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Thema:
Concepts of ‘Female Inversion’ and the ‘New Woman’
in Rhoda Broughton’s *Dear Faustina* (1897)

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1 Introduction

Published in 1897, Rhoda Broughton's fin de siècle novel *Dear Faustina*¹ took an active part in the discursive production of two cultural figures: the New Woman and the Female Invert. Employing those identity constructs to negotiate conservative anxieties about social change, while at the same time commenting on a range of alternatives to Victorian middle-class lifestyle, the novel is clearly rooted in the discourses of transition that characterised the fin de siècle.

The end of the Victorian era was marked by fantasies of social decay and degeneration, as well as deep-seated fears about Britain's cultural and imperialist decline (see Ledger/Luckhurst 2000:xiii and Cryle/Forth 2008:13). But at the same time, this transitional period was characterised by 'an exhilarating sense of possibility' (Ledger/Luckhurst:ibid.), connected to the broad scale of new cultural and political formations. Emerging cultural forms like the new woman, the new realism, the new drama and the new journalism, were accompanied by new political movements like Fabian socialism and imperialism, as well as by a range of new human sciences like psychology, eugenics and sexology (see ibid. and Schaffer/Wolfson 2007:1). In many critics the explosive mixture of reform aspirations and eroding social orders has evoked an apocalyptic view of the fin de siècle as representing 'an irrational disturbance in the smooth-running certainties of the Victorian epoch' (Kaye 2007:54).

Among the topics named, the fin de siècle period was intensely involved in questions of sexuality (see Marshall 2007:7). During the last decades of the nineteenth century, a complex and contradictory set of comprehensions of sexuality and sexual identity emerged. Controversies about declining birth rates, sex scandals and social purity went side by side with Olive Schreiner's and Edward Carpenter's utopian writings about 'homogenic love' or 'free love' unions (see Kaye 2007:53 f.). This 'sheer conceptual chaos' (ibid.) of opposing images and ideas has prompted critics to depict the period as animated by 'sexual anarchy', a term famously coined by the late-Victorian novelist George Gissing (quoted by Korb 1965:187).

¹ Rhoda Broughton (1897): *Dear Faustina*. London. When giving references to the novel and other sources, abbreviated titles will be used, e. g. DF for *Dear Faustina*. A summary of the novel is enclosed in the appendix.

At first glance, it seems as if sexuality was newly *discovered* by cultural and scientific discourses at the turn of the twentieth century; but cultural-revisionist scholars rather emphasise the historically constructed nature of sexuality, arguing in allegiance to Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* that the fin de siècle was 'the time when sexuality was quite ingeniously *invented*, or at least when a century-long progress of invention culminated in the rise of sexology' (Cryle/Forth 2008:10, my italics). Sexuality was now redefined as the central category of modernity (see Felski 1998:1).

The emerging science of sexology aimed at investigating 'the actual facts' about the sexual instinct from the new standpoint of 'sincerity', as the most prominent English sexologist Havelock Ellis never tires of emphasising (see *Sexual Inversion* (SI) 89). Sexuality is regarded by Ellis as 'the central problem of life' (SI 91), concerning everyone. Therefore, *scientia sexualis*, as Foucault termed the science of sexuality (see Foucault 1976:51), set itself the task of 'ascertain[ing] what is normal and what is abnormal, from the point of view of physiology and psychology' (SI 91), thereby creating a scientific language to conceptualise sexual normativity.

During the last third of the nineteenth century, German and English sexologists like Carl von Westphal, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Carl Ulrichs, Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis established sexological types, defining normal and abnormal² formations of sex. Those typologies were not limited to the question whether a person's sexuality was considered perverse or not, but they expressed that a person's sexuality constituted their very identity, the truth of the self (see Kaye 2007:62 and Felski 1998:1).

Psychiatrists started directing their attention towards the phenomenon of homosexuality that was now regarded as the precise reversal – 'sexual inversion' – of heterosexuality, 'in turn deemed the "normal" form of sexuality' (Hekma 1989:179). Homosexuality was, as Foucault argues, at that time 'transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (Foucault 1976:43). Becoming the decisive trait of a person's identity, deviant sexual

² Throughout this paper, I use normative and derogatory terms such as deviant, perverse, morbid, proper/improper, appropriate/inappropriate, normal/abnormal, natural/unnatural, healthy/unhealthy, or masculine/feminine in the nineteenth-century sense of departing from or conforming to middle-class definitions of acceptable behaviours and desires. Only when necessary to emphasise my analytical standpoint, I use quotation marks.

practices defined among others this new ‘species’ called ‘sexual invert’, ‘homosexual’, ‘lesbian’, ‘third sex’ or ‘intermediate sex’ (see Kaye 2007:62).

No longer a question of particular acts, sexuality now enclosed the entire manner of being – sexual identity was believed to be expressed by a person’s appearance, their bodily structure and personality (see Felski 1998:4 and Vicinus 2004:205). Through this development, the homosexual became ‘a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology’, as Foucault expressed it. ‘Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality’ (Foucault 1976:43).

The concept of ‘sexual inversion’, the main focus of my paper, connotes the binarism that controlled – and still controls – Western cultural thinking about matters of sex, gender and society, implying the idea that there exist fixed gender roles which can be reversed (see Bauer 2009b:86). The meaning of gender roles in the conceptualisation of ‘inversion’ is crucial especially in the theorisation of ‘sexual inversion in women’³ since female sexual pathology has always been linked to gender pathology. According to the hegemonic understanding that a person is either congenitally disposed with masculine/active or feminine/passive attributes, women inverted norms by taking the initiative in sexual encounters (see Felski 1998:5). It was assumed that in order to actively initiate sex with another woman, a female subject required masculine character traits. In contrast to ‘inversion’ in men, the concept of Female Inversion is thus closely tied to issues of social difference; deviant sexual behaviour in women could not have been investigated apart from gendered characteristics (see Bauer 2009b:85 and Vicinus 2004:205).

The Female Invert was broadly conflated with socially subversive attitudes and activism. This discursive conflation indicates that her ‘assumption of the opposite gender role [was considered] the truly serious offence’ (Chauncey 1982:125) rather than her same-sex object choice. By depicting female gender transgressions as symptoms of a deviant sexuality, sexologist theorists pathologised forms of sexual and gender deviancy in women that deeply troubled late-Victorian conservatism in the face of the rising feminist movement.

³ From now on, I use Female Inversion and Female Invert as short forms when referring to the central and frequently occurring concept of ‘sexual inversion in women’ or ‘female sexual inversion’, writing it with a capital letter in order to mark my critical distance to the terms.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the campaigns of the women's movement were beginning to bear fruit (see Ledger 1997:127). The modern woman's trespassing of the border between the traditional gender spheres aroused fundamental fears in those who held power in the patriarchal order of Victorian society, the degree of social anxiety rising proportionately with women's increasing independence and involvement in the public sphere (see Faderman 1981:237).

With the rise of feminism, not only the Female Invert but also another cultural figure was created to conceptualise the threat posed by the modern woman: the 'New Woman'.⁴ In introducing the Female Invert, I have shown that the interconnection between notions of sexuality and gender played a crucial role in redefining cultural identities at that historical moment (see Breger 2005:76). The same can be said for the New Woman. Broadly used as a synonym for activists in the cause of women's emancipating, the term pervaded literary discourse and public debates of the fin de siècle. The concept of the New Woman characterised the modern woman in terms of gender deviance, assigning her masculine attributes quite similar to those associated with the Female Invert. Because she entered into previously male realms, the New Woman was characterised as 'mannish' or 'inverted' (see Breger 2005:76, 80). With the invention of the New Woman, the debates about a woman's proper place, which had occupied the British nation throughout the Victorian era, became centred on notions of deviant female sexuality.

Feminism and sexologist theories not only emerged alongside each other, but they were tightly linked by cultural and scientific discourses, allying female transgression of social borders with female sexual deviance.

Rhoda Broughton's novel *Dear Faustina*, which enjoyed great popularity among its late-Victorian contemporaries, was created within the context of those intertwined discourses. Written by a prolific and highly popular writer with widespread recognition and economic success (see Murphy 2000:58), the novel was first serialised in *Temple Bar* and published in 1897 as a one-volume book by Richard Bentley and Son, a rather conservative London publishing house, as the label 'Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen' suggests.

⁴ 'New Woman' is a contemporary term, applied to emancipating women from the 1890s until the mid-war years; I use the conventional spelling of the term, writing it (like Female Inversion) with a capital letter to indicate critical distance.

Dear Faustina has scarcely been noticed by modern scholarship, but it did receive some attention from contemporary reviewers. A critic from *The Spectator* expressed ‘downright repugnance’ for the eponymous heroine Faustina Bateson and ‘the extreme left wing of the emancipation movement’ of which she is a member, while an *Athenaeum* reviewer accordingly surmised that the novel ‘is manifestly and before everything intended to strike into the heart of the “movement” – woman’s movement, of course!’ (both quoted by *ibid.*).

As can be seen from those reviews, Broughton’s novel contains a clearly anti-feminist message, which is conveyed by an extremely unfavourable description of the central female character. Intruding into a bourgeois family and disrupting its entity by ‘kidnapping’ (DF 297) innocent Althea, Faustina is depicted as a serious threat to the patriarchal foundations of Victorian culture. She offers Althea an alternative existence, marked by female independence, man-hating solidarity and passionate female intimacy. Expelled from plot and country at the end of the novel, Faustina is eventually ostracised, and with her the radical form of female emancipation that she stands for.

With Faustina Bateson, Rhoda Broughton created a narrative identity in which contemporary discourses of women’s emancipation overlap with the emerging notion of sexual deviance. How does the novel relate to the prevailing scientific and cultural discourses; in which aspects does it correspond to other fin de siècle accounts of the deviant female, in which aspects does it differ? By means of which narrative strategies does the text endow its heroine with the specific attributes, by which a deviant sexual identity is discursively produced, given the restricting genre conventions and moralities of the time? In what ways are both the protagonist and the ideas and social phenomena represented by her discredited by the narration? This is the set of problems I will investigate by a close examination of the novel, on the whole aiming at a thorough understanding of how late-Victorian ideologies, anxieties and stereotypes were transformed by the narrative into a transgressive female identity.

Doubtlessly, *Dear Faustina* conflates contemporary stereotypes drawn from intertwined ideologies to an ‘inverted’ New Woman identity. But a closer look at the text shows that the novel does not simply reproduce character traits that are usually associated with the Female Invert or the New Woman. Instead, the narration

deconstructs the stereotypes and rearranges some of their decisive components, such as the New Woman's commitment to the feminist cause or the Female Invert's sexual agency, thus producing new causalities and, as the reviews suggest, a powerful extratextual message.

I am going to analyse *Dear Faustina* in two steps, examining, one after the other, two distinct but interrelated groups of themes: firstly, the representations of social and gender transgression, such as social reform work, feminism and the New Woman; and secondly, a range of sexual and erotic aspects, all linked to different forms of intimate relationships, by which the notion of sexual deviance is introduced to the text.

In looking at the interplay of discourses in *Dear Faustina*, I refrain from assuming a direct influence of sexology on the novel, thus avoiding an approach that would assign a solely reproductive role to literature. Novels like *Dear Faustina*, I would rather argue, were as much involved in identity-fashioning processes as sexology.

In order to question the prevalence of sexology in the construction of sexual identities, I will briefly present Eliza Lynn Linton's novel *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) in my last chapter. Already in 1880, this fiction strongly anticipated what would later be termed a Female Invert. If the claim that a relation between sexology and literary production exists is appropriate at all, *The Rebel of the Family* might prove that it is not a one-sided influence.

Even if I reject the assumption of a one-sided influence of scientific discourses on cultural discourses, it is still helpful and necessary to have a close look at sexological accounts of 'sexual inversion' in order to 'reconstruct the conceptual frameworks in which homoerotic desire [has] been understood' (Chauncey 1982:146) at this specific historical moment. I will concentrate on Havelock Ellis' tract on 'Sexual Inversion in Women' that was first published in the medical journal *Alienist and Neurologist* in 1895 (see Crozier 2008:331). Later on, it was included in his study about *Sexual Inversion*, released as monograph⁵ in 1897, the same year in which *Dear Faustina* was issued. This nineteenth-century sexologist study, which considered Female Inversion in greatest detail (see Halberstam 1998:76), took shape at the same time and within the same discursive frameworks as *Dear Faustina*.

⁵ I quote from Crozier's critical edition of the monograph *Sexual Inversion* (1897), referring to it as SI.

Scrutinising the ideological assumptions and identity politics that underlie the narrative creation of Female Invert and New Woman characters, I pursue a queer approach, addressing issues of sexuality without relying on the binaries and causalities of heteronormative thinking which builds on the ‘compulsory order of sex/gender/desire’ (Butler 1990:8 ff.). I will carefully differentiate between aspects of biological sex, gender, sexual desire and sexual activity⁶ when drawing conclusions about the narrative representation of sexual deviance, thus distancing my study from previous research about Broughton’s account of Female Inversion.⁷ I will consider the contemporary conceptual frame in which same-sex desire was understood, as well as the confines of late-Victorian morality and genre conventions. By this, I attempt to avoid anachronistic assumptions⁸ and the projection of twenty-first-century understandings of sexuality onto fin de siècle texts.

⁶ Bearing in mind that both sex and gender should not be understood as fixed categories, I use the term ‘sex’ as denoting a person’s biological sex, and the term ‘gender’ when referring to the sex-related attributes that are ascribed to an individual by a culture’s hegemonic ideology, depending on their biological sex.

Heteronormative thinking understands all aspects of a person’s sexual identity as interdependent according to the compulsory order of sex/gender/desire, as Judith Butler explains in her groundbreaking study *Gender Trouble* (1990). According to heteronormativity, a person must either combine a male sex with a masculine gender and a sexual desire for female/feminine individuals, or a female sex with a feminine gender and a sexual desire for male/masculine individuals in order to be conceived as ‘normal’.

⁷ *Dear Faustina* has only been subject to two research articles so far: Patricia Murphy’s ‘Disdained and Disempowered. The “Inverted” New Woman in Rhoda Broughton’s *Dear Faustina*’ (2000) and Lisa Hager’s ‘Slumming with the New Woman. Fin-de-Siècle Sexual Inversion, Reform Work and Sisterhood in Rhoda Broughton’s *Dear Faustina*’ (2007). In her monograph *New Women, New Novels* (1990), Ann Ardis discusses only some aspects of the novel.

⁸ Before the emergence of queer theory, research about the cultural presence of deviant sexualities was largely characterised by anachronistic assumptions such as continuum and minority paradigms (see Ch. 3.1).

2 ‘The Cause’ and the New Woman in *Dear Faustina*

Dear Faustina was broadly perceived by contemporary readers as ‘manifestly and before everything intend[ing] to strike into the heart of the [...] woman’s movement’ (*Athenaeum* 1897, quoted by Murphy 2000:58). This assessment of the novel assumes both a deeply conservative standpoint in its writer and the conveyance of a unequivocal message by the narration. I will closely examine Broughton’s fictional representation of traditional gender roles and social reform work as well as her account of the feminist woman’s gender transgressions to find out by which means the impression of a determined fight against the changing of the patriarchal order is evoked.

2.1 A need for social reform?

The idea of humanising the lower classes held a fashionable status at the fin de siècle, and social reform movements burgeoned everywhere, which obviously also affected the creation of *Dear Faustina*. But since a deliberate occupation of the middle-class with philanthropic aims did not necessarily entail a questioning of their own status, conventions and rules, it is doubtful whether the narrative presence of social reform aspirations is an indicator of a truly progressive message. Analysing how representatives of traditional Victorian virtues are characterised by the narrator of *Dear Faustina*, I will show that the novel’s standpoint in the debates about social change seems surprisingly ambivalent.

Althea Vane, the protagonist of *Dear Faustina*, grows up with a typical Victorian middle-class background. Her family is organised according to patriarchal structures until her father’s death, lying back half a year at the beginning of the novel. His sudden death and Mrs. Vane’s decision to abandon her children in order to devote her life to ‘the Cause’⁹ split up the family. Althea’s brothers and sisters have adopted their father’s high esteem for morals and conventions, while Althea starts questioning those values. Astonishingly, the upholders of conservative values are not presented by the narration in a very favourable light.

⁹ Throughout my paper, I adopt this spelling of the ‘Cause’ from *Dear Faustina*.

Althea's little sister Fanny, who is still under age and staying as an in-law with her older sister Clare and her husband, is depicted as a stereotypical sweet, innocent and ignorant Victorian girl: 'Nearly all men feel kindly towards Fanny, who is a very pleasant little object to the eye, and who possesses the gift – more valuable to a woman than any wisdom of her own – of making every man she speaks to feel wise' (DF 27). Thus, Fanny's single outstanding character trait is, according to the narrator, her 'gift' of enlarging every man's self-confidence by displaying her female inferiority. As Virginia Woolf points out in *A Room of One's Own*,

women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. [...] That is why [patriarchal men] insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men. (Woolf 1929:53 f.)

Fanny seems able to deploy her charming, submissive behaviour consciously, for instance in 'pleasing their ears with her little observations of the stars, which make them feel quite clever' (DF 344). In explicitly pointing at Fanny's strategies to please her male acquaintances, and at their glad acceptance of her invitations, the narrator unveils the workings of patriarchal gender roles, ridiculing the weaknesses and vanities that necessitate such behaviour.

Fanny's special 'gift' is a constituting element of being the 'Angel in the House', the Victorian ideal of femininity. In a treatise about this female stereotype, Virginia Woolf presents a list of rules of conduct that were generally obeyed by the 'Angel': 'never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. [Women] must charm, they must conciliate, they must [...] tell lies if they are to succeed' (Woolf 1931:59 f.). The narrative voice of *Dear Faustina* ironically points out more than once that Fanny knows perfectly well how to, as Woolf puts it, 'use all the arts and wiles of [her] sex' (ibid.): 'Fanny has no repartee, and does much better without a gift which in general brings to its possessor, if a woman, neither love nor money' (DF 342).

It is Althea Vane's lack of those qualities, or rather her reluctance to deploy the same self-degrading strategies as her younger sister, that makes her quite incompatible with her brother-in-law, William Boteler. He complains to Clare about Althea being 'so unlike Fanny! [...] She is a bit of a wet-blanket' (DF 367 f.), because Althea never laughs at his chaffs while staying at the Boteler's house – 'The quality of his humour seems to have the faculty of inevitably stiffening her muscles' (DF

368). Fanny in turn gladly gives him the confirmation he needs: ‘you always make me die of laughing. I do not know how you manage it, but you do’ (ibid.). William clearly prefers the younger of his two sisters-in-law, the one who makes him feel witty and clever, and who lets him ‘chronically twine [his arm] round [her] waist’ (DF 334), in short: the one whose presence enlarges his size.

Althea’s elder sister, Clare, is flatly characterised as a modest and mild specimen of her sex who does not possess any outstanding character traits, and whose description amounts in nothing more than a ‘placid, smooth face [...], which in general does not rise above comeliness’ (DF 33, 37). In *Dear Faustina*, Clare functions as representative of the traditional Victorian housewife. As a stereotypical ‘Angel in the House’, she is always affectionate and caring, her voice is characterised by a ‘habitual suave moderation’ (DF 40) and ‘there had never been any touch of hardness in her heart’ (DF 67).

While William needs Fanny, the additional woman in the house to amuse him while his wife rests on the sofa, to give him comfort and to make him feel superior and clever, Clare’s role is more specifically geared to compensate or conceal William’s weaknesses: ‘Althea knows that Clare likes to be near William when he is in company, both to act as a gentle drag upon his sprightliness, and to hinder his asking after people’s dead or disgraced relations, as he has a well-meant, but uncomfortable, way of doing’ (DF 386).

Clare is newly married to the respectable William Boteler, and she is already pregnant. Although she does not feel ill, she always accepts her over-concerned husband’s orders to rest – his pushing a ‘superfluous footstool’ or insisting on ‘undesired sofas’ – with cheerful gratitude (DF 369). The narrator seems to sympathise with Althea’s indignation about William’s ‘tiresome solicitude about his wife’s health’ (ibid.), and consequently uses pejorative adjectives such as ‘needless’, ‘superfluous’, ‘undesired’, and ‘unnecessary’ when referring to his caring gestures. Since the focalisation is variable, it is never completely clear whether those contemptuous comments on traditional conjugality only mirror Althea’s opinion or the narrator’s opinion as well: ‘Among [a group of people] Althea detects the Boteler pair. William has made Clare lean on his arm, as he is fond of doing in public – a tiresome mode of announcement of his hopes of paternity, which always makes his sister-in-law very angry’ (DF 386). Regardless of the question whose attitude is expressed here, the narrator shows a tendency towards an exaggerating and ironic

tone when describing the world of middle-class conventions that Althea eventually chooses to leave behind.

Like her sisters, Althea remembers her father with the dearest and most respectful feelings at the beginning of the novel. At this point, she has already met Faustina Bateson, one of her mother's radical activist friends. Faustina's influence makes Althea start thinking critically about the essential Victorian institutions of marriage and family. But instead of questioning what Faustina dares to call '[her] father's régime' (DF 4), Althea rather transfigures the memories of her 'dear, kind old father' (DF 3) and her conventional upbringing: "He had the limitations, and perhaps a few of the prejudices, of his date; but" – her voice slightly quivering – "I was very, very happy with him" (DF 4). Althea's transfiguration of her deceased father's attitudes even brings them in line with her own infatuation with Faustina:

He might have disliked [Faustina] at first, [...] but afterwards, when he recognized the real grandeur of her character – under all the crust of prejudice that he could not help sharing with people of his date, he was so quick to recognize and so generous to allow nobility in others [...] – he would have rated her as highly as I do. (DF 63 f.)

Althea's high esteem of her father causes her to condemn her 'mother's methods', to complain indignantly about 'the way in which [my mother] tried to ride roughshod over my father's wishes' (DF 6), to accuse her of having made him unhappy (DF 66), and to worry about the 'eccentricities [my mother] may run into [...] now that the check of his firm hand is removed' (DF 6).

Althea talks frankly to Faustina about her initial dislike not only of her mother's ways but also of her mother's friends, including Faustina herself. Althea's radical change of mind in favour of Faustina and her feminist ideas is quite easily explained: 'If it had not been for [...] your extraordinary and most unexpected sympathy and kindness to me at the time [of my father's death] and afterwards, I dare say we might never have been drawn together' (DF 7). When she becomes interested in the ideas of 'the Cause' (DF 295), because she feels attracted to Faustina, a gap between Althea and her brothers and sisters opens up. Explaining away the family dissensions, Faustina praises Althea for having outgrown her favourite sister Clare, and the others. Although Althea deeply regrets losing her sister, she starts to believe in Faustina's persuasions.

While Althea's sisters continue living according to the values they were brought up with after being abandoned by their mother, Althea moves further and further away from the traditions embodied by her father, even finding sympathy for her mother and her emancipatory 'Cause'.

Giving a highly ironic account of traditional Victorian morality, the narrator seems to approve of Althea's decision to emancipate herself from her upbringing. In the course of the novel, Althea learns a lot about social injustices of privileged members of society towards women and the lower classes. Treating her wish to contribute to the remedy of those injustices seriously and without irony, the narration implicitly criticises the dominant order structuring Victorian society, suggesting that there actually is a need for social reform.

2.2 'The Cause'

Before elaborating on two different approaches to social and feminist reform work in *Dear Faustina* that are embodied by the figures of Faustina Bateson and Mrs. Vane on the one hand, and John Drake on the other hand, I will briefly introduce the status quo of the Victorian women's movement at the time of the creation of the novel. Since the position of the New Woman in society is central to *Dear Faustina*, I will concentrate on the feminist issues of 'the Cause' instead of taking all aspects of social reform work into account.

Victorian women's movement

By the end of the nineteenth century, the first British women's movement, also called first-wave feminism, had become one of the central social reform movements characterising the late-Victorian era.

It had its roots in Mary Wollstonecraft's famous protofeminist treatise, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she advocates the social and moral equality of the sexes and formulates the basic claims of feminism a hundred years earlier. Wollstonecraft condemns the sexual double standard and urges women's rights to education, employment and full citizenship (see Richardson/Willis 2001:1).

Subsequently, feminists had been struggling to realise those demands and to challenge woman's subordinate social and political position for the better part of the nineteenth century.

A landmark in nineteenth century's development of women's emancipation was the article *On the Subjection of Women*, published 1869 by the left-liberal sex egalitarian and middle-class reformer John Stuart Mill. In this famous tract, Mill unveils the cultural constructedness of female 'nature'. He describes how women are brought up to fulfil the 'feminine' virtue of submission and to yield to the control of men, believing that 'their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men' (Mill 1869: 232). Exposing that those gendered virtues and gender oppositions were utilised to subjugate women, and comparing women's conditions in patriarchal society with slavery, Mill played a crucial role in Victorian feminism (see Richardson/Willis:5).

Not only ideological thoughts, but also pragmatic forces had contributed to the rise of the Victorian women's movement. In the 1850s, 400,000 'surplus' women, later called 'odd women', were recorded; until 1891, the number had increased to about 900,000. According to the census, those unmarried women were redundant to social and reproductive requirements. Forced to work outside the home in order to support themselves, they posed a threat to separate-sphere ideology: women taking new employment opportunities in the public sector, especially those who occupied jobs that were traditionally reserved to men (see Ledger 1997:19), were no longer preserving their invisible, dependent and protected place in the domestic sphere (see Richardson/Willis 2001:4). The steadily increasing number of women that actually *were* in the workforce reflects how women's social and economic position changed considerably during the course of the Victorian era: between 1851 and 1901, the number of employed women rose from 2,832,000 to 4,751,000 (see *ibid.*:5).

Correspondingly, a comparable development is recorded with regard to educational opportunities for girls. In 1847, the first English college admitted women as students. In 1893, about fifteen university colleges had opened its doors to women. Still, it would take another fifty years until the last of those institutions granted women fully accredited degrees (see *ibid.*:7).

Another central area of feminist reform was marriage law. By the end of the century, married women got the right to own property. Furthermore, they were awarded the right to receive periodic allowance in case their husbands left them. Yet,

divorce on grounds of adultery was still reserved to husbands, and they could still force sexual intercourse upon their wives without being guilty of rape (see *ibid.*:7 f.).

This sexual double standard inscribed into Victorian marriage law and the Contagious Diseases Acts from the 1860s invoked a claim for moral reform taking shape in the social purity campaigns that were extremely significant for fin de siècle feminism. The Contagious Diseases Acts that had been introduced in order to control sexually transmitted disease amounted to a state regulation and detention of prostitution. The Acts built on the assumption that the female body was responsible for polluting the larger social body (see Ledger 2007:158). According to hegemonic morality, working-class women were prone to immoral sexual behaviour – that is, to prostitution – and thus guilty of ‘corrupting’ and ‘infecting’ men (see Heilmann 2000a:78). The moral and legal double standard regulating marriage and prostitution implied that society condoned middle-class men’s sexual exploitation of working-class women (see *ibid.*:79). Social purity campaigners, the leading New Woman novelist Sarah Grand among them, turned the basic assumption of the Contagious Diseases Acts on its head, arguing that it was the male body and male sexuality that needed to be controlled (see Ledger 2007:158). They pointed out that the source of the moral and health-related decline of the nation was not to be assigned to prostitutes but to man’s essentially reckless sexuality and his lack of self-control. Arguing that way, social purity feminists deployed the same patriarchal myths of biological determinism on which Victorian morality and gender ideology grounded, and which had been used for decades to diminish woman’s influence, but reconfigured them by emphasising woman’s role in the ‘race regeneration’ of the nation (see Richardson/Willis 2001:8). Only women, who were believed to be innately moral, pure and spiritually superior, were considered capable of restoring England’s health and morality. Social purity was bound to aspects of eugenics, not only demanding the instruction of men in self-control, in other words (pre-marital) chastity for both sexes, but also making the ‘sexual selection of a morally sound partner a matter of civic responsibility’ (Heilmann 2000a:79). In order to take that responsibility for the English nation and to protect their own bodies from institutionalised sexual violence, modern women needed an appropriate sex education. Thus, woman’s right to education, one of the earliest demands of feminism, was at the fin de siècle reinterpreted to include the right to sexual information (see *ibid.*). All of the three main demands of social purity feminists – an

end to the sexual double standard, sex education for women and the civic duty of chastity – were closely related to the aim of reforming marriage.

Simultaneously with social purity feminism, there existed another, more radical approach for woman's liberation from the sexual double standard. The advocates of 'free love', among them New Woman writers George Egerton, Olive Schreiner and Gertrude Dix, demanded sexual parity between women and men, that is, the right to the same sexual freedoms (see Ledger 2007:153). They suggested not simply a reformation of institutional marriage, but rather its replacement with 'free' marriage. Woman's social and economic independence was the main argument for that replacement, since they considered female autonomy as possible only outside the institution of marriage (see Heilmann 2000a:90) and economic independence as primary condition for freedom in marriage. According to the most notorious feminist Mona Caird, only love, trust and friendship should bind a couple together (see Ledger 1997:21 f.).

