

Clotilde Graves:
Journalist, Dramatist and Novelist.
Writing to Survive in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century.

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Abstract

Katherine Newey, in her study of nineteenth century female playwrights, has written of those, 'who routinely worked for money, in theatres where the takings were as important as aesthetic achievement or legitimacy'. While Joanne Shattock, in a study of women authors, acknowledges that earnings were the key to a woman's professionalism.

With her short hair, masculine style of dress and her penchant for cigarettes, Clotilde Graves (1863-1932) epitomised the vigorous New Woman of the fin de siècle. Drawing on previously unused material from Graves's case file, held in the Royal Literary Fund Archive, this thesis charts her progress as a writer to explore both the motivational force of economics on her literary career, and its impact on her various discourses as a journalist, playwright and novelist.

The study, divided into three sections, explores a number of key themes including: sexual abuse, marriage, the fallen woman, and the maternal ideal, to assess Graves's development as both a writer and an advocate of social purity feminism. The thesis exposes the precarious nature of the writer's profession, especially for a woman, and reveals the demands on Graves to balance personal beliefs against the immediate need to earn a living. Though she died penniless her extensive output included innumerable articles, twenty plays, nine compilations of short stories, and fifteen novels.

The thesis appraises Graves's adoption of male aliases and her employment of autobiographical material, which is contextualised against the production of her most popular novel, *The Dop Doctor*. This work shows that compromise was often a prerequisite and confirms that commerciality did not necessarily translate into financial achievement, nor did it provide economic security. This recovery of a forgotten female writer, of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, contributes to the growing body of work in this field.

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Abbreviations

BN:	The Bond of Ninon
CU:	Columbia University
DD:	The Dop Doctor
DT:	Dragon's Teeth
DMN:	Dr and Mrs. Neill
HRHRC:	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, Austin, Texas
KK:	Katherine Kavanagh
LCP:	Lord Chamberlain's Collection of Plays, at the British Library
MP:	Meynell Papers
SFL:	Shakespeare Folger Library, Washington
TT:	A Tenement Tragedy
URL:	University of Rochester Library, New York

Clotilde Graves:
Writing to Survive in the Late Nineteenth
and Early Twentieth Century

Introduction

‘The terms we should be prepared to offer you for the volume rights of this novel – did we offer any at all – would not be large,’ said William Heinemann. ‘Put it they would be small,’ boomed the big blonde Pawling. ‘How small?’ I asked, and was told, and nobody had exaggerated.

Clotilde Graves, 1908.¹

Joanne Shattock notes, in a study of women’s contributions to nineteenth century literary culture, that ‘earnings were important to women authors, not least’, she adds, ‘because they were the key to becoming professional, and few women remained long as innocents in the commercial world.’² Furthermore, she identifies their readiness to extend into other areas and write across a range of genres, in order to maximise their earning capacity.³ The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to chart the progress of one woman’s traverse of the literary path, to consider the extent to which, as Shattock attests, economics was a motivational force, and its impact, if any, on her various discourses as a journalist, playwright and novelist during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

¹ Frederic Whyte, *William Heinemann: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), p. 236.

² Joanne Shattock, ed. *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*

The writer under discussion, Clotilde Inez Mary Graves, was born at Buttevant Barracks, County Cork, Ireland, in 1863. The third daughter of an army Major, Graves penned her first piece while still a teenager and continued writing, unabated, for almost half a century until literally just a few weeks prior to her death, in 1932.⁴ Her career was long and arduous, and the importance of her ‘earnings’ cannot be overstated. Graves spent the last twenty years of her life as an invalid, residing as a paying guest, at a convent in Hertfordshire.⁵ Despite working assiduously for almost fifty years—her oeuvre includes: an incalculable number of articles; twenty plays; nine compilations of short stories; and fifteen novels, including a bestselling novel in 1910—she died penniless and is now virtually forgotten.

This study has been broken down into three sections, to chart the course of Graves’s work as a journalist, playwright and novelist. However, although they are arranged sequentially, to correspond to the order in which Graves negotiated her literary course, these were not discrete careers. The first section, comprised of two chapters, explores her journalism; though she contributed to a number of popular newspapers and periodicals well into the early twentieth century, this segment focuses, in the main, on the items published during the 1880s. Similarly, her dramatic writing spanned three decades, however, the four chapters in section two relate to specific plays from the 1890s and the early Edwardian period. The final section, made up of three chapters, considers her work as a novelist, concentrating specifically on her most successful book, *The Dop Doctor*.⁶ Written under the pseudonym of Richard Dehan, Graves’s novel is a romantic saga set in South Africa with the Boer War as

⁴ RLF: 2692/122.

⁵ The Convent of the Immaculate Conception, Oxhey Heath, Bushey, Herts.

⁶ Richard Dehan, *The Dop Doctor* (London: William Heinemann, 1910).

its main backdrop. It is a densely populated narrative which embraces a wide assortment of characters and subplots and, according to Graves, echoes her own, ‘thoughts, reflections, experiences and griefs of a lifetime.’⁷

Primary Sources

Graves’s published work;⁸ the manuscript copies of her plays;⁹ criticism published in Great Britain and the United States of America; correspondence from a number of archives and the firsthand accounts of many of Graves’s contemporaries provide the primary, and original, source material for this research.¹⁰ An invaluable seam of information mined in the course of this study is the Royal Literary Fund archive, currently lodged with the British Library. Between 1790 and 1918 almost three thousand people applied to the Fund for assistance, and Graves’s case file, number 2692,¹¹ comprises one hundred and thirty items covering two periods: 23rd January 1905 to 23rd June 1911 and 20th September 1929 to December 5th 1932.¹² It houses applications and income details; photographs; letters from administrators of the Royal Bounty Fund at Downing Street; correspondence from well-known figures of the day offering testimonials to Graves’s good character, and a large number of Graves’s private letters to Secretary of the Fund, Hugh John Cole Marshall. Though the dossier, as a whole, offers a valuable insight into Graves’s professional life, the

⁷ Whyte, p.237.

⁸ See bibliography for full list.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Between 1890 and 1918 twenty-two percent of these applicants were women. Anon, *Royal Literary Fund Handbook* (London: British Library), p. 22.

¹² British Library, RLF/2692. Microfilm at the British Library holds copies of sources until 1918. Access to records post 1918 are restricted, for purposes of confidentiality. Special permission was granted by the Royal Literary Fund for access to the period after 1918.

specific correspondence which appertains to Graves's personal background is of inestimable worth, and has furnished this study with a wealth of unique detail.

Additional source material has been garnered from: the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin, who hold the largest repository of Graves's books and manuscripts; the University of Rochester, Washington, for copies of Graves's letters to editor and theatre critic Clement Scott;¹³ and the Shakespeare Folger Institute, New York, who are custodians for her correspondence with theatre impresario Augustin Daly.¹⁴ In addition, the extensive collection of nineteenth and early twentieth century correspondence and miscellaneous papers held in the Meynell family's private collection has provided helpful supplementary background information.¹⁵ Although I have drawn on a wide range of scholarly research, space allows for reference to only a small selection in this introduction; full details are given throughout the thesis and in the bibliography.¹⁶

Section One: The Journalist

This section draws on George Gissing's fictional account of life in *New Grub Street* (1891), together with George Bainton's collected reminiscences of other Victorian writers,¹⁷ to tease out an accurate record of life as a female 'hack' during the late nineteenth century, in London's Fleet Street. Nigel Cross's comprehensive work on

¹³ URL, S3425. Fifteen letters: 1891 to 1896.

¹⁴ SFL, YC. 4345. Twenty two letters: October 1891 to August 1896.

¹⁵ Alice and Wilfred Meynell papers, Meynell Family Private Archive, Greatham.

¹⁶ Bibliography.

¹⁷ George Bainton, ed., *The Art of Authorship – Literary Reminiscences, Methods of Work and Advice to Young Beginners: Personally contributed by Leading Authors of the Day* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1890).

the Royal Literary Fund archive¹⁸ complements the study and substantiates claims made regarding both the pecuniary hardships endured by many employed in the newspaper trade, as well as the profession's resistance to female writers.

Chapter one provides the background to Graves's incursion into the male dominated world of the press—the 'Bastille of Journalism',¹⁹ as her fellow journalist Ella Hepworth Dixon²⁰ perceived it—and outlines Graves's efforts to operate profitably within that domain. This thesis also acknowledges the recent scholarship of Beth Palmer, with regard to, 'the anxiety and hostility felt by a predominantly male publishing industry towards what seemed to be a rapidly expanding group of women writers';²¹ similarly, Anne Varty observes that whereas women had broken through into the world of journalism, they nonetheless remained constrained by the gender based distinctions of Victorian society.²² She also stresses the influence of the embryonic 'New Journalism' of the period, a genre which she categorises as that designed exclusively for a female market: 'for soliciting and airing women's views [...] shaped largely by women's interests and often written by women'.²³

Chapter two builds on this foundational chapter, mapping Graves's development as a writer and identifying the key emergent themes which recur, at intervals, in her later discourse in other genres. These relate to women's issues and, in particular, the

¹⁸ Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁹ Ella Hepworth Dixon, 'The Modern way: A Social Causerie', *Westminster Gazette*, 14 January 1925.

²⁰ Ella Hepworth Dixon (1855-1932).

²¹ Beth Palmer, *Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2.

²² Anne Varty, ed., 'Introduction', *Eve's Century: A Sourcebook of Writings on Women and Journalism 1895-1918* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

modes of regulation affecting Victorian women as expressed through sexuality, marriage and motherhood.

Section Two: The Playwright

By her own account Graves's work as a playwright was founded on her failure as an actress in the provinces, and initiated by her desperate need to earn a living.²⁴ Her accomplishments as a journalist secured her a number of commissions, in the late 1880s, including a collaborative adaptation of H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1885)²⁵ and a Drury Lane pantomime, *Puss in Boots*,²⁶ which helped to establish Graves as a talented playwright 'with much potential'.²⁷ Her dramatic output during the 1890s continued to be demonstrably more progressive than her early literary fiction—reflecting her developing feminist ideas—and she explored a number of contentious themes: adultery; female sexuality and sexual exploitation; female suffrage; and the 'fallen' woman. With her short hair, masculine style of dress and her penchant for cigarettes, bicycling and angling, she epitomised the vigorous New Woman of the fin de siècle.²⁸ Though others plays are referenced in this section a close reading of four pieces is undertaken, to plot Graves's maturity as a dramatist and her engagement with a number of the aforementioned women's issues, they are: *Katherine Kavanagh* (1891); *Dr. and Mrs Neill* (1894); *The Bond of Ninon* (1906) and *A Tenement Tragedy* (1906).

²⁴ 'A Chat with Clo Graves', *Sketch*, 21 February 1900.

²⁵ LCP, *She* (1888), MS. 53404G.

²⁶ LCP, *Puss in Boots* (1888) MS. 53391Q.

²⁷ Douglas Sladen, *Twenty Years of my Life* (London: Constable & Co., 1915), p. 45.

²⁸ 'Richard Dehan', *New Zealand Evening Post*, 14 January 1933. Accessed at www.natlib.govt.nz

Chapter three appraises *Katherine Kavanagh*, Graves's dramatic adaptation of her earlier sensation novel, *Dragon's Teeth*, in which she claims to challenge the contemporary apotheosis of dramatic femininity and its handling of the 'fallen woman'. An examination of Graves's use of ekphrasis in her narrative approach to the representation of the fallen woman utilises Lynda Nead's *Haunted Gallery*,²⁹ while Nead's earlier work, *Myths of Sexuality*, is a useful secondary resource.³⁰ The chapter considers the dichotomy between the painted image and the female subject, with comparisons to Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861). The identifiable subtheme of maternal redemption, for the fallen woman, is also explored and marks out Graves's growing fascination with the issue of motherhood and the maternal ideal.

Chapter four evaluates Graves's treatment of another fallen woman character, but turns more directly to the issue of marriage and adultery and, in particular, to the response of a Victorian husband to his wife's alleged infidelity. As evidence of her advancing support for social purity feminism, and a prescription for marriage between equals, in *Dr and Mrs Neill* Graves challenges the patriarchal code, together with the sexual double standard, by offering a man who is able to forgive his wife's indiscretions. Tangential to this discussion, the chapter highlights the many characterisations of the doctor-character in Graves's other fictions, alongside Tabitha Sparks's recent study of the same model in the Victorian novel.³¹

²⁹ Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁰ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988).

³¹ Tabitha Sparks, *The Doctor in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009).

Kate Newey's comprehensive assessment of Victorian women's theatre writing lists seventeen plays penned by Graves, between 1886 and 1909,³² and labels her as an 'extraordinarily successful playwright.'³³ Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell make a similar claim, marking Graves out as one of 'the most commercially successful woman playwrights of the age'.³⁴ Though she was nominally successful during the 1890s—Graves was the first woman to have two comedies staged simultaneously in London theatres³⁵—chapter five argues that commerciality did not necessarily translate into financial achievement for the playwright, nor did it provide economic security. Indeed, Graves herself, when asked how many of her plays were successes, admitted: 'four very much so. The others – were – bad eggs (we had not the useful word in 1908, or I should have said “duds”).'³⁶

The discussion in this chapter draws extensively on Graves's first application to the Royal Literary Fund and is juxtaposed with the staging of her play, *The Bond of Ninon*; an historical piece, it marked the debut of the actress-manager Lena Ashwell, but achieved no lasting acclaim. Intended as a light comedy, it borrowed heavily from the Alexander Dumas *fil's* tragic tale of *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), and proved to be a costly enterprise. Graves had earlier found a valuable niche in the comic genre, and this chapter evaluates the extent to which, at times, in order to secure a commission, financial considerations forced Graves to compromise both her

³² Katherine Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 210-211, should read twenty Newey's list omits *The Mistress of the Robes* (1906), *A Tenement Tragedy*, (1906) and *The Other Side* (1909).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁴ Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell, 'Reimagining the Theatre: Women Playwrights', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 237-256 (p. 238).

³⁵ 'A Mother of Three', *Era*, 27 May 1896.

³⁶ Whyte, p. 236. Though Graves does not specify which they are, in terms of critical acclaim, they might be identified as: *Katherine Kavanagh* (1891) *Dr. and Mrs. Neill* (1893), *A Mother of Three* (1896), *A Matchmaker* (1896).

feminist principles, and her artistic expression. Michael Booth's reading of the intermingling of 'potentially tragic and pathetic material ... and overlapping of design from a range of genre' during this period, informs this part of the debate,³⁷ while Margaret Leask's fresh appraisal of the career of Lena Ashwell supplies the appropriate milieu.³⁸

The final chapter in this section examines a piece which is, arguably, the most naturalistic of Graves's plays. Moving away from her usual setting of the middle-class drawing room, *A Tenement Tragedy* offers a working-class domestic drama that Graves anticipated would 'create a sensation'.³⁹ The play maps out an episode of sexual abuse perpetrated on a young girl, and its effects are pursued in this chapter alongside an assessment of the legislation surrounding child protection, and the regulation of sexual offences during the late nineteenth century. The analysis also considers the standard portrayal of the Victorian mother figure, alongside Graves's various definitions of the maternal type, particularly in relation to the abused child; a contrast is generated between the 'ideal' mother and those categorised by Marina Warner as 'figures of female evil [...] monsters in female shape',⁴⁰ who fail to protect the abused child. Louise Jackson's research, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England*,⁴¹ underpins the discussion surrounding both of these themes, and is also carried forward into the assessment of Graves's later work as a novelist.

³⁷ Michael R. Booth, 'Comedy and Farce', in Powell (2004), pp. 129-144 (p. 129).

³⁸ Margaret Leask, *Lena Ashwell: Actress, Patriot, Pioneer* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2012), p. 3.

³⁹ CU, 18 July 1906.

⁴⁰ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, 1994 (Vintage: London, 1995), p. 201.

⁴¹ Louise Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Routledge: London, 2000).

Section Three: The Novelist

In 1910, as Richard Dehan, Graves published her best-selling novel *The Dop Doctor*. An Imperialist text which captured the public imagination and outsold most of its competitors, the book is especially significant because it marks the point at which Graves ceased to write as Clotilde Graves and, by her own admission, was based upon the personal reflections built up over her lifetime. Its narrative incorporates a number of controversial topics, with abortion and sexual abuse being the most contentious, while its key theme, driven by Graves's social purity orthodoxy, is that of motherhood.

The introductory chapter to this section draws on John St. John's study ⁴² of the publishing company William Heinemann, and on William B. Todd's review of *The Dop Doctor*'s sales and distribution data, collated by the Harry Ransom Research Centre.⁴³ The chapter outlines the novel's phenomenal commercial success, marked by a later production of a cinematic version of the story.⁴⁴ A synopsis of the book's main narrative also forms part of this preliminary section, as a prelude to the thematic reading which follows in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter eight frames Graves's apotheosis of the maternal ideal and assesses her response to the joint themes of motherhood and maternity; it is a complex and, at times, contradictory portrait. While, on the one hand, her rendering of the ideal

⁴² John St. John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990).

⁴³ Professor William B. Todd, 'Dehan's Dop Doctor: A Forgotten Bestseller', *The Library Chronicle of Texas*, 7, no.3 (1963), 17-26 (p. 17).

⁴⁴ British Film Institute, 'The Terrier and the Child', Samuelson, 1915.

appears to conform, in part, to what were perceived to be women's expected marital and maternal roles, on the other, Graves challenges the existing framework to argue for single motherhood as a workable alternative.⁴⁵ The chapter exposes Graves's views on contraception and abortion, and considers the fine balance between her religious convictions and feminist stance.

Graves's 'masking' as a writer, in the form of her various pseudonyms, is scrutinised in the final chapter, and seeks an explanation for the adoption of her final alias, Richard Dehan. The debate centres on a premise suggested by a contemporary of Graves's, the writer Grant Overton, who argues for a 'psychic explanation' to account for the guise of Richard Dehan;⁴⁶ evidence suggests, however, that other factors were also at play. The chapter, therefore, considers both the economic rationale for Graves's action, and the extent to which her decision was directed by the semi-autobiographical nature of her text and its somewhat sensitive subject matter. The discussion draws on Joanne Shattock's observations, with regard to the 'ambivalence' of women writers towards autobiographical types of writing,⁴⁷ together with Catherine A. Judd's useful dissection of publication trends connected to the Victorian woman writer.⁴⁸

Drawn together into a thesis, these three sections seek to contribute to our understanding of women's writing during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods;

⁴⁵ Shuttleworth, p. 41.

⁴⁶ Grant Overton, 'Alias Richard Dehan' in *When Winter Comes to Main Street* (New York: George H Doran & Co., 1922), p. 197.

⁴⁷ Joanne Shattock, 'Victorian Women as Writers and Readers of (Auto)biography', in *Mortal Pages, Literary Lives: Studies in Nineteenth Century Autobiography*, ed. by Vincent Newey and Philip Shaw (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 140-152 (p. 141).

⁴⁸ Catherine A. Judd, 'Male Pseudonyms and Female Authority', in *Literature in the Market Place: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices* ed. by John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 250.

they connect previously unused historical material and correspondence, existing scholarly research, and the account of one woman's foray into the various professional worlds of the Victorian press, theatre, and literature. It acknowledges too, that to classify women as an homogenous group—even those grouped as 'New Women'—fails to recognise the many complications, and overlaps of definition, associated with feminism at this time. It is a study which exposes the precarious nature of the writer's profession, especially for a woman, and the demands of balancing personal beliefs against the immediate need to earn a living, through literary endeavour, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Section One: A Journalist

Chapter One

The Female Hack

Clotilde Graves is an exceedingly clever young lady, an enthusiastic journalist, and “quite one of us” in the matter of cigarettes, cut of the hair and of the coat, and in the adjustment and shape of the collar. I remember once correcting proofs in the same office at the top of a big building off Fleet Street. She struck me then as being one of the type who will presently invade the realm of journalism in driving us out of our editorial rooms into the cold and bitter out-side world.

‘Flashes from the Footlights’
The Licensed Victualler’s Mirror, 29 April 1890

This unsigned description of Clotilde Graves, although acknowledging her intellectual capacity and a flair for writing, echoes an accepted fin de siècle view that, despite feminist inroads, journalism remained a predominately male domain. In being ‘quite one of us’, Graves had, it seemed, in the matter of vestments and hairstyling, ostensibly abandoned her biological sex and assumed male signifiers in order to participate within that sphere. However, whether this was, as the writer suggests, a compromise she adopted in order to succeed in a man’s world, or evidence of a genuine inclination to cross-dress, was, at this stage, unclear. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, the author of the piece has used her name in its unabbreviated state. Graves was in fact more commonly known, at this time, by the

contracted form of Clo,¹ being advised at the start of her journalistic career that this would be a wise strategy to employ as ‘editors did not think that women could write in the press in those days’.² Barbara Onslow, in her study of the difficulties faced throughout the nineteenth century by aspiring female journalists—the ‘Jill of all Trades’³—as she refers to them, cites Pearl Craigie writing as ‘John Oliver Hobbes’, and Marian Evans as ‘George Eliot’, as evidence that, ‘assuming a male persona was, at times, a useful subterfuge many women chose to employ; not least for the practical advantages it offered in providing women ‘with a “male voice” in business transactions’.⁴ This was, of course, an especially useful approach when submitting articles by post rather than calling to see editors in person and was a method similarly exploited by other female authors. Naturally, some women took this tactic further, including Clotilde Graves who, Onslow reports: ‘even wore men’s clothes’.⁵

Although the author of the introductory quotation concedes to the inevitability of being overrun by women journalists—‘the type’, as he brands them—his tone is, however, marked by an unmistakeable level of respect, seemingly shared by others within the profession: Edmund Yates⁶ professed that he thought Graves’s ‘stories ideal for [his] man-of-the-world *World*’,⁷ while Leonard Raven-Hill⁸ described her as

¹ Though not an explicitly male name, Clo. could be a contracted form of the uncommon, male name ‘Clovis’, or a misreading of the abbreviated military title, Colonel. i.e. Col. Its potential for ambiguity perhaps made it preferable to the unambiguous ‘Clotilde’.

² Clotilde Graves to Augustin Daly, SFI, YC4345 (14) Library. ‘I was obliged to sign a name which might possibly be masculine.’

³ Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), p. 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Edmund Yates (1831–1894) journalist and novelist. ODNB.

⁷ ‘Richard Dehan’, *New Zealand Evening Post*, 14 January 1933. Accessed at www.natlib.govt.nz

⁸ Quoted in, G. Krishnamurti, ed., *Women Writers of the 1890s*, (London: Henry Sotheman, 1991). Raven-Hill reported: ‘she had to do a man’s job in a man’s way, and in those days there were no ‘sob sisters,’ lingerie chatterers, and the shrieking sisterhood hadn’t started then’.

the first female journalist. Nonetheless, this unknown scribe did not foresee how gruelling Graves's climb up the journalistic ladder would be. While he might express concern over what he saw as a feminine invasion, which would result in his own expulsion into 'the cold and bitter out-side world', the evidence shows that Graves was to face a lifetime's battle against a similarly hostile environment. Although one might reasonably speculate that Graves's initial desire to write was fired by an instinctive urge, there is substantial proof that, throughout a long career, economic concerns constantly fuelled her authorship; the editor Sidney Low⁹ conceded that:

There was a literary quality about her articles which is too rare among writers for the press; and I always felt that if Miss Graves had been able to release herself from the stress of constant journalism, she would have produced imaginative work of exceptional merit. This impression has been confirmed by many of her short stories and essays, which I have read in magazines and weekly journals. Hastily as I suppose these were composed, they seldom lacked a distinction in style and some grace of fancy. I was particularly struck by her 'Lovers Battle' a rhymed comedy, based on Pope's 'Rape of the Lock',¹⁰ written in excellent verse, and exhibiting a marvellous knowledge of the literature and social life of the period. It was an interesting composition which, for some reason, attracted less attention than it deserved.¹¹

A close reading of Graves's oeuvre certainly confirms Low's premise that whereas

⁹ Sidney Low (1857–1932). Journalist, historian, and essayist, began as a writer on *The St. James's Gazette* in 1883. ODNB.

¹⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (first published 1712).

¹¹ RLF: 2692/9.

her newspaper and magazine contributions were often penned hurriedly, to meet editorial deadlines, her parody of Alexander Pope's 'high burlesque'¹² is arguably, as he attests, of a superior quality.

In his valuable account of life in 'Nineteenth-Century Grub Street', Nigel Cross contends that the two major obstacles to a Victorian woman's literary career were 'a lack of education and a lack of motivation', with the latter, he suggests, being 'attributable to meek acceptance of paternal authority'.¹³ Cross might also have added a further barrier to his list of alleged impediments, that of the opposition women faced from some of their male colleagues and editors, amid accusations of the inferiority of their output; this was in addition to the criticism also levelled by members of their own sex, who accepted the doctrine that women could only write for women about 'women's things'.

Returning to Cross's second point, it is obvious that the death of Major William Henry Graves, in 1882, countered any supposed patriarchal influence that may have already hindered Graves's authorial ambitions. It is more likely that his death served simply to aggravate her existing financial obligation to write, in order to support not only herself, but also her family.¹⁴ Graves had started writing for monetary gain five years before his demise; she later confirmed, in her first application for assistance to the Secretary of the Royal Literary Fund, Arthur Llewelyn Roberts, that: 'father's means were scanty and, as a very young woman, I settled in London to make my

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cross, p. 166.

¹⁴ At the time of her father's death, Graves was nineteen with three siblings, two unmarried.

living and assist my parents.’¹⁵ Her reminiscences echo, closely, those of the fictional journalist Mary Erle¹⁶ (Ella Hepworth Dixon’s own alter ego whom the author depicts labouring into the early hours), and Graves describes her own poor lodgings where she would sit and work until:

I put out my lamp at 3 am when the dingy cocks of Coram Street were crowing in their back yard coops and then try [sic] and sleep if the students in the adjoining rooms were quiet enough, and be down in Fleet Street by 10.30 am to pick up any job that might be going! That is how I got on the St. James’ Gazette.¹⁷

Certainly Graves’s bereavement, and the subsequent need to earn a living, was a commonplace event at that time; George Bainton identifies that the same misfortune had befallen many other female authors. Mrs. Henrietta Stannard, writing as ‘John Strange Winter’, had been in a similar position at the age of twenty-one—although she admitted that from a very young age she had always had ‘an immense ambition to be a writer’¹⁸—while the already motherless author Ella Hepworth Dixon lost her remaining parent at a similar age; an incident which acted as the catalyst for her subsequent career as a journalist and author of fiction. Like the fictional Mary Erle, Graves tried her hand as an artist, but whereas Mary toiled, unsuccessfully, at the Central London School of Art,¹⁹ Graves reports having taken up her paint brush at The Royal Female School of Art.²⁰ Similarly, Hepworth Dixon’s later descriptions of the depressing grind of churning out news copy and her despair at traipsing the

¹⁵ RLF: 2692/2.

¹⁶ Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman*, ed. by Steve Farmer, 1894 (Plymouth: Broadview Press, 2004).

¹⁷ RLF: 2692/45.

¹⁸ Bainton, p. 24.

¹⁹ Hepworth Dixon, pp. 83-88.

²⁰ Specific dates unknown. The Female School of Art at 43, Queen’s Square, Bloomsbury under the headship of Miss Louisa Gann, was amalgamated with the Central School of Art in 1908.

editor's offices in the hope of selling work, resonate with Graves's own testimony of life as a Fleet Street 'hack'. Though one might presume, given their shared occupations as journalists and their membership of various feminist groups and clubs in London during the 1880s and 1890s, that their paths may have crossed, there is no mention of Graves in Hepworth Dixon's memoir.²¹

Graves's situation also mirrors that of George Gissing's fictional heroine, Marian Yules in *New Grub Street*, who, in her desperate attempts to earn enough money from her literary work to support herself and her parents, forages desperately among the shelves of the British Museum Reading Room seeking inspiration and learning.²² Nigel Cross's original suggestion of the Victorian female writer's deficient education is a hypothesis keenly supported by Onslow's findings,²³ and borne out by Graves's own admitted lack of learning. In a revelatory letter, to Hugh John Cole Marshall,²⁴ somewhat curiously written as a third person narrative, she recounts that 'at 12 years of age – awakening to the ugly fact that she [sic] was absolutely ignorant, began to beg or borrow books, and try to teach herself'.²⁵ The correspondence corroborates earlier claims that 'the family had no money to spare for the barest pretence of education', and discloses a debt to a friend of her father's:

in whose quiet study I used to spend my happiest hours, sitting under a table ... and feasting on Shakespeare, Spencer and Ben Jonson, Plutarch and Dryden, Beaumont[sic] & Fletcher and Rollin's Ancient History. There were books on Art, too, in the collection and my bent was

²¹ Ella Hepworth Dixon, *As I Knew Them – Sketches of People I Have Met on the Way* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1930).

²² George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 1891 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 112-113.

²³ Onslow, p. 23.

²⁴ H.J.C. Marshall, a Secretary to the Royal Literary Fund.

²⁵ HRHRC, Letter to H.J.C. Marshall, 18 March 1930.

towards illustrations. In story numbers of the old comic papers 'Judy' and 'Fun' [sic] between 1886 and 1889, there are some examples of my black and white pen work. But one could not live by it and I gave it up for journalism educating myself as I could at the British Museum Reading Room.²⁶

Though Graves was issued with a reader's ticket for the British Museum in 1882, the records which detail her anticipated areas of study, together with the names of the mandatory referees, no longer exist. The opportunity to peruse its extensive shelves afforded Graves a mental lifeline,²⁷ as it did for so many of her fellow journalists; the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in 1883, reported that the two long tables allocated for 'ladies only' in the Great Reading Room, was 'insufficient for the numbers of women wanting to use them and, as a result, women were forced to intrude upon other areas'.²⁸ Similarly, Judith Walkowitz identifies the Reading Room as a prime target for advanced women during the last decades of the nineteenth century, and a veritable 'stomping ground of the "bohemian set"'.²⁹ Who perused the shelves alongside Graves, is unknown, but one can be almost sure that it included a number of eminent feminists; Walkowitz lists both Eleanor Marx and Olive Schreiner as 'readers' at that time.

Bainton's compilation of reminiscences also identifies many more self-confessed female autodidacts including: the writer Maxwell Grey, otherwise known as Miss M

²⁶ Ibid. 'Judge Paul Joy Sterling once Attorney general for the Crown Colony of Hong Kong' who lived 'a door or two above us in the same crescent at Southsea, where many other impecunious ex-army people like ourselves existed'.

²⁷ British Museum Archives: 2 July 1882, A11623/ 2780. Declaration, 'I have read the Directions respecting the Reading Room and I declare that I am not under twenty-one years of age'. Signed Clotilde Inez Augusta Graves. Graves had just turned nineteen.

²⁸ Quoted in Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 69.

²⁹ Ibid.

G Tuttiett; the popular author Marie Correlli who conceded that she was ‘largely self-taught on the classics’;³⁰ and Mrs. C. Riddell³¹ who, like Graves, revealed the enormous advantage of being turned loose while very young into a big library, where ‘[she] grazed without let, or hindrance’ and was delighted to report that ‘if there were any weeds there, they did me no harm’.³²

This dependence on a bibliotheca to both stimulate and nourish her literary output seems to have persisted throughout Graves’s lifetime and in her final years (after amassing her own library of approximately four thousand books) she was unable—indeed unwilling—despite her dire financial situation, to part with them. Letters written by Graves during the late 1920s, even though threatened with imminent expulsion from a residential home (due to debt), reveal her intense anxiety that she would be rendered homeless unless she was able to find accommodation with the necessary space to house her collection. Without her reference books she would, she declared, be ‘unable to write’, they were her ‘tools’ and were therefore invaluable to her;³³ it was not until eighteen months prior to her death that she finally acknowledged: ‘I could always, if the power to work suddenly failed me – sell up my beloved books and go into some nursing home’.³⁴ Her greatest fear was never realised and despite being faced, at aged sixty-six, ‘with poverty and something like destitution’, she entered a Catholic convent as a paying guest, with her collection still intact.³⁵ How, or at what cost, and during what period of time she amassed her

³⁰ Mary Mackay (1855-1924) novelist. Pseudonym, ‘Marie Corelli’. ODNB. Despite her remarks, she enjoyed a four year education at a Parisian convent from the age of eleven.

³¹ Bainton, p. 158. ‘Riddell’s pseudonym was the ambiguous, ‘F. G. Trafford’.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

³³ RLF: 2692/40.

³⁴ RLF: 2692/45.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

‘library’ is unknown and, given her shortage of funds over several decades, it might be presumed that many were gifted, inherited or acquired second hand over a lengthy period. There are no official details regarding the dispersal of her estate after her death—Graves indicated in a letter in March 1930 that her estate, ‘including her unpublished plays and manuscripts’ had been left to The Royal Literary Fund in her Last Will and Testament.³⁶ Sources suggest, however, that the books were sold, with the rest of her possessions, by the nuns; John Dettmer reported having ‘hawked’ one manuscript ‘all round London... for the Convent Nuns, who had inherited it from the author’.³⁷

Like most women writers of the period, Graves’s livelihood was founded on her journalism and she embarked upon her literary career, as a sixteen year old, with a couple of burlesque adaptations;³⁸ these would be the forerunners of a host of contributions she would make, to many of the popular serials and weekly magazines of the late 1870s and early 1880s aimed, primarily, at a female readership. One learns, from her own account, that she ‘set up as a journalist in lodgings in Coram Street, Bloomsbury, with my parents to support and a capital of thirty shillings’,³⁹ while an article in *Theatre* magazine in 1888 cites August 1879,⁴⁰ as the date her literary career began, ‘[...] under the auspices of Mr. Charles H. Ross⁴¹ and the ‘brothers Dalziel’, proprietors of the humorous weekly magazines *Judy* and *Fun*,⁴²

³⁶ RLF: 2692/44. No trace of any Will having been proved at the Probate Office, London.

³⁷ William B. Todd, ‘Dehan’s Dop Doctor: A Forgotten Bestseller’, *The Library Chronicle of Texas*, 7, no.3 (1963), 17-26 (p. 17). Todd reports that ‘Dettmer received £50 from Myers of Bond Street’.

³⁸ RLF: 2692/1. An adaptation of an unidentified Mayne Reade novel together with a burlesque on Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*.

³⁹ RLF: 2692/45.

⁴⁰ *Theatre*, n.d. 1888. Theatre Museum.

⁴¹ Charles Henry Ross (1835-1897) magazine editor and cartoonist and creator of ‘Ally Sloper’, the first continuing comic-strip hero in Britain. ODNB.

⁴² *Judy*, ‘A humorous and satirical journal’, Waterloo Directory, Volume 4, I-M, p. 2686.

for which she eventually became especially renowned with her topical round-up of the week's news, in poetic verse, as their 'Own Hurdy Gurdy Man';⁴³ the interview also confirms that 'dear old Mr. Walter Gibbons of Lady's Pictorial' gave her work.⁴⁴ However, an accurate quantitative measure of her prodigious output of poetry, stories and articles, over the ensuing decade, is almost impossible to establish with, as was common practice for the period, many of the items being published anonymously; the illustrations for 'the comic papers', referred to in the aforementioned letter to Marshall, are also unsigned and therefore, unidentifiable.⁴⁵

Usefully, however, Graves's later application, in 1905, to the Royal Literary Fund verifies that contributions were accepted in these early years by: *Atalanta*; *Fun*; *Gentlewoman*; *Illustrated London News*; *Judy*; *Ladies Pictorial*; *London Magazine*; *Pall Mall Gazette*; *Punch*; *Sporting and Dramatic News*; *St. James' Gazette*; and the *World*.⁴⁶ How many other items she produced for publication, but which were ultimately rejected is unknown. Moreover, during this unrelenting schedule (she was also working as an actress, with her sister Maud, in a provincial theatre company,⁴⁷ in itself a precarious and punishing occupation) she found the time to pen extra stories for *Judy*'s Christmas numbers and a serialised tale, *The Belle of Rock Harbour*, which was subsequently published in novel form in 1887.⁴⁸ On top of this,

⁴³ 'Our Hurdy Gurdy Man', *Judy*, 6 April 1887.

⁴⁴ *Theatre*, 1888.

⁴⁵ S. Bennett, et al., *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research*, ed., J. Don Vann and R. T. VanArsdel (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1978), pp. 124-5. 'Between 1824 and 1900 almost 75% of the articles and stories published in the monthlies and quarterlies were anonymous or pseudonymous'.

⁴⁶ RLF: 2692/1.

⁴⁷ Sarah Thorne's Co., and also with Willie Edouin's 'Babe's Troope'. 'An interview with Clo Graves', *Sketch*, 21 February 1900.

⁴⁸ *The Belle of Rock Harbour* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1887).

she co-wrote a four act farce—*The Skeleton* (1887);⁴⁹ an Egyptian verse-drama entitled *Nitocris* (1887);⁵⁰ a collaborative adaptation of H. Rider Haggard's novel *She* (1887) and an unattributed Drury Lane pantomime, *Puss in Boots* (1888) for the renowned Victorian impresario, Sir Augustus Harris.⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, by the close of the decade, Graves suffered a collapse, ostensibly due to exhaustion as a result of her prolific output. In correspondence, many years later, she furnished Marshall with an extremely bleak account of her breakdown:

... then I had brain-fever, all alone in a room on the top floor of a grimmish [sic] apartment home in Bedford Street, Russell Square, and when the percussion had stopped rolling by my bed, and the drumming and the trumpeting that had accompanied them were silent, I came back, a feeble wreck, to ordinary life again. That might be said to be a de-facto movement repeated many times in my life. A quite roaring success achieved and then a great breakdown in health.⁵²

Nigel Cross's comprehensive account reiterates the exhaustion many women suffered while writing specifically in order to support their families. The decision by many Victorian women, therefore, who chose to tread any literary path, not least the journalistic route, was governed, Cross argues, by the flexibility of time and location which writing allowed and its compatibility with the many constraints of maintaining the family hearth. Any prejudice, however, against working women was naturally fuelled by the belief that a woman's natural place was in the home. Though the

⁴⁹ LCP, *The Skeleton* [with Yorke Stephens] (1887), 53378E.

⁵⁰ LCP, *Nitocris* (1887), 53386E.

⁵¹ Sir Augustus Henry Glossop Harris (1852–1896), actor and theatre manager. ODNB.

⁵² HRHRC, 18 March 1930. The letter includes references to other breakdowns, '... perhaps you recall "The Mother of Three" at The Comedy in July 1896 ... I went a tremendous purler after that ... and in 1902'.

theatre offered some scope,⁵³ the employment options for females were decidedly limited and H. G. Wells, for example, through his eponymous heroine, *Ann Veronica*, demarcates the many challenges women faced in their attempts to secure a profession of some kind. Alone in one of London's many cheerless bed-sitting rooms, facing the very daunting prospects of unemployment and penury, Anne is forced to acknowledge that her options are severely restricted:

Slowly and reluctantly [she] came to realize that Vivie Warren⁵⁴ was what is called an 'ideal'. There were no such girls and no such positions. No work offered was at all of the quality she had vaguely postulated for herself [...] two chief channels of employment lay open, and neither attracted her, neither seemed really to offer a conclusive escape from that subjection to mankind against which, in the person of her father, she was rebelling. One main avenue was to become a salaried accessory wife or mother, to be a governess or assistant school-mistress. The other was to go into a business – a photographer's reception room, or a costumier's or hat shop.⁵⁵

Mabel Collins, in an article published in *Woman*, in 1890, cautioned her readers that 'the rich woman who has no hearth to tend can choose a vocation; there are many occupations and studies, any one of which can absorb a life-time. But a woman who has to become of necessity a breadwinner in her own right has to choose a profession or a business'.⁵⁶ While Marie Corelli's advice, to 'Young beginners', included an assertion that she wrote 'for the love of writing, not for the sake of money or

⁵³ See Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁵⁴ Character in, George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1893)

⁵⁵ H.G. Wells, *Ann Veronica*, 1909 (London: J M Dent & Sons, 1971), p. 107.

⁵⁶ 'Journalism for Women', *Woman*, February 15 1890.

reputation – the former,’ she avowed ‘I have without exertion, the latter is not worth a pin’s point in the general economy of the vast universe.’⁵⁷

Although Graves failed completely to achieve Corelli’s capacity to acquire funds ‘without exertion’, she was unrelenting in her efforts to secure due recognition as a writer and was singularly proud of her achievements in the literary sphere; there are numerous instances to support this view and which confirm that, unlike Corelli, Graves’s production, although initially fired by the spark of financial need, was without doubt also fuelled by a need to reaffirm her status as both dramatist and author. It is useful, here, to consider Linda H. Peterson’s critique, which questions how women writers faced the very real challenge of achieving economic success, but ‘without sacrificing the equally important need for critical esteem and lasting literary status’.⁵⁸ Her analysis contends that New Woman fiction, which had typically presented a woman of genius whose high ambitions were doomed to both failure and the ignominy of life as a Grub Street hack, reflected the real disjunction between aspiration and achievement of many New Woman writers of the 1890s. Graves had started out as little more than a ‘Grub Street hack’ and, from the rich source of letters available, it might be argued that although she would strive throughout her life to be viewed as a ‘professional’, she was in essence, despite a number of notable peaks in her career, a ‘jobbing writer’; her trade was authorship, supplying items of popular culture for consumption by either a magazine readership or a theatre audience. Unlike her contemporary George Augustus Sala,⁵⁹ who admitted that he knew: ‘perfectly well that I was altogether destitute of a particle of that genius without

⁵⁷ Bainton, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 6.

⁵⁹ George Augustus Sala (1828–1895), journalist. ODNB.

which I would never excel or become famous in pure letters ... I was fully cognisant of the fact that I had learned my trade as a journalist, and that I could earn a handsome income by it',⁶⁰ Graves never confessed to any such self-doubt about her own ability as a writer. Nonetheless, her craftsmanship and creativity, like Sala's, had also been forged through journalism; in a later acknowledgment to the Secretary of the Royal Literary Fund, Graves confirmed that 'like all dramatic artists who are journalists I am cooking up my short stories into one act plays'.⁶¹ And yet—to invoke Graves's own metaphor—despite her best culinary efforts, with her own unique recipe of literary ingredients, ill-health and circumstances ensured that she would fail, repeatedly, to secure either financial security or lasting literary acclaim.

By the beginning of the 1890s, Graves had recovered sufficiently from the attack of 'brain fever' to continue with her literary career, albeit with varying degrees of success. Her circle of professional associates and friends grew; she achieved great acclaim for a number of her works and acquired sufficient financial confidence to take up residence in a compact, bohemian studio in Primrose Hill.⁶² Although speculative, it might be argued that it was this period which provided Graves with the most professional satisfaction, and material comfort, of her career. It is also worth noting that contrary to the usual trend of males supporting their unmarried female siblings, Graves provided lodging to her brother Hugh, two years her junior. In Gissing's fictional account of Grub Street we see a more typical view of this model of sibling cohabitation, with the journalist Jasper Milvain shown to be supporting his

⁶⁰ George Augusta Sala, *The Life and Adventures of George Augusta Sala* (London: Cassell and Co., 1896), p.26. Sala claimed that at the peak of his career his income never dropped below £2000 a year.

⁶¹ RLF: 2692/12.

⁶² Graves provides a thinly veiled portrait of the studio in her later series of short stories concerning a character called 'The McWaugh'. Richard Dehan, *Earth to Earth* (London: Heinemann, 1916).

two unmarried sisters; both are encouraged by him, however, to fashion magazine articles, suitable for ladies or children, in order to contribute to their household expenses. Conversely, Gissing's struggling fictional author, Edwin Reardon single-handedly battles the spectre of poverty on behalf of both himself and his wife.

In March of 1893 Graves found time, while staying with her married cousin at Meesden Rectory, to craft a poem to her friend and fellow playwright Gertrude Kingston, which includes the telling postscript 'herewith the only verses I ever wrote out of doors, and not [sic] for money'.⁶³ Graves penned articles for Clement Shorter, editor of both the *Illustrated London News* and the more lowly sixpenny *Sketch*; the latter being one of the illustrated weeklies which, Cross asserts, was aimed at the 'music-hall public'.⁶⁴ Shorter's own philosophy, not unlike Jasper Milvain's aforementioned focus on simple profitability, was based on his realisation that magazines which contained short stories (and not necessarily of a high quality) with a generous supply of illustrations, sold far more copies. In addition, to her numerous contributions to the periodical press at this time, Graves had already written three books⁶⁵ and five plays. She demonstrated a high degree of dexterity in manipulating her articles and short stories to exploit fully their pecuniary value, and was one of the contributing authors, to the consecutive writing venture, *The Fate of Fenella*, who *The Times* critic scathingly referred to as those 'simply prostituting themselves in a kind of literary freak show'.⁶⁶ A harsh and seemingly unfair appraisal, perhaps, given that its supporters intended it to be an experimental literary exercise.

⁶³ 23 March 1893, Kings College Cambridge, Ref: GAK/1/2/1.

⁶⁴ Cross, p. 209.

⁶⁵ *Belle of Rock Harbour* (1887), *The Pirate's Hand: A Romance of Heredity* by the Author of *Kneecapped* and *the Strange Case of Doctor Shuffle and Mr. Glyde* (1889) *Dragons Teeth* (1891).

⁶⁶ 'Four New Novels', *New York Times*, 5 June 1892.

Nigel Cross asserts that certain women—he calls on Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot to illustrate his point—had no need to write in order to survive they were among those, he argues, who could write ‘against or ahead of the public taste when aesthetic or moral considerations demanded, and this in turn strengthened their work and contributed to its survival’.⁶⁷ Graves had neither this luxury nor, it would seem, until later in her career, the inclination. As a result, it might be admitted, driven by commercial motives, her work was, on occasion, of an inferior quality to that of her capabilities; she was compromised, it seems, by a need to produce journalistic fodder for a seemingly insatiable female audience.

Valerie Fehlbaum’s study highlights the fact that despite women having made substantial inroads, ‘the idea of separate spheres within the profession was regularly upheld’, even among women writers;⁶⁸ women wrote, in the main, either for women’s periodicals or, in other general publications, for the women’s pages and then only with regard to those topics considered a woman’s domain. Fehlbaum notes further, that, in relation to women and the press, a large section of the male population considered that, ‘woman was encroaching on man’s territory’.⁶⁹ When it came to the ‘woman question’, there were, naturally, other more enlightened editors. For example, in his memoir, the editor of the *World*, Edmund Yates, recalled, rather tongue-in-cheek, that in his original draft prospectus for the newspaper he had alerted the public to the fact that it would be, ‘written throughout by gentlemen and

⁶⁷ Cross, p. 192.

⁶⁸ Valerie Fehlbaum, *Ella Hepworth Dixon, The Story of a Modern Woman* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), p. 62.

⁶⁹ Fehlbaum, p. 60.

scholars', though this latter term obviously encompassed females.⁷⁰ It might also be noted that, irrespective of gender, Yates paid his writers identical rates for their contributions. His later recollections reveal that the first issue had received 'valuable assistance from Mrs. Lynn Linton',⁷¹ whose contribution was an article entitled 'Jezebel à la Mode', and was 'written very much in her well-known "Girl of the Period" style'.⁷² Furthermore, his reminiscences assured a prospective readership that:

The *World* [would] recognise women as a reasonable class of the community, whose interests should be equitably considered, and their errors explained without levity or hysterics. An Acrostic will be composed weekly to promote female education, and be printed conjointly with an elegant Essay suitable for mature ladies of quality. Also, the *World* will publish entertaining fictions without any admixture of twaddle; and the first of its serial tales will be a novel of Society.⁷³

The publication in 1880, of a booklet by Wilfred Meynell,⁷⁴ writing as 'John Oldcastle' and entitled *Journals and Journalism: with a Guide for Literary Beginners*, received positive reviews and was read with interest by many hoping to achieve literary success via the journalistic route. Although the language Meynell employs presumes a male readership, the book provided useful sound guidance and was read by both sexes. There is, of course, no hard proof that Graves read the guide but, given its circulation and relevance, it is reasonable to suppose that she was

⁷⁰ Edmund Yates, *His Recollections and Experiences* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1885, 4th Edition), p. 455.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Lynn Linton (1822–1898), writer and author. ODNB.

⁷² Yates, p. 456.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Wilfred Meynell (1852–1948) Editor, journalist and founder of the Society of Authors, the husband of the poet Alice Meynell (1847–1922). Edited the Catholic *Weekly Register* ODNB.

aware of it and may have even drawn on its advice. Although it is unclear when Graves was first introduced to Wilfred and Alice Meynell, a number of letters written in 1911 and 1913⁷⁵ verify her links with the couple, through their mutual acquaintance with Lady Colin Campbell.⁷⁶

During the 1890s, as Graves had become more established as a writer, she enjoyed membership of numerous women's clubs⁷⁷ and societies including 'The Pioneer Club' in Bruton Street, where the journalist Evelyn Sharp⁷⁸ later fondly recalled having felt:

desperately emancipated, almost raffish indeed moving familiarly among the advanced women I met there, many of whom, in appearance at all events, lived up to the popular idea of what was then called the New Woman, with their close-cropped heads and mannish coats and collars and ties. Their names conveyed little to me then, and probably the most famous were those who dressed as ordinary women, but I remember with gratitude Clo. Graves, the writer, whose kindness to a raw novice displaying ignorance of the world at every turn was of the sort to rouse the gratitude of any young thing in the period.⁷⁹

Graves's affiliation to these new women's clubs, which were proliferating rapidly during this period, provided a hospitable focal point for mixing with like-minded single women. The usefulness of these events, in terms of practicality, for broadening

⁷⁵ MP: 2 Nov 1911; 6 Nov 1911; 20 Nov 1911; 12 July 1913.

⁷⁶ Gertrude Elizabeth Campbell, (1857–1911), art critic and journalist. Subject of a high-profile divorce case. See also Anne Jordan, *Love Well the Hour* (Leicester: Matador, 2010).

⁷⁷ MP, Alice Meynell, 20 November 1911. Graves advises that she will 'telephone from my club, the Ladies' Athenaeum'. The Club was for described as being for ladies interested in 'politics, art, literature and music'. In Elizabeth Crawford, *The Woman's Suffrage Movement: A Reference guide, 1866-1928* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 122-123.

⁷⁸ Evelyn Sharp (1869–1955), journalist, children's writer and suffragette. ODNB.

⁷⁹ 'The New Woman in her Club'. *Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1933, p. 6.

professional networks, albeit among their own sex, was also widely recognised. An article published in *Woman*, signed by ‘Sarah Volatile’, recommended that ‘no woman in search of a livelihood [should] turn to journalism unless she has either a natural talent for the business, or friends of the press who are willing to help her’.⁸⁰ Although the writer in this instance was Arnold Bennett,⁸¹ editor of the weekly journal *Woman*, there was a great deal of truth in his words. It is therefore somewhat surprising, given the scrupulous nature of Cross’s work in this area, that he goes on to claim that, ‘because there was no common ground on the ‘woman question’ among writers themselves’, as a consequence, ‘there was no sisterhood of the pen, no shared commitment’. He refers to his own subsequent list of eminent writers, suggesting that they had nothing in common other than two factors: their sex and their authorship. Cross does, however, concede that in the absence of any glorious ‘sisterhood of the pen’, there was instead, ‘a well-established ghetto for women writers; a cramped literary world where women wrote discreetly to each other courtesy of the general Post Office while their male colleagues enjoyed the privileged freedom of the Garrick Club’.⁸² A brief article about Graves would suggest that not all of these women, as Cross supposes, relied on the Penny Post to connect with like-minded individuals:

Clo Graves is very versatile in her genius. She is a dramatist, a novel writer, a burlesque poet, an artist, and has even worked at stereotyping her own sketches. Introductions to her charming chambers in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, are much sought for by the literary Bohemians of

⁸⁰ ‘How Women May Make Money: Journalism’, *Woman*, 5 February 1896, p. 8.

⁸¹ Arnold Bennett (1867–1931), writer. ODNB.

⁸² Cross, pp. 164–5.

Fleet Street. Not to know Clo Graves is to argue one-self unknown in literary and Press circles.⁸³

Phillipa Levine's study of these female networks, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, attributes their popularity to both the valuable escape route they provided for the many lonely, single women living in London at that time, and to the ensuing social ties they created. She suggests that these relationships replaced absent familial bonds and offered support and sustenance based on common values.⁸⁴ Levine does stress, nevertheless, the distinctions which existed within these groups between, on the one hand, the feminist community and, on the other, working women, the latter group not always identifying with the same ideals as the former. As a consequence, the aforementioned 'Pioneer Club', for example, founded in 1892 and numbering around three hundred members, was more widely considered a bastion of feminism, and was populated in the main by the New Woman of the period. Although, in his recollections, Douglas Sladen, the author of *Who's Who*, would write rather dismissively of the 'Pioneer Club', the 'Writer's Club', and the 'Women Journalists' as, 'frankly, associations of working women who were more interested in women's movements' he did concede however, that 'The Pioneer', 'might also be called the ancestor of the Suffragettes'.⁸⁵ And in a letter to Graves in 1913, he paid tribute to her great authorship, reminding the fifty year-old of when, as a young bohemian, during the final years of the nineteenth century she had attended many literary parties at his home in Addison Mansions, where, he reminisced, 'so

⁸³ 'A Lady Journalist', *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 28 August 1888.

⁸⁴ Phillipa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990), p. 67.

⁸⁵ Sladen, p. 59.

many people, now famous, used to meet every Friday night regaled only with cigarettes, whiskeys-and-sodas, claret cups, bottled ale and sandwiches'.⁸⁶

Another of Graves's affiliations, and where she would forge long-lasting professional and personal relationships,⁸⁷ was with 'The Society of Women Journalists'; her name is to be found on the inaugural list for the first winter session, convened in 1894, at a cost to its members of one guinea for an annual subscription.⁸⁸ The pamphlet which accompanied the conference alerted its readers to the fact that, 'until the foundation of this Society, perhaps the only important class of professional Women workers having no representative Association, was the Lady Journalist'; a statement which, while hinting at the club's political stance, was arguably intended to re-emphasise the notion of journalism as a 'profession' as opposed to its aforementioned whiff of 'trade'. The Society was also keen to stress the negative impact of those perceived to be ill-equipped, and untrained, interlopers:

Latterly those who have served long years of apprenticeship and hard work in Journalism have found their positions assailed by new comers, many of whom lack both the qualification, or preparation, for so high a calling. Others who describe themselves as 'Lady Journalists,' have not added honor [sic] to the profession. These factors have tended to diminish the status of Women Journalists and reduce the standard of payment. The Society is not in competition with any existing institution. It is an Association of Women, managed by Women, and one of its chief aims is the cultivation of friendly

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 58. Frequent visitors included Sidney Low; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; J. S. Wood; Grant Allen and Compton Mackenzie.

