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Thema: Representation of Women in Mérie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia* (1895)

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## 1 Introduction

Written during the fin de siècle, a period known as one of “sexual anarchy,”<sup>1</sup> Mérie Muriel Dowie’s feminist *Gallia* (1895) joins the literary works of famous writers like Mona Caird or Sarah Grand. Wells. But although her novel covers the most explosive topics of the nineteenth century, namely degeneration and the female pursuit of emancipation, Dowie does not achieve great distinction as the limited selection of secondary literature on *Gallia* confirms. From my point of view, this has mostly to do with Dowie’s radical ideas on maintaining Britain’s health and supremacy, as well as with the novel’s unconventional structure according that makes it hard to say what Dowie actually drives at. Superficially, *Gallia* might look like a conventional, but failed love-story with a strong and feminist heroine. But on second glance, one realises that some more important structure underlies this stereotype-looking plot. Dowie’s creed is not that man is the measure – although the publicly powerful positions in this novel are all held by male characters – but that women set the new benchmarks for Britain’s society by secretly pulling the strings in order to disengage from male dominance.

Being herself an emancipated woman, who had already challenged her public perception by simply engaging in the male domain of authorship, Dowie used the genre of the novel so as to communicate her revolutionary ideas since it allowed her to reach the maximum number of female readers.<sup>2</sup> In a time when women were still under the thumb of their male relatives and husbands, forced to submit to the Victorian canon of femininity and its outdated division of private and public sphere, *Gallia* offers a new way of ‘career’ to those ready to take the opportunity. In contrast to the other female characters, who have more or less come to terms with their male-imposed course of life, Dowie’s eponymous protagonist constantly struggles with her social role until she finally finds a way to reconcile her ‘unfeminine’ inter-

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<sup>1</sup> Richardson, Angelique. *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Compare to Cunningham, Gail. *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. London [u.a.]: Macmillan, 1978. 73; Foster, Shirley. *Victorian Women’s Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual*. London and Sidney: Croom Helm, 1985, p. 12; and Young, Arlene. *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women*. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillian, 1999, p. 3.

est in politics with society's expectations on a respectable woman of the Victorian middle-class. Ultimately, Gallia Hamesthwaite's quest for the Grail ends with her acceptance and application of Eugenic Feminism.

Since the application of the correspondent principles as outlined in *Gallia* caused intense indignation, both inside and outside of the novel, this thesis focuses upon Dowie's representation of women and the revolutionary potential her eugenic heroine actually has in contrast to the Victorian concept. For this reason, chapter 2 and 3 will dwell on the depiction of British society in the nineteenth century, starting – just like the novel itself – with an analysis of the men in *Gallia* in order to investigate the male gaze upon women. Due to the fact “identity is something formed in relation to its ‘Others,’”<sup>3</sup> it seems reasonable to use a relationist approach so as to draft a first definition of the female identity.

The number of specimen to investigate in chapter 2 was hence limited to three men, namely to Mark Gurdon, Robert Leighton and Hubert Essex. This follows mostly from the fact that these three characters are actively involved in the mating process, but they were also selected because of their complex and well-developed personality which makes them stand out against flat characters like Old Lemuel or Lord Hamesthwaite. By applying the virtues of an English gentlemen onto Mark, Robert and Hubert, we will get to know that only the latter deserves this title, mostly due to his correct and respectful behaviour towards women. Furthermore, a close examination of these three men helps to understand the artificiality and hypocrisy of Victorian Britain. It also illustrates how negative the general opinion about women and their role in society was, and that only those of them were cherished who dedicated their entire life to the role as wife and mother.

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<sup>3</sup> Pristed, Helene. „The Concept of Identity.“ *Multicultural Dilemmas: Identity, Difference, Otherness*. Eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Marzena Kubisz. Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 23-41, at p. 30.

Due to the fact that the representation of men always entails the representation of women, at least to a certain extent, this negative mark of menfolk left by two out of three examples, in turn, casts a positive light on the seven women who will be contemplated in chapter 3. Again, the range of objects to investigate has been narrowed down, in this case to those female characters with the most impact on the storyline. Furthermore, the increased number in comparison to chapter 2 can be explained by the fact that the category 'woman' is not only confronted with its binary opposite 'men,' but also with its sub-categories like 'wife', 'mother' or 'girl.'<sup>4</sup>

In general, the different facets of femininity – as represented by six of the seven women – can be arranged in three opposing pairs so that the virtuous Margaret Essex can be considered the alternative draft to the dissolute Cara Lemuel, the frail Lady Hamesthwaite differs most from her resolute stepsister, and the pleasure-seeking Gertrude Janion is constructed as the exact opposite of the plodding Mrs. Miles. Only Gallia Hamesthwaite, the seventh women, stands out of this arrangement since she represents a variation from the standard Victorian woman depicted by the sum of the six others. While all of them have come to terms with their allotted role in society, Gallia constantly challenges her female nature and the accompanying expectations, thus identifying her as a variation of the nineteenth-century New Woman. Her continuous search for a possibility to have an impact on the big picture finally results in an extension of her already existing, feminist tendencies, namely with the help of eugenic principles.

This new way of contribution to public problems without obviously violating the unwritten laws of Victorian middle-class will be discussed in chapter 4. Not only grants the doctrine of eugenics a satisfying 'career' to Gallia, it also bestows a new power upon her that enables Gallia to self-actualise. Instead of subduing to male dominance, eugenic feminism, as it was called, offered sophisticated women like Gallia the possibility to extend their emancipation and confront men at eye level. Since the responsibility to breed 'better' people lay in women's scope of duty, re-

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<sup>4</sup> Compare to Gordon, Eleanor, Nair, Gwyneth. *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 3.

production became a female domain inasmuch as the choice of spouse and fatherhood henceforth lay in the hands of the woman. Based on the apotheosis of physical health – one of the most important topics in fin-de-siècle Britain – eugenic feminism provides a plausible explanation for Gallia's decision in favour of the sound Mark as well as for her final acceptance of the role as wife and mother.

For the sake of completeness, a short summary will be given in chapter 5 in order to sum up the multiple facets of the representation of women as drafted by Ménie Muriel Dowie.

## **2 Male identity and the significance of women therein**

### **2.1 Mark Gurdon, a man of debatable qualities**

Being the first character mentioned in *Gallia*, it is self-evident that Mark Gurdon has a huge impact on this story. But although this has mostly to do with his role in Gallia's new scheme of life, we should not ignore the fact that Mark features more than just a healthy body. Being granted an independent story line, which joins the main plot line around Gallia after more than half of the narrative, his path of life must be of relevance for the novel itself. In the beginning, he hence takes on the key function as embodiment of a virtuous Victorian gentleman who is commonly cherished and accepted. Due to the fact that Mark is not a middle-class member by birth, this perception is foremost predicated on his civilised and correct English appearance which speaks very much in his favour:

Gurdon looked exactly as one would have expected. He wore a brown travelling serge, a white shirt, and a black bow tie. He was clean shaven, his rather hatchet-shaped face pale and sallow, his reddish-dark hair just long enough to part in the middle, and rigorously flattened below a brown crush hat. There was about him that suggestion of baths and shaves and tailors and general precision, of which one is ashamed to feel a little tired, because it is in itself so admirable.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dowie, Ménie Muriel. *Gallia*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1895, p. 10.