To sum up, in the course of the nineteenth century women's movement had made considerable advances (see Ledger 1997:12). Women had gained a number of improvements in their legal position, the rights to employment, property and education, which granted them a remarkable independence. This independence on the one hand opened up economical opportunities and alternatives to marriage, which was the reason that feminism began to pose a considerable threat to the foundations of Victorian society at the end of the era. On the other hand this new independence and the existence of alternatives paved the way for a fundamental critique of traditional marriage and for a feminist vision of social and marital reconstruction (see *ibid.*:78), which mostly, however, did not seek to undermine the institution of marriage as such.

Obviously, Mary Wollstonecraft's early feminist demands were still central to the campaigns of her successors a hundred years later. The most prominent of her claims, woman's right to full citizenship, would be taken up by women's suffrage movement in the early decades of the twentieth century; these campaigns, focusing on woman's right to vote, are broadly conceived as the core of first-wave feminism.

Faustina's 'Cause'

According to her self-portrayal, eponymous heroine Faustina Bateson has 'devoted all [her] womanhood, every heart-beat, every pulse-throb' (DF 156) to 'the Cause'. It

is never clearly specified what she means when speaking of the ‘Cause of suffering humanity’ (DF 174). While showing that Faustina works a lot, mainly writing articles for papers called *Universal* or *Firebrand*, and that she can hardly ever spare a free evening, the narrator reveals only few details about the contents of her work. Once or twice it is mentioned that she does research on the topic of the ‘Child Insurance Bill’, or that she is always foremost in the fight about factory legislation (DF 150), but mostly her occupations are outlined rather vaguely. When for example going to a trades-union platform, she ‘goes forth to war against the Troy of “Capital”’ (DF 207).

Faustina is a regular member of a weekly tea-party that has been started to aid ‘needy young women writers of reforming views’ (DF 160). It is never made clear which views those fellow women writers exactly hold; instead the narrator adopts Althea’s perspective, characterising the core members of the club from the eyes of an outsider as women with ‘wildly cropped grizzled hair and super-manly coats and waistcoats [...] – the female “Old Guard” [...] of the army of advance’ (DF 164). It seems acknowledged here that this ‘super-manly’ type of New Women (the same type Faustina belongs to, as we will see further down) is fighting in the front row for advance. But an earlier passage denies those women the smallest influence in the outer world, ridiculing the celebrities of the club as ‘gods of a little esoteric clique, whose godhood seldom reaches the large inferior outer world’ (DF 161). A few pages later, the narrator assumes that the ‘now confessedly superior sex’ (DF 170), meaning the female sex, might contain weaknesses after all. Especially those passages, in which formulations are taken up that seem to follow an insider perspective (‘inferior outer world’ or ‘superior sex’), undermine the work and value of those insiders by ironically suggesting their insufficiency. While never clearly defined, Faustina’s work is, thus, clearly diminished.

Faustina’s interest in social reform is not focused on one single aspect of injustice, but rather on the ‘whole colossal body’ (DF 19) of it. When asked to write about one specific subject concerning the life of factory workers, she arrogantly refuses to occupy herself with that single problem, allegedly because she conceives the topic as only ‘one more pebble upon the gigantic cairn that is being built up against the day of retribution’ (DF 150).

Her approach to social reform work can best be understood if we look at the plans of her fellow radical reform worker, Althea’s mother. Mrs. Vane, who will be

properly introduced in Ch. 2.3, describes her ‘noble’ plan of sacrificing her life to the ‘pity of humanity’ (DF 23) as follows: as president of a newly formed society of women thinkers and workers, who are ready to invest what their society demands of them – ‘the whole being, the entire life, with no reservations – the soul, body, heart, and energies of each of its members’ (DF 17) –, she aims at redressing the balance between man and woman, rich and poor, the treader-down and the trodden (DF 16). But in contrast to the hundred of other comparable societies, Mrs. Vane’s association intends to apply itself to the ‘whole colossal body’ of the subject – the balance ‘between *every* wronger and *every* wronged, in *each* stratum of society, in *each* nationality, and in *every* quarter of the globe’ (DF 17, my italics). While presenting her ‘Cause’ in the most totalitarian and exaggerated way, Mrs. Vane does not specify any concrete aims or realisable plans. Her ideology is, like Faustina’s, characterised by delusions of grandeur, rather than practicable activity.

Although Faustina’s visiting of the club associates her with New Woman circles, her ‘Cause’ cannot be grasped solely in terms of the woman’s movement. Faustina’s ‘fighting the Hydra’ (DF 156) is not synonymous with feminist activity. What is noteworthy, though, is the way the narration deals with the main subject of late-Victorian feminism, the Marriage Question. While Faustina’s words about her ‘Cause’ remain almost empty of concreteness, she is given considerably more room to ferociously pronounce her convictions in the marriage debate. Faustina for example criticises Mrs. Vane for having married at all: ‘that was the root-mistake of her life, as it has been of so many millions of other women’ (DF 11). When talking to Althea about her sister’s wedding, she contemptuously replaces the words ‘wedding’ and ‘bride’ with ‘Function’ and ‘victim’ (DF 75). Althea, who is present at the wedding, reflects upon it in a similar way, denoting Clare’s prospect to fulfil ‘that contract of which Faustina has only lately explained to her the full iniquity’ as ‘awful fate’ (DF 69).

It is through Althea’s reflections about the topic that the reader learns most about Faustina’s opinion, which has rubbed off on the younger lady. For instance, Althea explains self-consciously to Clare that ‘ages of tyranny and the radical viciousness of the present social system’ are responsible for men’s faults and selfishness (DF 61). Althea clearly attributes her ‘deep abhorrence’ (DF 216) of marriage to her mentor, admitting that she fully intended to marry, till Faustina ‘lifted a corner of the veil’ (DF 76).

Faustina's abhorrence of marriage is the only of her convictions depicted by the novel in some detail. In contrast to her 'Cause', which always remains abstract and elusive, her standpoint towards the Marriage Question seems genuine and comprehensible.

Drake's 'Cause'

Faustina's approach to the solution of 'suffering humanity' – her disregarding single aspects in favour of the whole body of injustice – stands in sharp contrast to that of her acquaintance John Drake. Faustina contemptibly calls him 'a blundering amateur, with no comprehensive grasp for the subject, only a hot-headed zeal for one or two details of it' (DF 155 f.). But different from Faustina, John Drake is characterised as someone who actually *does* sacrifice his life serving philanthropic aims – and therefore he is classed by Althea 'with the martyrs of humanity, the noble and good' (DF 247).

After having found out about the poisonous living and working conditions of his father's factory workers, John Drake renounced his father's massive fortune, amounting to twenty thousand pounds a year. Since his father would not listen to his suggestions for improving the conditions, Drake brought his business to notice. His father disinherited him promptly, but his mother's heritage, several hundred pounds a year, are still enough of an income to allow Drake the life of a gentleman. And yet, Drake leads a noble, modest life, living and working at a reform settlement in Canning Town, organising meetings, giving lectures and the like. Having built up the settlement, he is rewarded by Althea with 'fervid appreciation of the energy, the method, the selfless, tireless industry, the high hope, the large love, that have gone to build this unpretending ark in the middle of the wretched human sea around' (DF 252).

Drake is the only character who is completely spared the narrator's irony and depicted in a thoroughly good light. The narrator asserts that 'he is as good as his word' (DF 102), his concerns are concretely defined (like, for example, making public the noxious effect that chromate of potash has on workers, DF 147) and his solutions are practicable. And by means of his real-life reports, Drake evokes a full understanding of social injustices in Althea.

Tired of the idleness of a middle-class lady's life, Althea is willing to devote all her energies to social work as well. But by the time she meets Drake, Faustina's

contemptuous disdain of her abilities has robbed Althea completely off her self-confidence, which is why she is unable to think of a way to realise her aspirations. Drake works out a solution for her, offering her a place in the Women's Settlement near his own settlement, where she can work under his guidance, instructing young women in needlework – an activity most detested by feminist women, because it signifies domesticity and suitable feminine endeavour (see Murphy 2000:75).

By offering this moderate plan to Althea, Drake reveals his standpoint towards the Woman Question. He suggests a lifestyle to her that is different from the bourgeois model of mother and wife, but that is still compatible with the framework of Victorian conventions. Doing local social work, Althea will not have to leave the domestic realm assigned to decent middle-class women by separate-spheres ideology. Deborah Cohler describes this fin de siècle variety of woman's 'proper place' as originating in a clearly anti-feminist position:

Woman's domain may extend from [the] biological reproductive imperative to a moral guardianship. For some antisuffragists, [the] maternal role may extend to women a domain beyond their own children to include local social work or political involvement at a municipal level. In line with Victorian club work and social reform, antisuffragists argued that women's influence must remain cordoned off to social rather than political issues.

(Cohler 2010:35)

The necessity of Althea's remaining in her sphere is also expressed by her characterisation. After having left the sphere of home and conventions she grew up with, Althea is depicted as extremely insecure and completely insufficient for nearly everything she sets about doing. Her main character traits are weakness, helplessness and need for advice (see DF 99 ff., 198, 259 f.), and only with Drake's support and guidance (see DF 398) is she able to find a new proper place, as her appeal to him indicates: 'if I only could find someone [...] to teach me how to set about rebuilding my life; the bricks are there, if only some mason would show me how to lay them upon each other. Left to myself, it will be but a jerry-built edifice' (DF 391 f.).

Althea's characterisation seems to imply that middle-class women who strive for an 'improper' sphere will be in deep trouble until rescued by a gentleman with moderate reformist attitudes. Showing that feminine weakness must be compensated with male strength (see Murphy 2000:74), *Dear Faustina* reinforces the ideology of gender binarism. The novel suggests that a reform movement based on a community of woman workers could never lead to a good solution; praising the leading and supporting nature of male influence, it implies that a successful realisation of a

reformist agenda can only be achieved through patriarchal guidance and approval (see *ibid.*:73 ff.).

Philanthropic social work, or ‘slumming’, as it was called by the Britons (see Koven 2004:4), was a fashion in fin de siècle England. *Dear Faustina* reflects on this fashion of slum benevolence in an ironic account of Althea’s admiring view of the ‘noble’ life of slum workers:

Do you mean [I shall] live with you in the slums at Notting Hill? Oh, how often I have thought of the tales you have told me of your experiences there! Of the people sitting out all night upon their doorsteps in summer because they could not face the vermin in their hideous beds! Do you really think me worthy and able to share that noble life? (DF 45 f.)

Faustina who, according to this passage, has earlier conveyed an enthusiasm about living in the slums, no longer seems to act up to her opinion: ‘We can serve the Cause, *our* Cause, the Cause of Humanity, better just now in a Chelsea flat than in a Notting Hill lodging-house’ (*ibid.*).

Faustina’s work is dissociated from philanthropy through a conversation between Althea and her brother Edward, the new patriarch of the family. Edward asks Althea, while she is still under Faustina’s influence, to ‘refrain from airing your peculiar views’ to the woman he is courting. Althea scornfully answers: ‘You are behind the times. Do not you know that philanthropy is the *fashion?*’, whereupon Edward replies: ‘Philanthropy! Yes; I was not alluding to philanthropy’ (DF 136). Edward, who represents a thoroughly traditional standpoint in the novel, does not object to his contemporaries’ enthusiasm for philanthropy, but to Faustina’s ‘peculiar views’.

In joining the unquestioned philanthropist Drake at the end of the novel, Althea moves to Canning Town. Ann Ardis claims that through this decision to permanently join a settlement house for working-class women in south London, ‘Althea chooses for herself a life more defiant of bourgeois ideology than either her mother’s or Faustina’s’, since none of those two ever truly left the middle-class sphere (e. g. Chelsea), whereas ‘Althea proves herself true – as her name suggests – to the workers’ cause’ (Ardis 1990:123 f.).

A close reading of *Dear Faustina* refutes Ardis’ statement of Althea’s ‘radical life’ choice (*ibid.*:122). Althea and Drake certainly choose to live in a working-class environment, but as his mother’s heir, Drake leads the life of an English gentleman, while helping the poor as a philanthropist. Drake and Althea reveal their class

consciousness when talking about the workers: he warns her that the factory girls who are invited for tea and entertainment ‘are of the class who go hop-picking, and have not a very high standard of politeness’; looking back at him cheerfully, Althea replies: ‘All the better; we shall have the more glory in humanizing them’ (DF 256). The factory girls are consequently depicted as a ‘riotous but still quite good-humoured mass [...] scrambling over their chair-backs and hasting as fast as the encumbered nature of the ground will let them to the buffet’ (DF 262), resembling rather hungry animals than human beings. Teaching needlework to those primitive factory girls, Althea’s contribution to the settlement’s goal of ‘reforming the working classes and making them more like the middle classes, and hence under control’, is framed by a ‘polite capitalistic and patriarchal system’ (Hager 2007:471).

In moving within the framework of middle-class conventionality while ‘humanizing’ the lower class, Althea and Drake do not actually defy bourgeois ideology. In the contrary, Althea is shown to have great difficulties with emancipating herself from the conventions she was raised with. Her characterisation rather suggests that a lady cannot live other than she has been socialised to live, that she can only successfully help the poor and uneducated when reforming them from her fixed, privileged standpoint. While still living with Faustina and being forced to lead a spartan working-class life, Althea could not access her capacities. Installed in a place that neither threatens her class nor her gender affiliation, Althea will be perfectly able to exhaust her (highly limited) potential, as the end of *Dear Faustina* implies.

While Faustina’s ‘Cause’ is marked by megalomaniac but empty words that are never supported by deeds, Drake’s reform work is characterised by a practical and selfless philanthropy. Juxtaposing their attitudes towards social work, the novel expresses a sympathy for Drake’s extremely moderate approach, presenting it as the superior one. When Faustina denies Drake any ‘comprehensive grasp for the subject’ (DF 155), because he chooses to focus on practical solutions to a few aspects of the social problem, instead of lamenting about the whole, she ironically names one of the main characteristics used by the narration to praise Drake and discredit her. Faustina’s contemptuous view is most obviously not shared by the narrator who sanctions Drake’s approach by for example awarding him Althea at the end.

Representing a moderate solution to social reform work and demonstrating a slightly new, and yet conservative model of woman's place, John Drake appears to be the narrator's mouthpiece. As we will see in the following chapter, Rhoda Broughton's account of the emancipated woman, seeking for more radical change than Althea, reassures that the novel held a rather anti-feminist position in the fin de siècle debates about woman's proper role.

2.3 The New Woman

The phenomenon of the New Woman stood in close connection to the late-Victorian women's movement and was utterly central to the literary culture of the fin de siècle. The emergence of the cultural figure was effected by the rise of feminist activism. Both the term 'feminism', coined early in the century by the French socialist Charles Fourier (see Rowbotham 1992:8), and the concept of the New Woman entered the English language in the mid-1890s and were later applied to the suffragists.

Although the popular term has always been used as a synonym for contemporary feminist activists, social reformers and popular novelists like Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner and George Egerton, it was predominantly a fictional construct (see Ledger 1997:1). When the New Woman was named and defined in a pair of oppositional articles by Sarah Grand and Ouida, published 1894 in the periodical press (see Grand 1894), she had already become an omnipresent 'fictional archetype' (Ledger/Luckhurst 2000:75). The periodical press and the fiction market 'explored the same range of social and cultural concerns throughout the [fin de siècle] period' (Ledger 2007:157). Therefore, the New Woman proliferated in the periodical press of the 1880s and 90s, and the topos was taken up in over a hundred novels (see *ibid.*:158), written by opponents and critics of women's emancipation, as well as by feminist writers and those who were ambivalent about the Woman Question. Conservative public organs such as the journal *Punch*, 'Victorian England's monitor of shifting cultural norms' (Koven 2004:14), and a considerable number of anti-feminist novelists canalised their fears about the activities of the feminist movement in a discursive response, constructing the phenomenon of the New Woman (see Ledger 1997:1).

While Ardis claims that many textual configurations of the New Woman were deployed to undermine the women's movement (see Ardis 1990:12), Sally Ledger

emphasises that those anti-feminist attacks made a contribution in favour of the success of feminism. Drawing on Foucault's theory of dominant and reverse discourse, Ledger explains how the offenders of the New Woman 'prised open a discursive space for her [...] that was quickly filled by feminist textual productions' (Ledger 1997:9). Thus, the dominant late-Victorian discourse on the New Woman made possible the formation of a reverse discourse, that is, a feminist discourse using the same vocabulary and categories that had been applied to discredit their own cause.

The feminist usage of the concept New Woman during the 1890s is evident, but the sympathetically characterised protagonists of the New Woman novels¹⁰ did not have so much in common with the contemptuously depicted New Women of anti-feminist fiction.

In English periodicals and novels of that period, a variety of different names for that cultural figure can be found: the New Woman was also known as 'wild woman', 'glorified spinster', 'advanced woman', 'modern woman', 'Novissima', 'revolting daughter', 'odd woman', 'superfluous woman', 'shrieking sisterhood', 'half woman', 'unnatural hybrids of no-sex' or 'desexualised half-man' (see Ardis 1990:1; Ledger 1997:3; Ledger 2007:156; Murphy 2000:60).

As this list of discursive constructs suggests, the representations of the New Woman are by no means homogeneous. The contested term combines various contradictory attributes, depending on the different discursive contexts: sometimes she was depicted as 'mannish' or 'unsexed', sometimes as 'womanly' woman or even as oversexed; she was seen as anti-maternal or supermother, as supporter or opponent of domestic values, as agent of social regeneration or symptom of decline (see Pykett 2001:xi).

In the debates about the New Woman, woman's conventional role variously as wife, mother or sexual subject were all under scrutiny (see Ledger 2007:156). Before she became associated with women's suffrage in early-twentieth century, the New Woman was mainly deployed to negotiate topics related to the shifting concepts of gender and sexuality, such as the Marriage Question and the sexual double standard, motherhood, sex education for women, social purity and sexual freedom, aspects of

¹⁰ Usually, the whole corpus featuring the topos of the New Woman is called *New Woman fiction* or *New Woman novels*. For a better understanding, I use this label only when referring to novels written by so-called New Women, that is, by late-Victorian feminists. When dealing with texts of their opponents, I use simplifying terms such as *anti-feminist novels*.

gender deviance and sexual deviance. Of course, other subjects related to early feminist achievements were also acted out by the fictional New Woman, such as woman's access to education, employment and economic opportunities, and as well as women's choices of alternative lifestyles.

Most representations of the New Woman corresponded in some basic assumptions about her deviation from traditional femininity, presenting her as independent, well-educated, practicably clothed middle-class woman (see Schaffer/Wolfson 2007:203). Apart from those common characteristics, the narrative portrayals of the New Woman show a large scale of variants, depending on the ideological context of each representation.

Feminist representations of the New Woman

As a response to the disreputable image that was given to the New Woman by the dominant discourse, as we will see further down, feminist writers widely eschewed to get their protagonists involved with disreputable debates surrounding female sexual desire (see Ledger 1997:124), or Female Inversion. Being anxious about the popularity of their novels, New Woman writers avoided to implicitly confirm the association made by anti-feminists between the feminist movement and deviant female sexuality. Any connection between their cause and the dominant fears about female perversion would inhibit the power of their movement. Therefore, female same-sex desire seems completely absent from late-Victorian feminist fiction, whereas close female bondings are firmly established in those texts (see Heilmann 2000a:101). It was not before the 1920s that the first affirmative discourse of female same-sex sexuality emerged with Radclyffe Hall's famous novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) (see Bauer 2009a:2).

Most New Woman writers preferred to focus with their novels on issues linked to the feminist cause. The two prevailing concerns of the late-Victorian women's movement (presented more detailed in Ch. 2.2) were social purity on the one hand, and 'free love' on the other hand. Accordingly, the fictional New Women of those feminist texts are either concerned with a reform of marriage, rejecting institutionalised male sexual exploitation of women and demanding extramarital chastity for both sexes in the interest of a healthy nation (see Heilmann 2000a:90, 115), or with demanding sexual parity between women and men (see Ledger 2007:155),

‘projecting a new kind of sexual relationship outside conventional marriage’ (Heilmann 2000a:116).

However, Heike Bauer and Ann Heilmann emphasise that there actually was an affirmative feminist discourse on ‘gender inversion’ (if not on ‘sexual inversion’) in fin de siècle literature. Coining a new term, Bauer produces evidence for the existence of the ‘feminist invert’ in New Woman novels, a literary phenomenon of gender transgression that was functionalised for feminist criticism. Bauer dissociates her study from earlier critics, such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg who reads female masculinity as an indicator of the failed feminist politics of the 1920s, while praising the New Women of the late-nineteenth century for rejecting the sexologist discourse of ‘sexual inversion’ and the anti-feminist stereotype of the ‘mannish feminist’ (see Bauer 2009a:14 and Smith-Rosenberg 1989:265). By contrast to Smith-Rosenberg’s assumptions, Bauer examines how late-Victorian feminists theorised sex and took up the concept of ‘inversion’ outside of scientific debates, conceiving sex in terms of gender (see Bauer 2009a:83). According to Bauer, the ‘feminist invert’ used discursive strategies of gender reversal in order to articulate feminist politics, while marginalising the disreputable issue of female same-sex desire (see *ibid.*:11). By means of activities and attributes that were perceived to belong to the male sphere, New Women criticised the female condition and dominant ideas of gender, degeneration and social order (see *ibid.*:83). Those gender transgressions, broadly conceived as female ‘mannishness’, were conflated by the opponents of emancipated women with matters of sexual deviance into the concept of ‘sexual inversion’ (see *ibid.*:84). Bauer states that the ‘feminist invert’ formulated a distinct discourse of Female Inversion, embracing a notion of female masculinity and focusing on ‘the *processes* of producing and refuting sex-gender binaries’ (*ibid.*:111) instead of same-sex sexuality.

Heilmann elaborates similarly how New Woman novels established an affirmative discourse of ‘gender inversion’ by taking up cross-dressing as a metaphor for feminism (see Heilmann 2000b:94). In demonstrating the essential performativity of gender, female cross-dressing highlights the constructed nature of separate spheres and challenges ‘the patriarchal conflation of biological maleness, socially constructed masculinity and hegemonic power’ (*ibid.*:83). Heilmann emphasises, like Bauer, that New Woman writers were concerned to clear their protagonists of suspicions of sexual deviance (or sexual desire of any kind), trying to avoid the charge of sexual

perversion, while exploring the metaphor of masquerade to destabilise the category of gender and to release women from the constraints of male-defined femininity (see *ibid.*:93 f.).

New Woman fiction represents, as Heilmann has demonstrated, an ‘influential force pushing for sexual, social and political transformation at the fin de siècle’ (*ibid.*:107) – New Woman novels can be regarded as the mouthpiece of late-Victorian feminism. The first and best-selling corpus of explicitly feminist literature was not merely used to articulate women’s needs in a tumultuous time (see Schaffer/Wolfson 2007:205); it was more than a literary response to social changes. New Woman novels were deployed to spread an obviously ideological message: ‘feminism could provide a political and structural solution to the problems women faced in a male-dominated society’ (Heilmann 2000a:101). Equating New Woman fiction with ‘first-wave cultural feminism’ (*ibid.*:10), Heilmann claims that this genre occupied a central place in the feminist movement. According to her, New Woman fiction was an agent of social and political transformation. This finding has its correspondence in the fact that many writers, such as Sarah Grand and Mona Caird, were committed feminists and took an active part in the movement and in related political causes (see *ibid.*:4, 10).

Mrs. Vane – Establishing the stereotype in *Dear Faustina*

Before continuing with an overview of anti-feminist fictional accounts of the New Woman, I will give a detailed example from *Dear Faustina*, which shows very well how the novel establishes the stereotype. I will investigate the gender-related ideological discourses deployed by the narration to produce the New Woman identity.

Right at the beginning of the novel, the reader is confronted with a short but striking portrait of Althea’s mother, a radical woman who has many similarities with the eponymous character. Mrs. Vane enters the scene only once, in the first chapter, when she announces to her children that she intends to change her life completely by leaving them for good. However short her presence in the novel may be, it is of great importance to the fictional representation of the New Woman in *Dear Faustina*.

Mrs. Vane is introduced sitting at her deceased husband’s writing-table, which she has covered with reports, schedules, books of reference, type-written letters and socialist journals, while the old books in the shelves around her – clearly belonging

to her late husband's remains – suggest that she has only cleared a little space for herself in his realm.

The narrator's description of Mrs. Vane, who is regarded with a 'complete want of sympathy' (DF 5) by her children, is extremely telling:

Were it not for a slight condescension in the matter of petticoats, it would not be obvious to a stranger that it is not a slender man who is preparing to address the little group, so austere masculine is the just-gray-touched thick short hair parted on one side, the coat, the tie, the waistcoat. This widow might at a pinch, and behind a table which would conceal the degradation of the female skirt, well pass for a little widower. (DF 13 f.)

Mrs. Vane's appearance is so 'austere masculine' that she would well pass for 'a slender man' or 'a little widower'. The impression of masculinity is, according to the narrator, evoked by Mrs. Vane's clothes that are generally worn by men – a coat, a tie, a waistcoat –, as well as by her haircut, her 'just-gray-touched thick short hair parted on one side'. She cut her hair after Faustina's example, in a style that Althea used to hate before she developed her devotion to Faustina. 'Even now', Althea admits in a conversation with Faustina, 'I rather regret that your example induced mother to adopt the same style of hairdressing' (DF 7).

A bit further down, the narrator mentions Mrs. Vane's 'cool, steely-gray eyes' (DF 14), utilising the strong symbolism of the description of the eye to indicate a lack of emotion in her. Missing emotions in a Victorian female character can doubtlessly be read as a lack of motherliness that is, in the context of Victorian culture, synonymous with a lack of femininity. Against the background of Mrs. Vane's characterisation as masculine woman, the quality of her eyes – lacking a feminine character – can be read as bodily marker of masculinity. If it were not for those cool eyes, Mrs. Vane's masculinity would only be linked to *acquired* attributes, since the narrator does not make any further suggestions that would characterise Mrs. Vane's *nature* as masculine.

In addition to her appearance, Mrs. Vane's rhetorical capacities and her demeanour are described in a way that strengthens the impression of masculinity. When she confronts her children with her radical speech, she is calm and determined (see DF 20). The absence of 'awkward and anguished gestures' (DF 14), expressing her perfect self-confidence, lets 'her speech [flow] with perfect round fluency' (ibid.). Mrs. Vane never needs to collect herself, she neither pauses from a difficulty in proceeding, nor 'because her theme or her breath is exhausted' (DF 17). Whenever she pauses, it is 'with a calculated intention of letting [her] words have time to sink

into the soil of her hearers' minds' (DF 14 f.). Mrs. Vane is a very skilled speaker with professional rhetorical capacities. It is made explicit by what the narrator calls her renunciation of 'womanly words or modes of expression' (DF 14) that her speech behaviour is conceived as masculine by her hearers.

Interestingly, Mrs. Vane's masculine way of speaking mirrors two aspects that have become the focus of gender and language research from the 1970s onwards (see e. g. Lakoff 1975, Eakons 1978). Firstly, it implies a fundamental difference in the speech behaviour of the two genders. The tone of the narration suggests that the signals of either speech behaviour are so obvious that, when a narrator installs male speech behaviour in a female character, it has a parodistic effect. Mrs. Vane's characterisation implies that an awareness of gender-related speech behaviour could be assumed in a late-Victorian reader. Secondly, with Mrs. Vane's portrait, the novel anticipates another standpoint of more recent gender and language research (see West 1995, Weatherall 2002), assuming that the difference in male and female speech behaviour is evident but not necessarily essential. Rather, as Mrs. Vane's performance of male speech behaviour implies, gender-specific speech behaviour is an acquired attribute.

Masculinity is, according to hegemonic ideological concepts of the fin de siècle, understood to be the superior one of the two intelligible genders, the gender that is associated with biological maleness, hegemonic power, and a considerable number of privileges (see Heilmann 2000b:83). Producing evidence from Aimée Duc's contemporary novel *Sind es Frauen? Roman über das dritte Geschlecht* (1901), Claudia Breger states that the 'masculinized female' ironically became a 'trendy being', a 'figure of partial privilege' in the discursive formation of hegemonic masculinity and anti-feminism (Breger 2005:100 f.). She draws on Otto Weininger, a most notorious anti-feminist, who praised the 'virilized female' in comparison to the weaker second sex, glorifying her masculinity as 'the condition of her higher degree of development' (Weininger 1903, quoted by *ibid.*).

Breger's astonishing observation of a discursive preference of the masculine woman over the feminine woman is not in the least supported by the narratorial characterisation of Mrs. Vane. Rhetorically sustaining the ideology of gender hierarchy, Broughton's account of the masculinised woman clearly ridicules Mrs. Vane, marking her as inferior to both, masculine men and feminine women.