⁸⁷ It is likely, though unconfirmed, that Graves's friendship with Gertrude Campbell (Lady Colin Campbell) was initially founded through membership of 'The Society of Women Journalists'.

⁸⁸ MP, Leaflet: 'The Society of Women Journalists'. It includes the names of 200 applicants for membership received in the first ten weeks of the Society's existence.

relationship with employers, so that it may become a centre of information to which Editors and Publishers will apply when needing the services of clever and capable WOMEN WRITERS AND ARTISTS.⁸⁹

Where many of these ‘new comers’ came from is unclear, particularly if, as the manifesto suggests, they were totally ill-equipped for the job and its inevitable hardships. Yet Onslow’s study confirms that there were increasing numbers of women, like Clo Graves, trying to break into journalism, particularly in London, and she cites the remarks of one concerned onlooker that: ‘any editor rash enough to advertise for a lady journalist would have been overwhelmed by inexperienced hopefuls’.⁹⁰

Although it was a male editor, J. S. Wood, who had been one of those instrumental in the founding of ‘The Society of Women Journalists’, clearly not all of his male colleagues shared his sentiments. It is also doubtful that many of the first two hundred members to have paid their guinea subscription, would have been judged fitting candidates by ‘Sarah Volatile’—not least when one considers Arnold Bennett’s response to an American newspaper’s claim that London already contained over a thousand women journalists:

My own necessarily extensive experience has taught me that there are some thirty or so of women efficient, all-round journalists; about fifty more who write well on special subjects, of which they have a special knowledge, and perhaps a couple of hundred who contribute

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Onslow, p. 24.

occasional articles to the daily and weekly press, or are content with penning descriptions of balls, bazaars, and suburban and provincial festivities for ladies' fashion papers. The class that I could wish to see very much augmented is that which I have classified as 'all-round' journalists.⁹¹

The situation was not helped by the growing numbers of educated women looking for work during the 1890s or, as Onslow notes, the highly ubiquitous 'Ladies'[sic] Employments' type articles, which had proliferated during the 1880s and showed no sign of abating. Many of these items encouraged females to consider other avenues of employment. Graves contributed to this particular genre herself, with an article extolling the virtues of chromolithography as a suitable profession for young women; the published piece, as it turned out, being somewhat prescient in foretelling Graves's own, eventual, impoverished state:

What shall we do with ourselves? Cry the girls of this our nineteenth century. For what profession or trade shall we qualify ourselves from the very beginning so that if our destinies are not fulfilled by marriage we may never find ourselves hopelessly stranded on the iron-bound shores of impecunious spinsterhood?⁹²

In her essay, Graves counsels those seeking happy, contented spinsterhood to 'find the vocation or profession for which one is best suited and stick to it, not like a man, but a brave woman.' Her recommendation duly concludes with a catalogue of suggested occupations that a skilled woman might eventually undertake in the area of 'high-class trade manufacture [...] as type-writers, telegraphists, or shorthand reporters'; for those of a particularly artistic bent Graves endorses both 'wood

⁹¹ 'What Women May Do: Journalism', *Woman*, 23 March 1892, pp. 3-4, signed 'The Editor'.

⁹² 'Employment for Girls: Chromo-lithography', *Atalanta*, 1 May 1888.

engraving and its sister art, chromo-lithography '. Graves wisely cautions her readers that 'some must fail, of course [...] from sheer weakness, or become discouraged and give up' and to those, she urges, 'press on towards the goal with winged feet and eager eyes'.⁹³

One wonders what the existing male chromolithographers made of Graves's suggestion that women might take up their trade. It is probable that they too shared the view that, like journalism, it was hardly to be encouraged. As a consequence, in the continuing debate over literature as a vocation, as opposed to literature as a trade, the dominant male view held that it was women who were contributing to the fall in literary standards. Similarly, Beth Palmer argues that: 'despite the fact that the press was fundamentally enabling for 'New Women' writers', they were hobbled by the 'widespread perception that fiction published in newspapers or magazines was not culturally valuable and that serial publication was old-fashioned and restrictive';⁹⁴ as a result, women's literary production in these areas was considered inferior. Moreover, although women had been writing for the press, in some measure, for many years, and increasingly so since the 1860s, it was still extremely difficult for women to gain entry; a rueful Ann Veronica recounts that she:

had heard of women journalists, women writers, and so forth; but she was not even admitted to the presence of the editors she demanded to see, and by no means sure that if she had been she could have done any work they might have given her.⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Palmer, pp. 161-162.

⁹⁵ Wells, p. 106.

The ubiquity of the ‘Ladies’ Employments’ editorials was matched by the sizeable number of articles recounting the actual experiences of women working for the Press—notably the hardships endured by the ‘poorer sex’ as they struggled to thrive in that quarter. Yet these accounts provide merely a glimpse of the intense misery many of these women suffered. To discover the true extent of their privations one need look no further than the Royal Literary Fund Archives and its surfeit of applications from impoverished writers; a conspicuously high percentage came from females, often more than once.

It was not, however, until 1904, that women were invited to attend the Royal Literary Fund Anniversary dinners. These occasions were, ostensibly, fund-raising opportunities and, as such, attendees and speakers incurred a charge,⁹⁶ moving George Gissing, when offered a seat at the dinner in 1895, to record in his diary: ‘invited to be a steward at a dinner of the Royal Literary Fund. As it involves payment of five guineas must refuse!’⁹⁷ Likewise, Graves twice declined a place but donated the sum of one guinea alongside a polite refusal wishing she might ‘make it 1000!’⁹⁸

That Graves was held in high esteem by her close friends and associates is evident from the many items of correspondence which form the bulk of her record in the Royal Literary Fund archive; one letter of recommendation to the Secretary of the fund to support her first application confirms Graves’s diligent nature, describing her as, ‘a writer of great industry, [who] has supported indigent relatives for many years

⁹⁶ RLF handbook, p. 22.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ HRHRC, 23 March 1929.

and is cordially respected by all who know her'.⁹⁹ Similarly, the author Edmund Gosse¹⁰⁰ asked for his letter to be read out on her behalf at the award fund's next hearing, 'it being a case', he advised, in which he was 'much interested'.¹⁰¹

Graves's initial application refers to the major surgery she had undergone in 1903 for a uterine growth, and to the diphtheria she had contracted which had subsequently weakened her heart. A medical certificate from Ernest Ware, the senior surgeon at the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth,¹⁰² together with a further submission from Lady Colin Campbell, corroborates the poor state of her physical condition, however the latter attests also to Graves's strong work ethic and her extraordinary resilience:

I have known Miss Graves intimately for six or seven years during which time I have hardly ever known her to stop work, even when seriously ill. She has had a life of great work and privation having supported herself and helped her family since she was fourteen. Last year Dr. Bland Sutton told her she had just two months to live if she did not consent to an operation for a tumour. Not being able to afford long convalescence, she went back to her writing. A month ago she collapsed with heart failure and was partially paralysed on the left side. She needs nourishment and is distressed by her debts for rent, taxes and to those who have supplied her with food.¹⁰³

Other archival correspondence, dated more than two decades later, reiterates the respect accorded to Graves by members of the establishment and includes a brief missive from C. P. Duff, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister Ramsey

⁹⁹ RLF: 2692/9.

¹⁰⁰ Sir Edmund William Gosse (1849–1928), writer. ODNB.

¹⁰¹ RLF: 2692/11.

¹⁰² Medical certificate from Ernest Ware, RLF: 2692/6.

¹⁰³ RLF: 2692/8.

MacDonald, sent to the Fund's Secretary, in which he confirms, 'the fact that she has a civil list pension (probably as a result of your advice!) – [sic] in itself shows the regard in which the Prime Minister would hold her work'.¹⁰⁴ Yet another of the sources, a sympathetic communiqué from Lord Baden Powell,¹⁰⁵ asks that the fund will look favourably on her appeal for assistance. Graves's connection to the hero of Mafeking is, as yet, unknown, although a letter to Marshall outlining the details of her final Will and Testament, and much lamenting the paucity of her belongings, refers to one item that she believes might be of some value and intimates that there was a link between them of some kind: 'Baden Powell's gift, the revolver holster he carried through the S.A War, and at Mafeking, together with some characteristic letters from BP and wife'.¹⁰⁶

Accompanying her first application, Graves makes a plaintive plea to the board, 'begging' them not to make public her claim for assistance. Her appeal asserts, bizarrely, that 'no editor would publish any work I may yet be able to do, and no manager would produce either of the plays I have upon the market, were it known that my circumstances were so straitened'.¹⁰⁷ Her claims were probably unfounded as it seems unlikely that members of the profession would act as she suggests. It is more likely, and understandable, that her petition for anonymity was fostered, naturally, by shame at her predicament. Following the success of *The Dop Doctor* in 1910, Graves suggests, optimistically, that even as an invalid and cared for by three nurses, she could earn a living from writing, estimating that she could 'turn out a book in a little

¹⁰⁴ RLF: 2692/100.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden- Powell, (1857–1941), army officer and founder of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. ODNB.

¹⁰⁶ RLF: 2692/46. In the letter Graves advises that these items will also pass to the RLF, but the whereabouts of the holster and letters is, to date, unknown.

¹⁰⁷ RLF: 2692/3.

under three years', while maintaining her flow of short stories. To support her assertion, Graves summarised that she had achieved earnings of between £650 and £700, in sixteen months, but conceded that she must earn a minimum of £289 per year to cover expenses, before she could take any money for herself; her outlay, she reports, must cover 'room and board; typing and medical costs; Nurse Kirby's board, lodging and salary leaves me short for paying the other two attendants, plus the merciless demands of income tax!'¹⁰⁸

Other societies were also approached, to try and alleviate Graves's financial distress. For example, though she appeared to fit the acceptance criteria, an application made on her behalf, by Lord Gorell, Chairman of The Society of Authors to the St. Monica Home of Rest, elicited an unsuccessful and equally unsympathetic type-written response; its misspelling and outline is also somewhat ironic:

The applications which my council are receiving are very often from Gentlefolk who are far more incapciated [sic] than Miss Graves and quite unable even to write who have practically no means of subsistence and in fact are often literally starving.¹⁰⁹

And so, at the start of the 1930s, having been an invalid for over twenty years, and undergone numerous personal setbacks with the accrual of further debts, Graves wrote once more to Marshall, to report that it is 'with grief and shame that I find myself compelled by circumstances to burden the fund with another appeal'.¹¹⁰ These later, usually unsuccessful, requests,¹¹¹ though they expose the full extent of

¹⁰⁸ RLF: 2692/67.

¹⁰⁹ RLF: 2692/ 66.

¹¹⁰ RLF: 2692/48.

¹¹¹ By the late 1920s the RLF had introduced a three year time limit between applications.

her despair, nevertheless demonstrate her indomitable resolve to sustain a living from her writing. She acknowledges the years of continued debt and ‘catch-up’ aggravated in her final years by demands from the Inland Revenue; she had become, she claims, ‘a target for the slings and arrows of Income Tax Assessors’.¹¹² Yet, the comic nod persists and accompanying the list she duly sent to Marshall of her proposed economies is an acknowledgement that ‘Mr. Micawber’¹¹³ was deadly right about that extra sixpence.’¹¹⁴

Graves’s last contact with Marshall, a distressing letter, written three months before she died, in a shaky though legible style, reveals the extent of her suffering: ‘I have written this with my left hand as I am stricken with paralysis’, she admits, and concludes with a piteous post script, ‘could you come and see me?’¹¹⁵

¹¹² RLF: 2692/56.

¹¹³ Mr Micawber in Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850).

¹¹⁴ RLF: 2692/49.

¹¹⁵ RLF: 2692/122.

Chapter Two

Measures of Success: Graves's 'Grindings'

I have the special faculty of an extempore writer.
Never in my life shall I do anything of solid
literary value; I shall always despise the people I
write for. But my path will be that of success. I
have always said it, and now I'm sure of it.'

Jasper Milvain, *New Grub Street* (1891)¹

In his portrayal of Jasper Milvain, Gissing was acknowledging an accepted truism for many aspiring writers of the fin de siècle—if success were to be measured in terms of financial achievement, then it often came at the cost of artistic merit; Gissing himself wrote a number of stories, for publication in the *Illustrated London News*, which he conceded were trash, though the payments were exceedingly handy. Similarly, though the items Graves penned by gas-light in her dingy garret in Coram Street, were not, perhaps, always of the quality she might have hoped for, they arguably paved the way for her to elicit sufficient income to survive as an independent woman. Furthermore, they inspired her with enough confidence to believe that she was well on her way to establishing a secure career as a writer. There is no reason either, to suppose that, like Milvain, Graves despised her audience, and in 1910 she wrote of having been a London journalist for thirty years while also enjoying a 'successful career as a playwright during the 1890s'.² However, there is a whiff of bravado about this statement—she was, after all, seeking assistance in her letter—and she knew that fundamentally, as a single woman of limited means, she

¹ Gissing, p. 105.

² RLF: 2692/2.

had no alternative other than to keep writing; in that regard, as noted in the previous chapter, she is representative of the scores of other female authors to be found in the Royal Literary Fund case files.

This chapter will chart Graves's development as a journalist, while identifying a number of distinct, emergent themes and examples of her nascent semi-autobiographical writing. A considerable amount of personal detail can be teased from her many scribblings for the periodical press; how many of these pieces were written 'extempore' is unclear, though she admits that many were penned through the night and in haste. Despite her seemingly inexhaustible contribution of stories and articles to a wide range of popular newspapers and periodicals throughout a writing career which spanned more than five decades, the items Graves penned during the formative years of her journalistic career are, regrettably, more difficult to identify; a failure due, perhaps, to the then customary practice of author anonymity.

According to the research of Mary Ruth Hiller, extant figures suggest that, between the years 1824 and 1900, almost seventy-five percent of the items printed in both the monthly and quarterly periodicals, were published either anonymously or under a pseudonym.³ Moreover, it should be stressed that this estimated figure does not include the many other nameless writers who also featured in the weekly papers. One of the more convincing reasons for the continued use of the practice, highlighted by Hiller, is the argument that anonymity engendered sincerity and candour among its writers: 'an author could attack a friend without loss of goodwill; praise a "great"

³ Mary Ruth Hiller, 'The Identification of Authors', in *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research*, ed. by J. Don Vann and R.T. Van Arsdel, (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1978) p. 124.

man without suspicion of toadyism; or criticize an institution that was a source of support without fear of reprisal'.⁴ Likewise, for the increasing numbers of young, unknown writers of both sexes vying to sell their news copy, anonymity ensured that not only did these aspiring journalists succeed in having their articles published, but they might also profit from having multiple items printed in a single issue.

Whereas, in the early part of her journalistic career, Graves used, in the main, the abbreviated form of her first name rather than a pseudonym, it is reasonable to argue that in common with many of her contemporaries, she too, published both anonymously or under an alias. The autograph of Clo Graves is appended to a number of items published in both *Judy* and *Fun* magazines, during the 1880s and 1890s, with *Fun*, also featuring a miscellany of jokes, brief 'dramatic scenes' and 'reader's letters', signed 'Poltwattle', which possess a markedly similar style to that of Graves's own hand; occasionally, this unusual surname is prefixed with Peter, or Penelope, as appropriate to the dictates of the article. Of course this similarity of style alone is an inadequate measure by which to confirm that they are by the same author. However, one of the later Poltwattle columns does bolster the argument and, as such, deserves specific mention, not least because the piece was framed as a review for one of Graves's most successful plays, *The Mother of Three*.⁵ Printed in 1896, and entitled 'The Poets on the Players in Panton Street' it opens thus:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ LCP, *A Mother of Three*, 53594A.

“A Pleasant Comedy”

Shakespeare, *Taming of the Shrew*, Sc. 2.

“O, Graves, where is thy sting,” as asked by Pope, would have found an easy answer to-day in “The Mother of Three” at the above theatre.

And in reference to the same gifted lady’s “Dr. And Mrs. Neill” and in “Nitocris” and in the farce being now played, he said:—
“From Graves to gay, from lively to severe.”

While Cowper evidently meant our authoress in this line:—
“Graves without dullness, learned without pride.”

—*Conversation*, 609.⁶

The full composition provides a positive appraisal of the production, and the writer has taken considerable trouble to allude, in detail, to a number of other of Graves’s earlier plays. While this again does not fully validate the premise that Graves had adopted the name of Poltwattle, it is nonetheless evident that whoever wrote these lines was keen to endorse her work, and was more than willing to invest some time in so doing; who, arguably, would be more inclined to an opportunity for self-promotion than, perhaps, the author herself?

While the real identity of Poltwattle remains a mystery, Graves herself verified that, in 1884, she drew ‘little pen and ink grotesques for the comic papers’, namely *Judy* and *Fun* magazines, producing an abundance of miscellaneous items, with her ‘Bobinet Ballads’⁷ receiving particular notice’.⁸ It was further noted that, as a consequence of the success of her Bobinet contributions, and following the death of

⁶ ‘A Pleasant Comedy’, *Fun*, 16 June 1896.

⁷ ‘Bobinet Ballads’, published in *Judy* between 8 July 1885 and March 1888.

⁸ *The Kalgoorie Western Argus* (Australia), 15 April 1913, p. 23.

the journalist Ernest Warren,⁹ Graves was offered his vacant post on the *Judy* staff; unfortunately, the report fails to report the nature of the post, and additional research is unable to verify this fact. Similarly, there is nothing to account for the name accorded to these stanzas—traditional ballads were typically of unknown authorship—though the title might well have been shaped by the character of Bobinet, from the comic operetta *La Vie Parisienne* by Jacques Offenbach.¹⁰ It is, however, more likely that Graves's column was a copy of, or perhaps intended as a homage to, W.S. Gilbert's highly popular 'Bab Ballads', circulated in *Fun* magazine during the 1860s and early 1870s;¹¹ Gilbert's light verses, with their comic illustrations, enjoyed widespread popularity and were subsequently published as volumes which would almost certainly have appealed to a young Clo Graves as she was growing up.

The first of Graves's 'ballads' 'The Carpenter's Story'—there were nine in total, with two of the verses extending into additional parts—was published in *Judy* on 8th July 1885.¹² The verse is a poignant, though amusing, rendition of a theatrical supernumerary's failure, at the crucial dramatic moment, to recall his solitary line of dialogue; the one that he believes will catapult him to eventual stardom. Given her early background with Willy Edouin's theatre troupe, it is feasible that this anecdote was mined from Graves's own stage experiences:

⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 March 1887. Ernest Warren (1841–1887) died of rheumatic fever. Described variously as a journalist and dramatist specialising in adaptations; a writer of '*Penny Dreadfuls*'... the regular theatrical correspondent from London on the *New York Dramatic Times*'.

¹⁰ *La Vie Parisienne*, by Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880) first appeared in London in 1872 and was adapted by F.C. Burnand. Bobinet is also the name of a gipsy character in *Mirette, the Opera Comique* by André Messager (1853–1929), first performed in 1894.

¹¹ Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836–1911) playwright. 'Bab Ballads' first published 26 October 1861, in *Fun*. ODNB.

¹² Bobinet Ballad I, 'The Carpenter's Story', *Judy*, 8 July 1885.

Underneath the rouge and powder wore his cheeks a livid hue;
 And he trembled when the time came—choked, and clean forgot his cue,
 Then they laughed—the people laughed, sir, and he stumbled, somehow
 missed
 Of his footing—came a cropper—and they thought him drunk and hissed!¹³

Primarily, the ballads are of a humorous, whimsical nature, though there are a couple of notable exceptions: the verse ‘Polemon: a Rhyme from Rollin’¹⁴ presumes a certain level of classical knowledge by the reader; and ‘The Seamstress’s Story’, articulates a disturbing account of working-class domestic violence.¹⁵ Whereas Graves’s lines, in the latter, are unmistakably reminiscent of Thomas Hood’s earlier masterpiece, ‘The Song of the Shirt’,¹⁶ the rhyme embraces a much wider narrative than simply that of poverty and is an early example of her engagement with the theme of domestic abuse. Using a lyrical style which anticipates A. E. Housman’s approach in his later collection of poems, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), the young wife of Graves’s verse recounts her painful experience at the hands of an abusive, alcoholic husband:

[...] But these are trials I’m used to, and trials as
 can be bore,
 And I’m promised some work, Jane— greatcoats
 from the Army Clothin’ Store;
 And liberally they pays us, at one-and-eleven
 a head,
 Out of which, Jane, you finds the needles, and
 likewise you buys the thread.

Just a twelvemonth since my Bill left me— a
 twelvemonth, or maybe more,
 Since the partin’ blow he give me, sent me flyin’
 across the floor!
 Bill was handy-like with his fists, Jane, as everyone jined to agree,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bobinet Ballad, VI, ‘Polemon: a Rhyme from Rollin’ *Judy*, 14 July 1886. Polemon of Athens, a Platonist philosopher.

¹⁵ Bobinet Ballad III, ‘The Seamstress’s Story’, *Judy*, March 1886.

¹⁶ *The Song of the Shirt*, Thomas Hood. First published in *Punch*, 16 December 1843.

And he kept hisself up to the mark, Jane— he
practised so much on me.

It is useful to consider Graves's motives for including this grim account among a collection of otherwise comic pieces, especially from one so young; she was, after all, still only twenty-three. Though this might simply be a reflection of a common social problem of the day—both A. James Hammerton¹⁷ and Lisa Surridge¹⁸ have underscored the prevalence of domestic violence and intimidation, which was endured silently, by many Victorian women—it might also be seen as evidence of a premeditated move to foreground this issue; given Graves's feminist leanings it would perhaps be fair to argue that she was doing both. It also raises the question as to whether or not the subject of domestic abuse had any personal resonance for Graves. Her later work, both serious drama and comedy, is certainly well punctuated with episodes of domestic abuse, conduct which, during the nineteenth century it has been argued, was often depicted as rather regrettable, though seemingly acceptable, male behaviour, and that which had become insidiously routine.

This hypothesis, Joan Perkin has argued, is evidenced by the representations of such acts which often 'seemed to be surrounded by a certain halo of jocularly' and as a result, she suggests, were pardoned on the basis that a man had the common-law right to chastise his wife in any way he saw fit.¹⁹ Correspondingly, it is significant to note that Graves herself appears to have perpetrated this sin, with George Bernard Shaw moved to comment, in his later review of a scene from Graves's comedy, *A*

¹⁷ A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁸ Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in 19th Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 174.

Matchmaker,²⁰ that a husband, who, having blacked his wife's eyes while under the influence of alcohol, 'apologised afterwards like a gentlemen';²¹ however, though the play was a comedy, Graves's message, in this specific case, was condemnatory.

It was only since 1870, with the introduction of The Married Woman's Property Act, that women had gradually ceased to be viewed, and treated, as property rather than as people. Nevertheless, in 1890, one of Graves's fellow journalists, Florence Fenwick Miller,²² in a speech to the National Liberal Club observed that there was still some way to go:

Under exclusively man-made laws women have been reduced to the most abject condition of legal slavery in which it is possible for human beings to be held...under the arbitrary domination of another's will, and dependent for decent treatment exclusively on the goodness of heart of the individual master.²³

Whereas, to some extent, a number of Graves's early dramatic portrayals of domestic violence conform to the model which Perkin outlines—aside from *A Matchmaker* there are instances²⁴ where such scenes are an implicit feature of the comedic discourse—in 'The Seamstress's Story' her message is explicit and her tone unambiguously serious:

So he was took away, Jane; but the last words he said,
A kind of partin' blessin', keeps ringing still in my head:
"You got me lagged, my woman? Ay! You can boast, it's true;
But when I come out of prison, d—n me, I'll swing for you!"

²⁰ LCP, *A Matchmaker*, 53601J.

²¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, 2 vols. (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1932), vol. 2, p. 133.

²² Florence Fenwick Miller (1854–1935), journalist, public lecturer and staunch feminist. ODNB.

²³ Quoted in Perkin, p. 175.

²⁴ For example, *Puss in Boots*.

“Swing for me.” So he will, Jane; Bill *never* broke his word—
 And sure as I live or die, Jane, he’ll keep to the oath I heard.
 Hide? There is no use hidin’; he’d find me in a trice!
 Yes, if the kittle’s biling, a cup of tea *would* be nice.²⁵

Although Graves does not condone the husband’s wife-beating, the victim’s resigned acceptance as to the predictable outcome, conveys an exceedingly bleak message and must, therefore, surely be taken as Graves’s subtle condemnation of the weaknesses in a judicial system that was unable, or unwilling, to put in place the necessary legislation to halt the abuse of women. For those able to afford the cost of pursuing matrimonial disputes through the courts, it was not until 1895 that violence, or cruelty, as it was more commonly labelled, was deemed grounds for a judicial separation; the added security of maintenance payments, to be paid to the wife by the husband, was also introduced at this time. However, for a woman seeking a full divorce, a husband’s cruelty was, on its own, insufficient justification and consequently the additional charge of *his* adultery was required. This law, however, did not work in reverse and consequently a double standard was created; a husband could divorce his wife—and as a result almost guarantee her social ostracism and disgrace—simply on the one charge of *her* adultery. Coincidentally, in 1886, Graves’s friend, Lady Colin Campbell, petitioned for divorce on the grounds of her husband’s adultery and cruelty; the cruelty charge was premised on the fact that he had knowingly infected her with syphilis. Her husband, the 8th Duke of Argyll, unsuccessfully lodged a counter-petition alleging her adultery with four named co-respondents.²⁶

²⁵ Bobinet Ballad III, *Judy*, March 1886.

²⁶ See Anne Jordan, *Love Well the Hour: The Life of Lady Colin Campbell* (Leicester: Matador, 2010).

In some respects Graves's telling of *The Seamstress's Story* reflects Louis James's perception of many of 'the New Woman' stories which, he argues 'were a cry of frustration not a programme of emancipation', but which, nonetheless, drew attention to the many important issues that still affected women, and which had been continually repressed during the mid Victorian period.²⁷ Though Graves's message in the ballad is fairly subtle—she indeed expresses sympathy for the victim rather than lambasting the perpetrator—she was unquestionably writing as a New Woman and it is reasonable to argue, therefore, that though it is on a lesser scale it is still, nonetheless, an example of Graves's commitment to the feminist cause.

Of course, as Sally Ledger reminds us, 'the New Woman—as a concept—was, from its inception, riddled with contradictions'²⁸ and thus, this does help to explain some of the perceived inconsistencies in Graves's handling of certain topics. Furthermore, whereas the characteristics of the female protagonist, depicted by Graves in 'The Seamstress's Story', may appear to be diametrically far removed from those of an independent New Woman (although domestic violence has no class barriers), it was, perhaps inevitable that a shared sense of sisterhood encouraged writers, like Graves, to embrace women who lacked 'a voice', and to attempt through their writing to articulate their struggles. Later, as a playwright, Graves revisited the theme of domestic abuse in *A Tenement Tragedy*,²⁹ and the story of an abused, working-class girl at the turn of the century is explored in a later chapter.

²⁷ Louis James, *The Victorian Novel* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), p. 204.

²⁸ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 16.

²⁹ LCP, *A Tenement Tragedy*, LCP1906/35.

Although Graves's final 'Bobinet Ballad'³⁰ was published in March 1888, from April of the previous year she had simultaneously contributed weekly topical verses to *Judy* under the title of 'Our Own Hurdy-Gurdy';³¹ although the lines are unsigned they are acknowledged as being authored by Graves.³² Varying in length from between two and six hundred words and labelled 'grindings for the week'—to reflect, one presumes, the daily slog of the newspaper hack—her comic renderings ruminated over sundry news stories and events drawn from popular culture, upon which the 'Hurdy-Gurdy Man' volunteered his own inimitable working class perspective, and peppered, quite often, with colloquial language. The monologues, written completely in verse are beautifully illustrated with pen and ink sketches crafted by the cartoonist Archibald Chasemore.³³

Encompassing contemporary news and events from London and beyond, the column was assigned an entire page and, in general, conformed to the same poetic metre for every edition, with the concluding stanzas of each soliloquy invariably composed to assonate with Graves's adopted moniker of 'The Hurdy-Gurdy Man'. Similarly, the artwork maintains a standard format, featuring a prominent pen and ink drawing of a shapely young woman, under the subheading 'Fashion for the Week'; the model is surrounded by a range of lesser sized caricatures and draws on the content of Graves's verse. Though the central figure is, invariably, attired to personify the 'Hurdy Gurdy' topic, the designs do not always necessarily conform to traditional

³⁰ Bobinet Ballad IX, *Judy*, March 1888. 'At the Sassengeries' – the tale of a London Pork Butcher and his three porcine sons.

³¹ 'Our Own Hurdy Gurdy' Published weekly, in *Judy* between 6 April 1887 and 18 June 1890, a total of 159 'grindings'.

³² The Australian newspaper, the *Queenslander* reported in its 'English Notes' that: 'The "Hurdy Gurdy Man", whose contributions appear in the comic weekly *Judy*, is Clo. Graves, a successful lady journalist'. 10 November 1888.

³³ Archibald Chasemore (b.1844- n.d.) illustrator and cartoonist.

late Victorian standards of dress; trousers, shorter length dresses and military uniforms are frequently recommended to the reader as *de rigueur*. This early humorous copy, already skilfully honed, testifies to Graves's innate talent for the poetic style and might well account for Sir Augustus Harris's decision later that same year, to offer her the commission for the verse pantomime, *Puss in Boots*, for production at his illustrious Drury Lane Theatre in December 1887. All this, despite the fact that she was still only in her early twenties and, in dramatic terms, still fairly untested.

Intensely patriotic, and occasionally jingoistic in tone, Graves's 'Hurdy-Gurdy Man' muses upon myriad items of contemporary popular interest and culture, including: the Royal Academy listings; seaside holidays; Music Hall and various other theatrical entertainments. The larger news stories covered by her 'grindings'—'Jack the Ripper' is mentioned fleetingly in one³⁴—advance Graves's satirical comment on matters of national and international politics. During her three years as the 'Hurdy Gurdy Man', she indiscriminately poked fun at many players on the European political stage, and dispensed—*Judy* was after all a Conservative newspaper—numerous swipes at Britain's own former Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone³⁵, using the affectionate soubriquet of the 'Grand Old Man', or 'G.O.M.' Moreover, the 'Hurdy-Gurdy' column usefully enabled Graves to continue to follow the trend of self promotion, or 'puffing' as it was more familiarly known in journalistic circles, an exercise admirably suited to the anonymous nature of Graves's 'grindings'. For example, the 'Hurdy-Gurdy' rhyme of 5th September 1888

³⁴ 'Our Own Hurdy', *Judy*, 12 September 1888.

³⁵ William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), prime minister and author. ODNB. Graves admitted, in *Who's Who*, to being a Liberal Unionist.

dealt with Graves's adaptation of H. Rider Haggard's latest novel, *She* (1887). Though the line's poetic metre was rather excruciating, 'She', Graves revealed, was 'appearing at the 'Gai-ety'',³⁶ it was demonstrably more subtle than a previous 'puff', which had alerted the theatre-going public to a matinee performance of Graves's acclaimed Egyptian drama, *Nitocris* which, she advised, might be enjoyed for the price of just one shilling, and was accompanied by Chasemore's sketch of a suitably attired Nubian queen:

[...] what's this dispels my gloom?
 And wakes my admiration? "The Nitocris costume"!
 As was a Queen of Egypt as lived in ancient days
 And led 'er troops to battle, so Mr. Chasemore says;
 And if you'd know more about 'er, says Mr. C., it's plain
 You'd best drop in and see 'er, as is on view at Drury Lane
 From half-past one this Wednesday until about five or so.
 Well if I can spare the shillin' I've half a mind to go;
 As what without relaxation is worth this mortal life;
 And clear starchin' can't be done always, says ...
 Your Own H.G.M.'s WIFE.³⁷

Despite the humour of the verses it is significant, from a feminist perspective, to note that although Graves's comments, as the 'Hurdy-Gurdy Man', are mediated through a male character and therefore might be expected to conform to the hegemonic masculine view, she ensures that her readers are left in no doubt that it is the Hurdy-Gurdy's spouse, 'Mary Ann', who rules the domestic quarter. Graves's choice of subject matter, for her Hurdy-Gurdy column, repeatedly affirmed her early commitment to the fight for women's rights. As a result, the female point of view, is paramount throughout, and challenges conventional male discourse and ideology.

³⁶ 'Our Own Hurdy Gurdy', *Judy*, 5 September, 1888.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 November 1887. (Appendix: Image 2).

For example, in one she highlights the inequalities of the higher education system, with the report that:

“Here’s the Mathematical honours of the present Cambridge year,
 Been took by Miss Fawcett, of Newnham,³⁸” says the missus, full of cheer,
 “As a gentleman takes the title of Senior Wrangler, it’s true,
 Which don’t belong to him by rights more than it does to you!”
 Which “luck to her,” I says and means the words as they are spoke,
 And candour is the motto of your HURDY GURDY BLOKE.³⁹

Similarly, in response to the Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1887,⁴⁰ aimed at banning women completely from working for the mining companies, groups of women affected by the statute were stirred to vigorous protest. Graves’s sestet reveals Mary Ann’s spirited defence of these females who were scorned by society when it was realised that not only did they work, but despite the obvious practical benefits of doing so, wore the trousers and discarded jackets of their men folk:

Which the missus says her ’pinion [sic] is them women of the Pit,
 Are as virtuous wives and mothers, and daughters, every whit,
 Though they do wear fustian thingumbobs, as any in the land;
 And she’d like to ask ’em in to tea, and shake ’em by the hand,
 For their pluck in comin’ forwards to battle against ill –
 So here’s luck and may they prosper, and blow the Mining Bill!⁴¹

Whereas these lines lend support to the women’s fight for equal employment rights, they, arguably, also seek to challenge the notion that a woman’s femininity could be lost beneath her ‘fustian thingumbobs’; a point, seemingly, more widely accepted by those who lived in the same communities as these women. Certainly Angela V.

³⁸ Refers to Philippa Fawcett, daughter of the feminist, Millicent Garrett Fawcett who helped establish Newnham College Cambridge. Philippa, gained a first in Mathematics.

³⁹ ‘Our Own Hurdy Gurdy’, *Judy*, 18 June 1890.

⁴⁰ Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1887. Hansard. Parliamentary Paper 163, of session 1887, amendment to the Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1872.

⁴¹ ‘Our Own Hurdy Gurdy’, *Judy*, 1 June 1887.

John's comprehensive study, recounts that a report as early as 1863 noted: 'No one in the crowd was at all surprised to see a grimy mother, with arms like a navvy's walking through the town in [the] strange medley of breeches and shawl, suckling her baby as she went'.⁴² Yet, attitudes surrounding male and female conventions of dress remained firmly entrenched as Marjorie Garber⁴³ and Julie Wheelwright⁴⁴ both amply demonstrate, in their respective texts. It was, of course, perhaps inevitable that Graves would support a group of working women who had adopted male attire, given Graves's own masculine style of dress. Although, unlike the pit women, Graves's vestments had no physical or causal impact on her literary output, she fully comprehended that the emotional response both parties provoked, by dressing in this way, was exactly the same.

The aforementioned piece, though notable for highlighting Graves's support for a rational dress code, further exposes her gradually evolving feminist ideas. Whereas Graves was quite patently of that order of women (the term New Woman was not coined until 1894) who relentlessly questioned classic definitions of Victorian femininity, she was not morally, or politically, opposed to marriage.⁴⁵ And though an avowed apologist for sexual equality and female suffrage, she did not concur with the theory that liberated women need abhor marriage or motherhood; principles advocated by many other feminists at the time. As Gail Marshall identifies, 'marriage

⁴² Angela V. John, *By the Sweat of their Brow: Women Workers and Victorian Coal Mines* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 26.

⁴³ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests : Cross-dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

⁴⁴ Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora, 1989).

⁴⁵ Marion Shaw and Lyssa Randolph, *New Woman Writers of the Late Nineteenth Century* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2007), pp. 2-3. An article published in 1894, 'The New Woman', by "Ouida", in response to 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', by Sarah Grand.

and sexuality became key issues in the debate over women's rights and position',⁴⁶ particularly during the 1880s and 1890s, the period when Graves was writing as the 'Hurdy Gurdy Man', and marriage remained for Graves an area of focus throughout her writing career. Graves's verse in support of the mining women, defends not only their cause but, significantly, asserts their moral decency too, as 'virtuous wives and mothers and daughters' and therefore accords with the existing archetype of Victorian female virtue.

Graves's writing on these matters exposes embryonic feminist ideals which were seemingly shaped by a number of factors—she was undoubtedly driven by Socialist and religious⁴⁷ principles—and it is clear (her later work bears this out) that her feminist convictions were predisposed toward Social Purity feminism, a particular strand of the feminist doctrine which, in simplistic terms, espoused equality of the sexes and endorsed both marriage and motherhood as desired positive options for women. Moreover, Carol A. Senf asserts that this was a philosophy keenly championed by a number of female literary exponents, who were determined to spotlight the hypocrisy of the double standard in marriage, through a moral fictional narrative, rather than dogmatic polemic.⁴⁸ They had taken their lead, Senf argues, from Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, published in 1893 as the second volume in her feminist trilogy.⁴⁹ And Sally Ledger identifies, in Grand's follow up article, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', her emphasis on the moral superiority of her

⁴⁶ Gail Marshall, *Victorian Fiction* (New York: Arnold Publishers, 2002), p.15.

⁴⁷ Graves converted to Catholicism in 1896.

⁴⁸ Carol A. Senf, 'Introduction' in Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins*, 1894 (Michigan: Michigan University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. vii – xxv. Sarah Grand, in *The Heavenly Twins* espoused Social Purity feminism through a New Woman discourse with a controversial theme of men as carriers of syphilis.

⁴⁹ Sarah Grand (1854-1943) *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), *The Beth Book* (1897).

new type of woman, and the need for her to hold out a ‘strong hand to the child-man’ in order to improve and support him.⁵⁰ Naturally, earlier writers had already advocated the notion of social purity in a wider sense with, for example, Henry Rowley’s didactic *Is it Nothing to You? Social Purity: A Grave Moral Question for Men and Women*,⁵¹ which tackled this subject from a male perspective. However, it was Sarah Grand, Ann Heilmann claims, who supplied the radical, though necessary call for women to ‘extricate themselves from patriarchal structures’,⁵² and free themselves from male repression. Yet Heilmann stresses that Grand was nonetheless keen to distance herself from the ‘shrieking sisterhood’ in order to enlist reader sympathies for, ‘the ‘right’ kind of rights-with-duties discourse’.⁵³ To account for this apparent anomaly she lauds Grand as ‘a virtuoso in the art of harmonising conflicting ideological positions’,⁵⁴ a skill, Graves too would seek to emulate as her career progressed, but not always necessarily due to her feminist inclinations; like Jasper Milvain, Graves was developing an acute eye for the business angle.

Many of Graves’s later articles, sketches and short stories published in the weekly and monthly periodicals reflect the mode of the ‘New Journalism’ of the period, a genre which Anne Varty categorises as that designed exclusively for a female market ‘for soliciting and airing women’s views [...] Shaped largely by women’s interests and often written by women’, in a manner marked, she asserts, by its use of ‘First

⁵⁰ Sally Ledger, ‘The New Woman and Feminist Fictions’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siecle* ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-168 (p. 157).

⁵¹ Henry Rowley, *Is it Nothing to You? Social Purity: A Grave Moral Question for Men and Women*, 1884 (Whitefish, USA: Kessinger Publishing, 2009).

⁵² Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 46.

⁵³ Heilmann, p. 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

person accounts, interviews and biographical profiling'.⁵⁵ Although Graves does not necessarily fulfil all of Varty's style criteria—there are few first person accounts—she did, indeed, write predominately for a female readership, furnishing them with tales that were set, sometimes, within a broader scope than just the traditional private sphere but which, typically, featured a range of strong, independent-minded women. For example, her serialised tale *Maids in a Market Garden*⁵⁶ details the efforts of a group of middle-class women to form a co-operative—the Limited Liability Company of Female Fruit and Flower Gardeners⁵⁷—and is based loosely on the work of Octavia Hill,⁵⁸ the Victorian social reformer and philanthropist; Graves's fictional heroine, Octavia Wall, the novel's key female protagonist, is the earliest model of Graves's thinly veiled portraits of actual people.⁵⁹ *Maids in a Market Garden* sits squarely in that category of women's writing produced at the end of the nineteenth century, which Varty asserts was: 'unashamedly white and middle-class in perspective'.⁶⁰ However, although *Maids in a Market Garden* engages with a fairly atypical subject and confronts a range of feminist themes (the difficulties faced by women wanting to work; female suffrage; and the suggested benefits for those who chose to remain single), Graves seemingly falters at ultimately transgressing fundamental norms. For instance, the horticulturalists declare an early resolution for women's emancipation:

Let us be of one mind said Octavia Wall. 'My dears, let us keep the insidious Man as well as the destructive wireworm out of this Eden

⁵⁵ Varty, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁶ Clotilde Graves, *Maids in a Market Garden* (London: W.H. Allen & Co. 1894).

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 16. This follows their earlier failed attempt at a secretarial agency: 'The United Gentlewomen's Work Association'.

⁵⁸ Octavia Hill (1838–1912) housing and social reformer. ODNB.

⁵⁹ Others include: Florence Nightingale as the character Ada Merling in *Between Two Thieves* (London: Heinemann, 1912) and Lord Baden Powell as the Colonel in *The Dop Doctor*.

⁶⁰ Varty, p. 3.

we propose to inhabit and cultivate [...] No foolish coquetries, no idiotic flirtations [...] Regular meals, early hours, sensible dress, hardy occupations should be enforced amongst our rules. And our watchword—borrowed from the labouring class should be “NO FOLLOWERS ALLOWED”” [sic]⁶¹

Yet, despite their emphatic determination to abhor any romantic liaisons, Graves blends several love affairs into a narrative which concludes with the conventional, nuptial outcome. Most of the females do eventually marry with one especially talented spinster, Joan, harbouring eternal grief for her deceased lover; the Victorian reader was reassured, however, that: ‘whatever laurels Fate held in store for Joan, she [would] wear them as she [wore] her beauty and her great grief—modestly and silently’.⁶² Whereas this might appear to conflict with Graves’s original feminist stance of the 1880s, it sits perfectly within the ideological framework of Social Purity feminism and, more importantly, given her primary need to earn a living, catered for the Victorian woman’s traditional, book-reading market.

Graves’s willingness to draw upon her own personal experiences, from either family life, or the theatrical profession, and often with barely concealed locations or place names, became a recurring habit throughout a long career. As a result, a number of early articles and short stories, described as fictions, which refer to an impecunious ex-military family, residing in Southsea, on England’s south coast, are easily identified as semi-autobiographical sketches of Graves’s teenage years. In order to, arguably, accentuate the masculine perspective—though they are signed by Clo Graves—the authorial voice in many of the stories is attributed to the son of the family, who supplies an amusing, though predictably male response to the activities

⁶¹ *Maids in a Market Garden*, p. 16.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 252.

of his three female siblings; the brother to sister ratio also mirrors that of the Graves's family unit. In 'A Hampshire Rose', the young man describes the girls' eager anticipation at the arrival of 'the Suffolk Scorchers'; the episode is highly reminiscent of the scene with the young Bennett sisters, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and the commotion aroused by the news that the regiment is in town. The article turns on the ubiquitous and, at least for the Graves family, the equally vexatious question of finances, with the added revelation that:

The family cupboard contained two skeletons. One was that grisly thing called Poverty, and the other—the other was the recurrent tendency on the part of the mistress of Castle Villa (Southsea teems with red-brick Noah's Arks like Castle Villa) to look, if not upon the wine cup when it was red, at least inside the gin-bottle until it was empty!⁶³

It was with much enthusiasm that Graves embraced the role of a brother, with the sisters supplying an endless source of material for Graves to satirise the stereotypes and foibles of typical young women operating within the confines of Victorian society.⁶⁴

“This may be unladylike,” said Belle to Tilly, “but what are poor girls to do? If the men won't hunt us, we must hunt them.”
 “We are all hunting them,” said Tilly. “There are the Verrikers with new hats, and the Plympton trio in a state of refurbishment. They have bought one long feather boa and divided it up among the three.”⁶⁵

⁶³ 'A Hampshire Rose', *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 2 December 1893.

⁶⁴ In an article in mid 1890s, she describes herself as the brother to two sisters. 'My Foreign Friend', *Penny Illustrated*, 28 December 1895.

⁶⁵ 'A Hampshire Rose', *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 2 December 1893.

This is not to suggest, however, that because these discourses unfold from a male perspective that she was endorsing an anti-feminist view. Though Graves might poke fun at the foolishness and perversity of silly young women, she did no less when it came to highlighting the imprudence of young men.

Despite Graves's undeniable readiness to embrace personal experience in her writing, there are surprisingly few examples which feature either a journalist as the central protagonist, or embrace journalism as a key topic, the author much preferring, it would seem, a theatrical setting or theme. This may, of course, as discussed in chapter one, have been a calculated response to the large number of articles which had already explored the subject matter—particularly from female writers—however, Graves very usefully supplies three very different examples, which merit further comment; not least because they offer a glimpse of Graves's first-hand view of the newspaper industry during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The first of these, a romance, entitled *The Pansy Papers*,⁶⁶ is a short, fanciful piece regarding a seemingly naive, beautiful, would-be journalist and her professional acquaintance with a hard-nosed newspaper editor. Although it was first published in 1909, it is possible that it had been written many years before. The heroine, young Miss Elsie Stillingfleet, presents for sale an extraordinarily lengthy manuscript in order to alleviate the distress caused by her father's bankruptcy. Entitled 'Alma

⁶⁶ 'The Pansy Papers', *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 17 July 1909.

Firenza – the Adventures of a Young Girl in Modern Society’, the piece is pronounced as woefully inadequate, and elicits the editor’s private misgivings that:

The story is as ridiculously written as it is badly spelt. It is full of impossible descriptions of things that the writer never saw in her life. It might have been written in the play-time of a little girl of eleven!

However, easily seduced by the aspiring author’s violet-coloured eyes, the editor agrees to publish the girl’s feeble ‘scribblings’, as the alleged outpourings of a gauche schoolgirl. He makes his calculations and advises:

Suppose I boiled the chapters down to one-quarter their present length and called them *The Pansy Papers*. Spelling and punctuation and all, just as it is. Painting the lily to add a touch to it. And each chapter would come to about 1,500 words, I think I could give you three guineas for each.

Although the story is crafted as a light-hearted fiction, it is clear from the outset that the woman has the upper hand; the subtext suggests that the young woman has sufficient sexual agency to undermine her male protagonist. Whereas Elsie Stillingfleet is mindful of the failings of her ‘*Pansy Papers*’, she is equally conscious of the advantages to be gained from her feminine wiles and beguiles the editor with tears and coquettish behaviour to maintain her dominant position in their negotiations; thus she inverts the conventional hierarchy of male superiority while subverting the notion of female innocence. Of significance, however, are the obvious parallels to Graves’s own story, in particular her father’s bankruptcy.⁶⁷ However,

⁶⁷‘English Bankrupts’, *Glasgow Herald*, 8 March 1873. ‘William Henry Graves, no occupation (late major in the army, and also staff-officer of Pensioners, Newry, Ireland), Alvington Lodge, Grenada Road, Southsea, Hants’. This was later reported as ‘annulled’ on 25th June 1874, in *Morning Post*, 1 July 1874.

though early descriptions, and images, of Graves certainly attest to her beauty,⁶⁸ it does not mean that Graves resorted to the same tactics as Elsie Stillingfleet, although one reviewer, trusting that ‘success would soon be hers’, admitted to having succumbed to her charms:

I hope that it will, for she is very fair to look upon, and when she took her call in her nice little black dress, white waistcoat, and red sash, and she smiled seraphically behind her neat, tip-tilted nose, I felt that I could almost have forgiven her, if instead of a blank verse tragedy, she had perpetrated an old comedy.⁶⁹

Though Graves’s portrayal here, of the inexperienced young female journalist, lacks the realism, perhaps, of that offered by Gissing’s ‘Marian Yules’ or those created by Lady Colin Campbell,⁷⁰ it is, however, a valuable representation. Likewise, both H.G. Wells’ ‘Anne Veronica’, and Ella Hepworth Dixon’s ‘Mary Erle’, again spring purposefully to mind, not least because their fictional experiences reflect, in many instances, the real-life stories of both Elsie Stillingfleet and Clo Graves.

The second of Graves’s journalistic portraits is a character called Lady Hannah Wrynche, a thinly veiled representation of female war-correspondent Lady Sarah Wilson.⁷¹ Though Wrynche is married, she is portrayed as of the ‘New woman’ type, an independently-minded journalist who ‘smoked and enjoyed snooker-pool and whiskey-soda’;⁷² a description which resonates strongly with Douglas Sladen’s previous vignette of Graves herself, as the ‘young bohemian’ and the evenings they

⁶⁸ Image 1.

⁶⁹ ‘Flashes from the Footlights’. *The Licensed Victuallers Mirror*, 18 September 1888.

⁷⁰ Campbell’s novel, *Darrell Blake* and her play *The Bud & [sic] Blossom* both used the setting of journalism. Jordan, pp. 167-168.

⁷¹ Lady Sarah Isabella Augusta Wilson (1865-1929), daughter of the 7th Duke of Marlborough and aunt to Winston Churchill she was in South Africa with her army officer husband. Acclaimed for her bravery and fortitude, Lady Sarah is said to have been conducting spying activities against the Boers until arrested by General Snyman and exchanged for General Viljoen, held prisoner by Baden-Powell.

⁷² DD, p. 151

spent drinking ‘whiskey and sodas’.⁷³ In reality, Lady Sarah Wilson, had no previous ‘form’ in this field of work, or indeed any experience which paralleled Graves’s own endeavours as a news hack. The outbreak of war in South Africa had seen a rush of women to the Cape, in the main, the wives and mothers of serving English officers, including the aforementioned Lady Wilson.⁷⁴ Brian Roberts argues that this exodus had been ‘a spontaneous event’ (more of an emotional response to the looming crisis than a loyal closing of ranks) and keen to play some part, however vague, in what promised to be ‘the stirrings of some great Imperial drama, the activities of these ‘society butterflies’, was keenly observed back in England, by many of the daily papers’.⁷⁵ The *Daily Mail*, a news sheet popular with the masses, secured the services of Lady Sarah Wilson, who had been caught up, purely by chance, in the beleaguered town of Mafeking, as she accompanied her husband Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Wilson.⁷⁶ Duly enrolled as the only female Special War Correspondent to cover the conflict, Wilson demonstrated incredible courage and resilience in the face of much danger and deprivation with her despatches creating a ‘great sensation’.⁷⁷ Given Graves’s subsequent creation of Lady Wrynche, one might even argue that Graves’s fictional heroine was a projection of her own, ultimate, desired self.

In her final, and perhaps most realistic, portrait of Victorian journalism Graves looked back to London’s Fleet Street of the 1870s, and the fortunes of a young man, Patrice Carolan Breagh. Though the novel also features Germany’s ‘Iron

⁷³ Letter to Graves, 15 March 1913. Sladen Collection, Richmond Local History Archive.

⁷⁴ Wilson produced a memoir of her exploits during the campaign: Lady Sarah Wilson, *South African Memories: Social, Warlike and Sporting from Diaries Written at the Time* (London: Edward Arnold, 1909). It includes details of Wilson owning a pony called ‘Dop’.

⁷⁵ Brian Roberts, *Those Bloody Women: Three Heroines of the Boer War* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1991), p. 17.

⁷⁶ Aide de Camp to Colonel Robert Baden Powell.

⁷⁷ Roberts, pp. 30-31.

Chancellor', Otto von Bismarck,⁷⁸ and is contextualised against the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, its sweeping narrative follows more closely the tribulations of its ordinary characters, than those operating on the international stage. Among them is the aforementioned Breagh, an Anglo-Irish immigrant whose nationality is the first of many traits he shares with Graves; there is, once more, the uncertain financial state and the military family background. Breagh arrives in London to discover that, initially, his only means of earning a living is as a news hack, and Graves duly furnishes the reader with evocative images of Breagh's lodgings and sundry vignettes of his friends and acquaintances from the newspaper profession:

Mr. Ticking was a journalist who possessed a knack of rhyme, penned comic ditties for Lion Comiques ... and lived in the hope of getting a Burlesque produced at a West-End Theater one day. He had educated himself because you couldn't get on if you were not educated [...] By dexterously angling matter for short paragraphs from the swirl of happenings about him, he contrived between the Camberwell Clarion and the Islington Excelsior to net some three pounds at the end of each week. Thirty shillings of this went to support an aged and invalid mother resident at Brixton.⁷⁹

Both Breagh and the self-educated Mr. Ticking, with his 'knack of rhyme' and versatility at manipulating paragraphs, are recognisable as probable self-portraits of Graves; compounded, perhaps, by the revelation that Ticking has a dependent, aged parent. Similarly Graves's cameos of the 'penny-a-liners of Paternoster Row' with their 'out-at-elbows', and also the 'seedy-looking literary free-lances, who picked up a living by indicting touching tracts and poignant pamphlets',⁸⁰ reflect not only Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen from Gissing's *New Grub Street*, but Graves's own down-at-heel companions from the 'Grub Street' she frequented. Graves's

⁷⁸ Otto von Bismarck (1 April 1815 – 30 July 1898), unified the German states into the German Empire, became the first Chancellor of Germany – 'The Iron Chancellor'.