So Mark seems to be perfectly in line with society's expectation which is not only emphasised through his impression of purity and cleanliness, but also through the accurate trim of both his hair and beard. Moreover, this effect of civilisation is fortified by his tidy clothes – a privilege that was claimed by middle-class and can therefore be seen as a contributing reason for his admission to the inner circle.<sup>6</sup> It is this concern for a perfect outer-appearance which is remarkable enough to make Mark stand out in a positive manner. Again, this is a very exceptionable fact as he is not the offspring of a rich Lord or famous doctor, but the son of an engineer and a curate's daughter. By definition, he is thus part of the working-class – a fact which Mark tries to conceal from the world at large. His efforts to do so are additionally favoured by his good Christian name and his bodily assets, especially by his nose that is “not too suggestive of talent to be handsome and even aristocratic.”<sup>7</sup>

The single flaw in Mark's outer-appearance can be considered his “fine and slightly rippled hair“ since there was nothing more dreaded than “a tendency to curl or crinkle”<sup>8</sup> in a man's hair. In my opinion, this fear derived from a degenerationist connection between hairiness above-average and the previous developmental stage of the wild beast which deemed any sign of neglect a possible prevention of advancement. Since Mark has ensured that his looks are perfectly in accordance with society's expectations, he does not run the risk to ruin his endeavours to get on. Thus, neither high birth nor a lot of money are responsible for Mark's rise into the spheres of Victorian middle-class, but his care for details and his own will to aspire.

What helps Mark achieve his ambitious aims in both personal and occupational respect is the good education he has received in his youth. Although he complains to Mrs. Leighton and Gallia that he has “wasted three or four years at a great public

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<sup>6</sup> Compare to Gelpi, Barbara Charlesworth. “Introduction.“ *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States*. Eds. Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen Offen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981, pp. 8-21, at p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Dowie, p. 26f.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

school, learned nothing, and had to do without the kudos as well,”<sup>9</sup> Mark has definitely benefited from it in more than one respect. A “traditional liberal education at a reputable public school”<sup>10</sup> was seen as a qualification rather than a flaw, especially when the school was located at renowned places like Rugby, Bordeaux, Munich, London and Oxford. That Mark had also benefited from the different languages that are spoken at these places, can be considered another asset that pushes his ambition in regard to both career and acceptance.

Nevertheless, education and outer-appearance can only smooth the way to advancement, but they do not guarantee that the claimed middle-class position can also be maintained. For this reason, correct and adequate behaviour was of prime importance for the newly-made gentleman as it helped him to retain his achieved standing. That Mark is aware of the extreme significance that social perception has to him is not only illustrated by several references to his “decorously correct”<sup>11</sup> behaviour or form, but is also expressed in his conscientiousness concerning middle-class’s habits and expectations. Basically, this is the reason why Mark combines his stay in Paris with meeting other important people like some men from the Embassy or the Marquis de Mont Voisin. As the latter is also involved in sports and horse breeding – two hobbies that were seen as sign of real masculinity<sup>12</sup> – Mark can kill two birds with one stone: By exhibiting official interest in activities generally associated with men, he confirms his membership to the dominating gender while he also sustains his professional contacts at the same time. Mark himself is the best example for the paramount importance of influential friends since acquaintances like Mrs. Leighton are the powerhouse behind his social and occupational success. By actively seeking the company of people from above his own class, Mark increases his chance to be perceived as someone of high “birth, rank, fashion and re-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 188f.

<sup>10</sup> Gilmour, Robin. *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. London et al.: George Allen & Unwin, 1981, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Dowie, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Compare to Wintle, Sarah. “Horses, Bikes and Automobiles: New Women on the Move.” *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. Eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 66-79, at p. 67.



spectability”<sup>13</sup> while also averting the danger to retrograde. The participation in appropriate social activities was therefore considered an imperative for every man who had the ambition to rise as social bonding could not only result in strategic alliance, but also in marriage.<sup>14</sup> Again, we can name Mark to be the perfect proof for the truth of this statement as he taps the full potential of his possibilities without exceeding the limits of meetness. Since he lives according to the watchword “Decency,” be it in terms of society or politics, this success seems to me like a win by default.

However, this perfect image of a Victorian gentleman shows multiple cracks which create justifiable doubts about Mark’s suitability for this title. Outwardly, he might look like a virtuous and pleasant man, but inside, Mark is no knight in shining armour at all. To be honest, he is one of the most terrible characters in this novel due to the fact that his hypocrisy covers his real motives whereby his concealed immorality becomes a dangerous threat for Victorian middle-class. What disqualifies Mark are not only obvious moral misconducts like keeping a mistress, but also his weaknesses in character, the hidden agenda that seems to underlie every of his actions. It is the explanation for Mark’s visit to Mrs. Leighton, for his stay at Paris, and for his glorification of Hubert Essex in the presence of the latter’s sister. All of these things happened for one reason, and this is not gentleness or general appreciation, but pure expedience. Mark exploits other people in order to attain his own goals, his “schemes of transcendent ambition” that should ultimately lead to a life as middle-class member and successful junior politician. He even tries to use Gallia so as to achieve this objective as “money, and money only, and a great deal of money at that, would have helped him.”<sup>15</sup>

So basically, all of his social bonds, all of his contacts are nothing more than instruments, nothing more than means to an end. The fact that none of these people noticed this objectification – or wanted to notice it – can only be credited to Mark’s

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<sup>13</sup> Brander, Michael. *The Victorian Gentleman*. London: Gordon Cremonesi, 1975, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> Compare to Beisel, Nicola. *Imperiled innocents: Anthony Comstock and family reproduction in Victorian America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Dowie, p. 113f.

ability to disguise and beguile as is perfectly illustrated during his first visit at the Essexes' in chapter XI. Based on the malicious deceit of Margaret concerning his close friendship with Essex, Mark is unhesitatingly invited to Hammersmith Terrace- There, he meets Mrs. Essex who "imagine[s] that she ha[s] been entertaining a young man of public importance, as well as a young man whom Margaret must like."<sup>16</sup> This, in turn, leads Essex, who joins the party later on, to appreciate Mark as a friend to both his mother and sister – a fact that is completely erroneous, but a result of Mark's initial lie due to which he is able to win the sympathy of all three Essexes off the reel. As acceptance was considered to be the "final test and certificate of gentility,"<sup>17</sup> Mark Gurdon's success seems to be predicated upon his manipulative ability and his fine grasp of other people's usefulness.