Mrs. Vane's wearing petticoats and a skirt – in other words her concession to traditional female attire – is denoted as a 'condescension' and 'degradation'. Is the 'condescension in the matter of petticoats' to be understood as Mrs. Vane's active choice of female garments which is, according to the dominant ideology, an indicator of second-rateness, when she could as well dress completely in male clothes? Does the 'degradation of the female skirt' signify that Mrs. Vane feels degraded by the fact that she can be identified as a woman? Marking her choice of female garments in that way, the narrator seems on the one hand to convey Mrs. Vane's disdainful opinion of traditional female clothing and the lifestyle it stands for, while on the other hand ridiculing this opinion by means of repetition and exaggerated wording. It is thus not the narrator's intention to criticise the ideology of gender hierarchy, but rather to satirise a feminist standpoint, embodied in this scene by Mrs. Vane, that works to unveil this hierarchy and tries to defy it.

The 'degradation' happens because Mrs. Vane's audience can *see* the attributes signifying her femaleness. It is explicitly pointed out that, if a table would conceal those female garments, Mrs. Vane could well pass as a man – mainly due to her cross-dressing with male garments. It is, according to that logic, again the attributes of the outer appearance – the visible attributes – which decide whether an individual is conceived as a specimen of one or the other sex.

But while the narrator does not provide Mrs. Vane the concealment needed for a successful passing, speculations about her supposed passing are made. Mrs. Vane does not simply pass *as a man*. The narrator makes sure to mark her female 'mannishness', both times when referring to her passing, as inferior to a masculinity that is coupled with a male body. Althea's mother passes as a 'little' widower or as a 'slender' man. Both adjectives can be read literally, referring to the difference of her bodily condition from that of an average man who would probably be taller and more powerfully built. But at the same time, those attributions classify this woman who, breaking with the compulsory order of sex and gender (see Butler 1990:8 ff.), could from the outside pass as a man, but whose biological sex is female, as inferior, smaller, less powerful – understood in more general terms.

Is the impression of Mrs. Vane's inferiority explicable by the *acquired* quality of her masculinity, which lacks the *natural essence* of biological maleness? Are the contemptible formulations of the narrator coined by essentialist ideology? Does the narrator of *Dear Faustina* intend to emphasise that a woman can struggle to adopt as

many masculine attributes as she likes, but still, she could never acquire the real grandeur of male masculinity? The ridiculing tone in which Mrs. Vane is characterised as masculine implies that she is not (and can never be) a man's equal. This entails that her feminist claim for equal rights is implicitly marked as unjustifiable.

A woman like Mrs. Vane can pass the border of traditional gender spheres in placing herself at her husband's writing-table, spreading her own papers and thoughts on it, but she is not able to take possession of the whole room once occupied by him; his dominance is still represented in the old books covering the walls. The impression of Mr. Vane's dominance, still perceptible in the house after his death, is supported by Mrs. Vane's report of the past years. She resumes: "the aims and aspirations of my life [...] have hitherto been [entirely] frustrated by" – a slight and telling hiatus – "circumstances" (DF 15).

When she reflects about her role as mother, she specifies this allusion to her late husband's influence:

I have done my duty by you according to my lights. If I have lavished fewer caresses upon you than other mothers, I have laboured harder than most to impart to you that habit of mind, that mode of regarding life, which are more valuable than any endearments. That I have failed to inoculate you with my ideas is due [...] chiefly to the existence of a strongly antagonistic influence entirely outweighing and rendering nugatory mine. That influence no longer exists [...] but its effect remains. (DF 21)

She detects a 'fundamental difference in nature' (ibid.) between herself and her children, a difference responsible partly for her failure to influence them and entirely for their wish to continue living according to their father's views. That Mr. Vane's dominance over his wife survived him is not only testified by his house, but also by his children; and therefore Mrs. Vane announces to them that 'our ways must part' (DF 22).

How is this woman, who deliberately resigns the guardianship of her minor children to their elder brother, characterised in her function as a mother? She does not value endearments and frankly admits to have 'lavished fewer caresses upon [her children] than other mothers'. Her children have, as Althea reflects earlier, never been able to get near their aloof mother (see DF 11). Mrs. Vane speaks to them with a slight intonation of contempt, when addressing matters important to her (see DF 16), and implicitly denotes them as hearers with 'the meanest capacity' (DF 18). She is obviously presented as lacking all significant character traits of a traditional mother – loving care for her children coupled with self-sacrifice.

What is outstanding though is Mrs. Vane's urge to impart to her children 'that habit of mind, that mode of regarding life'. It shows that she has, in fact, sustained a kind of relationship to them, done her duty, as she puts it, but with a priority unconventional for a mother. Her priority in breeding her children lay within their intellectual education, within the transmission of values. Thus, she tried to occupy a position in a family that has traditionally been reserved to the patriarch and was accordingly occupied by Mr. Vane. Reinforcing the separate-spheres ideology, the narration suggests that a mother's striving for the traditional role of the father is not likely to be rewarded, but rather to end in failure and separation from her children.

Mrs. Vane disqualifies herself as a housewife, claiming not only that her scheme for the future is incompatible with the duties of family life, but denying herself the ability to fulfil them properly as well: 'For those cares, those duties, I have never been endowed with any special aptitudes' (DF 18). Her future life will, as Mrs. Vane announces, not admit a settled home. "It will entail much moving from place to place, much public speaking" – a slight writhing on the part of the down-faced elder son – "an entire freedom from the ties of family life' (DF 22). Both aspects addressed here: the emancipated woman's lack of special domestic aptitudes and the neglect of family life as a necessary side effect of radical social activism, correspond to wide-spread anti-feminist prejudices of the era. Edward's writhing at his mother's words expresses his aversion of women who desire to move in public and to speak publicly. As his father's successor of the patriarchal position in the family, he is characterised as a representative of a deeply anti-feminist standpoint towards women's emancipation.

It should be emphasised at this point that Mrs. Vane does not regard her unfitness for domestic life as a flaw. In the contrary, she considers her existence 'destined [...] to higher and broader uses' (DF 18), and, after having sacrificed the bigger part of her existence to those lesser duties, cannot wait to 'set sail [...] upon that noble voyage which, but for the clogging, petty impediments of domestic life, [she] should have embarked upon twenty-five years ago' (DF 19 f.). The ironic tone of exaggeration reveals that the narration has an obviously critical standpoint towards Mrs. Vane's self-complacent rejection of family life, instead of for example praising her attitudes as progressive.

As I have shown above, it is in that same pompous, vivid tone that Mrs. Vane keeps describing her plan of 'noble' self-sacrifice to the 'Cause'; and while she

presents her 'Cause' in the most fanatic and exaggerated way, her megalomaniac speech remains entirely empty of concrete aims and realisable plans.

The parodistic character conception of Mrs. Vane is clearly coined by an anti-feminist attitude and effectively discredits what she stands for – a New Woman aiming at a radically feminist solution, who adopts masculine behaviour and acquires a masculine appearance, lacking traditional female virtues in turn. Longing for man's privileges, surrounding herself with intellectual books and papers, moving freely in public and speaking publicly, dealing with political and global problems, living free of the 'impediments of domestic life', while at the same time neglecting her family duties and her children, Mrs. Vane is characterised as a stereotypical New Woman, as she can be found in many anti-feminist accounts.

Anti-feminist representations of the New Woman

The 'complete want of sympathy' (DF 5) with which this New Woman character in *Dear Faustina* is regarded by her children seems to mirror the attitude of the narrator who characterises her in a most unfavourable and ridiculing way, associating most of her character traits with failure and incapability. In the fictional representation of Mrs. Vane, many stereotypes are evoked, which were recurrent in late-Victorian anti-feminist representations.

Driven by profound anxieties about 'sexual anarchy', the erosion of fixed gender identities and social roles and the changing relationship between women and men (see Heilmann 2000b:107), opponents of feminism deployed hostile or parodistic textual representations of the New Woman to ridicule renegade women and undermine the women's movement (see Ledger 1997:9). While the anti-feminist concept of the New Woman was riddled with contradictions, all representations had the conviction in common that she was dangerous, 'a threat to the status quo' (Ledger 1997:11, 16).

Mostly depicted as an embittered spinster who was independent of the male sex or even man-hating, the New Woman of the anti-feminist accounts lived and worked in 'unwholesome' all-female surroundings, replacing marriage and motherhood with female same-sex bondings and reform work. A contemporary critic, Charles Harper, indicted the New Woman for her 'zeal of domination' which made her 'forget that Woman's Mission is Submission' (Harper 1894, quoted in Murphy 2000:60), expressing that the New Woman strongly conflicted the Victorian ideal of the

domestic 'Angel in the House' whose femininity was constituted of modesty, self-sacrifice, passivity and a willingness to defer to men.

Her deviating gender performance was a central topic to every representation of the New Woman. Bauer observes that many of the famous illustrations from *Punch* and other nineteenth-century periodicals portrayed the New Woman as 'inverted' in showing her 'in open-legged, space-hugging male poses, writing, hunting, smoking, cycling, and reading books' (Bauer 2009a:12). Cohler argues that the masculine New Woman was only one of several figures deployed by anti-feminist rhetoric. The New Woman was characterised by her opponents in counterbalancing stereotypes, either as 'mannish' (emphasising the unnatural masculinity of her appearance, attitudes and activities), as 'unsexed' (referring rather to frigidity than to same-sex desire) or, contrarily, as 'oversexed' (meaning over-*heterosexualised*, see Cohler 2010:34, 40, 51, 223).

Not only the 'mannish' woman was conceived as a threat to the institution of marriage, but also the "'fast" woman pursuing an unwilling male prey', as the *Cornhill Magazine* presented the New Woman in 1894 (quoted by Ledger 2007:155). The supposed hallmarks of this oversexed stereotype were moral decadence and sexual licence (Ledger 1997:16). A commentator of New Woman fiction, writing in the *Contemporary Review* in 1895, condemned the New Woman's 'unnatural [promotion of] "the sexual passion" as the mainstay of all social action' and her presentation of 'men and women as merely or mainly conduits of sexual emotion' (quoted by Ledger 2007:155). Quoting Walter Besant, a polemic of New Woman fiction, Ledger demonstrates why the New Woman's alleged support of 'free love' caused severe anxieties in many contemporaries:

the preservation of the family is at the very foundation of our social system. As for the freedom of love which you want to treat in your books, it strikes directly at the family. If there is no fidelity in marriage, the family drops to pieces. [...] We will have none of your literature of free and adulterous love.
(Besant 1890, quoted by Ledger 1997:12)

Therefore, when Faustina Bateson openly questions the value of the family – 'family life [is] generally more of a hamperer than a help' (DF 42) – and states that the break-up of Althea's home is 'indispensable to [her] mental development' (DF4), she indirectly claims that the Victorian sanctuary must be destroyed in favour of progress, placing herself in a radical counter position to the traditional attitude expressed by Besant. Broughton's fictional representation of the New Woman

thereby sustains the conservative view of the emancipated woman as ‘a corrupting influence who undermines the stability of the family’ (Murphy 2000:68).

Also, the New Woman’s alleged indifference to the responsibilities of motherhood (see Murphy 2000:59) and her rejection to fulfil ‘her function of race production’ (Karl Pearson 1885, quoted in *ibid.*) posed a threat to ‘Britain’s imperial supremacy’, which was dependent on English women raising up ‘a strong British “race”’ (Ledger 1997:18). Biologist and novelist Grant Allen, for example, argued that ‘most women must become the mothers of at least four children, or else the race must cease to exist’ (Allen 1889, quoted in Murphy 2000:59).

The conflation of this eugenicist ideology and the New Woman figure illustrates that the spreading of derogatory stereotypes in fin de siècle periodicals cannot be comprehended other than in terms of political interests and power. Cohler argues accordingly that ‘rhetoric against masculine suffrage women cannot be read as diatribes against sexual deviance but must be understood as positions against deviation from gender codes aligned with broader nineteenth-century ideologies’ (Cohler 2010:40.). Claiming that ‘gender inversion’ in textual productions of the fin de siècle was primarily a sign of cultural rather than sexual transgression, Cohler opposes a common twentieth-century research standpoint. According to her, scholarship has too often read cultural representations of ‘inversion’ in the lines of sexologist categories, deriving cultural organisations of identity directly from medical models of ‘sexual inversion’ (see *ibid.*:xv) and reading female masculinity anachronistically as a necessary symptom of sexual deviance (see *ibid.*:x, 34).

With my analysis of Mrs. Vane, in which I pointed out that the character is discredited for infringing basic rules of Victorian gender ideology, I have sustained her argument about the negotiation of broader ideologies by means of female masculinity. By acquiring abilities and attributes that were culturally marked as masculine, Mrs. Vane questions the compulsory order of sex and gender, which is a basic condition for the ideologies of gender hierarchy and separate spheres, grounding on the idea of essential difference between the sexes and genders.

As to the constituents of Mrs. Vane’s acquired masculinity, all of them are recurrent in the stereotypical representations of anti-feminist commentators: like other New Women, she has an ‘aggressive air of independence’, which was seen as masculine trait (*Cornhill Magazine 1894*, quoted by Ledger 1997:17); her dress is ‘always manly’ (*ibid.*); she is educated, or, in Hugh Stutfield’s words, ‘a victim of

the universal passion for learning' (Stutfield 1895, quoted by *ibid.*); and she vociferously demands political rights, and seeks 'supreme power over men' (Linton 1891:596). Like many New Women depicted in *Punch*, Mrs. Vane embodies confidence, freedom of movement and carefreeness (see Bauer 2009a:12). Her rejection of motherhood and her lack of domestic feminine skills 'after having acquired socially unacceptable masculine ones' (Cohler 2010:46) is recurrent in the documents of anti-suffrage campaigns (see *ibid.*:40-46).

Although my account of Rhoda Broughton's older New Woman character has, until this point in my study, sustained this claim of Cohler about the conception of female masculinity as cultural rather than sexual transgression in fin de siècle Britain, I would like to question the absoluteness of her argument and allow for the opposing research standpoint.

Producing evidence of unfavourable fictional accounts of masculine New Women, Sally Ledger and Lillian Faderman argue that anti-feminist writers, driven by their panic that the modern woman was no longer interested in men and could do without marriage, pathologised her as 'sexual invert', and codified her same-sex relationships as unnatural (see Ledger 1997:5; Faderman 1981:238). Likewise, Heilmann claims that 'anti-feminist writers transcribed their anxieties about feminism into an anti-lesbian rhetoric' (Heilmann 2000a:101), backing up her statement with a quotation from Eliza Lynn Linton's novel *The Rebel of the Family* (1880).

Interestingly, Cohler in turn illustrates her argument with a citation of a vehemently anti-feminist article written eleven years later by the same author. In 'The Wild Women', Linton writes about 'a curious inversion of sex' which is evident in the mind of emancipating women, and judges 'the unfeminine ways and works of the wild women of politics and morals [as being] even worse for the world in which they live' than abnormal, physiological masculinity in 'a woman who has physically failed in her rightful development' (Linton 1891, quoted by Cohler 2010:31). While incidentally linking gender deviance with physiological deviancy, and thereby implying that the New Woman's 'unsexing' behaviour has 'horrendous physical and psychological consequences' (Schaffer/Wolfson 2007:203), Linton does in fact only denote what she perceives as unnatural cultural masculinity in women, as Cohler plausibly demonstrates. But drawing her conclusions from the rhetoric of the pre-war

suffrage debates (starting, however, with textual evidence from the 1890s), while ignoring anti-feminist fiction, Cohler does not consider evidence that strongly contradicts her argumentation. She states that with Linton, 'gender inversion exists without sexual inversion [since] among all of her accusations of moral and developmental failure, Linton never accuses these inverted suffragists of homosexuality, nor does she explicitly discuss sexuality at all' (Cohler 2010:31). This statement testifies to Cohler's disregard of Linton's fictional representation of the New Woman in *The Rebel of the Family*.

My analysis of both, Broughton's *Dear Faustina* and Linton's *Rebel* in Ch. 3 and 4 contradicts Cohler's thesis of the New Woman's purely gender-related offence. Although none of those female authors would have been driven by a panic about women being no longer interested in men (see Ledger 1997:5; Faderman 1981:238), both created a New Woman character whose masculinity is constituted by more than cultural transgressions. Faustina Bateson and Bell Blount, I will argue, are both endowed with a deviant sexuality.

Faustina Bateson – Expanding the stereotype

After having shown that Rhoda Broughton's account of Mrs. Vane corresponds perfectly with contemporary anti-feminist rhetoric about the 'mannish' New Woman, I am now going to elaborate on the characterisation of Faustina Bateson, the more central New Woman identity in the novel. I will again focus on the aspect of female masculinity with special regard to the narrative explanation of its origin, pursuing the question whether Faustina's masculinity is presented as a cultural achievement or as an inborn condition.

Faustina's physical appearance and clothing is not described in as much detail as that of Mrs. Vane. The narrator initially characterises Faustina by contrasting her to Althea: '[They] are both feminine, the superiority in years lying with the former [Faustina], in comeliness with the latter [Althea]' (DF 1 f.). A few pages later, Faustina's 'short hair parted on one side' (DF 7) is mentioned by Althea. The main narrative purpose of revealing this second physical feature of Faustina is the characterisation of Mrs. Vane who adopted the same hairdressing. That fact evokes the impression that the narrator is not interested in giving the reader a clear picture of the heroine's appearance. But since the narration presents Faustina and Mrs. Vane as two specimens of the same type, showing that the elder has been strongly influenced

by the younger, the more detailed description of Mrs. Vane offers the reader a quite definite idea of Faustina's appearance as well. By this means, the heroine is given an unambiguous image of a New Woman right at the beginning of the novel. Towards its end, when Faustina is denoted as 'shrieking sisterhood' (DF 340), a term coined 1870 by Eliza Lynn Linton, the narration establishes an explicit connection between the heroine and the contextual debate about the modern woman.

Besides the dark colour of her hair, the only further detail revealed about Faustina's physical appearance is the quality of her complexion. An implicit comparison of her unusual complexion with Althea's and Clare's skin tone is quite telling. Althea and Clare are having a heated debate about Faustina's reliability, when the person in question enters the room and calls for Althea. Then Faustina's 'speech breaks off [...] on catching sight of Clare [...], and they all for a moment or two look at each other with uncomfortable scarlet faces; that is to say, two of the faces are scarlet, the third keeps its cool sallow untinged' (DF 41). The two scarlet faces doubtlessly belong to the sisters, whose reddening cheeks have already been mentioned a few pages earlier. The passage makes it obvious by means of two aspects that Faustina is different from the other young ladies, whose kinship is revealed by the similarity of their somatic reactions. Firstly, the uncomfortable situation leaves her face cool and untinged. The fact that, in contrast to Althea and Clare, she does not show any emotional reaction to the situation could either be read as an indicator of her lack of authenticity, assuming that she actually does *not* feel uncomfortable at all, or for a general lack of emotions. Althea, like so many Victorian heroines before her, is inclined to show every emotion in a change of colours: alternating pale and red cheeks in female fictional characters are a common means of transmitting a notion of femininity.¹¹ Faustina, in contrast, flushes only in very rare situations. When a 'slight colour comes into [her] handsome olive cheek' (DF 26), when it puts on 'its rare and dusky flush' (DF 233), or 'a dull flush, which shows even through her habitual high colour' (DF 155), the event is always emphasised as something extraordinary. When Faustina flushes, it is in spite of her unusual skin tone. It is this colour, specified once as olive, once as sallow – a sickly yellow or pale brown –, which can be read as the second indicator of Faustina's deviance from the female type to which the Vane sisters belong. While Althea and Clare have pale or red cheeks, depending on their mood, Faustina lacks this common

¹¹ For an elaborate account of the implications of the blush in the nineteenth-century English novel, see Mary Ann O'Farrell (1997): *Telling Complexions*.

light and variable complexion, which would show every change of emotion to her company. Faustina's 'handsome olive cheek' – in contrast to Althea, she is never described as pretty or beautiful – indicates an 'unsexed' or even masculine, rather than a feminine appearance.

While the novel does not pay much attention to Faustina's appearance, her physical and spiritual constitution is specified as that of 'a born fighter' (DF 95) a couple of times. She is said to belong to a class of persons who is absolutely indifferent to minor discomforts of life – her 'iron health and steel nerves enable her to face almost any kind of food without aversion' (DF 92). Her own disposition is responsible for her scepticism against 'anyone ever being "not up" to any exertion' (DF 207). Althea, who is disposed to feel low and weak now and then, envies Faustina for her constitution: 'If you could give me your physique, as well as your indomitable spirit!' (DF 206). In that exclamation, Althea admires both, Faustina's bodily strength and her mental condition, without relating both features with one another.

However, there are other passages that suggest a correlation between her bodily and mental traits more clearly. When Althea expresses that she would like to lighten Faustina's burden, meaning a big amount of work to be done, the latter replies: 'As to my burden, my shoulders are broad' (DF 85). Although the figurative meaning of the phrase is more dominant here, the literal meaning of her words has an effect as well, offering to the reader's imagination one of the few explicit hints about her appearance. The image of Faustina's strong stature brought to mind by her self-characterisation has quite a masculine connotation. It corresponds perfectly with the impression evoked by the figurative meaning of the same words: due to her physical strength she can work hard. By working on two different levels to establish an image of masculinity, this phrase presents Faustina's physical and mental features as correlated. It even implies a causality, according to which her 'iron' physical constitution is an essential trait, promoting – or causing – her proneness to an 'unwomanly' lifestyle, constituted only partly of her work.

As for Faustina's spartan home, which works as a mirror of her lifestyle, it is depicted in some detail. The narrator mainly focuses on her tiny sitting-room, which is dominated by her writing-table; like Mrs. Vane's table, the 'disproportionately large and business-like' (DF 81) table, occupying a third of the room, is covered by a wilderness of papers. When Clare enters Faustina's drawing-room, visiting for the first and last time, she exclaims: 'what a dog-hole! and *how* untidy!'. With Althea's

reply – ‘Very busy people cannot have everything in as apple-pie order as those who do nothing, and have a score of lackeys to help them’ (DF 237) – she chooses an explanation for the chaos that feeds one of the basic prejudices against independent women, named above, that women who work in public necessarily neglect their domestic duties.

While Althea’s explanation suggests that Faustina simply cannot spare the time to keep everything in an ‘apple-pie order’, another passage about Faustina’s inability to revive an ‘all-but-dead flame’ in her fireplace (DF 80) rather implies a missing aptitude in her. Faustina’s neglecting her home is explicitly brought into correspondence by the narrator with her contemptuous neglect of other basic Victorian virtues: ‘Miss Bateson has no more opinion of order and neatness in her surroundings than she has of filial piety, reverence, etc.’ (DF 348). Hence, it is marked as only one of a bunch of correlating aspects inherent in Faustina, which were believed to be characteristic traits of the modern woman.

Faustina’s physical and mental constitution as well as her inability of house-keeping are depicted as essential constituents of her identity, whereas her activities, her behaviour and her words are usually either accompanied by ironic comments or ridiculed by other narrative means. Among the few scenes in which the narrator depicts Faustina quite free of irony, one dwells a bit longer than usual upon a description of her demeanour: ‘Faustina hangs her dark head luxuriously backwards over the top of her chair – it is one of the rare moments of inaction – and blows the smoke of her cigarette through her nostrils’ (DF 119). What is noteworthy here, is the decadent way in which she smokes her cigarette – an activity associated either with the male sex, or with modern women striving for male privileges (see Ledger 1997:16 and Bauer 2009a:12).

Faustina’s conduct is marked as masculine more than once. A whole conversation between her and Drake is depicted as a perfect performance of a stereotypical meeting *between men*. Althea leaves the room to give the two old friends opportunity to talk freely, acting like a lady in presence of two gentlemen would. Indeed, after she has left, they start talking to each other without paying any attention to conventions of politeness or gender. They both light up cigarettes and speak coolly and condescendingly about Althea as Faustina’s ‘new enthusiasm’ (DF 115) and ‘valuable acquisition’ (DF 116). It is, significantly, only with Drake that

Faustina talks without her habitual use of embroidery, which is why the character appears uncommonly authentic in those scenes.

All of Faustina's 'unwomanly' traits – her deviant countenance, her 'iron strength' of mind and body, even her inability of house-keeping – are depicted as essential and authentic. Accordingly, the rare narrative moments, in which Faustina's conduct is not ridiculed by the narrator but as well presented as authentic, are those depicting her gender transgressive verbal and non-verbal behaviour. To sum up, Faustina Bateson's masculinity is marked as an essential trait.

2.4 The 'mannish' woman and the 'actively inverted' woman

At first glance, both radically emancipated women in *Dear Faustina* seem to be characterised as two specimens of one type. Like other fictional New Women, both of feminist and anti-feminist accounts, Mrs. Vane and Faustina strive for male prerogatives and show their aspirations in a deliberate adoption of attributes traditionally perceived as masculine. But while they both pass as stereotypical New Woman figures with masculine traits, my examination of narrative subtexts has shown that they differ in one vital aspect. Mrs. Vane's masculinity is clearly linked to acquired attributes only, whereas Faustina's image of gender deviance is mainly evoked by a number of essential traits, giving an impression of authenticity that is exceptional in the ironic characterisation of this figure.¹²

A difference between acquired masculinity and congenital gender deviance is also part of the conceptual framework established by Havelock Ellis to categorise 'sexual inversion in women' in his famous tract of the same title. It has occasionally been stated by recent research that Ellis depicted 'gender inversion' as a necessary symptom and indicator of sexual deviance (see e. g. Cohler 2010:x). My following analysis of Ellis' different categories of gender transgression shows that this research standpoint grounds on an inaccurate reading of his theory.

In characterising his main category of female sexual deviance, the 'actively inverted woman' (SI 167), Ellis takes care of dissociating her from 'what would be called a "mannish" woman' (ibid.):

¹² My argumentation crucially differs from Murphy's, who claims that Mrs. Vane's mannish behaviour suggests a physiological proclivity toward inappropriate sexuality, without providing evidence for her thesis (see Murphy 2000:66).

The chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity. [...] She may not, and frequently is not, what would be called a “mannish” woman, for the latter may imitate men on grounds of taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion while in the inverted woman the masculine traits are part of an organic instinct which she by no means always wishes to accentuate. [...] There is, however, a very pronounced tendency among sexually inverted women to adopt male attire when practicable.
(SI 167, 173)

The ‘mannish’ woman ‘who is inclined to adopt the ways and garments of men’ (SI 173) is not necessarily ‘inverted’, as Ellis emphasises twice. Ellis produces evidence for this finding by referring to a number of fictional texts that feature cross-dressing heroines whose masquerade is motivated by their love for a man (see *ibid.*). At first sight, Ellis seems to deploy those questionable references in order to clear this female type of the suspicion of sexual perversion. But in his comparison to the unintentional congenital masculinity of the ‘invert’, the deliberately adopted masculinity of the ‘mannish’ woman appears as an absurd quirk. Ellis’ formulations – the ‘mannish’ woman is inclined to ‘imitate men’ – suggest the same condescension and disdain towards women who choose to adopt a gender transgressive behaviour that also marks the attitude of Broughton’s narrator towards Mrs. Vane.

Although Faustina is regarded with the same narratorial attitude, she is, in contrast to Mrs. Vane, endowed with some authentic traits that are not ridiculed by the narrator but depicted as essential. If we look at Faustina against the backdrop of Havelock Ellis’ theory, reading her character in terms of his categorisations, her characterisation as *essentially* gender deviant is decisive.

Ellis describes the ‘more or less distinct trace of masculinity’ in the ‘inverted’ woman as ‘fairly essential character’ (SI 167) that can take different shapes, all of which inferring her ‘underlying psychic abnormality’ (SI 175). Apart from the masculine garments that Female Inverts often wear because they feel ‘more at home in them’ (SI 174), there is, according to Ellis, a range of ‘instinctive gestures and habits which may suggest [...] to a keen observer [...] that such a person “ought to have been a man”¹³ (SI 175): he names the ‘invert’s’ ‘brusque, energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness’ (*ibid.*) as well as ‘a pronounced taste of smoking’

¹³ Statements like this prompted some critics, Jay Prosser the most prominent among them (see Prosser 1998), to argue that the term ‘inversion’ certainly included types of homosexuality but clearly centred on transgender identifications (see Felski 1998:6) and aimed at conceptualising the desire to become the other sex for the sake of self-identity (see Breger 2005:79).

and ‘a dislike and sometimes incapacity for needlework and other domestic occupations’ (SI 176).