⁷⁹ Richard Dehan, *The Man of Iron* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), p. 120.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 105.

drawings of these desperate souls as they struggled to survive, has an urgency which is both touching and realistic, and she records the manner in which:

the pen would hang idle between the fingers of P. C. Breagh, and the article commissioned by the benevolent editor, or the more ambitious magazine-story that was being written as a bait to catch a literary reputation, and would return as surely as the swallow of the previous summer, from the editorial offices of Blackwood's, or the Cornhill, or even Tinsley's, would hang fire. With his elbows on the blotting-pad, exposing to view the shiny places on the right-hand cuff of the old serge jacket, and his eyes vaguely staring at the strip of London sky seen above the chimney-pots of Bernard Street.⁸¹

This particular paragraph is especially revealing, with its reference to the sky-line over Bloomsbury's Bernard Street, because Graves herself lived at number eight, for a time, during her own early years as a writer.⁸² Therefore, if Breagh represents Graves, which surely he does, then his stated ambition, to catch a 'literary reputation',⁸³ surely reflected her own.

Nigel Cross notes the perception of H.G. Wells, and others, during the fin de siècle that the grip of the Victorian giants i.e. Dickens, Thackeray and the like, on the reading public, was giving way to a new generation of younger writers.⁸⁴ Others saw this, Cross contends, as indicative of a decline in literary standards; curiously, perhaps, Gissing numbered among those who shared the pessimistic view. The theme of literary decay was reiterated in the Royal Literary Fund after-dinner speeches

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 128-129.

⁸² 8 Bernard Street was demolished in the late 1890s to make way for the construction of Russell Square Underground station, though the rest of the row still exists.

⁸³ Richard Dehan, *The Man of Iron* (London: William Heinemann, 1915), p. 129.

⁸⁴ Cross, p. 213.

throughout the 1880s, culminating, in 1888, in a diatribe from the historian W.E. H. Leckey, against the popular press:

Literature loses still more by the large amount of literary talent which is devoted to what cannot be properly called Literature – which is pulverised and absorbed in the daily or weekly Press. I suppose there has never been a country or an age in which so large an amount of excellent literary talent has been devoted to writings which are at once anonymous and ephemeral.⁸⁵

Clotilde Graves was, undeniably, one of those who, as Leckey saw them, squandered their talent on the production of transient pulp, to be consumed by an ever hungry newspaper industry. And yet, though not all of her writing for the popular press might properly be called ‘Literature’ there are, nonetheless, a number, several of which have been highlighted here, which affirm her ability as a more than proficient writer. In 1905, Sidney Low still believed this and wrote that ‘if [Graves] is relieved from the immediate pressure of pecuniary embarrassment, poetical or dramatic work, possibly literary essays, of value, might still be expected from her’.⁸⁶ It is somewhat ironic that though he intended his use of the term ‘of value’ to be interpreted from a literary perspective, he knew only too well, that the financial definition was the more to be desired.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶RLF: 2692/9.

Section Two: A Playwright

Chapter Three

[No] Shining Example of Theatrical Purity: Katherine Kavanagh, the Heroine with a Past

27th December 1891

Dear Mr. Scott

Mrs Beringer and I have just received a cablegram from the Kendals. Our play, **Katherine Kavanagh** was produced at Chicago on Saturday night and went off without a hitch. This is all the more satisfying to us, as, of course you have told us before, the American public as in cases of the Money Spinning and Home – Still Waters Run Deep, and other plays, - have envied a determination not to accept our ‘shining example of female theatrical purity’ in the part of a heroine with a past. If you could give us a line in Friday’s dramatic column we should be ever so much indebted to you.

Very sincerely yours

Clo Graves¹

Although Graves’s letter to Clement Scott, in late 1891, primarily expresses the playwrights’ pleasure upon hearing of the American success of their ‘fallen woman’ play, *Katherine Kavanagh*,² it was a gratification accentuated more readily, Graves reveals, because they had successfully challenged the contemporary apotheosis of dramatic femininity. Furthermore, their premeditated drawing of a protagonist who ran contrary to, as Graves phrases it, ‘a shining example of female theatrical purity’, offered a portrait which subverted the standard treatment of the Victorian ‘heroine with a past’; whereas the usual handling of the ‘fallen woman’ decreed that shame

¹ URL, S3425, 27 December 1891.

² Clotilde Graves and Mrs. Oscar Beringer, *Katherine Kavanagh*, LCP, 53482M.

and repentance or, at worst, death would be her ultimate end, in this instance the eponymous stage heroine faced neither. This is a significant issue, which merits further scrutiny, because not only did their stage rendering of the ‘fallen’ woman’s fate intentionally flout the usual standard, it also countered that of her fictional equivalent in Graves’s earlier novel, *Dragon’s Teeth*,³ from which the play had been adapted. Moreover, given the initial press report which advised that it was ‘so well received’ in Chicago and was to be ‘given in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities’,⁴ its eventual lukewarm reception implies otherwise.

Dragon’s Teeth was Graves’s second published volume and had also been printed, for an American audience, in its original format as *A Field of Tares*;⁵ both were dedicated to the actress Annie Irish.⁶ The stage adaptation, produced in collaboration with Mrs. Oscar Beringer⁷ and bought by the actors William and Madge Kendal,⁸ in 1892, was abridged from the book, under the soubriquet *Katherine Kavanagh*,⁹ into a prologue followed by four Acts. Though the novel and play both engage with a number of controversial themes of the 1890s, it is her treatment of the fallen woman which is the prime focus here. It is only in the book, however, that the disgraced female’s premature death satisfies rather than defies orthodox treatment of the ‘fallen woman’. Therefore, her decision to challenge the status quo in the dramatic version

³ *Dragon’s Teeth* (London: Dalziel Brothers, 1891).

⁴ ‘The Kendals in America’ *Hearth & Home*, 21 January 1892.

⁵ *A Field of Tares* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891)

⁶ Annie Irish, wife of the actor J. E. Dodson. ‘Annie Irish to Retire’, *New York Times*, 15 December 1905.

⁷ Aimeé Danielle Beringer (1856-nd), playwright, wife of Oscar Beringer.

⁸ William Hunter Kendal (1843-1917) Actor and theatre manager. Dame Madge Kendal (1848-1935) Actress. ODNB

⁹ ‘Katherine Kavanagh’, *Fun*, 30 June 1891.

is a useful point of reference in an analysis of Graves's development both as a writer and as a feminist.

The influence of Henrik Ibsen's work, during the late-Victorian period, has already been well documented by scholars as an identifiable force which encouraged a shake up in the themes and issues that were explored on the fin de siècle English stage, and inspired a number of British playwrights to pursue a similar course. Though Holbrook Jackson's¹⁰ critique usefully presents the dramatists Henry Arthur Jones¹¹ and Arthur Wing Pinero¹² as two such 'pioneers to compromise' in their tackling of the New Woman issue, it is, however, Pinero's success with his 'fallen woman' drama, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, in 1893,¹³ which is of significant interest here; according to theatre critic William Archer the huge success of Pinero's 'problem play' induced other dramatists to take his lead in their portrayal of contentious issues, specifically with regard to the female sex. Eltis notes, in her study, that plays which focussed on the issues of women's sexuality, adultery, and the double standard had become so popular during the 1890s that 'some of the most successful late Victorian playwrights seemed to write almost exclusively within this genre',¹⁴ and he identifies a number of works by Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, Oscar Wilde¹⁵ and George Bernard Shaw¹⁶ to illustrate this point. The inclusion of Shaw on the list is interesting, not least because, as Joel Kaplan observes, many of these plays were read

¹⁰ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Arts and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 258.

¹¹ Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) Playwright. ODNB.

¹² Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934) Playwright. ODNB.

¹³ A W Pinero, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was first performed 27 May 1893.

¹⁴ Sos Eltis, 'The Fallen Woman on Stage: Maidens, Magdalens and the Emancipated Female', in *Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Powell (2004), pp. 222-236 (p. 227).

¹⁵ Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) Writer. ODNB.

¹⁶ George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Playwright and polemicist. ODNB.

by contemporaries as ‘sex-problem’ plays, ‘curious amalgams of drawing-room melodrama, well made play, and Ibsen accommodated to Mayfair sensibilities’,¹⁷ and it was Shaw, Kaplan advises, who was particularly critical of the ‘Pineroticism’,¹⁸ which he perceived had infected the stage with its prevalence of ‘naughty ladies’. Nevertheless, as Holbrook Jackson reminds us, it was Pinero who had ‘inserted the thin end of the wedge’ with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and, as a consequence, the Victorian theatre was ‘indeed on the threshold of a new epoch’.¹⁹

Though *Katherine Kavanagh* was the first of Graves’s ‘problem plays’, and lacks some of the sophistication to be found in the work of the aforementioned male dramatists, the play nonetheless demonstrates her keenness to engage with a burgeoning trend; it is also important to reiterate that it was fashioned before many of the other better known ‘problem plays’ by Pinero et al, produced during the 1890s. The unveiling of *Katherine Kavanagh* aroused some interest in the theatrical papers, not least because the Kendals included it in their American tour for 1891/1892.

A number of Graves’s lexical choices, with regard to the adaptation, also particularly illuminating. For example, on the play manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain’s collection, the original title of *Dragon’s Teeth* has been scored through and replaced (in Graves’s own hand) by the name ‘Katherine Kavanagh’. Though there is nothing to explain the reason for this name change, at a stroke, Graves has centralised the spotlight of the dramatic version on to her heroine. Similarly, in her correspondence

¹⁷ Joel Kaplan, ‘Pineroticism and the Problem Play’, in *British Theatre in the 1890s*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 38-58 (p. 38).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 58. Kaplan identifies the first reference to ‘Pineroticism’ coming from GB Shaw in the *Saturday Review*, 23 March 1895.

¹⁹ Holbrook Jackson, p. 259.

with Scott in the opening quote, her labelling of the protagonist as a ‘heroine with a past’ rather than as a ‘woman with a past’, is evidence of Graves’s sympathetic regard for her female subject; unlike the word ‘woman’ which, other than from a gender perspective, is coded as a neutral term, ‘heroine’ has immediate positive signifiers. It can therefore be argued that Graves’s act of coding has duly elevated her subject, and constructed around it a propitious, feminist discourse. And while Graves’s use of the word ‘theatrical’—neatly sandwiched by the phrase ‘female purity’—might initially signal that the term is, of course, no more than a benign reference to feminine virtue within a ‘theatrical’ context, it is crucial to note, Deborah Logan reminds us, that when reading Victorian fallen woman literature, ‘we must read between the lines’.²⁰ It is therefore pertinent to argue that Graves was mindful of the fact that negative, or artificial, connotations were often associated with the term ‘theatrical’ and, consequently, she was aware that an alternative interpretation might be perceived, especially when the word was juxtaposed with ‘a heroine with a past’.

In a detailed collection of essays on ‘theatricality’, Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait tussle with the duality and complexity of the word ‘theatre’ together with its subsequent derivatives, ‘theatrical’ and ‘theatrics’.²¹ They too acknowledge the pejorative meanings that the word might provoke, citing numerous examples to demonstrate how, in drawing on an adjective from the dramatic lexicon, a simple term such as this might be loaded with often derogatory signifiers because ‘theatricality’ implies something which is exaggerated, ‘over the top’, or, as in this

²⁰ Deborah Ann Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die or do Worse* (Missouri: Missouri University Press, 1998), p. 3.

²¹ Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., *Theatricality; Theatre and Performance Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

example, that which is a deception and a masquerade. Although, naturally, Davis and Postlewait explore the term from a twenty-first-century orientation, they acknowledge the negative connotations of an etymology which, though it dates back centuries, was similarly understood and employed by their Victorian counterparts; for example, in 1897, the editor of *Hearth and Home*²² magazine exhorted his subscribers to consider carefully their choice of reading materials as a means of avoiding ‘the tawdriness and theatricality of such works as those of Miss Corelli’. Likewise, a large percentage of Graves’s work (as journalist, playwright and author) was similarly imbued with dramatic resonances that were undeniably drawn from her own theatrical inclinations. The ‘theatrical’ trait is also discernible in the writings of other female novelists and Lyn Pykett²³ has explored it as a characteristic of the writer Mary Elizabeth Braddon, author of the definitive sensation novel of the 1860s, *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1861). By the same token, Kate Mattacks too concurs that distinguishing elements of Braddon’s early sensation fiction, i.e. the melodramatic display, calculated effects and theatricality, were all derived from Braddon’s stage career.²⁴ Pykett perceives that the character of Lady Audley ‘is staging herself’, arguing that ‘virtually all [Braddon’s] heroines have something to hide, and to that extent are actresses’.²⁵

These same elements feature strongly in Graves’s own drawing of the character of Katherine Kavanagh who, like Lady Audley, exploits an agency of ‘performance’ as

²² ‘Editorial’, *Hearth and Home: An Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlewomen*, 1 April 1897.

²³ Lyn Pykett, *The Improper Feminine: The Woman’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 89. Braddon, like Graves, failed as other than a provincial actress.

²⁴ Kate Mattacks, ‘After Lady Audley: M. E. Braddon, the Actress and the Act of Writing in *Hostages to Fortune*’, in *Feminist Readings of Victorian Popular Texts: Divergent Femininities*, ed. by Emma Liggins and Daniel Duffy (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2001), pp. 69-89 (p. 71).

²⁵ Pykett, p. 89.

a means of female empowerment. Though sympathetically portrayed as a victim of both male exploitation and cruel circumstance, Katherine too, is nonetheless shown to be innately resourceful, and Graves has endowed her with the capacity to take on a range of womanly guises in order to manipulate people and situations to her advantage. And yet, paradoxically, although in one of those roles she embodied the Victorian ideal of femininity—as the wife of Colonel Kavanagh—she was also concealing a past which, if exposed, would have debarred her from that culturally elevated position. In her creation of Katherine, Graves was admitting that women could, and often did, ‘mask’ and it is her acknowledgement that they were actually empowered through their ‘performance’. Eltis has identified three essential manifestations of the fallen woman on stage: ‘the seduced maiden, the wicked seductress, and the repentant magdalen’, arguing that given enough stage time the fallen woman could embrace all three during a single production;²⁶ Graves’s drawing of her protagonist is, undoubtedly, illustrative of the type identified by Eltis, with Katherine fulfilling each of those guises.

Though Graves exposes notable similarities to the eponymous Mrs. Tanqueray (in addition to their dubious pasts, both have married widowers and inherited step-daughters and are subsequently confronted by the man who has contributed to their ‘fall’) Graves’s play, *Katherine Kavanagh*, failed to achieve the same level of notoriety, interest, or critical acclaim as Pinero’s ground-breaking production. The reason for this might fairly be attributed to a number of factors: firstly, it was penned by a female hand; Graves had already acknowledged the difficulties women writers faced and, as previously noted, had addressed this to some extent with an abbreviated

²⁶ Eltis, p. 222.

signature. Secondly, Graves's texts (the novel and the play) fell within the genres of sensation literature and melodrama, contexts guaranteed to situate them pejoratively low down within the cultural taxonomy; Eltis argues that the influence of Ibsen's plays, though they were never major box-office hits, made the melodrama look increasingly old-fashioned and, therefore, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*'s success was founded on its capacity to have detected the 'lucrative middle-ground between Ibsenite radicalism and conventional melodrama'. Guy Barefoot insists, in *Gaslight Melodrama: From Victorian London to 1940s Hollywood* (2001), that these attitudes to melodrama still persist, arguing that the genre has endured numerous peaks and troughs, over the years, in terms of academic support for its perceived lack of sophistication, or relevance to cultural studies.²⁷ Finally, but of no less significance as a reason for the play's lack of apparent success, was that the part of Katherine was taken by Mrs. Madge Kendal, a popular, though somewhat prim, well-established actress, linked in the public conscious with the Victorian representation of ideal womanhood.²⁸ Acknowledged in her day as a doyen of theatrical respectability—an image which Kendal was eager to maintain—it is arguable that this made it difficult, in some measure, for an audience to disassociate Kendal's own personality from that of Graves's heroine; Arthur Wing Pinero had expressed similar sentiments with regard to *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, expressing concern that the actress engaged to undertake the part of his 'fallen woman' character should not bring to it any 'excess

²⁷ Guy Barefoot, *Gaslight Melodrama: From Victorian London to 1940s Hollywood* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2001), p. 7. One such challenge, from Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), argues that far from being unrealistic and mawkish, melodrama is key to 'an understanding of an important and abiding mode in the modern imagination'.

²⁸ Made a Dame of the British Empire in 1926, she insisted always, on acting alongside her husband, William Kendal. In *Katherine Kavanagh* he played the 'villain' Reginald Hawley.

baggage from previous roles’.²⁹ To what extent, if any, this was as a result of Madge Kendal’s influence is unclear.

Despite Graves’s avowed commitment to counter the ‘shining example of female theatrical purity’, the ‘past life’ of Katherine’s dramatic incarnation is arguably more sympathetically expressed than that of her fictional equivalent. And whereas, in the novel, the darker side to the heroine’s personality is significantly more pronounced, there is a stress on the redemptive maternal qualities of the women in both examples. Graves’s predisposition toward the strand of social purity feminism so favoured by Sarah Grand³⁰ has already been acknowledged, and it is clearly in evidence here. Andrew Maunder refers to the ubiquitous habit of many Victorian writers, of women’s literature, of propagating ideological messages to its readership and, in particular, reminding women of ‘their social responsibilities, of the joys and privileges of the cult of motherhood and of the fact that motherhood was woman’s primary duty as a citizen’;³¹ this is indeed a pronounced and recurrent theme in Graves’s work and is revisited in a later chapter.

Before exploring the various hypotheses detailed above, it is first necessary to offer a brief synopsis of the book and the play, to establish the core differences between the two narratives and their subsequent outcome and handling of the ‘fallen woman’. A review in the *Era*, following the Kendals’ production at Palmer’s Theatre, New York on 14th March 1892, includes the following précis of the drama:

²⁹ Kaplan, p. 40.

³⁰ Senf, pp. vii – xxv. In *The Heavenly Twins* Grand espoused Social Purity feminism through a New Woman discourse with the controversial theme of men as carriers of syphilis.

³¹ Andrew Maunder, ed., *The Fate of Fenella*, 1892 (Kansas: Valancourt Books, 2008), p. 6.

[Katherine] acts as the decoy of a Brussels gambling “hell”, and robs Reginald Hawley, a wealthy and dissipated Englishman...she has reformed and is married to a respectable country gentleman. Her past is unknown, and as the wife of Colonel Kavanagh of Selbrigg Hall,³² she is a universally esteemed member of rural society. Her [step] daughter is about to be married to a rich young baronet, and the play opens with a scene of general happiness and festivity. At this moment the climax arrives. The swindled Englishman, Hawley, happens to be invited to the wedding. He has never forgotten the trick that was played on him at Brussels, and has sworn to find and punish the woman who robbed him. By accident he discovers her in the wife of his host. His desire for revenge is immediately awakened, and, in spite of her pleadings for mercy and threats to commit suicide if her former life be exposed, he remains obdurate in his decision to have her arrested. Before he can proceed to this extremity, however, a new personage becomes prominent in the drama, Hoell Brinnilow, who, formerly Hawley’s “fag” at school, had been permanently crippled in rough play by his superior. Under obligation to the man whom he maimed for life, Hawley has promised to grant any favour that Hoell may entreat. This favour, of course, is silence about Katherine Kavanagh’s early life. After several dramatic scenes between the two men and Mrs. Kavanagh, the drama ends happily.³³

Though, in the main, this review offers a fairly accurate summary of the basic story as related in both the original volume and in the play manuscript, the closing three lines relate only to the story as it unfolds upon the stage; unlike the dramatic version, there is, perhaps unsurprisingly, no fairy-tale denouement for the fallen woman in *Dragon’s Teeth*. By the close of the novel the aforementioned Reginald Hawley, and Katherine, are both dead; the former fatally poisoned by Hoell Brinnilow and the latter, as an accessory to Hawley’s death, has also met an untimely end.

The prologues to the drama and the novel both open within the domestic settings of a salon in the Hotel du Place, Brussels, sites which, initially, fulfil the positive connotations of the feminine, private sphere. However, given that the salon is

³² From the thinly disguised place names, it is evident that Selbrigg Hall is an alias for Felbrigg Hall, now part of the National Trust.

³³ ‘Theatre’, *Era*, 26 March 1892.

subsequently exposed as a locale which doubles, euphemistically, as a ‘casino’, and is where the protagonist, Katherine Kavanagh, discharges her role as ‘hostess’ (she is complicit in drugging, and stealing from male clients), effectively destabilises any earlier positive, domiciliary reading of this *mise-en-scène*. Furthermore, Graves’s choice of location—Brussels—linked, at that time, in the popular imagination with ‘white slavery’ and prostitution, underscores this familial instability and, by extension, that of the female at the epicentre of the domestic sphere. Although, in the 1860s, the social reformer Josephine Butler³⁴ had successfully launched an attack against the owners of brothels in the Belgian capital, more recently still, in 1880, three of London’s largest daily newspapers had published details of the ‘sexual trafficking’ of innocent, young English women over to the ‘bawdy houses’ of Brussels.³⁵ These often salacious press reports detailed the ‘goings-on’ at establishments along the infamous Rue St. Laurent—the street of ‘licensed hells’³⁶ as it was known—where many girls were allegedly held against their will, often under the watchful eyes of the *tenants-maison*, or ‘Madames’, by whom they were operated. The fact that Graves has situated her heroine in a street which, as the crow flies, stood within only two hundred metres of the aforementioned Rue St. Laurent: ‘[On] the second story [sic] of a gaunt old house in the Place du Congrès [in] the apartment of Madame de Quayros’,³⁷ highlights Graves’s premeditated intent to link the two sites in the audience’s subconscious. This amalgam, therefore, in Graves’s story, of a domestic setting, mingled with that of a European ‘gambling den’, defines

³⁴ Josephine Elizabeth Butler (1828–1906), social reformer and women’s activist. Honorary secretary of the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1886 provided for the medical and police inspection of prostitutes in garrison towns and ports. ODNB.

³⁵ *Daily News, Standard, Daily Chronicle*. From Michael Pearson, *The Age of Consent: Victorian Prostitution and its Enemies* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles (Publishers) Ltd., 1972), p. 41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁷ DT, p. 14.

it categorically as a corrupted space, and this sense of contamination is arguably heightened by the application of a discourse of ‘otherness’ found in her imperialist subtext of supposed inferior, foreign, ‘other’.

Moreover, Graves foregrounds the contradictions of this wholesome space—a domestic sphere with, at its heart, an idealised Angel in the House—to represent the instability barely concealed beneath the plush carpets of the drawing room. Indeed, Graves labels it ‘a House of Shadows—even in the daytime’,³⁸ which, given the intangible and ephemeral nature of the phenomenon, evokes myriad readings. Employing a mixture of repetitive patterns, for both rhetorical effect and emphasis, Graves traces out the scene:

Uncommonly well-attended had been the *salon* of Madame de Quayros on this particular night. Shadows of so many varieties of shape, and such dazzling efflorescences of gesture had been thrown upon those closely drawn blinds, in relief against the radiance emanating from behind them, that the soberest sense might well have grown dizzy in merely trying to distinguish one from another. Shadows with double chins, and shadows with none. Shadows Roman-nosed and shadows snubbed. Lean shadows, stout shadows, long fantastic shadows, short grotesque ones. Shadows bifurcate—masculine almost without exception. Once or twice, indeed, a portly matron shadow, with a bosom and a bustle—the shadow of Madame beyond a doubt. Twice or once a slighter woman’s shadow, a shadow in flowing draperies, with a shadowy grace in its smooth movements and a shadowy pride in the carriage of its head. Young and old shadows [...]³⁹

There are, inevitably, a number of interpretations which could usefully be applied to this passage. For example, whereas a Victorian medical expert, might have

³⁸ DT, p.13.

³⁹ DT, p. 14.

advocated that ‘shadowing’ symbolised some metaphorical notion of insanity,⁴⁰ or a twenty-first century eye, such as Mangham’s, might perceive it as illustrative of the ‘concept of the “dangerous” woman as a shadow of masculine neuroses’,⁴¹ it is reasonable to argue that Graves’s use of the shadow trope here indicates primarily, a feminist intent; on the one hand, though the shadowy figures are vague and at times imprecise, they are ‘almost without exception’ male. And this majority, or mass, which seemingly overwhelms both of the female forms in Graves’s ‘House of Shadows’, symbolises male influence; the long shadow of an ideology of patriarchal control which extended across Victorian society. Though it is possible to define basic features (Graves notes double chins and snubbed noses) they are, nonetheless, of an indistinguishable type. The darkness of their shape, in the Manichean sense, denotes an ability to corrupt, they are perhaps, if such a thing were possible, shadows able to cast shadows, yet Graves determines ‘beyond a doubt’ that the outlines of the two women are not subsumed as part of the masculine whole. While the male silhouettes provoke a feeling of stasis the female shadows are more positively defined and, in her closing lines, are favoured with the capacity for movement; Graves purposefully delineates the amorphous nature of the younger woman using fluidity in her language—the ‘flowing draperies’ and smooth, ‘shadowy grace’—to symbolise female advancement.

The shadow metaphor is revisited later in the novel, with a description of Hawley’s return, as ‘a Shadow [sic] stretched across the lapse of years and [which] fell upon

⁴⁰ Forbes B. Winslow, *On Obscure Diseases of the Brain, and Disorders of the Mind* (London: John Churchill, 1860).

⁴¹ Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). Mangham explores the notion of ‘the shadow of a woman’ in Wilkie Collins’s *Armada* (1866), pp. 196-197.

her blackly'.⁴² Evoking an impression of some disinterred vampiric form, Graves uses the trope, in this instance, to stress his vengeful malevolence; 'the buried evil of her past rose up and menaced her now'.⁴³ Hawley's prompt, 'Remember, I only have to lift my hand to bring your carefully reared edifice of respectability toppling about your ears – remember – I have only to tell what I know and you are a ruined woman, Mrs. Kavanagh',⁴⁴ can be read as Graves's reminder, for all women, of their own precarious status as idealised women within Victorian society.

The whiff of sexual danger which Katherine exudes is due, in some measure, to the ambiguity which surrounds the extent of her 'fall'. In *Dragon's Teeth*, Katherine admits to having 'crawled in the slime of loathsome byways' and 'drunk to the dregs of every bitter cup', euphemistic terms which insinuate prostitution. However, the play manuscript reveals an admission by Katherine which appears to contradict this:

Katherine: ... amongst all the degradations, the insults, the infamies of the past years, there is one degradation I have not undergone, one insult I have not been subjected to, one infamy I have not endured, thanks to this and my determination to use it, if need be, when occasion should arise. (Shows a small revolver)⁴⁵

Although not explicit, the quotation is a powerful indicator that the 'one degradation' not hitherto undergone relates to any unwanted sexual advances but it remains unclear, not least because this quotation is followed by a reiteration of the novel's

⁴² DT, p.145.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ KK, Act III, p. 57.

⁴⁵ KK, Act 1, p. 13.

original discourse that she [Katherine] has ‘drunk to the dregs’ and is a victim of ‘inexorable circumstance’.⁴⁶ The ambiguity surrounding her criminal nature and sexual history makes it difficult to define fully her past. And it is this latter point, as Logan affirms, which makes it particularly contentious when trying to categorise Victorian women who were believed to have slipped beyond the boundaries of acceptable sexual behaviour. Lynda Nead, in *Myths of Sexuality* (1988), maintains that: ‘the connotations of prostitution were activated through a particular language. Within this system’, she contends, ‘two terms in particular demand some consideration; these are the “prostitute” and the “fallen woman”, both discrete forms.’⁴⁷ Nead writes of the fluidity of the ‘prostitute’ category, arguing that it ‘was accommodating and flexible’, and able to define ‘any woman who transgressed the bourgeois code of morality’.⁴⁸ The prostitute:

[C]onnoted a public practice, the regular exchange of sex for money. The combined associations of cash and the public sphere rendered the prostitute powerful and independent [...] part of the ‘dangerous classes’[...] she belonged to the ‘residuum’, from that displaced and disinterested mass at the very bottom of the social hierarchy.

The ‘fallen woman’, on the other hand, Nead argues, ‘activated significantly different associations’, asserting that though she *had been* respectable, the ‘fall’ denoted her tumble from respectable society. The term is therefore, Nead advises:

class specific; unlike the working-class prostitute, the fallen woman came from the respectable

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Nead (1988), p. 95.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

classes [...] a woman's 'fall' from virtue was frequently attributed to seduction and betrayal which set the scene for her representation as victim. Most importantly, the victimized [sic] fallen woman mobilised none of the connotations of power and independence; her deviancy did not involve money and thus, to a certain degree, she retained her femininity, that is, she remained powerless and dependent.⁴⁹

It can be seen that in the case of the theatrical Katherine Kavanagh there is a blurring between these two divisions; Katherine's 'deviancy' did entail money and it gave her a degree of power. Nead does, however, helpfully concede that 'the distinctions between the prostitute and the fallen woman were frequently obscure' and it is an obscurity about the true nature of Katherine's past which, perhaps, in the stage version made her appear less threatening; moreover, the fact that Katherine lavishes maternal affection on her step-daughter helps further to redeem her character.

Within the wide range of academic literature which has sought to explain the representations and treatment of the 'fallen woman' in Victorian literature, a consensus of opinion affirms that it was, ultimately her fate to be punished; thus providing an object lesson in remaining pure for all women within Victorian patriarchal society. As a result, Eltis argues, in both her literary and dramatic portrayals, '[the fallen woman] continued to fulfil her inevitable doom; to repent and die an untimely death – or, in occasional more fortunate cases, had her sentence commuted to incarceration in a nunnery'.⁵⁰ In her literary rendering of Katherine

⁴⁹ Nead, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁰ Eltis, p. 225.

Graves indeed complied with the prescribed formula, describing how ‘the Nemesis of Retribution finally descended upon Katherine and over whelmed her’.⁵¹

The terrible ordeal through which she had passed, the agonising dread of the past—and of the present—had slowly, but surely sapped the foundations of that magnificent vitality... a deadly stupor crept upon and overwhelmed her—a numbed sensation she had felt of late weighed upon her limbs—the cold drops of exhaustion broke out upon her forehead. Her eyes closed, her muscles relaxed, the worn-out heart ceased to beat...the eyes opened—fixed in the immutable stare of death.⁵²

Dragon’s Teeth employs stock motifs of the sensation melodrama genre and Graves borrowed, quite judiciously, from sensation fictions of the 1860s and 1870s. A reviewer from the *Manchester Guardian* declared that, ‘the keenest appetite for sensational horrors [would], in fact, be satisfied with the concluding chapters of *Dragon’s Teeth*’, noting carefully the comparisons to be found between the character of Katherine Kavanagh and the ‘Eugene Arams’⁵³ and Lady Audleys of modern fiction’.⁵⁴ Another critic supposed that, ‘while the world continued to take greater interest in the dark side of life than in homely pictures of peace and content, a thrilling novel like “Dragon’s Teeth” [would] be sure to find plenty of readers’.⁵⁵

⁵¹ DT, Proem [sic].

⁵² DT, p. 249.

⁵³ Eugene Aram (1704-1759) A murderer and subject of numerous texts, including a ballad by Tom Hood: *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, also a novel by Bulwer-Lytton in 1832 and a play by W.G Wills, with Henry Irving as the eponymous lead.

⁵⁴ ‘Dragon’s Teeth’, *Manchester Guardian*, 21 April 1891.

⁵⁵ ‘Dragon’s Teeth’, *Lloyds Weekly London Newspaper*, 3 May 1891.

The parallels between *Dragon's Teeth* and *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861)⁵⁶ are fairly explicit, with the female protagonist of each narrative demonstrating similar personality and behaviour patterns. For example, the disordered state and oppressive atmosphere of Lady Audley's boudoir, or her saloon at the maison santé 'furnished with gloomy, velvet draperies—amid faded splendour of shabby velvet...wretched mockeries of burnished tin... and tarnished gilding, and polished wood',⁵⁷ reverberate in the opulent decay of Katherine Kavanagh's gambling salon in Brussels, with its 'sickly yellow gaslight and the putty-faced, gaudy plaster Madonna in a shrine upon the wall'.⁵⁸ Further reflections resonate in Graves's account of Hoell Brinnilow's unsuccessful attempt to paint Katherine, in oils, as the perfect woman he (and society) expects her to be, and of the subsequent destruction of his failed portrait when he discovers his mistake. And it is a scene which is repeated in the play manuscript.

You were so kind; so indulgent, and I worked on blindly hoping, fancying with each touch of the brush that the portrait grew more like. But last night my eyes were opened. I was looking at it in the lamplight (shudders) and I saw all at once that I had not painted your face, but that of another woman...hard, bold, defiant – a face that mocked at life and defied fate – a face that made me shudder as I looked at it. ...Then I caught up the palette knife and stabbed the canvas through and through.⁵⁹

Graves highlights the Janus-faced nature of women, and although the dialogue echoes Braddon's description of Lady Audley's Pre-Raphaelite portrait: '[...] the strange sinister light to the deep blue eyes [...] that pretty pouting mouth [...] the

⁵⁶ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* 1861 (London: Penguin Group, 1998).

⁵⁷ Braddon, p. 382.

⁵⁸ DT, p. 16.

⁵⁹ KK, Act II, p. 31.

hard and almost wicked look [...] the aspect of a beautiful fiend',⁶⁰ it also clearly evokes Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)—published the same year as *Dragon's Teeth*—and its exploration of the destructive power of male beauty. In defence of what might be regarded as Graves's blatant plagiarism, it is helpful to draw on Jerusha McCormack's study of the Wildean classic, and her considered assessment that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was itself drawing on the 'magic portrait' genre and had tapped in to a 'deep and ubiquitous root of Western Folklore', which used the reflected image to underscore the truth behind the façade.⁶¹

Graves is undoubtedly attracted to the coded signals contained within the painted image and employs scenes, together with their implicit subtexts, in both her literary and stage versions which provide further insight into her feminist handling of the fallen woman. Though it is possible to detect two quite distinct interpretations in Graves's accounts of Katherine's portraits, it is from the art work in *Dragon's Teeth* that a rather more disturbing impression is to be found.

Brinnilow's first portrait of Katherine, in the novel, is a pseudo Pre-Raphaelite 'image in oils of a Knight in armour helping a mediaeval Lady out of a difficulty with a Dragon'.⁶² Though described by Graves as romantic and exceedingly imaginative there is scant additional detail, other than her critique that it was

⁶⁰ Braddon, p. 72.

⁶¹ Jerusha McCormack, 'Wilde's Fiction(s)' in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed., Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 110-111. McCormack lists diverse, and numerous, sources drawn from a range of academic research including Kerry Powell in 'Tom, Dick and Dorian Gray: Magic Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction', *Philological Quarterly* 62 (1983), pp. 147-170.

⁶² DT, p. 85.

‘extraordinarily out of drawing’.⁶³ At one level this failure denotes, simply, the artist’s incompetence, while on another, however, it signifies the impossibility, for the artist, of reproducing the image of a beautiful woman, where the outward appearance did not correspond with that of her inner personality. This implies that there exists some kind of fundamental ‘truthful’ connection between the subject and the captured image—that the artist as conduit, might only relay that which is an inherent truth.

Lynda Nead promotes this theory, tracing the possibilities of ‘transformation from stasis to movement’ in all forms of visual media between the latter years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth.⁶⁴ More specifically, for the purposes of this discussion, Nead considers the notion of enchanted images, through the concept of a supposed ‘haunted gallery’ wherein, she argues, texts capture the sense that a once-living body, which ‘has been stilled and transformed [is] caught between layers of canvas and pigment. Life is suspended rather than terminated by [their] representations’.⁶⁵ One might argue, therefore, given Brinnilow’s evident fascination with Katherine, that in his desire to capture her likeness he hoped to ‘capture’ the woman herself, and this act is a symbol of Victorian patriarchal control. It is this captivity which positions Katherine, Fraser Harrison would argue, as the ‘Enslaved Angel’, a woman to be extravagantly worshipped, but also to be safely confined.⁶⁶ Conversely, Katherine has used Brinnilow’s obsession to her own

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Nead, (2007) p. 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶⁶ Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1977), p. 49.

advantage—she manipulates him—therefore, in this instance, Harrison’s premise is inverted, with the enslaved, arguably, having become the enslaver.

Although Graves clearly defines the male and female roles of the Pre-Raphaelite genre, it is less certain, given the brevity of her description of the portrait whether, in this instance, Graves had in mind any specific Pre-Raphaelite text.⁶⁷ Significantly, however, Brinnilow is depicted as the knight and therefore, by extension, as the chivalric defender of all womankind, including the fallen woman. The employment of the Pre-Raphaelite symbolism in Graves’s narrative not only reflects a Victorian nostalgia for the medieval period, but also, if one accepts Harrison’s view, an idealisation of sexual love. According to Harrison it was through service to his Lady that latter-day knights would ‘hope to attain that state of redemption inherent in all Victorian idealizations of sexual love’.⁶⁸ Therefore, given the later revelation that, ‘in a fury of disappointment and anger at his own failure’, Brinnilow proceeded to ‘stab the canvas through and through’, might easily be read as an analogy of both Brinnilow’s sexual ‘impotence’ and his artistic inability. Moreover, given his mode of destruction of the portrait, it is reasonable to argue that the sexual connotations are well to the fore; signified by his use of a knife (the phallus) to repeatedly penetrate the canvas (Katherine).

Following his destruction of the first portrait, the impotence of the artist is reaffirmed in Graves’s account of his later second attempt to capture Katherine’s likeness:

⁶⁷ The description of the portrait, in both texts, though it typifies the genre, is too brief an account from which to identify a specific source. Though speculative, Graves might possibly, with reference to the dragon, have had in mind Sir John Everett Millais’ ‘Knight Errant’ (1870).

⁶⁸ Harrison, p. 49. Harrison evokes Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*.

[he was] out of sorts. His very lameness more pronounced [...] huddled up before his easel, with his dried-up palette and unused brushes drooping from the nerveless hands that hung idly by his sides,⁶⁹ his deformity was more painfully apparent than ever [...] a new and even more execrably unartistic representation of the old subject had taken its place. There was the mediaeval knight who bore a grotesque likeness to Hoell. There was the mediaeval lady whose form and features, traced by the hand of respectful admiration, wreaked hideous injustice, such as the most inveterate caricaturist breathing would have shrunk from wreaking upon the personality of Mrs. Kavanagh.⁷⁰

The ‘hideous injustice’ of the painting, intended here as a reflection of Katherine’s corrupted virtue—it is described as even more ‘execrably unartistic’—borrows from Wilde’s decomposing image of Dorian Gray. Mangham has argued that many female characters of the 1890s were represented as ‘disturbingly over-sexualised and capable of leading unsuspecting men to destruction’.⁷¹ He cites Arthur Machen’s femme fatale, Helen Vaughan, from *The Great God Pan* (1894) to illustrate his point:

[...] she operates like a venereal disease- infecting and destroying those she touches. As such she is a physical, living signifier of sexual excess and danger [...] more broadly, the *fin-de-siècle femme fatale* [sic], appeared to confirm presumptions that when women’s sexuality became excessive, it became destructive. Late-Victorian texts also seemed to agree that such horrors often lurked beneath calm, deceptive and beguiling feminine appearances’.⁷²

⁶⁹ This line resonates with an account in chapter two, from *The Man of Iron*, describing Graves’s journalist, Carolan Breagh, who is also seeking inspiration—to write news copy.

⁷⁰ DT, p. 113.

⁷¹ Mangham, pp. 209-210.

⁷² Ibid., p. 210.

Graves's literary drawing of Katherine clearly resonates in Mangham's overview of the type; though Brinnilow doesn't quite finish at the end of the hangman's noose he receives an eleventh hour reprieve and, by the close, has been transformed into a witless invalid. However, it is not just she who might be interpreted as 'disturbingly over-sexualised'; Graves also reveals, in *Dragon's Teeth*, a more sexually charged aspect to Brinnilow's infatuation for Katherine. His attempts to 'capture' the image of Katherine transmute into a voyeuristic gratification, which culminates with an account of him watching Katherine:

From a knoll of rising ground and situated in the barest and least cultivated quarter of the garden, a tower of red brick, crude and glaring—the architectural manifestation of another outbreak of harmless eccentricity on Hoell's part—reared itself in naked hideousness towards the sky. Hoell pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked a little door in the tower's base, half hidden amongst the shrubs that grew about it, and painfully, and with many a panting stoppage for rest upon the way, climbed the tortuous iron stair that led to the observatory. He emerged in a dusty and breathless condition on a circular platform [...] crowned with a narrow stone coping. Here stood Hoell's telescope, mounted on a stand of Hoell's own designing, and pointing steadily, over the tops of the intervening trees, towards the hall.⁷³

The language Graves employs to describe Brinnilow's folly, which 'reared itself in naked hideousness' rising as a 'tower of red brick, crude and glaring', marks it, unmistakably, as a phallic signifier. The imagery is incredibly powerful: Brinnilow's 'panting' as he climbs ever higher to reach his goal; the telescope which points steadily towards its target—Katherine—augments the already loaded sexual

⁷³ DT, pp. 114-115.

connotations of the text. In the *Haunted Gallery* Lynda Nead explores these narratives of intense desire, asserting that ‘the viewer is omnipotent and the power and intensity of the gaze becomes the instrument for generating life’. She describes it as a penetrating gaze wherein ‘looking becomes an aesthetic and erotic reverie, a kind of enchanted rapture that creates life’.⁷⁴ Significantly, this sexually charged element of Brinnilow’s obsession with Katherine has been removed from the dramatic adaptation.

In Nead’s analysis of the cultural consumption of the artistic representations of supposedly sexually deviant women, she argues that ‘representations of the prostitute offered the pleasure of titillation. The painting was the site where the visibility of prostitution was acceptable, where the fallen woman could be looked at and sexual deviancy observed’.⁷⁵ It is evident that these same opportunities were available on the Victorian stage. Kaplan’s study of the ‘fallen woman’ play, asserts that the erotic energies which were a central feature of Ibsen’s playwriting, and which were subsequently adopted by other dramatists in the 1890s, were designed to ‘disturb as well as titillate’, but it was also what ‘made them safe for spectators who wished to leer from a distance’.⁷⁶

In the play, though he is initially shocked to discover the nature of Katherine’s past, Graves uses the character of Brinnilow to articulate a call for sympathy and understanding for the fallen woman. Though he concedes that, ‘the Angel of my life – is no Angel after all, fallen and frail, dirtied and cut, my unstained Queen of

⁷⁴ Nead, (2007), p. 58.

⁷⁵ Nead (1988), p. 191.

⁷⁶ Kaplan, p. 39.

gracious purity, dethroned – degraded to the mire!’,⁷⁷ his subsequent destruction of her portrait expresses metaphorically, in this instance, the call for Victorian society to rid itself of its unrealistic demand for women to be perfect beings. The painted image is offered as a tangible representation of the fallen woman’s sins which can be destroyed, without risk of injury to its flesh and blood equivalent. Unlike Wilde’s Dorian Gray, whose life is extinguished via the stabbing of his portrait, Katherine continues to function despite the annihilation of her painted image. Graves is advocating that a woman could be less than the perceived ideal yet remain a competent wife and mother. Katherine’s own response to the destruction of the painting, as performed in the play, reaffirms that the past is now behind her and she can move on, unshackled by her past:

Brinnilow: I wished I hadn’t done it afterwards,
but wishing won’t bring her back. She’s gone—
forever!

Katherine: Gone—and forever! (stage aside)
Thank God!⁷⁸

Although Katherine dies in the novel, Graves’s defence of the fallen woman is outlined in a decisive scene, found in both texts, which endeavours to condone her crimes, and consequently challenge conventional thought. Graves posits her key protagonists in a ‘storytelling parlour-game’ whereby, as part of the entertainment, a fictional topic is outlined into which the other guests insert their own narratives.⁷⁹ Seeing this as his opportunity to expose her true identity, Hawley sets out an imaginary scenario which mirrors Katherine’s duplicitous past. In what can only be

⁷⁷ KK, Act III, p. 57.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁹ This mirrors, in a simpler form, the consecutive story writing project *The Fate of Fenella* (1892) with which Graves was later involved.

interpreted as a vigorous commentary on behalf of all ‘fallen women’, Katherine skilfully mounts a spirited defence of the ‘fictional accused’ with her own interpretation of the key events. Employing an argument which is mitigated by examples of redemptive acts of a maternal bent, Katherine pleads, ostensibly on behalf of the fictional accused, for leniency from her would-be persecutors. Moreover, and employing a strategy calculated to reinforce Katherine’s defence and, therefore, simultaneously that of all errant women, Graves further reiterates her feminist message with an explicit denunciation of societal codes articulated specifically, this time, through a male voice. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, it is Brinnilow whom Graves again employs as the fallen woman’s arch defender:

Brinnilow: Call her a martyr. For the sake of the unmerited sufferings endured by that unhappy victim of a man’s vileness and man’s treachery, her sin should be dealt with tenderly, even by that man who she had wronged. When the gate of prison opened for that woman and the gate of hope shut in her face – when she stood in the sight of the world once more, her womanly purity and pride outraged, the memory of her wifely love a thing to shudder at, her good name gone forever – her child, the one treasure left to her snatched away by inexorable death – was there no excuse for her?⁸⁰

Though Graves inclines to melodramatic verbosity in this speech, the call for the exoneration of the fallen woman is answered and, subsequently, Katherine secures a future for herself as mistress of the domestic sphere with her position seemingly untarnished. It should be stressed, however, that this is not because Graves is suggesting that society has readily accepted, and forgiven, the fallen woman’s past, even though she believes that they should, it is due to Katherine’s ultimate concealment of it. Whereas Pinero’s play had depicted a husband who wished

⁸⁰ KK, p. 74.

‘simply to bury [his wife’s] past life’,⁸¹ Graves’s drama portrays a husband who is completely unaware of it; it is the wife who wants and needs to bury the past, and in this instance Graves attaches no shame to that. It is her acknowledgement of the hypocrisy of the period.

Although the disparity between the conclusions of the two narratives is striking, it should not, necessarily, be seen as surprising. Graves worked in a range of genres and, as described in the previous chapters, she availed herself of any opportunity to extend or modify her texts in order to enhance their popularity with a wider audience,⁸² hence, in this instance the leap from page to stage. The reasons for Graves’s apparent volte-face in the stage adaptation were possibly influenced by a range of factors—her willingness to exploit the financial opportunities of her texts has already been noted—however, the extent to which Graves’s single authoritative voice had been broken up, or to what degree it was influenced by her collusion with Aimeé Beringer, is purely speculative. Though the playwrights moved in the same circles⁸³ and are both identified as having feminist sympathies—reflected variously in their individual literary publications—*Katherine Kavanagh* is the only verifiable instance of a collaborative venture between the two women.

Conversely, Madge Kendal had already worked with Beringer on a number of occasions, and in 1888 they had colluded on a version of a proto-New Woman adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) with Kendal’s firm insistence that the power of the maternal bond between mother and

⁸¹ Eltis, p. 228.

⁸² SFL: Letters to Augustin Daly.

⁸³ Graves and Beringer were both members of the ‘Theatrical Ladies Guild’ and the ‘Pioneer Club’. ‘The Theatrical Ladies Guild: Meeting at the Lyceum’, *London Daily News*, 3 December 1898.

son was to be retained at all costs, in order to ‘reform a patriarchal aristocratic system’.⁸⁴ This latter point, Kendal herself confessed, was a personal preference, designed to address the actress’s need to elicit ‘the maternal side of every part [she] played’, the motherly instinct being, Kendal admitted, her ‘one great weakness’.⁸⁵ Although, in this instance, Kendal was referring to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, there is no reason to suppose that she was any less influential in the staging of *Katherine Kavanagh*; Katherine’s means of attracting Colonel Kavanagh is through a display of exceptional maternal dexterity as she nurses his young daughter back from the verge of death.

Whereas, for the Fauntleroy adaptation, Kendal reports that they cut out from the book ‘everything which was valuable for dramatic purposes, being scrupulous, however, that every word which did appear in the play was the author’s own writing’,⁸⁶ in the case of *Katherine Kavanagh*, there is nothing to indicate the degree of involvement Madge Kendal may have had with the adaptation. Mrs. Kendal’s own memoir—which details most of their British and American tours—makes no reference whatsoever to Graves, stating only that: ‘[Mrs W K Clifford] ... was the only other woman, beside Mrs. Beringer, with whose work I was associated’.⁸⁷ It is also interesting to note Kendal’s admission that she was ‘not a very good judge of a play, or a part [...] Mr. Kendal reads most of the plays sent to us. He is an excellent judge and possesses the faculty of knowing exactly when there is money in a play’,⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Cited in Shaw & Randolph, p. 76.

⁸⁵ Madge Kendal, *Dame Madge Kendal by Herself* (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 154.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁸⁸ Madge Kendal, *Dramatic Opinion*, (2nd Limited Edition, 1890); reprinted ‘privately for friends’ in, 1925), British Library copy, pp. 38-39. It was originally published as articles in *Murray’s Magazine*.

which confirms that artistic principles might easily be compromised by financial considerations.

Although the extent of Madge Kendal's input at the manuscript stage is unknown, it would be reasonable to argue that once the final draft had been agreed, her influence would have impacted keenly upon the production script. For example, note here Kendal's somewhat audacious, even arrogant, perspective a propos the dramatist's 'voice', despite her earlier assertion that every word must be the author's own:

When a writer leaves his play in a theatre, he gives it up, as it were, and, in my opinion, it should be left to the feelings of the artists engaged in it, who, as a rule, work most wonderfully together...threshing out the meanings of the author's words, sometimes wonderfully improving the play in the process.⁸⁹

Note too, that in spite of the actress's earlier pledge to undermine 'aristocratic patriarchal values', the playwright is automatically gendered as male. Kendal's inherent confidence as an actress appears matched only by her indefatigable need to counter any hint of theatrical impropriety that often attached itself to the profession, or, more specifically, to the actress. Regardless of this, the Kendals included *Katherine Kavanagh* in their American tour of 1892, provoking one critic to judge that Madge's rendition 'did not create an agreeable impression' and that the character was not one upon whom 'her admirers wish to see the talents of Mrs Kendal employed'.⁹⁰ As there are very few identifiable reviews which relate to the production of *Katherine Kavanagh*, it is difficult to offer a detailed, contemporary

⁸⁹ Madge Kendal, *Dramatic Opinion*, 2nd Limited Edition (1890) British Library copy, p. 27.

⁹⁰ 'Katherine Kavanagh', *Era*, 26 March 1892.

critical assessment, given that it seemingly crossed the accepted boundaries for plays in this genre with Graves's portrait of the antithesis of 'feminine theatrical purity'.

The Kendals' decision, the following year, to stage *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* aroused further censure, with one shocked reviewer stating that Madge had 'scandalised America' with her portrayal'.⁹¹ The Kendals' biographer T. Edgar Pemberton conceded that they were dealing with a formidable theme and provided an illuminating description of the level of hostility the actors received following a performance at New York's Star Theatre:

There was a prompt and generous response to Mr Kendal's after-show greeting to the audience—until he mentioned Mrs Tanqueray. The silence of the audience was ominous. They had applauded the acting, but had refused to applaud the play. They were delighted to see the Kendals but shocked at being presented with Mrs Tanqueray [...] how a courtesan would look and act if married to a respectable gentleman is not a subject to be represented upon the stage.'⁹²

It is therefore somewhat surprising, given Madge's determination to maintain a wholesome feminine ideal, to discover that Madge herself later confessed to being immensely proud of her portrayal of the fallen woman. What Kendal's image of a 'fallen woman' was predicated on, however, is unclear; her own vague euphemism for the character of Paula Tanqueray—a woman she described as having 'frayed the

⁹¹ Her appearance as Paula Tanqueray at the Star Theatre, New York, is detailed in T. Edgar Pemberton's *The Kendals: A Biography* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1900), p. 279.

⁹² Pemberton, p. 279.

hem of her [Tanqueray's] petticoat'⁹³—implies that it was derived from a rather sanitised source, and there is no record of her thoughts on the character role of Katherine Kavanagh. It is evident that Kendal most likely resisted any attempts to restore the status of the 'fallen woman' in any manner other than that outlined by Pinero's Mrs. Tanqueray. Deborah Pye confirms that Kendal sought, through her memoirs, to erase the distance between herself and middle-class female readers, by representing a life on and off stage as 'congruent with the virtues that [her] readers were expected to admire'.⁹⁴ Certainly Kendal's own analysis of *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* seemed to acknowledge the inevitability of Paula's death, despite the fallen woman's attempts to rehabilitate herself. It is evident that Graves's final staging of *Katherine Kavanagh*, however, ran contrary to Kendal's own evaluation, detailed here, on the usefulness, indeed necessity, for a good stage death:

The only suitable occasions for representing the horrors of death on stage would be when the man had been playing the villain, or the woman had been bad, so that there would be a moral in the fact that he or she suffer agonies, even in quitting this life; but, where the artist has to realise before the audience a good and noble character, and has seen a vision of heaven, then I would try to bring before the minds of the audience a marvellously peaceful and beautiful death, as the one last glamorous moment of a beautiful life.⁹⁵

Graves's stage version did not call for her to deliver Katherine's 'last glamorous moment', and there is no trace of any suggested 'punishment' for the reinvigorated fallen woman; ideologically, the focus at the denouement is based solely on the

⁹³ Kendal, (1933), p. 266.

⁹⁴ Deborah Pye, 'Irreproachable Women and Patient Workers: The Memoirs of Leading Ladies', in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* (Spring 2003, 45.1), p. 78.

⁹⁵ Kendal, (1890), p. 47.

paradigm of the perfect mother. And in the final moments of the play, maternal redemption is symbolically and emphatically reaffirmed, with the curtain falling on a tableau of mother and step-daughter in a tender embrace. Given all of the aforementioned points, it is reasonable to argue that though Graves was intent on offering a new model of the ‘heroine with a past’—her opening letter is evidence of this—Madge Kendal seemingly preferred a stage adaptation which followed more closely the original conclusion of the novel, *Dragon’s Teeth* and, as a result, there appears to have been a compromise. A dilution of the protagonists ‘past’, in exchange for an emphasis on her maternal function, not only satisfied the actress’s theatrical and personal inclinations, but also the social purity ideologies of the playwright; we also know from her later correspondence with Daly that Graves was amenable to discussions regarding potential changes to her manuscripts. That these modifications perhaps lessened the intended impact of Graves’s ‘heroine with a past’, would seem to have been an unanticipated consequence, which perhaps also accounts for its singular failure to create any great reaction from the public or critics.