Moreover, this hypocritical behaviour thoroughly demonstrates how little Mark cares for women since none of his intersexual relationship goes without a hidden agenda. Mrs. Leighton, for example, is extremely useful for Mark due to her widely ramified network in London and Paris including not only lords and ladies, but also politically important people like the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Cara's function, in contrast, has mostly to do with the reduction of sexual lust which abases her to a mere outlet for his socially unacceptable behaviour and emotions. The fact that she can additionally entertain Mark by singing and dancing as well as by teaching him some Spanish is nothing but a nice by-product. Similar to this matter, the "paradise"<sup>18</sup> of Lady Hamesthwaite's dinners, to which Mark longs to be invited, is of no relevance to him because of the good food or the beautiful hostess, but solely because of the possibility to meet important people and to rise in his chief's estimation. Ultimately, there is Gallia, who is only courted because she serves as Mark's entrance ticket to a world of social and political influence. In all of these four cases, the woman herself is absolutely insignificant, she is interchangeable with any other female person unless the economical circumstances remain the same. This detection is further fortified by the quick judgement which

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<sup>16</sup> Dowie, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Gilmour, p. 5f.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

Mark grants to Margaret and Gallia. Considering himself to be an expert in the field of woman, he needs nothing more than a glimpse of Margaret in order to know exactly what kind of person she is:

Besides, I know the sort of woman Miss Essex is; it was written all over her—in her walk, her face, the swing of her gown ... You can't mistake them. Made of a very fine material, but cold and inhuman as the grave itself. [...] Measuring all men with a measure, and that measure made of wrought steel.<sup>19</sup>

That his opinion is eventually a wrongful conviction, Mark realises himself after he gets to know more of Margaret than just her outer-appearance. Still, it is very telling that Mark is so quick in measuring people he does not know, especially after he accuses Margaret, and the alleged group of women she belongs to, to apply a one-size-fits-all-approach upon men in general. Nevertheless, Mark did not learn from his experience, but keeps judging people on base of the first impression. He deliberately ignores the fact that not all women are the same so as to be unswerving in his own opinion:

Mark had discovered that there is no kind of woman who will not admire personal ambition in a man—irrespective of the object of that ambition. Women, Mark knew, will respect a clever murderer if he shows sufficient dexterity. Her next remark, therefore, surprised him, simply spoken though it was.<sup>20</sup>

Again, Mark renders a false judgement because he is not able to admit his incorrect image of women. As mentioned before, this partly results from his extreme concentration on his life and aims, but it can also be ascribed to the misconception of his superiority over women in general. Since his androcentrism makes it impossible for Mark to acknowledge specimen of the opposite sex as equals, deceiving and taking advantage of women seem to be legitimate means in order to achieve his objective.

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<sup>19</sup> Dowie, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

For a real gentleman, whose “aims are generous, whose truth is constant, and not only constant in its kind but elevated in its degree,”<sup>21</sup> any of these charges would be virtually impossible. In Mark, however, they are only symptoms of the same root cause, namely his haughtiness and ambition. These two weaknesses of character are the real reason for Mark’s disqualification, the grounding upon which his calculating and manipulating behaviour is constituted. Whereas the fine gentleman was signified as “modest without bashfulness, frank and affable without impertinence, obliging and complaisant without servility,”<sup>22</sup> the same cannot be said about Mark Gurdon. Not only does he see himself “so in advance of [...] men of his age”<sup>23</sup> due to his peculiar education – which in the presence of Gallia and Mrs. Leighton, he suddenly declares to be worthless – but he also feels predestined to belong to the chosen race of middle-class gentlemen. From a neutral point of view, this idea is absolutely fatuous, especially if it is wrapped in pretensions:

He was a gentleman, and looked like one (a great advantage, this); he was poor, certainly, but he had a future; his manners and character—well, *he* didn't know anybody with better manners or character—this frankly and without any egotism, in fact, speaking as an outsider.<sup>24</sup>

Even though this last sentence intends to create an air of humility, it only fortifies the impression that Mark has nothing in common with the virtuous gentleman as which he likes to see himself. His extreme selfishness and his complete inability to see his own mistakes induce nothing but a distinct antipathy and revulsion at the man who claims to be better than most others whom he “would like to have given ... each a sovereign, poor chaps.”<sup>25</sup> Instead of facing that it is human to err, Mark usually tries to shift the blame on someone. For this reason, it is not his fault that

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<sup>21</sup> Thackeray, as quoted in Haley, Bruce. *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 206.

<sup>22</sup> Gilmour, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Dowie, p. 28f.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30f.

Margaret had reject his proposal, but the result of her being a “very inexperienced creature [so] that she [is] not able to see how superior he [is] to most other fellows from whom she might have expected proposals.”<sup>26</sup> It is also Margaret’s fault that Mark falls under Cara’s spell in the first place because she had aroused those emotions and feelings which she later on denies to be lived out on her. Of course, Cara is also to blame for the escalation of this rather harmless situation since her nature predestines her for “the oldest of all professions for women.”<sup>27</sup> Mark, in contrast, considers himself to be completely innocent in all these situations which appear more like a fatal concatenation of unfortunate circumstances to him. Albeit he never openly gives this opinion, his point of view is a typically male one.<sup>28</sup> It is this hypocrisy in combination with his obsession on advancement that makes Mark an embodiment of vice instead of virtue albeit he tries so hard to keep up his social mask. Gallia and the other characters might have missed or deliberately ignored this negative connotation, but the reader is perfectly aware of Mark’s stained record, of the double moral standards according to which he lives. Complacency is the prevailing feature of his character so that it is only fair that in the end, he is reduced to an instrument himself, sacrificed to the higher aim of Gallia’s eugenic vision.

For this reason, and for all the other discrepancies that lie underneath the social mask of a Victorian gentleman, Mark Gurdon turns out to be nothing more than a reckless parvenu. He might evoke the impression of a good and virtuous person, but in fact, Mark is a wilful deceit himself and can therefore be seen as a plea against male domination, as the reason for vice being biologised as male.<sup>29</sup> By depicting a glorified specimen of menfolk like him as a sinner beneath, Dowie does not only cast a positive light on women, but also declares that hypocrisy and dishonesty will ultimately break the back of male dominance.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>29</sup> Richardson, p. 52.