It is obvious that among the ‘instinctive gestures and habits’ that Ellis ascribes to the Female Invert there are a number of attributes stereotypically associated with the New Woman in literary discourse and public debates, for example the assumption of a dislike for domestic occupations. Interestingly, while helping to construct the same anti-feminist stereotypes with another label, Ellis never suggests a direct correlation between women’s emancipation and gender transgressive behaviour in women. Although he recognises the women’s movement as a factor with regard to the increase of homosexuality among women (see SI 177), he does not conflate gender deviance with feminist attitudes. But due to the most obvious parallels between the descriptions of gender deviance in the New Woman and the Female Invert, historical and recent recipients of ‘Sexual Inversion in Women’ have broadly agreed on identifying both figures. Therefore, Ellis is commonly understood to have endowed the New Woman with a deviant sexuality, an opinion which mirrors the dominant assumption of a one-sided influence of sexology on cultural productions.

Different from anti-feminist discourses about the New Woman, Ellis’ identity construction of the deviant female takes somatic aspects into account, promoting the idea that the body reflects a person’s mental state (see Vicinus 2004:204), or rather that body and mind are shaped by the same hereditary, psychological and sex-related factors (see Schaffer/Wolfson 2007:300). When for example presenting feeble evidence for a deviating tone of the voice of Female Inverts, he claims that ‘there is reason to suppose that [those] approximations to the masculine type [...] rest on a basis of anatomical modification’ (SI 176). Ellis clearly draws causal connections between ‘masculine’ traits of different kinds.

This approach resonates very well with Broughton’s characterisation of Faustina, which, as I have analysed above, implies similarly essentialist causalities between physical, mental and habitual traits. In those causalities and correspondences of the character traits of Faustina and the ‘invert’, the fin de siècle conceptualisation of identity – or sexual identity – is expressed since identity was believed to enclose all aspects of a person’s bodily condition, appearance and personality (see Felski 1998:4).

Faustina’s characterisation as a ‘born fighter’ with ‘steel nerves’, giving the impression that her strong physical constitution is accompanied by a congenital

mental masculinity, also corresponds with a theorem of a contemporary German sexologist, Carl Ulrichs. According to him, the mental organisation is, like the bodily disposition, part of a human's inborn condition (see Ulrichs 1898, quoted by Breger 2005:91).

In Broughton's characterisation of Faustina, not only the 'masculine straightforwardness', the taste of smoking and the repulsion for needlework – 'Faustina could not bear the sight of a needle' (DF 397) –, can be traced, but another trait as well, which is regarded by Ellis as highly symptomatic for congenital 'inversion': Faustina's attitude towards men. As mentioned above, Faustina's conversations with the only male character she is in contact with, Drake, are marked by a high degree of directness and by an absolute lack of shy and submissive behaviour. Havelock Ellis argues that an 'inverted' woman 'treats all men in a cool, direct manner, which may not exclude comradeship, but which excludes every sexual relationship, whether of passion or merely coquetry' (SI 167). Due to this absence of sexual tension, the attitude of Female Inverts towards men is 'free from any suggestion either of [sexual] shyness or audacity' (SI 171, 175) or from an 'engaging air of weakness and dependence which are an invitation to men' (SI 176).¹⁴

Havelock Ellis insists that the masculine trait of the Female Invert – the crucial element of her 'inversion' – may consist in no more than that repulsion of men combined with 'the fact that she makes advances to the woman to whom she is attracted' (SI 167). Of course, Ellis pays more attention to the main characteristic of the 'invert', her sexual advances to women (see Ch. 3.3), but in this definition, he makes sure to emphasise her attitude towards men as the most obvious *marker* of a woman's 'inversion', underlining that notwithstanding the above mentioned characteristics, 'sexual inversion in a woman is as a rule not more obvious than in men' (SI 176). He mentions the 'invert's' cool, comradely bearing towards men several times in his short tract and claims right at the beginning of her classification that 'as a rule the inverted woman feels absolute indifference towards men, and not seldom repulsion. And this feeling, as a rule, is instinctively reciprocated by men' (SI 167).

In laying down those rules and stating that a cold attitude towards men is the main symptom of female 'sexual inversion', Ellis establishes an allegedly reliable

¹⁴ Not only the fact that Althea's attitude towards Drake is the very opposite to Faustina's suggests that she belongs to a different category of female deviance. I will shed more light on those differentiations in Ch. 3.3.

tool that can be ‘instinctively’ deployed by every man in order to detect a woman’s sexual deviance. The ostensible fact that an ‘inverted’ woman is ‘not attractive to men’ (SI 176) helps Ellis to obscure his weak documentary evidence.¹⁵

While the brief passages of Mrs. Vane’s characterisation in *Dear Faustina* focus on her gender transgressive behaviour and do not relate to aspects of deviant sexuality, the presentation of Faustina Bateson obviously goes beyond negotiating the contemporary stereotype of the ‘mannish’ feminist. Cast as a woman with essentially masculine traits who treats men in a cool manner, Faustina has striking similarities with the individuals portrayed in Ellis’ case studies. In Ch. 3 and 4, I will return to the question of common ground in Broughton’s and Ellis’ representations of deviant sexual identities, scrutinising in how far the fictional and the sexologist figures correspond in aspects of sexual desire and sexual behaviour.

2.5 Depriving the New Woman of her ‘Cause’

Before I redirect my focus towards Faustina’s sexuality, I need to shed more light on the narrative strategies by which this deviant figure is disqualified as a suspect, unreliable and even parasitic hypocrite, whose rhetoric barely covers her lack of real convictions. Ridiculed and treated with irony from the beginning of the novel, Faustina is finally deprived of her last grains of trustworthiness.

The narrator is always uncertain about Faustina’s thoughts (see DF 24), while being perfectly able to perceive the other characters’ inner processes. The narrative report of Faustina’s conduct reveals a bunch of internal traits, such as sarcasm (DF 26), self-control (DF 292), coldness and contempt (ibid.), lack of respect (DF 350). By means of figural characterisation we learn that she is determined (DF 301) and ‘not a person who ever loses time’ (DF 327). But due to the missing insight in Faustina’s thoughts and feelings, the presentation of her inner traits is reduced to this rather unfavourable altero-characterisation. While revealing everybody else’s motives, the narrator keeps a distance to Faustina and never attempts to give explicit reasons for her attitudes and activities. As a result, a general distrust towards Faustina is produced in the reader.

¹⁵ More about Ellis’ argumentation strategy in Ch. 4.1.

Faustina therefore is the only character in the novel who is full of discrepancies and who remains elusive to the reader's grasp till the end. Not only is her emergence in the novel accompanied by a number of more or less encoded hints at her hiding something, giving her an air of unreliability and danger, but she is also endowed with contradictions that are never fully resolved by the narration. This vague and enigmatic characterisation of the heroine could be a narrative strategy to reflect upon the unintelligible nature of her (sexual) identity.

As mentioned above, only few of her characteristic traits are presented as authentic, whereas most characterising passages put her reliability into question. Like Mrs. Vane, Faustina is shown as very prone to big, impressive words. When reading one of Faustina's examples of 'inflammatory literature' (DF 94), Althea hesitantly protests about Faustina's exaggerated use of rhetoric: "Do you think we need be *quite* so abusive?" she asks, pausing over a sentence even more violently vituperative than its predecessors. [...] "Do not you think our arguments are weighty enough in themselves to be even more effective if put temperately?" (ibid.).

Faustina not only deploys her effective way of speaking when referring to her 'Cause', but also when characterising herself. She depicts her work for 'the grandest crusade ever undertaken by humanity' (DF 299) as a whole-hearted life choice: 'I glory in the class from which I spring. If I were not a working woman by necessity, I should certainly be one by choice' (DF 123). She seems proud of living in what Althea calls 'honourable poverty' (DF 157) and of depending 'almost entirely [on her] own exertions for support' (DF 153). The issue dominating her self-portrayal is her altruist commitment to 'the Cause', which craves 'all [her] womanhood, every heart-beat, every pulse-throb' (DF 156). According to Faustina, her task does not 'allow personal feeling to outweigh abstract right' (DF 299). She claims it a necessity to sacrifice every interest of one's own in favour of the 'Cause': 'with me, the Cause always goes before the individual' (DF 295).

Every single aspect constituting Faustina's heroic self-characterisation is shown to be insubstantial in the course of the novel: neither her noble choice of poverty, nor her pecuniary independence, nor her altruist commitment to the 'Cause' do persist the narratorial characterisation.

According to herself, Faustina had to leave her parents' home because of her wish to live faithfully to her convictions. Her explanation is quite appropriate to make her troublesome life path appear like a noble choice. But the only character

convinced of this is Althea. The narration does not miss a chance to give hints at Faustina's untruthfulness about her past. Clare has heard other people say 'that she left home because she was kicked out – that is, because she could not get on with any one member of her family' (DF 40). When asking Drake about Faustina's past, Althea gets an evading answer (DF 112). It becomes even more obvious that he knows more than he reveals when Faustina hears about that conversation; at first, she reacts nervously, and when it becomes clear that Drake did not give a detailed account of her past, she allows a relieved smile to spread out over her face (DF 122). Faustina's secretiveness implies that the rumours spread by Clare are true, that she was kicked out of home because of her bad character rather than because of dissensions. This reason is not only less noble, but it also infers a different causality: Faustina did not choose to leave home in order to work for 'the Cause'; instead, she started working in social reform surroundings in order to support herself financially when turned out of doors. Within the feminist and reform movement circles, she found the opportunity to make a living with her most outstanding ability, her effective rhetoric.

Another constituent of Faustina's overwhelming self-confidence, her financial independence, does not seem inflicted by the revelation of this different causality of her engagement in reform work. As mentioned above, she boasts with depending 'almost entirely' (DF 153) on her own work. It seems to be for the reason of this financial independency that she regards herself as the only person entitled to judge her own actions: 'I deny, absolutely and entirely, the right of you or of anyone else to challenge my actions. I am my own judge and censor; to myself I stand and fall' (DF 297). This statement exclaimed to Althea shows that in connection with her independence in pecuniary matters, she also claims for herself an independence in aspects of morality.

At the end of *Dear Faustina*, those constituents of her self-glorification are proved to be insubstantial by Drake. He threatens Faustina to withdraw the pecuniary help he has given her in all the years of their acquaintance because he 'could not see an old playmate starve' (DF 356), unless she agrees to leave the country. Although she hates to do it, Faustina accepts his conditions. Thereby, she loses her self-determined agency additionally to the feigned financial independence – two prerogatives that she had borrowed from the male sphere and that are constitutive parts of her reputation as emancipated woman.

Another aspect of Faustina's self-glorification is her feigned altruism. Faustina seeks to establish an image of her spartan lifestyle as an altruist choice. One of her self-characterising strategies, deployed to erect this image, is to point out the parallels between her own and Drake's noble story. But the narration undermines Faustina's attempts to present herself as Drake's moral equal. One crucial plot turn deployed to destroy her heroic self-portrayal is Althea's discovery that Faustina might not be single-minded in her 'devotion to the cause of suffering humanity'; that she might 'allow motives of personal interest to sway [her] conduct' (DF 174). Confronted by Althea, Faustina has to admit that she mainly writes for an editor who holds shares in a company, which profits from the iniquities that her 'whole life is spent in making war upon' (DF 156). In order to earn money with her writing – most of the reform papers do not pay well –, Faustina closes her eyes in front of her employer's immorality, even covering it in refusing to write an article for another paper about the conditions in his factory (DF 154).¹⁶

Drake finally deals the deathblow to Faustina's credibility. Although he never accurately names the true reasons of Faustina's exclusion of society, his accusations against her at the end of the novel (DF 355) confirm everyone's suspicion that she was turned out by her parents for less noble reasons than he himself. What is more, Drake openly denies the sincerity of her convictions. Although he has been noticing 'all the puff and push and vulgar striving for notoriety' (DF 357) about her, Drake has always believed in the 'grain of selfless love, of righteous anger, of noble faith' (ibid.) existing in her. Now, that her 'extravagant and immoral action' (DF 356) has been revealed, his belief 'that [her] convictions *were* convictions' (ibid.) has died.

In contrast to Drake, who sacrificed everything for his convictions without ever glorifying himself, Faustina does not have any scruple to make money at the expense of exploited workers, while always praising her noble poverty and altruist fighting for 'the Cause'. The discrepancy between her alleged convictions and her actual deeds makes her rhetoric skills her most significant character trait. She has used her ability of finding convincing words in order to conceal the complete lack of substance behind them. But this major fault in her does not remain unnoticed. The

¹⁶ It is this *pact with the devil* that reveals Faustina's real character and that could be taken as one explanation for her telling name. Her characterisation as egotistical seductress of the innocent, who satisfies solely her own desires (and those only temporarily) reminds of Johann W. Goethe's Faust as well. For other interpretations, see Ardis 1990:124, Hager 2007:474 and Murphy 2000:68, who connect the name not only with Faust, but also with Algernon Charles Swinburne's 'demonic female' (Murphy) in his poem "Faustine" (1862), a text that deals, according to Hager, explicitly with lesbian desire' (Hager).

insubstantiality of her rhetoric is not only named by Drake, but also demonstrated by the narrator. After threatening Drake to refuse his conditions for further financial support, Faustina's mood is described as follows: 'Her self-respect is almost as much restored by the utterance of her threat of renunciation as if she had carried it out, and it is with what she feels to be real dignity that [...] she turns to him' (DF 358). This narratorial comment, showing that Faustina's verbal threat to renounce Drake's support satisfies her as much as the consequent activity of renunciation would do pinpoints that her empty talk is a constitutive characteristic of the heroine.

Faustina's exclamations that 'the Cause always goes before the individual' (DF 295), and that individuals are to be considered as 'tools' for the 'task' (DF 351) seem to be a matter of rhetoric as well, since she applies this standard of altruist social work to the women she recruits for 'the Cause', but not to herself. While her activity is reduced to the production of effective words, she requests of her intimate friends what she is not willing to do: Althea is forced to break with all conventions dear to her in order to prove to Faustina that *she* is more single-minded in her devotion to 'the Cause'. Cressida Delafield, Althea's successor, is persuaded by Faustina to do a job most inappropriate for a young lady. She is asked to do 'rescue work' on Haymarket at night, the most indecent business thinkable for a woman of her class and age, since her visibility at the most public and immoral place and time would cost her no less than her image of purity. Drake's reaction to this plan – '*Rescue work!* Why, even Faustina– [...]' (DF 317) – suggests that even Faustina, a person with iron health and an indomitable spirit, would never volunteer to do that kind of work.

At the end of the story, the suspicions against Faustina that had been evoked by hints at her untruthfulness throughout the novel are confirmed: her interest in 'the Cause' is not genuine; she is neither characterised by actual commitment, let alone altruist fighting for 'the Cause', nor by sincere convictions.

Her self-portraying statements, deployed by herself to establish an image of nobility, are mainly used by the narration to characterise her in the opposite way. Since her self-glorifying words stand in harsh contrast to her actions, they only show the unreliability and emptiness of her rhetoric. Faustina is ridiculed by an ironic exaggeration of her verbal ability – her strongest weapon is turned against her by the narration.

When Clare openly calls Faustina a fraud (DF 336), she names what has already been proved by several narrative means. Faustina is marked as a beneficiary of 'the Cause'. The discrediting account of Faustina Bateson implies that the surroundings of social and feminist reform movements might serve as a gathering place for 'radicals' (DF 341) of Faustina's type who receive profit out of the movement, rather than serving 'the Cause'.

In unveiling Faustina's insubstantiality, the narration also in general discredits the radical feminist approach to social problems that is represented by this character. It is certainly not the 'Cause' of social improvement that is condemned in *Dear Faustina*, as I demonstrated in my interpretation of John Drake's function in the novel (see Ch. 2.2). The narration rather dissociates the true 'Cause' from its radical New Woman representative, assigning it to a moderate male activist instead. Patricia Murphy gains that central insight as well, concluding that the novel, while demonising the radical activist, actually recuperates her social agenda by relocating it 'from a tainted and threatening female-controlled realm to an approved male-dominated environment in which female contributions are limited to "womanly" work and distanced from an aggressive public posture' (Murphy 2000:57). The New Woman is left with nothing but empty words.

3 Conflating the New Woman and Sexual Inversion

Faustina Bateson's characterisation as beneficiary of the 'Cause' suggests that she makes a profit out of her involvement with social reform work. But what kind of benefit does she derive from her deceit? Until a certain point, the narration seems to suggest that the financial profit of her work for social reform papers is Faustina's major point of motivation. But the late revelation of her material dependence on Drake contradicts this explanation – if Drake's support is so indispensable to her, the financial outcome of her own work is unlikely to be considerably high.

There are many passages that illustrate Faustina's purposefulness and strongly suggest that she is actually highly motivated by an aim yet unspecified. Faustina's tendency to calculation is shown for example by the description of a 'very business-like, sharp brightness' in her black eyes (DF 87, 177), or by her language and tone that she adopts professionally to each situation, in order to attain something: 'the soothing tone of her [...] words seems calculated to meet [Althea's anger]' (DF 232). Her purposefulness is further revealed by her tactical hoodwinking of Althea when she needs her out of the way (DF 289), or by her indifference to issues that are not linked to one of her aims (DF 9). The narration makes it seem highly unlikely that Faustina could act and talk *without* a specific motivation. And yet, the text abstains from presenting an unambiguous explanation about the nature of her motivation.

Pursuing the question of Faustina's motivation, I will direct my focus on her passionate relationships with female friends. Taking up the discussion about whether the notion of 'inversion' in fictional representations of the fin de siècle could connote deviant sexual desire and sexual acts additional to gender deviance (see Ch. 2.3), the question structuring the second part of this paper is whether Faustina is shown as a subversive character, who not only threatens the social order by claiming male prerogatives, but also offends her surroundings by instances of sexual transgressions.

Faustina does not like to live and work on her own; instead, she surrounds herself with young middle-class women, who all have some basic traits in common, such as a pretty appearance, a tendency to admiration and devotion, and a willingness to self-sacrifice. Before she invited Althea to share her life, another intimate friend lived with her, and when Althea leaves, there is already another waiting to take her place. Althea's first attempts to find the proper wording for Faustina's lifestyle – 'I thought

that another friend shared your life – lived with you?’ (DF 46) –, or rather, a proper formulation for *her own* new lifestyle – ‘I have taken half a flat – half Fausti- half Miss Bateson’s flat in Chelsea’ (DF 57) – are quite awkward. It seems as if she finds it hard to grasp and pronounce the nature of their union as well as her status in that unconventional relationship. In her first conversation with Drake, she seems to get an idea of the fact that her status as Faustina’s intimate friend could be a temporary one:

‘You are staying with Miss Bateson?’

‘I am living with her.’

‘Oh, indeed!’

It is clear that he is trying to keep his words politely colourless, but interested enlightenment will pierce through their neutral tint, so much so that Althea cannot forbear putting a question in her turn.

‘Did you know my – my predecessor, Miss Lewis?’

[...]

‘I not only knew Miss Lewis, but *her* predecessor.’

‘*Had* she a predecessor?’

‘Oh yes, more than one.’

Althea starts slightly. She feels as if a sharp pebble had hit her – small but unexpected. It takes her a moment or two to recover. (DF 107 ff.)

Althea’s difficulty to get used to the idea of being only one in a row of intimates will become fully comprehensible after I will have explained more about the nature of her relationship to Faustina.

Althea gradually finds ways to express the unconventional quality of Faustina’s contacts to women, for example when accusing Faustina to ‘have contracted an intimacy’ with Cressida Delafield (DF 291), or when speaking of her own ‘former infatuation’ (DF 326) referring to her friendship with Faustina. Those formulations, attempting to grasp the character of their relationship, hint at a kind of union that involves much more than a joint commitment for a common ‘Cause’.

Nevertheless, Faustina insists on having selected Althea and her predecessors solely in order to instruct them to work for ‘the Cause’. The narrator takes up Faustina’s definition of her relationship with Althea by ironically referring to Faustina as a ‘Mentor’ and to Althea as her pupil, making ‘strides [...] under her auspices [...] in the new path’ (DF 5), and later as a ‘General’ and his ‘aide-de-camp who disobeyed him’ (sic!; DF 290).

When adopting Althea’s point-of-view and referring to Faustina’s elevated status, the narrator usually chooses exaggerating words: the heroine is called a ‘deity lifted on its pedestal again’ (DF 159), an idol (DF 160), a ‘valiant fighter in the host of righteousness and pity’ (ibid.), Althea’s leader (DF 196) and an expert (ibid.). By

ironically contrasting those effusive wordings with the fictional reality of Faustina's deeds, the narrator undermines Faustina's self-assigned superiority and puts the rightfulness of Althea's subordination into question.

Faustina explicitly claims that she always chooses her lady friends as tools for 'the Cause', while never regarding them with personal interest: 'I look upon the persons whom I am able to influence primarily as its instruments, and only very secondarily in their relation to myself or to themselves' (DF 295).

This statement is belied by the fact that the individuals she selects for 'the Cause' are far from being useful to it. As for Althea, Faustina has chosen her for the 'project of social utility' (DF 94): Althea is supposed to be Faustina's key to society, to use her connections in order to acquire inside information for Faustina – but she is bound to fail. While Drake recognizes Althea's incompatibility with Faustina's plans right from the start, Faustina refuses to admit the error of her choice:

[Drake:] 'So that is the new enthusiasm, is it?'
[Faustina:] 'If you choose to put it so' [...]
'It is a more comprehensible ardour than the last; but if you will excuse my putting it so, she does not look cut quite on *our* pattern.'
[...]
[Faustina:] 'However much her outside may belie her—'
'I am far from objecting to it.'
'She is one of us! [...] She is prepared to go as far as anybody. She is very keen about the vote, perfectly sound upon the Marriage Question, and her opinion of men is, if possible, lower than mine.'
He receives this last thrust with perfect equanimity. 'She is a very valuable acquisition [...] In what direction do you mean to utilize her? [...]'
'[...] do not disquiet yourself; she will find her proper sphere.'
'What is her history? How did you get hold of her? Is she an isolated fact? and if not, how did her relations allow you to spirit her away?'
'It was no case of spiring; she has broken with her family deliberately for the sake of her opinions.' (DF 115 ff.)

Drake's representation of Althea as Faustina's 'new enthusiasm' and 'comprehensible ardour', as well as his hint at Althea's comely appearance and his suggestion that Faustina 'spirit[ed] her away' from her family counteract Faustina's attempt to present her interest in Althea as only related to 'the Cause'. His choice of words and their speaking which reminds of the talk between two men (see Ch. 2.3) rather implies a conversation about a new mistress.

Analogously to Althea, who fails completely when trying to fulfil the only task assigned to her, her predecessor Miss Lewis was, to echo Faustina's opinion, 'a faddist' who disillusioned her deeply (DF 96). Althea's successor, Miss Delafield, is

characterised by her mother as a ‘dear, affectionate child – never very strong-minded, but so loving and nice’ (DF 279) and depicted by Clare as ‘really very silly’ (DF 240). Although Cressida Delafield is extremely attracted by the fashion of philanthropy and by the adventurous flair of joining the life of working women, her portrayal does not leave any doubt about her being useless to ‘the Cause’. Thus, it is obvious that none of the ‘cat’s-paws’ (DF 305) chosen by Faustina are appropriate tools for the purpose of serving ‘the Cause’.

Faustina’s official reason for recruiting them is disproved. It seems as if Faustina does what she explicitly condemns – that she ‘allow[s] personal feeling to outweigh abstract right’ (DF 299). This finding gives the search after her true motivation a new direction, focussing now on her reason for luring those young and pretty, but silly and useless ladies into ‘the privacy of her eyrie’ (DF 72) – a phrase that, according to Murphy, connotes concealment and rapacity (see Murphy 2000:69).

In order to find a plausible answer to this central question I am going to scrutinise the quality of Faustina’s relationships with Althea and Cressida.

To start with, I will inquire into the latter’s initial motives to join Faustina. Cressida on the one hand is attracted by the fashionable appeal of the social reform movement. She sees in a philanthropic lifestyle first and foremost an adventurous thrill of crossing the borders of class and conventions. Cressida is uncritically enthusiastic about everyone who masters the art of rhetorical speaking and who can teach her how to lead a ‘noble’ life. Faustina’s self-stylisation fits the idea Cressida has of a reform worker. Faustina shows her ‘pupils’ how to dedicate themselves to an altruist purpose, which gives them an opportunity to feel useful, thus offering those young Victorian middle-class women an attractive alternative to marriage by appealing both to their susceptibility to self-sacrifice, and to their surfeit of idleness.

In contrast to Cressida, Althea has been quite repugnant towards her mother’s activist friends at first, including Faustina and the ideas she represents. But after her father’s death, it was Faustina who was there to comfort her with caresses and loving words. Althea is quite aware of the fact that this tender treatment was the foundation stone of their relationship:

‘If it had not been for [...] your extraordinary and most unexpected sympathy and kindness to me [...], I dare say we might never have been drawn together. Oh, but you *were* kind!’ – her eyes filling.
‘There is no question of kindness where one loves.’ (DF 7)

Those two very different examples show that Faustina knows how to adapt her recruiting strategy to the desires and needs of her new acquaintances. Cressida seeks for an access to the core of the reform movement, and Faustina invites her to stay with them to experience a working woman's life. Althea is weakened by her grief and therefore very susceptible to Faustina's effusive kindness. Faustina knows how to capture them by either offering a helping hand or deploying the irresistible call of 'the Cause'. It is this ability of finding and taking advantage of her 'victim's' weakest point which gives Faustina the image of a sexual predator, an image that Lisa Hager and Patricia Murphy emphasise in their analyses of the novel without providing however plausible evidence for it (see Murphy 2000:72 and Hager 2007:460).

Her relationship to Althea shows, however, that Faustina's strategies do not exist separately from each other. After Althea has accepted Faustina's offer to move in with her, their relationship is determined by aspects of romantic friendship as well as by a hierarchical structure that can only partly be put down to their joint work for 'the Cause'.

3.1 Romantic friendship

Althea's and Faustina's reunion in their shared flat, after some days of separation, provides a vivid portray of their intimate friendship:

The strenuousness of Faustina's embrace is grateful to the heart [...], and her torrid words do not sound as exaggerated as in cooler moments they might be recognized to be.

'My darling! I have you at last! I was terrified lest at the final moment Philistia [i.e. Althea's family] might triumph over me. But here you are – here WE are – and can earth give anything better?'

To an indifferent or over-critical eye it might seem that earth must be but poorly supplied with conveniences if it could not; but the depressed and overwrought girl to whom this flight of rhetoric is addressed hears only the warm affection that dictated it, and she bursts into grateful tears.

[...] With their friendship at this high pitch of tension, they enter their now joint domain. (DF:72 f.)

In presenting a friendship that builds on intense emotional responsiveness as well as physical tenderness and rhetorical expression, the novel conforms to the traditional pattern of romantic friendship that had been featuring English novels for over a hundred and fifty years.

The literary model of romantic friendship was a popular frame to conceptualise and at the same time idealise women's intimate friendships from the middle of the eighteenth century until the late-nineteenth century. Inspired by romanticism, the literature of this period praised the fidelity and beauty of female friendship, contrasting it to 'a quickly ignited, but quickly burnt out, heterosexual passion' (Vicinus 2004:xviii). Martha Vicinus underlines that this idealisation of same-sex friendship made it not only more valuable, but at the same time less important – close friendship was conceived, to put it in Rousseau's words, as a means, and never as an end (see *ibid.*).

Apart from this ideological background, which 'consistently marginalized [women's friendships] as "second best" to heterosexual marriage' (*ibid.*:xv), women's obligations to marry for social and economic security ensured the marginality of female friendship during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century: neither did the majority of women have the necessary economic means to establish a home together, nor did social and familial structures encourage such an arrangement (see *ibid.*:xv f.).

In literature, the intimate friendship between two young women was traditionally represented in terms of tenderness, loyalty, coquetry, sensibility, and even passion; romantic friends shared beds and tastes, held hands and exchanged vows of eternal love, writing letters in the language of romance (see Mavor 1971:xvii and Faderman 1992:4). Strong feeling and rhetorical expression that strike twenty-first century readers as extreme were constituting elements of passionate friendship (see Oulton 2007:1). The language employed by romantic friends was often indistinguishable from the erotic language of lovers (see *ibid.*:9), and even the commentators of romantic friendship, such as fictional narrators, used the rhetoric of love and marriage, when discussing its nature (see *ibid.*:16).

Faustina Bateson's affection for Althea is expressed by her caresses. Several hand-pressures (DF 4, 6, 174) ardent embraces (DF 71, 96) and reassuring pressings of the other's shoulder (DF 125, 180) accompany their intense conversations. The friends constantly 'fall into each other's arms. And even when they emerge, the talk keeps at a high level of tenderness' (DF 206).