Although maternal motivation was an existing plot mechanism, used in various dramatic and literary forms, this strategy did not usually excuse the fallen woman from her final punishment. And while Graves makes clear, in the play, that death is not necessarily the inevitable outcome for a ‘woman with a past’, it is nonetheless evident that there is a penalty to be paid; that it is sprung from a maternal source, is somewhat ironic. There is, in this instance, a plausible argument that Graves’s emphasis regarding the death of Katherine’s biological child, and her subsequent saving of a surrogate child (i.e. her step-daughter), was fully intended as a signifier of retributive justice with a significant nod to the biblical cliché of ‘an eye for an

eye’,⁹⁶ in order to expiate Katherine’s crimes, and thus provide the means for her redemption.

These close readings of Graves’s texts, naturally, present certain contradictions as to her intentions regarding the handling of the ‘fallen woman’ in a dramatic sense, and consequently makes it harder to make a definitive judgement on what message, if any, she was trying to present. Unquestionably Clotilde Graves was of the New Woman type, but as Shaw and Randolph remind us, the New Woman – as a concept – was hard to pin down: she resisted ‘fixed categorization [sic]’,⁹⁷ and, as Mangham usefully posits:

[T]here is an alternative way of thinking about representations of dangerous female characters. Rather than being the products of any given author’s proto-feminist or misogynistic leanings, such depictions can be seen as a notion working its way through a large and complex web of ideas.⁹⁸

Mangham’s analysis, that the fallen woman trope is just one aspect of a larger developmental process, goes some way to explaining the inconsistencies in Graves’s work; she was, after all still only in her late twenties with her feminist views not fully defined. And although there is evidence to suggest that, at times, her inconsistencies were based on pecuniary considerations, this should not be overstated. There is no definitive explanation as to why Graves chose to write an alternative conclusion for the adaptation of *Dragon’s Teeth*; there is every likelihood that an adaptation which

⁹⁶ Leviticus 24. 19-21.

⁹⁷ Shaw & Randolph, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Mangham, p. 210.

retained the original plot would have achieved as much, if not more, success. There is some merit to the argument that she anticipated, with only minor revisions, that the novel could be successfully reworked into a dramatic version, which fitted with the developing new trend of 'problem plays', and also offered a feminist challenge to the Victorian double standard.

The next chapter will look at another of Graves's 'problem plays', produced three years later, which, though it revisits a number of similar themes, demonstrates a more subtle, sophisticated approach.

Chapter Four

Dr and Mrs Neill

My dominantly chronological reading of Victorian novels, analyses not the co-production of scientific and literary ideas so much as the marriage plot's efficacy in harnessing the empirical mindset, as represented by the doctor, into a conventionally romantic story... I focus on the figure of the Victorian doctor to chart the sustainability of the Victorian novel's central imaginative structure, the marriage plot.

Professor Tabitha Sparks,
The Doctor in the Victorian Novel (2009)¹

While many paradigms of the doctor figure exist in literature and, as Tabitha Sparks suggests, are a useful framework through which to explore the marriage plot—her study ploughs fertile ground unearthing a diversity of characters who include: Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional surgeon Mr. Gibson,² George Eliot's Dr. Tertius Lydgate,³ and both 'Physician'⁴ and Dr. Allan Woodcourt⁵ from the pen of Charles Dickens—much less has been written with regard to any of their rather less well known dramatic counterparts. Although doctor-characters are to be found in a number of plays that were produced during the nineteenth century they are, more often, only minor parts, and it is the individual who occupies a more central role, particularly in the plays staged during the late-Victorian period, who is of specific interest here. Though an index of doctors, appropriate for such scrutiny, might usefully include: 'Sir Peter Lund', Sydney Grundy's distinguished surgeon from A

¹ Tabitha Sparks, *The Doctor in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2009), p. 3.

² Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* (1866).

³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1872).

⁴ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857).

⁵ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1852).

Fool's Paradise (1899); 'Sir Lewis Carey', perhaps, Henry Arthur Jones's physician, from the play of that name;⁶ or, even, George Bernard Shaw's Edwardian specialist, 'Sir Colenso Ridgeon', from his satire *The Doctor's Dilemma*;⁷ it is, however, Dr. Alexander Neill, the eponymous protagonist of Clotilde Graves's play, *Dr. and Mrs Neill* (1893),⁸ who is to be the central focus of this chapter.

Dr. and Mrs Neill, a three-act melodrama, examines the ménage à trois between a naive young wife (Charliott Neill), her much older husband (Dr. Neill), and his feckless protégé (Edward Valancy). Though Graves's probing of a ménage of this kind was a theme hitherto unexplored in her dramatic writing, the same cannot be said for her creation of a fictional doctor-character; the paradigm was to become a recurring model in Graves's oeuvre, with her articles, short stories and novels featuring countless renderings of the type. These include, for example, brief cameos of unnamed medical practitioners: '[the] sensible Scotchman' from the pages of *Dragon's Teeth* with 'a professional eye for a fine woman'⁹ and, in her short story *The Fourth Volume*, the 'rising surgeon' who conceals a most unprofessional interest in his patient's wife.¹⁰ There are other, more complex characterisations: 'he of the responsible, square-toed, patent-leather boots' with his 'heavy yellow eyelids—livery eyelids, if one might dare to hint so', who crept 'so softly from the sick-room'

⁶ Henry Arthur Jones, *The Physician: an original play in four acts*, 1897 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1899).

⁷ George Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, 1906 (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2004). Though staged a decade afterwards, it displays notable parallels to H. A. Jones' 'Physician'.

⁸ LCP, *Dr. and Mrs Neill* (1894) MS. 53556A.

⁹ DT, pp. 40-45. 'A sensible Scotchman ... who had a professional eye for a fine woman, looked at her from head to foot, nodded approvingly, and grunted, "You'll do."'

¹⁰ Clotilde Graves, 'The Fourth Volume', in *The Head Quarter Recruit and Other Stories*, 1913 (Freeport, USA: Libraries Press, 1971), p. 89.

in ‘The Night of Power’;¹¹ and the arrogant ‘Distinguished Surgeon [sic]’ brought low in ‘The Hand that Failed’;¹² and finally, atop this extensive list of characters, is Dr. Owen Saxham, the eponymous inebriate, and key protagonist, of her Boer War saga, *The Dop Doctor*.

Despite this ubiquity of fictional literary examples, the ‘doctor type’ is, however, conspicuously absent from most of Graves’s dramatic work.¹³ Why this should be so is unclear, however, notwithstanding that scarcity, a study of *Dr. and Mrs Neill* provides a useful context for an assessment of her use of the paradigm, as a means of exposing Graves’s efforts to undermine patterns of accepted gendered behaviour; especially when—to apply Professor Sparks’s methodology—the figure is juxtaposed against the late-Victorian marriage plot.

Sparks notes in her study that as much as the doctor-character changed over the course of the Victorian era, so also did the representation of marriage,¹⁴ and it will be seen that, in her play, Graves too offered the late-Victorian audience an alternative dimension to both of those elements. Though Sparks distinguishes ‘the doctor-character as a human index of modern material and physiological knowledge as it enters and shapes the novels’,¹⁵ she argues more specifically that the doctor-character’s ‘own participation in the marriage plot offers a *précis* of the novelist’s relationship to material knowledge as it furthers ... [or as Sparks finds, ‘dominantly

¹¹ Clotilde Graves, ‘The Night of Power’, in *The Cost of Wings and Other Stories*, 1914 (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. 124 -134.

¹² Ibid., ‘The Hand that Failed’, pp. 259-266.

¹³ A female doctor, Arabella Walker, features in one of Graves’s later comedies, *The Bishop’s Eye* (1900).

¹⁴ Sparks, p. 5.

¹⁵ Sparks, p.3.

threatens'] the literary love story'.¹⁶ In this chapter it will be shown that Graves is less interested in the impact of the doctor's specific medical acumen; rather, she has taken the doctor-character and used his reactions to a marriage-in-crisis (his own) to unsettle expected codes of male behaviour. This is especially significant because Graves's work, as a general rule, focussed predominately on the development of her female characters; the male roles were smaller and, from a dramatic perspective, often marginalised. Although the female protagonist still retains an important, and central, role in the play, it is the action of Dr. Neill which undermines Victorian patriarchal culture through his unexpected response to female infidelity.

Graves determined that her portrayal of the doctor figure would be more than simply a two-dimensional drawing; not only do the stage notes provide a detailed description—'tall, lean, broad shouldered – middle aged, and in careless evening dress, narrow black tie ends undone ... face lined and rugged, his hair long of a reddish colour mingled with grey, thrown back from the forehead'¹⁷—she arguably also tenders her own ideal of the type: 'it's an unselfish profession; the man must be good in grain – honourable, steadfast, upright – who succeeds in it'.¹⁸ It is, therefore, useful to note that whereas the resulting depiction of Dr. Neill as demonstrably noble, resolutely self-sacrificing and exceptionally righteous, fulfils Graves's own desired criteria for the perfect doctor, he also simultaneously satisfies the idealised image of the Victorian male; unsurprisingly perhaps, given that the required attributes were the same. As a consequence, the two are, seemingly, inextricably intertwined, which might suggest, despite her ostensible feminist leanings, that

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ DMN, Act 1, p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Graves's stereotype of the doctor as an heroic figure represents a romantic ideal and, as such, she is offering a discourse which conforms to the patriarchal ideology.

The original date, or inspirational source, of the play's construction, is unknown, however, given Graves's acknowledgement, in a letter to Augustin Daly, that she had reworked the piece and, as a result, 'this course had led to its purchase and production by Johnston Forbes-Robertson',¹⁹ it is probable that it was originally conceived as a journalistic piece. A news item published in November 1893 announcing Graves's dramatic new offering, *Hey for Honesty!*, and which included details of the aforementioned ménage, would appear to confirm this:

The annual issued by *The World*²⁰ is always full of capital stories of a society and *fin de siècle* kind, and the present number fully bears out the reputation. [...] the place of honour is rightly given to a little domestic drama, by Miss Clo Graves, entitled "Hey for Honesty!" The materials of it are old enough—a foolish wife, an unworthy lover, and a magnanimous husband—but they are powerfully used, and the conclusion is treated with remarkable pathos.²¹

A later press notice, however, in the *Newcastle Weekly Courant* reveals that though '*The World* open[ed] with a three Act play entitled "*Hey for Honesty*"' the drama had already been licensed, performed and registered, for copyright purposes, 'under the title of *The Physician*'.²² While there is nothing to account for this apparent name change, a manuscript copy in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection of Plays,

¹⁹ SFL, YC4345 (16).

²⁰ *World*, edited by Edmund Yates. Graves wrote a number of short stories for the paper during the 1880s and 1890s.

²¹ 'The Christmas Numbers', *London Standard*, 23 November 1893.

²² 'The Christmas Numbers', *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 9 December 1893.

verifies that an inaugural production of *A [sic] Physician*²³ by Clo Graves was indeed given at the Lyric Theatre on June 23rd 1893. Moreover, to add to the melange of titles already linked to this text, the archive reveals that almost a year later an additional type-written script, labelled *Dr. and Mrs Neill*²⁴ was also registered with the Lord Chamberlain's office. Though this second manuscript was licensed, ostensibly, as a new entity, it is, aside from some minor revisions to its conclusion, a reproduction of the same play. This was not usual practice; plays submitted to the Lord Chamberlain did not require re-licensing to accommodate name changes or minor revisions and therefore, in the absence of extant records to account for the anomaly in this particular instance, the second manuscript may have been lodged merely as a courtesy.²⁵ However, it should be noted that whereas the aforementioned corrections might appear to be fairly inconsequential—they relate more specifically to Graves's rewriting of staged interactions between the male and female protagonists at the denouement of the play, rather than to dialogue—these differences, though subtle, result in a pronounced and perceptible shift in the power balance between the sexes, which were, arguably, deliberate, and this point will be examined, in more detail, later in the chapter.

Despite the confusion surrounding its cataloguing, in June 1894 the *Daily Graphic* announced that:

²³ LCP, *A Physician*, 53529N. The original title, 'The Physician' has been amended by hand to, 'A Physician' and is catalogued as such under registration date 23 June 1893.

²⁴ LCP, *Dr. and Mrs Neill*, 53556A. Registered 30 August 1894.

²⁵ Given the confusion that might potentially occur through such a system, an enquiry to the British Library, and subsequent correspondence with BL archivist, Kathryn Johnson, suggests that it was unusual to have a play re-licensed for a name change, especially if it was scarcely altered. However, it is unclear in this instance, due to a lack of records, [there is also no entry in the day books of the LCP] but it may have been as a courtesy to accommodate the name and script changes.

At the end of their autumn tour with “The Profligate”,²⁶ Mr. Forbes-Robertson²⁷ and Miss Kate Rorke, will give a trial performance in Manchester of a new play they have secured, from the pen of Miss Clo. Graves. This is called “Dr. And Mrs. Neill”.²⁸

And thus, *Dr. and Mrs Neill* was eventually staged during Johnston Forbes-Robertson’s provincial tour²⁹—or to quote nineteenth-century parlance, ‘tried on the dog’—at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, in October 1894,³⁰ earning, over the next few months, mixed reviews for Forbes-Robertson, Kate Rorke and the rest of the cast.³¹ Though the play was well received by large audiences and, on its opening night, ‘the authoress herself was called before the curtain’ to take a bow, it nevertheless provoked conflicting criticism regarding its style; whereas one reviewer acknowledged ‘some smart dialogue’,³² another decried Graves for having:

Followed the fashion of the day and studded it with epigrams. The characters fire off brilliant impromptus at one another from the rise to the fall of the curtain, until the brain begins to reel. ‘Your genuine dyspeptic’, says one of the party in the opening stages, ‘is like your genuine genius, born not made’... and the society granddame assures us that ‘between being recognised and being seen there is a wide difference’. Other characters indulge in philosophical reflections which should cure Mr. Oscar Wilde of the practice for ever and a day. There is, in short, too much ‘fine writing’ about the dialogue; too much moralising.³³

²⁶ Arthur Wing Pinero, *The Profligate* (1889).

²⁷ Johnston Forbes-Robinson (1853–1937), actor and theatre manager. ODNB. The actor makes no reference to Graves in his later memoir – *A Player Under Three Reigns* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1925).

²⁸ ‘Dr and Mrs Neill’, *Manchester Advertiser*, 23 June 1894. In a letter to Augustin Daly, Graves confirmed the earlier sale of her play, *Dr and Mrs Neill*, to Forbes-Robertson. SFL, YC4345 (16).

²⁹ The repertoire included Pinero’s *The Profligate* and Clement Scott’s *Diplomacy*.

³⁰ ‘The London Letter’, *Star*, 21 November 1895.

³¹ URL, 14 September 1894, a letter to Clement Scott, in which Graves invites Scott to the first performance in Manchester of *Dr. and Mrs. Neill*, she says she will ‘have great pleasure in making over [to him] the box reserved [for her]’.

³² ‘Dr. and Mrs Neill’, *Manchester Weekly Times*, 5 October 1894.

³³ *Manchester Evening News*, 29 September 1894.

One can only speculate as to Graves's response to an evaluation which, though it admired her witticisms, was nonetheless disapproving of her rhetoric. However, despite these comments, *Dr. and Mrs Neill* was revived the following year, this time with the forty-six year old actor Brandon Thomas³⁴ adopting the role of Dr. Neill. An appraisal of its London debut at The Grand Theatre, Islington, was again, however, less than encouraging, with one columnist observing, somewhat flippantly, that:

The authoress should think more of dramatic motion than emotion, for it must be confessed that the play is somewhat sluggish, and tears, idle tears, although occasionally suitable for dramatic use, should not be wrung from a sympathetic audience too often. Miss Kate Rorke did her best with a rather Rorkeward part ... Messrs Gardiner and Brandon Thomas are never deficient in intelligence or stage experience but it is doubtful if, with all these clever and competent people, 'Dr. and Mrs Neill' will greatly advance the dramatic reputation of Miss Clo Graves. Happily she is not an old Clo, and may change her dramatic habits in time to win popularity. Her reception at Islington was certainly a Grand one, if the play was not, and if it was too weak it has two weeks to get stronger in.³⁵

Unlike the heroine with a past from Graves's earlier 'problem play', *Katherine Kavanagh*, the female protagonist in the *Dr. and Mrs Neill*, Charliott Neill, is presented as a hitherto innocent young woman, 'a beautiful, somewhat pale and fragile looking girl of about 24 [sic]'³⁶ who has foolishly exchanged compromising letters with her husband's protégé, a young medical student named Edward Valancy. The incriminating correspondence duly falls into the hands of Dr. Neill, a cardiac specialist who is thirty years his wife's senior and suffering from a heart condition. Believing that she no longer wants him, and that he has very little time left to live, the doctor excuses his wife's indiscretion and explains that she will soon be free to

³⁴ (Walter) Brandon Tomas (1848-1914). Actor and playwright, author of the play *Charley's Aunt* (1892) ODNB.

³⁵ *Moonshine*, 8 September 1895.

³⁶ DMN, p. 9.

take up with Valancy. Stung by remorse, Mrs Neill seeks her husband's forgiveness pleading with him that 'though she had been frivolous, she was never false'.³⁷ It is all too late as Dr. Neill, heartbroken by her betrayal, appears to be on the point of death. Valancy renews his advances but is scornfully rebuffed by Mrs Neill, and it is this act, inadvertently overheard by Dr. Neill, which convinces him that his wife loves him after all; thus the play ends with a fittingly sentimental tableau of the seemingly 'not-quite-fallen' wife, and her forgiving husband.

In the opening sequence to the play the curtain rises on the set of a 'luxurious dining room of a house in Mayfair, set for a small dinner-party for five'. The room itself, Graves relates 'contains all of the successful trimmings of a doctor of Dr. Neill's status',³⁸ which includes the full length portrait, in oils of the hostess, Mrs Neill, occupying a central position above the fireplace. As a preamble to the doctor's return, the guests consider favourably this image of Mrs Neill, and it is soon revealed that a request from the Royal Academy for the painting to be displayed has been denied:

Mrs Neill: Alec didn't quite like the idea of it being exhibited.

Renfrew Plunkett Q. C: So wifely obedience triumphed over pardonable vanity!³⁹

Although succinct, this introductory tête-à-tête between Mrs. Neill and Plunkett (Dr. Neill's close friend) establishes a patriarchal tone to the piece, with the husband's

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ DMN, Act 1, scene 1. The descriptive narrative outlines the intended opulence of the set and, by extension, accentuates the doctor's accomplishments. It is a device used repeatedly by Graves in her later work. For example, one of her short stories sketches the affluent quarters of a doctor's residence in what she terms, 'a fashionable street in the West End of London – a street which is the Eldorado of the struggling professional man, the Tom Tiddler's ground of successful members of the faculties of surgery and medicine'.

³⁹ DMN, p. 3.

control of the inanimate image of his wife symbolically reflecting both his authority over the flesh and blood equivalent, and Mrs Neill's own tacit agreement. Though the use of portraiture had become a feature of the realistic sets of the period,⁴⁰ it is evident that, once again, as identified in the previous chapter, Graves employed the painting for, arguably, more than simply aesthetic reasons. Whereas, in *Dragon's Teeth*, Graves explores the dichotomy between the painted image and the female subject, in this instance, the portrait of Charlott Neill acts not only as a signifier of Dr. Neill's material success—his capacity to afford the artistic commission—but as a metaphor of possession; both the subject matter i.e. Mrs Neill, and the artwork itself, are recognisable as trophies. They are, in a sense, 'hunting booty', with the artwork 'hung' in the same manner as the stuffed and mounted spoils gathered by the Victorian 'White Hunters' of the period, such as H. Rider Haggard's fictional hero, Allan Quartermain, from *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). The final act of the play is set at Dr. Neill's country house which, the stage notes confirm, is also heavily adorned with examples of his hunting prowess, including 'a large stuffed pike in a glass case'.

The representation of women as 'goods' at this time is similarly remarked upon by Sparks, and in her analysis of *Middlemarch* she notes 'the acquisition of wives by successful men as if they are commodities', highlighting in her example Dr. Lydgate's view that because Rosamund was anatomically beautiful she would make 'an impressive wife for a status-conscious rising surgeon'; one might similarly argue that Graves was making the same point regarding her own doctor and Mrs. Neill.

⁴⁰ A motif employed by a number of Victorian playwrights including Henrik Ibsen, Granville Barker and George Bernard Shaw. In the latter instance, in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Shaw's heroine, Mrs. Dubedat, is attributed as the painted subject, which is shown to account for her husband's genius as an artist.

Likewise, Kerry Powell also identifies that ‘much of Victorian drama reduces women nearly to the level of properties — ancillary images imprisoned in male written texts’.⁴¹ And though, in this instance, Powell is referring to their representation within the play itself, Graves is making a similar point; the message of containment and possession is clear. Charliott is imprisoned within a male ‘painted’ text, and her lifeless image in the portrait reflects the impotence of a middle-class Victorian wife. One might argue further that Neill is more attached to the canvas likeness than to the real woman; he is certainly able to sustain more control over the inanimate version. In Act two, Dr. Neill addresses the painting directly, as if he is speaking to Charliott, and though the scene has been crafted as a device to articulate the doctor’s thoughts, it also serves as a reminder of many women’s lack of ‘voice’ at this time. Graves is suggesting that women, like children, were often preferred to be seen, but not heard.

The extent of Mrs Neill’s infidelity is never fully made clear; the euphemistic declaration: ‘I have sinned against you it is true, but not vilely, not basely – not unpardonably! (imploringly)’,⁴² is indeterminate and implies that a sexual relationship may not have taken place. This would confirm, from a legally defined position, that she is no adulteress. However, given Victorian expectations of female behaviour, a woman’s fall from grace was just as easily predicated on an alleged tumble in a biblical sense, i.e. the *suggestion* of adultery in thought, as it was through a physical act. The theatre reviews are unhelpful, being similarly imprecise and undecided about the nature of her ‘sin’, and whereas one commentator from the

⁴¹ Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 125.

⁴² DMN, p. 18.

Birmingham Post saw her as ‘frivolous, but not false’,⁴³ another refers, vaguely, to ‘the compromising relations which exist[ed] between [them]’.⁴⁴

Whatever Mrs. Neill has or has not done, the action which elicited most astonishment from the critics, however, was the husband’s response to the couple’s indiscretion; not only is the wife forgiven, but she is advised that her wait will be of a short duration as ‘death must, of necessity, step in and unite her to her lover’.⁴⁵ Though one reviewer noted that whereas ‘the theme [was] a comparatively common one’, he granted that ‘the manner in which it [was] worked out [was] distinctly unconventional’,⁴⁶ while the ensuing level of incredulity which greeted Dr. Neill’s subsequent settlement of Valancy’s debts, provoked another startled critic to observe that:

The attitude of the old man to his wife’s lover is remarkable ... when Dr. Neill discovers the compromising relations which exist between his wife and this man he does not have him kicked out of the place, but resolves to reclaim him from his wild antics, if possible, in order that he may be a fit husband for Mrs. Neill when she is free to marry a second time! Such an attitude is scarcely human.⁴⁷

This behaviour, even to a modern eye, might be considered as exceedingly liberal, so for Graves to suggest such an approach, when conventions dictated that wives were expected to ‘turn a blind eye’ to their husband’s infidelities, and women were expected to maintain an unblemished record, was indeed, as the reviewer exclaims,

⁴³ ‘Dr. and Mrs Neill’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 September 1895.

⁴⁴ *Manchester Weekly Times*, October 5 1894.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ ‘The Stage’, *Morning Post*, 5 October 1894.

‘scarcely human’.⁴⁸ The sexual double standard, which condoned male promiscuity and punished women for identical behaviour, was deeply ingrained within the consciousness of late-Victorian society and, as a consequence, Graves’s drawing of the doctor’s magnanimous reaction to his wife and her alleged lover, ensures that Graves has set him even further at odds with contemporary attitudes. Dr. Neill’s response corresponds with Graves’s own interpretation of marriage within a framework of Social Purity ideology, i.e. men and women should come together as equals, irrespective of any earlier alliances—though Graves does acknowledge that this was not always feasible. Kerry Powell notes George Bernard Shaw’s complaint that the feminist Sarah Grand demanded that: ‘the man shall come to the woman exactly as moral as he insists that she shall come to him’,⁴⁹ and it is clear that Graves concurred more readily with Shaw in that respect. However, Grand’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Beth Book* (1897), while similarly outlining the marriage of a young woman to a doctor, (Grand’s own first husband was a doctor twenty-one years her senior) differs from Graves’s play in that it is the husband, rather than the wife, who flaunts his infidelities. And whereas Grand’s polemic argues against marriage, Graves’s narrative promotes a positive outlook. Though in the case of the *Dr. and Mrs Neill*, however, it is not a previous relationship that is the contentious issue, but rather the suggestion of a woman’s infidelity post-marriage.

In his comprehensive study of marital discord—especially among the middle classes during the second half of the nineteenth century—A. James Hammerton takes the Foucauldian approach and asserts that as marriage became:

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Christopher Innes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 92-93 [and therefore wrote *You Never Can Tell*, Powell disputes, to refute Grand’s insistence ‘upon male (as well as female) rectitude.’]

established as a bastion of privacy and domesticity, supposedly secure from outside influence, [it] was subjected to unprecedented public scrutiny and regulation ... it focused increasingly on the darker side of conjugal life, on behaviour, from both sexes and in all social classes, which was inconsistent with the middle-class domestic idyll and with heightened emotional expectations of marriage.⁵⁰

And it is evident from her portrayals that Graves was exposing the conflicting patterns of actual, as against the anticipated, modes of male and female conduct from within, and outside of, marriage. Moreover, Graves was not advocating that marriage was a state to be avoided at all costs. Although her focus, in *Dr and Mrs Neill*, is on what appears to be a failed marriage—a concept, as Hammerton observes, which ran contrary to the Victorian ideal—she determines that a resolution will be found through mutual understanding and forgiveness, and seeks to establish a middle ground in order to restore a balance. Hammerton's thesis usefully posits the work of a number of nineteenth-century writers, who sat at the opposite extreme to the anti-marriage lobbyists, and offered women prescriptive messages regarding their place both in society and in the domestic quarter. One of the most popular of these authors was Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis⁵¹—whose works include the conduct-books: *The Women of England, their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839) and *The Wives of England, their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (1843)—who advocated correct training in domesticity for all women, to enable them to be good wives and to avoid marital conflict. Hammerton notes that much of this discourse, was predicated on supposed male perfection, and as a result was

⁵⁰ Hammerton, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ Sarah Ellis - née Stickney (1799-1872) writer and educationalist. ODNB. Produced moral and didactic fiction, conduct-books, works on moral education etc. most influential works focused on the role of women in the middle-class family, and emphasised the moral influence a Christian woman, particularly as wife and mother, should bring to bear on the men of that family.

‘bound to strain credibility’;⁵² he cites Ellis’s descriptions of ‘the power and sublimity ... approaching what we believe to be the nature and capacity of angels ... [in a] noble, enlightened, and truly good man’, it was a ‘perpetual feast [to] dwell within the influence of such a man’.⁵³

Though Graves undoubtedly complies, in part, to this notion of the masculine ‘beau ideal’, her careful drawing of Dr. Neill was, nonetheless, also simply reflecting and reinforcing contemporary representations of the doctor-character within literary culture at this time; men who, as a rule, were generally faultless. There were of course exceptions, for example: Ella Hepworth Dixon gives an account of a predatory medic, Dr. Dunlop Strange, in *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), who seduces then abandons a young woman, leaving her to die in poverty; Graves’s own antithesis of Dr. Neill’s idealised masculinity is presented through the character of Valancy, albeit he is still a trainee physician.

Graves was fully prepared to acknowledge that not all members of the medical profession achieved Dr. Neill’s exacting standards; indeed, at times, she exhibits a degree of ‘moralising’. It might be pertinent to note, however, that her approach remained significantly less verbose than George Bernard Shaw’s assessment of the medical profession, aired over a decade later, in 1911, in his preface to *The Doctor’s Dilemma* (1906), which extended to almost eighty pages. Shaw’s play considers the value attached to human life and the dilemma faced by his doctor, Sir Colenso Ridgeon, as to whether he must use the limited resources at his disposal to save the

⁵² Hammerton, p. 75.

⁵³ Ibid.

life of an honest, though impoverished doctor, or a talented, though amoral, artist. In his preface, Shaw disparages those who talk of ‘the high character of a noble profession and the honor [sic] and conscience of its members,’ arguing that ‘they have as much as any other class of men, no more and no less’.⁵⁴ Moreover, he highlights both the incompetence of the profession and its tendency for ‘bleeding the rich man ... not only metaphorically but literally every day’; he notes too, the fashion ‘in operations as there is in sleeves and skirts’.

Graves too, criticises the stylish women of the period who undergo unnecessary but ‘fashionable’ operations, with Dr. Neill’s scathing attack:

I wonder a sensible woman like you would be putting any faith in doctors! Quacks and charlatans all, from Galen and Hippocrates down – empirics and nostrum-mongers ivery [sic] one of us! Groppers in the dark - groppers in the dark! (Sadly [stage notes])⁵⁵

Though Lady Carthew is astonished by Dr. Neill’s outburst, it becomes clear that his comments are, in reality, an expression of self doubt and that, in truth, he has sincere socialist principles; one might contend that this is Graves’s attempt to justify Neill’s undoubted wealth. Though she acknowledges the financial avarice of many of his colleagues, Graves is determined to stress the doctor’s philanthropic side toward those from the poorer classes; an act which he admits has detrimentally affected his own health. Valancy’s derisory accusation that his mentor has an apparent ‘preference for pauper pneumonia, somebody sick in Seven Dials or Soho, somebody ignorant, somebody unwashed—somebody who doesn’t pay and isn’t even

⁵⁴ Shaw, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁵ DMN, p. 13.

grateful!’,⁵⁶ is swiftly countered by Plunkett—Graves’s mouthpiece—who rather disdainfully observes that ‘the type is not indigenous to the West Central slums ... being sometimes found in Belgravia and Mayfair’.⁵⁷

Sparks writes of the socialist bearing of fictional Victorian doctors, which, she claims, was employed to enhance their professional status, citing, by way of example, Dr. Woodcourt, from *Bleak House*, with the claim that:

[his] selfless treatment of the diseased poor in London, his heroism as a naval surgeon aboard a shipwreck and his exemplary marriage to Emily Summerson, all make him an admirable example of mid-century reformism and domestic honour.’⁵⁸

Though Dr. Woodcourt was drawn in an earlier period, there are, nonetheless, echoes of Dickens’s surgeon in Graves’s own drawing; Dr. Neill’s altruistic ministrations to London’s poorer classes, his benign actions toward his disloyal protégé combined with his unqualified forgiveness for his errant wife, mark him out too, as an ‘admirable’, though updated, model of fin de siècle matrimonial radicalism. Admittedly there are inconsistencies in Dr. Neill’s character, but these are minor; his positive enduring qualities, Graves would have her audience believe, are always those ‘seemingly’ attributable to his profession.

In the confrontation which eventually erupts between the doctor and his wife he accepts his part in the failure of their marriage admitting that ‘when I married you I acted selfishly – mistakenly. You were a young creature, with no one to advise you.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Sparks, p. 2.

I, a man fast growing old'.⁵⁹ Though there is limited background about their courtship—Charliott was a 'motherless' bride—Graves exposes the reality of marriages brokered as business transactions rather than love matches. Marriage for Charliott, as it was for many women, had been predicated on simple economics:

You're aware that if a lady can't have a Bond street bonnet she'll put up with a Bayswater one. Not because she doesn't know choice from cheap, but because a bonnet of some kind she must have. It's like that with Charliott. Oh! What possessed the doctor to marry her without love?⁶⁰

Mrs. Neill has little to stimulate her mentally, or physically, and consequently her indiscretion is represented as both symptomatic and predictable; Charliott's life reflects that of many middle-class women whose days were spent indulging in aimless diversions to occupy their time, and Dr Neill's concern, in the opening scene, that '[Charliott] has tired herself out with shopping',⁶¹ underlines this lack of fulfilment. It also echoes the discontent of other fictional doctors' wives who, as Lyn Pykett observes, 'were tired of the routine of ordinary existence';⁶² both Emma Bovary, the heroine of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Isabel Gilbert, the namesake of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) spring readily to mind. Yet unlike Isabel Gilbert, who escapes the ennui of married life through sensation literature, for Charliott Neill, her route is via horse riding, singing, or promenading the new department stores of the 1890s.

⁵⁹ DMN, p. 36.

⁶⁰ DMN, p. 38.

⁶¹ Ibid., Act 1, p. 6.

⁶² Lyn Pykett, ed., 'Introduction', in Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife*, 1864 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. viii- xxv (p. xv).

These discernible traces of female protagonists from earlier, popular texts, are not altogether unexpected; as discussed in the opening chapters, Graves was a seasoned ‘borrower’ and her tendency to emulate other narratives did not escape the incisive gaze of the theatre critics. A commentator from the *Pall Mall Gazette* identified in *Dr. and Mrs Neill*, that ‘[Graves] had selected incidents of plot and situation as old as the Drama itself’.⁶³ Yet, whereas any correlation between Charlott Neill, Isabel Gilbert and, by extension, Emma Bovary,⁶⁴ might seem a little tenuous, there is little doubt that Graves’s inspiration, for her ‘doctor’s wife’, was in fact drawn from an earlier Dickensian model.

A journalist from the *Manchester Courier* attests to this evident recycling, with an accusation that: ‘Miss Clo Graves has written another ‘new’ play all about an old doctor who married a young wife, who flirted with a handsome medical student, and nearly broke the poor old man’s heart’. The columnist enquires, somewhat cynically:

whether the gifted authoress of “The Dr. and Mrs Neill” has ever heard of a certain book called “David Copperfield,” by one Charles Dickens or read the touching chapters that refer to Dr. Strong, a benevolent old school master.⁶⁵

Though the anonymous critic is ostensibly indifferent to the fact that one is a doctor of medicine, and the other a doctor of theology he, nonetheless correctly notes the parallels between Graves’s dramatic ménage à trois, and Dickens’s drawing of a domestic scene in *David Copperfield*. Dickens’s ‘Dr. Strong’ lives with his wife Annie—‘the beautiful young lady [...] whom [Dr. Strong] had married for love; for

⁶³ ‘Dr. and Mrs Neill’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 September 1894.

⁶⁴ Pykett (1998), p. viii, suggests that Braddon, ‘an inveterate recycler of her own and other novelists’ plots, borrowed this one from Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857)’. She cites Braddon’s letter to Bulwer-Lytton in 1864: ‘The idea of The Doctor’s Wife is founded on “Madame Bovary”’.

⁶⁵ ‘Truth’, *Manchester Courier*, 13 October 1894.

she had not a sixpence’—and her ‘scapegrace cousin, Jack Maldon’,⁶⁶ with whom it is falsely rumoured that she has been conducting an illicit affair. Like Dr. Neill, Dickens’s Dr. Strong admits that he too, ‘may have unwittingly ensnared that lady into an unhappy marriage’⁶⁷ and proceeds, by way of an apology, to explain his actions:

‘I married that lady,’ said the Doctor, ‘when she was extremely young. I took her to myself when her character was scarcely formed. So far as it was developed, it had been my happiness to form it. I knew her father well. I knew her well. I had taught her what I could, for the love of all her beautiful and virtuous qualities. If I did her wrong; as I fear I did, in taking advantage (but I never meant it) of her gratitude and her affection; I ask pardon of that lady, in my heart!’⁶⁸

Charliott Neill and Annie Strong are both naive young women married to older men, and their relationships with their husbands are conveyed as cautiously paternalistic, rather than sexually, or even romantically, charged. Like Annie, Charliott Neill’s innocent, almost child-like, state is accentuated by the impression that the couple have a non-sexual relationship; despite three years of marriage the couple remain childless. This fact is not entirely surprising when it later emerges that Dr. Neill’s bedroom and study are situated adjacent to one another on the ground floor, while his wife’s apartments are located elsewhere in the house; this apparent demarcation of their personal ‘spaces’ is intended, possibly, to mirror their disconnection in a physical sense.

To assert that Graves plotted this as an explicit signifier of an unconsummated marriage might be considered somewhat untenable—a man and his wife sleeping

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 624.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

apart was perfectly in keeping with the conjugal habits of many middle- and upper-class couples during this period, and did not automatically denote a nonsexual liaison. However, the claim, that the Neills sustained a celibate relationship, is significantly more plausible with the supporting knowledge that fifteen years later, in *The Dop Doctor*, Graves constructed a domestic set-up which replicated this exact scenario. In her novel, she maps out a pre-nuptial agreement between a young virgin, barely out of her teens, and a much older doctor who, though he would prefer it otherwise, consents to forego a sexual relationship until such time, if ever, as she desires it:⁶⁹

“If I were to marry you, would you leave me absolutely free?”
 “Absolutely,” said Saxham. “With the utmost complete freedom a wife could possibly desire.”
 “I meant—a different kind of freedom from a wife’s.” She knitted and unknitted her hands. “Would you be willing to ask nothing of me that a friend or a sister might not give?”⁷⁰

Though the wife does eventually change her mind, Graves finds this difficult to convey; perhaps, one supposes, because of the paradox that a woman could be the ‘Angel of the House’ while also embracing a healthy sexual appetite. The couched references in *Dr. and Mrs Neill* suggest that Graves is making a similar point here; in Act two, as Mrs. Neill offers up her mouth, as a precursor to a goodnight kiss from her husband, she is gently rebuffed with the lines:

Dr. Neill: Not your lips – not your lips. I am nothing but your friend – your physician – your father now. (kissing her lightly and gravely on the forehead) Goodnight my child! ⁷¹

⁶⁹ DD, p. 538.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 539.

⁷¹ DMN, p.25.

Though Charlott is eventually forgiven by her husband, this is only after she is seen to negotiate through the prerequisite stage of penitence expected of all fallen women, and Graves seemingly captured Charlott's contrition most appropriately, the critic from the *Birmingham Daily Post* observing that:

It is beautifully written, its sketches of character are at once vigorous and carefully finished and its hold upon an audience is complete. Indeed we have rarely seen a play of this class make so marked an impression ... the penitence of the thoughtless young wife is touchingly depicted.⁷²

As a result, and rather unexpectedly given Graves's predilection for strong female characters, Mrs Neill becomes, during her period of atonement, 'nervy, tense and feverishly excited'. The stage notes advise that she is 'maddened by the jarring sound of a discordant rendering of a vulgar, popular music hall song heard playing outside'.⁷³ While her anxiety is used, in part, to reflect her mounting agitation at the return of the incriminating correspondence, the discourse is laden with lexical references symptomatic of some predisposition to female hysteria; in one scene the stage notes describe her 'rocking to and fro' with her head in her hands',⁷⁴ while in another, she declaims '(with a spectral laugh) - I am almost insane - I am a lost soul!'.⁷⁵ Lucy Bland's research on the perceived 'emotionality and capriciousness of women', confirms that 'hysteria was uniquely tied to femininity',⁷⁶ and with it, Bland argues, came the 'loss of inhibitory influence exercised on the reproductive and sexual instincts of women'. The crucial phrase here, therefore, is 'almost insane'.

⁷² *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 September 1895.

⁷³ DMN, Act 1. 'Ta Ra Ra Boom Di Ay' by Lottie Collins, played under the window by a German band.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Act 3, p. 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Act 3, p. 8.

⁷⁶ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 64.

Though Graves allows that femininity had an ‘emotional’ edge, it is arguable that she was determined that Charlott should not be seen to have completely ‘lost her mind’, as this would certainly authenticate the ideological dogma of feminine hysteria. It is essential to note too, that at this point in time, Graves herself had already suffered at least one debilitating attack of the ‘brain fever’⁷⁷ which would later recur, at intervals, in her own life. It is possible, being an intermittent sufferer of some form of depression herself, as well as a feminist, that she would have been extremely reluctant to acknowledge any gendered perceptions surrounding the condition. It was, perhaps, Graves’s intention, in portraying Mrs Neill in this way, to express women’s inner torment when they erred morally and physically, in order to signify their own personal disappointment at having lapsed in their attainment of the Victorian ideal of womanhood; according to Graves’s philosophy, women set their own standards to live up to, and failure was its own punishment.

Charlott’s own act of reparation in the play is marked by her adoption of a symbolic ‘hair shirt’ as a constant reminder of her indiscretion; the epistolary proof of her infidelity is secreted in her bodice as a cilice for penance. Lady Carthew reassures Mrs Neill that she is not insane, but simply a woman who ‘has erred and repented ... a woman for whom there is hope and forgiveness’.⁷⁸ The heroine’s redemption is finally secured in a scene reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite work *The Awakening Conscience*, which illustrates a young man and his mistress as she

⁷⁷ HRHC. Letter to H.F.C. Marshall. She lists a first attack of ‘brain fever’ in 1890, following a period of overwork. She also reports further attacks, one in 1896, following the success of *A Mother of Three*, and that she also ‘went a purler’ in 1902.

⁷⁸ DMN, Act III, p.2.

awakens to the fact of her lost innocence.⁷⁹ Charliott's own moment of epiphany occurs as the spurned lover tries to embrace her once more; the stage notes record how 'she recoils with abhorrence and snatches up her whip, cutting him across the face':

fool that I was in those dead days ... I turned ... mean base poor creature that I was – to seek an equal fellowship with you! ... then there came a day when my eyes were clear and my brain was too! I saw you as you were.⁸⁰

Kerry Powell's commentary on nineteenth-century female playwrights identifies 'the traditionally "masculine" characteristics of Victorian stage heroines drawn by women writers', and he classifies 'one of the most striking [as] the capacity they display for violence—a violence often anchored in their intensity of feeling as wives'; he duly cites Graves's work, to illustrate his argument, detailing how the 'young wife picks up a whip and cuts her would be seducer "*stingingly across the face*," then coolly breaks the whip across her knee and tosses it into the fireplace'.⁸¹ Though, as Powell identifies, Graves did indeed challenge a number of the accepted gender codes—both male and female—it might appear, nonetheless, in as much as Charliott Neill and her husband are happily reconciled by the end of the play, that Graves had relinquished her feminist position. Before the curtain makes its final drop, the heroine has been prostrated by guilt, laid bare her soul, and been driven almost to madness; yet her life appears to have changed very little.

However, it is important, at this juncture, to recall the aforementioned two scripts, which had been submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office. The differing stage

⁷⁹ 'The Awakening Conscience' (1853) William Holman-Hunt. Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), p. 238.

⁸⁰ DMN, Act II, p. 24.

⁸¹ Powell, (1997), p. 130.

directions, for the closing scene, are especially significant: not only do they reflect Graves's sense of performance, but also act as a marker of Graves's feminist challenge to patriarchal culture. In the original 1893 manuscript, the doctor is seated, as if dead, facing toward the window with his hand resting on his wife's head as she kneels, submissively, at his feet. As the dawn breaks they are flooded with light and he, arms outstretched, rises to 'greet the dawn'.⁸² In the amended 1894 version, Graves's annotations direct that both the doctor and his wife stand, side by side, for the final tableau. The playwright has established a visual signifier of the doctor and his wife as equals—there is no submission—their joint greeting of the new dawn remains, but, given that they now stand shoulder to shoulder, it can be read as a semiotic expression of a new beginning, forged by the shift in the balance of power between the sexes.⁸³ Furthermore, Charlott's euphemistic affirmation that, henceforward, they would have a 'real marriage', suggests that the dawn is a signifier too, of a sexual awakening, which, by extension implied both a consummation of their union with offspring to follow; this denouement was a fitting end for Graves, as it reinforced her fundamental and enduring feminist belief, that a woman's foremost role was as a mother, whatever her past life had been.

Of course this final tableau is only possible because of Graves's portrayal of the doctor-character as a man who is able to counter the expectations of a patriarchal society and thus forgive his wife without fear of society's condemnation or ridicule. Throughout the play, Graves underscores the hypocrisy of a Victorian social system which was appalled at the openness of this kind of situation, rather than with the

⁸² DMN, Act III, p. 15.

⁸³ Ibid., Act III, p. 14.

situation itself. It is expressed most acutely through Lady Carthew, as she admonishes the doctor for his indulgence:

Lady C: I have no patience with Dr Neill... I go tomorrow – I mean that I can no longer consent to act as *couvre-feu* to a matrimonial scandal ... he visits every day, he reads to her, sings with her, walks, rides, drives with her. Not at Mrs Neill's instigation but at Dr. Neill's. That a husband who is about to make his conge to the world should allow a would-be seducer to flourish openly about under his nose is not only wrong, but ridiculous and if he doesn't think so, Society will!⁸⁴

In response to this outburst, Renfrew Plunkett concedes that indeed:

Society would be likely to take the dirty point of view ... we live in a world that's made of dirt. Reliable authorities inform us that we're made of dirt ourselves. We absorb dirt - in considerable quantities during our journey from cradle to grave. It's only natural that we should look at these things in general from a dirty point of view'.⁸⁵

Similarly, three years after Graves's play was aired, the dramatist Henry Arthur Jones considered the duplicity of late-Victorian society in his play *The Physician* (1897).⁸⁶ His protagonist, Dr. Lewis Carey, admits to a seven year romantic attachment to a married woman, Lady Valerie Camville.⁸⁷ Though Jones tries to mitigate their adulterous behaviour with the knowledge that: 'her husband is a blackguard who resides abroad', Dr. Carey, nonetheless, concedes that '[...] society, with its perfect good nature, its perfect tact and sympathy with a genuine attachment such as ours, has nodded and smiled, and whispered no doubt, but has never *openly* [sic] said one word against her'.⁸⁸ And yet, Lady Camville herself is subsequently

⁸⁴ DMN, Act II, p. 6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Act II, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Henry Arthur Jones, *The Physician: an Original Play in Four Acts*, 1897 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1899).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 'A handsome woman about thirty-three bright red hair, brown eyes with a merry twinkle – a face with beauty, intellectuality, and humour, without spirituality', p. 13.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

appalled at the doctor's suggestion that she obtain an annulment in order that they can marry. Recognising the fact that she would be shunned by polite society and as a consequence ruined socially, his enquiry 'Why not the scandal ... Dare you face it?' elicits from her a vehement, entirely mercenary response, and one which employs a similar 'muddy' metaphor:

Lady Valerie: Gracious no! To sink into social extinction in a bog of newspaper mud! No! Trust me, this is our fine artistic moment for bidding each other adieu!⁸⁹

Though, naturally, other contemporary playwrights offered comparable themes, Jones's play has been referenced here due to its identifiable parallels with *Dr. and Mrs. Neill*. Aside from Graves's first manuscript having the same original title, Jones's *The Physician*, has a similarly aged doctor—Carey is described as being forty-five to fifty years of age—suffering from a nervous disease of which he, too, is a leading authority. Following Carey's affair (this is the notable exception between the two; Dr. Neill is morally his superior) he too falls in love with an innocent young girl, Miss Edana Hinde, who, 'pretty, not quite twenty and countrified', is affianced to a most unsuitable young man. Dr. Carey has a dilemma, like Shaw's Dr. Ridgeon, and must decide between his duty as a doctor and his feelings as a man, i.e. as George Rowell recounts, 'he has the option of saving the flawed young genius whose fiancée he worships or allowing him to drink himself [sic] to death'.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ George Rowell, 'Criteria for Comedy: Charles Wyndham at the Criterion Theatre' in *British Theatre in the 1890s: Essays on Drama and the Stage*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 24-37 (p. 29).

Jones's physician is considerably less benign than Dr. Neill; Carey admits his inclination is to let the man die (though he doesn't) and that even as he ministers to him, he hates him. It might be argued that Jones blackened the character of the patient as a device to ameliorate the moral fibre of Dr. Carey, however, though Dr. Carey eventually wins the hand of Miss Hinde, the play was not a success; as Rowell advises, 'Wyndham's public rejected their idol's infatuation with a girl half his age'.⁹¹ This does not appear to have been a problem with Graves's play; the thirty year age gap between the doctor and Mrs. Neill, did not provoke comment and the acting of Brandon Thomas moved one reviewer to declaim:

The real purity of the character conveyed in every look and gesture ... his [Dr. Neill's] tender and self sacrificing love for his sweet, young wife is most touchingly portrayed, and he has the sympathy and affection of the house from the rise to the fall of the curtain. The part could not be better played... all who care for a well-written, high-toned, and thoroughly well-acted play will do well to go and see "Dr. and Mrs. Neill". It is in every respect a credit to English dramatic art.⁹²

Graves herself found much to credit in the doctor-characters she created. The type was undoubtedly a useful paradigm, given, perhaps, his uniquely privileged status to move freely within people's lives and to know their vulnerabilities and innermost secrets. Graves's own life was blighted by ill-health and, though speculative, it might be reasonable to assume that, having encountered so many men from the medical profession, they would naturally permeate her work;⁹³ not least because she appears to have held them in such high esteem. Whereas the author and educationalist, Mrs. Stickney Ellis, elevated men to an almost deified status, and Lyn

⁹¹ Rowell, p. 29.

⁹² 'Dr. and Mrs Neill', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 September 1895.

⁹³ Graves identifies Dr. Bland Sutton as the surgeon who removed her abdominal tumour. RLF: 2692/3.

Pykett observes of Isabel Gilbert in *The Doctor's Wife*, that her husband's altruistic actions transformed him into a kind of demi-god,⁹⁴ Charliott Neill ultimately acknowledges the magnitude of her husband's vocation. The doctor figure, for Graves, undoubtedly transcended that of a mere man; her closing tableau, with its omnipotent overtones, of Dr. Neill standing, bathed in light with his arms outstretched, endorses that view.

Kerry Powell, in his comprehensive analysis, extends the view that 'dramas by Victorian women were the product, above all, of the social conditions under which they wrote, even when', he argues, 'their habits and training made them compromise with the dominant tradition or led them to doubt whether they were equipped to write plays at all'.⁹⁵ Although there is nothing to suggest that Graves lacked confidence as a playwright, it is clear that at times, she surrendered in some degree, to established conventions. However, Powell's additional premise, 'that there is often a duality to these female playwright's discourse, wherein the favoured hegemonic voice is superimposed with a 'deeper and "less socially acceptable" subtext', is validated in her drawing of *Dr. and Mrs. Neill*.⁹⁶ This willingness to compromise is discussed in the following chapter, against the context of Graves's first application to the Royal Literary Fund.

⁹⁴ Pykett, (1998), p. xv.

⁹⁵ Powell (1997), p. 127.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter Five

Comedy, Compromise and Commerciality: *The Bond of Ninon*

9-12-1891

Dear Mr. Daly

[...] I regret to say that I could not undertake to work upon the terms you offer (videlicet £50 on completion and acceptance and 5 per cent of your receipts when you play it.) To gain sufficient time to devote myself to it I should have to resign several journalistic engagements – I need not say, with a great deal of goodwill! I should want £50 down with a further sum of £80 upon your acceptance of the play, together with the 5 per cent upon the receipts, whenever and wherever the piece was played. And I should stipulate for the right to publish, within 2 years of date of production [...]

Believe me
dear Mr. Daly
very truthfully yours
Clo. Graves ¹

In his study of women and nineteenth-century theatre, Kerry Powell asserts that ‘more and more women were attracted to playwriting as it became remunerative during the Victorian period’, ² and he cites an article published in the *Era*, in 1892, which suggests that a relatively new system of paying playwrights ten percent of the gross, had encouraged this. ³ According to Powell, by 1895 ‘the scale of remuneration for authors typically ranged from a low of five percent to fifteen percent, of the gross, in prestigious West End theatres’. He concedes, nevertheless, that a discrepancy still existed between the negotiated rates for male and female

¹ SFL, YC4345 (9).

² Powell, (1997), p. 80.

³ Ibid.

playwrights.⁴ It is also worth noting the many playwrights who were often driven by immediate financial need to accept a lower, one-off fee, for their manuscripts, rather than waiting, often tentatively, for a percentage of the receipts when, or indeed if, the play was produced. Novelists too, were often in a similar predicament, selling their publishing rights in advance of royalty receipts.

Newey's study of Victorian female playwrights, devotes a chapter to those women whom she identifies as having: 'routinely worked for money in theatres where the house takings were as important as aesthetic achievement or legitimacy',⁵ and she duly implicates Clo Graves, for the purposes of her critique, as 'representative of any number of those women writing for the main stream theatre of the period.'⁶ Graves is selected, Newey advises, on the basis of her significantly prolific output; she lists seventeen plays by Graves, between 1886 and 1909, and labels her as an 'extraordinarily successful playwright'.⁷ Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell make a similar claim, marking Graves out as one of 'the most commercially successful woman playwrights of the age'.⁸ However, this chapter will argue that commerciality did not necessarily translate into financial success for the playwright, and that the notion of theatrical acclaim routinely equating with economic security was a misconception.⁹

In the opening quote Graves outlines her proposed terms for the preparation of a play manuscript, entitled *The Walnut Tree*, for Daly's forthcoming American

⁴ Powell, p. 80.

⁵ Newey, p. 66.

⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell (2004), p. 238.

⁹ Newey, p. 100.

production.¹⁰ The letter, useful though it is as a practical indicator of the commitment required and the remuneration that might be negotiated by a female playwright—as Powell notes, there was a wide gender disparity regarding payment—is also a significant reminder that women were increasingly forging successful careers in the public sphere and conducting their own business transactions, despite, as Newey observes, the difficulties that were created by ‘the conflicts between theatre as an art and theatre as industry’. That is, the production of texts, already deemed to be inferior because they were penned by a female hand, were considered doubly so if produced purely for commercial gain.¹¹

Powell has similarly identified women who were handicapped by ‘the common opinion that their gender disqualified them from writing drama’, and cites the rejection of ‘even [the] well-connected’ actress and playwright Elizabeth Robins who, in her negotiations with the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree, found that ‘she was dealing with one who had long held the prevailing opinion that women were incapable of writing good plays’.¹² Another contemporary of Graves’s, the actress and playwright Winifred Dolan, also recalled the unpredictability of the profession, for either sex, suggesting that, ‘if acting [was] a gamble, playwriting was worse. Success [was] not won solely by good work, and on top of that, any success won must be sustained by good, if not better, work’.¹³ However, as Newey also concurs, notwithstanding their disparagement, ‘the theatre still existed as one of the

¹⁰ The name of the play was eventually changed to *The Wooing*. LCP, 53664G.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Powell, (1997), p. 82, cites the actress’s autobiography, Elizabeth Robins, *Both sides of the Curtain* (London: Heinemann, 1940), p. 252.