## 2.2 Robert “Robbie” Leighton, the charming, but immoral bonvivant

“Life, and don't be ashamed of it,”<sup>30</sup> this is the official creed of Robbie Leighton. On the face of it, the statement itself suggests a certain self-confidence, but is not associated with a pejorative or embarrassing character. However, when considering the principles according to which the other protagonists live – truth, goodness, decency – it becomes quite obvious that Robbie Leighton marches to a different drummer. Enjoying a dissolute lifestyle, he also openly keeps a mistress, and has fallen victim to several vices like extravagance or vanity. In fact, the only argument for Robbie's membership to Victorian middle-class is the assumption of his high birth, but due to the fact that his parents are never mentioned in the text, even this one is built on sand. Additionally to the already mentioned moral lapses, Robbie displays several other features which were virtually impossible for an English gentleman. The most obvious detection in matters of his non-conformance with Victorian values is his parasitism and his absolute dependency upon other people. Even though this fact runs through the narrative like a golden thread, it is constantly ignored by Robbie himself who wrongly assumes that he is able to make his own living:

Well, after all, a man only wants a manner. [...] So that we should be perfectly independent, you know; I'm sure you couldn't bear to feel dependent on anyone, and I know I couldn't. And Grannie makes a lovely background to a fellow's life.<sup>31</sup>

It is quite striking that Robbie himself leads his own argument of independence ad absurdum by mentioning Mrs. Leighton's involvement in the same breath. He might be aware of his own dependence, but he still wants to make both society believe that he is able to take care of himself. Unfortunately, this is an erroneous assessment by which exclusively naive and credulous individuals like Margaret can be deluded since it flies in the face of reason. Of course, we have to admit that Mrs. Leighton seems to believe in Robbie's stories as well, but as she is his grand-

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<sup>30</sup> Dowie, p. 134.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

mother, she is somehow obliged to do so. Since Robbie's parents are never mentioned during the novel, Mrs. Leighton seems to be his closest relative who has also taken over the role of educator and sponsor. But her support is not only of a moral nature, but also in monetary form which has been stopped at the moment of Robbie's departure to Paris where he ought to "develop character."<sup>32</sup> As this could also be interpreted as a synonym for manliness,<sup>33</sup> the development of character should normally contain making a living with hard work. For some reasons, Robbie seems to have missed this undertone as he reacts to his sudden poorness by counting on Lord Hamesthwaite's money – a subsidy he was granted when studying in Oxford<sup>34</sup> – while also making arrangements with Arsénie. That she is nothing more than a means to an end, no matter if financially or physically, Robbie makes very plain from the very first moment:

"Who is Arsénie?" Gurdon asked, as lightly as he could, and smiling. "Arsénie? Have I not mentioned her?" Leighton looked at him in frank surprise. "Oh, she lives with me, and cooks, and looks after me, and keeps me out of mischief." He laughed — laughed like a Paris art student.<sup>35</sup>

Considering this description from an objective point of view, Arsénie could be anything from a maid to a housewife since she is said to perform all sorts of household chores. What might allude to Robbie's and her intimate relationship is the 'Parisian' laugh – remember Mrs. Leighton's remark that Robbie was "getting into the ways of wicked Paris"<sup>36</sup> and its *ménage à deux* – as well as the apparent violation of Victorian decency. It was commonly agreed that first names between single men and single women were only used if an engagement had taken place,<sup>37</sup> which was also seen as signal for an intimate relationship, so that the conclusion for Robbie

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Compare to Haley, p. 206.

<sup>34</sup> Dowie, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Compare to Mitchell, Sally. *Daily Life in Victorian England*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996, p. 150.

and Arsénie is evident. In the eye of a nineteenth-century beholder, however, it was insignificant whether they really have had sexual intercourse or not since their simple cohabitation was already unacceptable.

This lack of masculine decency is even aggravated by Leighton's financial dependence on Arsénie, depriving him of any claim to be a Victorian gentleman. "I could never keep out of debt in this world if I hadn't Arsénie,"<sup>38</sup> Robbie has to admit, but however, he makes absolutely no effort to change the situation and take real work into consideration. Instead, he stays as carefree as ever, solely focusing upon art and amusement. That he actually lives at other people's expense can also be spotted by the fact that Mark Gurdon has to pay "an exceedingly round number of francs"<sup>39</sup> for their joint breakfast. In the course of the novel, there is no mentioning that Robbie ever pays for something or that he has some money at hand. Quite contrary to this, he is even associated with gambling as well as with an extravagant and exaggerated lifestyle.<sup>40</sup> During the complete novel, Robbie is more or less a nobody for society since he has neither the money nor the qualities that would identify him as a Victorian gentleman or a valuable part of society at all.

Robert's adaptation of French values and habits additionally strengthens this impression. Although it is not very likely that all of the undesired attributes in his character and behaviour came out of nowhere, Robbie's moral decay is mostly traced back to his French residence by applying a different approach of degeneration based on "adverse environmental conditions."<sup>41</sup> First mentioned by Mrs. Leighton, this argument is taken up again by Mark who – subsequent to Robbie's mentioning of living with Arsénie – asserts that his friend is "pretty well acclimated."<sup>42</sup> This statement might look unsuspecting at first sight, but when considering that Robbie has just confessed to have violated the Victorian moral code, the reproachful undertone becomes much more obvious. In fact, there are several text

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<sup>38</sup> Dowie, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, pp. 218f and 127f.

<sup>41</sup> Hambrook, Glyn. "Baudelaire, Degeneration Theory, and Literary Criticism in Fin de Siècle Spain." *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 101, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), pp.1005-1024, at p. 1006.

<sup>42</sup> Dowie, p. 19.



passages that challenge Robert's suitability for English middle-class, the most obvious being his extreme deviance from the Victorian norm. Represented by his friend Mark Gurdon, Robbie is not able to score in a direct comparison:

Leighton's fair hair was four inches long where it had been barely half an inch, he had a weird beard of rough tow-coloured stuff which partially covered his white throat. He was extremely *décolleté*. A horrid rag of a tie disappeared into a stained blue waistcoat front, and a grey jacket with gaping side pockets modelled his muscles effectively with its greasy shine.<sup>43</sup>

This description alone already ruins the picture of an English gentleman as it reminds more of a vagabond or working-class person than of a member of Victorian middle-class. But Robbie is not only ill-clothed and dirty, he also has – in contrast to Mark – a lot of needless hair on his head and throat that savagely grows and therefore underlines his 'degenerated' or 'beastlike' condition. This hairy detail does not only stress Nordau's belief that authors and artists were degenerates by default,<sup>44</sup> but also the fact that Robbie is extremely different from the ideal gentleman as represented by Mark. Since both men had the same starting point, namely a graduation from Oxford, it is reasonable to ask why Robbie has developed in a completely different direction. One theory would be to blame his immoral surrounding, to state that the environmental changes and his bad company have turned Robert into this caricature of himself. This theory has the advantage to keep his reputation intact as it puts the blame on France and its inhabitants. Furthermore, it allows Robbie to return to the British Empire and his middle-class rank where he can promptly begin his catharsis. Because Robbie has the ability to make his stories sound credible, it seems reasonable to assume that this is the version society wants to believe.

The other theory – and from my point of view, it is the one Dowie favours – pinpoints to Robert's weak character which is not able to overcome the temptations

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 9f.