With the heroines' rhetorical expression of their strong mutual feelings, the representation of Althea's and Faustina's relationship stands in the tradition of romantic friendship rhetoric. The opening quote exposes Faustina's proneness to

pouring out ‘shower[s] of sugared phrases’ (DF 253). Her extraordinary aptitude for effusive words can be nicely illustrated by the names she gives Althea: she alternately calls her ‘my own darling’ (DF 41), ‘dearest’ (DF 43), ‘beloved’ (DF 77), ‘my own’ (DF 148), ‘love’ (DF 173) or ‘my heart’s dear one’ (DF 174). Althea, usually the receiver of Faustina’s verbal excesses that often ‘stirred her like a trumpet-call’ (DF 299), is also shown to take an active part in the cult of romantic language. After her ideal is broken, Althea exclaims heartrendingly: ‘I loved her dearly; I believed in her – oh, *how* I believed in her!’ (DF 336).

The narrator, whose ‘over-critical’ and cool view on Althea’s and Faustina’s relationship is named in the opening quote as well, barely misses a chance to give a satirical account of this extreme verbal and non-verbal behaviour: “‘How out of breath you are, my own!’” says Miss Bateson, slewing herself round from her writing-table, and dropping her pen to extend her arms. But Althea neglects their invitation. [...] The ecstatic smile upon Miss Bateson’s lips dies away’ (DF 148 f.). In passages like this, the narrator ridicules the heroine in displaying her ‘ecstatic’ words and attitudes as highly exaggerated.

As in most representations of passionate friendship, the language and intonation of the friends concerned are similar to the language of lovers, and the relationship is most explicitly discussed in the rhetoric of love and courtship. The tender tone characterising Faustina’s and Althea’s intimate dialogues is described as ‘excessively kind’ (DF 43) or as ‘lovelorn’ (DF 157); their voices either have a ‘quite un-put-on tremble in it’ (DF 45) or they are ‘slightly quivering in the ardour of [their] affectionate homage’ (DF 95). The nature of their love is not differentiated verbally from the love between conjugal partners.

The border between friendship and conjugal unity is even further blurred when Faustina’s inviting Althea to live with her is constructed as a variant of a conventional proposal scene:

‘Will you come and live with me? share a home where there may not be a great many silver spoons’ – laughing – ‘but where work and aspiration and love will certainly not be lacking?’

A flush of gratitude and half-frightened pleasure rushes over Althea’s face. [...] ‘But’ – with a relapse into cloudiness – ‘I thought that another friend shared your life – lived with you?’

‘We have agreed to part,’ replies Faustina gravely [...]. ‘No, darling’ – with solemn tenderness – ‘if you bless my home with your sweet presence, your sovereignty over my heart will be absolutely unshared.’ (DF:45 ff.)

Althea's flush of 'half-frightened pleasure' is one of the few narrative signals in *Dear Faustina* that can be read as an indication of erotic attraction on Althea's part as well as of an awareness that her infatuation with Faustina entails an element of immorality. As I will show in Ch. 3.4, Althea usually spares her agitated blushes for John Drake.

The more salient aspect addressed in this quote however is Faustina's promise of exclusivity. Exclusivity is, besides eternity and entireness, one of the crucial concepts to be found in literary representations of a romantic union (see Reinhardt-Becker 2005:100-118).

As to the 'eternity of their intimacy' (DF 302), Faustina declares that her devotion to Althea will not end before 'all the seas run dry' (DF 96); Althea in turn gives a paper-knife 'as early love-token' to Faustina, with '*Auf Ewig* foolishly slanting across its blade in gilt letters' (DF 353). Both partners obviously indulge in celebrating the eternal nature of their friendship, while the narrator takes up this ideal of eternity rather ironically, circumscribing their relationship as 'a friendship proudly warranted to outlive the everlasting hills' (DF 365) after its breakdown.

Althea becomes aware of the entireness characterising their relationship when finally having left Faustina: 'The violent death by which her passionate love and reverence for Faustina has perished has left a void which, as she gloomily tells herself, nothing can ever fill' (DF 369). The narrator reflects that 'her whole scheme of existence seems now to have been so entirely bound up with Faustina's as to have necessarily perished with her' (DF 370 f.). Althea had devoted every fibre of her being to Faustina, and now she finds herself miserable, helpless and empty after having been robbed of her subject of fixation.

Twice in *Dear Faustina*, choices are shown to be necessary in order to constitute the exclusive status of Althea's and Faustina's relationship: first, Althea has to choose between her sister Clare and Faustina.¹⁷ Her 'beautiful loyalty' (DF 44) to Faustina is the reason that the members of her family turn their backs on her. Later, Althea challenges Faustina to choose between herself and Cressida Delafield, bearing still in mind 'so much [...] of the habit of belief in the eternity of their intimacy' (DF 302) that she expects Faustina to make her choice in *her* favour. But in the end, Althea has to leave the field to the newcomer Cressida, who is characterised by the narrator as 'the axe to cut off [Althea's] own head' (DF 282).

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the sororal relationships in *Dear Faustina* (Althea's healthy, biological sisterhood with Clare vs. her degenerate sisterhood by choice with Faustina), see Hager 2007:464 ff.

Breaking up their exclusive union that was bound for eternity, Cressida's appearance in their joint life initiates a great conflict. When Cressida declares that Faustina has 'most kindly invited me to stay with you for a couple of nights' (DF 226), Althea's reaction is marked by such 'undisguised consternation' (DF 227) that Faustina sees a need for further explanation:

'Miss Delafield expressed such a strong curiosity to know how we working women live, that I told her her best plan would be to come back with me and make practical trial of it. I have engaged to treat her exactly as one of ourselves.' She says it with calm good-humour, as if suggesting the most natural and feasible project imaginable.

Althea's brain whirls round like a peg-top. (DF 227)

Faustina breaks up their exclusivity 'as if suggesting the most natural and feasible project imaginable', whereas Althea quite obviously considers this action as anything but natural. During the following days, she has to deal with 'unsuspected capacities for jealousy [lying] in her own breast' (DF 229), witnessing that Faustina's announcement to treat Cressida 'exactly as one of ourselves' meant to treat her exactly as she treated Althea until that point – not only with regard to 'the Cause', but in every other aspect as well. Watching what could be conceived as Faustina's seducing strategy, Althea sees her own history accurately repeated:

The memory of the rise of their reciprocal devotion is too recent for her not to be able to trace an exact reproduction of its earlier stages in Miss Bateson's method of recommending herself to the newcomer. Little tricks of phrase, slight but expressive caresses, which she had believed to belong to her alone, she now sees to have an equal fitness of application to another. (DF 230)

Understanding that Faustina's courtesy was not meant for her alone, Althea is deeply disillusioned of the ideas of exclusivity and eternity, which seem to have constituted the core ideal of their friendship to her. In this moment of disillusionment, the narrator accords her a clear, analytic view. With a surprising clear-sightedness, Althea is able to name exactly those little tricks that she herself had been seduced by into entering Faustina's lifestyle only a few weeks earlier.

As in many other Victorian representations of romantic friendship, Althea's and Faustina's intimacies, their expressions of mutual fondness and jealousy, as well as their cultivation of romantic values, such as exclusivity, eternity and fidelity, blur the boundaries between intense friendship and sexualised responsiveness. Most elements of their relationship are in a twenty-first-century understanding largely associated with a sexual attachment.

In her study about Victorian representations of romantic friendship Carolyn de la Oulton points out that its commentators actually *were* aware of the erotic potential in its conventions (see Oulton 2007:105); accordingly, literary treatments of romantic friendship made a great effort to establish the distinction between friendship and sexual love, paying tribute to the fact that homo-eroticism was seen as a threat to social stability (see *ibid.*:4, 9, 16). In assuming an awareness of the erotic potential of romantic friendship, instead of making it her focal point in question, Oulton opposes the predominant standpoint of scholarship. Victorian gender research largely adheres to the idea of the asexual Victorian woman who is ignorant of sexual desire (see Faderman 1981:150 and Ledger 1997:125) – an idea that is judged by Sharon Marcus to be a myth: ‘not a Victorian myth, but our own’ (Marcus 2007:259).¹⁸

Instead of occupying herself with that myth, Oulton focuses on the question of self-regulation. She claims that the maintenance of the romantic friendship ideal depends on self-control of those involved, on a ‘deliberate rejection of erotic elements, not an ignorance or even unthinking denial of erotic potential’ (Oulton 2007:3). In consequence, it would not be a woman’s ignorance of the sexual nature of her affection, as sexologist Havelock Ellis propagated (SI 161), but her anxiety that constitutes a necessary condition of romantic friendship.

Oulton explains that ‘a widespread knowledge of what is acceptable and what is not informs the nineteenth-century writing on romantic friendship, and allows it a range of expression within the limits established’ (Oulton 2007:2). She discerns a complex pattern in Victorian accounts of romantic friendship, stating that they are restricted by a quite proscriptive template (see *ibid.*:155). Largely unspoken rules govern literary representations of the ideal: there is either no suggestion of erotic exchange at all, or at least one party remains unconscious of the erotic implications of their friendship. In those cases, the other – the evil and subversive figure, trying to exploit the innocent friend – is finally expelled from the text, whereas the initially too trusting victim desists from homo-eroticism (see *ibid.*:4, 155). This pattern is perfectly reproduced in *Dear Faustina*, featuring Faustina as the outlawed predator and Althea and Cressida as her victims, who are finally rescued by heteronormativity¹⁹.

In accordance with the conventions of nineteenth-century writing, there are almost no suggestions of a deliberate rejection of an erotic element in *Dear Faustina*.

¹⁸ Marcus builds her argumentation on evidence from sources recording daily life, so-called life-writing (see Marcus 2007:8).

¹⁹ For Cressida’s heteronormative ‘happy ending’ with Edward Vane, see DF 385.

Nevertheless, the question of self-control is taken up by the novel in an interesting and significant way. After Faustina's breaking up their exclusivity, Althea's superior pain is caused by her 'unsuspected capacities for jealousy' (DF 229). She is most ashamed of her wounded feelings and her 'suspicions of her *alter ego's* fidelity' (DF 230), which is why she struggles painfully against her jealousy during the days of Miss Delafield's visit. But on the morning of her departure, when Althea learns that Faustina has started calling the newcomer by her Christian name, 'Althea's self-command breaks down' (DF 230) – Althea cannot hide her jealousy from Faustina any longer.

This feeling, which Althea tries to suppress and of which she feels ashamed, is displayed by the narrative as a disagreeable emotion. In a conversation with Clare, Althea voices her fear to be suspected of jealousy of Cressida Delafield, and her consideration is followed by 'an uneasy pause' (DF 244). When Faustina notices Althea's jealousy, calling it a 'weakness' (DF 298) in Althea's character, she starts treating her with contempt:

'I spared you the knowledge of my intercourse with Cressida Delafield [...] out of consideration for a weakness which from the first I divined to exist in your character, but which until lately I hoped might remain latent. You must know that I am alluding to that tendency towards jealousy which I have always thought somewhat unworthy of you.' (DF 298)

Althea is condemned for her open jealousy. Only as a latent trait it has been tolerated by Faustina. Holding a taboo status in this novel, jealousy must be controlled by self-command in order to remain latent. When Althea fails to suppress this element of her character, her romantic friendship with Faustina is bound to end.

I would suggest that in the narrative representation of romantic friendship in *Dear Faustina*, the erotic element, which must not be referred to on the surface of the text, is replaced by the feeling of jealousy. Althea's jealousy is induced by doubts about Faustina's fidelity (see DF 230) – a wording that connotes a conjugal nature of their relationship. Demanding a partner's fidelity implies a demand of monogamy, which, in its turn, implies a sexual element. It seems as if it is not until the appearance of this semantically charged feeling that Althea becomes uncomfortably aware of the inappropriate nature of their union, and the reader with her. When Althea loses control over this feeling, their intimate friendship breaks up. Assuming the symbolic status of Althea's jealousy, I would argue that the plot structure of the narrative conforms to one of the central unspoken rules of representations of

romantic friendship, explained by Oulton: ‘the ideal is only viable as long as the relationship remains within the realms of the non-erotic’ (Oulton 2007:156). As soon as an erotic element, which is by Oulton’s definition always a latent characteristic of romantic friendship, becomes discernible, the friends are no longer joint by that kind of ideal union since their union fails to respect the prescribed boundaries of the ideal. Transferred to a narrative treatment of romantic friendship, this means that the appearance of eroticism necessitates the breakdown of friendship. In *Dear Faustina*, it is Althea’s latent jealousy rising to the surface that infringes the boundaries of ideal same-sex friendship and leads to its end.

What is most contradictory in Victorian representations of the romantic friendship ideal is the pairing of a largely predominating unconsciousness of erotic potential on the part of the protagonists with the narrative rejection of the (homo)sexual element. Since it is obligatory for the ideal that the relationship remains chaste, the narrator has to constantly reinforce its non-erotic status for the reader’s reassurance (see *ibid.*:156 f.). I will elaborate on the narrative (non-)treatment of (homo)sexuality in *Dear Faustina* in Ch. 3.4.

The best-known rule for romantic friendship, put forward by Oulton, is that it should not survive marriage. Friendship is most highly valued in its preparatory function for marriage, and only secondarily as a substitute (see *ibid.*:73). William R. Alger, who wrote a monograph about female friendships, called *The Friendships of Women* (1867), defined its main function in the development process of young women: ‘In the lives of women, friendship is, – First, the guide to love; a preliminary stage in the natural development of affection [...]. Fourthly, it is, in other cases, the comforting substitute for love’ (quoted by Vicinus 2004:xviii). According to Alger, youthful friendship promotes the girl’s elevation of capacity for feeling (see Oulton 2007:10). Moreover, as Oulton elaborates, it fulfils the social purpose of ‘displaying a susceptible and responsive nature to potential suitors, without the danger of compromising restrictive feminine codes of behaviour’ (*ibid.*:9).

The appropriate expressions of intimate friendship change with the woman’s passing through different life stages. While the friendship of the young is perceived, as illustrated above, in relation to passionate feeling for the opposite sex, its enthusiasm is not appropriate to friendship between middle-aged women. But Victorian prescriptions of propriety made a concession for close friendship to ‘old

maids' (see *ibid.*:153), regarding those supportive relationships as substitute for marriage to be characterised, however, by stability, companionship and mutual dependence, and not by passionate feeling (see *ibid.*:30).

Dinah Mulock Craik, editor of the essay collection *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1857), explains in words of 'common sense' the moderate nature of emotional expressions perceived as appropriate for close friends beyond adolescence:

Two women, past earliest girlhood, to be completely absorbed in one another, and make public demonstration of the fact, by caresses or quarrels, is so repugnant to common sense, that where it ceases to be silly it becomes actually wrong. But to see two women, whom Providence has denied nearer ties, by a wise substitution making the best of fate, loving, sustaining, and comforting one another, with a tenderness often closer than that of sisters, because it has all the novelty of election which belongs to the conjugal tie itself – this, I say, is an honourable and lovely sight. (Quoted by Oulton 2007:30)

According to those rules of appropriate expressions of female friendship, Faustina, as a woman 'past earliest girlhood [...] whom Providence has denied nearer ties', should strive for a stable, supportive friendship, a relationship that is certainly *not* to be based on foolish enthusiasm and passion. As we have seen, her relationships, however, are characterised as quite contrary to the Victorian friendship ideal. They rather resemble what Vicinus describes as its counterpart, namely 'a quickly ignited, but quickly burnt out, heterosexual passion' (Vicinus 2004:xviii).

Oulton states that a protagonist's impingement of the designated boundaries often leads to ridicule or reprimand from the fictional narrator (see *ibid.*:155). Hence, with its thoroughly satirical account of the 'fashion of passionate expression' (*ibid.*:125) *Dear Faustina* treats Faustina and her indecent relationships according to contemporary morality. Nevertheless, Faustina's relationships also feature elements like love, support and comfort that were perceived as appropriate for 'surplus women' (Richardson/Willis 2001:4) in fin de siècle England. It is questionable, though, whether Mulock Craik would have described her demeanour as 'an honourable and lovely sight'.

Passionate female friendship as a changing concept

In her groundbreaking study on Victorian female conjugality and intimacy, Sharon Marcus highlights that recent scholarship on female friendship between 1830 and 1880 still broadly adheres to the continuum and minority paradigms that characterised research before the emergence of queer theory (see e. g. Rich 1983 and

Smith-Rosenberg 1975). Both paradigms are based on a notion of the Victorian woman as asexual being, as well as on a general association of female intimacy with a subversive rejection of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1983:139) throughout the centuries. Marcus analyses Vicinus' assumption of the consistent marginalisation of women's friendships 'as "second best" to heterosexual marriage' (Vicinus 2004:xv), showing that she reasserts the distinction between a lesbian minority and a heterosexual norm (see Marcus 2007:11). Attached to the conceptional system of the heterosexual matrix (see Butler 1990), most scholars have tried to 'restore lesbians to history, [portraying] their subjects as an outlawed minority' (Marcus 2007:11) defined by same-sex desire, transgressive gender identification and their exclusion from the institutions of marriage and family.

Incorporating insights of queer theory into her studies on Victorian women, Marcus claims that

we need to abandon continuum and minority theories that define kinship as exclusively heterosexual and frame female couples in terms of their rejection of marriage or their failed appropriation of it [...] in order to see that sexual relationships between women have been part of the history of the family and marriage since at least the nineteenth century. (Ibid.:12)

Those sexual relationships, called 'female marriages' by some Victorians, were not perceived as challenging the conventions, but rather as a variation of the married couple, as Marcus can prove by nineteenth-century sources recording daily life. It is the above presented friendship model of two oldish 'surplus women', who are joint in a non-passionate, supportive, stabilising companionship as a substitute for marriage – an arrangement that was denoted by Dinah Mulock Craik as 'an honourable and lovely sight' – that comes probably closest to Marcus' concept of a socially accepted 'female marriage'. Marcus agrees with Oulton that Victorian female friendships were likely to have an erotic element. But she goes much further than Oulton in arguing that 'our contemporary opposition between hetero- and homosexuality did not exist for Victorians' (ibid.:19), and that the heterosexual matrix is an anachronistic and inadequate frame for understanding the Victorian past. She states that there were actually concepts of lesbianism before 1880, taking shape in French fictional representations of the raw and lawless sapphist, but that those were not perceived as conflated with other forms of female bonds. While French sapphists were considered an antisocial threat to family life – mainly because of their disregard for wedlock, and not so much because of sexual acts –, women in female

marriages had their place in the social order (see *ibid.*:18, 20f.). Their relationships were seen ‘as placid embodiments of the middle-class ideal of marriage: a bond defined by sex that also had the power to sanctify sex’ (*ibid.*:21); like other conjugal partnerships, their marriage signified integration into social networks, sharing of household labour, physical and spiritual care-taking and the transmission of property.

Marcus points out that the notions of woman, sexuality and marriage all changed conceptually in the 1880s. Due to eugenic ideology, marriage was now in the first place framed as a reproductive union, depending on heterosexual fertility; at the same time, feminism’s criticism of men’s oppression of women (hetero)sexualised marriage. In reaction to those discourses, Marcus argues, female couples began to identify with the feminist ideal of chaste love and rejected marriage as a patriarchal institution (see *ibid.*:6). By this, they confirmed the conceptual clustering of marriage/family/heterosexuality versus lesbianism/antisocial subversion constructed by hegemonic discourses.

It was not before 1880s and 90s that the heterosexual matrix became the conceptual frame of female relationships, involving the ‘invention of distinct lesbian identities’ (*ibid.*:261). Scholarship broadly agrees that this moment of radical change in conceptualising female friendship is connected with the spreading of sexologist theory, which located a sexual tendency in romantic friendship and conflated it with feminist alliances that women joined to rebel against the confinements of marriage.

In ‘Sexual Inversion in Women’, the leading late-century sexologist Havelock Ellis remarks that ‘passionate friendships, of a more or less unconsciously sexual character, are certainly common’ (SI 165), explaining his finding with the strong female need for affection and self-devotion to another person, and with the social conditions that leave a girl with no other opportunities of finding an outlet for her sexual emotions than same-sex intimacy. The sexual character detected in female friendships is, according to Ellis, ‘a spurious kind of homosexuality’, mostly a precocious play in puberty that is not necessarily related to ‘true sexual inversion’ (SI 163). Those relationships often come to an end through a relationship with a man that ‘brings the normal impulse into permanent play’ (SI 166), or through knowledge of the real nature of such feelings and ‘a consequent distaste for them’ (*ibid.*). But employments that keep women in constant association and without the company of men can foster this ‘spurious kind of homosexuality’ beyond the phase of puberty

(see SI 163 f.). Relationships of that kind, when formed after school life, can be permanent; in those cases, usually one of the partners is grateful for her friend's devotion, but may not actively reciprocate it, and due to the 'feeble sexual instinct' that characterises this woman, sex is scarcely the fundamental element of the relationship (see SI 166).

Although Ellis assumes that 'conventional propriety recognises a considerable degree of physical intimacy between girls, thus at once encouraging and cloaking the manifestations of homosexuality' (SI 165), he claims that the sexual experience is seldom carried very far in those 'rudimentary homosexual relationships' (SI 165), because the English girl of the lower and middle classes 'is extremely fettered by conventional notions' (SI 164), and her ignorance of sexual matters works as a restraining influence from the carrying out of the 'perversion' to its 'logical conclusions' (ibid.). According to Ellis' research findings, the sexual expressions of school girl attachments commonly amount in kissing, sleeping together and close embraces, and the usually ignorant girl may not even understand the occurring emotions as sexual (see SI 165).

In asserting that the commonest forms of sex practice between women were 'sleeping together, kissing and close embraces' (SI 176), whereas genital contact was rare, Havelock Ellis redefined precisely those forms of female same-sex intimacy as sexual that had until that point been depicted and largely perceived as harmless and innocent expressions of romantic friendship (see Jeffreys 1985:109).²⁰ Conceding that women may not realise the sexual character of their affection, he uses the image of 'unconscious innocence' against them, which had been promoted by the romantic friendship ideal, because he assumes that *every* intense emotional responsiveness implies a sexual force (see Oulton 2007:2).

It was not only this sexologist redefinition of female same-sex intimacy as 'sexual inversion' that brought an end to the innocent image of romantic friendship, but also the contemporary anti-feminist tendency to conflate the concept of Female Inversion with that of the New Woman. Ledger argues that, by means of this linkage,

²⁰ Initially, Ellis did not put those different expressions of female homosexuality into this hierarchical order. In his 1st edition of *Sexual Inversion* (1897), he simply lists 'sleeping together, kissing and close embraces, with more or less sexual excitement, the orgasm sometimes occurring when one lies on the other's body; the extreme gratification is *cunnilingus* [...], sometimes called sapphism' (SI 176).

In his revised 3rd edition of 1915, which Sheila Jeffrey draws on in her argument, Ellis rephrases this passage, almost reducing women's homosexual contact to expressions that were not perceived as sexual before the 1880s: 'Homosexual passion in women finds more or less complete expression in kissing, sleeping together, and close embraces, as in what is sometimes called "lying spoons" [...] mutual contact and friction of the sexual parts seems to be comparatively rare'.

female intimate friendships became frequently codified both as unnatural and as anti-male after the emergence of the New Woman, and was no longer regarded as a harmless and healthy preparation for heterosexual love and marriage (see Ledger 1997:125). She explains this finding with the fact that before the rise of the feminist movement, romantic friendship was depicted as a union of women with otherwise conventional lives (see *ibid.*:128). Female friendship was represented as compatible with conventions then, whereas it would be associated with subversive female solidarity from the fin de siècle years onward. Ledger further claims that it were mainly male, anti-feminist writers of the period, such as George Moore, George Meredith, Henry James and George Gissing, feeling provoked and threatened by the anti-marriage campaigns of the New Women, who sought to pathologise this cultural figure as 'lesbian' (*ibid.*:124).

The emerging scientific discourse about female sexual deviance corresponded with the culturally produced stereotype of the 'inverted' New Woman, which allied sexual perversion with subversive, 'anti-social' activism. Both Havelock Ellis and his friend and fellow sexual theorist Edward Carpenter lay emphasis on the connection between feminist environments and the phenomenon of 'sexual inversion' in women (see Ledger 1997: 130). Ellis sees the women's movement as one of the environmental influences that encourage the increase of homosexuality in women most strongly (see SI 177):

The modern movement of emancipation – the movement to obtain the same rights and duties, the same freedom and responsibility, the same education and the same work – must be regarded as, on the whole, a wholesome and inevitable movement. But it carries with it certain disadvantages. It has involved an increase in feminine criminality and in feminine insanity, which are being elevated towards the masculine standard. In connection with these – we can scarcely be surprised to find an increase in homosexuality which has always been regarded as belonging to an allied, if not the same, group of phenomena. (*Ibid.*)

Ellis suggests that 'a tendency develops for women to carry [their newly acquired independence of men and disdain for the old order] still further and to find love where they find work' (SI 178). According to him, this happens because of both the decay of marriage and the socially still discouraged status of free heterosexual intimacy, restricting the 'sexual field of women [...] to trivial flirtation with the opposite sex, and to intimacy with their own sex' (*ibid.*). That means, women's emancipation aims at invalidating the institution of marriage without offering a new

solution for opposite-sex intimacies, thus leaving homosexual manifestations as the only plausible option. Ellis concedes:

I do not say that these unquestionable influences of modern movements can directly cause sexual inversion, though they may indirectly, in so far as they promote hereditary neurosis; but they develop the germs of it, and they probably cause a spurious imitation. This spurious imitation is due to the fact that the congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in women of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily, influence others. (Ibid.)

Ellis' efforts to differentiate between the 'congenital anomaly' and its 'spurious imitation' are owing to the fact that his 'inversion' research broadly aimed at freeing homosexuality of its disreputable, degenerate and 'morbid' (Felski 1998:5) image in order to create conditions for the public acceptance of the homosexual subject. He emphasises that true 'inverts' are honourable 'individuals of more than average ability or character' (SI 94), who are equipped with sexual health and moral probity, depicting the homosexual element as an incurable phenomenon naturally occurring in them (see Kaye 2007:63).

Instead of speculating about a proper cure for this biological and psychological anomaly, he argues that congenital 'sexual inversion' should be tolerated in a person; only if repressed it could cause damage since psychic denial leads to a 'genetic catastrophe'. In promoting the idea that repressions inevitably materialise in the next generation, Ellis adapted contemporary tropes of heredity, well-known from nineteenth-century dramas such as Henrik Ibsen's (see *ibid.*:64 f.).

While taking up the cudgels for congenital 'inversion', Ellis rejects acquired homosexuality as a result of misguided choice (see Doan/Waters 1998:42). The 'spurious imitation' of homosexuality is judged as a superfluous and disadvantageous side effect of the modern development of society, which is equally despicable as increasing criminality and insanity.

Similar to Ellis, Carpenter noticed in the women's movement

a marked development in the homogenic passion among the female sex [...]. It is pretty certain that such comrade alliances – and of quite a devoted kind – are becoming increasingly common, and especially perhaps among the more cultured classes of women who are working out the great cause of their own sex's liberation. (Carpenter 1908:72)

Unlike Ellis, who is careful not to depict congenital homosexuality as a manifestation that can be 'caused' by environmental influences, Carpenter does not differentiate between acquired and innate forms of the anomaly.

There are several aspects in the sexologist conflation of ‘sexual inversion’ with women’s emancipation movement which appear analogously in Rhoda Broughton’s novel. A congenitally ‘inverted’ woman of high intelligence who works for ‘the great cause of [her] own sex’s liberation’ and voluntarily influences others to follow her example seems to be an accurate description of Faustina Bateson. Cressida Delafield in turn is flatly cast as a young and silly girl who would do anything to take part in the latest fashion. She thus perfectly mirrors the image of an impressible female who uses her adventurous trip into the core of women’s movement to pursue a spurious imitation of homosexuality, because ‘trivial flirtation with the opposite sex’ does not give her enough satisfaction. Cressida’s mother complains to Althea about her daughter’s obsession: ‘scarcely a day passes without their spending hours of it together. In Cressida it has become a madness, a frenzy’ (DF 279). It becomes apparent that Cressida’s ‘madness’ is a temporary one when she finally surrenders to Edward Vane’s attention (see DF 385).

Because of its complexity, the question whether Althea can be characterised as the same type as Cressida will be considered in Ch. 3.3.

Looking at fin de siècle treatments of romantic friendship in comparison to those of the earlier decades of the century, Oulton concedes that the later sources actually reveal a higher awareness of what is perceived as subversive and suggest a greater level of anxiety. However, she observes that ‘the gradual erosion of intense language is not yet visible in the last years of the nineteenth century’, concluding that the conventions governing female friendship are only minimally adjusted in the literary accounts of the fin de siècle (ibid.:17, 156).

It is striking that novels written by feminist woman writers of the 1890s stuck to the ideal, non-erotic image of romantic friendship, persistently representing it as an orthodox form of expression (see Oulton 2007:3). New Woman fiction indeed explores the subversive potential of female solidarity (see ibid.:86), but the individual friendships between protagonists were depicted as unapologetically as ever (see ibid.:126).