¹³ Winifred Dolan, *A Chronicle of Small Beer: The Memoirs of Winifred Dolan, Victorian Actress*, ed. Andy Moreton (Society for theatre Research: London, 2010), p. 61.

few fields in Victorian Britain where women could participate with anything near to the advantages men took for granted in most aspects of their lives'.¹⁴

Graves had already encountered the snobbery which surrounded the concept of writing as an art, and the associated debate with regard to it being considered either a 'profession', or a 'business'. And although the binary distinctions were perceived to be literary acclaim versus hard cash, Graves, like many of her contemporaries was aiming for both. However, practical need was frequently in the ascendency and, as a consequence, the female playwright found herself forced to compromise in a variety of ways; Newey's findings show, for example, that this sometimes included, and Graves is no exception, the manipulation of cultural and social capital, often through comedy, to achieve commercial success.¹⁵ As Graves's experiences show, a dramatist, on occasion, found it necessary to compromise feminist principles, or artistic expression, in order to accommodate either a theatre-manager's, an actor's, or even an audience's preferences—to ensure the sale of a play. Although it might be tempting to view this as a complete surrender, Newey suggests that this was not always the case. The interpretation is best seen, she says, as an acknowledgement of 'the ideological work of the many women playwrights making women visible on the stage, even in the most conventional of forms.'¹⁶

¹⁴ Newey, p. 108.

¹⁵ Newey, p. 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

Though Graves and Daly did eventually agree terms—following a number of revisions the manuscript was finally completed in December 1892¹⁷—the play was never staged and, therefore, the anticipated royalties did not materialise. As a result, by 1895, Graves was once again in correspondence with Daly to request that, if he had no objection, she might ‘found a novel upon [the] play’ in order to, one presumes, wring the text of every last drop of financial liquidity it might contain; Graves was at pains to advise that she would ‘of course alter the title and so forth’.¹⁸ The date range of these letters illustrates the considerable time lapse between the crafting of a play manuscript, and its subsequent reception by an audience; all of which impacted heavily on a playwright’s work schedule and earning potential. During the intervening period, Graves had witnessed the successful staging of both *Katherine Kavanagh* (1892) and *Dr and Mrs Neill* (1894), therefore, by the following year, 1896, she was undoubtedly gratified by the approbation and enthusiasm which greeted her four-act farce, *A Mother of Three*.¹⁹ The play, which follows the antics of a wife who adopts the guise of her absent husband, in an attempt to present a respectable, middle-class facade for their three eligible daughters, according to the critic William Archer, ‘vastly delighted the audience’.²⁰ The actress Fanny Brough adopted the leading role, and though some critics abhorred its ‘crude comicality’²¹ and the heroine’s ‘audacity at donning trousers’,²² the play ran for over one hundred performances.

¹⁷ SFL, YC 4345 (13)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, (16)

¹⁹ Comedy theatre, 8 April 1896. See also, Jenny Bloodworth, ‘From Petticoats to Shepherd’s Plaid Trousers: The Cross-Dressed Mother of Three’, in ‘The Rediscovery of an Exceptional Woman: Clotilde Mary Inez Graves’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of Leicester, 2007), pp. 32-45.

²⁰ William Archer, *The Theatrical World of 1896, 1897* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, Inc., 1971), p. 115.

²¹ Archer, p. 115.

²² ‘A Mother of Three’, *Monocle*, 15 April 1896.

For Newey both the ‘pleasure and the unease’ of the critical reactions evoked by women’s plays of this type, are particularly significant, not because of the plays’ central themes, but rather, she argues, because the good and bad reviews they provoked, ‘articulate the conditions of women’s professionalism as playwrights at the end of the Victorian period.’²³ Whereas the reviews might not always be complimentary, they were a marker of the progress that was being made and for that reason, she argues, were extremely important.²⁴ Though the critics ‘might carp about women’s inability to structure plays as they “should” be put together’, by the end of the nineteenth century, in Newey’s estimation, there was at least less of a sense, ‘that women should not be playwrights at all.’²⁵

A notable point, which has possibly helped to fuel the notion of Graves’s outstanding commercial success at this time, is the fact that, concurrent with the staging of *A Mother of Three* at the Comedy theatre, another of Graves’s plays, *A Matchmaker*,²⁶ was also being aired at the Shaftesbury. Although *A Matchmaker* failed to achieve the same level of success—it ran for only a few weeks—its appearance occasioned huge surprise from the male critics; the *Sketch* noted, ‘it has never before occurred in the theatrical annals of London that two plays by the same woman have been running at the same time’.²⁷ Notwithstanding the plaudits for this singular dramatic achievement, and the indubitable commercial success

²³ Newey, p. 104.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

²⁶ Shaftesbury Theatre, 9 May 1896. A four-act farce, with Gertrude Kingston playing the eponymous lead, Mrs Lane. See also, as before, Jenny Bloodworth, ‘Marriage: An Indecent Proposal’.

²⁷ *Sketch*, April 1896.

of *A Mother of Three*, within a decade, by 1905, Graves was compelled to make her first application, for financial assistance, to the Royal Literary Fund.²⁸

Regardless of her alleged ‘commerciality’ over the previous decade, Graves advised the Fund’s board that she was penniless and struggling to secure any new commissions, or to sell existing manuscripts. Extant records confirm, following the close of *A Mother of Three*, that aside from two copyright readings during the late 1890s: *A Florentine Wooing* (1898)²⁹ and *Princess Tarakanoff* (1897),³⁰ no other of Graves’s plays were produced until the early part of 1900, when two comedies, *A Bishop’s Eye*³¹ and *Nurse!*,³² were staged in quick succession.

Following Graves’s triumph with *A Mother of Three*, all of her manuscripts until 1906, with the exception of *Princess Tarakanoff*, were comedies, which might suggest that Graves identified the comedy genre as that which offered her the greatest scope for success. Moreover, her apparent preference for the domestic setting and its identification as a female sphere made it an attractive option. And as Michael R. Booth argues in his study of the comedy genre, during the Victorian period, ‘the importance of domestic life in comedy can hardly be overstressed’.³³ Furthermore, Booth identifies a curious anomaly that the same ‘serious themes’, which were widely explored in the Victorian novel, came ‘to characterize Victorian comedy’.³⁴ Newey has likewise identified the concept of what she terms a certain ‘precariousness of masculine advantage’ that was

²⁸ RLF: 2692/1.

²⁹ *Era*, 6 August 1898. The play received a copyright airing at the Avenue Theatre on 6 July 1898.

³⁰ LCP, *Princess Taranakoff* original title *The Northern Lights* MS. 53637G. Prince of Wales Theatre, 28 September 1897.

³¹ LCP, *A Bishop’s Eye*, 1900/3.

³² LCP, *Nurse!* 1900/4.

³³ Booth, p. 131.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

embedded in domestic comedies and farces, and which she believes the clever feminist playwright was able to exploit to her advantage.³⁵ Newey's judgement perceives that it was 'as if in the deliberate creation of chaos, which was central to comic genres ... the "uneven developments" of Victorian gender and class ideologies could be performed, in ways which constantly challenged Victorian conventions of both femininity and respectability'.³⁶

In her application to the Royal Literary Fund, in 1905, Graves disclosed her present means as: 'nothing, except payment for articles and stories etc. when I am able to write them,' and, as an example, just prior to the submission of her application, she recounts having received 'a cheque for £2 -17s for one article'.³⁷

Her income for the remainder of the decade is detailed thus:

1895 - £570
1896 - £1,000 and £300.
1897 - £105
1898 - £150
1899 - £500³⁸

In 1900, though having suffered from very poor health, she reports an income of £600, which possibly accrued from the two comedies produced that year. In 1901, her revenue had dropped to £570, 'almost all earned by works on the sofa', and by 1902 and 1903, the figures have plummeted to 'zero' with Graves relating that she had been 'desperately ill with pleurisy in March. [Had an] operation for a tumour and living on £500 from a play, £30 for a one-act play, £30 in articles, and paid away £400 to creditors.' By the following year, 1904, her situation had

³⁵ Newey, p. 108.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

³⁷ RLF 2692/10.

³⁸ Ibid.

improved slightly, and though she had contracted diphtheria, and ‘the lease expired on her premises’, she lists an income of ‘£260, principally for a play written during illness in 1903’.³⁹ This latter piece was a verse comedy, *The Mistress of the Robes*,⁴⁰ written for the actress Ellen Terry as part of the 1903/4 repertoire for Terry’s ill-fated attempt at management of the Imperial Theatre, London. Given Graves’s rather bleak position, it must have been with some relief that two weeks after her application she received an award of two hundred pounds from the Fund. Graves duly sent them her ‘heartfelt thanks’ for the cheque which, she declared, had ‘relieved [her] from the pressure of immediate need and painful anxiety with regard to the near future’.⁴¹

It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that an opportunity which presented itself the following year, 1906, to work alongside the accomplished and highly respected actress Lena Ashwell,⁴² was keenly welcomed by Graves, both for the financial reward it offered and the potential of possibly securing further commissions. The play, a romantic comedy by Graves entitled *The Bond of Ninon*,⁴³ with the actress in the starring role, was to be staged for Ashwell’s debut performance as the manageress of London’s Savoy theatre. It is unclear when, or where, the pair became acquainted. It may have been a decade earlier, when Ashwell had played the character role of Margaretta in *A Matchmaker* or, perhaps, the existing friendship

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Mistress of the Robes* LCP, 1903/26. See also, J. Bloodworth, ‘The Burden of Eternal Youth: Ellen Terry and *The Mistress of the Robes*’, in *Ellen Terry, Spheres of Influence* ed. by Katharine Cockin (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 2011), pp. 49–64.

⁴¹ RLF 2692/11.

⁴² Lena Ashwell real name Lena Margaret Pocock (1872–1957), actress and theatre manager. ODNB.

⁴³ LCP, *The Bond of Ninon*, LCP1900/11.

between Lena Ashwell⁴⁴ and their mutual friend, Gertrude Kingston—co-author of *A Matchmaker*—was the root of this burgeoning set of connections. David Mayer contends that many collaborative ventures at the end of the nineteenth century ‘resembled an assembly line for writing hits’,⁴⁵ and Newey specifically argues that, ‘Graves’s collaborations are indicative of the development of female-centered networks of professional women, helping each other in the face of a still male-dominated theatrical industry,’⁴⁶ that flourished in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Her relationship with Ashwell certainly appears to be one such example.

The Bond of Ninon encapsulates a brief episode from the life of Ninon de l’Enclos,⁴⁷ an author and courtesan of the court of Louis XIV, and was the last in a quartet of historical plays, written by Graves, professing to represent the lives of four ‘real’ women. The first of these, chronologically, was a one act duologue entitled *Death and Rachel* (1890),⁴⁸ which claimed to portray the final days of the French tragedienne Elizabeth Rachel Felix, more commonly known as ‘Mademoiselle Rachel’.⁴⁹ The second, *Princess Tarakanoff*, produced for copyright at the Prince of Wales’ theatre, in July 1897,⁵⁰ provides a melodramatic account of the life of Yelizaveta Alekseyevna, the alleged, illegitimate daughter of Elizabeth of Russia and a pretender to the Russian throne. The third in the

⁴⁴ Leask, p. 3. Ashwell had established a friendship with Gertrude Kingston from around 1892.

⁴⁵ David Mayer, ‘Encountering Melodrama’, in Kerry Powell, ed., (2004), p. 160.

⁴⁶ Newey, p. 102.

⁴⁷ Anne ‘Ninon’ de l’Enclos (1620-1705) – wrote *La Couquette Vengée* (1659).

⁴⁸ LCP, *Death and Rachel*, 53444H.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Rachel Felix (1821-1858) French tragedienne associated with work of Racine and Voltaire. Never married, had many lovers and two illegitimate sons. Died of tuberculosis.

⁵⁰ ‘Theatrical Gossip’, *Era*, 31 July 1897. ‘Princess Tarakanoff, a new and original romantic drama, based on historical fact. Mr. W. H. Vernon, Miss Granville, and Mrs Beerbohm Tree kindly took part in the copyright performance. The play was started last February and finished in May.’

group, the aforementioned comedy written for Augustin Daly, entitled *The Wooing*—which claimed to portray the courtship and marriage of Dianora, Duchess of d’Accolti—daughter of Lorenzo de Medici—was, in truth, a pastiche of incidents relating to a number of women who had shared a similar name.⁵¹

All of the women represented in this collection of plays fulfil a particular stereotype to which Graves was noticeably drawn.⁵² They are independent, often self-taught, extremely articulate, and ostensibly determined to rebel against the prescribed sexual standards of the period, even though, to varying degrees, their lives are ultimately tragic. And although the ‘Florentine piece’, as Graves referred to *The Wooing*, was only ever aired for copyright purposes it is of interest here, along with *The Bond of Ninon*, because whereas both are described as comedies, they sit uncomfortably within that genre and, perhaps for that reason, failed to secure any lasting success for Graves.

Whereas, in *A Mother of Three*, Graves had drawn her humour from both the cross-dressing element of the play and the farcical antics of those involved, Graves relies instead, in both *The Bond of Ninon*, and in *The Wooing*, on the cleverness of her dialogue and the constant banter between her characters. As a consequence, it is arguable that this impacted negatively on their entertainment value because they possibly lacked both ‘the chaos’ of her earlier comedies, and provided little scope for Graves to undermine the ‘masculine advantage’.⁵³

⁵¹ Eleanora (Dianora) Duchess of Toledo.

⁵² Correspondence with Augustin Daly confirms that she was working on a commission for an adaptation of Joan of Arc and she further advised that she had bought the dramatic rights for the novel *Mademoiselle IXE*. SFL, YC4345 (22).

⁵³ Newey, p. 108.

Furthermore, there was also at this time, as Michael Booth has noted, the added ‘difficulty of definition’; it was, he argues, a theatrical period that witnessed:

[...] potentially tragic and pathetic material so often mingled in the same play with low and eccentric comedy, serious characters with comic ones, and a constantly changing dramatic tone.⁵⁴

This was, undeniably, a factor which impacted unfavourably in the staging of *The Bond of Ninon*, although both plays certainly show evidence, as Booth describes, of overlapping design and theme from a range of genres. The journalist and theatre critic H. Chance Newton,⁵⁵ in his creative review of *The Bond of Ninon* presents a rather droll ‘snapshot’⁵⁶ of the colourful, though seemingly sanitised, French courtesan:

I’m Ninon L’Enclos! As you’ve doubtless read,
I was a wicked person – yea a Cat:
“No Better than I should be” – if so good –
In short a “faggit” of most frightful fame.
But happily the smart Clotilda [sic] Graves,
Playwright, Poet, Journalist, and Artist
(And once upon a time Gaiety Actress),
Using large chunks of Literary Whitewash,
Hath made of me a most *un-naughty* Ninon!
And thus I’m not unworthy to be played
By London’s latest Theatre-Manageress,
Lena Ashwell, ever sympathetic,
Who made big hits in “Mrs. Dane’s Defence,”⁵⁷
In “Resurrection”⁵⁸ and in “Leah Kleschna.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Booth, p. 129.

⁵⁵ Henry Chance Newton (1855-1931).

⁵⁶ H. Chance Newton, ‘Too Fond of Ninon! (or Clo the Clever’s Bonded beauty and Ashwell that Ends Well)’, ‘Snapshotted’, *Free Lance*, 28 April 1906.

⁵⁷ H. A. Jones, *Mrs Dane’s Defence* at Wyndham’s Theatre, 9 October 1900.

⁵⁸ Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection* at His Majesty’s theatre, 17 February 1903.

⁵⁹ C. M. S. McLellan, *Leah Kleschna* at New Theatre, 2 May 1905.

Chance Newton observed that the character of Ninon had been cleansed in order that the part might be deemed apposite for Ashwell's debut as actress-manageress, even though, as he notes, she had already executed successfully a number of other risqué character roles. Significantly, when reflecting on her role in Henry Arthur Jones's *Mrs Dane's Defence*, Ashwell declared somewhat unexpectedly, given her feminist outlook, that 'Mrs Dane was a woman with a murky past, and heroines should have virtue on their side ... even if for a time circumstances were against them, they should be proved innocent in the end'.⁶⁰ Graves may have thought it expedient, or was possibly persuaded by Ashwell's strong preference for a virtuous heroine, to present this bowdlerised view of the female protagonist, on the premise that though it was acceptable for an actress to depict a woman of dubious morals, the same did not, perhaps, apply to a woman elevated to the professional level of a theatre manager; it was after all, as Tracy C. Davis observes, not many years since the actress label had been synonymous with that of a prostitute.⁶¹ In terms of audience expectation, this implies that public and private images were expected to coincide, that both should represent a certain moral and social standard. Such a hypothesis would suggest that the public lacked the ability to discriminate between the two, which appears doubtful, yet that does appear to be the point, albeit ironically, which Newton is proposing in his critique.

Given the type of women Graves had represented in a number of her earlier works, and her willingness as a 'New Woman' writer to engage with often fairly

⁶⁰ Ashwell, pp. 117-118.

⁶¹ Davis, p. 83.

contentious issues, it is somewhat unlikely that Graves would have knowingly selected, as the subject for her play, a female of some notoriety and then, as Newton describes, proceed to pour ‘literary whitewash’ over the character’s apparent misdemeanours. Whereas the real Ninon had combined beauty with intellect, maintained an independent lifestyle and entertained a succession of lovers, the fictional Ninon is depicted here as a somewhat more sentimental character; though she is no less clever or witty than the real life equivalent there are no overt references to her earlier sexual indiscretions.

Ninon’s love interest in the play is in the form of a young provincial, the Chevalier de Bellorne who, it was reported, ‘for some unaccountable reason [Graves has] hampered with a painful stutter’;⁶² one can only surmise that this was intended purely as a comic device. Newly arrived in Paris hoping to restore royal favour and wealth to his once noble, but now impoverished family, Bellorne forgets his prior betrothal to childhood sweetheart, Helene. For reasons which are not entirely clear, Ninon signs a promissory note, which Bellorne carries, promising that she will love only the bearer of this said bond. In the meantime, and highly reminiscent of an episode from Dumas’s *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), Bellorne’s aged uncle begs Ninon to relinquish her attachment to his nephew because of his earlier pledge to Helene. Ninon’s strenuous denial of any impropriety or ‘vulgar liaison’ having existed between the pair, is accompanied by a declaration that she is ‘too great an epicure in love to hasten the hour of disillusion by such a surrender’;⁶³ however, in a later, brief sequence, Helene also begs the courtesan to give him up. Ninon finally agrees to this, and in

⁶² Morning Post, n.d.

⁶³ BN, p. 27.

an act of self-sacrifice, convinces the young Musketeer that he has been deceived by her declarations of love. In the closing scene she succumbs to almost overwhelming grief as she watches her lover depart.

The tragedy, as Graves has written it, though it is useful to recall that the play was originally promoted as a comedy, seems to be that strong women surrender the men they love to other women, thus ennobling themselves in the process; Graves employed a similar process at the denouement of *The Wooing*, with Carlson observing that:

In the first two acts we experience Dianora's dazzling display of wit, chicanery and daring. Her character has a depth and originality rare in plays of the 1890s. But she is reduced to a sobbing heap by the end of the second act.⁶⁴

Carlson suggests that though Graves has toyed with 'the promise of a different kind of comic life for Dianora,' one is left with a sense that the playwright feels her only option is 'to return to a destructively potent plot formula', that is, the character is to marry and give up her independence.⁶⁵ However, it is important to recognise, as Booth's study shows, that the 'happy-ever-after', though idealistic, was not only 'audience-pleasing, it was', he argues 'a prerequisite of the comedy'.⁶⁶ Even though it might appear that Graves has surrendered her heroine to a conventional fate, she had, nevertheless, up to that point countered patriarchal expectations of feminine behaviour. And, as Booth is keen to remind us, the handling of 'courtship and romantic love demanded it, as did the treatment

⁶⁴ Susan Carlson, 'Conflicted Politics and Circumspect Comedy', in ed. by Tracy C. Davis & Ellen Donkin, *Women & Playwriting in 19th Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 269.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 270.

⁶⁶ Booth, p. 132.

of marital problems. No matter what the difficulties between husband and wife, conventions and audience taste required that they be resolved – or evaded.⁶⁷ The compromise was fashioned, arguably, in this specific case, on audience expectations, and by extension, the need for commercial success, Graves, quite possibly, had no alternative other than to concur. But it is also important to recall that the play has echoes of *La Dame aux Camélias*, and therefore, perhaps, there was an understandable expectation that Ninon's romantic outlook would, in part, reflect that of Dumas's own Marguerite. It is worth noting too, that the original play version of *La Dame aux Camélias*, written in 1849, was refused a licence for performance until 1879 'simply because', Sos Eltis highlights, 'the courtesan was presented as capable of true love and noble self-sacrifice'.⁶⁸

Playwrights could naturally be pressured into making changes and Graves was not always in a very strong position to resist. There is evidence that, on occasion, usually when money was particularly scarce, Graves submitted willingly to demands for amendments to her manuscripts; for example, in 1891, in response to a discussion with Augustin Daly, regarding *The Wooing*,⁶⁹ Graves at length agreed, at his instigation, to make a number of alterations to the final act, whereupon Dianora would consent to marry Bernardo even though it would make him, Graves noted, 'a perpetual mortification to [Dianora's] unruly spirit'. There remains, around Graves's responses to Daly, understandably perhaps, a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Eltis, p.98.

⁶⁹ SFL, YC4345 (7). The letter reveals that but for Daly's recent purchase of the play it would have had its copyright reading by now.

discernible whiff of flattery; on one occasion, she graciously acknowledged:

‘your suggestions are splendid, if you will allow me to say so’.⁷⁰

The *Telegraph* judged *The Bond of Ninon* to be ‘the work of a clever writer, who has taken pains to study the characteristics of the period in which the action of her story passes’, a compliment which was echoed by the *Era* who also agreed that ‘Miss Graves has the history of the period at her fingers’ ends.⁷¹ These assertions refute the possibility that Graves was in any way ignorant of her protagonist’s true nature and, therefore, suggest that the impropriety which surrounded Ninon was shifted intentionally; whether this was done to demonstrate, albeit implicitly, the favouring of intellect over a woman’s reputation, or simply to satisfy Ashwell’s preference for a ‘heroine with virtue on her side,’ is unknown. Whatever the reason for Graves’s drawing however, one might argue, quite confidently, that it was tempered more by commercial considerations than a concern for feminine sensibilities.

As Newey observes, though ‘women routinely worked as playwrights, this was always done in an often painful dialectic with social and cultural proscriptions on their participation’.⁷² Given the poor reviews, however, which were provoked, by Graves’s ‘whitewashing’ of Ninon de l’Enclos’s character, it would seem that someone had made a miscalculation. One critic argued that the dramatist had missed an opportunity ‘of presenting an illuminating study of one of the most famous courtesans of history and turning her personality to proper dramatic

⁷⁰ SFL, YC4345 (4).

⁷¹ ‘Theatrical Gossip’, *Era*, 21 April 1906.

⁷² Newey, p. 66.

account', another that she had forged Ninon as, quite simply, a 'conventional heroine of costume romance and woven the usual, hackneyed story of artificial intrigue and adventure'.⁷³

An interview with both Ashwell and Graves, immediately prior to the premiere of *The Bond of Ninon*, confirms that the production costs were high, fostered in part by the considerable outlay for the magnificent backdrop. The *Daily Mail* spoke not only of its beautiful costumes and fine scenery, but also of the theatre's staging of 'a vast and stately salon of the Louis XIV period', a salon which had been built 'with every detail of the mounting historically accurate'.⁷⁴ The size of the stage set probably also accounted for there being no scene changes during the three acts; whether this was a restriction imposed upon the playwright, or something Graves executed by design, is unknown. The aspirant manageress herself described the set as 'a wonderful reproduction of a room at Fontainebleau, with carved and gilded furniture, painted ceiling, and a massive marble chimney piece, a fit background for the beautiful costumes of the period'.⁷⁵ To complement this backdrop Graves's list of characters (there are twenty-seven in total) embraces a host of luminaries from the court of King Louis XIV. Graves proudly specifies in the interview that the display included 'not only Louis Dieudonne himself, but La Rochefoucauld, Marshal Turenne, Molière, Racine, La Fontaine ...' and so the list goes on.⁷⁶ But where, ordinarily, one might expect these figures to contribute much of interest to the dialogue, they are, in this case

⁷³ 'The Playhouses', *Illustrated London News*, 28 April 1906.

⁷⁴ 'Savoy Theatre – Bond of Ninon', *Daily Mail*, April 1906.

⁷⁵ 'The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell's Comedy Part' - Actress and Author interviewed', 'Special to the "*Pall Mall Gazette*"', April 1906.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

peripheral, supernumerary, props. However, they symbolise Ninon's accumulation of cultural, social and academic capital and are emblematic, perhaps, of Graves's admiration for a woman shown to operate on equal terms with men of learning; Ninon is, in essence, Graves's drawing of a prototype, seventeenth-century 'Nouvelle Femme'.

A number of critics questioned the plausibility of Graves's plot—the story line is, at times, somewhat improbable—however, this reflects an occasional tendency, on Graves's part, to capriciousness. At the start of her career, when discussing the merits of a play with Daly, Graves admitted that:

The idea [for the plot] is rather a fantastic one but you said to me that you did not object to a little whimsicality, and I see my way to smart dialogue, and several good situations. The combined comicality and tragedy of the Duchess, as I conceive the part, would make it as goodly a part for a woman.⁷⁷

Ashwell herself makes only a passing reference to *The Bond of Ninon* in her memoir,⁷⁸ and there is scant documentary evidence to account for her decision to adopt a role which, in Graves's comedy version of the courtesan's life, was deemed by a majority of the critics to be unsuited to her skills. However, an interview with Ashwell, shortly before her debut, reveals a great deal about her wish to try something which was both original, and outside of her usual range. When asked how much she liked the part of Ninon, she replied:

I like it immensely, and after having endured on the stage so many tragedies, I simply revel in a comedy part. For the first time for some years I shall disport myself in beautiful clothes.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ SFL, YC4345 (5).

⁷⁸ Ashwell, p. 48.

⁷⁹ 'The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell's Comedy Part'.

The actress's yearning to transform from tragedienne to comedienne reveals no personal misgivings that, as would eventually prove to be the case, the aptitude for a comedy role was outside of her range. Ashwell's complaint that she had 'endured so many tragedies' and looked forward to adopting a beautiful wardrobe, underscores her weariness with the type of characters who had, up to that point, been the key to her success. Moreover, her subsequent remarks in the interview stress her resolve to suppress any elements of supposed 'misbehaviour' from the character of Ninon:

and you will be relieved to hear that I do not commit murder this time. Neither do I burgle, nor become intoxicated as I did in 'Resurrection', nor seriously misbehave myself in any way as it has been my fate to do in many plays of late. In *The Bond of Ninon*, the criminal side of my character, you see, remains for once undeveloped.⁸⁰

The Bond of Ninon was eagerly anticipated by the theatre-going public; Ashwell was a popular actress and it was, after all, still uncommon for women to adopt the role of manager. It is, therefore, somewhat telling, that the character traits Ashwell reports herself as having been so keen to avoid, are those which, hitherto, Graves had employed, fairly successfully, in her previous fictions and dramatic works. Moreover, the scenes for which Ashwell received the most acclaim were those which, ironically, embraced the tragedy of the role.

Graves was acutely aware of the opportunities, financial and professional, to be gained from a highly successful run, and though she had suffered

⁸⁰ Ibid.

disappointments in the past there is no intimation that she doubted the play's merits. For its first Saturday evening performance, on the 9th April, 1906,⁸¹ the play drew a large and fairly illustrious audience, including lesser members of royalty. Despite a diversity of opinion regarding Ashwell's suitability for the role, all were unanimous in their wish to see her succeed as a theatre manager; the following column inches from the *Telegraph*'s first morning reviews offer a representative sample of that support.

Sooner or Later Miss Lena Ashwell was bound to enter upon West End management on her own account; the brilliant work she has accomplished in the past few years, the popularity she has won by virtue of a very rare and exquisite talent, the appeal she never fails to make to those who delight in powerfully emotional acting, all these things rendered her appearance in a theatre controlled by herself only a question of time. Last night the expected happened. At the Savoy Miss Ashwell started her season, which everyone will certainly join in hoping may prove a prosperous and enduring one. Of Miss Ashwell's strong hold upon the public the demonstrative welcome accorded her, the applause which greeted the endeavours of herself and of her company, gave the best proof.⁸²

Although, as Ashwell confirms, there was no criminal side to the role of Ninon, the real-life character was, for an Edwardian audience, a colourful, unconventional and certainly immoral figure.⁸³ Whether the cleaned-up version of Ninon's character and the context of the play were sufficient to warrant a comedy is also questionable, yet as Carlson points out 'women's comedy [did] not always collapse under the weight of innovation', and there was a certain

⁸¹ *Mirror*, n.d. Despite a clash with Charles Frohman's new play at the Comedy, the Savoy audience included: their Royal Highnesses the Princesses Christian, Victoria, Louise Augusta Schleswig-Holstein; Prince and Princess Alexander of Teck and Major and Mrs Sackville West.

⁸² *Telegraph*, 20 April 1906.

⁸³ The real Ninon, a popular figure in the Salons of Paris and the feted hostess of her own intellectual drawing room, had retained her own financial independence despite enjoying a succession of illustrious lovers. Cardinal Richelieu was reported to have offered fifty thousand crowns for a night in her bed. She had many other influential connections, including the famous Madame de Maintenon and was imprisoned, briefly, in a convent by the Queen of France.

amount of that in this piece.⁸⁴ However, as Carlson has identified, Graves was not always able to sustain her feminist heroines in a comic plot; though she does concede that it was fully within Graves's skill set to do so, as had already been proved in *A Mother of Three*. The difference was that *A Mother of Three* was an overt farce and, despite its radical treatment of cross-dressed women, contained none of the tragedy or emotional complexity of either *The Wooing* or *The Bond of Ninon*.

Contemporary reviews of *The Bond of Ninon* note its distinct lack of action and Graves's efforts to replicate the incisive wit and repartee of the real Ninon de l'Enclos overload an already verbose script—the *Mail* critic labelled it 'rather talky'⁸⁵—and one is reminded of earlier criticism, levelled at the prolixity of Graves's philosophical reflections in the *Dr. and Mrs. Neill*. A degree of 'misbehaviour' by Ninon might, arguably, have provided both a welcome relief for the audience and, quite probably, offered more realistic comedic opportunities.

Ashwell's talents were, evidently, better suited to the emotional aspects of a role; though even she seemed a little uncertain as to the dramatist's intent. In a pre-production discussion, when asked if the play was pure comedy, she proposed that 'Miss Graves might prefer to answer the question.'⁸⁶ The playwright's subsequent, non-committal response, 'we had better leave the christening of the play to the critics' is no more illuminating. Moreover, Graves's revelation that

⁸⁴ Carlson, p. 268.

⁸⁵ 'Bond of Ninon', *Mail*, 22 April 1906.

⁸⁶ 'The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell's Comedy Part'.

she ‘intended it for a romantic comedy, but on the programme [I] modestly describe it as a new and original play’, suggests that even she was undecided about the true nature of the beast she had created.⁸⁷

Whereas Ashwell had expressly admitted her enthusiasm for a comedy role, the actress might usefully have reflected upon her published remarks, a decade earlier, in which she had described her ideal part as one:

In which humour and pathos are combined... when you hardly know whether to laugh or cry – that is, to me, true pathos ... But I am getting almost tired of pathetic parts: I want a change, something lighter.⁸⁸

Although these comments reveal Ashwell’s restlessness, she conceded, somewhat prophetically, that there were disadvantages to this ideal and recognised: ‘we [actresses] are always wanting to do the very thing we can’t, and we are too apt to forget that the public are far better judges of our capabilities than we are ourselves’;⁸⁹ although this was good advice, Ashwell appears to have ignored it herself. Similar counsel was echoed by another critic, who asked: ‘Should actors be allowed to choose their own plays?’ His response to his own query was a resounding ‘No’, and though conceding that the issue of choice was of profound importance, ‘in nine out of ten cases’, he argued, ‘actors chose incorrectly, and if alighting on the right one, it is more by luck than judgement’.⁹⁰ Moreover, he argued:

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ ‘A Pleasant Comedy’, *Fun*, 16 June 1896.

⁸⁹ Leask, p8.

⁹⁰ ‘The Bond of Ninon’, *Stage and Sport*, 20 April, 1906.

Anyone who knew Miss Ashwell would have known [the part] was completely out of her range. The character needed a comedienne of sparkle, brightness and daintiness. We find them on the French stage but they are almost unknown to us in this country.⁹¹

Whereas the *Era* considered that ‘Miss Ashwell handled the part with absolute ease and confidence’, B. W. Findon of the *Morning Advertiser*, asserted, less kindly, that:

Miss Ashwell made of Ninon a prosaic Englishwoman, with little grace of diction, with no manner of distinction, and without any suggestion of that personal magnetism which is so indispensable when an author relies for his or her effects on dialogue rather than action.⁹²

This final point, suggesting that Graves had mistakenly relied on discourse to drive the plot, became a recurring theme for most of the reviews, which appears justified, notionally, given that the swashbuckling antics of Ninon’s suitors, together with the heroics of the King’s Musketeers, are simply referenced by the actors, with most of the action being posited off stage. Some tried to shift the blame from Ashwell’s shoulders onto those of the author, with accusations that the play’s malfunctions were due to a poor script. Naturally, the playwright had her defenders too, including one gallant reviewer who argued that:

Although Miss Clotilde Graves may not have written a particularly good play, it was not so bad as those critics tried to make out – and they were the majority – who have not sufficient experience or instinctive feeling to discriminate between the part and the actor.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² ‘Music and The Drama’ – ‘A Managerial Debutante’, *Morning Advertiser*, 21 April 1906.

⁹³ ‘Bond of Ninon’, *Tribune*, April 1906.

He was not a lone defender of the playwright and many references to Graves, in a range of letters,⁹⁴ prove that she was highly respected by her peers in both journalistic and theatrical circles. While some critics might, on occasion, censure her texts, there was never any question about her overall craftsmanship as a writer per se. Her incredible depth of knowledge and her skill with a poetic narrative were widely acknowledged; the *Morning Advertiser* confirmed that she was ‘a clever, witty, and satirical writer, with a strong dramatic sense and a very happy knack of jeering amusingly at the follies of the day’.⁹⁵ However, it was also remarked that the play ‘was conventional to a degree and nothing better than a *rechauffe* of a dozen old comedies with all their dramatic flavour left out’.⁹⁶ This review, with its claim that *The Bond of Ninon* was simply an inferior blend of old ingredients, reflected others which accused Graves of ‘adapting’ the work of French authors.⁹⁷ Though she was, admittedly, familiar with the work of Dumas *filis* and his countrymen, having completed numerous adaptations for Daly early on in her career,⁹⁸ Graves was, robust in her defence of the play: ‘I modestly describe it as a new and original play’, she countered, ‘and I should like emphatically to contradict the rumour that *The Bond of Ninon* has been suggested or inspired by any other play’.⁹⁹ Ignoring her claims, *The Times* correspondent evaluated it as composed in ‘about equal quantities of “The Three Musketeers”

⁹⁴ RLF: 2692/11. Edmund Gosse: ‘The enclosed letters I shall be much pleased if you will read at the meeting on the 8th’ and RLF: 2692/8 from Lady Colin Campbell.

⁹⁵ Article in a scrapbook at the Theatre Museum Archive, n.d.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ The *Era* also reported that ‘Miss Graves desires to contradict the rumour that *The Bond of Ninon* has been suggested or inspired by any other play, or by any other character existing in any other play’. 14 April 1906.

⁹⁸ Marvin Felheim – *The Theatre of Augustin Daly* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1956). ‘Others who worked on French adaptations for Daly included Dion Boucicault, John Brougham, Robert Buchanan, Clo Graves, Brander Matthews and Justin McCarthy’ p. 195.

⁹⁹ ‘The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell’s Comedy Part’.

and *La Dame aux Camellias* [sic]’ arguing that ‘to the first we owe the period and the adventures, and some of the people’.¹⁰⁰

The popularity of Dumas’s novel had been sustained, since its publication in 1848, through the many subsequent stage adaptations it had provoked; the most recent of which, in 1896, had starred Eleanor Duse, which may have been the inspiration for Graves’s ‘borrowings’. However, *The Bond of Ninon* was by no means the first of Graves’s plays to invoke the Dumas legacy. A review almost twenty years earlier of Graves’s duologue, *Death and Rachel*, had provoked the same charge from the critic W.S Gilbert who complained that Graves’s staging of the French tragedienne’s death was ‘in circumstances not unlike those of “La Dame aux Camélias”’.¹⁰¹

According to Graves, any similarities were purely accidental and her strong rebuttal accompanied a detailed account of when, and where, she had conceived the idea:

The story occurred to me when I happened to come across a quaint little brown volume with snuff-stained pages, ‘Lettres de Ninon’¹⁰² – I can assure you there was a separate sneeze in every page – once the property of the Earl of Eglinton, of tournament fame, for his book-plate adorned the cover. Out of these letters I have built up the character of Ninon.¹⁰³

The small volume to which Graves referred was a French edition, written by Louis Damours, based on the alleged correspondence between the real Anne de

¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, n.d.

¹⁰¹ ‘Death and Rachel at the Haymarket’, *The Times*, 1890, W S Gilbert.

¹⁰² *Lettres de Ninon* (French) Louis Damours. published in 1752 and later editions a spurious account. letters from Ninon to one of her lovers the Marquis de Sevigne.

¹⁰³ ‘The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell’s Comedy Part’.

l'Enclos and the Marquis de Sevigne. It was reported to be a spurious account of their liaison, and if, as Graves relates, her character was built upon that version, then it was almost certainly bowdlerised. Graves concluded on a positive note—though with no comment as to the play's humour, surprising perhaps, given that it was ostensibly a romantic comedy—with an assurance that 'the play is full of action and excitement, with a strong love interest – or, at least, we hope that it may prove so'.¹⁰⁴

Graves's optimism was short-lived, and a respondent from the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that though 'for some time back there has been no booing in our theatres, no matter how bad the play', there was, in this instance, he solemnly recorded 'booing'.¹⁰⁵ While naturally regretful that the piece evoked such a response, he did agree that there were perhaps grounds for the 'jeers', citing 'periods of boredom and several ineptitudes, which provoked titters'.¹⁰⁶ The critic's judgement was founded on a conviction that the play was 'characteristically feminine' and, with an increasingly patronising tone, opined that one could 'hardly imagine a male author writing it' nor indeed, 'a male manager producing it'.¹⁰⁷

His hypothesis, for what he distinguished as a decidedly 'feminine' piece, centred on an assertion that 'Ladies are fond of dress', which ignored the fact that this was a commonly used, commercially propitious tactic, with many plays at this

¹⁰⁴ 'The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell's Comedy Part'.

¹⁰⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 April 1906.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

time, by both male and female authors, featuring costumes which were often reviewed in their own right.¹⁰⁸ Ashwell and Graves claimed to have made determined efforts with many of the finer points of the play,¹⁰⁹ to ensure that the costumes would be ‘historically correct’, while Graves admitted to ‘ransacking the British Museum for old prints of the period’ with a belief that ‘the costumes [would] be an interesting feature of the production’.¹¹⁰

Another critic had no issue with the aesthetics of what he considered to be a most ‘feminine production’, conceding that the stage set was one of the finest and most artistic he had seen. His primary complaint, however, was with:

the heroine ... a lady of unsavoury reputation, who retained her youth and beauty to an advanced age, and found among her own issue one of her most passionate admirers. In the play, however, we have nothing of this; we have little more of her than her name.¹¹¹

Though the writer allowed that both actress and playwright were familiar with the ‘unsavoury reputation’ of their subject, he calls in the review for a truthful interpretation. Likewise, the reviewer from the *Morning Advertiser*, also keen to acknowledge Ninon’s not inconsiderable intellectual and literary talents, allowed that Graves:

has fully realised the type of woman Ninon is, or she would not have written a first act solely intended to display the power and accomplishments of her notorious heroine. But, alas, [due to the

¹⁰⁸ The *Dundee Courier* columnist ‘Annette’, gave a detailed account of Miss Terry’s ‘toilette’ for her performance in another of Graves’s plays, *The Mistress of the Robes* (1903). Jenny Bloodworth, ‘The Burden of Eternal Youth’, in *Ellen Terry, Spheres of Influence*, ed. by Katharine Cockin (London: Pickering & Chatto Ltd., 2011), pp. 49-64 (p.60).

¹⁰⁹ Similar efforts were taken with the incidental music too, Graves advised that it was ‘of the period with the exception of one song’, which had been written specially by Mr. Stanley Hawley.

¹¹⁰ ‘The New Play at the Savoy – Miss Ashwell’s Comedy Part’.

¹¹¹ ‘New Play at the Savoy’, *Morning Post*, 20 April, 1906.

acting] her first act fell upon the audience with the heaviness of a cold suet dumpling.¹¹²

The critics and audience were decidedly more interested in a rendering of the real woman and her exploits, rather than Graves's fictionalised version, with its clever dialogue. Despite the exertions of both Ashwell and Graves, the play was withdrawn after only three and a half weeks.¹¹³ Part of Carlson's extended critique posits the idea that 'in the most extreme cases, an author's attempt to tell her story as comedy completely breaks down' and, by way of example, she cites Dianora in *The Wooing* as 'a disturbing example of a play in which the creation of a strong woman character is clearly at odds with standard comic plotting', and the same might, in truth, be said of Ninon.¹¹⁴ Whereas *A Mother of Three* was an unmistakable farce, the humour in *The Bond of Ninon* is, at times, difficult to locate; Bellorne's stutter, arguably an incongruous feature for a hero, was heavily criticised, and the stage directions for Ninon's final tableaux, though intended as a tragic scene, might well, in the hands of a less capable actress, have 'provoked titters', for its unintended humour:¹¹⁵

(Her voice breaks, she rises, dropping the lute and stands holding the window curtain with an expression of terrible anguish.) Gone! (with a shriek) Gone! she bites the curtain savagely, stifling her cries, reels and falls heavily, partly dragging the curtain with her (final tableaux)

¹¹² 'Bond of Ninon', *Morning Advertiser*, 21 April 1906.

¹¹³ *Era*, 5 May 1906, reported that the BN was to be replaced with a new play, *The Shulamite*. A play in 3 acts, the scene of which is laid in the Transvaal, adapted from the novel of the same name, and had only six characters.

¹¹⁴ Carlson, p. 269.

¹¹⁵ BN, Act 3, p.29.

Given also, as Booth notes, the difficulty of knowing ‘what *was* [sic] comedy, so much had the old separation of genres broken down’,¹¹⁶ it is tricky, from the distance of more than a century, to gauge accurately a writer’s comedic ability, or audience taste. Add to this, a commonly held view at the time—it prevails today to some degree—that women were without humour, and it is evident that women playwrights, such as Graves, were arguably as disadvantaged writing in the comedy field as in any other. A column in the *Graphic* claimed that ‘the gift of humour had not been universally bestowed on [women]’,¹¹⁷ and though the *Era* conceded that Graves, ‘had not struck oil until her comedy farce was produced’, it tempered its commendation with the assertion that this was unusual because:

Chiefly ... most women are devoid of deep and mirthful humour, on account of their prolixity of diction and tendency to introduce a superabundance of small irresponsible details into their writings.¹¹⁸

Though a contemporary, in 1914, attributed to Graves ‘a pretty humour, sometimes sub-acid in flavour’,¹¹⁹ Newey defines Graves’s comedies as those which were ‘of contemporary life, broadly realist in style, but not Naturalist in their aesthetic or ideological approaches or content’,¹²⁰ and this might account for the failure of *The Bond of Ninon*, given its period setting. Comedy had evolved noticeably during the 1890s, and was, as Booth identifies, ‘beginning to assume its Edwardian dress’. Out went eccentric characterisations and flowery rhetoric,

¹¹⁶ Booth, p. 130.

¹¹⁷ *The Graphic*, Lady Violet Greville. n.d.

¹¹⁸ *Era*, 23 May 1896.

¹¹⁹ *Western Daily Press*, 30 March 1914.

¹²⁰ Newey, p. 102.

as comedy, ‘moved upmarket, both in setting and *dramatic personae*, and right into the heart of Mayfair’.¹²¹

Graves’s obvious fondness for the historical play, based around the literature, culture and social glitterati of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was becoming outdated. Although that style had remained popular around the turn of the new century, it was now being pushed aside in favour of the work of more modern female playwrights, such as Elizabeth Robins, Florence Bell, Cicely Hamilton, with their insightful, realistic portraits of women’s lives. How much Graves’s drawing of Ninon was shaped by commercial necessity rather than her own dramatic inclination or, indeed, to what extent Ashwell had influenced the script cannot be fully known. However, within months, the New York stage was the location for a new play by Graves, in which she had shaken off the witticisms, the middle-class setting and the comic genre to explore—this time, through an arguably more naturalist lens—the contentious topic of sexual abuse.

¹²¹ Booth, p. 134.

Chapter Six

Staging Sexual Abuse: *A Tenement Tragedy*

Her life was sad beyond Life's common wont.
Pale sorrow fed her from a bitter feast:
Hunger stood sponsor at the christening-font
And Death sat shrouded at her wedding feast.¹

This brief, melancholic verse, inscribed in Graves's distinctive hand on to the title-page of a typed manuscript, lodged with the Lord Chamberlain's collection of plays, sets the tone for a dramatic piece which, though it embraces a number of stock, nineteenth-century melodramatic motifs, strikes a modern, dissonant note, with its controversial subject matter. And while there is no clue, in these few, bleak lines, of the sexual abuse, or the vengeful murders that are to be found within, Graves's poem, with its anthropomorphic reflections of famine and death, portends the heroine's tragic, and seemingly inevitable, fate.

Why Graves chose to add the quatrain to the frontispiece, once the typewritten manuscript was complete, is unclear; it neither informs the dialogue nor influences the stage directions in any way. Among other annotations on the page, is a list of scored-through titles, which suggests that they have been duly rejected as alternatives. They are: *Tina*; *Bill Kelsey's Wife*; *One of These* – [sic]; *The Wedding Guest* and *A Tenement Tragedy*, with the latter, transcribed carefully, in ink, above the scored through typed-original of *A London Vendetta – A Humble Tragedy in One Act*. Though the motivation behind this final name change remains unknown,

¹ Frontispiece, LCP, *A Tenement Tragedy*, 1906/35.

correspondence suggests that it was at the instigation of Eleanor Robson,² who was to play the leading female role. Graves's letter conveys her delight that the actress was 'so pleased with the one-act play' while adding:

Let me suggest as an alternative title [to *A London Vendetta*] –
 "Tina"
 Or else "A Tenement Tragedy"
 Or, carrying out the subliminal reference,
 "One of These — " ³

Graves use of 'one of these', her euphemistic expression for a prostitute, affirms that the subject matter is contentious, while the allusion to a 'subliminal reference' demonstrates fully her subversive intent.

The play manuscript's registration stamp shows the 'Criterion Theatre, London, 27th November 1906', but, as there is no evidence to suggest that the play was ever staged in Great Britain, it is reasonable to conclude that the Criterion played host simply to a 'read through', merely for copyright purposes. Indeed, extant records verify that the piece was staged for two weeks only, as part of a double-bill, at the Liberty Theatre,⁴ New York, in November 1906.⁵ Despite its limited exposure it is an important expression of Graves's development as a writer and feminist, for a number of reasons. First of all, the manuscript was founded on an actual event, and though Graves had taken that step before, those narratives were historically based; the context for this dramatic piece drew on a recent incident. Secondly, her inspiration for the plot was drawn from a newspaper report, and though it was to be expected

² Eleanor Robson (1879-1979). Born in England, first appeared on Broadway stage in 1900, retired in 1910 following marriage to August Belmont Jr. Although George Bernard Shaw wrote the play *Major Barbara* (1905) for Robson, contractual issues prevented her from playing the role.

³ CU, 18 July 1906.

⁴ Liberty Theatre, 236, West 42nd Street, New York (1904 – 1933).

⁵ *New York Tribune*, 10 December 1906. The first performance was on Tuesday, 22 November 1906.

that writers might use this method, there is nothing to suggest that it was a technique Graves had previously employed. Finally, Graves's play deals with sexual abuse, and though her early writing had featured examples of domestic violence, as detailed in chapter two, this was not a theme she had previously explored.

In an age when society, ostensibly, preferred to ignore those topics which might destabilise its own idealised sense of moral rectitude, Graves's decision to explore this disturbing theme was, arguably, a daring one. In her comprehensive study of Victorian sexual abuse, Louise Jackson suggests that the developing statute laws, in addition to reflecting Victorian debates on childhood and sexuality, had 'effectively brought new groups of "children" into being as it attempted to re-label, repackage and re-educate society'.⁶ *A Tenement Tragedy* might, therefore, be regarded as Graves's New Woman response to sexual abuse—the existence of which was barely acknowledged as credible, given that it undermined the Victorians' own sense of decency. However, the fact that only a few years after the staging of *A Tenement Tragedy* Graves would revisit the theme in a novel which she admitted was drawn from her own thoughts and experiences, implies that the subject matter had significant personal resonance. Though for some, the subject matter perhaps elicited a level of prurient curiosity, for the majority, one presumes, it was no doubt a shocking issue and entirely inappropriate as the focus for a dramatic production. There was already a developing trend, in the early years of the twentieth century, towards short, intensely dramatic plays mirroring life for those on the lower rungs of society—for example John Masefield's *Tragedy of Nan* (1908) and D.H. Lawrence's later piece, *The Daughter-in-Law* (1912)—and it is clear that Graves fully intended

⁶ Louise Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Routledge: London, 2000), p. 12.

to stir the audience; in her letter to Robson, she anticipates that ‘the piece will make a sensation’.⁷

An interview with the actress Ada Dwyer, who appeared in the play during its two-week run, confirms that the piece was founded upon a double-murder trial, which had concluded just a few months before and had been widely reported in the American press. The case, according to Dwyer, concerned:

[a] man who had betrayed his niece with the sanction of the child’s aunt ... and was [later] killed by his victim ... [which] set New York on fire with rage and sympathy on behalf of the young victim.⁸

The woman on trial was Josephine Terranova, a young, newly-wed of seventeen, who admitted to shooting her uncle and fatally stabbing her aunt. The ‘betrayal’, as it was euphemistically expressed by the newspaper, which had triggered the sequence of events, was an act of rape perpetrated by the uncle. The girl, initially ignorant of the enormity of the crime committed against her, was provoked into action after being abandoned by her new husband, following his discovery of her earlier sexual relationship. The girl was reported to have shown no remorse for her murderous actions.⁹

Eleanor Robson’s own account, however, when asked if the play had been based on the ‘Terranova case’ was rather less dogmatic, somewhat coyly, she replied that ‘it

⁷ CU, 18 July 1906.

⁸ Ada Dwyer played Mrs. Kelsey. ‘Ada Dwyer – Just a Word with her at Home’, *Goodwin’s Weekly*, 3 August 1907.

⁹ ‘Terranova Murders’, *The Evening World* (New York), 16 May 1906.

may have been'.¹⁰ According to Robson, she had 'heard of the tenement tragedy [sic] for the first time in Paris, one day last summer, and two weeks later, curiously enough Miss Graves sent [me] "A Tenement Tragedy" from London';¹¹ though a report in the *New York Tribune* recorded that the play had been 'written especially for Miss Robson by Clotile [sic] Graves'.¹² Despite Robson's rather vague explanation, Graves plainly used the 'Terranova' story as the basis for her drama. The case had been reported, though not widely, in the British press in May 1906¹³ and the similarities are too marked to be coincidental. Graves's adaptation was completed fairly swiftly as, by the 18th July 1906, she was already engaged in correspondence with Robson regarding its staging.¹⁴ From a financial perspective, Graves achieved very little, confirming in a later letter to the Royal Literary Fund that 'unfortunately [the play] was sold by me outright, for a small sum, to Miss Eleanor Robson'.¹⁵

Given the play's subject matter, it is important to note that, during the nineteenth century, licences for plays dealing with murders were often refused outright; Shellard, et al cite a case in 1862, in which Lord Chamberlain Viscount Sydney accounted for the censorship of murder plays, especially as they related to real cases:

All such representations of recent murder on the stage appear to me to be very undesirable. It only gives the public a morbid feeling, and encourages mischievous ideas in their minds. The manager I

¹⁰ 'Eleanor Robson a Home-Made Cockney', *The Evening World's Daily Magazine* (New York), 24 November 1906.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 'Terranova Case', *New York Tribune*, 16 May 1906.

¹³ 'A Vendetta in New York', 19 May 1906, *Derby Daily Telegraph*. Reported that the trial of Josephine Terranova, for the murder of her uncle and aunt, was continuing. The case was, understandably, not as widely reported in Great Britain as it was in America.

¹⁴ CU, 18 July 1906.

¹⁵ RLF: 2692/14.

think should be warned not to submit this type of play especially if, as in this case, there is any disguise of [a real] murder.¹⁶

Though Graves's play was staged forty years after this specific judgement was made, the views it expressed were still considered valid by successive Examiners, yet the manuscript attracted only a few cursory revisions from the censor. This might, therefore, suggest, given the Terranova story's significantly lower profile in England, that the drama was appraised as no more than simply a fiction.

Graves's one-act play has removed the action from New York, to the front kitchen of a tenement square in North-West London, close by to Regent's Park. An introductory scene, which somewhat anticipates the same domestic setting and atmosphere of D. H. Lawrence's later play, *The Daughter-in-Law* (1912), finds the widowed Mrs. Kelsey preparing a modest wedding breakfast, for her son Bill and his new wife, 'a cockney waif', Tina.¹⁷ As the drama unfolds it is revealed that the young bride was orphaned as a child before being given a home by an Italian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Paratti, who have subsequently mistreated and overworked the young woman. Mrs Kelsey's initial dismay, at the realisation that her new daughter-in-law has never received any religious instruction and was brought up in a common lodging—where her late mother 'used to cook an' run herrands [sic] for the lodgers at a dossin' 'ouse',¹⁸—is soon tempered with sympathy at the discovery that Tina's mother had been kicked to death by a drunkard;¹⁹ it is later disclosed that Mrs Kelsey's blindness

¹⁶ Dominic Shellard, Steve Nicholson, Miriam Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets: British Stage Censorship and Readers' Reports from 1824 to 1968* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 42.