<sup>44</sup> Compare to Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. Translated from the Second Edition of the German Work. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895, p. VII.

of life. Being described as “scatter-brain”<sup>45</sup> which is a nice paraphrase for his volatility, he turns a deaf ear to Victorian principles so as to keep on wallowing carelessly in pleasure. It is indubitable that he lives beyond his means – Arsénie, Mrs. Leighton, Lord Hamesthwaite and Mark can confirm this – and that he is absolutely ignorant of being wrong in doing so. Although it was commonly agreed among the Victorian middle-class that “[g]entlemen have to learn that it is no part of their duty or privilege to live on other people’s toil,”<sup>46</sup> Robbie seems not to agree with this conception – and when we consider that he ends up as an accepted member of Victorian middle-class who is going to marry the ideal woman, we have to concede this point to him

Nevertheless, the thorough reader is quite aware of the fact that Robbie is neither a very positive nor a very loveable character. He definitely knows about middle-class’s habit to ignore or transform inconvenient facts, especially when they affected a gentleman of the higher classes.<sup>47</sup> In fact, this habit in combination with Mrs. Leighton’s inconsequence are the only reasons why Robbie still belongs to the respectable part of Victorian society since he has none of the qualities that were generally asked for such as decency or goodness. He does not even love Margaret, but uses her in order to steady his position as well as to live his own narcissism. By pushing her around so as to find the perfect motif for his new masterpiece, he demonstrates quite clearly that Margaret is nothing more than a projection screen for his personal ideas:

“My idea is to have her here—Miss Essex, do you mind—just half a minute? Thanks—by this pink peony tree. In this same pink gown. No hat on. Drenched in sunlight—you see?” “She will have sunstroke to a certainty,” cried her mother. “Face, hair, hands, all that wonderful gold shade,” Robbie went on, with unabated enthusiasm,—“that grey atmospheric gold; and then the peonies and the dress—masses of bluish-purple.” [...] “Then I am of course going to do a head in the old Italian manner, with a gold background. Gold is Miss Essex's inevitable setting.

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<sup>45</sup> Dowie, p. 261f.

<sup>46</sup> Ruskin, as quoted in Gilmour, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Compare to Brander, p. 17.

But it is among flowers that a large portrait should seize her. Dear Miss Essex—is it troubling you too much? Just over here. The pink of your gown is simply inspired! I see a most fascinating scheme, by using that sheet of poker-red nasturtiums as a background.”<sup>48</sup>

That he does actually not care about Margaret’s well-being or convenience, is in my opinion self-explanatory as Robbie deliberately ignores Mrs. Essex’s concerned remark about the threat of a potential sunstroke. He is so focused upon his work and inspiration that he quite honestly objectifies Margaret. Especially during the last part of the novel – the one when Margaret finally speaks to Robert instead of cutting him dead – a lot of evidence for this reproach can be gathered. It begins with Robbie’s claim that Margaret has to love him because he had fallen in love with her at first sight. Not only does he take her love as a certainty, but also completely ignores her utterance pertaining to this monumental day. “It was one of the most frightful moments of my life,”<sup>49</sup> poor Margaret quietly confesses, but instead of responding to her fears and sorrows, Robbie simply passes over her comment and goes on wallowing about the new picture he is going to paint. For him, Margaret is more like an object, something he possesses and of which he can dispose at will. This is also the reason why Margaret is never heard again after she agrees to marry Robert: Her existence is totally absorbed in his, making her the projection screen Robbie needs to build up his picture of an ideal and independent man who needs no help from no one, not even from a picnic.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, this clean record is at least questionable from a reader’s perspective as we are in possession of all dirty details of Robbie’s life. “Liquorice and *aguardiente*,”<sup>51</sup> that is all Robbie is interested in, and it is reasonable to assume that the exploitation of his family and friends will never stop. Everything Robert does is planned, performed intentionally and in his own favour, and he does not wince at

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<sup>48</sup> Dowie, p. 246.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 267f.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 307f.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

using others to supply his wants. He is the representative of insincerity, hypocrisy, and male overestimation, the real “parasite... of society.”<sup>52</sup> Although he finally marries one of the most innocent personages in the novel, Robert Leighton is neither a good person nor a real Victorian gentleman. The copper money on his watch chain sums up his personality as completely as his sleeping late whereas society is already having breakfast. Demonstrating middle-class’s blindness to a gentleman’s vices, Robert Leighton is the real threat to society, not Essex and his hereditary heart-disease. Poor, naive Margaret is the perfect victim for his vicious game, on the one side covering his moral lapses with her innocence and perfection while on the other side serving as his personal muse and motif. Men like Robert Leighton and Mark Gurdon, who consider women to be mere instruments in order to supply their wants, are the best explanation why “the degeneracy we deplore lies at the door of a selfish, lustful, diseased manhood.”<sup>53</sup>

### **2.3 Hubert “Dark” Essex, the masked gentleman**

Although he might look like one of ‘them,’ Hubert Essex – henceforth simply referred to as ‘Essex’ like mostly done in the novel itself – should not be lumped together with the previously described characters who demonstrated society’s superficiality and ignorance to almost perfection. Of course, one might rightfully ask why this categorisation should be false as it is always the reactionary Essex who tends to demonstrate a certain shallowness and arrogance towards other people. However, he is a much more difficult case than it might appear at first sight so that it is recommendable to start with the indubitable facts in order to analyse Essex and his intended function for this novel. One of these hard facts – and maybe the one most important for Victorian society – is his social unfitness for middle-class which is based on two major flaws: Essex’s work and his financial situation.

Even though he partakes on several social events such as the dinner at Mrs. Leighton’s or the big party in Surrey, Essex is not really an appreciated guest, but appears to be mostly tolerated so as to keep Margaret’s company. He neither has

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<sup>52</sup> Calder, Jenni. *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

the social competence of Mark nor the financial background of Robbie which is also the reason why Essex is generally perceived as harasser. Evidence for this thesis can be found in Lord Hamesthwaite's disapproval or Mrs. Leighton's rude interview towards the end of the novel.<sup>54</sup> This general hostility cannot be completely attributed to his lower middle-class status as otherwise, also Margaret would be affected. Nevertheless, it can be seen as the cause of Essex's problematic stand in society since this difference in money and reputation is also responsible for his own negative perception of the world:

“By the way, the man across there, now gnawing a salt almond, has honoured you with a number of savagely covetous stares.” “That is Sir Edmund Bruce.” “It is so delightful to be in the society of some one who is *au fait* with little social details of that kind—to a commoner like myself the greatest treat,” said Essex, with exaggerated enthusiasm.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, one can argue that Essex only tries to mark his territory – his love for Gallia is another indubitable fact to be explained later – but still, the quote perfectly illustrates the battle between classes or, in this case, between levels within these classes. With Sir Edmund Bruce, we have a perfect specimen of the upper middle-class, a person with financial and/or political influence, and Essex is quite conscious of the fact that he cannot compete against someone with so obvious advantages. For this reason, Essex, being only a ‘Mister’ and awfully poor,<sup>56</sup> tries to disparage his rival by ridiculing his high birth. The irony is quite striking, but it contains an element of truth as “in the strictest legal sense, England had only two classes: aristocrats (who inherited titles and land) and commoners (everyone else).”<sup>57</sup> With this knowledge borne in mind, we can easily understand Essex's aversion to people from the upper middle-class such as Sir Edmund Bruce or Lady

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<sup>54</sup> Dowie, pp. 95 and 310f.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, p. 17f.