In contrast to that finding, Rhoda Broughton’s novel explicitly points out the subversive potential of the excessive variant of female friendship, acted out by Faustina and Althea. The comments given by the speaker upon Faustina’s violation of conventions do indeed reveal a narratorial awareness of the limits imposed on

female friendship. The narrator patrols the prescribed boundaries (see Oulton 2007:9), condemning Faustina twice of trespassing them by claiming 'Love' as the rightful realm of the intimate tone she applies towards Althea:

(a) The elder girl has sat down by her young friend, and is speaking in that tone of passionate caressingness which used to belong to Love, but which female friendship has lately stolen from his quiver. (DF 2)

(b) [Althea:] 'How long do you expect to be away?'
[Faustina:] 'You may be quite sure as short a time as I possibly can' – using the tone with which in old days that contemptible survival, a man in love, was wont to part from his mistress. (DF 96 f.)

With one example exceeding the other's ironic distance to the protagonists, the position of the narrator is clearly marked in those passages by a critical evaluation of the contemporary fashion of female friendship. Two semantic fields are built up in those passages. On the one hand, 'Love' is associated with 'passionate caressingness', 'quiver', 'old days', 'wont', 'belong to', 'a man in love' and 'his mistress'. Doubtlessly, 'Love', written with a capital letter, has a sublime status and carries a thoroughly positive connotation. By means of the named associations, it is ascribed an emotional essence, represented by tenderness and excitement that are said to 'belong to' it. Moreover, it is equipped with tradition ('old days', 'wont') and tied to heteronormativity ('a man in love' with 'his mistress').

The second semantic field is constructed around 'female friendship', linking it to 'lately', 'using', 'stolen from' and, I would argue, to the contemptuous attitude towards men which is expressed ironically with words ('that contemptible survival, a man in love') that obviously do not reflect the opinion of the commentator, but rather that of the protagonists. The field of 'female friendship' lacks every attribution of emotional substance; instead, female friendship is said to use and steal forms of expression originally belonging to love. This representation suggests both that same-sex friendship takes what rightfully belongs to love, and that it can only acquire the form – 'the tone' – of love, but never the emotional essence 'belonging to' it. Thereby, those text examples not only suggest an association of rhetorical skills with a lack of authenticity in Faustina, but also in romantic friendship in general.

Linking 'female friendship' with the adverb 'lately', the narration seems to refer to a new, fashionable form of it. Juxtaposed to the 'old days' – with the connotation of *good old days* –, the current development of same-sex relationships with their new intensity is shown in a derogatory light. There have always been female friendships, but obviously, only 'lately' they have stolen what 'used to belong

to Love'. The narrator's idea of how society would change when remodelled by hatred towards men and anti-marriage campaigns, leaving only the place of a 'contemptible survival' to 'a man in love', gives the impression of a dystopian vision, in which the rightful owner of love is deprived of his mistress and every other privilege, for the benefit of a dubious character like Faustina. At this point, the narration expresses a profound anxiety extremely common with Rhoda Broughton's contemporaries – conservatism feared that those close and self-sufficient bonds that were growing in many all-female surroundings of the women's movement posed a threat to the heteronormative order, which ruled the whole social system of Victorian Britain.

3.2 Patriarchal structures

Faustina, who is obviously not sincerely interested in romantic values, makes use of the conventions of Victorian romantic friendship in order to evoke in Althea a feeling of familiarity and safety, while luring her into a relationship that entails much more than intense emotional responsiveness and eternal fidelity. But what is Faustina's interest in that relationship with Althea? If she is neither motivated by Althea's utility to 'the Cause', nor by the exclusivity and eternity of their union, how does Faustina profit from Althea's presence?

Of all the convictions Faustina pretends to have, the only one presented as thoroughly genuine is her repugnance towards the institution of marriage. Moreover, there is not a single hint to be found in the novel about Faustina having ever paid attention to men – on the contrary, the narrative suggests that she does not find men prepossessing (DF 119). As mentioned above, Havelock Ellis reads a repugnant feeling towards marriage as a plausible constituent in an 'invert's' character (SI 172), and he regards a woman's cold attitude towards men as the most obvious marker of her 'inversion' (see SI 167). Obviously, a novel written in 1897 would not discuss as openly as a sexologist study whether a character's disinterest in men signifies a lack of opposite-sex desire and a disposition for same-sex desire. Consequently, *Dear Faustina* evades the question of Faustina's sexual orientation. But different from other novels of the time, such as George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), it does not *exclude* the option of 'sexual inversion' in the central character by hinting at her romantic involvement with men.

The reason implicitly provided by the novel to explain Faustina's contemptuous distance towards men is plausible without taking up the topic of sexual desire at all. It is her strong aversion of traditional gender roles, to be more precise, of the traditional *female* role. Faustina is disgusted of 'the miserable old path, the wretched old attitude of inferiority and appeal' (DF 306), as she depicts woman's role in a marriage. As elaborated above, woman's role has traditionally been reduced to what Virginia Woolf illustrates as a looking-glass, serving to enlarge men's size (see Woolf 1929:53 f.). A Victorian woman was expected to encourage a strong self-confidence in her husband, to admire him and to forgive and compensate his faults. Faustina is characterised as someone whose main interest lies in *enjoying* exactly those male privileges, and certainly not in treating someone else in that self-sacrificing manner.

Faustina's life with Althea is structured so as to satisfy her desire for male prerogatives. Althea, who in a quite rebellious act leaves home and society in order to share Faustina's life, is assigned a place by the latter that does not differ significantly from the traditional place of a Victorian wife – a place ferociously rejected by both of them. Althea wants to *work* with Faustina, and since she is unable to imagine her own function for 'the Cause', she keeps asking Faustina how she is expected to contribute. The elder finds a number of comforting but confining answers, expressing that 'All that is asked of such as *you* is to *be!*' (DF 206). She invites Althea to 'bless my home with your sweet presence' (DF 47), assuring her that 'your lovely presence – the sense of having your exquisite sympathy always to turn to – is unspeakably helpful in itself' (DF 85). Faustina appreciates Althea's supporting her with her 'exquisite faith and courage, after having worked alone all my life' (DF 95). While Faustina's statements express that she expects from Althea no more than agreeable passivity ('presence', 'to be'), their visitor John Drake immediately discerns 'Althea's refining and straightening influence' in Faustina's flat (DF 348). Althea's sphere of influence is, as in traditional marriage, reduced to the home.

Indeed, Althea has perfectly internalised the art of 'whole-hearted admiration' (DF 95), serving to enlarge her partner's self-confidence. She never stops transfiguring Faustina as 'the noblest [influence] I have ever known' (DF 38), or as someone 'who has cut herself adrift from every natural tie in order to devote herself to what she thinks – to what everyone must think – the higher claims' (DF 40).

Having placed most of those words into Althea's mouth, Faustina at least acknowledges that she has 'magnificently profited [from Althea's] generous tendency to idealize' (DF 122).

Their relationship not only mirrors the patriarchal structure of traditional marriage because of the tender admiration on Althea's side, but also because of Faustina's patronising support. She feels responsible to provide for Althea (DF 114), talks to her 'with lenient indulgence, as to a sick child' (DF 10) and, when Althea is ill, insists on her 'abiding, like Achilles, in her tent; while she herself goes forth to war against the Troy of "Capital" on a trades-union platform' (DF 207). Faustina establishes a position of the weak and fragile wife for Althea, whose 'delicacy of fibre' (DF 205) does not allow too much exertion. Althea, in turn, gratefully accepts the role assigned to her, showing regular rushes of gratitude for Faustina's generosity (DF 45, 72 f., 206).

Soon, the two attitudes on which their extremely hierarchical relationship is built, admiration and patronage, turn into disillusion and condescension. Faustina has grown sick of Althea's 'tender spirit' (DF 233, 337), pointing out her 'incapacity, brittleness, and futility' (DF 235). At the peak of her disappointment, Faustina starts insulting her intimate grossly by accusing her of 'petulant feebleness' (DF 304), 'prurient squeamishness' (DF 299), 'irritable self-love [...] and minute brain-power' (DF 304), 'paltriness' of character and an 'inability to embrace great design' (DF 303). In Faustina's opinion, it is Althea's 'head-strong self-opinion' coupled with her 'intellectual weakness, [that] makes [her] so impossible to deal with' (DF 306). Finally, Althea has become a 'clog with which I had fettered myself' (DF 304), as Faustina puts it. As for Althea's admiration for Faustina, it ceases to exist with the 'smashing of [Althea's] ideal' (DF 279), which is caused by the revelation of Faustina's untruthfulness and infidelity.

So, while this relationship offers Althea nothing more than the traditional female part, entailing precisely the same 'wretched old attitude of inferiority and appeal' (DF 306) that Faustina so bitterly accuses her of looking for in a heterosexual romance, Faustina profits greatly from the masculine role she occupies, a role that is indeed comparatively new and radical for a woman.²¹

²¹ For an earlier example of nineteenth-century female masculinity, see Judith Halberstam's account of the 'female husband', which grounds on the diaries (1819-1826) of Miss Anne Lister (Halberstam 1998:65-73).

The patriarchal structure I demonstrated to be determining Faustina's relationship is confirmed by Ardis for a number of late-century novels in a footnote to her study *New Women, New Novels*:

Significantly, lesbian relationships are characterized very negatively in the handful of New Woman novels that present such relationships at all. In Mrs. Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* and Rhoda Broughton's *Dear Faustina*, as well as in [Edith Johnstone's] *A Sunless Heart*, lesbian partnerships simply reproduce the pattern of sexual, intellectual, and economic domination that New Women were objecting to in the practice of Victorian heterosexuality. In other words, lesbian pairings do not represent any kind of alternative to patriarchal (hetero)sexuality in these novels; women 'invert' their sexuality, to use Havelock Ellis's phrasing, but they sustain the active/passive dichotomy associated with male/female partnerings. (Ardis 1990:198)

Unfortunately, Ardis neither clarifies her usage of the term 'New Woman novels', obviously including novels written from an anti-feminist perspective *about* New Women, nor does she consider that current concepts of sexual orientation cannot easily be deployed to fin de siècle representations of same-sex relationships. With this anachronistic approach, drawing on Adrienne Rich's theory of the 'lesbian continuum' (see Rich 1983), Ardis' study is clearly located before the rise of queer theory. Differentiating the 'lesbian relationships' she discerns in the named novels by Broughton, Linton and Johnstone from a couple of other fictional same-sex relationships that she conceives as homoerotic but not as homosexual, since 'they do not encompass genital sexual contact between women' (Ardis 1990:138), Ardis inexcusably ignores nineteenth-century morality and literary convention, which foreclosed explicit representation of sexual contact of *any* kind. Moreover, she does not provide any evidence for her daring statement of Faustina's and Althea's relationship *being* homosexual, and thus encompassing 'genital sexual contact' according to her definition.

Nevertheless, Ardis' footnote about *Dear Faustina* includes some relevant conclusions. As I stated before, Faustina's relationship with Althea does in fact reproduce a patriarchal pattern of domination, sustaining the 'active/passive dichotomy associated with male/female partnerings'. Ardis notes that New Woman novels established female friendships which reproduced the pattern 'that New Women were objecting to in the practice of Victorian heterosexuality', suggesting that those fictional same-sex relationships did not represent an alternative. I would argue that the examples chosen by Ardis were written with the *intention* to discredit not only radical feminism but also self-sufficient female partnerings in order to strike

a blow either for traditional heteronormativity or for a moderate reform movement coupled with heteronormative unions (like Althea and Drake). The contradiction emphasised by Ardis dissolves when we desist from gathering all novels about New Women under the corpus label *New Woman novels*, looking closer at the single texts instead.

In *Dear Faustina*, it is John Drake instead of Faustina Bateson who is represented by Broughton as a potential partner for Althea, able to offer her a real alternative. When Althea meets him coincidentally in church, they discuss her relationship with Faustina, and Althea reflects: ‘Sometimes I think I might have done better if I had been with a person nearer my own level intellectually – someone who would have made mistakes too, whom I might have gone hand-in-hand with, helped as well as been helped by’ (DF 224). And a moment later, having spent some time intensely looking into each other’s eyes, she repeats: ‘Someone whom I could have gone hand-in-hand’ (DF 225). Although never suggesting that Drake might be someone to make mistakes or to need help, the narration implies – by having Althea repeat her wish while nearly drowning in his eyes – that he might be the one in whom she could find a more equal companion than Faustina. This romantic notion of a relationship at eye level is taken up once more at the very end of the novel when Drake and Althea are united by ‘a delightful dawning sense of the unity of interest that is for the future to connect their lives’ (DF 399). Apart from those two passages, the narration suggests that John Drake will be, due to his obvious superiority over Althea, her advisor and leader rather than her equal partner.

3.3 ‘A spurious kind of homosexuality’

So far, I have not exposed very much of the sexual identity ascribed to Althea Vane by the narration. In order to receive a clearer image of how the protagonist is characterised in aspects of sexual desire, I will briefly compare her to Havelock Ellis’ types of deviant femininity. Reading Althea’s characterisation against the backdrop of sexology, I do not mean to imply that Broughton cast the character after the model of Ellis’ categories. Rather, I assume that Broughton and Ellis were both influenced by the same ideological stereotypes when creating their female figures. Thus, I use Ellis’ studies of Female Inversion to reconstruct the conceptual

frameworks in which same-sex desire has been understood at the time that *Dear Faustina* was written.

Faustina Bateson, as I have demonstrated above, has a lot in common with the Female Invert, whereas Cressida Delafield's short but intense intimacy with Faustina resonates perfectly with Ellis' definition of a precocious, 'spurious imitation' of homosexuality. Althea's fictional identity is less easy to categorise in terms of sexologist theory. It is not obvious whether she is cast as essentially deviant or as only temporarily drawn to homosexuality.

Besides the three types of women that I have presented before (the 'actively inverted woman'; the 'mannish' woman with no tendency to sexual perversion; the impressible, immature female in whom homosexual activity is spurred only temporarily by environmental influences), Havelock Ellis also distinguishes 'a class of women in which homosexuality, while fairly distinct, is only slightly marked' (SI 166). He places all specimens of his case studies 'to whom the actively inverted woman is most attracted' (SI 167) into this vague category of women. A woman of this class is not repelled by the lover-like advances from other women; in the contrary, she accepts the 'ardent love [of an inverted woman] with pleasure, but in a passive manner' (SI 170). Her 'sexual impulses' are seldom well marked. While 'always womanly', endowed with a good figure, a rather plain face and a strongly affectionate nature, the passive lover of the 'invert' is usually 'not very robust and well-developed, physically or nervously' (SI 167). Ellis notes that these are 'the pick of the women whom the average man would pass by' (ibid.), which might be one reason for their being open to homosexual advances. But he emphasises that the more prominent reason lies within the fact that these women possess a genuine (though not precisely sexual) preference for women over men. Their coldness towards men – not their lack of charm – again explains men's indifference to them (see ibid.).

The 'actively inverted woman' in turn, is characterised in aspects of sexual desire and sexual behaviour as the perfect match of a woman of this class: she is voluptuous, takes the initiative in sexual matters and 'makes advances to the woman to whom she is attracted' (SI 167, 172); she is an enthusiastic admirer of the statuesque beauty of the feminine body, rather than of beauty of the face (see SI 176); she is attracted to younger women with whom she can act out her love of domination and form relationships that give her a sense of power (see SI 172); she is

energetic in character and likes to take the active and protecting role with her lovers (see *ibid.*).

George Chauncey explains that exactly this active mode of the ‘invert’s’ sexual behaviour – her sexual aggressiveness – is the distinctive feature of sexological classifications of ‘inversion’. As most scholars, he assumes that Victorian ideology regarded women as passionless and not prone to express sexual desire. Within this ideological system, a complete reversal of a woman’s sex role and sexual character was required for her to actively initiate homosexual acts. ‘Sexual inversion’ in a woman meant that she had to become man-like in all aspects of her gender behaviour, including sexual desire. Or, to look at it the other way around, a woman’s assumed sexual passivity served as a paradigm for her complete gender role (see Chauncey 1982:117 ff.). ‘Sexual inversion’, as Chauncey famously claimed, ‘did not denote the same conceptual phenomenon as homosexuality. [Rather, it] referred to a broad range of deviant gender behaviour, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect’ (*ibid.*:116).

Chauncey further elaborates that sexological thought was governed by the ‘heterosexual paradigm’ (*ibid.*:125): as usual during the nineteenth century, *fin de siècle* sexologists could only comprehend a homosexual relationship in terms of their conventional knowledge about heterosexual conjugality. In Victorian thinking, marriage represented a union of opposed characteristics, attributed to man and woman respectively. Correspondingly, the Female Invert was imagined to hold the place of a ‘female husband’ who embodies all typically male character traits, while her passive partners were never labelled as deviant, but rather as ‘normal wives, playing their proper feminine roles’ (*ibid.*).

As I have shown in the last section, the strict categorisation of the partners into an active and a passive role, usually associated with husband and wife, is taken up by Broughton’s constellation and characterisations of her protagonists: Faustina’s and Althea’s relationship is based on an active/passive dichotomy. Althea accepts a role similar to that of a traditional Victorian wife when she decides to join Faustina; her sphere of influence is reduced to domesticity, and all that is asked of her is an agreeable, passive presence. By contrast, Faustina inhabits a position of domination, cultivating a protective demeanour towards Althea. Althea has, like Ellis’ passive lover, a very feeble nervous constitution. She possesses feminine beauty, which is

mentioned explicitly by Faustina once; yet it is rather a beauty of the face (see DF 87) than of the figure.

So far, Althea could therefore be characterised in the spirit of Ellis' category of the passive lover, in whom homosexuality is distinct, but hardly marked. This form of homosexuality is as congenital as the sexual deviance of the 'invert'. Read against the backdrop of Ellis' 'inversion' research, there is only one aspect in *Dear Faustina* suggesting that Althea's anomaly is of congenital nature, namely her mother's involvement in the feminist movement that could, according to Ellis, promote 'hereditary neurosis' (SI 178), which, in turn, could be a possible explanation for Althea's susceptibility to homosexual advances.

There are, however, a lot more implications to be found in the novel that characterise Althea as a woman who is only temporarily drawn to a 'spurious kind' (SI 163) of intimate same-sex relationship due to her ignorance of sexual matters. Like in most examples of passionate friendships depicted by Havelock Ellis, Althea's intimate contact to Faustina ends when two conditions are fulfilled: her own jealousy evokes in the innocent and ignorant protagonist an awareness for the true, inappropriate nature of her relationship with Faustina; at the same time, her growing (sexual) interest for Drake supersedes her devotion to the female friend.

Different from the category of the homosexual lover of the Female Invert, Althea is usually interested in a men, and she also receives attention from men. Faustina's admiration of Althea's beauty is limited to one or two declarations, whereas there are several passages in *Dear Faustina*, describing how Althea's comeliness is perceived from the perspective of a male observer: Althea is 'accustomed to being stared at for her prettiness' (DF 331), and not only is her very pretty face (DF 185) noticed by an old friend of her father's, but also by John Drake who observes 'her pretty shoulders and [...] her faintly-indicated collarbones' (DF 189). Already at the beginning of their acquaintance, 'she throws what he thinks, what most people would think, an extremely pretty look of silent gratitude at him' (DF 104). This image of her is not changed in Drake's eyes until the end when he calls her a graceful, 'silent lily' in his thoughts (DF 381). Her resemblance with this Marian image does not only characterise Althea as a woman of traditional feminine beauty, but it also evokes 'a Victorian woman's proper role of wifely submission[,] quietude' and innocence (Murphy 2000:68).

It has not been clarified yet to what degree Althea's devotion to Faustina can be characterised as sexual. Does her narratorial characterisation suggest that she accepts Faustina's 'ardent love [...] with pleasure, but in a passive manner' (SI 170), like Ellis' passive homosexual, or rather that she is grateful for Faustina's devotion but does not reciprocate it, as common in Ellis' categorisation of 'rudimentary homosexual relationships' (SI 165)?

The novel suggests, as Murphy points out, that this 'unnatural but reversible allegiance [to Faustina] represents an almost involuntary misstep for an otherwise wholly traditional Victorian female' (Murphy 2000:74). This impression that Althea's attraction to Faustina is of a temporary kind is not only evoked by the final plot turn leading Althea into Drake's realm, but also by Althea's characterisation as a typical English middle-class girl who is, despite her attempts to emancipation, still to a considerable degree concerned about conventions. This being 'extremely fettered by conventional notions' (SI 164) is, according to Ellis, a significant marker of a temporary homoerotic experimentation.

Before inquiring further into the sexual aspects of Faustina's same-sex relationships, I can put down that unlike Havelock Ellis, who in his case studies always assigns a passive, but 'truly homosexual' lover to his 'sexual inverts', Rhoda Broughton offers her 'invert' only partners with a 'spurious' kind of homosexual interest.

3.4 Sexual agency

Under the guise of conventions

Why does a 'traditional Victorian female', as Murphy characterises Althea, get involved with Faustina in the first place? How can Althea reconcile her decision to join the New Woman with her traditional upbringing? Since intimate female friendship has had a long tradition and has never been conceived as immoral, Faustina does not violate any of the basic rules of middle-class morality by simply *sharing a home* with other women. From what we have seen so far, her lifestyle is less offensive than that of other fictional New Women, who provoke their conservative surroundings by choosing a 'free love' relationship with a man.

In public, Faustina finds an appropriate way of continuing their domestic structure of domination, this time combining aspects of convention and subversion in herself – she treats Althea and Cressida in a gentlemanly manner when they are out-of-doors. When taken by Faustina to a club night for the first time, Althea tries to get along on her own for some time, but the new impressions and acquaintances are more than she can cope with.

It is with genuine relief that she sees Faustina masterfully ploughing a path towards her through the female sea. She nods familiarly to the young journalists, but her words are for Althea.

‘I am afraid I must take you away; it is later than I thought.’ In a lower tone: ‘You look fagged, darling. Is it so?’ (DF 171)

The scene is very similar to another, showing John Drake rescuing Althea from another crowd: ‘the sounds begin to come huskily from Althea’s oppressed chest, when she becomes aware [...] that someone is making vigorous efforts to clear a way through [the] mass, and in another second, to her infinite relief, she sees Drake shouldering his way with little ceremony to her side’ (DF 263). Faustina’s position as Althea’s rescuer is depicted analogously to Drake’s. Like him, she is responsible for the health and comfort of the weak, fagged and helpless lady in her custody. Faustina can realise this gentlemanly, or ‘mannish’ behaviour without being especially objectionable, because both of her friends, Althea and Cressida, are middle-class ladies in need of a chaperone.²² Her expressing the ‘wish to escort the poor little girl to her aunt’s door’ (DF 231), when she wants to share some exclusive moments with Cressida, shows that Faustina is perfectly aware of the opportunities provided by tradition.

Althea, whose activities are controlled by her ‘native maiden’ (DF 316) attitudes, thinks it far too unseemly at first to be escorted by Drake, whereas walking in Faustina’s company seems completely natural to her (see DF 220). I would argue that however ‘mannish’ Faustina acts, she is perceived by the other characters as essentially female. Hence, she enjoys both, the prerogatives of the male and the female sex, leading an unconventional life under the guise of conventions.

It seems to be one of the privileges of Faustina’s unconventional interpretation of conventionality that she can have intimate, and even unseemly, physical contact to her friends without really upsetting them.

²² It is, at the same time, never addressed why Faustina, who is an unmarried woman as well, is allowed to walk alone; but this different evaluation of seemliness can probably be drawn back on their class difference.

(a) Faustina [...] subsides, first on to her heels, and then into a sitting posture on the rug, with her head leant against Althea's knees. The attitude a little shocks the disciple, as an unseemly reversal of the fit order of things; but Faustina's sigh of enjoyment arrests her protest. (DF 81 f.)

(b) Before Althea opens the door [she hears her leader's] voice in fluent interchange with another female one [striking her as familiar], yet on her entrance she does not for the first moment recognize the figure seated in an attitude of eager devotion at Faustina's knee. (DF 225)

By emphasising Althea's status as Faustina's 'disciple' in that first passage (a), the narration suggests that Althea's reaction to the 'unseemly reversal of the fit order of things' should be first and foremost read as the shocked reaction of a disciple, whose mentor deliberately disregards the fit order of things, meaning an hierarchical order, and leans her head against her subordinate's knee, instead of being leant on. With the 'unseemly reversal' and Faustina's 'sigh of enjoyment', the text invites, however, to a queer reading as well. Were it not for the 'disciple', Althea could as well be shocked by her same-sex friend's physical obtrusiveness, finally yielding to it because of her status of subordinate dependence. Although Althea is very concerned about her acting in accordance with the basic Victorian morals, she does not resist Faustina's physical advances for long since 'Faustina's sigh of enjoyment arrests her protest'. Faustina is the one who calls the tune; Althea trusts in her and obeys her.

Cressida's position at Faustina's knee (b) would, according to the first interpretation of the 'fit order of things', be anything but unseemly, since it is the disciple sitting on her leader's lap this time. And yet, it seems odd that her being 'seated in an attitude of eager devotion at Faustina's knee', striking a twenty-first-century readership as a perfect image of a flirting couple, is not commented on by the narrator at all.

The lacking narrative treatment of what could be perceived as Faustina's trespassing of borders of sexual morality is astonishing. The signals given by the narration on different levels are, however, coherent. While Faustina is characterised as thoroughly repellent to her acquaintances, as someone who 'infect[s her victims] with her pestilent opinions' (DF 285), none of them seems to perceive her as a threat to Althea's and Cressida's sexual purity.

There is one passage in the novel illustrating that aspect very well. It starts with Althea's family being convinced that Faustina has chosen Cressida Delafield as her next 'victim' (DF 239) in order to take revenge on Althea's brother Edward, who has always treated Faustina contemptuously and who is in love with the lady in question.

When Althea has finally convinced her sister that ‘wreaking of petty spites’ (DF 242) is not the reason for Faustina’s choice, Clare starts wondering about a question very central to this study: ‘Then, what *could* have been her motive?’ (ibid.). Althea replies: ‘If you can conquer your prejudices enough to credit her for once with an innocent one, you may believe that it was simply because Miss Delafield expressed a wish to see how people like us – working women – lived’ (DF 242 f.). Learning that Cressida actually appreciates this lifestyle and plans to continue with it, Clare exclaims: ‘Then [Edward] will go mad!’ (DF 243). In that passage, the narration quite obviously suggests that there is more to Edward’s fear about Cressida’s entering of Faustina’s realm of influence than his loathing for Faustina’s ‘pestilent opinions’ (DF 285) and her lifestyle.

As I have elaborated above, the novel has proved Faustina’s official motive for choosing Cressida wrong – the young lady is not useful to ‘the Cause’. Thereby, Althea’s explanation of Faustina’s innocence is shown to be insubstantial as well; Faustina is guilty of not having an innocent motive. Combined with the wordings chosen by the narrator and the minor characters to characterise Faustina’s relationships to her young, innocent friends, the lack of innocence in Faustina suggests a sexual character of her guilt. Althea and Cressida are denoted as Faustina’s ‘victims’ and ‘preys’ several times (DF 239, 285, 300), Faustina is accused of ‘an iniquitous case of child-stealing’ (DF 279) and of ‘kidnapping a foolish young girl from her home’ (DF 297). Those formulations caused other critics to call Faustina a sexual predator (see Murphy 2000:72 and Hager 2007:460), but the narrator is very careful to give the words a different, non-sexual meaning.

Coming back to the passage discussed above, Edward’s fear of Faustina’s influence is a perfect example of how the narration diverts the reader’s suspicion away from Faustina’s sexuality. Clare explains the nature of Edward’s anxiety to her sister:

‘It is not so much, or, at least, not *only*, Faustina’s influence that he dreads; he has a terror of her meeting *men* here – men of the type of that Mr. Drake, who has a sort of good looks, has not he? and is a plausible kind of person. Though Cressida looks such a baby, she is nearly of age; and Ned is in terror lest this Mr. Drake, or someone like him, should try to get hold of her for the sake of fortune.’ (DF 245)

The idea that Cressida could meet men at Faustina’s place troubles Edward most. This information undermines Faustina’s self-built image completely, depriving her both of the subversive potential of *replacing* a male partner and of her influence to

draw away girls from the institution of marriage by means of conviction. The narration characterises Faustina as a subversive figure with bad influence on innocent characters, but obviously not because she constitutes an alternative and a threat to men and marriage. Faustina does not taint her victims' purity. After having lived with her, they are still marriageable – unless they are introduced by her to 'bad', *male* company and seduced by *them* to immoral sexual conduct.

Corresponding to this ideological framework, Althea is most horrified when Faustina suggests that she has been paying attention to John Drake; she reflects: 'she had carried her white maiden pennon so high; and now it lies dragged and defiled in the filth of the public street' (DF 310). While the passionate friendship with Faustina left Althea's 'white maiden pennon' unsullied, the mere romantic longing for Drake has defiled her purity.