¹⁷ 'Eleanor Robson a Home-Made Cockney', *The Evening World's Daily Magazine* (New York), 24 November 1906.

¹⁸ TT, p. 9.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 12. 'Tina: A drunken man had kicked mother cruel. In the morning I couldn't git 'er to wake up, 'er face was stiff and cold.'

is the result of a violent attack by an inebriate husband.²⁰ Neither of these incidents steer the plot, or have a major bearing on the play's eventual outcome, nor are they drawn from any of the detailed background material supplied in the original Terranova court case. One might conclude, therefore, that Graves's allusions to these topics, is indicative of the significance she affords the issue of alcohol-induced domestic violence and, as discussed in chapter two, reflects her determination to foreground the problem. Though, at the outset, the abuse suffered by Tina is disclosed as being of purely a physical nature—beatings with a leather strap, for example—it is later disclosed that Tina has been raped, repeatedly, over the course of five years by Mr. Paratti, with the full knowledge of his wife.

This was hardly an auspicious start to a marriage. Sally Ledger identifies that 'earlier nineteenth-century novels quintessentially closed with a marriage', and she argues that an inversion of this typical characteristic, when employed, provided an opportunity to 'dissect, rather than celebrate, one of Western culture's major institutions, and [...] a major feature of New Woman fiction'.²¹ Though, for the purposes of this analysis, one must transpose the words 'novels' and 'fiction' with those of 'plays' and 'the drama', it is nonetheless clear that Graves was utilising the same tactic as that outlined in Ledger's hypothesis.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 14.

²¹ Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and Feminist Fictions', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siecle*, ed. by Gail Marshall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-168 (p. 165).

In the opening scene Mrs Kelsey, a blind scripture-reader,²² sits centre stage of a ‘neat little kitchen’, tracing out a passage written in braille from a well-used bible:

Mrs Kelsey: (reading aloud)

And he that shall receiveth one such little child in my name receiveth me ... but he that shall offend one of these little ones, that believe in Me, to o-ffend [sic], it were better for him that a mill stone were hang-ed [sic] about his neck and that he were drown-ed [sic] in the depth of the sea. [Uneasily] What’s wrong with me today? Texts of woe and judgement is all I keeps on feeling about.²³

This passage, drawn from the Gospel of Saint Matthew,²⁴ was ubiquitously employed during the long nineteenth century in, for example, church sermons, or as an accompaniment to illustrations of Jesus as the protector of Victorian children, and Graves’s own use of the lines, in the play’s opening speech, delineates the fundamental theme of her play: transgressions against the innocent. The verse which succeeds it, ‘woe unto the world because of offences ... but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!’ can be read as Graves’s explicit signifier of the play’s eventual outcome. The new husband vows to kill the man who has wronged his new wife, his fury fuelled by the knowledge that the young bride is no longer ‘virgo intacta’. Tina, meanwhile, as an act of self-sacrifice to prevent Bill from committing a murder, fatally stabs the Italian organ-grinder herself and subsequently strangles his wife.

The play received mixed reviews, one critic, ostensibly unaware of Graves, declared it:

²² Graves describes Mrs. Kelsey as a ‘scripture reader’ who sits on a stool all day at the gates of Regent’s Park and, for the price of a few coppers, reads requested passages for passers-by.

²³ TT, pp. 3-4.

²⁴ Matthew 18. 5-6.

... an anonymous playwright's bit of maudlin melodramatics, dragged from the police court records and daily news to be catalogued and acted under the illuminative title of "A Tenement Tragedy"... the piece is so commonplace that little or no illusion can result. Miss Robson is pretty and natural, but there is no very strong sympathetic grip at any moment. Mr. Warner's²⁵ playing of the husband reveals him as an actor of power and versatility.²⁶

Though the play manuscript suggests a rather melodramatic staging, its context is realistically based. Tina's disclosure that, as a child, she had been fostered by the Italian couple, following the death of her mother, reflects a customary practice of the period, which, from the mid-century, according to Ginger S. Frost, had developed fairly steadily due to the philanthropic efforts of religious and charitable societies who were responsible for handling children in the state system. Though Frost notes that the duty of care for minors had an upper age limit—fourteen years, at which time they were considered adults—her scholarly research into the plight of these children includes an exploration of the difficulties faced by 'orphans, paupers and criminal children without a functioning family'.²⁷ Frost argues that well-off children, through the advantages of their class might have lived outside the home, whereas 'poor orphans had fewer options. If they could afford it, relatives or neighbours took them in'.²⁸ Conversely, those like Tina without this network of support had scant choice other than to accept what little help the state offered.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the assistance available to these different groups of children was inconsistent, and often woefully inadequate. One early literary example of poor

²⁵ H. B. Warner (1875 – 1958) an English born actor, went on to star in numerous Hollywood blockbusters: Jesus in Cecil B De Mille's *King of Kings* (1927) and the part of Mr Gower the druggist in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

²⁶ 'Syrupy Sentiment; Maudlin Melodrama', *New York Times*, 21 November 1906.

²⁷ Ginger S. Frost, *Victorian Childhoods (Victorian Life and Times)* (Westport, U.S.A.: Praeger Publishers, 2009), p. 121.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

guardianship, is that endured by Charles Dickens's fictional orphan, Oliver Twist, who is sent from the workhouse to live with a family of undertakers, only to be exploited and cruelly treated;²⁹ in Graves's play, Tina confirms that 'the parish took [mother's] baby, an' Mr. And Mrs. Paratti took me'.³⁰ Despite a change in the law, in 1868, which allowed for children to be boarded with foster families with an incentive payment of between three and five shillings per child, the standard of care in these homes remained profoundly variable. And as late as 1906, the year Graves penned her play, Frost confirms that many children were still being treated as cheap labour and vulnerable to all manner of abuse.³¹ By the close of the nineteenth century, under the Poor Law system, many workhouses had attempted to replicate family units in separate 'cottage homes' and statistics for 1906 indicate that, although the child population in British workhouses was between fifteen and twenty thousand, there was a greater number accommodated externally.³²

Mrs Kelsey's suspicion that the young Tina has suffered far more than she has disclosed, results in a highly charged and melodramatic exchange between the two females, which the actress Ada Dwyer, later considered was:

[the] best thing I have ever done ... if I had performed it for six months instead of two weeks, I should have been a shadow, for it is one of those things absolutely exhausting in its demands and so tragic that it is utterly impossible for anyone to play it, and not surrender self to the depths of feeling it brings forth'.³³

In their final confrontation Mrs Kelsey challenges Tina to confess:

²⁹ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1837), p. 39. Oliver is 'sold' by the beadle to Mr & Mrs Sowerberry.

³⁰ TT, p. 12.

³¹ Frost, p. 130.

³² Ibid., '12,393 in district schools; 14,590 in scattered homes; 11,368 in special institutions; 179,870 on outdoor relief'.

³³ 'Ada Dwyer – Just a Word with her at Home'.

'as [sic] my son married a virtuous young woman or 'as 'e not? Answer me gal! (straining her blind eyes towards Tina's face) Your looks would tell if I could only see! (Shaking Tina) why don't you up an' answer? ... (Rising suddenly and towering above Tina, whom she clutches by the shoulders) Tell me 'as any man 'ad you before my son took you to church? [sic]³⁴

As far as the Examiner of Plays was concerned, the concluding sentence to this speech plainly overstepped the permissible boundary of Victorian sensibilities and, on the manuscript, the offending line has been duly underlined with the censor's familiar blue pencil, to be replaced, in Graves's hand, with the query, 'was you an honest gal before my son took you to church?'.³⁵ Mrs. Kelsey's continued interrogation of the young woman culminates in an intensely emotional scene which, Eleanor Robson later reported, 'affected her like no other role had ever done';³⁶ she recounted the despair she felt:

When we were rehearsing the play I was obliged to stop every now and then and have a little cry. [...] I must confess that Tina is almost too much for me. My heart ached for her as it has never ached for another character.³⁷

It is reasonable to suggest that Robson's sympathy was stimulated, in this scene, by Tina's revelation of the true nature of her liaison with Paratti which, predictably, elicited further editing from the censor:

Mrs Kelsey: (with a violent gesture throwing Tina from her)
You fallen creature! You bring shame to me an' mine!
Tina : (on the floor sobbing and trembling) I was ... only 12 years old
['12 years old' has also been underlined with the censor's pencil and is duly scored through and replaced with 'a kid!']

³⁴ TT, p. 36.

³⁵ Ibid..

³⁶ 'Eleanor Robson a Home-Made Cockney'.

³⁷ Ibid.

Mrs Kelsey: (Recoiling in horror) Christ above us! When it began you mean?

[‘Christ’ underlined by the censor, with Lord inserted] *Tina:* (piteously) I was only 12 years old [underlined by censor and replaced with ‘a kid!’] An’ Mrs Paratti told me ...

Mrs Kelsey: (Horror and anguish stamped on her blind face) Mrs Paratti!

Tina: Paratti said I’d got to do as I was told.

Mrs Kelsey: (faint and sick) My Gawd! A helpless child!³⁸

The fact that Tina has been sexually intimate with the man who had adopted the paternal role in their relationship, adds a trace of incest to the episode, albeit of a surrogate nature. This is compounded further by the admission that the abuse was perpetrated with the direct knowledge of Mrs. Paratti, who is clearly intended, in this scenario, to represent the maternal stand-in.³⁹ As a consequence, the couple’s behaviour not only destabilises notions of fundamental, parental norms, it entirely corrupts the accepted and, for the Victorians, idealised view of ‘natural’ womanhood. In the play, as in the real-life case of Josephine Terranova, the behaviour of the abuser’s wife (in Terranova’s case it is her aunt) is, unsurprisingly, portrayed as a particularly heinous feature of the abuse. Graves’s subsequent approach to, and handling of, Mrs. Paratti is consistent with this.

Although scripts were scrutinised for unsuitable political and religious references, increasingly, Shellard et al argue, the official examiners had become more generally ‘associated with policing public morality’;⁴⁰ however, the censor’s motivation in this case is not known. Shellard’s discussion further highlights the anomalous action of, for example, one Examiner, who: ‘saw lewdness only in inappropriate onstage touching; [but] saw nothing lewd in making entertainment out of the threat of sexual

³⁸ TT, p. 38.

³⁹ It was not until 1908 that incest was classified as a crime in Great Britain.

⁴⁰ Shellard et al, p. 5.

violence.’⁴¹ Jackson draws on the work of Vikki Bell and Shani D’Cruze who identify ‘physical aggression’, or even just the threat of it, as a ‘central constituent of the power dynamics of interpersonal relations’.⁴² When this authority ‘combined with both material and economic factors ... it enabled men to exploit women, or make them victims of sexual violence’ despite, they assert, ‘women being conscious of the need to maintain their reputations’.⁴³ Certainly Graves illustrates this point with Tina beaten into submission by Paratti.

In the absence of correspondence from the Lord Chamberlain’s office, one can only speculate as to the censor’s rationale for the aforementioned deletions regarding Tina’s age. A review of British law, with regard to the regulation of sexual offences during the late nineteenth century reveals that in 1875 the statutory age of sexual consent for girls was raised from twelve to thirteen, and in 1885 from thirteen to sixteen,⁴⁴ therefore, although the manuscript revisions appear, as Graves later pointed out, ‘to be fairly simplistic’,⁴⁵ they were, arguably, potentially more significant in their effect upon the audience’s understanding of the play. The age of the victim explicitly determines both the definition and, in part, the audience perception, of the crime itself, not least because distinctions at that time, between a felony and the less serious charge of misdemeanour, were also contingent upon the age of the victim.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴² Cited in Jackson, p. 10.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ It has remained at aged 16 to the present time.

⁴⁵ CU, 2 December 1906. Graves advises Robson’s manager George Tyler that she will send him: ‘the slight alterations I have made by order of the Lord Chamberlain, to be used if the piece is done in London. They are exceedingly slight and trifling’.

Jackson has explored in detail the complexity of age-of-consent legislation; a judicial process which was often dependent, she argues, upon a range of factors, including a victim's gender and, significantly in many instances, the specific charge laid against the accused.⁴⁶ Whereas, in the Terranova case these factors remain explicit, in the play they are somewhat vague, due in part to the censor's changes. It is therefore useful to consider Mrs. Paratti's comments, when she realises that their crimes are about to be uncovered: 'Do you think I wants to git ten years in quod?'⁴⁷ And it's a lifer for him. Felony is felony, call it wot you may'.⁴⁸ Surely there can be no reason why Graves would chose to include this line, other than to stress her knowledge of the distinction and severity of the crime.

It was not until 1885, when the Criminal Law Amendment Act in England raised the female age of consent to sixteen, (where it has remained to the present day) that the irregularity was created whereby sexual intercourse was considered a felony if the girl was under thirteen, but a misdemeanour if she was aged between thirteen and sixteen.⁴⁹ Therefore, whereas Graves's original drawing of Tina as a twelve-year-old, when first the offence occurred, would classify the crime as a serious felony, the label 'kid' makes it more ambiguous and, as such, might deem it to fall within the less serious category of a misdemeanour. Either way, Michael Pearson argues, the laws were completely inadequate, and he highlights that whereas in France, for example, the age of consent was twenty-one, in England it was still thirteen.⁵⁰ In America, in 1900, it varied across the states between the ages of ten and sixteen, until

⁴⁶ Jackson, p. 23-24.

⁴⁷ Slang term for Prison.

⁴⁸ TT, p. 48.

⁴⁹ Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: 1872-1989* (Routledge: London, 1994), p. 56.

⁵⁰ Pearson, p. 25.

1920 when it averaged out at eighteen years. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that Mrs. Paratti's earlier comments, with regard to her husband's felony, were indeed Graves's feminist attempt to underscore the inadequacy of this specific legislation.

Harry Hendrick's study of this topic is inspired by a 'class' narrative, and his research advocates that the history of child welfare policy in both the nineteenth and twentieth century, is best understood in relation to shifting and overlapping narratives of children as both victims and threats; the 'children of the poor', he suggests, were clearly perceived as both.⁵¹ While, historically, rape as a crime was based on the issue of consent or resistance, girls under a certain age were deemed incapable of giving their consent to sexual acts, and in both the play and the actual Terranova case, the female victims are portrayed as ignorant of the gravity of the crimes being committed against them—though they both try, unsuccessfully, to resist their seducers. The perceived notion of when a girl child might be deemed to have become a responsible, adult woman, moved dramatically, but certainly not uniformly, in nineteenth-century England, and this was further confused, Jackson has identified, 'because the age of responsibility was judged differently in statutes referring to guardianship, work, marriage or property ownership'.⁵² Significantly, with regard to the age of consent, a girl of twelve who was considered sexually mature in 1870 had, by 1885, been labelled as a child and, as such, was acknowledged as vulnerable and unable to defend herself from sexual predators.

⁵¹ Pearson, p. 26.

⁵² Jackson, p. 12.

The changes to the script of *A Tenement Tragedy* which determine that Tina is not referenced as a twelve year old—or, even as a ‘child’—meant that the audience could construe the victim as a young female who had, perhaps, colluded in her own ‘fall’. The notion that a girl in her early teens might, in part, be somehow to blame, was a commonly held view, as the newspaper reports attest, and Graves highlights this herself in the play. Lucy Bland’s assessment of this hypocrisy remarks on a positive effect of the ‘Maiden Tribute’ articles of 1885, which encouraged ‘feminists to ‘speak out on sexual violence’.⁵³ She identifies a number of feminists who involved themselves in specific cases; for example Henrietta Muller, who ‘intervened in the case of a fifteen-year-old working-class girl who had been raped and made pregnant by her uncle’.⁵⁴ The parallels to Graves’s piece are clearly evident. In the play, Bill initially concludes, because the sexual abuse has continued into young adulthood, that Tina’s sexual relationship with Paratti is consensual, and thus he classifies her as a prostitute, though the term is not specifically employed. His contempt, however, is short-lived and though he is too late to stop Tina’s murderous revenge, he nevertheless begs her forgiveness for his earlier condemnation.⁵⁵ It is also important to note Graves’s hesitancy, which reflected a similar reluctance by society in general, to articulate the word ‘prostitute’; though Graves was not averse to confronting difficult topics, she nonetheless retained a certain delicacy in her choice of words, arguably to accommodate audience sensibilities. Jackson too, outlines that ‘the term ‘juvenile prostitution’ had become, by the late Victorian period, yet another euphemism’ – along with those of ‘moral outrage’, ‘corruption’

⁵³ Bland, p.152.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 152-153.

⁵⁵ TT, p. 54.

and ‘immorality’ – to refer to what would now be described as child sexual abuse.⁵⁶

Likewise, Kim Stevenson identifies ‘moral outrage’, together with ‘shocking outrage’ and ‘abominable case’ as terms regularly employed by the Victorian press as polite alternatives to describe sexual attacks on women, ‘particularly rape and sexual assault’.⁵⁷ As a consequence, these overlapping references serve only to further muddy the waters when trying to sieve out the actual acts to which they refer.⁵⁸

The construction of childhood, in terms of sexual innocence, Jackson asserts, was dependent on the association of adulthood with knowledge and experience. Girls who lost their innocence, she argues, could no longer be deemed ‘children’ and, instead, became social misfits who required retraining and reforming in specialist institutions.⁵⁹ In terms of age, body and appearance they might still be children, while in terms of their mentality and, significantly, their morality, they were seen, Jackson maintains, as “unnatural” beings—premature adults who had not had the benefits of a “healthy”, “normal” development’.⁶⁰ Among the American press reports relating to the Terranova case, which are, on the whole, sympathetic to Josephine’s plight, is a detailed, pseudo-scientific analysis of her physiognomy that claims to identify a number of symptoms, which verify her ‘physical degeneracy’, including the shape of her teeth, eyebrows and ‘extraordinary neck’. Offering the description of a body which ‘might be that of a robust exuberant woman of forty’, the female

⁵⁶ Jackson, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Judith Rowbotham, ‘Crimes of Moral Outrage: Victorian Encryptions of Sexual Violence’ in *Criminal Conversations: Victorian Crimes, Social panic and Moral Outrage*, ed. by Kim Stevenson (Columbus, USA: Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 232.

⁵⁸ American press reports list, variously, Josephine Terranova having been ‘betrayed’, ‘debased’ and ‘robbed her of her honor’.

⁵⁹ Jackson, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

columnist concludes her critical assessment with the alarming information that Josephine possessed ‘the head of a child, the face of a school girl and the neck of a Napoleon’.⁶¹ Graves’s own notes in the script, meanwhile, describe the heroine of *A Tenement Tragedy* as having, ‘curly hair untidily but becomingly dressed after the fashion of London coster girls ... [she] is a gray-eyed and wistful looking young woman of eighteen, but looking four and twenty’;⁶² this final remark appears to be Graves’s only nod to the Victorian perception of advanced maturity in those who were morally tainted. On the other hand it might be a sympathetic acknowledgement that Tina had experience of life beyond her years.

The melodramatic tension of *A Tenement Tragedy* is driven by the paradox which surrounded female victims of sexual abuse during the late Victorian and Edwardian period; an inconsistency, which Hendrick insists—from roughly the 1860s onwards, through the ‘discovery’ of sexual abuse in England—was the result of an amalgamation of ideas between the numerous social purity societies and the child welfare movement, which was beginning to flourish at this time.⁶³ Jackson concurs, and in her thesis is keen to stress a similar point, that:

The invisibility of boys in this (despite police knowledge of a market for adolescent boy prostitutes) lies in ... the social purity and rescue societies’ preoccupation with ‘fallen’ women and young female prostitutes. A woman’s character, unlike a man’s, was judged in relation to her sexual reputation. Girls and women could ‘fall’ but boys could not ... Sexually abused girls, as a group, constituted a specially targeted social problem.⁶⁴

⁶¹ ‘Josephine Terranova’, *Evening World* (New York), 22 May 1906. Article by Margaret Hubbard Ayer, author of a regular beauty column in the *New York World* and married to its editor, Frank Irving Cobb.

⁶² TT, p. 5.

⁶³ Hendrick, p. 53.

⁶⁴ Jackson, pp. 15-16.

Whereas Victorian society, as a rule, acknowledged that the rape of innocent young girls was a monstrous crime, the actual victims themselves were generally seen as problematic to a society which held great store by feminine virtue. Though it might be clear that a girl was a helpless victim, she was nevertheless stigmatised and, Jackson's thesis asserts, she was subsequently 'seen as a polluting presence ... the act of sexual abuse was deemed to have corrupted the girl and effected her 'fall' from innocence; once 'fallen', her moral status was dubious'.⁶⁵ Graves acknowledges this herself, when Bill, in an argument with his mother retorts: 'do you know the name for the class o' thing I bin an' married? If you don't, you shall 'ear it now'.⁶⁶

Moreover, Jackson's research usefully highlights the Victorian hypothesis that the reputation of a female child, in cases of sexual abuse, was often gauged in terms of sexual knowledge and experience unlike that of a male defendant's, which was judged in relation to his occupational status and position as a family man. This, Jackson argues, underscores the apparent difficulty for many Victorian juries to accept that a "normal", "respectable" male, with a permanent job and family responsibilities, should wish to molest a child.' Consequently, she notes that 'the middle-class male and, indeed, the middle-class home, were [therefore] less likely to be the subject of surveillance or scrutiny'.⁶⁷ This point was not lost on Josephine Terranova's defence team; it was reported that every member of the all male jury, had been specifically approved of beforehand, by the girl on trial, who declared that she wanted 'only fathers of daughters, for they would understand'.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ TT, p. 48.

⁶⁷ Jackson, p. 26.

⁶⁸ 'Terranova Case', *Evening World* (New York), 16 May 1906.

Graves appears to conform to that ideological perspective by duly situating the character of Mr. Paratti beyond the boundary of, supposed, middle-class respectability. Firstly, he is defined as a semi-itinerant organ-grinder, located in the lower echelons of the working class; secondly, his inferiority is reinforced by Graves's imperialist standpoint, with her classification of Paratti as some foreign 'other'; and, finally, she employs explicitly negative, masculine imagery to categorise him as a deviant, as opposed to a 'respectable', Victorian male. In support of this argument, the annotated manuscript, lodged in the Lord Chamberlain's collection, offers a useful, detailed account of Graves's vision of her dramatic villain:

Mr Paratti is a swarthy, deep wrinkled, bow-legged [bow-legged is a later insertion] Italian of 56. His manner is taciturn and sullen, expression stolid, furtive and cunning. He is dressed in an old brown cloth coat buttoned over a long loose waistcoat of greasy, green plush. His trousers are of corduroy, old and dirty. Clumsy half shoes with iron on the toes and dirty white socks. Around his neck is a twisted yellow silk handkerchief. His hat is a soft brown felt, wide brimmed, slouched and much worn.⁶⁹

Graves's drawing of this particular 'Hurdy-Gurdy Man' is far removed from the avuncular incarnation of the gypsy figure and his poetic 'grindings', of her early years as a journalist. Mr. Paratti, the organ-grinder of this drama, is coarse, vulgar, and blatantly working-class and exhibits the worst excesses of a Victorian middle-class reading of his type. He is also, conveniently, Italian, a 'Johnny foreigner' character who, to an Imperialist eye, reaffirmed the xenophobic notion of 'otherness' with its associated negative binary opposites of light and dark. Graves further reiterates this concept of 'other'—along with her distinct sense of theatricality—in

⁶⁹ TT, p. 48.

her written instructions to Eleanor Robson, that '[Bill Kelsey] should be blonde to contrast with the Italian'.⁷⁰

Jackson has identified a shared Victorian vocabulary, through which real people (parents of abused children and other adult witnesses) confronted abusers and were able to articulate their sense of abhorrence at this type of crime; she cites an extensive list of collective responses, employed between 1840 and 1910, which include such examples as: 'you contaminating villain'; 'you dirty beast'; 'dirty old man'; 'you beastly man'; 'dirty devil'; 'dirty pig' and 'dirty goat', while she notes that others used extreme threats, generally with an ultimate warning of intentions to kill the abuser.⁷¹ These terms illustrate a tendency to that which is both unclean and inhuman, and Jackson draws on the work of Mary Douglas⁷² to argue that 'concepts of dirt and contamination act symbolically to define social and moral boundaries'.⁷³ Graves, notably, employs this same language in her description of Paratti's clothing: '[his] old brown cloth coat'; 'waistcoat of greasy, green plush'; 'trousers of corduroy, old and dirty' and 'dirty white socks'.⁷⁴ Jackson deduces that these derogatory comments used against witnesses, such as those cited, reinforced the existence of 'a cordon sanitaire' in order to 'position abusers as an abject group and, consequently, to expel them from the otherwise respectable and civilised community'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ CU, 18 July 1906.

⁷¹ Jackson, p. 32.

⁷² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1966).

⁷³ Jackson, p. 32.

⁷⁴ TT, p. 48.

⁷⁵ Jackson, p. 32.

This notion of an abuser as a type of ‘beast’ deflects the possibility that a perpetrator of such crimes might possibly be an ordinary man, perhaps someone’s father or son, and thus, this language of pollution and bestiality, Jackson suggests, negated the family as a site of sexual danger ‘by positioning the abuser safely outside of the social circle’.⁷⁶ Similarly, as Judith Walkowitz argues, there were those, like the newspaper proprietor W. T. Stead,⁷⁷ who had sought to expose the sale and trafficking of young girls into prostitution, who likened the image of a child abuser, in his ‘Maiden Tribute of Babylon’,⁷⁸ to that of a type of monster, or Minotaur, stalking the streets of London.⁷⁹ And certainly the physical appearance of Paratti, though he is not quite the grotesque being of Classical myth, is nonetheless deliberately repellent; he is ‘swarthy, deep wrinkled and bow-legged ... sullen, furtive and cunning’. He is, moreover, violent and sadistic and, in order to emphasise these intrinsic features of his personality, Graves makes it clear, in the play, that a young replacement for Tina has already been found.

Jackson, like Walkowitz, argues that labelling these men as ‘monsters’ enabled Victorian society to justify its paternalistic hierarchy, and to reaffirm the image of the upstanding Victorian gentlemen as a moral protector. It was perceived that this type of offence could only be executed by the most vicious among the criminal fraternity:

The character of both the accused and accuser in such cases was always important, and the evidence suggested that members of the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ William Thomas Stead, (1849–1912), newspaper editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. ODNB.

⁷⁸ ‘The Maiden Tribute of Babylon’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1881.

⁷⁹ Walkowitz, p. 126.

working class were more likely to be convicted of such offences than members of the middle class.⁸⁰

Likewise, Walkowitz points to the proliferation of discourses around sexual crime, citing the work of W. T. Stead who, she argues, ‘wherever possible ... tried to highlight sex exploitation as class exploitation’.⁸¹ And Graves’s own categorisation of Paratti as a bestial figure from the residuum⁸² also fits the hegemonic acceptance of the criminal predisposition of the lower classes.

Though Graves appeared to be aiming for a more modern, ‘naturalistic’ approach in *A Tenement Tragedy*, the tone of the piece, combined with the melodramatic stereotypes, for example her villainous drawing of Mr. Paratti, ensures otherwise. Jackson usefully cites Martha Vicinus’s analysis of the genre which, it is argued, centres on the emotional impact of the ‘melodramatic fix’, which she alleges:

makes the most profound of problems manageable, by placing them in a moral context, whereby ‘the good is made visible in the passive suffering of virtuous characters, while evil is embodied in the villain, who is constructed as an amalgamation of lust, violence and avarice’.⁸³

Though Mr. Paratti does indeed provide a good fit with Vicinus’s outline of the villain, her claims for the efficacy of the ‘melodramatic fix’ appeared, for one New York critic at least, to have fallen somewhat short; though he found the acting ‘excellent’, he was doubtful that ‘this harrowing little play [would] be taken to the

⁸⁰ Jackson p 125.

⁸¹ Walkowitz, p. 126.

⁸² Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, (Woodstock, USA: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 11. Koven refers to the ‘submerged tenth’, or so called ‘residuum’, those right at the very bottom of the social class system.

⁸³ Quoted in Jackson, p. 32.

hearts of people who go to the theatre merely to be amused'.⁸⁴ His judgement was seemingly well-founded and, as already noted the play closed after two weeks, failing to make the transition on to the English stage; the story, and its characters being, perhaps, too discomfiting, and its staging too melodramatic and old-fashioned, for an early-twentieth-century audience.

Marina Warner's meticulous cultural study of fairy tales likens the old woman narrator of the genre to a surrogate for the absent mother; a woman, she argues, who often becomes a symbolic fairy godmother model.⁸⁵ By utilising Warner's mode of analysis, it is certainly possible, and useful, to 'read' Mrs. Kelsey as the proxy mother-figure because not only does she support the heroine in distress, it is she who drives the narrative forward; despite her 'fairy-godmother' status, however, she is unable to circumvent the tragedy's inevitable outcome. On the one hand, it is Mrs. Kelsey's religious sentiment that dictates her disquiet about a daughter-in-law who, she believes, cannot fulfil an important holy covenant:

The Lord himself put *His* law into your 'art and showed you how a wife must come pure and unspotted from the touch of Man to 'er marriage bed, or she'd bring nothing but ruin and misery to the man who's wedded her.⁸⁶

While on the other, employing a secular response which is informed by her feminine sensibilities, Mrs. Kelsey concedes that Tina has been a helpless victim. It is in Graves's rendering of the mother-in-law's intense struggle to reconcile these conflicting views that the playwright draws most explicitly on the maternal facets of

⁸⁴ 'A Tenement Tragedy', *New York Evening World: Daily Magazine*, 21 November 1906.

⁸⁵ Warner, p. 202.

⁸⁶ TT, p. 45.

Mrs Kelsey's character, determined that they should be keenly, and appropriately, expressed by the actress adopting the role. Graves's letter to Robson makes it quite clear that she has a precise model in mind, one that is shaped by the paradigm of the ideal mother:

When writing the part of Mrs Kelsey I had our dear old actress Mrs E H Brooke in my mind sometimes, and sometimes Mary Rorke.⁸⁷ There must be pity and maternal tenderness and a good deal of womanly dignity conveyed.⁸⁸

As it transpired, neither of these British actresses, despite Graves's endorsement of their credentials, took up the role, it was taken instead by the actress Ada Dwyer. It is to be assumed that Dwyer's performance was more than creditable, given that, the following month, a report from another Broadway production declared her to be 'one of the dearest old mothers imaginable'.⁸⁹

Though Graves's letter to Robson is adamant that the character of Mrs. Kelsey must express feminine sympathy and, significantly, maternal compassion, she was keen to ensure that this was combined with a distinct air of feminine gravitas. By heightening these elements of goodness—Mrs. Kelsey is caring, compassionate and god-fearing—a far greater contrast is thus generated between this 'ideal' of motherhood and Mrs. Paratti, the alternative 'maternal' character in the play. Painted as an 'unnatural' woman and mother, in every Victorian sense, Graves was also mindful of expurgating anything which might redeem her character, however slight; she highlights Mrs. Paratti's callous disregard of animals and humans alike:

⁸⁷ Mary Rorke (1858-1938).

⁸⁸ CU, 18 July 1906.

⁸⁹ 'Review: The Girl Who has Everything', *New York Times* 5 December 1906.

Monkeys we 'ad first, but we got so sick of it, what with the Animal Societies meddling and the beasts themselves falling sick and dying, the worry and expense was more than we could bear. While a gal will live where a monkey dies, eat wot a monkey would turn his nose at, and where you give her the strap – she snivels instead of biting – which shows what providence originally intended.⁹⁰

As a marked contrast to the ideological 'English Rose', Mrs. Paratti is described in the play manuscript as 'a tanned, hard-featured, evil-looking woman of sixty' with a manner which is 'fawning and repellent' and a tone 'alternately caressing and brutal'.⁹¹ Moreover, this veritable demon in petticoats embraces enthusiastically the fairy-tale role of the wicked step-mother and readily admits to a voyeuristic pleasure in her husband's ill-treatment of young girls in their care, with the admission that:

If there wasn't the will, Paratti would find the way. It's beautiful to see 'im with the stubborn ones! Beautiful ain't it Tina (Tina shivers and shudders) – we 'ad four or five young persons to break in before Tina, but none such a credit to us.⁹²

It is, arguably, this shocking detail—that she condones her husband's abuse of these girls—which posits her irrevocably beyond the margins of acceptable 'womanhood'. That a female might be party to such an act was not entirely unheard of—Ronald Pearsall outlines numerous instances, including one example from *My Secret Life*, by "Walter", which 'tells the appalling tale of [Walter's] violation of a ten-year old girl with the full approval of her mother'.⁹³

⁹⁰ TT, p. 24.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹² Ibid., p. 22.

⁹³ Ronald Pearsall, *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 362. *My Secret Life*, by "Walter", is the memoir of the alleged sexual exploits of a Victorian gentleman, published in a private edition c. 1888.

Though one must concede that Graves's drama does not, essentially, fit the taxonomy of a fairy story, the character of Mrs. Paratti nonetheless fulfils Warner's categorisation of 'figures of female evil [who] stride through the best loved, classic fairy tales on this earth ... monsters in female shape'.⁹⁴ And her identification of narratives which 'centre on a young woman suffering a prolonged ordeal before her vindication and triumph, which frequently focus on women as the agents of her suffering',⁹⁵ is recognisably manifest in Graves's own dramatic interpretation here, of the 'story' being re-told. However, though Tina's torment has been prolonged, her triumph, if it can be viewed as such, is only achieved through the vengeful murder of her tormentor and his wife.

Significantly, Graves's feminist construction of the fairy tale reverses the usual premise of the male character slaying the monsters or villains of the piece. Instead, it is shown that Tina does not need a man to deliver retribution or vengeance on her behalf. Furthermore, the conventional structure of the fairy tale with, at its denouement, the marriage of the hero and heroine, as noted earlier, is also inverted in *A Tenement Tragedy* with Graves's drama opening, instead of closing, on their nuptial celebrations. Moreover, the fantasy of the anticipated 'happy ever after' is seemingly exposed as a sham, as in the final frieze Tina is led away to receive her fate.

The foremost casualty of this affair is Tina, Graves's representative on a wider scale, perhaps, of women and girls who were victims of both the moral double standard and

⁹⁴ Warner, p. 201.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 202.

the darker side of Victorian child care. Graves's anger, that this sexual abuse has been inflicted upon one so young is unmistakable, and in her letter to Robson she outlines her wish that the actress will evoke a similar, passionate response from the audience:

When that white-faced, wide-eyed, half developed creature realises the great and terrible wrong her womanhood has suffered in those dreadful days of childhood; when she suddenly awakens to the fact that the husband's death must be an inevitable consequence unless something is done to prevent a meeting between him and Paratti? When she suddenly transforms into a tear-stained Judith ... [sic] a kind of Destroying Angel with stained and broken wings, and kills! ---- that will stir the pulse of the public – or nothing will!⁹⁶

Tina's initial 'crime' is to have plunged from the pedestal of feminine virtue, and in this she is representative of any other fallen woman of Victorian fact and fiction, and for that, as outlined in chapter three, she was often expected to pay a heavy price. Graves is seemingly in accord with that ideology and, as a result, she has deviated from the original Terranova story in two ways. Primarily, whereas Josephine Terranova was openly unrepentant and admitted that she had murdered her aunt and uncle to avenge the sexual abuse she had endured, Tina's actions, by comparison, are conceived as an act of self-sacrifice, to 'save' her husband from, as Graves terms it, an 'inevitable death'.

In the above letter, Graves summons forth the Old Testament story of Judith,⁹⁷ as a metaphor for Tina's actions. This is, arguably, a curious choice, given that the biblical heroine allegedly encouraged the sexual advances of her enemy, waited until

⁹⁶ CU, 18 July 1906.

⁹⁷ Old Testament, Judith 10. 13:20.

he was intoxicated, and then decapitated him in order to save her people. Though Tina, like Judith, kills to avenge herself, her action is inspired, Graves would have her audience believe, by a desire to pre-empt her husband from executing the same crime and suffering certain death at the hands of the British judicial system. Graves anticipated, possibly, that this act would mitigate Tina's motive for the killings, and perhaps, foster further sympathy for Tina as a victim. Powell claims that for many violent heroines, the depiction of their acceptance of death, as their inevitable fate, was effected in order to, 'in some degree neutralize unconventional behaviour and render it palatable for the stage'.⁹⁸ Though Tina might be unable, or indeed unwilling, to express remorse for having killed her abusers, Graves ensures that her feminine compassion—exposed by her altruistic efforts to save her husband from the gallows—redeems her. Tina is, nonetheless, led away in hand-cuffs, leaving the audience to presume that a guilty verdict and the death sentence will follow.

Graves's drawing of Tina as a murderess, and particularly the manner in which she strangles Mrs. Paratti, does certainly transgress Victorian female norms, and illustrates further what Powell previously identified in Graves's work as her 'capacity to display violence' in her female characters.⁹⁹ In the earlier example, Mrs. Neill whips an unwanted suitor, while in *A Tenement Tragedy*, Graves unleashes a veritable powerhouse of fury. In the final scene, Tina fatally stabs Paratti, before turning her attention to his wife. Despite Tina being rained 'a shower of blows with the poker',¹⁰⁰ she succeeds in throttling the woman with the same leather belt which the Parattis have previously used to abuse her; one presumes that this irony is fully

⁹⁸ Powell, (1997), p. 130.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁰⁰ TT, p. 51.

intended. Graves was also keen to exploit, and perhaps unable to resist, the melodramatic opportunities which the scene offered. Conceding that Robson would, no doubt, cast the play according to her own ideas, she nevertheless advocated:

One very important point is the gradual coming-nearer of the organ, so that the death struggles of the vile couple have the accompaniment of ferocious, jarring music. But the instant the knife is thrown through the window the organ must cease ... [sic] the girl grinding it has got scared and run for the police and we must hear their whistles (I forgot to put that in the script) up and down the street while Mrs Paratti is being strangled.

Graves deviated from the ‘real’ murders in the manner by which Mrs. Paratti is despatched. Josephine Terranova stabbed her aunt in the abdomen, which would, arguably, have been far easier to stage. Instead, in Graves’s adaptation, the woman is strangled after a ferocious struggle; Tina is shown kneeling on the body as she pulls the belt tighter around her neck. Though one might argue that Graves intentionally assigned a grislier death for the one who represented the unnatural mother figure, it is likely that she simply saw the melodramatic opportunities which the scene offered. For example, just prior to the stabbing of Mr. Paratti, the stage notes direct that:

Tina quietly takes the birdcage down from the peg and lets the bird fly out of the cage and through the door. She then swiftly and furtively locks the door, putting the key in her pocket.¹⁰¹

While this incident is, in itself a rather hackneyed, and one might say clumsy, attempt to execute a symbolic representation of Tina’s eventual freedom from her tormentors, it nonetheless demonstrates fully Graves’s keen sense of theatre.

¹⁰¹ TT, p. 48.

Josephine Terranova was eventually acquitted of both charges and Graves's decision not to follow the same line in *A Tenement Tragedy* is surprising, given that this would have arguably delivered a more satisfactory conclusion for a New Woman playwright, i.e. the fallen woman had escaped her expected punishment. It is reasonable to argue that Graves, perhaps, considered her own denouement to be more appropriate to the mood and message she was determined to convey. Her careful drawing ensures that there is a decisive and calm resolve to Tina's demeanour, which has echoes of the forbearance of Jean Creyke, the condemned woman from *Alan's Wife*,¹⁰² seen a decade earlier. It is in stark contrast, however, to the unfortunate example set by *Justice*, in 1892, in which the playwrights Greville and Arthur Bourchier rationalised male violence against women with a female protagonist who, Powell notes, 'gradually falls in love with, then marries, the aristocrat who raped her'.¹⁰³

Moreover, Graves's final treatment of Tina reflects the reality, at that time, of females who were facing criminal charges in Great Britain, and who, Bland argues, were more likely to receive heavier sentences than men.¹⁰⁴ The inequalities in sentencing, prescribed by British courts, was brought to public attention in 1912 by *Vote*, the newspaper issued by the Women's Freedom League, which stressed several disturbing anomalies to be found within the penal system. It included statistics showing the light sentences afforded to male culprits of assaults on women and children, as opposed to the much severer sentences men could expect for crimes against property. Of particular note, the commentary referenced the inequalities in

¹⁰² Florence Bell & Elizabeth Robins, *Alan's Wife* (1893) in *New Woman Plays*, ed. by Linda Fitzsimmons and Viv Gardner (London: Methuen Drama, 1992).

¹⁰³ Powell, (1997) p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Bland, p. 252.

sentencing for crimes committed by women;¹⁰⁵ it was shown that females faced harsher punishment than men, which, Bland argues, was seen by many as an added penalty for transgressing feminine expectations.¹⁰⁶

Powell notes that ‘the association of women and violence in earlier Victorian plays by women’ had been carried over, in the 1890s, into the ‘new drama, where it was presented by women playwrights:

within the context of a social problem and, as such, more thoughtfully rationalized. Although the heroines of these late Victorian plays display on many occasions the power and aggression of female characters in earlier dramas by women, they often resonate with a psychological complexity which is more fully elaborated than in their precursors.¹⁰⁷

Though Graves tried to illustrate the psychological impetus for Tina’s crimes, it seemingly fell short. Despite having a script which dealt sympathetically with a victim of sexual abuse, the play failed to counter the set norms surrounding the fate of the fallen woman or, what to do about the ‘fallen child’. Though there were a number of reviews which did concede that the actors had shown some fine acting—Graves also offered her ‘hearty thanks and congratulations’ to the leading actress for her ‘pathetic and powerful performance’,¹⁰⁸ *A Tenement Tragedy* was not popular

¹⁰⁵ Bland, p. 252.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Bland draws on the Home Office reports to Parliament entitled ‘Assaults on Females’ which revealed the figures for males convicted in 1889 of murder, manslaughter, and assault on females. ‘Of 8075 assaults on women only 43 were punished with a prison sentence of more than two years. The report made no difference to subsequent sentencing ... a man who knocked down a woman three times without provocation was fined forty shillings, a man who killed his wife with a poker got nine months, but a man who pick-pocketed two guineas received five years penal servitude’.

¹⁰⁷ Powell, (1997), p. 133.

¹⁰⁸ CU, 2 December 1906.

with the critics, nor did it achieve the playwright's hoped for 'sensation'.¹⁰⁹ Ada

Dwyer gave her own explanation for the play's lack of success:

The intensity of the play was awful—not alone on the people who witnessed the tragedy, but on those who played it [...] that's just the trouble [...] the dramatic possibilities of the thing were tremendous, but even with the scene removed to London under the clever construction of Clo Graves, it was too fresh in the New York memory, and we had to close.¹¹⁰

Perhaps, if the play had been perceived as a fiction it might, possibly, have been more easily digested. Likewise, the play may have fared better had it been staged in London, where the story was less likely to have been identified with the real court case. The subject matter was not the easiest of themes to present as an entertainment; despite its melodramatic staging sexual abuse remained an unpalatable issue for an early-twentieth-century audience. Seth Koven, in his appraisal of the topic during the long nineteenth century, draws in detail on Dr. Barnardo's much criticised photographic images, which were engineered to publicise his pioneering work on behalf of destitute and abused children. Koven highlights the philanthropist's conviction that 'the deepest truths about society's most vulnerable members could be represented most powerfully through "artistic fictions"... to compel viewers to simultaneously acknowledge and take action against child abuse'.¹¹¹ Though she was operating through an entirely different medium, there is scope to suggest that Graves's dramatic 'artistic fiction', *A Tenement Tragedy*, shared Barnardo's vision.

¹⁰⁹ CU, 18 July 1906.

¹¹⁰ 'Ada Dwyer – Just a Word with her at Home'.

¹¹¹ Koven, pp. 134-135.

Graves revisited the subject, though with significantly more success, a few years later in her magnum opus *The Dop Doctor*. The final section of this thesis considers this, as a tangential issue to the wider discussion of the novel's themes of motherhood and maternity.

Section Three: A Novelist

Chapter Seven

A ‘forgotten bestseller’: *The Dop Doctor* by Richard Dehan

His plot is strong, his incidents are innumerable but not too crowded, his characters for the most part live, his South Africa, and more especially the siege, is often magnificently done ... it is enough story, enough character, enough picturesqueness, enough real sentiment and humanity, to carry the writer straight to the top.

Evening Standard, 1912¹

Although this review from the *Evening Standard*, along with countless others, offered a positive response to *The Dop Doctor*—Graves’s first novel written under the pseudonym of Richard Dehan—its forecast, of a meteoric ascent for the author, was never realised. Professor William B. Todd,² in an essay in 1963, shares a similar regret, referring to the work as ‘a forgotten bestseller’, lamenting the apparent loss of both book and author to the reading public.³ The novel was, however, an incredible financial success for its publishers, William Heinemann, and following a first publication on 15th April 1910, Todd notes that the firm ‘immediately reprinted the book nine times, and upon further demand eventually distributed sixty one issues,’⁴ selling a staggering 229,877 copies from thirty-seven impressions. Similarly, John St. John records, in *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990*,⁵ that there were eighteen reprints of the first 6s. edition; eight reprints of a 2s. edition, first

¹ From an advert in the *Evening Standard* for Dehan’s next novel *Between Two Thieves* (1912). Professor William B. Todd, ‘Dehan’s Dop Doctor: A Forgotten Bestseller’, *The Library Chronicle of Texas*, 7, no.3 (1963), 17-26 (p. 17).

² Professor William B. Todd (1919-2011), The Mildred Caldwell and Baine Perkins Kerr Centennial Emeritus Professor in English History and Culture at the University of Texas, Austin, USA.

³ Todd, p. 17.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John St. John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990).

issued in 1913; five of the 3s.6d. edition, first issued in 1918; at least eight colonial (export) editions, and various others right up to 1940.⁶ As Graves declared: ‘Dehan was as famous as Galsworthy in 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913 and for some years after!’⁷

As a measure of the book’s incredible sales, and identifying an opportunity to maximise its evident popularity, the production company, Samuelson, commissioned the rights for a black and white cinematic version, entitled *The Terrier and the Child*, to be distributed by Pathe in 1915.⁸ However, following complaints that it expressed anti-Boer sentiments, the film was duly banned by the colonial office under the Defence of the Realm Act: ‘at General Botha’s request the Home Secretary has prohibited the exhibition of the cinematograph film of “The Dop Doctor” founded on Richard Dehan’s novel, on the grounds that it strongly represents Boers as cheats and immoral persons.’⁹ In the absence of extant official records, one can only surmise that this sensitivity was, perhaps, informed by the Great War, then in progress; South Africa, as part of the Empire, was allied to Great Britain. To date the British Film Institute has been unable to locate either a script copy or stills – all that remains is a simple cast list which indicates that the novel’s ‘theatre of war’ focus has become peripheral to the romantic focus of the celluloid adaptation. The curator of silent film from the British Film Institute, Bryony Dixon, reports that basic records show it ‘was released, or at least trade shown, in December 1915, but there are no papers relating

⁶ St. John, p. 50.

⁷ RLF: 2692/46.

⁸ ‘A Pathe Gold Rooster film, all British Production’ in ‘Amusements in Derby’, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1916.

⁹ ‘General War Cables’, *The Advertiser*, (Adelaide, Southern Australia), 17 June 1916.
www.newspapers.nla.gov.au

to the film , and scripts from this period are extremely rare'.¹⁰ Graves was not involved in the adaptation, but her later letter to H.J.C. Marshall expresses deep regret at its failed distribution, in particular the pecuniary benefits which were lost to her.¹¹ She noted later, somewhat ruefully: 'there were queues from the Marble Arch Electric Palace right down Oxford Street (according to the newspapers) also at Birmingham and Northampton – waiting to see it!'.¹²

Todd's research, completed in 1963, draws on the recollections of one of the company's former directors, John Dettmer,¹³ who observed that, 'no novel Heinemann ever published attained a more remarkable success, with sales exceeding the combined issue of all the work the firm was then promoting of E. F. Benson, D. H. Lawrence, John Galsworthy, and William de Morgan'.¹⁴ Moreover, according to Dettmer, the novel also broke new ground aesthetically, and whereas the original edition had the usual khaki-coloured dust jacket with the window punched in to show the title and author on the book's spine, he recalled that 'the wrapper of the cheaper edition (2/-) struck a new note in publishing. It was one of the first, if not the very first, to have an all-round pictorial jacket'.¹⁵ Notwithstanding the innovative design or its phenomenal sales, Todd's discourse notes regretfully that, although the novel 'immediately evoked the warmest praise from "the great unwashed"', it induced only

¹⁰ Curator of Silent Film, Bryony Dixon, British Film Institute, BFI National Archive. 27 April 2009. Email correspondence from Dixon.

¹¹ HRHRC, C.I.M, 2 April 1930.

¹² RLF: 2692/46.

¹³ Todd, p. 19. Mr. John W. Dettmer, employee at the time of publication of *The Dop Doctor*, later became a director of Heinemann Ltd.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 23. 'It illustrated a rather sad episode in the book, a man kneeling at the rudely constructed graveside of his wife somewhere or another in the veldt; a sombre scene, but effective and most appropriate to the times.'

“cold hostility” from the “select few”.¹⁶ The reason for this clearly class-based aversion, Todd contends, is because:

To the professionals, the unknown ‘Dehan’ was not only an interloper (as the author’s own bookseller remarked), but an offence against the establishment, and thus the more ‘he’ intruded upon their notice the more he was to be ignored.¹⁷

Todd’s argument is predicated, in the main, on comments made at the time by the writer and critic Arnold Bennett,¹⁸ who judged, correctly, that entry to the literary clique, was closed to those who lacked the perceptible cultural, social and political capital deemed necessary for entry:

The celebrated ‘Dop Doctor’ ... [had] not been sufficiently ‘talked about’ by ‘the right people’. And by ‘right people’ I mean the people who make a practice of dining out at least three times a week in the West End of London to the accompaniment of cultured conversation. I mean the people who are ‘in the know’, politically, socially, and intellectually – who know what Mr. F. E. Smith says to Mr. Winston Churchill in private, why Mrs. Humphrey Ward made such an enormous pother at the last council meeting of the Author’s Society, what is really the matter with Mr. Bernard Shaw’s later work ... and whether the Savoy Restaurant is as good under the new management as the old. I reckon there are about 12,055 of these people. They constitute the elite. Without their aid, without their refined and judicial twittering, no book can hope to be a book of the year.¹⁹

As a result, Todd argues, ‘Dehan never became “fashionable”’ and, therefore, Graves, in whatever guise, failed to receive her due recognition.²⁰ Although Bennett’s review has a sympathetic undertone, Todd nonetheless, in his defence of Graves, still targets the essayist alongside the guilty cultured ‘elite’, asserting that:

¹⁶ Todd, p. 18.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Arnold Bennett (1867–1931), writer. ODNB.

¹⁹ *New Age*, 12 January 1911.

²⁰ Todd, p. 19.

Had Bennett, and the 12,054 other arbiters of literary destiny, then realized that ‘Dehan’ was ‘Clo’ Graves, a charming and beautiful lady already known to the establishment, the resulting pothole would have rocketed her tour de force to permanent fame.²¹

Though it had been a conscious decision, on Graves’s part, to publish under a male pseudonym, it would be wrong to suppose that this was formulated on the notion that a male author might garner a more positive reception; Graves refutes that entirely in her own account of the circumstances surrounding its publication. She does, however, reveal that *The Dop Doctor* had been wrought from her own ‘thoughts, reflections, experiences and griefs of a life-time,’²² which might more readily imply that the pseudonym was employed through a desire for anonymity, and this specific issue is examined in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

The book was accepted for publication by Heinemann at one of the lowest points in Graves’s career—financially and mentally she was almost broken—and as a result, she made the decision to forgo her copyright and, instead, sold the manuscript for a one off payment. However, her resolve not to publish as Clotilde Graves determined that the publishers were only prepared to offer a figure considerably less than her expected fee, because, they explained, ‘Richard Dehan’ was ostensibly an unknown writer. Graves later recounted the conversation which had occasioned her large, pecuniary loss:

‘The terms we should be prepared to offer you for the volume rights of this novel – did we offer any at all – would not be large,’ said William Heinemann. ‘Put it they would be small,’ boomed the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Whyte, p. 237.

big blonde Pawling. ‘How small?’ I asked, and was told, and nobody had exaggerated.²³

The novel runs to six hundred and seventy-one pages, divided up into seventy-three chapters. Its length, together with the breadth and intricacies of its plot and subplots, its wealth of characters, and, according to the *Daily Mail* ‘its sand heaps of detail’,²⁴ ensures that a close reading of any one of its key themes is a complex and unwieldy task. The undertaking is further complicated by Graves’s disclosure that the story was nourished by her own experiences, which frequently results in her dipping in and out of the narrative voice, to address the reader directly. Therefore, a brief synopsis of *The Dop Doctor* follows here, in order to provide a measure of clarity in advance of a thematic analysis, with regard to motherhood and maternity, which is executed in the next chapter.

Graves’s best seller is set in the main in South Africa, in the Transvaal, and is contextualised against the build up, and eventual outbreak, of the second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The various strands of the story unite at the site of the siege town of Gueldersdorp, Graves’s fictional name for Mafeking,²⁵ where Graves has interwoven the history of the famous blockade around the lives of her carefully drawn characters; she describes them as ‘my puppets dressed ... in the brave deeds of those who strove, endured and suffered’.²⁶ More than five hundred pages later, the relief of Gueldersdorp is finally secured, at which point the novel’s focal point

²³ Whyte, p. 236.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 234.

²⁵ A small English garrison town, in the North-West province, under the command of Colonel (later Lord) Baden Powell, besieged by Boer troops for 217 days from Oct 1899 to May 1900. Reported in the press in great detail, and followed with much interest by Queen Victoria and the British public, its eventual relief was celebrated by the nation.

²⁶ DD, p. 529.

switches to London's sprawling metropolis, where Graves's 'puppets' are left to play out their life-stories, on the cusp between the epochs of Victorian and Edwardian England.