Mary Mortimer, but we can also sense his own despair in regard to his life as ‘commoner.’

Building on these two arguments, we can detect both a social and a physical unfitness. Since Essex has chosen the profession of a writer, he disqualifies as a reputable middle-class member from the very beginning, though writing for the literary weeklies even downgrades his already low position.<sup>58</sup> However, it is his decision for intellectual instead of manual work that marks Essex as a potential threat for English society. Based on the rather strict separation of private and public sphere, it was extremely complicated for authors and male intellectuals in general to be seen as respectable gentlemen. Most of them worked in private or domestic areas, some of them even at home – realms that were generally assigned to women. This supposed femininity that writers and other male artists were said to harbour can also be held responsible for the frightened claim that “[d]egenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists.”<sup>59</sup> From this starting point, several more arguments in a writer’s disfavour can be made up, such as the lack of a symptomatic mark or their alleged idleness because mental work could not be measured in the same way as manual work.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, it was virtually impossible for intellectual workmen to get rid of the stigma of degeneration.

Interestingly, Ménie Muriel Dowie decided to even strengthen this already overwhelming perception of Essex’s unfitness by providing him with a most inappropriate companion:

While the household was still at breakfast, there was heard the heavy clapping of under-bred hoofs upon the drive, and when they looked out, there was Essex, mounted on some strange quadruped he had hired from his inn at Hiddenfold.

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<sup>58</sup> Dowie, p. 95.

<sup>59</sup> Nordau, p. VII.

<sup>60</sup> Compare to Danahay, Martin A. *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture. Literature, Art and Masculinity*. Aldershot et al.: Ashgate, 2005, pp. 2 and 7.

“Ah, but you haven't felt him trot!” [...] “Well, I think you had better abandon him and see what we can do,” Lord Hamesthwaite called from his little table near the fire.<sup>61</sup>

In this context, the poor-bred horse is refused by society because of its impure breeding; it is simply unsuitable for middle-class society. Although this is an utterly superficial point of view, Lord Hamesthwaite's remark applies to both horse and equestrian: They both do not belong to this society due to their outwardly visible flaws; the personality inside is not even of secondary importance. Remarkably, it happens directly after this incident with the inadequate horse that Gallia begins to spot Essex's physical anomalies:

Gallia noted, with a feeling of dislike, when she handed him a peach with a bit of ice in place of the stone, that his feet were too small. In the Cloisters, just when he took her hands, she had observed that his hands were too small. It was a blemish in so handsome a man; a blemish that gave her a feeling of discomfort.<sup>62</sup>

As already mentioned before, this situation affiliates directly to the incident with the blemished horse, as if seeing Essex next to a poor-bred animal had completely changed her mental attitude. This appears even more striking when taking into account that Gallia had already talked about Essex's “very fine sallow hands.”<sup>63</sup> At this time – her confession in chapter VIII – no word is spoken about any kind of flaw, and when considering that the two of them know each other for more than three years, Gallia's sudden discovery appears to be very odd. It might have to do with her decision for Mark and against Essex, but nevertheless, her change is remarkable and might also be ascribed to the above-mentioned cliché of the degenerated author. In any case, the mentioning of Essex's mar fits perfectly into the line of argument since his hands testify to his non-manual work. Those hands – “if uncal-

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<sup>61</sup> Dowie, p. 258f.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

loused and clean, could appear dangerously close to a woman's hand,"<sup>64</sup> – stigmatise Essex as an essential threat to the nation's continuance.

That his hereditary heart-disease perfects the picture of the degenerate is in my opinion self-explanatory, but it does not decrease the affection Essex bears for Gallia. Although being described as rude and vain, with a slightly superficial and negative touch in the beginning, the whole novel displays hints of his love for Gallia. Some of them are easier to spot such as keeping her glove or the emotional outburst in the Cloister, but when paying special attention to these little signs of love, it is utterly impossible to ignore that not only Gallia had tender feelings right from the start. The first evidence for this assumption can be found in their common past. Even before Essex's attitude and his personal living conditions are mentioned, the text establishes a connection between Gallia and him that is not limited to studies and tutoring. As the text states, it was Essex who asked Gallia to stay on his boat where "they had spent at least four hours together"<sup>65</sup> – quite a long time for a person who denies most of the time to have any feelings or sympathies at all. Nevertheless, this meeting was definitely triggered by Essex although both of them seem to have enjoyed the trip since otherwise, the four-hours time span is hardly allegeable.

Bearing in mind that a certain intention from his side can be imputed, the second meeting – which is said to be a mere coincidence – might also be planned in advance by Essex. Although the text mentions that "he too was going the same way,"<sup>66</sup> namely to Abingdon, it remains questionable what was the aim of both Gallia's and his trip as they ended up having tea together without the slightest reference to any other errand. Both times, I am firmly convinced that a hidden agenda on Essex's side had existed as both meetings were more or less produced by him. Since they spent several hours on his boat, he has to extend an invitation, and it was his trip to the same destination as Gallia that makes the joint tea time possible in the

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<sup>64</sup> Danahay, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Dowie, p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.



first place. From my point of view, especially this last chance encounter contains too many coincidences to be not planned, not to mention neither the length of their meetings nor the fact that drinking tea was seen as an implement to get together men and women in order to reproduce their middle-class status.<sup>67</sup>

Based on these facts, several other text passages appear in a different light. As mentioned before, Essex explicitly points out Sir Edmund Bruce's 'savagely covetous stares' to Gallia, but although I have already mentioned his dislike for aristocratic people, his scathing remark can also be interpreted as a sign of jealousy. By denouncing his potential rival – as this is the only decent explanation for Sir Edmund's conspicuous gazes – Essex makes sure that he himself is seen in a better light, that he is the educated and civilised one. As he cannot compete with neither Sir Edmund's title nor his presumed wealth, education and manners are the only assets to speak in his favour. Furthermore, this theory of jealousy would also explain why Essex demands Gallia's glove from Maurice Forrester, as well as the manner in which he utters this claim. "Give it to me, I will take it to Miss Hamesthwaite"<sup>68</sup> – this is not a question, but an order Maurice follows without opposition which emphasises the natural authority Essex must have exerted. Moreover, it is explicitly mentioned that he seems to hide the glove from Sir Edmund as if to deprive him of any possibility to interact with Gallia. That the following scene in the palm-house is both a very intimate and romantic moment is not disputable in my opinion, particularly in regard to the fact that in the end, Essex keeps the glove for himself. That he does not hand it back to Gallia until she directly asks for it, confirms my theory: Essex is in love with Gallia. He might try to suppress or ignore this fact in order to protect her, but in contrast to Mark and Robbie, he is not able to fool himself. "I am not making love to you now, Beautiful, Beautiful,"<sup>69</sup> that is the lie Essex tries to teach the world, but unfortunately, he cannot convince himself of this fact.

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<sup>67</sup> Fromer, Julie E. *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Dowie, p. 72.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200f.