It may seem astonishing at first that the narration does not suggest Faustina's intimacy with other women to have a tainting effect on their purity. But if we take another look at Havelock Ellis' account of passionate friendship between women, we get a clearer idea of how Broughton's contemporaries judged such behaviour. According to him, women's emancipation at the fin de siècle is still limited when applied to the sexual sphere. Therefore, free heterosexual intimacy is as much discouraged socially as ever, restricting the 'sexual field of women [...] to trivial flirtation with the opposite sex, and to intimacy with their own sex' (SI 178). While commenting on the limitations of women's emancipation and the status quo of sexual conventions, Ellis incidentally suggests that women's 'intimacy with their own sex' is socially accepted. Although it is detested by anti-feminists for its 'anti-social' implications, female same-sex intimacy seems to have been perceived as a smaller threat to the patriarchal order than heterosexual 'free love' unions.

Depriving the sexual predator of her agency

Although the narration ostensibly denies a sexual element in Faustina's relationships to her 'victims', it still gives a number of more or less obvious hints to characterise them as deviant from usual female friendships, which again fuels the image of Faustina as being sexually deviant. The deviant quality of Faustina's relationships is suggested firstly, by the narratorial comments about current changes of female friendship (analysed in Ch. 3.1), secondly, by its incompatibility with heterosexual

marriage, and thirdly, by narrative techniques that suggest the existence of a physical intimacy that cannot or may not be expressed directly in a novel of 1897.

A basic condition of Faustina's friendship with Althea is their shared ferocious rejection of marriage:

[Althea:] 'It sounds incredible now, but I fully intended to marry. [...] Till you lifted a corner of the veil –'

[Faustina:] 'I could have lifted it a good deal more [...].'

'[...] You need not be afraid. You told me quite enough.'

Both feel that they are getting on a plane of emotion too high for everyday use, and by one consent descend to earth again. (DF 76)

Their joint repulsion of marriage puts them on a high level of emotion, it ties them together by stabilising their promise of exclusivity. Faustina perceives heterosexual marriage as the greatest treachery. As long as her loyalty to Faustina lasts, Althea has to uphold her contempt for this institution as well, which is why she feels so guilty when detecting an interest for Drake in herself. Faustina has always perceived Drake as an 'intruding third' (DF 152), and condemns Althea's 'contemptible willingness to be the cat's-paw of John Drake' (DF 305) when she learns about her sympathy for him. In their last fight, Faustina expresses a deep bitterness about Althea's eventual return towards men and heteronormativity:

'It is such as you, whose petulant feebleness, whose irritable self-love, whose silly conventions and minute brain-power, have [...] palliated, justified, explained man's attitude to us. [...] Do you think that I have not seen you, in spite of all I have told you of the horror of men's lives, in spite of your hypocritical air of repulsion – do you think that I have not seen you drifting into the miserable old path, the wretched old attitude of inferiority and appeal? Has it ever struck you that, had I been cast in the same mould as you, I, too, might have played at jealousy?' (DF 304, 306).

In the first place, Faustina seems to be angry that her influence on her disciple is restricted. But it is obvious that her furious words are led by personal feelings as well, although she denies to be prone to jealousy. Althea's interest in Drake means an end to their intimacy. There can be no doubt that their friendship would be incompatible with a marriage of Althea and Drake, since it claims a considerable number of exclusive rights usually belonging to a conjugal bond. Althea's marrying would involve Faustina's degradation to a sisterly friend and deprive her of all the conveniences and privileges connected to the specific nature of their relationship. Since such a sororal friendship is of no interest to Faustina, she supplants Althea with a fresh 'victim' as soon as she realises Althea's romantic involvement with Drake.

In a number of passages, the narration suggests the existence of physical intimacy in Althea's passionate friendship with Faustina, which could not be expressed directly in the novel under the constraints of genre conventions and Victorian morality. This sexual aspect, which is absent from the surface of the text, is implied mainly by means of pauses and ellipses. One of the narrative strategies to express the unspeakable can be demonstrated with the following example. Althea warns Drake about Faustina's goal-directed fastness: 'She is not a person who ever loses time; and she may [...] put her—her scheme into execution to-ni— at once' (DF 327). Althea's inability to pronounce 'to-night', when referring to Faustina's plans of taking Cresida away from her parents to live with her, mirrors the novel's confines to express what could happen during that night when Faustina puts her scheme into execution.

Hager points out that even the pause of a comma can serve to 'indicate a moment of unnarratable physical intimacy' (Hager 2007:467), drawing on a passage where Faustina declares her eternal love to Althea: 'Such a declaration cannot help but be followed by an embrace, and then they return to business' (DF 96). It is often after the mentioning of embraces (which are never described in detail) that the narrator leaves a gap: 'Here they fall into each other's arms. And even when they emerge, the talk keeps at a high level of tenderness' (DF 206). According to Hager, Broughton uses 'the silence of the pause to take the place of the precise nature of their physical intimacy' (Hager 2007:467).

Murphy claims that the gaps convey that their relationship is an improper one, quoting the passage that most explicitly marks the unspeakable (see Murphy 2000:69):²³

[Althea:] 'If it had not been for [...] your extraordinary and most unexpected sympathy and kindness to me [...], I dare say we might never have been drawn together. Oh, but you *were* kind!' – her eyes filling.

[Faustina:] 'There is no question of kindness where one loves.'

A short pause. (DF 7)

The 'short pause' in conversation at this high pitch of emotion is likely to have been filled by the readers, according to their late-Victorian reading experience, with imaginations of the unspeakable sexual element.

²³ According to Murphy, a whole list of further narratorial hints made it obvious to the Victorian public that Faustina violates the approved manifestations of female friendship. Unfortunately, Murphy ignores the discourse of romantic friendship, sustaining her claim of 'the cultural awareness of unseemly female bonding' (Murphy 2000:69) with a row of text examples that I have quoted as evidence for *acceptable* forms of female intimacy within the framework of Victorian romantic friendship.

It is questionable, though, whether it is appropriate to interpret those hints at physical intimacy as signifiers of homoerotic tension between Althea and Faustina, or even of homosexual activity. Nevertheless, Murphy does not only draw this direct conclusion, but she even goes one step further, explaining Broughton's cautious representation of the sexual element with Ellis' influence: 'It is immaterial that the text never suggests the pair engages in blatant sexual acts, for under Ellis' description of impassioned female friendship, the mutual attraction is a sufficient indication of homosexual behaviour' (Murphy 2000:71). Murphy's weird argumentation for the presence of homoerotic attraction in *Dear Faustina* reveals a lot about her approach. Suggesting that Broughton took Ellis' studies as a guideline when deciding how blatantly she would write about sex, Murphy's reasoning not only assumes a direct influence of sexologist texts on fictional texts, but it also ignores the confines of contemporary genre conventions. Moreover, Murphy simplifies and misinterprets Ellis' explanations about homosexual attraction and behaviour in order to state that mutual attraction automatically implied 'blatant sexual acts', however absent in the fictional text.

A closer look at the novel leads to a different set of findings. While hinting at physical intimacy, the subtext of *Dear Faustina* also conveys a lack of bodily indicators of desire. In Faustina's company, Althea lacks somatic responses like blushing almost completely, whereas her face is quite treacherous of her feelings when she speaks about Drake or when she is in his company. When Clare suggests that men like Drake could try to get hold of Cressida Delafield's fortune, 'Althea's first answer [...] is a deluge of crimson that submerges face and throat' (DF 245). Asked by her sister, whether she classes Drake with the saints, 'the never-quite-ebbed red rushes back over Althea's cheeks' (DF 247). Later, when Althea sees Drake again, after some days of separation, and offers him tea, her face is covered by 'a far-reaching blush, extending from ear to ear' (DF 383), and she reflects with embarrassment 'how painfully she is reddening again!' (DF 387).

In contrast to the most decent gentleman, Faustina touches Althea all the time; but while Althea blushes because of *almost* touching Drake's hand when passing the tea, Faustina's physical contact to her never seems to arouse any feelings in Althea, nor is it answered by a returned caressing.

As we could also see in Edward's fear about Cressida's meeting men at Faustina's place, it is John Drake – an actual man – who is attributed agency by the

narration, a sexual kind of agency that is not admitted to Faustina; her agency seems to be reduced to talking. Rhoda Broughton does not deny her fictional character what Havelock Ellis attributes to his Female Invert: a masculine trait of sexual aggressiveness. Like the 'invert', Faustina actively approaches women to whom she is attracted. But by means of this unequal distribution of agency, the narration denies Faustina any reciprocity of sexual attraction. Faustina's attempts of seduction leave Althea cool – she never actually succeeds in evoking sexual feelings in her partner.

Heteronormativity strikes back

While Althea's friendship with Faustina is characterised by an exaggerated portrait of romantic female attachment, marked by open exclamations of eternal love and unremitting caresses, it lacks a more subtle level of erotic tension that is characteristic for the traditional romance plot. Murphy understands Althea's more or less chronological 'progression from homoerotic infatuation to heterosexual commitment' as a gradual process that is mirrored by a displacement of her erotic inclinations 'from the overt and transgressive sexuality represented by Faustina to a covert and socially accepted form' (Murphy 2000:74). Besides the undisguised demonstration of Faustina's frequent search for bodily contact with Althea, which is characterised by rather blatant advances, the novel makes some use of coded allusions as to physical intimacy between the two heroines, but it spares all suggestions of an erotic potential to the relationship between Althea and Drake.

In addition to Althea's treacherous blushes, there exist a vast number of passages that imply an emerging romantic involvement between Althea and Drake, anticipating a sexual level in their relationship. Their mutual attraction is quite visible from an outside perspective, as the narration suggests: twice, when they are deeply engaged in a conversation about the 'Cause', Drake cannot help thinking 'how easily their attitude might be misread by a passerby' (DF 148): Althea 'has come quite close to him; her cheeks are blanched, and her eyes are plunged into his' (ibid.) – 'it is as fellow-champions, brother fighters in the battle of mercy, that they involuntarily draw together. But to an onlooker their attitude would be misleading' (DF 199). And indeed, Edward perceives Drake's way of talking to Althea as 'offensive intimacy' (DF 203) – a judgment that is never transferred to Faustina's inclination to physical contact.

The narrator reveals enough of Drake's and Althea's emotions to confirm Edward's impression: Drake sees her in 'a lovely light' (DF 218), covering his admiration for her womanhood behind 'a tribute to her apostleship' (DF 195). Althea feels 'comforted warmth [...] about her heart' (DF 212) when in his presence, and finds herself in 'a very much brighter mood than she has for some time enjoyed' (DF 270) after having spent a day with him. But, like Drake, she does not allow herself to become fully aware of the cause of her light-heartedness: 'She does not pry too nicely into the component parts of her good spirits, though, if the question were pressed, she could give a very handsome and creditable account of them' (ibid.).

Those passages give early signals of the couple's falling in love and being meant for each other. This narrative strategy of revealing unconscious and semi-conscious feelings that two characters have for each other is counted by Ina Schabert as one crucial element of every traditional romance plot. The reader of a romance is used to comprehend the protagonist's sexual desire in certain plot turns, including (apart from those first signals of a new infatuation) the hero's explicit courting of the heroine, a proposal scene and the fulfilment of desire in the happy ending of a wedding scene (see Schabert 1997:527). As a late-Victorian novel dealing with fin de siècle debates around female emancipation, *Dear Faustina* transforms the three last steps. Because of their rejection of the institution of marriage, Drake and Althea keep denying their mutual attraction. Instead of explicitly courting Althea and making her a proposal, Drake offers her a working settlement which will join their lives by their united work for the 'Cause'. But undoubtedly, his efforts to help Althea find a new place only cover his courting. The novel dismisses the reader with an open ending that clearly suggests reciprocal sexual attraction between Drake and Althea, without demonstrating an option of how they could realise a sexual union (in an alternative form to marriage). Obligated to their anti-marriage conviction, and yet bound to Victorian morals that forbid a 'free love' union, Althea and Drake seem to have built an obstacle in the way of their own fortune.

This problem is expressed most explicitly when they find themselves

standing side by side at the old oak altar-rails [of a church], at which so many a man and maid [...] have stood to engage in that sacred contract for which both the present man and maid, as each has been separately informed [by Faustina], feel and express so deep an abhorrence. (DF 215 f.)

This passage includes a hint, which allows to interpret the open ending as leading to the traditional close of a romance plot all the same; standing with Althea before the

altar and looking as if they were being married gives Drake ‘an annoyed sense of being always, in reference to his companion, seeming something that he is not’ (DF 216). Drake is annoyed, so it seems, to have been given the image of a radical marriage opposer by Faustina – an image that now stands in the way of a union with Althea. His reflection about being seen as ‘something that he is not’ suggests that he actually is not such a fervent marriage opposer as Faustina told Althea he was: ‘John Drake has a rather firmer hold upon his convictions than you, your attentions to him are not likely to lead to the only clause which would seem a satisfactory one to yourself and your highly respectable family’ (DF 306 f.). When Faustina confronts Drake with what she perceives as treachery – ‘Since when has this admiring loyalty to the Marriage Laws blossomed out in you?’ (DF 356) –, Drake ignores her accusation, neither confirming nor denying it. In fact, he never declares an opinion of his own about the marriage question.

Althea is characterised by Faustina in a conversation with Drake as ‘perfectly sound upon the Marriage Question, and her opinion of men is, if possible, lower than mine’ (DF 116). But her anti-marriage conviction is so closely bound up with her devotion for Faustina that it is not likely to last after their break-up (see DF 370). Althea seems mainly embarrassed to be interested in Drake because she knows about *his* abhorrence of marriage. Her reflecting with a ‘shame-dropped head’ (DF 311) about the question whether she paid him any attentions signifies ‘a dawning realization that she cannot ignore cultural expectations of the proper restraints on desire in a heterosexual context’, as Murphy puts it (Murphy 2000:75). Thus, Althea is troubled in the face of the incompatibility of her morality (craving the institution of marriage) and Drake’s convictions (rejecting this institution) – and not because her attention to him challenges her own convictions (see DF 307).

By hinting at the inconsistency of both Althea’s and Drake’s anti-marriage conviction, the novel suggests that they will sooner or later resolve their misunderstanding and clear the path for a wedding. Althea, as Hager puts it, will make ‘the long and overdue transition from immature homosocial love to adult heterosexual union’ (Hager 2007:471), fulfilling thus the pattern of Victorian romantic friendship.

The characterisations of Althea and Drake as well as their hierarchical relationship, which is based on support on Drake’s side and admiration on Althea’s side, do not imply that they could enter into a new, emancipated variant of marriage,

grounding on equality and independence, as it has been propagated by some New Woman activists at the turn of the century (see Ch. 2.2). Rather, it seems to be quite a traditional scheme that they are up to fulfil.

First installed by the narration to expel his deviant and immoral New Woman counterpart from the text, John Drake, who is characterised by the narrator as ‘able-bodied, healthy-minded’ man (DF 347), finally steps into the void (see Murphy 2000:74). Cast as an extremely moderate ‘New Man’, Drake represents not only a better, heteronormative alternative to Faustina’s indecent same-sex bondings, but also a ‘mobilisation of heterosexuality, capitalism and patriarchy to locate power in bonds between men rather than women’ (Hager 2007:469). After having sanctioned Drake’s patriarchal approach to social reform throughout the novel, the narration rewards him with Althea Vane’s devotion at the end.

3.5 Condemning the Female Invert

As I have demonstrated in the course of this chapter, *Dear Faustina* has a lot more to say about sex than scholarship has taken notice of so far. Denying the sexual element on the surface of the text, the narration takes a distinct standpoint towards female same-sex devotion by making uncompromising suggestions about the rightful distribution of sexual agency.

Although not openly defining Faustina’s behaviour as sexual, the novel still characterises Faustina as a ‘sexual invert’. This image is evoked by her fixation to female friends, her abuse of both romantic friendship conventions and the chaperone tradition, her constant search for physical intimacy, as well as her courting strategy and the conjugal nature of her relationships which give her the opportunity to hold a privileged position of masculine power.

But first and foremost, it is the revelation of her wilful deceit, which characterises the heroine as Female Invert. By revealing her deceit, the novel does not leave any other explanation to Faustina’s overall motivation than a desire to have agreeable young girls around her, a desire that ‘constitute[s] the driving force of the narrative’ (Murphy 2000:63).

The question whether or not Faustina’s same-sex relationships are of a sexual quality has been very central to the few existing analyses of *Dear Faustina*; but, as I

have shown, it is too simplistic a question. It appears much more relevant how the sexual aspects are evaluated by the narration.

By means of the novel's character constellation, Faustina is given the image of a selfish, 'morbid' seductress, who abuses innocent girls. This is due to the fact that Broughton, unlike Ellis, does not create a passive equivalent to the Female Invert. Instead, the novelist offers her 'invert' only partners with a 'spurious' kind of homosexual interest, to borrow Ellis' terms. Faustina's central counterpart Althea does not show sexual attraction and arousal in her presence, which cannot simply be drawn back to genre conventions and contemporary morals, as the novel proves by making sexually charged allusions to a heteronormative romance.

In contrast to the romantic involvement of Althea and Drake, which is expressed in terms of excitement, erotic tension, reciprocity and a polite respectation of conventional boundaries, as well as elegant and subtle courting, Faustina's advances are marked by more overt physical intimacy which is rather characterised as blunt, clumsy and deficient.

In coupling a selfish, sexually 'inverted' seducer with an innocent and essentially heterosexual 'prey', the narration implies that unreciprocated desire, clumsy advances, and an abuse of ignorance are the basic characteristics of a homosexual relationship.

Broughton establishes only one type of deviant sexual identity that is condemned for all this indecency: Faustina. While she is depicted as essentially immoral, her innocent 'victims' go only temporary astray and can be rescued in the end.

4 Kindred figures: Faustina, Bell Blount and the Female Invert

With *Dear Faustina*, Rhoda Broughton makes a contribution to the fin de siècle debates around deviant female sexuality. In constructing a fictional sexual identity that has striking similarities to the cultural figures of the New Woman and the Female Invert, the novel mirrors the current ideological frameworks by which women, their relationships and their sexuality were conceptualised during the 1890s.

And yet, the novel does not simply reproduce stereotypes of deviant femininity already prevalent in sexologist texts of its time. Instead, both fictional accounts and sexologist accounts of the ‘sexual invert’ emerged from a ‘messy and complicated interaction’ (Felski 1998:2) between different contemporary discourses.

While Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* suggests that *scientia sexualis* alone was responsible for the creation of new sexual identities, more recent scholarship has started to focus on the impact that popular discourses had on the changing conception of identity, since sexologist texts were almost inaccessible for a broad, uneducated audience (see *ibid.*).

Rita Felski in this regard goes a decisive step further than many other critics, speaking of a ‘messy and complicated interaction’ between scientific and cultural discourses. Scholarship has largely considered the impact of sexology as one-sided, assuming that sexologist discourse had a huge influence on cultural productions of the late-nineteenth century, whereas public discourses left sexology unswayed (see e. g. Ledger 1997 and Faderman 1981).

In a footnote to her analysis of *Dear Faustina*, Hager states that although it is unclear whether Broughton herself read any of the sexologist texts, ‘she was definitely aware of their central ideas’ (Hager 2007:474). Hager assumes a pre-existence of sexologist classifications of identity and alleges that Rhoda Broughton has drawn ‘compelling ideas’ (*ibid.*:463) from sexology, and transformed them into fiction.

Detecting a close resemblance between the figures of the Female Invert and the New Woman, Murphy similarly assumes that the ‘sexual invert’s’ entering the cultural discursive field had ‘important ramifications for representations of the New Woman’. She concludes that scientific writings were ‘filtering into cultural discourse during the fin de siècle’, and that conservative forces ‘marshal[ed] “scientific”

findings [to substantiate their] emotional biases against [the] disconcerting figure' of the New Woman (Murphy 2000:62 f., 65).

Scrutinising the late-Victorian novel for an influence of sexology, Murphy and Hager do not read corresponding findings in both genres as evidence for the ideological discourses underlying *all* textual productions of the time.²⁴

Murphy's notion of 'resonance' between *Dear Faustina* and sexologist discourses is however well-chosen to describe their originating from the same cultural context. But instead of suggesting that the novel 'provides a fascinating glimpse of the discourses marshalled in the century's final decades to decry the "shrieking sisterhood" that threatened the stability of patriarchal Britain' (ibid.:57), I would rather argue that *Dear Faustina* takes an active part in producing those ideological stereotypes.

In order to question the prevalence of sexology in the construction of sexual identities, I will first analyse Havelock Ellis' argumentation strategy and his use of evidence in 'Sexual Inversion in Women'. Finally, I will compare Broughton's and Ellis' accounts of the deviant female with an earlier novel, *The Rebel of the Family*, in which Eliza Lynn Linton anticipated already in 1880 what would later be classified as Female Invert.

4.1 Producing evidence – Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion in Women* (1895)

Havelock Ellis' 'inversion' research is commonly counted as one of the works that played a most crucial role in constructing new sexual identities and were most influential in spreading the image of the 'sexual invert'. However, his own argumentation strategy suggests a far greater role of broader cultural discourses taking the form of general stereotypes, common beliefs and the rhetoric of political ideology.

²⁴ An outstanding example, which does not reproduce the dominant ideology, is L.T. Meade's novel *A Princess of the Gutter* (1895). In this popular fin de siècle novel, stereotypical contemporary traits of deviant femininity are *not* merged into a New Woman or Female Invert identity. Instead, the novel distributes those attributes onto different female characters: Joan, the protagonist, shows a lover-like desire for her friend Martha and is even allowed to make rather explicitly sexual advances to her, kissing her on her lips 'as if she were starving, and I had given her a full and satisfying meal' (295); Martha, in turn, possesses a bunch of character traits that would have been considered as masculine by the contemporary readership (although the novel never classifies her as masculine), while having a heterosexual love affair. Refusing to produce a sexual identity which corresponds to the dominant ideology of the time, the trivial novel might have been one of the most subversive narrative texts of the time. As such, it is worth further examination.

Ellis explains in his study that it is hardly possible to gather citable evidence for 'sexual inversion' in women, because it has 'usually been considered as no offence at all in women' (ibid.) while being criminalised in men, and because it is 'less easy to detect' (SI 161) than the male variant. 'We are accustomed to a much greater familiarity and intimacy between women [...] and we are less apt to suspect the existence of an abnormal passion', Ellis claims, continuing with an appeal to the reader to 'bear in mind the extreme ignorance [and] reticence of women regarding any abnormal or even normal manifestation of their sexual life' (ibid.). This claim of a general ignorance of sexual matters in women is used by Ellis to explain why he could hardly find female volunteers for his case studies.

Although admitting that 'we know comparatively little of sexual inversion in woman' (ibid.), Ellis does not refrain from creating four types of homosexual manifestations in women, as we have seen above. Notwithstanding the limited information, Ellis does not confine himself to presenting examples; instead, he draws general conclusions that can often be traced back to no more than one instance. This strategy is among others applied for conclusions about the 'invert's' rejection of needlework (SI 168, 176) and her sense of beauty (SI 168, 176), or for the occurrence of orgasms in female homosexual acts. In his report about Miss H. (Case XXXI), he records for example that 'orgasm is rare and is produced by lying on the friend or by the friend lying on her, without any special contact' (SI 173); this notion is recurrent in his general characterisation of the 'inverted' woman: 'the orgasm [is] sometimes occurring when one lies on the other's body' (SI 176).

For a number of characteristic traits assigned to one of his categories, Ellis does not produce evidence at all; he for example does not substantiate his statement that the 'pronounced taste for smoking [is] sometimes found in quite feminine women' (ibid.).

However limited and scientifically insufficient from a modern perspective, Ellis' argumentation reveals what kind of information was available to an English sexologist of his time. Where did he receive the required information from? Besides a small number of case studies, his evidence is mainly taken from general knowledge ('it has been stated by many observers who are able to speak with some authority', SI 177), or it is made available to Ellis by 'several friends [who] obtained a considerable number of reliable histories to me, and [...] supplied many valuable hints' (SI 94). His argumentation even suggests that he also takes fictional

representations into account: right after stating that ‘this passion of women for women has, also, formed a favorite subject with the novelist’ (SI 160),²⁵ he concludes that ‘it seems probable that homosexuality is little, if at all, less common in woman than in man’ (ibid.).

Drawing on ‘reliable histories’, ‘valuable hints’, ‘private letters’ (SI 164), general knowledge, and probably on fiction as well, Ellis is fully aware of the weak spot of his work (not evaluating it as a flaw, however):

For many of the remarks [...] regarding true inversion in women I am not able to bring forward justificatory individual instances. I possess a considerable amount of information, but, owing to the tendencies already mentioned, this information is for the most part more or less fragmentary, and I am not always free to use it. (SI 166)

The ‘considerable amount of information’ is, I would suggest, comparable with the information available to an average late-Victorian Briton who took part in fin de siècle debates around changing concepts of sexuality and women’s role.

Havelock Ellis’ account of the Female Invert and her lover, as well as of acquired forms of homosexuality, is as much influenced by common stereotypes and ideological prejudice as any fictional text of the era. Thus, the alleged aim of fin de siècle sexologists to confront the prejudices of their time by describing previously obscure sexual behaviours in detail (see Cryle/Forth 2008:9) is highly untenable, since their own thinking was hardly free from those prejudices.

Against the backdrop of those findings, a question that has been central to scholarship for some time becomes obsolete: it is no longer necessary to search for the influence that sexology had on fin de siècle literature.²⁶ Scientific discourses of sexuality should rather be considered in interplay with literary and other forms of cultural discourses, all of them reproducing the same ideological patterns in different ways. While sexology takes up stereotypes in order to categorise them and place them as an actual phenomenon into a scientific explanatory model, anti-feminist novelists deploy the same stereotypes in order to give their message a shape, providing the enemy with a face, a character, a history and a fate.

²⁵ Ellis lists a number of French novels in his footnote, among others Diderot’s *La Religieuse*, Balzac’s *La Fille aux Yeux d’Or*, Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Zola’s *Nana*.

²⁶ Here, I do not mean to include literature that explicitly refers to sexologist texts or to the science of sexuality, such as Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928); but it is consensus among the scientific community that fictional texts dealing with sexology in that way have not occurred in England before the mid-war years.

Breger concludes similarly that ‘in telling their stories both the scientific and the literary text [...] contribute to the transformation of historical experience into sexologist discourse and vice versa [...], constructing sexological accounts of “inversion” [in a] complex, dialogic process’. She states that all of those identity-fashioning discourses are similar in their mode of representation as well – ‘notably narrative’ (Breger 2005:85 f.; see also Bauer 2009a:8).

Seen in that light, it is not Broughton, whose novel is influenced by Ellis’ research studies, but both authors are influenced by the prevailing discourse around female deviancy. Whether scientific or literary, all of those contemporary discourses reproduced and maintained the dominant ideology.

4.2 A source – Eliza Lynn Linton’s *The Rebel of the Family* (1880)

In order to illustrate the interplay between different texts of the era, I will introduce a popular fictional example that might have both played a role in the creation of *Dear Faustina* and provided Ellis with notions that he later integrated in his tract about ‘Sexual Inversion in Women’.

With *The Rebel of the Family*, Eliza Lynn Linton wrote an early anti-feminist account of a radically emancipated woman. Published in 1880, this novel, which is counted as one of the first anti-New Woman novels (see Murphy 2000:62), precedes Broughton’s text and Ellis’ ‘inversion’ studies by seventeen years. Like *Dear Faustina*, it was first serialised in *Temple Bar* and published as a book in the same year. Read against the background of my analysis, *The Rebel* seems to work as a source to both the fin de siècle novelist and the sexologist. Not only the parallels between the two novels are striking, but also the degree to which Linton’s characterisation of Bell Blount, the immoral seductress of the innocent protagonist Perdita Winstanley, anticipates Ellis’ descriptions of the Female Invert.

Perdita Winstanley has a lot in common with Althea Vane: as daughter of a widowed woman, she is the only one of her family who strives for social change, ‘longing to emancipate herself from these frayed and fettering rags’ (*Rebel of the Family* (RF) 48) of her conventional genteel life. Being punished for her improper behaviour, she is banished from her home. At first, she becomes involved with Bell Blount, the ‘Lady President of the West Hill Society for Women’s Rights’ (RF 50).

But then, she falls in love with pharmacist Leslie Crawford and learns that Bell Blount and her fellow feminists are hypocrites (see Meem 2002:10).

Linton's characters appear to be prototypes for Havelock Ellis' different classes of female deviance. Bell Blount possesses a large number of traits that later characterise the Female Invert, whereas Perdita and Connie Tracy, Bell's 'little wife' (RF 55), are shown to be more womanly counterparts to the 'inverted' woman.