The novel's first chapter, set twenty years earlier, in 1881, opens with the descriptive sequence of a man in his mid-twenties, Richard Mildare, transporting the corpses of a young woman and her still-born son across the sun-scorched African veldt. Mildare, a former English army captain and heir to a large estate, is accompanied on his journey by a two-year-old female child, the result of his love-affair with the dead woman, Lucy Hawting. Their illicit relationship, begun almost five years earlier, has been the catalyst for their ostracism from London Society. Graves highlights both the gossip which they provoked—he was affianced to another, Lucy was a married woman, her husband being the Colonel of Mildare's own regiment—and also the hypocrisy of the period: 'they had played the straight game, and gone away openly together, to the immense scandal of Society that [was] so willing to wink at things done cleverly under the rose.'²⁷

To accentuate the extent of their betrayal, Graves also identifies Mildare's jilted fiancé Lady Bridget-Mary Bawne, as having been Lucy's close friend. Shunned by their friends and families, and unable to marry (the Colonel's refusal to agree to a divorce compounds their disgrace), the couple, with 'hardly a passing twinge of regret', have since then endured a nomadic existence.²⁸ They have wandered the African terrain, 'on that never-ending journey in search of something', Graves

²⁷ DD, p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

records, ‘that the woman was to be the first to find’.²⁹ Mildare, already gravely ill, chances upon a lonely tavern peopled only by its Boer publican, Hans Bough, some itinerant travellers, and a succession of Bough’s women; Graves relates how the inn keeper made the journey to ‘Johannesburg on business and on pleasure, and brought [one] back from an establishment he knew’.³⁰ Despite Mildare’s weakened state, though ultimately hastening his own end, he single-handedly excavates the sun-baked earth to bury Lucy, in unconsecrated ground, close to the tavern, where shortly, he too, will be interred. According to Dettmer, this particular scene featured on the innovative wrap-around cover of the two shilling edition, which he noted:

Illustrated a rather sad episode, a man kneeling at the rudely constructed graveside of his wife somewhere or another in the veldt; a sombre scene but effective and most appropriate to the times.³¹

The orphaned child, thus abandoned, remains at the tavern under the ‘care’ of the innkeeper, Bough, who has appropriated her deceased father’s belongings as ‘payment’. The child, unkempt, neglected and physically abused, sleeps in an outhouse, and it is in these segments of the book that Graves records the child’s dreams, which centre on an ethereal ‘mother’ figure.³² The girl, afforded scant care or attention, grows up nameless and unaware of her true identity until, around the age of eleven, Bough’s demeanour toward the girl changes, perceptibly for the worse. Graves asks the reader to contemplate: ‘why did [Bough] follow her about with those

²⁹ DD, p. 4.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

³¹ Todd, p. 23.

³² DD, p. 32.

strange eyes, and smile secretly to himself?’³³ Somewhat inevitably, Graves submits a disturbing response to her own enquiry, classifying him, as a result, as a dissolute, predatory male:

A man having some secret luxury or treasure locked away in a private cupboard will smile so. He knows it is there, and he means to go to the hiding-place one day, but in the meantime he waits, licking his lips.³⁴

Graves’s metaphorical salivating beast reinforces the Victorian notion of the baser animal instincts believed to be inherent in all men, and which, in Bough, are barely suppressed. The sense of ‘other’ is once more evoked, in Graves’s depiction of one who is ‘dark-complexioned’ and hirsute,³⁵ with ‘a regard which was either insolent or cringing, according to circumstance’; Graves admits that women, for Bough, were of no consequence:

[they] had been his tools, and his slaves, and his victims ever since he had been born. When the old was worn out and use-less, he shook them off, and fresh instruments rose up to take their places.³⁶

At length, Bough attacks and brutally rapes the young girl. Fleeing from her assailant, she is beaten into unconsciousness and left for dead on the veldt.

Miraculously, the child is found by a group of nuns led by a Mother Superior heading for the mission school at Gueldersdorp (Mafeking). Stretching coincidence almost to incredulity, the Mother Superior is none other than Lady Bridget-Mary, Richard Mildare’s former fiancée, who has taken holy orders following his rejection of her five years earlier. The Mother Superior finally bestows a name on the

³³ DD, p. 34.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 498.

foundling child—Lynette Mildare—she says, ostensibly, that the surname has been chosen simply in remembrance of an old friend, Richard Mildare. When, in time, she discovers Lynette’s true parentage, she keeps the fact to herself and, similarly, realising the full magnitude of Lynette’s sexual ordeal, counsels the girl never to reveal the details of the rape she has suffered. Track forward seven years, to the siege of Gueldersdorp—the two females enjoy an intensely close relationship—Lynette has developed positively, under the Mother Superior’s care, into an intelligent, articulate and strikingly beautiful young woman, with progressive views on female emancipation.

Running parallel to this narrative of Lynette’s formative years is an account of the rise, and subsequent fall, of Owen Saxham, a brilliant young doctor, respected by Society and famed by the medical profession for his skill as a surgeon, destined for both a glittering career and financial security. However, following the false accusation of having administered abortifacient drugs, with fatal consequences for the female patient (though he is eventually cleared of all charges), he is disgraced professionally and his personal life left in tatters; his fiancé cannot face the humiliation of marriage to a man so dishonoured. Saxham too leaves England, just a few years before the siege, to take over the medical practice in Gueldersdorp, where he has sunk to the very depths of despair having adopted the role of town drunk along with the soubriquet of ‘dop doctor’.³⁷ However, with the outbreak of war, and through his unstinting work and unrivalled bravery during the siege, his reputation is eventually restored.

³⁷ Todd, p. 18. ‘Dop – depending upon the source, Afrikaans term for either ‘brandy’ or ‘drunk’.’

Lynette, meantime, working alongside the nuns nursing the injured and dying, falls in love with Lord Beauvayse, a young army officer, who omits to tell her that, prior to his posting to South Africa, he has secretly married a ‘Gaiety’ actress, who has subsequently borne him a child. Injured during the siege, Beauvayse dies of his wounds, with Lynette still unaware of his deceit. Saxham, now thoroughly moralistic, especially in matters of the heart, has fallen in love with Lynette, but determines that he will not denigrate the reputation of a dead man in order to benefit himself. Consequently, he maintains his silence on the true character of Lynette’s idealised Beauvayse.

A chance sighting of Lynette, by Bough, results in a secret meeting in the church, between Bough and the Mother Superior Bridget-Mary. He admits to knowing of Lynette’s past, suggesting, in his version of events, that Lynette had been caught ‘in flagrante’ with, he recounts: ‘a bloke that used to hang around the place—kind of a coloured loafer, with Dutch blood, overgiven [sic] to whiskey. He got going gay with the girl—’.³⁸ According to Bough’s mendacious account, he had beaten the girl as a punishment and she had run away. He offers to marry Lynette, proposing, if she agrees, to return one hundred pounds and a locket which are in his keeping. Should Lynette not consent, however, he intimates that he will expose her illegitimacy, true parentage, and the details of her sexual ‘past’, thus ruining her socially.³⁹ Incensed by his threats, a violent exchange ensues between the pair resulting in the fatal shooting, by Bough, of the Mother Superior. Lynette knows nothing of what has ensued, but this second, dreadful bereavement compounds her grief to the point of a

³⁸ DD, p. 492.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 491.

nervous collapse. Saxham offers Lynette marriage on nonsexual terms. Although Lynette does not love him (yet) she agrees on the condition that he makes no physical demands upon her and that theirs will be a platonic marriage. Following the relief of Gueldersdorp, the couple return to London to rebuild their lives, and set up home in Wimpole Street.

Owen and Lynette, are both portrayed, initially, as emotionally crippled, which, combined with an inability to communicate their true feelings, leads to unhappiness on each side. She, having eventually fallen in love with Owen, yearns for a physical relationship, while he, unable to cope with living alongside a woman whom he now believes craves her freedom, slips back into alcoholism and contemplates suicide. The conflicts and misunderstandings which blight their relationship are finally resolved, and the epic tale closes with the pair's emotional embrace, as a signifier, to the reader, of the sexual consummation of their marriage.

Précised from an incredibly lengthy, detailed and rich narrative, the aforementioned is only a brief summary of the experiences of the two central protagonists; Graves's saga necessarily embraces a number of interrelated subplots and a great many characters. Some are very obviously fictional, while others are thinly veiled cameos of real people; for example, both Lady Hannah Wrynche, and the British army's 'Chief of staff', act as covers for the earlier mentioned female war-correspondent Lady Sarah Wilson, and the Commander in Chief, Lord Baden Powell. And yet, because, as Graves herself admits, the novel includes her own 'thoughts, reflections,

griefs and experiences,⁴⁰ it is arguable that the narrative contains many vignettes of ordinary people who, though unidentifiable to the reader, were possibly very much a part of Graves's own life story. The text, unsurprisingly perhaps, habitually slips between the narrative and the authorial voice; the reader can therefore only wonder at where, in this dense sequence of events, one might begin to tease out Graves's own, individual story. It seems probable, given her living arrangements, health, and financial situation, that most of Graves's comprehensive background detail was sourced from magazines, daily newspapers and her own library of four thousand books.

Graves's discourse includes many explicit personal reminiscences. Sometimes brief, often disparate, she writes, at one stage, of the 'rows of bored, familiar, notable faces in the [theatre] stalls, representing Society, Art, Literature, Music and Finance',⁴¹ in another, of the violence witnessed at a North Antrim Sunday-school, 'wrecked in a faction-fight between the Orange and the Green',⁴² further on, she bares her own soul in a poignant soliloquy of lost love:

We know the name of the divine madness, but we know not why it comes. Suddenly after long years in a crowded place or in a solitude where two are, it is upon you or upon me. The blood is changed to strange, ethereal ichor, the pulse beats a tune that is as old as the Earth itself, but yet eternally new. Every breath we draw is rapture, every step we take leads us one way. Our voice calls through all the voices, one hand beckons whether it will or no, and we follow because we must. With the Atlantic rolling between us I can feel your heart beat against mine, and your lips breathe into my soul. The light that was upon

⁴⁰ Whyte, p. 237.

⁴¹ DD, p. 116.

⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

your face, the look that was in your eyes as you gave the unforgettable, immemorial kiss, the clasp of your hands, the rising and falling of your bosom, like a wave beneath a sea-bird, like a sea-bird above a wave, shall be with me always, even to the end of time and beyond it.
For there are many loves, but one Love.⁴³

In a later disclosure, Graves meanders into a private reminiscence of the sighting of the recovery of a body from Regent's Canal, as she had passed over it one day; the drowned wretch, she relates, was a person known to Graves, the memory of whom had haunted her that very day. She anticipates her reader's scepticism: 'Coincidence, did you say, lifting your eyebrows over the book? The long arm of coincidence – stretched to aching tenuity by the dramatist and the novelist!' And then, summarily, as if in response to unspoken doubts, retorts: 'Nay, but the thing happened just as I have bid!'⁴⁴

The novel is a distinctively 'pro-feminine' canvas, which proliferates with an assortment of finely drawn female characters. Aside from the 'Dop doctor' himself, the featured male figures have lesser roles and, arguably, operate from within the shadows of their female counterparts. Graves's women characters drive the plot and it is they who are favoured with the largest share of the dialogue. Though the novel features a host of themes, each worthy of inspection, it is the thread of motherhood that leaves a trail from the beginning to the very end of the novel, and which dominates any close reading of the text. Therefore, the following chapter will

⁴³ DD, p. 264.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

examine Graves's responses to motherhood and the maternal ideal, through her various representations of the mother figure in *The Dop Doctor*.

Chapter Eight

A Superior Mother:

Representations of Motherhood and Maternity
in *The Dop Doctor*

You ask no questions – you to whom she comes. You call her softly at night, stretching out your arms, and the clasp of her arms answers at once. You whisper how you love her, with your face hidden in her neck. The great kind dark that brings her is your real, real day time in which you live and are glad. Each morning, to which you waken, bringing its stint of hunger and abuse and blows renewed, is only a dreadful dream, you say to yourself, and so can face your world.

Richard Dehan, *The Dop Doctor*¹

The penultimate chapter of this thesis examines notions of motherhood and maternity, as central themes of Graves's most successful novel, *The Dop Doctor*. Although previous chapters affirm Graves's sustained focus on the domestic arena, in particular the redemptive qualities she attaches to women who provide 'good mothering', in this, her magnum opus, she presents the reader with a specific archetype of the maternal ideal. The paradigm she offers is a religious surrogate, who connotes superiority both in nature and name, i.e. a Catholic Mother Superior, conflated with the biological secular model of the ideal, in order to symbolise maternal instinct at its highest level. The 'womanly' side of Bridget-Mary, as opposed to her vocational persona as the Mother Superior, is far more pronounced, and this representation, likely influenced by Graves's conflicting feminist and religious beliefs, destabilises a number of the established core tenets of the Victorian maternal landscape. It will, of course, also be recognised that Lynette symbolises a

¹ DD, p. 32.

kind of ‘immaculate conception’ for Bridget-Mary, because, though there has been no sexual union with Richard Mildare, the man whom she had earlier anticipated would share her life and her bed, it is nonetheless his child who fulfils her maternal desire.

Sally Ledger argues that “social purity” and “sexual liberationist” New Women had a shared preoccupation with motherhood’, and this is undoubtedly to the fore in Graves’s work. Though Ledger perceives the motherhood fixation to have been, ‘the unifying theme’, of the disparate mass of New Women literature, from the 1880s and 1890s,² Graves successfully revisited the topic, in *The Dop Doctor*, though it was published over a decade later. Likewise, Sally Shuttleworth’s scholarly research classifies ‘motherhood’ as a key concept of the ‘long nineteenth century’, and ‘a focal point for many of the most problematic areas of Victorian ideology’.³ And whereas her study of bourgeois motherhood focuses primarily on the mid-Victorian period, she identifies specific characteristics of the ‘mother figure’, which, she argues, straddled the decades and persisted well into the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴

Barbara Z. Thaden, meanwhile, suggests that ‘an ideal mother [did] not make for an interesting fictional character’⁵ and certainly the fascination with Bridget-Mary in *The Dop Doctor* is due largely to the unconventionality of Graves’s model. An

² Sally Ledger, ‘The New Woman and Feminist Fictions’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siecle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-168 (p. 160).

³ Sally Shuttleworth, ‘Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Mothers in the Mid-Victorian Era’, in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. by Linda M. Shires (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 31.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Barbara Z. Thaden, *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction* (London & New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), p. 4.

examination, therefore, of Graves's representation of the 'superior' mother offers both an insight into Graves's feminist responses to motherhood and maternity, and exposes some of the complexities surrounding the maternal ideal at that time. For example, Bridget-Mary is an educated, self-assured woman, seen to possess enlightened political and feminist views, which she ensures will be passed on to her surrogate daughter; the doctor expresses surprise that Lynette is so advanced in her thinking:

'You are an advocate of Universal Suffrage, then? You believe that there must be absolute sex-equality before the world can be—I think "finally regenerated" is the stock phrase of the militant apostle of Women's Rights? I have heard this from many feminine throats in London, but Gueldersdorp,' said Saxham drily, 'is about the last place one would expect to ring with it.'⁶

In terms of plot structure, Graves's initial treatment of the 'mother figure' in the novel clearly mirrors the subject's handling by other women writers of the period; Thaden argues that many of the most popular and well-known female Victorian authors, were obliged to 'kill the mother, or incapacitate her, to allow their female protagonists to develop, because they write from the daughter's point of view', and refers, for example, to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Thaden also cites Gaskell and Oliphant, but observes, 'they tend to have a different agenda, because they write from the mother's point of view, even when employing the dead-mother plot device'.⁷

John Peck's study of the paradigm, specifically in relation to the Boer War, notes that 'a woman increasingly becomes the central character in these novels ... because

⁶ DD, p. 292.

⁷ Thaden, p. 28.

of the way in which a woman can more easily be used to symbolise reconciliation and the redemptive power of love'.⁸ Graves has employed both of these strategies and, whereas the title of the novel might suggest that the disgraced medic is to be the key protagonist, the locus of her narrative is instead Lynette Mildare, an illegitimate child whose story unfolds, in this instance, with the death of both of her parents.

Thaden has extended 'the absent mother' premise, with an assertion that the lack 'often correlates to a heroine's seduction and betrayal, or to her near seduction, or even to her failure to become a normal human being';⁹ she identifies Mrs Gaskell as the first to implement this theme in *Mary Barton* (1848) and in most of her other fiction. In Lynette's case this is a highly significant factor; devoid of protection, she soon becomes a target for abuse in all of its guises, not least as the victim of a brutal rape. Lynette's subsequent mental breakdowns together with an initial, pathological aversion to sexual intercourse, sustain Thaden's argument of a heroine's inability to function normally in the absence of a mother figure. Reynolds and Humble, on the other hand, perceive that narratives inevitably 'remedy the orphan's lack through the appointment of surrogates or spouses, to provide the missing family structure'.¹⁰ Graves, accordingly, ameliorates Lynette's suffering, with the introduction of the replacement mother figure, Mother Superior Bridget-Mary, ensuring that the heroine's eventual recovery is as a direct consequence of the actions of the maternal stand-in and, in so doing, privileges the surrogate role.

⁸ John Peck, *War, the Army and Victorian Literature* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 176.

⁹ Thaden, p. 28.

¹⁰ Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, *Victorian Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth Century Literature and Art* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 27.

Though Shuttleworth agrees with the view that the absent mother is undeniably an overriding feature of Victorian literature, she also, usefully, identifies a paradox wherein, she argues, ‘simultaneously, the mother figure is both centralised and marginalised’, and cites the characters of both Brontë’s eponymous Shirley (1849), and Dickens’s Lady Deadlock, from *Bleak House* (1852), in her analysis.¹¹ This seeming contradiction is a notable trait of Graves’s own tale, but she complicates it further, with an intersection between the ‘absent’ biological mother, Lucy, and the surrogate figure of Bridget-Mary; though both are marginalised by death—one dies prior to the opening sequence and the other survives two-thirds of the way through the volume—their maternal influence is a seminal force in Lynette’s development and is exerted well beyond the confines of the grave.

Although, ultimately, Graves’s tale offers an outstanding archetype of the good mother, the burial of Lucy, the deceased ‘failed’ mother, in the opening sequence, acts as a metaphor for Victorian society’s determination to inter and conceal women who deviated from the orthodoxy. The taint of immorality, real or imagined, created intense anxiety among certain sections of the Victorian and Edwardian public leading some to judge that any immorality on a mother’s part might somehow infect her offspring. Whereas Lynette’s biological roots—her mother’s adultery and Lynette’s subsequent illegitimacy—might be read as signifiers of potential corruption, Graves dismisses any suggestion of an hereditary backlash, and highlights the overcoming of these barriers as a result of the excellent ‘mothering’ by Bridget-Mary.

¹¹ Shuttleworth, p.32.

A key point for Thaden, in her treatise, is an observation that despite ‘the emphasis on the pure and self sacrificing mother within the dominant cultural ideology’, there are very few mothers to be found as main characters in Victorian fiction. From within the small minority which do exist (even from female authors), she argues, there are significantly ‘few representations of good mothers’.¹² Graves’s contribution of Bridget-Mary to this shortfall, offers one who is an exceedingly ‘good’, if not ‘ideal’, mother figure who, as a mark of her worth, executes the ultimate maternal sacrifice—she forfeits her own life to save her ‘adopted’ child.

Though, on the one hand, Graves promotes the hegemonic view which anticipated virtue and femininity as distinctive and inherent characteristics of all Victorian mothers, on the other, she also acknowledges that maternal sentiment was not necessarily an inherent female attribute. Of particular significance too, is Graves’s suggestion that the potency of maternal emotion did not necessarily stem uniquely from a biological connection—indeed, Graves habitually favours the role of the substitute, or surrogate, mother, above that of the birth mother, while expunging completely the need for any male input in the process of child rearing; how much this was a consequence of her own, unmarried, status is, of course, a debatable point. Ledger notes the striking tendency in George Egerton’s¹³ work ‘for non-biological motherhood [...] to be much more fulfilling than with biological ties with children’, and she cites instances of Egerton’s protagonists achieving fulfilment through the ‘fostering of illegitimate children’. However, this differs fundamentally from Graves’s own rendering, because whereas in Egerton’s fictions these children are

¹² Thaden, p. 4.

¹³ Mary Chavelita Dunne [*pseud.* George Egerton] (1859–1945), writer. ODNB.

‘looked after ‘alongside the outcast mothers’,¹⁴ for Graves the non-biological stand-in supplants the biological mother.

Academics, including Sally Shuttleworth, Barabara Thaden and Lucy Bland, promote the theory that these projections of ‘ideal motherhood’, developed, in part, from a medical hypothesis.¹⁵ Shuttleworth underscores the diversity of medical opinion at this time, which included such diverse claims as: women lacked any sexual desire, or that they were so afflicted by their reproductive systems as to be mentally inferior to the male species. There were, naturally, those who disputed such theories, and Lucy Bland’s incisive and comprehensive study highlights the increasing numbers of feminists who, over time, challenged what they saw as the ‘medical profession’s [continued] legitimacy to define and control women’ purely on this basis. Bland’s research draws specifically on the pioneering work of Elizabeth Blackwell,¹⁶ Britain’s first female doctor, and though the doctor’s views on female sexuality originate somewhat earlier, they are still a useful source of reference, not least, because, as Sue Bruley argues, very convincingly, the feminist lobby had made extremely slow progress in this area and ‘the notion of profound sexual difference was still very dominant in the Edwardian period’.¹⁷

Given the highly contentious nature of the subject, Blackwell’s lifelong commitment to the cause was occasionally at odds with the views of her feminist colleagues, not least because there was no overriding consensus in these matters; while some

¹⁴ Sally Ledger, ‘The New Woman and Feminist Fictions’ in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siecle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-168 (p. 161).

¹⁵ Bland, pp. 67-70.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Blackwell (1821–1910) physician. ODNB.

¹⁷ Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain Since 1900* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 43.

feminists concurred with aspects of the prevailing patriarchal ideology others sat firmly at the opposite end. Graves's own beliefs, aligned with social purity feminism, fell somewhere between. Blackwell held that the crucial difference between the sexes—the reproductive organs—far from being the site which affirmed women's inferiority and neuroses and, therefore, upheld the patriarchal code of superiority, was, in essence, what gave women their advantage.

There were, naturally, women who chose not to have children and, in that respect, Bland highlights another shared feminist belief which, though it acknowledged women's intrinsic, maternal predisposition, did not rest entirely on 'literal motherhood'.¹⁸ According to Bland's hypothesis, women's 'potential motherhood, and their concomitant maternal instinct', she argues 'could take the form of 'spiritual motherhood': an altruistic approach towards humanity in which a whole nation represented a women's progeny, to be 'protected' and 'saved'.¹⁹ Graves's drawing of Bridget-Mary, as an unmarried, celibate woman, who had successfully commandeered the role of 'mother', might readily be seen as one such example of the type; by its very nature, her position as Mother Superior i.e., a woman who has taken holy orders, already establishes the notion of 'spiritual motherhood'. Moreover, the surrogate mother's capacity to forgive those who have deceived her and to nurture the product of their betrayal is, for Graves, arguably an added affirmation of Bridget-Mary's 'spiritual motherhood'. Bland argues that woman's potential for both literal and spiritual maternity, in conjunction with her inbuilt sexual control, formed the basis for Blackwell's assessment that women were

¹⁸ Bland, p. 68.

¹⁹ Ibid.

morally and mentally superior to men. As a result, Bland maintains that many feminists embraced this philosophy as testament to their importance as progenitors of a superior race, with women perceived not only as ‘mothers in general, but as mothers of “the nation”, set up squarely within an Imperialist ideology’.²⁰

Graves appears, ostensibly, to share this view, laying down her thoughts in a novel that had been formulated against a context of growing interest in eugenics, developing public concern about the relative deficiencies of British racial stock, and amid disquiet that middle-class women were not fulfilling their duty to produce offspring of the calibre required to populate and manage the Empire. This latter point was a debate which had gathered momentum fairly steadily, following the disclosure, a decade earlier, that approximately a third of all Boer War recruits were deemed unfit for military duty.²¹ The issue was advanced further by the findings of a report, from the Interdepartmental Government Committee on Physical Deterioration (1904),²² which focused on infant mortality as the chief cause of this national decline,²³ together with the attendant fear of venereal disease, and the added consequence of women giving birth to enfeebled children. To alleviate the problem the report’s synopsis recommended the introduction of a range of measures which, it was hoped, would positively redefine the role of women as mothers, in order to

²⁰ Bland, p. 70.

²¹ Bruley, pp. 11-12. She notes that ‘The Women’s co-operative Guild was campaigning on issues which had recently become the focus of government attention. Concern about Britain’s inability to maintain its position of world leadership led to fears of “racial decline”. The parameters of the debate were largely set by the eugenics movement.’

²² Cited in Bruley, p. 11.

²³ Ibid., p. 12. The statistics showed that more than one in five children was dying in infancy.

reverse the national decline; put simply, as Bruley notes, ‘Motherhood was now seen as a national duty.’²⁴

Ledger, in her acknowledgement of the gathering momentum, from the 1890s, of the Eugenics debate, and its entanglement with both the imperialist project and New Woman writing, cites the work of Olive Schreiner;²⁵ in particular her ‘best known fiction, *The Story of an African Farm*(1883)’, which explores the relationships between race, motherhood and empire.²⁶ Lynette’s origins are easily construed as part of that Imperialist ideology, to which Graves is patently drawn, and it is arguable that Graves’s story was inspired by Schreiner’s African text. In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner’s protagonist, the orphaned Lyndall, is brought up by her father’s widow Tant Sannie, but proceeds to educate herself—much in the same way that Graves had done—before being sent off to boarding school, which also equates with Lynette’s time at the mission school. Graves too, foregrounds Lynette’s birth at an unnamed location on the African veldt to accentuate the privations of her environment and to mark it as an ungodly place; this harsh, arid spot, located within the landscape of foreign ‘other’, is an explicit signifier of its heathen status. And Graves likens Lynette’s demeanour to that of a wild animal, informing the reader that ‘the devil lived down in the kraals with the natives’ noting that it was ‘a wonder that she had not sunk into idiocy’.²⁷ Lynette is handicapped still further by her nameless state and the absence of maternal care and intellectual stimulation or spiritual instruction but this is, arguably, all part of Graves’s grand design. Having brought

²⁴ Bruley, pp. 12-13. The Infant Welfare campaign, in 1904, introduced mother craft classes, raised the status of midwives and introduced health visitor schemes.

²⁵ Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner (1855–1920), author and social theorist. ODNB.

²⁶ Ledger, p. 163.

²⁷ DD, p. 30.

the girl down to her lowest point, she can then chart the inexorable development of Lynette's inherent characteristics, which are founded on notions of her indisputable Anglo-Saxon superiority. Graves tells of a 'neglected, sordid little figure', wherein, eventually, she recounts: 'Something stirred in her, whispering in the grimy little ear, "*it is good to be clean,*" [sic] and with the awakening of the maidenly instinct the womanly purpose framed'.²⁸ There is also, in this scene, an implicit sense of religious cleansing, which again connotes purification of her body from any remaining traces of parental sin. Lynette eventually blossoms into the perfect English rose, and her healthy growth, attributed to the Mother Superior's influence, again reaffirms the Victorian maternal ideal, underpinned by the prevailing Imperialist ideology.

Graves's naming of Lynette is also significant; until 'adopted' by the Mother Superior she has remained nameless. Lynette is an unusual name and would appear to be a hybrid, taken in part, perhaps, from Graves's mother—Antoinette—for its suffix, and with the prefix of 'Lyn' drawn, arguably, from Lyndall, Schreiner's protagonist. There are other obvious parallels between the two texts, not least the sense of 'dreaming' which infects Schreiner's text.²⁹ Graves advances her own notion of spirituality in *The Dop Doctor* with the ethereal manifestation of a woman, who first makes an appearance when Lynette is about six years of age. She describes:

Such eyes – neither grey, nor brown, nor violet,
but a mingling of all these colours, and deepening
as you gazed up into them into bottomless lakes

²⁸ DD, p. 33.

²⁹ Ledger too, picks up on the dream quality of Schreiner's work, in another of her short stories, 'A Child's Day' (1887), which, Ledger advises, is 'narrated from a five-year-old child's point of view, a young girl with a powerful maternal instinct', who dreams, at one point, of meeting Queen Victoria. Ledger, p. 163.

of love. Then her face ...and a warm balmy breath came nearer, and you were kissed. No other lips, in your short remembrance, had ever touched you. You had learned the meaning of a kiss only from her, and hers was so long and close that your heart left off beating, and only began again when it was over. Then arms that were soft and warm, and strong and beautiful, came round you and gathered you in, and you fell asleep folded closely in them, or you lay awake and the Lady talked to you in a voice that was mellow as honey and soft as velvet ... you told her everything ... And oh! how you loved her – how you loved her!³⁰

The reader cannot be sure who the phantom is supposed to represent and it is reasonable to argue that this ambiguity is deliberate; Graves herself poses the question ‘Who is the Lady?’³¹ She offers no definitive answer, only a set of possibilities; she might be ‘Mary, the Mother of Pity stepped down from heaven’, alternatively, the spectre of Lucy, ‘the dead mother buried out on the veldt’, or, in what might be an implicit reference to one of Graves’s attacks of ‘brain fever’,³² is she simply ‘a dream or a mere illusion born of loneliness and starvation, physical and mental?’³³ Whoever she is, Graves confides that:

It was only to the Lady that one could reveal the secrets of the heart and she answered with her cool sweet, fragrant lips upon your eyelids, and your head upon her breast ... she comes to you only at night ... she wears a silken, softly rustling gown that is of any lovely colour you choose.³⁴

This account, in combination with the aforementioned passage, might provoke an entirely different interpretation, were it between two adults, rather than a child’s

³⁰ DD, pp. 30-31.

³¹ Ibid., p. 32.

³² HRHRC, C.I.M, 18 March 1930.

³³ DD, p. 32.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

dream sequence, given the potentially implicit sexual undertone. The spirit no longer appears once her new life as Lynette has begun.

In her detailed analysis of the binaries of the good and bad mother, Shuttleworth highlights the continual threat to the idealised mother figure from its ‘demonic’ opposite,³⁵ and Graves, unsurprisingly, offers her own contrast to the ideal. However, unlike the character of Mrs Paratti, the unambiguous antithesis offered in *A Tenement Tragedy*, Graves’s ‘demonic’ figures in *The Dop Doctor* are less well defined. Shuttleworth notes that the ‘demonic mother’ is a somewhat fluid concept, and her definition helpfully encompasses a range of oppositional types who are readily distinguishable from Graves’s own stock of female characters. For example, Lucy, the absent mother, epitomises the demonic model through her earlier ‘fallenness’, while Bough’s mistress—the former prostitute—in her expression of utter indifference at Lynette’s distress, signifies by her maternal ‘unnaturalness’ that she too is representative of the demonic category.³⁶ However, it is in her final sketch of Bridget-Mary that Graves drafts an astonishing scene with, at its centre, a figure of seeming ‘demonic’ bearing which has, until now, lain dormant behind the Mother Superior’s outwardly serene visage. In an explosive collision between Bridget-Mary and Bough, representing the binaries of both male versus female and good versus evil, the Mother Superior confronts Lynette’s abuser with an incredible, almost preternatural force:

Rain fell in a curtain of gleaming crystal rods
between them. Seen through it, she appeared
supernaturally tall, her garments streaming like
black flames, her face a white-hot furnace, her

³⁵ Shuttleworth, p.38.

³⁶ DD, p. 36.

eyes intolerable, merciless, grey lightnings, her voice a fiery sword that cleft the guilt to the soul ... her eyes were wide and preternaturally bright and held him ... She was infinitely more terrible than the lioness who has licked her murdered cubs. No pythoness at the dizziest height of sacred frenzy, no Demeter wrought to delirium by maternal bereavement, was ever imagined by poet or painter as half so grand, and terrible, and awe-inspiring, as this furious cursing nun.³⁷

In this shocking episode, which erupts into violence, Graves evokes the Classical Demeter to underscore the terrifying potency, and depth, of the maternal instincts which drive Bridget-Mary's actions. Shaw and Randolph, in their discussion of this trend, reference the work of women dramatists with 'swashbuckling, melodramatic female protagonists', whose courage was aroused in this fashion and specifically in defence of their children, and include Graves on their list.³⁸ Though Graves had, as they suggest, offered earlier portraits of women provoked to anger, there had never before been one who had expressed it with such maternal fervour; because she exposes a woman of almost monstrous dimensions, the result is, arguably, highly effective, and completely shatters the conventional view of the benign 'Angel in the House'. Graves's allusion to Demeter, the mythical mother who was so determined to reject all would-be suitors for her daughter's hand, is an appealing analogy. The traditional tale of Persephone, the beautiful young woman hidden away from the covetous gaze of the Olympian gods, reflects Bridget-Mary's own protective concealment of Lynette; for seven years Lynette is nurtured within the female enclave of the convent's mission school, under the omniscient eyes of the holy mother. Unlike Persephone, who was snatched away by Hades, Lynette is saved from

³⁷ Ibid., p. 493.

³⁸ Shaw and Randolph, p. 75.

abduction, by the aforementioned fatal confrontation between Bough and the Mother Superior.³⁹

Thaden claims that despite this emphasis on the idealised mother figure in Victorian literature, a wife's primary responsibility had always been to her husband, rather than her children.⁴⁰ Yet Graves's work offers the reverse option as the preferred state; of the many family networks encountered in her prose, the husband takes secondary place to his wife's overriding concern for her offspring. Thaden does concur that an eventual change in attitudes allowed 'separated and divorced mothers an equal chance at child custody', but she reasons that this had unintentionally created an ideology which 'epitomised a completely different type of feminine bondage to the home and hearth';⁴¹ again, this is not reflected in Graves's novel.

In her earlier writing Graves had engaged with female characters who, despite operating from within conventional family units, were perceptibly independent mothers, for example, Mrs. Murgatroyd, in *A Mother of Three*. More alarmingly, for the Victorian traditionalists, perhaps, she had also dabbled with both the notion of single motherhood and the viability of female only communities. In 1894, for instance, the single volume novel, *Maids in a Market Garden*, told of a group of females, coexisting very successfully in both their private and professional capacities, in a type of 'New Woman' cooperative. This women-only business enterprise, with its additional twin pledges: 'to deter male followers' and 'to forgo

³⁹ DD, p. 495.

⁴⁰ Thaden, pp. 5-6.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 6.

marriage’,⁴² bears distinct echoes of Graves’s later drawing of the mission school at Gueldersdorp. Graves’s feminist ideas, as expressed two decades later in *The Dop Doctor*, have noticeably matured, and though she remains an advocate for marriage, there is now an explicit acknowledgement that single women are entirely capable of rearing children, without male support or interference. Though, on one level, this reinforced the concept that all ‘natural’ women embraced a maternal desire that was founded on their gender, on another level, more importantly, it challenged conventional thinking, because it offered a radical alternative for those women who wanted children, but without marriage as a prerequisite.

There were, of course, many females already raising families alone—for example, Sue Bruley’s study highlights the difficulties faced by a large number of women who were widowed⁴³—yet Graves’s portrayal is especially significant because, contrary to the accepted dynamic of the Victorian family unit with two parents, Bridget-Mary is doing so alone and by choice. Although she is a Catholic nun guiding a sisterhood of like-minded women, Bridget-Mary is presented fundamentally as simply a woman experiencing the usual emotions and concerns of running a household at that time; the religious aspects of the role remain undeveloped while the essence of a private, domestic sphere is predominantly to the fore. The convent, though categorically female territory, is nonetheless a familial space, but it lacks any paternal, or male, influence. Though Bridget-Mary is, after all, symbolically a bride of Christ, there is no metaphysical ‘Joseph’ figure or other indefinable, male presence, lurking in the background. Yet, despite Graves’s challenge to the patriarchal doctrine, it is clear

⁴² *Maids in a Market Garden*, p. 16.

⁴³ Bruley, p. 60.

that Bridget-Mary's motives are grounded, undeniably, by an almost visceral and unfulfilled, maternal longing.

Nowhere is this more marked, nor arguably more disturbing, than in Bridget-Mary's expression of intense regret at her inability to lactate. 'The image of the Victorian mother giving suck to her innocent babe was', Shuttleworth maintains, 'a potent one in Victorian ideology',⁴⁴ and Bridget-Mary offers an extremely powerful lament in her yearning to be classified as 'a real mother'; measured, in her reckoning, by a woman's capacity to breastfeed. The scene, ostensibly of Bridget-Mary comforting Lynette after her mental breakdown, exposes the intensity of that desire:

The Mother turned, rose upon her elbow, leaned over the low dividing barrier, took the slight body in her arms, and gathered it closely to her ... how thin and light ... how wasted the face that pressed against the broad, deep bosom whose chaste and hidden beauties famine had not spared. She would be a real mother once – just once. God would not grudge her that. She bared her breast to the cheek with a sudden half savage, wholly maternal gesture, and drew it close and pillowed it and rocked it. Had heaven wrought a miracle and unsealed those white fountains of her spotless womanhood, she would have found it sweet to give of herself to Richard's starving child.⁴⁵

Shuttleworth notes controlling undercurrents within often seemingly innocuous, and of course entirely normal, acts of breastfeeding. She identifies the Victorians' employment of this 'natural' discourse, as a means of enforcing the mother's obedience with, she suggests, 'milk as a metonymic projection of motherhood ... seemingly pure and untainted [with] wet nurses often employed if it were considered

⁴⁴ Shuttleworth, p. 38.

⁴⁵ DD, p. 485.

that that there might be some hereditary taint in the mother's family'.⁴⁶ That being the case, it is reasonable to argue that Bridget-Mary's offer of her own breast, again, denotes a symbolic attempt to cleanse Lynette of any contamination inherited from her erstwhile 'fallen', biological mother.

Yet, despite Graves's assurances that this is a 'wholly maternal gesture', the episode is rather disturbing, given that Lynette, by this time, is seventeen years of age. As a consequence the scene is marked, however unintentionally, by a homoerotic undertone. Shuttleworth's discussion identifies a pronounced focus 'on the ideal of female beauty', which, in the course of its evolution, had become transfixed, she argues, by an 'exaggeration on the reproductive areas' and, in particular, 'on the notions of bust and hips'.⁴⁷ Because of the acknowledged conflict between what were seen as 'woman's marital and maternal roles', this resulted, she suggests, in descriptions of the breasts becoming far more sexualised, to the extent that identifiable sexual overtones became attached to the act of breastfeeding; whether or not this is the case for Graves is unclear. However, breasts are again centralised at the novel's close. As the couple embrace, for the first time, Lynette draws Owen onto her chaste 'white bosom', as if in a maternal embrace, though it is fundamentally clear that the embrace is, in reality, a sexual overture to what will be the eventual consummation of their marriage:

His scalding tears wetted her white bosom as she drew the squared black head to rest there. Her rich hair, loosed from its coils fell in a heavy silken rope upon his shoulder ... [sic] their lips met in the nuptial, sacramental kiss. . . . [sic]⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Shuttleworth, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁸ DD, p. 671.

THE END

This scene symbolises the climax of Saxham's rescue from the clutches of alcoholism and suicide, and Lynette, having repulsed her own demons regarding sexual intercourse, is clearly ready, in Graves's eyes at least, to execute her conjugal duty and procreate.⁴⁹

Despite Graves's undoubted feminist beliefs and a blatant support for single motherhood, Graves's attitude to contraception appears initially to be fairly conformist—she was, after all, a Roman Catholic. Though she expresses 'pro-motherhood' convictions in her writing, this is tempered by both her social purity feminism, and her promotion, in part, of 'voluntary motherhood', as a result, her ideas are somewhat tangled, and, at times, conflicting. And, as Ann Heilmann notes, motherhood was indeed 'a complex, highly ambivalent concept',⁵⁰ especially, one might argue, when considered in conjunction with the issue of contraception.

While Bland concedes that, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, there was an undoubted feminist commitment to the right for 'voluntary motherhood',⁵¹ she argues that resistance to contraception was often founded on the question of women's capacity as sexual beings and 'was further entangled by questions of morality and control; if the sexual act was for reproductive purposes the willing use of contraception implied sex as an act of pleasure and codified those who did so as

⁴⁹ In *The Cost of Wings*, the sequel to *The Dop Doctor*, Lynette has become a mother and her son is named Bawne; after Bridget-Mary Bawne – the Mother Superior.

⁵⁰ Ann Heilmann, 'Introduction', in *Volume I: Marriage and Motherhood*, *the Late Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, ed. by Ann Heilmann (Abingdon: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998), p. xxiii.

⁵¹ Bland, p. 189.

immoral'.⁵² On this basis there was opposition to birth control, which included many feminists, in the belief that it might, therefore, encourage promiscuity outside of marriage.⁵³ However, as Heilmann observes, New Women writers raised concerns about the social repercussions of contraception or, more specifically: 'the lack of choice in the absence of any', together with the 'health risks in the face of potential infection with VD'.⁵⁴ While there is no evidence that Graves shared the view that contraception endorsed promiscuity, it is clear that she nonetheless held strong views on the subject.

Although Graves acknowledged the difficulties surrounding the institution of marriage, she was not against it in principle and rarely passed judgement on women who had sex outside of marriage, preferring to offer a sympathetic judgment when society might decree otherwise; Lynette talks of her plans to work with women and girls who have become 'victims of the dreadful pleasures of Man'.⁵⁵ However, for Graves the over-riding issue, influenced by her Catholicism, was the specific argument that women's superiority lay in their ability to be mothers and therefore the act of childbirth was a sacred function. It is important, therefore, given Graves's Catholicism, to contextualise this against contemporary, religious thought.

The Catholic Women's League had been set up only a few years before the publication of *The Dop Doctor*, in 1906, with the intention of both representing the interests of Catholic women in England and promoting Catholic social teaching in all

⁵² Bland, p. 189.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 196.

⁵⁴ Heilmann, p. xxiii. Venereal disease.

⁵⁵ DD, p. 294.

areas of English life.⁵⁶ Caitriona Beaumont suggests that though the League, like the Anglican-based Mothers' Union, was 'fervently opposed to any liberalisation of the law in relation to divorce, birth control or abortion', and that their views were 'very different from those held by other women's organisations', they claimed, nonetheless, 'to place women's rights and welfare at the top of their agendas'.⁵⁷ That said, the Catholic Women's League would not compromise on the question of birth control because it contradicted Catholic social teaching. Abstinence and the 'safe-period' were therefore offered as the only acceptable methods of family limitation; it is also worth noting that Church of England teaching took a similar line.⁵⁸ While there is no evidence to show that Graves was wholly against women using birth control, it is manifestly clear, however, that once a pregnancy had occurred, she fiercely abhorred any attempt to terminate it and in *The Dop Doctor*, Graves tackles the contentious subject of abortion and takes a decidedly oppositional stance.⁵⁹

Of the forms of contraception available at that time, abortion⁶⁰ was still the main form of restriction adopted by Victorian women, and although utilised predominantly by working class females it was a practice which straddled all of the social groups; not only were abortifacient drugs significantly cheaper than other forms of contraceptive,⁶¹ they were also far easier to access. According to letters collected by

⁵⁶ Caitriona Beaumont (2007): 'Moral Dilemmas and Women's Rights: The Attitude of the Mothers' Union and Catholic Women's League to Divorce, Birth Control and Abortion in England, 1928–1939, *Women's History Review*, 16:4, 463–485. University of Leicester, download, 21 August 2012. Beaumont notes, 'by the interwar period the [Catholic Women's] League represented approximately 22,000 members, who were mainly well-educated middle-class women'. p. 465.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 474. 'At the Lambeth conference of 1908 and again in 1920, the Church [of England] had refused to condone contraception even in cases of medical or economic necessity'.

⁵⁹ In 1918 Graves revisited the topic of abortion in *The Cost of Wings*, her sequel to *The Dop Doctor*.

⁶⁰ Illegal from 1803 until the introduction of the 1967 Abortion Act.

⁶¹ Bland, p. 190. Women employed oral remedies herbs, including pennyroyal, gin, salts, turpentine, castor oil, and by 1890s, lead pills.

the Women's Cooperative Guild in 1915, if an unwanted pregnancy did occur anxious women sought abortions from wherever, and with whomever, possible.⁶² The illuminating report reveals not only the extent of the problem, but details the wide range of concoctions and drugs available and refers to the more serious abortive methods which were often employed, including botched operations. Graves's text reproduces instances of desperate women, from both ends of the class system, seeking such assistance, and here she supplies a brief, though stereotypical, cameo of someone from the bottom end of the market offering the procedure:

It wasn't my doings Doctor Hi told Bough what you said ... an 'e swore if you wasn't the man to do what 'e wanted, 'e'd be damned but 'e'd find a woman as would! And she come next night – a little shabby, white-faced, rat-nosed old thing, shiverin' an' shakin'. Five pounds she 'ad off Bough.⁶³

Though Graves's responses are coloured by her anti-abortion beliefs, they are nevertheless still useful reflections of attitudes to terminations at that time; in another example Graves reiterates the dangers of the practice, with Saxham, in *The Dop Doctor*, reporting, this time on conditions at the top end of society:

After a brief absence accounted for as a 'rest cure', she would shine forth again upon the world, smiling, triumphant, prettier than ever or, as a woman who had passed through the Valley of the Shadow, she would emerge from that seclusion a nervous wreck, and take to pegging⁶⁴ or chloral or spiritualism. Most rarely she would not emerge at all, and then her women friends would send wreaths for the coffin and carriages to

⁶² Collected by the Women's Cooperative Guild, *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1915).

⁶³ DD, p. 117.

⁶⁴ Pegging: to drink alcohol.

the funeral and whisper mysteriously together in their boudoirs.⁶⁵

The issue of abortion was a fundamental ingredient of Graves's polemic against women's denial of motherhood; early in the novel, the reputation of Dr. Saxham is ruined by the false accusation that he has supplied abortive drugs to terminate a pregnancy, which has resulted in fatal consequences for the mother to be. Later, to reiterate her condemnation of abortifacients, Graves details an acrimonious exchange between Saxham and Lady Greta Atherleigh—Lynette's former school friend and now wife of a Baronet—over the doctor's refusal to terminate her pregnancy. The scene is framed by an account of the funeral of Queen Victoria,⁶⁶ and Graves juxtaposes the demise of the monarch, as the supreme mother figure, against Greta's protestations, that: 'heaps of her women friends did the same [...] expense was absolutely no object';⁶⁷ a device to highlight perhaps this new, and arguably alarming, modernist view. Graves also draws the reader's attention to the photograph of Lynette, which sits aloft on Saxham's desk looking down on Greta, to symbolise the superiority of one destined to produce 'healthy, wholesome sons and daughters of their race',⁶⁸ over one who 'did not want children'. The doctor:

heard this woman out, as he had heard all the others ... the delicate titled aristocrats, the ambitious Society beauties, the popular actresses, the women who envied these and read about them in the illustrated interviews published in the fashion-papers ... an appreciable number of them had asked him to be accommodating and render them temporarily immune against the menace of Maternity.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ DD, p. 113.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 581.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 582.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 112.

Graves uses Saxham to articulate a feminist diatribe against women prepared to forgo their 'natural' womanly duty, though Graves slips, purposefully, back into the narrator voice to alert her reader to the hypocrisy of the double standard, and to underline the social purity feminist thinking which guides her portrayal of Saxham:

Men did not enter into marriage pure ... by some unwritten code of that strange lawgiver, the world; they were absolved of all the necessity of spotlessness. They might slake their thirst at muddy sources unrebuked. And the more each wallowed, the more he demanded of the woman he wedded that she would be immaculate in thought and deed – if in knowledge, that was all the better.⁷⁰

Heilmann identifies the entanglement of the various groups of feminists and the overlap of their discourses, but notes that 'while they were divided on the issue of free love, New Women and feminist writers shared a sense of outrage about the sexual double standard'.⁷¹ Though Graves shared this contention, she also believed, as a feminist, that women played an intrinsic part in the righting of this wrong. Ledger draws on Grand's philosophy on marriage to highlight that men's 'lack of moral turpitude meant that they lacked manliness, and needed to be reformed rather than abandoned'.⁷² Graves's work concurs, as she illustrates that it was women who were undoubtedly the agents for change in the drive for improved male behaviour. Consequently, Saxham is revealed as Graves's chief male ally in her feminist attack: he reveres the female sex and acknowledges their moral superiority based, significantly in this case, on their maternal capacity. However, Mary Hammond

⁷⁰ DD, p. 484.

⁷¹ Heilmann, (1998), p. xix.

⁷² Ledger, p. 157.

suggests that there is more of a religious bias to Saxham's rehabilitation, and that the 'alcoholic English doctor [...] is dried out and re-Anglicised by her love just in time'.⁷³ Likewise, Peck observes that 'it is [Lynette's] love that secures [Owen's] redemption'.⁷⁴

It is clear that Graves's attitude to, and treatment of, motherhood and maternity are extremely complex and, at times, contradictory; a fact not entirely unsurprising, perhaps, given that her beliefs were complicated, as noted, by religious doctrine and feminist ideas. Thaden's study also notes '[an] assumption that the ideology which surrounded women and mothers had a greater influence on the representation of female characters in fiction than had the actual experiences of the authors'.⁷⁵ However, lacking full details of Graves's past, makes that difficult to judge. Thaden cites two female authors from the literary canon to explore her argument:

While Gaskell never forgot the pain and loneliness of being motherless, as her fiction demonstrates, she also clearly identifies with mothers in her fiction, even dead mothers. This point of view contrasts with that of an author such as Charlotte Brontë, who lost her mother at an age when she could more clearly remember the loss; who never achieved a close bond with her mother substitute, her mother's sister; who never had children; and who consequently, I argue, never achieves a maternal perspective.⁷⁶

Graves does, clearly, identify with mothers in her fiction, but to suggest that she experienced the sting of childlessness would be pure conjecture. However, Graves's

⁷³ Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 165.

⁷⁴ Peck, p. 177.

⁷⁵ Thaden, p. 20.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

absorption with the maternal theme, and her promotion of single motherhood as a plausible alternative, confirms that it was a lack she nonetheless felt. Unlike Brontë, who lost her mother at a young age, Graves suffered no such misfortune, but there may be other incidents which, as Thaden suggests, influenced her writing on this subject. Her ambivalence to the conventional model of motherhood does, however, correspond with her feminist status as a writer; Shaw and Randolph offer a pertinent argument that whereas a New Woman writer ‘might be characterised by sexual licence, an outrageous lifestyle and a repudiation of heterosexual norms’ she could also be highly moralistic and would frequently take the subject of motherhood as an issue of ‘crusading concern’.⁷⁷ So while Graves might not fit specifically into their particular definition of the New Woman, her crusading zeal for all things maternal is fully evident and, some might argue, moralistic; especially in *The Dop Doctor*.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Shaw & Randolph, p. 7.

⁷⁸ *The Cost of Wings*, takes a rather didactic approach to a number of issues connected to contraception and maternity, while Dehan’s *The Pipers of the Market Place* (1924), foregrounds a single mother’s attempts to provide for her children.

Chapter Nine

Clotilde Graves or Richard Dehan?

There is no final disassociation between Clotilde Graves and Richard Dehan. Richard Dehan, novelist, steadily employs the material furnished in valuable abundance by Clotilde Graves's life. At the same time the personality of Richard Dehan is so gifted, so lavish in its invention and so much at home in surprising backgrounds, that something approaching a psychic explanation of authorship seems called for.

‘Alias Richard Dehan’
When Winter Comes to Main Street
Grant Overton¹

In his attempt to account for Clotilde Graves's success as a pseudonymous male author and influenced, perhaps, by his own anti-feminist tendencies, the American writer Grant Overton² seeks out, in part, an arcane rationale to justify her achievements. While readily acknowledging Graves's talents—he does concede that there is a mutual interdependency between the two—his praise is, however, more favourably bestowed upon what he suggests is, in essence, Graves's male alter ego, ‘Richard Dehan’. It was this male ‘other’, Overton claims, who was decidedly superior in ability and was therefore better able to express Graves's thoughts and experiences. He suggests an almost parasitic quality to Dehan's regurgitation of the substance of Graves's life, as if Dehan had virtually subsumed the female host, and that Graves became ‘a secondary personality’.³ While evidence suggests that Overton's hypothesis is, in part, correct—Graves did, to a certain degree, allow the

¹ Grant Overton, ‘Alias Richard Dehan’ in *When Winter Comes to Main Street* (New York: George H Doran & Co., 1922), p. 197.

² Grant Overton, (1887– 1930) American author.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

name of ‘Richard Dehan’ to dominate—it will be shown that this was a premeditated course, driven by economics, rather than, as Overton implies, one which was mystically engineered. Whereas the opening chapters of this thesis examined the pieces written by Graves under her various soubriquets as a journalist, i.e. the grindings of *The Hurdy Gurdy Man*; the androgynous ‘Poltwattle’; or simply as ‘Clo’, this chapter will now consider the roots behind Graves’s aliases as both dramatist and novelist, and in particular that of ‘Richard Dehan’.

Graves achieved her breakthrough as a playwright in 1887,⁴ with a collaborative adaptation of a piece by the German writer Von Moser entitled *The Skeleton*.⁵ She had worked previously with actor and playwright Yorke Stephens⁶ and now, as dramatists, the pair executed an elaborate ploy to deceive their first night audience as to her real identity.⁷ Although, in the press and on the playbills the pre-show publicity for their three-act farce acknowledged the authors as ‘Yorke Stephens and Austin Stannus’, it was left until afterwards for the *Daily News* to reveal that:

Mr Yorke’s collaborator, indicated in the bill only by the epicene designation of ‘Austin Stannus’ is a lady, well known to the initiated as the writer of sprightly dramatic criticisms in an illustrated paper.⁸

⁴ In December 1887, the popular playwright W. E. Blanchard, writer of many Drury Lane pantomimes, was credited as author for *Puss in Boots*, which had been written by Graves. ‘A Chat with Clo Graves’, *Sketch*, 21 February 1900.

⁵ LCP, *The Skeleton*, 53378K. Vaudeville Theatre. *Era*, 28 May 1887.