Nevertheless, his weakness for Gallia also contributes to the fact that Essex becomes the tragic hero of the novel since it is merely his hereditary that mulcts him of a happy future with Gallia. Instead of being noticed as the loving soul mate Gallia longs for, he and his malformed genes are recognised as the story's villains. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that Essex is – in opposition to Mark and Robbie – a perfect gentleman. Although he is described as a superficial and unpleasant person in the beginning, this soon turns out to be a social mask, a mechanism in order to prevent Gallia from falling in love with him and hence reproducing his hereditary heart-disease. From my point of view, it is this genetic failure and his pro-active handling that deprives Essex of being husband and father because he matches the ideal of a Victorian gentleman in terms of nineteenth century's social specifications.

In order to evaluate what actually makes Essex a perfect, Victorian gentleman, we first need to know what was typical for nineteenth-century middle-class, what were their values and characteristics. First of all, "money was not the defining factor"<sup>70</sup> so as to belong to nineteenth-century middle-class, but "the subtle shifting balance between social and moral attributes,"<sup>71</sup> with a slight preference for the moral component. Besides from this moral purity, middle-class people were said to possess "restraint and sobriety in dress and demeanor, honest and forthright expression, sexual continence, religious conformity, and, last but certainly not least, financial solvency."<sup>72</sup> In regard to the moral component and 'sexual continence,' Essex is the only one of the three men who has never left the path of virtue. Even the caresses he bestows on Gallia are of a totally innocent character as they are not intended to lead in an affair, but are dedicated alone to bid farewell.

What goes hand in hand with this argument of purity is the mentioning of religion. During the whole novel, this topic is more or less left untouched although Christianity still seemed to play a major role in people's life. This can be concluded

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<sup>70</sup> Mitchell, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Gilmour, p. 4f.

<sup>72</sup> Young, p. 48.

from several, but discrete allusion like Gallia having “no religious idea”<sup>73</sup> or Mark being thankful for his “Christian name”<sup>74</sup> although actually being an agnostic.<sup>75</sup> These quotes clearly illustrate that religion was part of middle-class’s values, but that its influence seemed to decrease. Nevertheless, Essex is again the exception to the rule as he is the only character revealing a religious belief by possessing “a long silver cross that hung on his watch-chain but never dangled publicly upon his waistcoat.”<sup>76</sup> The fact that this religious sign is not openly exposed, but only coincidentally noticed by Gallia supports my thesis that religion seemed to have lost ground. Nevertheless, Christian orthodoxy was seen as a marker for a middle-class gentleman, and Essex alone meets this criteria.

Unlike Robbie, of whom we know that he wears “tiger-skin and a drift of muslin afterwards,”<sup>77</sup> Essex’s clothes are always clean and decent so that he definitely meets the next gentlemanly criteria of ‘restraint and sobriety in dress and demeanor’ as well. Even the text itself notes that Essex looks “correct” and “elegant,”<sup>78</sup> leaving the overall impression that he cares a lot about his outer-appearance. Moreover, it must be mentioned that parts of his outfit like hat and stick were generally associated with the leisure class, not only “greatly enhanc[ing] the native dignity of a gentleman,” but also “express[ing] the fact that they have dissociated themselves with productive labour.”<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, Essex never appears to be as overdressed as, for example, Gertrude Janion, especially because he is not a very wealthy person.’

This last remark already touched another criterion a perfect gentleman had to meet and this is ‘financial solvency. Although the text states in Chapter IX that the

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<sup>73</sup> Dowie, p. 307.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 81f.

<sup>79</sup> Harrison, Fraser. *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality*. London: Sheldon Press, 1977, p. 35.

Essex family is very poor,<sup>80</sup> this does not entail they do not possess money or land. The term 'poor' as mentioned by Gallia refers not to the family being bankrupt and starving, but to the fact that they are settled in the lower levels of Victorian middle-class. Otherwise, they would neither be able to afford a house nor dress well enough for society to accept them. That Margaret can even live a bit beyond her means can be ascribed to her brother who, "though he was not particularly generous, provided his sister's dress allowance from his own not over well-filled coffers."<sup>81</sup> Due to this fact, we cannot only conclude that Essex is financially solvent, but also that he is selfless in regard to people he loves.

That this does not only apply to his sister of mother, but also to Gallia should be self-evident as Essex does not only approve of her decision for Mark, but also burns his captious letter and even intends to smooth out Cara while concealing his hereditary heart-disease until Gallia is spoken for.<sup>82</sup> In contrast to the two other men, Essex refrains from using women so as to achieve his objective, but instead treats them like equal partners. His idolisation of Margaret and his support on her dress allowance testify to this fact as well as his constant efforts to keep Gallia off. Furthermore, his private conversations with her were not limited to polite small talk, but "subjects that interested Gallia" which can be translated as politics, natural science and social ethics. Since he conducted these discussions in "her own key," and also took her opinion and arguments as serious as those of a man at eye-level, Essex shows a lot of respect to Gallia in particular and women in general, which also is said to account for a perfect gentleman.

The remaining criterion, 'honest and forthright expression,' might lead to confusion if we consider what I have just stated: that Essex refrains from mentioning his birth defect until the very end. This most obviously contradicts the concept of an honest and blunt-talking gentleman, but again, we should take the context into consideration. In a society where every deviance from the norm was seen as a potential haz-

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<sup>80</sup> Dowie, p. 95.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 103f.

<sup>82</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, pp. 278ff and. 313.

ard, people tended to swim with the tide which meant that “acting, behaving well, seeming like a lady or a gentleman, require[d] a mask.” That he is able to create such a façade should be indubitable although Essex seems to use it only in regard to his feelings. Concerning political or class issues, he is in fact very outspoken since he does not mind uttering his contemptuousness for the Colonial Office in public, and is therefore redolent of Gallia.<sup>83</sup> There are several more points to speak in Essex’s favour like his classical education or his ability to ride, but the criteria mentioned in the section above were unique features which also belong to the canon of Victorian gentlemanliness, and which therefore account for his hidden ideality. Hence, from all of the three male protagonists, Essex is the only real gentleman, the only one that qualifies from a moral and human perspective. Even though he is dominated by his dark secret and its consequentially needed mask, Essex keeps treating women with love and respect instead of degrading them to the level of mere instruments.

### **3 Dowie’s Victorian woman – a cross-section**

#### **3.1 Margaret Essex, the ideal statue of perfection**

After the discovery that the labelled gentlemen Robert Leighton and Mark Gurdon represent the viciousness of Victorian society whereas the outwardly masked Essex represents the few good people, we turn towards the one person in *Gallia* who outshines everyone else in terms of virtuousness. Being the embodiment of Victorian perfection, no matter if related to character, behaviour or outer-appearance, this woman is adorable enough to justify a saint-like position, but too innocent to evoke distrust or jealousy, so that even a feminist like Gallia has to admit her special position: “I could not forgive any man who had not loved Margaret Essex. She is the ideal woman. She is a thousand women—not one woman. All men ought to worship her.”<sup>84</sup> It is this passing comment of Gallia that captures the personality of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>84</sup> Dowie, p. 299.