Bell Blount is described as a 'handsome but bold and confident-looking woman [...] whose age was nearer fifty than forty' (RF 48), and who is 'kind in manner, [...] soft in speech and uncompromising in views' (RF 54). Wearing 'a kaleidoscopic arrangement of colours that was simply barbarous' (RF 49), she has an 'evident want of taste' (RF 48). Bell Blount is a separated woman whose aim is the transfer of the complete social and political power to women, an aim that is clearly inspired by her absolute hatred of men: 'Men are the embodiment of greed and tyranny, of selfishness and animalism' (RF 52).

Her masculine trait – the chief characteristic of Ellis' category of 'actively inverted women' – is expressed by the narration in describing her smoking. In the same passage, she is compared to her more feminine lover, Connie Tracy, who confesses to Perdita that she 'should miss [her] weed dreadfully'.

Perdita thought how odd it sounded to hear that slang word from this pale, delicate, refined-looking little woman [...]. It was far more incongruous than with Mrs. Blount, who had a certain flourish of masculinity about her that made a cigarette between her full hard lips infinitely more natural than a knitting-needle in her hand'. (RF 143)

Like Mrs. Blount, Faustina Bateson likes smoking and cannot 'bear the sight of a needle' (DF 397). Havelock Ellis mentions the 'invert's' 'pronounced taste of smoking' and her 'dislike and sometimes incapacity for needlework' (SI 176) as well, juxtaposing both characteristics in one sentence, like Linton. This scene might also have been a model passage for another of Ellis' statements – one of the considerable number for which he does not present any evidence –, that is, for his statement that the pronounced taste for smoking is 'sometimes found in quite feminine women' (ibid.).

Perdita calls Mrs. Blount a 'handsome hybrid' who flings away the cigarette 'like a man' (RF 145) and whose 'present attitude, too – lounging in her easy-chair, her head thrown far back, and her right foot crossed over her left knee – [is] in accordance with her being' (RF 143). Not only do we find an almost identical

description of Faustina's demeanour in *Dear Faustina* (see DF 119), but those two emancipated women are strikingly alike in many other aspects as well: they are handsome, but never pretty, they are fast and straightforward, aggressive, self-assured and (ostensibly) independent.

At the same time as describing Bell Blount's masculine attitude as harmonious with her being, the protagonist of *The Rebel* also discerns an 'incongruity between the woman's handsome face, which fifty years of life and passion had hardened but not disfigured, and her unsexed mind – her costly if ungraceful clothing and her mannish attitude – that seemed to Perdita more monstrous than piquant' (ibid.). We recognise this notion of incongruity between a person's look and her inner traits in Ellis' theory. He states that it is instinctive gestures and habits which suggest a woman's 'underlying psychic abnormality' (SI 175), rather than her outer appearance: 'sexual inversion in women is as a rule not more obvious than in a man' (SI 176).

Like Althea Vane, Perdita Winstanley has some traits of the class of women later defined by Ellis as the passive lovers of the active 'invert'. But she is 'essentially a man's companion, friend, and lover' (RF 108), having the 'natural woman's instinctive admiration for masculine strength – the loving woman's instinctive glory in acknowledging her own comparative inferiority' (RF 151). In Perdita, it is not a lacking interest in men and a resulting coldness towards them that is the reason for their indifference to her, as Ellis explains the homosexual woman's effect on men. She rather belongs to what Ellis calls 'the pick of the women whom the average man would pass by' (SI 167); and her lack of charm might be the reason for her susceptibility to homosexual advances, as the story suggests. Perdita is a plain and bespectacled young woman, who is denied any chances to get married by her beautiful sisters. When meeting her potential seductress, she is in her lowest spirits, reflecting about her life:

Disinherited by nature, unlovely in person and with a blemish that counted for a deformity, disdained by her own and with no one in the wide world to love her – she who could love so well in return; who only asked for leave to love! – she yet was conscious in her humiliation of a life that could be lived to glory and good uses if her feet could but find the leading path – (RF 48)

Lonely, depressed and tired of living a purposeless life, 'rusting as she was in idleness, starving for want of an object in her life, eating out her heart for want of something to do and some one to love' (RF 50), Perdita is – like Broughton's Althea

– an easy victim to Bell’s advances. The women’s rights activist promises her ‘all you want – work, love, freedom and an object’ (DF 51), demanding ‘nothing in return but your love and that you will let me guide you’ (ibid.). Perdita finds Bell Blount’s programme – a life of self-support, independence and female friendship – ‘seductive and inspiring, yet it lacked something, she did not know what’ (RF 57). It is quite obviously ‘men as the noble leaders’ (RF 53) whose influence she misses in Bell’s world.

Perdita’s ‘affectionate nature’ (RF 138) is a key characteristic of Ellis’ passive lover of the Female Invert (see SI 167). And yet, her repeatedly emphasised search of an outlet for her love rather characterises her as a precocious and sexually ignorant girl with a strong ‘need of affection and self-devotion to another person’ (SI 165) – a trait assigned by Ellis to every specimen of the female sex that is, according to him, the reason for women’s susceptibility to a spurious imitation of homosexuality in their adolescent years.

Like Faustina, Bell Blount profits from conventionalism. It is her essential femaleness that helps her to inspire confidence in a girl; she lures Perdita by arguing: ‘You cannot have any objection to come and see two working women of good character and a social position equal to your own! [...] We are not men in disguise [...]; and we have none of the odious creatures about us!’ – and Perdita reaction confirms that Bell’s argumentation corresponds with Victorian morality: ‘There can be no harm in it’ (RF 54). Bell is no ‘man in disguise’, she is rather something that is a lot more difficult to grasp in 1880. Since the prevalent ideology does not yet offer an intelligible concept of active same-sex sexuality in women, it neither condemns this phenomenon. Bell Blount can approach Perdita in a way that a gentleman could not.

Although depicted as innocent and ignorant of sexual matters – Bell’s letters ‘made Perdita’s cheeks burn, she scarcely knew why’ (RF 174) –, Perdita feels an intuitive repulsion to Bell’s lover-like advances right from the beginning, which differentiates her from Ellis’ later defined class of passive homosexuals (see SI 167). While ‘the vast Unknown’ and ‘the suggestive vagueness’ of Bell’s first words to Perdita starts a ‘sudden flame’ in the girl, ‘something in Mrs. Blount’s face chilled and repelled her; [...] she only felt that this was not the ideal for which she was looking’ – and ‘the fire died out as quickly as it had burned up’ (RF 51). Facing ‘the Prince of Darkness clad as an Angel of Light, [Perdita] felt bewildered and shocked,

while at the same time fascinated and attracted' (RF 54). Although a female sexual predator is not conceptually framed so far, a decent Victorian girl intuitively rejects that kind of person, as the novel suggests.

But similar to Althea, Perdita is grateful for Bell's devotion. When Bell once 'kissed the girl fondly, and said, "My darling!" softly below her breath' [Perdita's] heart was full of gratitude for Bell's kindness [although she] involuntarily [shrank] from her embrace' (RF 183). The notion of gratitude is also taken up by Ellis in his characterisation of the essentially heterosexual girl, stating that she pursues a passionate female friendship out of gratitude for her friend's devotion (see SI 166).

With her presentation of Bell's relationship to her 'little wife', Linton shows the reader where Perdita's gratitude would lead her if she submitted to Bell's courting:

'Connie!' [Mrs. Blount] called in a caressing voice.

'Bell!' responded a little woman, darting up from the sofa and flinging herself into her arms.

They kissed each other fondly; as friends who had been separated for as many months or years as they had been parted hours.

'This is my good little wife!' then said Mrs. Blount, turning to Perdita; 'and' – to Constance Tracy – 'I have brought you a new friend, dear. She is to become one of us.'

Constance smiled [...] But her smile was more forced than spontaneous, and the quick, scrutinizing look with which she measured Perdita [...] had less of welcome in it than of suspicion and latent hostility. [...]

Connie Tracy [...] lived with Mrs. Blount on those terms of dependence and subserviency which the champion of her sex found so infinitely degrading when they exist between men and women. It was Mrs. Blount who had the money while Miss Tracy had nothing but her industry and devotion [...]; and Mrs. Blount thought the arrangement honourable to both as things were; when, had it been a husband to whom her friend had been devoted and on whom she had been dependent, it would have been a degrading institution and the sign of woman's shame and destitution. (RF 55 f.)

This scene is strikingly similar to the passage in *Dear Faustina* when Cressida is introduced to Althea. But Linton expresses her criticism of Bell Blount's lifestyle much more directly than Broughton. She condemns the radical woman for assuming all the negative characteristics of which she accuses the other sex, casting her as a 'male impostor and sexually voracious predator' (Heilmann 2000a:100). 'Keeping' Connie Tracy 'as if she had been a man's mistress' (RF 173), while railing against 'marriage as the sanctioned selling of women' (Meem 2002:13), Bell Blount is cast as a hypocrite. Comparable with Ellis' later characterisation of the 'invert', she is shown to enjoy a hierarchy that allows her love of dominance; like Faustina Bateson,

she profits greatly from the patriarchal structure of her relationship. Since Bell and Connie call each other ‘little wife’ (RF 55) and ‘husband’ (RF 173), the conjugal nature of their relationship is mirrored linguistically in a way that is not in the least taken up in Broughton’s adoption of the constellation.

Introducing Perdita as ‘one of us’, Bell Blount exposes her ‘wife’ to jealousy. Connie Tracy’s fear of ‘her “husband’s” affection for the new comer’ (RF 173) is, as the novel suggests, completely justified:

[Connie Tracy’s fear] sprang from that kind of jealousy which belongs to those whose status rests on the caprice or fidelity of another – not bound. Connie Tracy was as much Bell Blount’s creature as if she had been a man’s mistress to be discarded, without a pension, at pleasure and for the sake of a new face. Bound to serve and to obey – to take no other ‘friend’ from among her own sex, and to abjure the love of man as an unspeakable crime against herself, her vows, the Cause and her woman-‘husband’ [...] – in what was her position different from that of any other woman whose temporary wifeness rests on nothing more solid than fancy? (ibid.)

Linton judges Connie’s status as ‘Bell Blount’s creature’ as much worse than that of a traditional wife. As her ‘mistress’, Connie is completely dependent on Bell’s ‘fancy’. Bell is not bound to fidelity, but her goodwill towards Connie depends entirely on *her* fidelity. Her ‘temporary wifeness’ seems, according to the narrator’s analysis, to offer nothing but disadvantages to Connie.

It has already become apparent that *The Rebel of the Family* is more admitting towards an erotic undertone than *Dear Faustina*. In fact, the earlier novel is much more explicit when depicting Bell’s seduction strategy: her ‘caressing voice’, her ‘sing-song intonation’ (RF 49), her ‘speaking with extraordinary tenderness’ (ibid.), her flattering words – ‘I thought of little else since I saw you’ (ibid.) –, her embraces and kisses are undoubtedly sexually charged. When Perdita agrees to visit Bell at home, the latter ‘nearly scared Perdita by suddenly taking her in her arms and kissing her with strange warmth’ (RF 55). It is always Perdita’s perspective by which the reader is made aware of the unusual quality of Bell’s intimacy.

Murphy claims that Perdita ‘never succumbs to the New Woman’s advances’, while Faustina’s ‘erotic temptations succeed, at least temporarily’ (Murphy 2000:63, 70). By that, she strongly contradicts my own findings. It is Althea who remains almost completely cool towards Faustina, whereas Perdita actually reciprocates Bell’s advances, at least once, when they meet intimately for the last time:

Bell Blount turned and caught her to her breast.

‘Oh, Perdita!’ she cried with strange emotion. [...] Leave that prison which you call your home, and come to me, your truest friend and safest lover! With me your life will be happy and honourable, with any one else it will be ruined!’

Her passionate emotion gained on the girl so far that she returned her caress with gratitude and affection. (RF 292)

At that intense moment, Bell’s ‘little wife’ enters the room, and Bell, who was holding Perdita ‘tightly clasped’, withdraws herself ‘as suddenly as if Perdita had been a burning coal’, breathes quickly and has the ‘look of having been “caught”’ (RF 292).

While almost openly characterising Bell’s emotions and acts as belonging to the sexual realm, the narration interrupts the intimate play between her and the seduced girl, finishing it for good: after having allowed so much intimacy and witnessed Connie’s jealousy as well as Bell’s revealing reaction, Perdita feels ‘as if she were being forcibly thrust into deep waters which gave no foothold’ (ibid.) and turns her back on Bell Blount.

The Rebel of the Family is constructed after the same pattern as *Dear Faustina*. Both novels share a core message and an essentially similar plot: the radical New Woman intends to tempt innocent Victorian girls not only to joining the women’s rights movement, but mainly to joining a sexual relationship. Having kissed Perdita for the first time, Bell exclaims ‘That is my kiss of adoption [...] I claim you now as one of us! – the friend of woman and the enemy of man’ (RF 52). By that initiation rite, the narration produces the image of an inseparable alliance of same-sex intimacy and the feminist cause. Both novels connect ‘sexual inversion’ to an extreme man-hating feminism, sexual coercion and hypocrisy (see Meem 2002:13). While represented as a ‘peripheral narrative presence’ (Murphy 2000:63) in *The Rebel*, the disruptive New Woman becomes a central character in *Dear Faustina*.

Doubtlessly, *The Rebel of the Family* comments more explicitly than *Dear Faustina* on the sexual nature of the New Woman’s advances towards women, on the conjugal nature of her female relationships, as well as on the feminist nature of her cause. How can this change in representation be explained?

Before 1880, neither romantic friendship or female marriages, nor female same-sex intimacy were contravening conventional codes. Sally Ledger demonstrates this plausibly by Thomas Hardy’s example: in his mid-century novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871), he could write a rather explicit scene about two women who

passionately kiss and hug in bed ‘without fear of remonstrance from the literary establishment’ (Ledger 1997:127). The physical intimacies would have been rated as expressions of romantic affection rather than sexual activity during that era. From the 1880s onwards, the conceptual frame for understanding female relationships changed, because of emerging feminist, anti-feminist and – finally – sexologist discourses that brought about far-reaching conceptual changes of women, sexuality and marriage.

At that time, Eliza Lynn Linton had been an active contributor to the debates around woman’s changing role for decades. When she died in 1898, she could look back upon a long and prolific literary career; between the late 1840s and the 1890s, she was the first English woman journalist with a fixed salary who wrote hundreds of articles, ‘The Girl of the Period’ (1868), ‘The Shrieking Sisterhood’ (1870), and ‘The Wilde Women’ (1891) among the most prominent examples. Linton’s forceful and influential voice was one of the first to reconceptualise female marriage as ‘anti-social’ and immoral.

Written in a transitional phase, her novel is on the one hand *still* more explicit about the erotic element of the depicted female friendship than the succeeding novels, or at least more interlarded with unambiguous implications. Like her successors, Linton presents female same-sex desire according to Victorian constraints, but she does so as unscrupulously as mid-century accounts. On the other hand, Linton is *already* one of the first to produce a fictional identity around same-sex sexuality – an identity that conflates sexual desire with gender transgression, ‘anti-social’ behaviour, immoral attitudes and the striving for radical social change. This fictional identity – Bell Blount – is an influential model for both later anti-feminist characters like Faustina Bateson and sexological categories like the ‘actively inverted woman’.

Claiming that sexology played the most decisive role in changing the conception of female deviance, like Murphy and many other scholars do, is assigning a greater force to scientific discourse than textual evidence suggests. I would argue that fictional texts that dealt with deviant femininity, like Eliza Lynn Linton’s *The Rebel of the Family*, among other forms of cultural discourse shaped its readers’ world knowledge and paved the way for an approving reception of emerging sexologist accounts of the same identity phenomenon.

5 Conclusion

Faustina Bateson has striking similarities with two popular discursive constructs of the fin de siècle: the New Woman and the Female Invert. Like most contemporary accounts of those cultural figures, Broughton's fin de siècle novel conflates notions of gender and sexuality into Faustina's identity. But since decisive attributes of the stereotypes are reconceptualised in *Dear Faustina*, the narration creates a new variant of the deviant female.

First characterised as a gender transgressive threat to the social order, Faustina is in the course of the novel deprived of most of the 'masculine' privileges that she acquired by means of her gender 'inversion'. She is finally revealed to be neither equipped with financial independence and self-determined agency, nor with an ability to influence others. In the end, Broughton exposes her New Woman to be a fraud, who does not take a genuine interest in social reform issues and shows even less commitment to 'the Cause', dissociating the radical figure completely from her vocation.

The sexual aspect of Faustina's 'inversion', expressed in her female bondings which have the potential to supplant heteronormative marriage and thus undermine the foundation of the patriarchal society, is judged by the narration as a disruptive element as well. But Faustina's sexual transgression is not given a chance to unfold its subversive potential since her relationships are judged as a worse alternative to repressive heterosexual marriages, and her physical advances are denied any effect on her female partners, neither tainting their sexual purity, nor causing sexual arousal in them. Faustina is given the sexual aggressiveness of the Female Invert, but she is refused sexual agency.

Deprived of all her privileges, Broughton's deviant female character is left with nothing but unfulfilled desires of dominance and seduction, constituting the driving force of the narrative. Faustina Bateson is not coincidentally located in the fin de siècle environment of burgeoning social reform circles. The female communities of the women's movement offer her an opportunity to make use both of the fashionable status that social reform enjoyed with idle middle-class girls, and of the conventions of female passionate friendship. The fashion of philanthropy provides a fertile ground for Faustina's seduction strategy, which builds on her 'victims' willingness to sacrifice their life to the 'Cause'. At the same time, romantic friendship conventions

allow her to become intimate with her objects of desire without offending basic Victorian morals since a considerable degree of physical intimacy was socially accepted between young women.

With the unfavourable characterisation of Faustina Bateson in *Dear Faustina*, Rhoda Broughton discredits not only her 'inverted' New Woman character, but also a radical feminist approach to social reform work, suggesting that all-female reform surroundings are a gathering point of radical women in search of a niche that allows them to indulge in their selfish, 'morbid' desires.

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Appendix

Summary *Dear Faustina*

Deutsche Zusammenfassung der Magisterarbeit

Lebenslauf

Erklärung

Summary *Dear Faustina*

Althea Vane's Victorian middle-class family is torn by the sudden death of her father and by her mother's decision to abandon her children in order to devote her life to 'the Cause'. Since Althea is of age, she can choose for herself how to go on with her life. Being influenced by Faustina Bateson, one of her mother's radical feminist friends, Althea condemns marriage and cannot bear the idea of living as an in-law in her sister Clare's traditional home. When Faustina invites Althea to live with her in a small and unpretentious Chelsea flat, she accepts at once what seems to her the only agreeable option at this time. Althea's brothers and sisters do not accept her unconventional decision and turn their backs on her, hoping, however, that one day she will 'see the error of her ways' and return to them and their lifestyle.

During the first days with Faustina, Althea's sole purpose is to 'bless Faustina's home with her sweet presence'. But after a while, Faustina persuades Althea of her specific value for 'the Cause': Althea shall utilise her excellent social connections to receive confidential information needed by Faustina for an article. Althea fails, feeling useless and insufficient, and Faustina almost immediately turns her attention to another young lady, Cressida Delafield, and invites her to stay in their flat for a few days. Althea is shocked and jealous, and, deprived of her exclusive status as Faustina's intimate friend, feels more insufficient than ever.

At that time, Althea has only one acquaintance she can talk to and feels understood of: Mr. John Drake. He is an old friend of Faustina's, having grown up in the same town as her. Like Faustina, Drake had been cast out of society because of dissensions with his family. Since he has given up an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds a year for conscience' sake, it is suggested, however, that his reasons to be kicked out by his family are far nobler than Faustina's. When Althea's bond with

Faustina is shattered by her failure and Miss Delafield's intrusion, her friendship with Drake grows deeper.

Some weeks after Cressida's visit, Althea finds out that Faustina and the young lady have secretly met every day since Cressida's departure. Furthermore, Cressida imitates Althea in planning to leave her bourgeois home and to sacrifice her life to social work. Althea is not only shocked for personal reasons of jealousy. She is also put under a considerable pressure by her family: her beloved brother Edward, who is courting Cressida Delafield, threatens never to talk to Althea again, if she is not able to foreclose the realisation of those plans. Althea confronts Faustina, who, confirming every suspicion, suggests that if Althea cannot accept Cressida's joining them, she will have to leave.

Before they separate, Faustina humiliates Althea by calling her 'the cat's-paw of John Drake' and accusing her of having paid attention to Drake as a suitor. Those accusations of treason against 'the Cause' make Althea feel even more wretched than the separation from her intimate friend.

When John Drake finds the low-spirited Althea and offers to persuade Faustina to abstain from taking Cressida as her next 'victim', Althea agrees only reluctantly. Drake has been supporting Faustina financially for several years. Therefore, his influence on her is considerable, and she finally consents to leave Cressida alone – and to leave England for some time.

Althea has returned to her family, but the idle, useless life of an in-law lady makes her miserable. Although she is extremely unsatisfied with her fate, she is unable to think of an alternative, partly due to Faustina's contemptuous words that robbed her completely of her self-confidence. She spends her time agonising over the thought that Drake, who has a critical opinion of marriage as well, could condemn her for paying him attention.

When Drake finally calls, he finds Althea still willing to lead a useful life devoted to social work, if she could find a guide to show her the way. He offers her a place in a women's settlement that he helped to build up near the men's settlement he lives and works in. There she could work under his guidance, instructing young women in needlework. Althea gratefully accepts.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung der Magisterarbeit

In der vorliegenden Arbeit mit dem Titel "Concepts of 'Female Inversion' and the 'New Woman' in Rhoda Broughton's *Dear Faustina* (1897)" untersuche ich, wie Rhoda Broughtons populärer Jahrhundertwende-Roman *Dear Faustina* sich zu den zeitgenössischen identitätsbildenden Diskursen über die „Neue Frau“ und die „Sexuelle Inversion der Frau“²⁷ verhält. Dabei verfolge ich einen queeren Analyseansatz und vermeide dementsprechend heteronormative und anachronistische Grundannahmen.

Beide Denkfiguren, die „Neue Frau“ und die „Sexuell Invertierte“, entstanden gegen Ende der viktorianischen Ära im Kontext von Feminismus und aufkommender Sexualwissenschaft durch ein Zusammenspiel von kulturellen und sexualwissenschaftlichen Diskursen. Konservative Ängste, geschürt durch die wachsende Emanzipation der Frau und den damit einhergehenden gesellschaftlichen Wandel, trugen ebenso zu der Formulierung neuer Identitätskategorien bei wie der neue wissenschaftliche Drang, Menschen im Allgemeinen und sexuelle „Abweichungen“ im Speziellen kategorisch zu erfassen. Sexualität wurde zur bestimmenden Kategorie einer jeden Identität, denn über die Charakterisierung des Sexualinstinkts konnte ein Individuum in seiner Gänze erfasst werden, so nahm man an.

Die moderne Frau, die sich über die gesellschaftlich vorgeschriebenen Grenzen hinwegsetzte, indem sie sich kleidete und sprach „wie ein Mann“ und für männliche Privilegien – wie den Zugang zu Bildung und Arbeitsmarkt, finanzielle Unabhängigkeit und sexuelle Selbstbestimmung – kämpfte, stellte eine Bedrohung für die patriarchale englische Gesellschaftsordnung dar. Die gesellschaftlichen Grenzüberschreitungen der „Neuen Frau“ wurden als Bruch mit der ihr zugeschriebenen Geschlechtsidentität, ihrer Gender-Rolle gewertet.

Von dieser Annahme war es wiederum nicht weit zu der Einschätzung, dass eine Frau, die sich nicht genderkonform verhielt, auch in sexueller Hinsicht „abweichen“ müsse. Das Bild der emanzipierten Frau wurde also häufig mit einer „abweichenden“ Sexualität ausgestattet, und im Umkehrschluss wurde eine als „sexuell invertiert“ aufgefasste Frau gerne dem Umfeld der Frauenbewegung zugeordnet. In beiden eng miteinander verknüpften Diskursen, aus denen die

²⁷ Eine Gleichsetzung des Begriffs „Sexuelle Inversion“ mit Homosexualität greift zu kurz, da er mindestens so sehr Abweichungen bezüglich des sozialen Geschlechts wie gleichgeschlechtliches Begehren zu konzeptualisieren sucht.

Denkfiguren „Neue Frau“ und „Sexuell Invertierte“ hervorgingen (dem antifeministischen kulturellen Diskurs sowie dem sexualwissenschaftlichen Diskurs), wurden demnach unterschiedliche Aspekte von Sexualität miteinander vermischt, um eine deviante weibliche Identität konzeptionell zu erfassen und festzuschreiben.

Im Kontext dieser Diskurse entsteht *Dear Faustina*. Im Verlauf der Abhandlung zeige ich auf, wie Faustina Bateson mit Hilfe verschiedener narrativer Strategien eindeutig als „Neue Frau“ markiert wird – ihr Verhalten, ihr Aussehen und sogar ihre körperlichen Attribute verletzen grundlegende zeitgenössische Vorstellungen einer „angemessenen“ Weiblichkeit. Auch wird die zentrale Figur als „sexuell abweichend“ charakterisiert, obwohl der spätviktorianische Roman Sexualität nicht offen thematisieren kann.

Aufgrund der ins Auge springenden Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Faustina und dem Stereotyp der „Sexuell Invertierten“ ist häufig argumentiert worden, dass Rhoda Broughton ihre Heldin beeinflusst von sexualwissenschaftlichen Studien entworfen hat. Am Beispiel von zwei zentralen zeitgenössischen Texten unterschiedlicher Genres nehme ich zu dieser Forschungsdebatte über den Einfluss der Sexualwissenschaft auf kulturelle Diskurse Stellung. Mit meiner Analyse der Abhandlung ‘Sexual Inversion in Women’ (1895), verfasst vom einflussreichsten englischen Sexualwissenschaftler, Havelock Ellis, und des Romans *The Rebel of the Family* (1880), geschrieben von einer der produktivsten und bekanntesten Schriftstellerinnen der Zeit, Eliza Lynn Linton, zeige ich, dass die Annahme eines einseitigen Einflusses zu kurz greift. Eine Einflusstheorie ist nur zu halten, wenn sie umformuliert wird, denn es gibt ebenso viele Hinweise darauf, dass wissenschaftliche Texte, wie der von Ellis, von der zeitgenössischen Fiktion beeinflusst sind, wie sich Hinweise für einen Einfluss von Ellis’ Forschung auf kulturelle Texterzeugnisse finden lassen. Jede Textproduktion der Zeit ist, so meine Annahme, von denselben zugrunde liegenden ideologischen Diskursen geprägt.

Wie viele andere kulturelle Erzeugnisse der Jahrhundertwende, transformiert Broughtons Roman vorherrschende Ideologien und Ängste zu einem fiktionalen Feindbild. Doch mit Faustina Batesons Charakterisierung beschränkt die Autorin sich nicht etwa darauf, bestehende Stereotypen zu reproduzieren. Der Text nimmt vielmehr aktiv an der Identitätsbildung der devianten Frau teil. Indem der Roman entscheidende Attribute der stereotypen Denkfiguren zunichte macht und andere neu anordnet, kreiert er eine gänzlich neue Variante der „invertierten Neuen Frau“.

Faustina verliert im Verlauf des Romans nahezu alle „männlichen“ Privilegien, die sie sich als „Neue Frau“ angeeignet hatte: ihre finanzielle Unabhängigkeit, ihre selbstbestimmte Handlungsfähigkeit und ihre Fähigkeit, andere zu beeinflussen. Da sie als Betrügerin entlarvt wird, deren Engagement für „die Sache“ (gemeint ist gesellschaftliche Erneuerung im weitesten Sinne) nur ihren eigenen Zwecken dient, wird der Entzug ihrer Privilegien als logische Konsequenz und gerechte Strafe vermittelt.

Auch im Hinblick auf ihre sexuelle Handlungsfähigkeit – ein zentrales Merkmal der „Sexuell Invertierten“ – wird Faustina von der Erzählung in ihre Schranken verwiesen: Ihre sexuellen Verstöße gegen die geltende Moral werden nichtig gemacht, indem ihren körperlichen Annäherungen das Potential abgesprochen wird, die Unschuld ihrer „Opfer“ zu beflecken oder sie sexuell zu erregen.

Mit Faustina Bateson selbst wird auch ihre feministische Herangehensweise an „die Sache“ verurteilt. *Dear Faustina* impliziert, dass das Umfeld der Emanzipationsbewegung ein Sammelbecken für „abnormale“, „unmoralische“ Frauengestalten darstellt, die in der frauendominierten Gemeinschaft günstige Bedingungen vorfinden, um ihr „morbides“ Begehren auszuleben.

Lebenslauf

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Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt sowie die Stellen der Arbeit, die anderen Werken dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach entnommen sind, durch Angabe der Quellen kenntlich gemacht wurden.

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