⁶ Yorke Stephens (d.1937), actor. National Portrait Gallery. In the early 1880s, Graves and Stephens worked at Sarah Thorne’s in Margate, and later with Willie Edouin’s troupe. He appeared in Graves’s play, *A Bishop’s Eye*, in 1900.

⁷ *Era*, 28 May 1887.

⁸ *Daily News*, 28 May 1887.

A later review reported that the pretence was wholly maintained until the final curtain of the première performance, at which point the two dramatists took their bows to enthusiastic applause; no doubt pleased at their trickery. Although the playwrights themselves offer no explanation as to why this was done, it is reasonable to assume that their ruse was motivated by a desire to counter any negative preconceived judgements that might have been provoked, had it been revealed that a female had collaborated in the venture. Indeed, Kerry Powell notes the comments of the dramatist Cicely Hamilton, who realised early on that: ‘it was advisable to conceal the sex of [an] author until after the notices were out, as plays which were known to be written by women, were apt to get a bad press’.⁹ Graves’s deception was only maintained until the first performance, which might imply that although she was initially agreeable to using an alias, she was determined to claim any eventual plaudits and, more importantly, to publicise the fact that she was a woman.

This argument is sustained, in part, by a letter Graves penned to Augustin Daly¹⁰ in 1892, following the success of *Katherine Kavanagh* in America, and in which she asked that her full name of Clotilde, rather than the abbreviated ‘Clo’, be applied to the favourable publicity which had followed that production. This reiterates her insistence that any triumph she achieved as a dramatist would be indisputably linked to her name. Though she concedes that as a journalist the employment of the indeterminate ‘Clo’ was a necessary ploy—not least for the pecuniary advantage to be gained—once success was assured she plainly foresaw no disadvantage to admitting her gender, or in using her full title of Clotilde. This would suggest, at least

⁹ Powell, (1997), p. 122.

¹⁰ SFL, YC4345 (14).

at this point in her career, that she had no desire to institute a separate identity for herself as a playwright and, indeed, the practice was not repeated; all subsequent plays were attributed to Clotilde or Clo, and no further trace of the pseudonymous playwright 'Austin Stannus' is to be found. Though Graves did not reuse the 'Stannus' alias herself, the name was resurrected, almost two decades later, in her final comedy drama, *The Other Side* (1909), produced by William and Madge Kendal; Mrs Kendal played the leading character, Lady Marrable—a woman estranged from her husband and living under the assumed name of 'Mrs Stannus'.¹¹

As noted in chapter one, Graves frequently adopted a male authorial voice in her stories for the newspapers and periodicals in order to uphold the illusion of a male storyteller. Significantly, many of these accounts are expressed in the 'first person', often in the guise of male stereotypes of the period, for example: dashing 'swells', wealthy doctors, and military officers all feature. This action might suggest, at some level, that Graves was exploring the notion of cross-gender identity, which was clearly in keeping with her proven masculine style of dress; in her later career as a dramatist, Graves touched on notions of cross-gendering in two of her comedies. The earlier mentioned farce, *A Mother of Three*, produced in 1896, deals with a wife cross-dressing as the husband, whereas, in the later *The Bishop's Eye*, Graves abandons comedic transvestism, and inverts the sexual categories through a reversal of both gendered work roles, and male and female modes of behaviour. A leading male protagonist in *The Bishop's Eye* is an emasculated character nicknamed 'Rose', whose list of 'feminine' accomplishments includes making preserves, and expertise

¹¹ Graves had two uncles with the same name. (i) Her father's brother, Robert Stannus Graves (1830-1882) and (ii) Robert Stannus (no dates) who married her father's sister, Clotilda Bona Graves (b.1811). Burke's peerage www.thepeerage.com/284516. Accessed 14 July 2012.

as a 'seamstress'. Rose is also engaged to be married to Dr. Arabella Walker, a female physician who navigates her way effectively in both the public and private spheres. To reinforce her somewhat clichéd drawing of the New Woman, Graves describes Arabella as 'a small, serious, intelligent looking woman of twenty-nine, [who] wears pince-nez and dresses with brevity and plainness'.¹² Both of these characters were clearly intended to challenge accepted notions of gender, and Graves commented beforehand, in a *Sketch* interview, that 'a character who would invite a great deal of criticism was the portrait of a lady doctor'.¹³ Though the play received some positive reviews, it was not hugely successful and ran for only a few weeks.

In the same *Sketch* article,¹⁴ and for the first time, Graves talks quite openly and not without a degree of pride, of a brother who embodies the late-Victorian period's imperialist, masculine ideal. Drawing the readers' attention to her bookcases, surmounted by various historical artefacts and sculpted porcelain busts, she details her sibling's exploits:

I am rather proud of my trophies of arms, Chinese and Japanese. They were sent to me by my brother Captain Graves, RN, one of five European officers who held commissions in the Chinese Navy [...] he had a command and was on the bridge of the Chen Yuen, when that ship was riddled by 700 shot, surrendered and Admiral Ting committed suicide.¹⁵

Despite her scrupulous attention to detail there is, however, a distinct lack of factual evidence to authenticate the existence of this heroic 'Captain Graves'; there are

¹² A Bishop's Eye, p. 17.

¹³ 'A Chat with Clo Graves', *Sketch*, 21 February 1900.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

neither birth nor death certificates, he is notably absent on all census returns and is not mentioned in the Graves family's papers, including the last Wills and Testaments of Graves's mother and two sisters.¹⁶ Although an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* confirms that a 'W. H. Graves' was among the handful of officers involved with the surrender of the town of Wei-Hai-Wei,¹⁷ there are no records to suggest that this man, whose surname and initials coincidentally match those of Graves's father, was in any way related to her. From this, one might realistically conclude that Graves had seized an opportunity to weave the gallant Captain into her own life story, even though he was, arguably, simply yet another product of her imagination. From an economic perspective, however, this phantom sibling offered great potential and two years after the original *Sketch* interview, which had disclosed his existence, a short story in an Australian newspaper was prefaced by a report allegedly submitted by 'Clo Graves's brother, Captain W. H. Graves'.¹⁸

The featured column, a tale of 'derring-do' entitled 'Capturing a Dacoit¹⁹ in Burma', was duly prefaced with the following brief cameo of the alleged, adventurous sibling:

It is reported that Capt. W. H. Graves, late of the Chinese Imperial Service—himself the hero of many hair-breadth escapes ... has sent us the following extraordinary narrative. Capt. Graves is at present leopard shooting in a practically unexplored country some seventy miles above the Ruby mines of Mogolok, in Upper Burma ... according to Captain Graves, 'The enclosed story was entrusted to me by a great friend of mine, and I think it so curious that I forward it to you for publication in your magazine, per favor of my sister Miss Clo. Graves'.²⁰

¹⁶ Principal Probate Registry, Holborn, London.

¹⁷ 'Battle at Yalta', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 April 1895, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Victoria Daily Colonist* (Australia), 11 July 1900. The article advised that the story had also been published in George Newnes's *Wide World* magazine.

¹⁹ A Dacoit: A member of a gang of armed robbers in region of Burma/Myanmar.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Victoria Daily Colonist*.

It is interesting to note that an article, published in 1983, which explores the literary portrayals of a town in Western Australia, also perpetuates the myth of this imaginary brother.²¹ The author of the piece, Peter Cowan, observing that Graves has used the location of Broome²² for two of her later works, *The Sower of the Wind* (1927)²³ and *Dead Pearls* (1932),²⁴ declares that '[Clo's] brother, Colonel Graves, supplied her with the background and local colour for some of her novels, including the *Dop Doctor* and her novels of Broome'.²⁵ He supports this statement—though he fails to credit a source to substantiate his assertions—with a claim that 'Colonel Graves' had 'worked as a shell-opener on the pearling boats, and was credited with some fame as a raconteur'.²⁶ Though Cowan's assertions modify his military rank and service attachment he nonetheless reaffirms 'Colonel' Graves's status as an imperialist hero:

an endorsement of the white man's supremacy, and the white man's burden, whatever that meant in Broome around nineteen hundred and three. Broome becomes a background for the Boys of the Bulldog Breed anecdote, which throws up suggestions of racial conflict, justice and white privilege.²⁷

Cowan was apparently unaware that his supposed 'Colonel Graves' was an alter-ego of an elderly, female author who, as John Dettmer notes, 'had been confined to a

²¹ Peter Cowan, 'Broome: A Fiction', the *Westerly*, No. 3, September 1983, pp. 1-100.

²² Broome – a pearling and tourist town in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

²³ Richard Dehan, *The Sower of the Wind* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1927)

²⁴ Richard Dehan, *Dead Pearls: A Novel about the Great Wide West* (London: J. Long Ltd., 1932)

²⁵ Cowan, p. 85.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 86.

wheelchair, for twenty years and [was] quite unfamiliar with South Africa or any of the other distant locales so minutely described in later novels'.²⁸

Graves did in fact have a younger brother, Hugh, though he appears to have been the antithesis of her intrepid 'Captain'. Little is known of Hugh Percy Graves, born in 1865,²⁹ other than that he had a seemingly uneventful life and, after a brief unsuccessful career as an actor, became a clerk at Lloyds. He never married and lodged intermittently with one or other of his close female relatives, until his rather early death at the age of thirty-seven.³⁰ Graves's reference to an older male sibling is not, however, entirely without foundation, as it would appear that a child was born to her parents in the first years of their marriage; the announcements column of *The Morning Post*, in May 1856, reported that an unnamed son was born to Antoinette, 'the wife of Captain W. H. Graves, of the 18th Royal Irish'.³¹ The brief statement does not disclose the name which may, or may not, have been given to this child, other than to advise he 'survived his birth but a few hours'. Though speculative, it is feasible that Graves embraced the notion of a deceased brother, in the form of an 'alter ego', as a means, perhaps, of playing out an alternative life from which she was debarred simply by gender. Although this hypothesis echoes Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and its leading protagonist John Worthing—who invents the existence of a younger brother 'Ernest' in order to lead a double-life—there is nothing to indicate that Graves's deception, with her own 'Captain

²⁸ Todd, p. 18.

²⁹ There were two older siblings: Dora Victoire Graves (1855–1936), married to William Greet. No issue. Maud Antoinette Graves (1858–1959), unmarried.

³⁰ National Archive, Certified Copy of Death, 3 July 1902. Ref: COL203915.

³¹ 'Births, Marriages and Deaths', *Morning Post* (London), 19 May 1856, p. 7. A child born 3 May 1856.

Graves', was mirrored in any form other than through her writing though Wilde's comedy may, nonetheless, have inspired the initial idea.

While extensive research over many years has revealed countless numbers of nineteenth-century female authors, who chose to employ an alias—Catherine A. Judd,³² Anne Varty, Gaye Tuchman³³ and Laurel Brake,³⁴ have all explored this topic in detail—it is less usual to discover a writer who, late on in an already fairly well established writing career, determined to adopt a new and decidedly male alias. Consequently, Graves's move, in 1910, to publish *The Dop Doctor* as Richard Dehan, was distinctly atypical and, given her precarious financial situation, entirely unexpected; Graves herself concedes that it was a cause of some concern to the book publishers, Messrs. Heinemann and Pawling, who conceived her actions to be extremely ill-judged. However, though one might speculate endlessly about the motives which had prompted this decision, Graves's own account, that she 'had stipulated' that its authorship 'should be kept profoundly secret',³⁵ is particularly illuminating, given that it suggests this was not an impulsive act. However, being further pressed for an explanation as to why, with the launch of *The Dop Doctor*, she would willingly forgo 'the helpful impetus' of a name already familiar with the public and, more importantly, be forced to accept a considerably lower fee, she confessed that:

³² Catherine A. Judd, 'Male Pseudonyms and Female Authority', in *Literature in the Market Place: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. by John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³³ Gaye Tuchman, with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1989).

³⁴ Laurel Brake, *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990).

³⁵ Frederic Whyte, *William Heinemann: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), p. 235.

I had no more convincing argument to put forward than that I had known Clotilde Graves for a long time, and regarded her and her attainments with a certain proprietorial esteem, but that I was more than a little bored with her and that I would like to drop her for a while.³⁶

Graves's inclination to refer to herself here, in the third person, is a significant reminder that she believed it possible to demarcate Graves the author, from Graves the woman, and that it was possible to cast off, as it were, that particular strand of her personality; it is also, perhaps, this admission which is the primary foundation for Overton's aforementioned theory of a 'psychic explanation'. However, one might argue that the notion of a dual personality lends itself more to a rationale which is psychologically based, rather than one which Overton perceives to be supernaturally founded. It is also important to bear in mind that Overton's decision to draw on a psychic justification for Graves's talents as a writer, was mediated by his anti-feminist instincts; he appears to find it untenable that a woman would have the necessary mental capacity to produce a narrative such as *The Dop Doctor*, or indeed those which followed it. Overton, evidently scrutinising Graves through a determinedly male-orientated lens, conceives of Dehan as 'the master'³⁷ and, interestingly, given Graves's focus on motherhood, attributes to their 'partnership' an intimacy akin to a maternal relationship. In his reaffirmation of the gender imbalance he identifies Dehan as, 'intellectually and spiritually, the full-grown son of Clotilde Graves', but then concludes that 'she does not matter'. Though it is, in essence, a subliminal acknowledgment of the primacy of motherhood, Overton's subsequent

³⁶ Whyte, p. 235.

³⁷ Overton, p. 210.

comment, 'I think she existed to bring Richard Dehan into the world',³⁸ reiterates his position. Graves's thoughts about Overton's critique are not known.

Being pressed by Heinemann to explain why she wished to 'drop' Clotilde Graves 'for a while', brought forth the following, rather enigmatic, response:

I had the desire, and that was my reason – good enough for any woman. But as the partners seemed to expect more, I was silent, merely bowing my head [...] But I was hardened in my determination to bob under, and bob up again as Somebody Else.³⁹

This arguably endorses the concept of, if not a dual personality, an entirely new persona. Graves's use of language is also revealing, given that there is a distinct sense of liquidity in her analogy that one might, as in water, 'bob under'. Within this concept of submersion, and the contra action of 'bobbing' up, or resurfacing, are the co-existing signifiers of both cleansing and purification. In a spiritual sense these might be seen to connote a form of renewal, and perhaps this was Graves's intention; to wash away a former life with all of its constituent problems.

Whatever her motives it is clear that this was a calculated move, and one which was quite remarkable, given that, by this course of action, she was forced to accept a substantially lower payment than she might have otherwise commanded. Tellingly, perhaps, her explanation to Heinemann was accompanied by an account of the childhood years of the Brontë sisters who, Graves observes, were too shy to speak boldly with their father in any domestic debate on matters of, 'political, military and

³⁸ Whyte, p. 235.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 236-237.

social news of the day'.⁴⁰ As a consequence, they were thus encouraged by the Reverend Brontë to, literally, don a mask through which, Graves tells, they might 'speak boldly' and in that way 'have no fear, because nobody could see them'.⁴¹ Graves supposes the Brontë 'mask' to have been 'some rubicund cardboard visage remaining from a Rectory Christmas Tree', and as a mark of their genius she recommends a wholly masculine list of suitable candidates: 'Shakespeare, Milton, Keats or Napoleon I'.⁴² Although Graves makes no mention of the Brontës' other early habit of employing male pseudonyms as a 'masking' technique,⁴³ the example she has employed both to illustrate, and justify, her decision to keep her own identity 'a profound secret' is significant. Like the Brontës, Graves is proposing that in putting on her mask, she also might speak boldly and 'have no fear', and hers too, bore a masculine countenance.

The precise topics, or possibly secrets, which Richard Dehan's facade was intended to mediate, remain unclear. Graves disclosed, in a touching speech, that:

The nom de guerre I had chosen was to serve as my mask when the thoughts, reflections, experiences and grief's of a life-time, contained between the battered leaves of eighty-seven notebooks and wrought into the chapters of a novel, should be sent out into the world. I had written articles and stories and verses and plays, but the book I had entitled *The Dop Doctor* was another matter. I had filled my fountain-pen from the veins of my heart!⁴⁴

Although, in her description of *The Dop Doctor* Graves does not affix the label of 'autobiography' to her notebooks, her candid explanation, nevertheless, makes clear

⁴⁰ Whyte, p. 237.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Tuchman, p. 53. Anne, Emily and Charlotte Brontë wrote as Acton, Ellis and Currer Bell, respectively.

⁴⁴ Whyte, p. 237.

that its content is biographically based. It is therefore perfectly understandable that she should want to protect her identity, having employed a narrative overflowing with topics which even today might provoke a heated debate, for example: alcoholism; abortion; child cruelty; female suffrage; prostitution and sexual abuse; especially if the discourse is truly masking personal recollections. However, due to the absence of the eighty-seven notebooks, one can only speculate as to which are drawn from personal reminiscences, and those which are entirely fictional.

In her chapter ‘Victorian Women as Writers and Readers of (Auto) biography’, Joanne Shattock recognises ‘the ambivalence, if not the disinclination, of nineteenth-century English women writers towards the writing of autobiography’.⁴⁵ She notes too, that it ‘raised anxieties’ due to the twin elements of self-definition and self-exploration—both prerequisites of the autobiography genre—because it implied self-confidence about ‘a sense of a writing self and the acknowledgment of a public role with which [women] were uncomfortable’.⁴⁶ There is nothing to indicate that Graves suffered in this way, as her marked willingness to try her authorial hand in any previously unexplored genre proves. For example, she wrote to the music impresario, Sir Thomas Beecham⁴⁷ in 1915, offering him an opportunity to purchase her ‘four act verse comedy, The Lover’s Battle [sic] founded on Pope’s immortal “Rape of The Lock” [sic]’, suggesting that it could be used ‘as the libretto for a real English Opera’,⁴⁸ and in 1916 she penned the lyrics to a World War One recruitment song.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Joanne Shattock, ‘Victorian Women as Writers and Readers of (Auto)biography’, in *Mortal Pages, Literary Lives: Studies in Nineteenth Century Autobiography*, ed. by Vincent Newey and Philip Shaw (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 140-152 (p. 141).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴⁷ Sir Thomas Beecham, (1879–1961), conductor and music impresario. ODNB.

⁴⁸ Letter to Sir Thomas Beecham, 22 March 1915, St. Helen’s Local History and Archive Library. BP/2/2/3/62.

It is, therefore, not beyond the bounds of probability that these notebooks had originally been conceived as material which might be suitable for future publication as an autobiographical narrative. However, it is also possible that she nonetheless shared the sense of ‘unease’, which Shattock identifies, and that it was this, combined with the sensitive nature of her subject matter, which had the biggest influence on Graves’s decision to lay down her story as a ‘fiction’, rather than as a clearly defined autobiography; not forgetting her determined proviso that it could only to be published with a hitherto unknown pseudonym.

Shattock’s study draws on Nancy K. Miller’s hypothesis of an ‘intratextual practice of interpretation’, which recommends a ‘practice of reading autobiographies in conjunction with fiction in order to gain a full representation of the author’, with neither given preference over the other.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, in the absence of an autobiography by Graves, a ‘reading’ of that type would not appear to be entirely possible. However, given Graves’s declaration that *The Dop Doctor* was founded on her own experiences and reflections, and because the novel is presented as a canvas woven with both real and fictional incidents which it is impossible to unpick, means that, arguably, it cannot be read as any other than an ‘intratextual text’. As the previous chapter tried to show, Graves’s personal responses to, for example, the themes of motherhood, rape and sexual abuse, clearly affected her fictional representations of these issues, but to what extent they reflected actual episodes from her own life cannot be known for sure.

⁴⁹ ‘The Boys in Brown: A Patriotic Recruiting Song’, written by Richard Dehan, music composed by Harry P. Bartlett. 1916, London: Lawrence Wright Music Co. Ltd. [Author’s own copy].

⁵⁰ Nancy K. Miller, quoted in Shattock, (1996), p. 141.

Valerie Sanders, writing in the same volume as Shattock, claims that for centuries ‘women have been ashamed of writing about themselves, and yet have longed to recount the experiences that have shaped their lives and to share them with other women’;⁵¹ there is a distinct sense that this is very much the case for Graves. It is useful here, also to bear in mind Marina Warner’s comprehensive study into the patterns of female authorship and storytelling, which leads her to conclude that:

The large numbers of Victorian women who wrote oblique or truncated or long-winded forms of autobiography, whether novels, travel memoirs, descriptions of childhood or social reminiscences, tend to be dismissed as unimportant because they fail to focus on a single coherent subject: a defect that may now seem less serious and more interesting because of the critical doubt surrounding the viability of the unified subject, still more the subjects ability to transpose his or her life into ‘art’.⁵²

Graves’s lengthy narrative encompasses many topics which provoked a range of emotions: *The Times* described it as a ‘generous, over-lavish book’ and the *Daily Express* as ‘pulsatingly real—gloomy, tragic and dignified’. The *Daily Mail* celebrated the power of ‘Mr. Dehan [to] grasp and handle and penetrate human passion more surely than most writers of our day’, while noting that it was ‘a huge slice of human life, chaotic, formless, sombre, complex, as life is’.⁵³ Graves had seemingly overloaded her original notebooks with these outpourings, which were then moulded and re-crafted until quite possibly, the compulsion to publish overwhelmed her. The story Graves tells, in *The Dop Doctor*, is a mix of many of the ingredients Warner identifies, and, perhaps, because of this it soon fell out of fashion.

⁵¹ Valerie Sanders, in ‘‘Fathers’ Daughters’: Three Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Autobiographers’ in *Mortal Pages, Literary Lives: Studies in Nineteenth Century Autobiography*, ed. by Vincent Newey and Philip Shaw (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 153-171 (p. 153).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁵³ Quoted in Todd, p. 20.

Sanders, meanwhile, mediates her argument further, offering a theory that many nineteenth-century women writers ‘frequently pretended they were doing something other than telling the story of their lives: writing, for instance, autobiographical fiction, such as *Jane Eyre*’,⁵⁴ though this is clearly not something which Graves has done.

Though Graves has outlined the specific function of her nom de guerre, she offers no explanation as to why she employed a specifically male pseudonym when—if it was solely to hide her identity—a female nom de plume would arguably have served the same purpose. If, however, the decision was predicated on a perception that the topic of war might be more readily accepted from the hand of a male author, Graves could easily have offered this as her reason; the publishers evidently saw no problem with this. Catherine A. Judd’s study of anonymous publishing during the nineteenth century, argues that of the few women who did use pseudonyms, many employed female, rather than male, ones.⁵⁵ Judd’s analysis embraces the work of Gaye Tuchman, who points out that ‘both male and female authors were far more likely to adopt a pseudonym from their own gender than to cross over’, although she concedes that there were, naturally, exceptions.⁵⁶ This was not, however, necessarily the case for female playwrights, and as Powell has identified, women trying to succeed as dramatists found it more useful to employ a male pseudonym.⁵⁷ Though Graves employed a number of aliases, she only ever ‘crossed over’ the once, i.e. into the shoes of Richard Dehan; she never, as far as is known, employed a female alias.

⁵⁴ Sanders, pp. 153-4.

⁵⁵ Judd, p.250.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 250.

⁵⁷ Powell (2007), p. 122. He cites Harriett Jay writing as “Charles Marlowe”, and Pearl Marie Craigie who was known as “John Oliver Hobbes”.

With regard to publication trends and the use of pseudonyms, Judd's thesis argues very much against the grain of conventional thinking in this area; she suggests that a cluster of 'mythic images' made up of three strands has grown up around the Victorian woman writer.⁵⁸ The first of these 'myths', which Judd posits, is 'a belief in the gender bias of the market place [...] that the male pseudonym was a necessary mask due to the prejudices and exclusions of the literary marketplace'.⁵⁹ Though Judd later admits that it is not her aim to diminish the gender discrimination which undoubtedly did exist, she claims, instead, that it has perhaps been overstated; Graves's own case, as shown, argues strongly against this, especially early on in her career.

Judd does concede, again implicating Tuchman's argument, 'that the "edging out" of women occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century when men began to regain the literary marketplace after a brief field victory by their female rivals'.⁶⁰ However, it is useful to note, that *The Dop Doctor* was published during the period Tuchman refers to as '*the period of institutionalization*'[sic], the years 1901-1917, when, she argues, 'men's hold on the novel, particularly the high culture novel, coalesced'.⁶¹ She makes an interesting, and strong case, not least with the revelation gleaned from the Macmillan Archives, which indicate 'that in these years men submitted less fiction than women but enjoyed a higher rate of acceptance'.⁶² Though Tuchman here is drawing only on evidence from one specific publishing archive (and not that

⁵⁸ Judd, p. 251.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 252.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tuchman, p. 8.

which Graves used), it is reasonable to argue that is still a relevant factor in this discussion.

The second of these ‘myths’, Judd suggests, was derived from the ‘notion of the domestic novelist as at once family protector and family martyr’ with, Judd continues, the female writer concealing her name ‘both to protect her family honor and to protect herself from the wrath of her disapproving family’.⁶³ Her theory, that this too has been over emphasised, seems also to be disproved, at least in Graves’s case. If, as Graves implies, the narrative of *The Dop Doctor* embraced her own family ‘business’, this suggests that the pseudonym was designed, at the very least, to safeguard them all, especially given Graves’s admission that the alias was to be a ‘profound secret’.

Judd’s third, and final, point identifies ‘twentieth-century readings which claim that the male pseudonym is a mark of the androgyny of the female domestic novelist and a symptom of her need to feel somehow masculinised before she could pick up the “phallic” pen’.⁶⁴ Though early on in her career Graves had adopted a male tag, this was enacted, she herself freely admits, entirely out of necessity and not through any primal desire to feel masculinised or, indeed, to inscribe her work using a ‘phallic’ pen. And whereas post modernist readings might, undeniably, identify women who fall in to this category, and likewise present a strong case for the defence, this is for Graves, as it is for Judd, a myth—though Grant Overton might well have disagreed.

⁶³Judd, p. 251.

⁶⁴Ibid.

Overton devotes an entire chapter⁶⁵ to the Clo Graves/Richard Dehan conundrum asserting that whatever her motive for selecting the name of Richard Dehan ‘the result was the distinct emergence of a totally different personality’, and that since Richard Dehan’s name had first appeared on the title page of *The Dop Doctor*, ‘there has never been a Clotilde Graves in books’.⁶⁶ This is, of course, disingenuous. For example, Graves admits that many of the collections of short stories she published as Richard Dehan had been conceived and written many years earlier; though they had been refined, perhaps, and re-crafted they were still, ostensibly, from the pen of Clotilde Graves. Overton’s hypothesis stems, chiefly, from his inability to credit Graves, as a woman, with either the mental, or physical, capacity to have produced a work of this kind and he negates her input in every physical sense—her real name, naturally, is absent from the text. According to Overton, in the course of the story’s transition from Graves’s imagination on to the page, the female author has been completely consumed by Richard Dehan, her male ‘other’:

Then there was born in the mind of the woman who purposed to write the novel the idea of a man – of the man – who should be the novelist she wanted to be. He should use as by right and from instinct the material which lay inutile at her woman’s disposal.

He would appear to be suggesting that Graves’s aspirations to be a successful novelist were founded on the concept of masculinity, that her sex rendered her subject matter useless, or ‘inutile’, and that as a woman she was, ostensibly, functionally disabled. Overton is, nevertheless, exceptionally familiar with both Graves and her oeuvre, having read Graves’s entire collection of short stories and

⁶⁵Overton, pp. 196-211.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.199.

novels.⁶⁷ He is generous in his praise of her ‘expansive texts and incredible amount of exact and easy detail’, recording that another of Graves’s five hundred page novels, *The Just Steward*, is ‘truly monumental and makes the labours of Gustave Flaubert in *Salammbô* seem trivial.’⁶⁸ Yet, always, there is the faintest whiff of astonishment, as if he is still unable to reconcile such mastery from the hand of a woman, as he argues that:

The passionate tenacity with which the French master studied ... [and] grubbed like the lowliest archaeologist to get at his fingertips all those recondite allusions so necessary if he were to move with lightness, assurance and consummate art through the scenes of his novel ... frankly, one does not expect this of the third daughter of an Irish soldier, an ex-journalist and the author of a Drury lane pantomime. Nevertheless the erudition is all here.⁶⁹

Despite the blatant and chauvinistic resonances of Overton’s critique, which cannot conceal his wonder at the extent, and incredible depth, of Graves’s knowledge, he nonetheless embraces the utmost respect for her perspicacity. While on the one hand he acknowledges her fairly simple lifestyle, and is unable to explain how ‘Miss Graves could write such a book’, on the other, he is amazed that:

Richard Dehan knows the early history of the Christian Church; he knows military life, strategy, tactics, types; he knows in a most extraordinary way the details of Jewish history and religious observances; he knows perfectly and as a matter of course all about English middle class life; he knows all sorts of things about the east – Turkey and Arabia and those countries.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Overton, p. 211. The bibliography for his chapter cites three sources including, ‘Private information’.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Overton, p 204.

He might also have added to the catalogue of Dehan's scholarship, her familiarity with the 'Dark Continent' of South Africa and its people, customs and landscapes; her knowledge of Western Australia and the life of the Aboriginal tribes; the complicated history and politics of the rise of the German state and the personality of its 'Man of Iron', Otto Von Bismarck. But, as might be expected of this anti-feminist, Overton persists in crediting Richard Dehan, rather than Clo Graves, with owning this encyclopaedic knowledge. The only justification Overton can provide for this seeming anomaly is that: 'Richard Dehan wrote it.'⁷¹ As far as Overton is concerned:

To a woman in middle age an opportunity presented itself. It was the chance to write a novel around the subject which, as a girl, she had come to know a great deal about – the subject of war. To write about it, and gain attention, the novel required a man's signature.⁷²

For some people, as Overton insinuates, it was inconceivable that a woman could truly represent the horrors enacted in a theatre of war, which rather reiterates Tuchman's earlier point regarding men's hold on the novel during '*the period of institutionalization* [sic]'.⁷³ For a woman to write articles for ladies' popular periodicals, and farces for the West End stage was one thing, but for her to have the capacity to make the necessary step-change to novelist, at this level, completely challenged contemporary expectations of the female author. It was, as Alexis Easley notes of the mid-Victorian period:

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Tuchman, p. 8.

working in the interstices between high-culture literary production and popular print culture—that is, by simultaneously writing for the anonymous periodical press and engaging in high-profile literary careers—that women writers were able to complicate notions of ‘feminine’ writing and identity, redefining themselves within and against the narrative and social conventions of their age.⁷⁴

It would perhaps be stretching the point to argue that *The Dop Doctor* falls into the category of high culture, but it is nonetheless still feasible to classify Graves as a member of that cohort of women who were challenging the status quo, not least because she continued to produce articles for the popular press as Clo Graves, while simultaneously pursuing publishing opportunities as Richard Dehan.

Inevitably, the popularity which surrounded *The Dop Doctor* extended to speculation as to who was this hitherto, unknown author; as John St. John observed:

The identity of Richard Dehan remained a mystery. No one connected with South Africa knew him, though he was obviously personally familiar with the veld and the war. Was he perhaps a journalist hiding behind a pseudonym? It was two years before it was revealed that the author was Miss Clotilde Graves, approaching fifty and with a heart condition.⁷⁵

Todd notes, however, that when the secret was finally out, it was too late, ‘the old book had been discarded, and gossip diverted to other things’.⁷⁶ Though Graves had adopted the name Richard Dehan to mask her real identity, paradoxically, over the remaining twenty years of her life, she was forced, through financial necessity, to remind people that Clotilde Graves and Richard Dehan were one and the same

⁷⁴ Alexis Easley, *First person Anonymous: Women Writers and the Victorian Print Media 1830-1870* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004), p. 184.

⁷⁵ John St. John, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁶ Todd, p. 19.

person; though ‘Richard Dehan’, did not provide financial success, he brought Graves significantly more fame than anything she was ever to achieve writing under her real name. Yet, driven constantly by the spectre of poverty, she relentlessly prompted sundry editors and publishers, of the fame, though fleeting, which had once been hers. Consequently, her letters were invariably double signed, thus:

RICHARD DEHAN

CLOTILDE GRAVES⁷⁷

Yet, whereas Overton takes this as a mark that ‘Clotilde Graves [had] become a secondary personality’,⁷⁸ and perhaps to some extent she had, it must surely be conceded that the truth was far simpler than that; she was simply writing to survive.

There are so many contradictions surrounding the various aliases and pseudonyms Graves adopted over the course of her career and Alexis Easley’s theory wisely counsels caution, suggesting that in our efforts ‘to recover lost women writers we do not re-impose narrow definitions of “female writing” that rely upon the idea of author as a ‘single-gendered agent’.⁷⁹ A rereading of Graves’s prodigious output, and an acknowledgment of her incredible breadth as a writer, together with the ease with which she slips across into ‘the male voice’, makes that seem unlikely. To endorse that view one need only, perhaps, reiterate the words of a contemporary critic who,

⁷⁷ Overton, p. 209.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Easley, p. 184.

reviewing a collection of 'Richard Dehan's' short stories, remarked: 'if any writer was ever possessed by divers personalities, surely it is Clotilde Graves'.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Charles Peers, ed., 'The Review of Reviews', Apr 1914, pp. 327-328.

Writing to Survive in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

Conclusion

But more humiliating still it is to be a mature, grown-up person, and know how far off you are from being the wonderful creature you intended to be, when you began the world. You did not contemplate being exactly beautiful—it is not for everyone to achieve that—but you meant to be commanding. You were going to do everything well: to succeed gloriously—to be distinguished and brilliant—knock lumps off this poor old globe, in fact. And now—well—you haven't! The clay you're made of is the ordinary kind: not the blue earth diamonds grow in. You might make up for your absolute lack of individuality by a brilliant suicide. But you don't. You're too commonplace. You're contented to go on being nobody. This may be a calm state, but it is certainly not a happy one.

Clotilde Graves, *Idler*, 1893¹

Graves's comments, in this brief article, written in her thirtieth year and with four more decades of work still ahead of her, concede to the inevitability that lasting fame and fortune will not be hers. The success she craved was achieved in part, but it was both intermittent and transient and failed to secure for her the earnings which, as outlined in the introduction, and as Joanne Shattock observes of female writers of the nineteenth century, was her 'key to becoming professional'.² In her journey through the commercial world, in her various roles as journalist, playwright and novelist she had, undeniably, not 'remained long as an innocent'.³ She had learnt early on the benefits of adopting a male pseudonym; the need, at times, to adapt her writing to secure a commission; how to 'borrow' from other literary sources or to utilise personal experience when either a deadline was imminent or inspiration failed her.

¹ 'Is Childhood the Happiest or Most Miserable Period of One's Existence?', *Idler*, 1893

² Shattock, (2001), p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*

She had developed the dexterity with which she could modify and augment her texts—in order to wring out every drop of their financial worth—and had cultivated her professional networks to seek out further work.

Linda H. Peterson has identified the trepidation felt by many nineteenth-century writers (of either gender) who feared the negative associations and ‘taint of trade’, if they were actively involved in selling their texts as commodities, created for public consumption, rather than as artistically produced narratives.⁴ Yet, driven by financial hardship, particularly in her later years, this does not appear to have been an issue for Graves; the previous chapters show that she was neither discomfited, nor reticent, in touting for commissions or seeking publicity for her literary work. The example of her ‘Lover’s Battle’,⁵ a play based on Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (1712), which Sidney Lowe considered to be ‘written in excellent verse ... and which attracted less attention than it deserved’,⁶ attests to her valiant efforts to secure it a stage production; she claimed years afterwards that it had been leased by ‘great managements’, and lists the lessees as, ‘the Maude & Harrison Haymarket combination,’⁷ Mr and Mrs Fred Terry,⁸ Miss Irene Vanburgh⁹ and Mr. Dion Boucicault’; though it was never ultimately staged.¹⁰

⁴ Peterson, p. 2.

⁵ Clotilde Graves, *The Lovers’ Battle: Heroical Comedy in Rhyme*, 1890 (New York: Brentanos Publishers, 1902).

⁶ RLF: 2692/9.

⁷ Frederick Harrison and Cyril Maude, Managers of Theatre Royal, Haymarket.

⁸ Fred Terry (1863–1933), actor, brother to the actress Ellen Terry (1847–1928). Julia Terry, née Nielson (1868–1957) actress and theatre manager. ODNB.

⁹ Irene Vanburgh (1872–1949) actress, married to Darley Boucicault (1859–1929), actor, later took the name Dion Boucicault, Jnr, after his dramatist father.

¹⁰ HRHRC, 2 April 1930.

The theatre, despite its aesthetic pretensions, Nina Auerbach rightfully concludes, ‘was a creature of pure capitalism’,¹¹ and by the late 1880s Graves had shifted her focus on to that arena drawn by the lucrative opportunities allegedly available in that sphere. Though, as Powell’s study identifies, the ‘usual routes into playwriting were difficult for a woman to enter’,¹² Graves had already successfully circumnavigated many of the initial obstacles, via her work as a journalist, to enter the swelling ranks of the professional woman dramatist. Powell’s argument that this increase was driven, in part, by its identification as a ‘profitable enterprise’,¹³ is perhaps a classification which is too prescriptive. The rising number of aspirant playwrights, with the even greater numbers of manuscripts they generated, arguably engendered mounting competition and, even for those already established in the profession, made it harder for both men and women to succeed. Winifred Dolan, herself an ambitious actress and playwright considered:

If acting is a gamble, play-writing is worse. Success is not won solely by good work, and on top of that, any success must be sustained by good, if not better, work. In the first place, a play must be read which generally means it is kept for three or four months – precious time lost if the play is at all topical. A reminder brings it back unread and refused.¹⁴

Dolan later reported her immense difficulty, as the ‘reader of plays’ for theatre manager George Alexander,¹⁵ in keeping abreast of an enormous pile of scripts:

two feet high ... [it] never grew smaller – all the world was apparently writing plays: clerks, bricklayers, maiden aunts ... people without a glimmer of stage craft; others who could write

¹¹ Nina Auerbach, ‘Before the Curtain’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3-14 (p. 4).

¹² Powell (1997), p. 81.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁴ Dolan, p. 61.

¹⁵ Sir George Alexander, (1858-1918), actor and theatre manager. ODNB.

good dialogue but with impossible plots, or good ideas they could not clothe in dialogue.¹⁶

Although, as Graves acknowledged, her work as an actress was fundamental to her later proficiency as a playwright, her skills were honed in the early days through the many adaptations of popular novels and French plays prepared for theatre manager Augustin Daly. Artistic vision, however, was not Daly's main focus. According to the Victorian theatre critic J. R. Towse, the impresario was intent on reaping the largest profit and, as a result, his achievements were 'mostly overrated' and some pieces 'unmitigated trash'. Towse further accused Daly of having resorted to, 'some of the most mischievous practices of the purely commercial and speculative managers ... [employing] flagrant melodramatic absurdities, with no possible object other than to catch the mob.'¹⁷ While this is not to suggest that Graves's work for Daly duplicated that approach—even though it is reasonable to argue that while under Daly's patronage, she acquired her knack of 'borrowing' from other sources—their correspondence nevertheless exposes her willingness to comply with his requested changes to manuscripts. Graves was fully cognisant of the extenuating need to secure the affection of 'the mob', especially if one wanted to survive as a writer.

Similarly, Graves's expression of feminist ideology, as represented in her dramatic work, shows further evidence of compromise as a result of pecuniary concerns. Though Graves's heroines are generally resourceful, outspoken and ready to defy convention, they seemingly often slip back into their expected roles. In the *Dr. and*

¹⁶ Dolan, pp. 56-57.

¹⁷ J. R. Towse, cited in Glenn Hughes, *A History of American Theatre 1700-1950* (New York: Samuel French, 1951), p. 232.

Mrs Neill, for example, Graves challenges the treatment and handling of the ‘fallen woman’, and though she exposes a distorted image of Victorian marriage, she seemingly endorses the institution despite its constraints on the feminine sex. In *Katherine Kavanagh* she outlines women’s potentially violent streak, or as Andrew Mangham notes: ‘the ghastly, destructive energy lurking beneath female spaces and feminine graces’.¹⁸ In *The Wooing*, Susan Carlson identifies Graves’s drawing of the heroine’s ‘dazzling display of wit, chicanery and daring’, but observes that by the denouement she has been reduced ‘to a sobbing heap’. For Carlson, it is as if Graves’s ‘only option [for her women] is to return to a destructively potent plot formula, after experimenting with the promise of a different kind of life’.¹⁹

Though these dichotomies demonstrate Graves’s determination to confront a whole raft of feminist concerns, they also, Carlson suggests, confirm that Graves was, at this time, a woman still ‘in her apprenticeship as a writer’.²⁰ Notwithstanding her reservations, Carlson includes Graves in her list of female playwrights who, she maintains, were writing influential plays during this period. The critics ostensibly agreed, and yet, despite their early accolades, which lasted through to just beyond the mid 1890s and reaffirmed Graves’s status as a promising ‘New Woman’ dramatist, by the turn of the century she was practically destitute, having failed to secure the level of acclaim many believed she justly deserved. There are a number of factors which could account for the downturn in her popularity as a playwright, in the early years of the new century. One might argue that her writing had become formulaic, or that she had lost some degree of artistic innovation in the concession to audience

¹⁸ Mangham, p. 9.

¹⁹ Carlson, (1999), p. 268,

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 272-273.

expectations of character and plot; she certainly appeared to be playing safe with both her subjects and themes. For example, *The Bond of Ninon* might have achieved more success if Graves had celebrated, rather than sanitised, her historical heroine's colourful past; or possibly restaged it as a modern piece. In her portrayal of *A Tenement Tragedy*, she had taken a modernist excursion into the domestic life of the working class which, undoubtedly for Graves, struck a new note. The venture, however, was not repeated, and her final plays, *The Other Side* and *The General's Past*, both in 1909, returned to the staid confines of a middle-class drawing room and, in critical terms, to oblivion.

To account for the Edwardian audience's apparent apathy towards Graves's plays, one might usefully consider the perceptible 'shift', which Newey identifies, in the 'theatre industry's attitudes to women playwrights, at the end of the Victorian period', despite, she says, 'a framing discourse which still saw women playwrights as exceptional, and complained about 'ladies' plays'.²¹ Newey's assessment considers the position of 'popular theatre' at the end of the nineteenth century and, locating Graves as one of the many female writers within that sphere, Newey argues that this positions them: 'in that critical and historical no-(wo)man's-land between the modernist avant-garde and the New Drama or literary drama'.²² Though she concurs with Peter Bailey's persuasive argument, that the mass entertainment industry at the turn of the new century should be regarded as 'popular modernism'—and she posits 'popular theatre' in that category—she is resistant to the incorporation of this 'popular modernism' into the wider, conventional definition of 'modernism' itself.²³

²¹ Newey, p. 186.

²² Ibid., p. 187.

²³ Ibid.

Newey's resistance is founded on a desire to maintain a distinction between these overlapping narratives—in order that aspects of 'cultural phenomena' are not overlooked—yet there remains an implicit sense that 'popular modernism' is afforded a secondary status. As a result, even though as Newey admits, Graves's plays are grouped with those which, 'are ingenious in demonstrating female characters' coping strategies and potentially subversive avoidance of restrictive codes of feminine behaviour',²⁴ it is clear that Graves's plays had, quite simply, fallen behind the times.

Graves's decision to move into the novelist's marketplace was influenced, in the main, by her failing health; she was unable to work other than from her sick bed and, as Shattock identifies, writing remained one means of female employment 'which could be conducted from within the domestic sphere'.²⁵ With her 'eighty seven note books' to hand, Graves seized an opportunity to 'cook [them] up' into a valuable literary work. John Peck's thorough assessment of literary responses to the South African conflict, judges that 'the old narrative modes seem[ed] exhausted and redundant ... unable to cope with a new, and unprecedented, state of affairs', and though he concedes that a romantic novel lent itself so well to a story of heroism, 'the facts of the Boer War for many authors, proved too awkward for the simpler form of romance'.²⁶ Though almost a decade had elapsed since the Boer War it had retained sufficient popular interest and, for her sweeping Imperialist narrative, was an eminently suitable panorama. While Peck concedes that: '*The Dop Doctor* confronts anxieties about nationality, addiction and sex', he holds that these themes

²⁴ Newey, p. 187.

²⁵ Shattock, (2001), p. 3.

²⁶ Peck, p. xii.

are outflanked, through Graves's determination 'to restore a vision of the British hero with a supportive female partner'. And though he affirms 'it might, as such, be a novel influenced by the degeneration debate', he admits frankly that in the end 'it turns out to be a simple romance'.²⁷

Graves's writing was clearly motivated by a need to survive financially; her desperation in many letters to H. J. C. Marshall is almost tangible. I would argue, however, that in the case of *The Dop Doctor*, she was impelled by a further requisite compulsion; the act of writing as a means of surviving the effects of disturbing episodes from her past. Her admission: 'I had filled my fountain-pen from the veins of my heart!' suggests a catharsis; a means of release and the opportunity to make sense of her own life experiences, which were possibly too shocking or inappropriate, to be chronicled in any format other than this. From a psychological perspective, Graves's recurrent bouts of 'brain fever' might also be read as signifiers of suppressed incidents of abuse. I would further contend that Graves embarked on *The Dop Doctor*, perhaps subconsciously even, as a writing mechanism for her 'mental survival'; coincidentally, Graves does not report having suffered any further mental breakdowns post-publication of *The Dop Doctor*.

The therapeutic effects of autobiographical writing have already been extensively explored in various quarters; for example, Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, explore the concept through its application to Charles Dickens's autobiographical narrative in *David Copperfield*,²⁸ while Celia Hunt writes of how this type of

²⁷ Peck, p. 177.

²⁸ Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, *Victorian Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth Century Literature and Art* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 161.

therapy helped her to discover the truth about herself, ‘or rather’, she says, ‘not *the* truth, but *my* truth, my own *personal truth*, which turned out to be a mixture of fiction and reality’.²⁹ *The Dop Doctor* is Graves’s ‘personal truth’, and though we cannot, for sure, tease the fiction from the reality, we are able to speculate with a degree of confidence that it is a conflation of multiple aspects of her life—as it was, and possibly as she would have liked it to be. The self, for Graves, was constructed through *The Dop Doctor* in collective, as opposed to individual, ways. It interweaves a fiction with her reality and conflates real and imagined characters: those we can easily recognise as figures writ large in the history of the Boer War—Lord Baden Powell or Lady Sarah Wilson—and others, known only to Graves. Victorian women writers, Reynolds and Humble conclude, generally constructed themselves as fictionalised characters, rather than through traditional first-person narratives.³⁰ In this instance, however, Graves slides more readily into the slippery aspects of autobiographical text, in a kind of splitting, multiplicity of the self, which Reynolds and Humble perceive, as a method, to be ‘fragmented, camouflaged, and fleeting’.³¹

If, as I claim, the narrative hides Graves’s own experience of sexual abuse, and if she perceived that her mother had failed her in some way, this may have created an implicit animosity between them. The fact that the novel was published a year after her mother had died, might also indicate that, if it shrouded any family secrets, she had waited out of respect for her mother’s feelings. Graves demonstrates a fixation with the ‘mother figure’, but whether this was founded on her own sense of lack, or by her disappointment in her own mother’s failure to protect her, cannot be known.

²⁹ Celia Hunt, *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), p. 10.

³⁰ Reynolds, p. 146.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

As shown, Graves places great stress on ‘real’ mothers and it is always their duty of care which is paramount. Graves tells, through Lynette, of a child learning by instinct, ‘that it was best to bear hunger and pain in silence, lest worse befell ... to little, weak, and feeble creatures of their race, grown human beings can be marvellously cruel’;³² though what form these acts of cruelty take is not revealed. The act of rape committed against Lynette is the epicentre of a traumatic childhood, which reverberates throughout the book, with the damage from the aftershocks affecting every aspect of her adult life. This is significant, not least, because the same theme had been earlier represented, by Graves, through the abuse of Tina in *A Tenement Tragedy*. Whether Graves herself was a victim of sexual abuse is, of course, purely speculative, but if she was it might well account for her determination that the book was not to be published under her own name, being most insistent from the outset that the author’s identity must be kept a ‘profound secret’. Whatever the truth behind its conception, the sales figures behind *The Dop Doctor* attest to its popularity, and perhaps, as Ella Hepworth Dixon observes, in her story of Mary Erle, ‘it is because they suffer so, that women have written supremely good fiction’.³³

To what extent, however, Graves’s writing might be read as a truly personal response to the subject remains unclear; although she readily admitted that *The Dop Doctor* had been drawn from her own ‘experiences and griefs’, she never married or, as far as it is possible to know, conceived a child. Graves celebrates motherhood and marriage, throughout her writing—especially the redemptive qualities of the former and equality of the sexes in the latter. Though she may, at intervals, have seemed to

³² DD, p. 30.

³³ Hepworth-Dixon, (1894), p.106.

compromise, or even sacrificed, women's happiness, it was often done for the sake of another woman and, as such, particularly from the perspective of social purity feminism, might be seen to represent sisterly solidarity rather than submission to patriarchal ideology. Although Graves's mother, Antoinette,³⁴ survived to a good age, little is known of their relationship, other than a number of couched remarks drawn from her short stories and a few scant references in her correspondence. For example, a letter sent to the playwright Clement Scott reveals a trace of impatience in the young dramatist, who apologises for having missed sharing a theatre box with Mrs Scott, due to Graves's mother having 'forgotten' to pass on a message until the following morning.³⁵

Graves mostly lived independently of her mother from a fairly young age, returning only when extreme circumstances, for example ill-health, made it unavoidable, as was the case in 1909 the year that her mother died. Curiously, Graves refers to her bereavement in a letter to the Royal Literary Fund, with the passing remark that 'owing to the death of a near relative with whom I lived as a paying guest, I was obliged to incur the expense of moving to my present address'.³⁶ Similarly, Graves's childless siblings appear,³⁷ in later years at least, to have been estranged from her; though they were both very much alive and well in 1913, in a letter to Alice Meynell, Graves remarked, somewhat wistfully, 'I am alone in the world'.³⁸ Therefore, although Graves's fascination with the maternal theme may have been founded on

³⁴ Antoinette Graves. Died 23 March 1909.

³⁵ URL S3425, 12 September 1895.

³⁶ RLF: 2692/14.

³⁷ Hugh Percy Graves died 1902. Maud Graves (1855-1956) lived with her widowed sister Dora Greet (1858-1936) until Dora's death. Neither of their Last Wills and Testaments mentions Clotilde. However, although Clo Graves was buried in a plot purchased by Edith Brown (a retired secretary), it was the two sisters who later paid for a headstone.

³⁸ MP, 12 July 1913.

these familial circumstances, any other contingent factor which may have directed her personal perspective on the issue remains a mystery.

Grant Overton's notion that Graves had become a secondary personality to that of Richard Dehan was influenced in part by a newspaper report of Graves's objections to the issue of an early work, already published as by Clotilde Graves, 'with 'Richard Dehan' on the title-page'.³⁹ Stirred by Graves's 'vigorous and public protest', a supporter of Graves's, wrote to the paper to advocate that: 'any proposed reissue would not be more indefensible than the act of a publishing house bringing out posthumous "books" by O. Henry and dragging from its deserved oblivion Rudyard Kipling's *Abaft the Funnel*'.⁴⁰ The publishers, evidently unmoved, and keen to cash in on Graves's success as Richard Dehan, continued, where possible, to exploit the name; in 1915 Graves was forced to write, once again, to the newspaper:

Sir, will you courteously allow me to make public through your columns the fact that the book advertised by the title 'Dragon's Teeth' was written 27 years ago, and published at a shilling, and that I have not authorised the republication of this aged relic, or consented to the association of the name of 'Richard Dehan' therewith.
Faithfully Yours,
CLOTILDE GRAVES⁴¹

Graves had sold the original rights of this and other books, so she had nothing to gain from their reissue. One might, therefore, conclude that her resistance was sprung out of concern that the association of 'Richard Dehan' with an 'old relic', could impact detrimentally on any future work under that name.

³⁹ Overton, p. 199.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

⁴¹ 'Letters to the Editor', *The Saturday Review*, 3 November 1915.

Graves had achieved her greatest success as Richard Dehan and, ironically, given her initial secrecy, she spent her remaining years reminding prospective publishers that she was ‘Richard Dehan’, and promoting ‘his’ reputation whenever possible. Her letters, on headed notepaper, displayed a list of Dehan’s work and consistently bore either a double signature, or simply that of ‘Richard Dehan’. Two autographed photographs, sent to H. J. C. Marshall, which almost span her writing career, illustrate this idiosyncrasy. One, a sepia print dated 1884,⁴² is of a beautiful, unsmiling young girl, with cropped hair and a faraway look; as if unconscious that she is the subject of the photographer’s or, indeed, anyone’s gaze. The other, dated 1929,⁴³ shows an elderly, stout, snowy-haired woman, ensconced in her invalid chair working on a manuscript; there is a pen in her hand and she is surrounded by her books. On the mantle sits the aforementioned portrait of the young journalist, though the former has been ‘double signed’, on the latter there is but one, ‘Richard Dehan’.

When Graves died in 1932, the two-column obituary in *The Times* spoke of ‘her very real and diversified gifts which enabled her to entertain so vast a number of readers’.⁴⁴ It mentioned the extensive corpus of work she had left behind, and though, as she herself recognised, it had provided neither great riches, nor lasting acclaim, there was, undoubtedly, an exceptional richness and quality about it. Even though she had written some ‘duds’ there were pieces of great merit, which are testimony to her tenacity and relentless hard work; *The Times* spoke of her ‘long

⁴² RLF: 2692/129.

⁴³ RLF: 2692/130.

⁴⁴ ‘Miss Clo Graves, Novelist and Dramatist’, *Times*, 12 December 1932.

literary career’ as an example of what could be achieved by ‘force of character, resourcefulness, and hard work’.⁴⁵

Of those two essentials identified by Virginia Woolf as crucial for the triumph of the woman writer—‘a room of one’s own’ and five hundred pounds a year⁴⁶—though Graves secured her privacy, in a room of her own, the monetary prerequisite of Woolf’s assertion forever eluded her. Ironically, only a few months prior to her death, Clotilde Graves was finally awarded an annual pension of £100 from the Civil List, in recognition of her services to literature, but it was too late to be of use; as Graves observed, ‘authorship is a terrible profession when all is said and done’.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 1929 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945), p. 94.

⁴⁷ RLF: 2692/115.

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