEN WOOD'S *EAST LYNNE*, MARY  
ELIZABETH BRADDON'S *LADY AUDLEY'S*  
*SECRET*, MARGARET OLIPHANT'S *HESTER*

**TEZİN TÜRÜ** : Yüksek Lisans ☐ Doktora ☒

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir. ☐
2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir. ☒
3. Tezimden bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz. ☒

**TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ:**