Margaret Essex in a nutshell while also pointing to her role as paradigm of men's expectations.

As base for Margaret's idolisation, we can name her absolute and almost inhuman perfection in regard to any female aspect. She always knows how to behave, how to dress or when to remain silent, and therefore displays how familiar she is with the tasks society assigned to her. In this context, it should be mentioned that the Victorian woman had more or less only two principal duties: representation and reproduction. As the latter part was considered a logical consequence of marriage, girls were taught from an early age how to represent in society in order to find a potential husband. For this reason, their training and education was very much focused upon features that could be used to impress men such as "a smattering of French, music and drawing, [...] fancy needlework,"<sup>85</sup> as well as singing and playing piano.<sup>86</sup> In short, a woman's education was "planned in relation to man"<sup>87</sup> so that eventually, his well-fare turned out to be the sole aim of a woman's life. Whenever in company, it was her duty to "restore good-will, arouse interest and make the evening pass happily"<sup>88</sup> while putting aside her own interests.

A direct cause of this one-dimensional approach – and I deem it also to be an intended cause – was the fact that women were not able to cope with the real world. Because of their superficial training, it was virtually impossible for them to gain independence as they were raised to become "ill-educated, inexperienced and over-protected"<sup>89</sup> creatures. That this argument is also valid for Margaret – at least from a male perspective – is elucidated by Mark in chapter XII where he uses exactly these three criteria to sugar-coat his failed proposal:

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<sup>85</sup> Gorham, Deborah. *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 21.

<sup>86</sup> Compare to Kortsch, Christine Bayles. *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> Rousseau, quoted in Gelpi, p. 16.

<sup>88</sup> Crow, p. 22.

<sup>89</sup> Harrison, p. 35.

A girl—that is, a nice girl—is a very inexperienced creature, he told himself, and no doubt she had known so few men in her beautiful, carefully supervised life, that she was not able to see how superior he was to most other fellows from whom she might have expected proposals.<sup>90</sup>

As can be seen from this short text passage, the female lack of experience – although generally regarded as desirable – is in this context used to look for excuses. Instead of qualifying his self-perception, Mark argues that Margaret is too ill-educated to recognise a real gentleman, too inexperienced to appreciate the chance he has offered her, and too over-protected to draw a comparison to other men. It might be a simple mechanism in order to protect his ego, but Mark's acting also demonstrates the downside of meeting expectations. Nevertheless, we have to admit that his accusations hit a valid point which is not only inferred from the quotation mentioned above, but also from a previous passage in chapter X:

She was not very clever, she had not much brain, and her training had been desultory; but none of those things matter in such a woman. I think she may be exempted from tediously practical formulae, and the set duties of a dull world.<sup>91</sup>

So it is true that due to her superficial training, Margaret is neither intelligent nor well-educated, but as the text already implies, she would have had no use for intellectual qualities. Comparable to the concept of the ideal woman, a preselection has been made for her inasmuch as Margaret was only taught representative values instead of maths or classical languages. Because she is excluded from the 'dull world' of the public sphere, it is simply undesired that Margaret learns anything with respect to this. Instead, she is trained in another way for another purpose which is the home life within the private sphere. This is also the reason why she was not allowed to go to Paris on her own, but should be accompanied by her – in my opinion – over-protective mother. Albeit Mrs. Essex simply wants to patronise

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<sup>90</sup> Dowie, p. 120.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

her single daughter, her acting deprives Margaret not only of making her own experiences and mistakes, but also of closer acquaintanceship with other people. As far as the text states, Margaret seems to have no or few friends beside Gallia and Gertrude since generally, “every precaution [is] taken”<sup>92</sup> to avoid undesired contact. Although a close connection between mother and daughter was seen as ideal,<sup>93</sup> Mrs. Essex definitely exaggerated her role as Margaret’s “mother-friend”<sup>94</sup> and protector inasmuch as her daughter evokes the impression of aloofness.

This finding also goes along with a certain paternalism which was generally accompanied by the continuing comparisons of women to pets, flowers and angels. In Margaret’s case, this paternalism is performed by two different parties: her family and her suitor. But whereas the caution Essex and his mother display can be interpreted as a sign of love and affection, the same is not true for Robbie. His use of the title “child” or “girl”<sup>95</sup> when addressing Margaret directly already shows that Robbie does not consider her to be an equal. This is also fortified by the fact that the address ‘my dear child’ or the like is merely used within conversations of daughters and mothers/aunts.<sup>96</sup> But Robbie seems to be not the only one who belittles Margaret by using a certain address. Additionally, Lord Hamesthwaite calls Margaret “a great pet”<sup>97</sup> of Mrs. Leighton, and although the word can be interpreted as ‘favourite’ in this context, Margaret matches too perfectly the definition of the “pretty foolish-kitten style of person”<sup>98</sup> with whom men like Essex are said to end up. Both descriptions do not display a positive touch, but remind of men’s idea of child-like and dependent housewives. Margaret’s “flower-fingers”<sup>99</sup> might contribute to this conviction, but in any case, her persistent belittlement is hard to ignore.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 103f.

<sup>93</sup> Compare to Gorham, p. 48.

<sup>94</sup> Dowie, p. 117.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 269ff.

<sup>96</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, pp. 50, 115, and 181.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 102.



However, this was a general problem for women since they were not only infantilised, but also reduced to the core values mentioned before so that there were no other career opportunities than becoming a wife and mother – two roles Victorian society naturally assigned to them. It is therefore no wonder that women were commonly described as “charmingly infirm, angelic or divine, fragile as a ‘flower,’ gentle as a kitten, naturally graceful”<sup>100</sup> because all other traits have been subdued right from the start. What remains is a childlike, dependent and helpless creature imprisoned in the private sphere of children and household tasks, the so-called ‘angel in the house.’ To the misfortune of the wife, this label is not just a pet name or title, but also refers to the moral position a woman was expected to fill. Urged to live according to “all the Christian virtues of love, purity and self-sacrifice so as to act as moral centre of the family,”<sup>101</sup> the woman was a priori defined to be a person with extremely high moral standards, not only in regard to herself, but also in regard to her (future) husband. Naturally, this entailed not only a life under the terms of the Victorian code of conduct, but also a dogma of chastity that was merely valid for unmarried women.<sup>102</sup>

With regard to these expectations, it becomes quite easy to point out that Margaret definitely fulfils her representative function now, and will probably comply with the reproductive part once she is wife of Robert Leighton and mother to his children. That she will fill both roles is a certainty to me although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, but it was common knowledge that perfect representation and attraction inevitably led to wedlock and maternity. For Margaret at least, we can consider this thesis to be valid as her education was indubitably planned in relation to men and their wishes:

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<sup>100</sup> Lefkowitz, Lori Hope. *The Character of Beauty in the Victorian Novel*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987, p. 41.

<sup>101</sup> King, Jeannette. *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> Compare to Schoder, Angelika. *Blutsaugerinnen und Femmes Fatales: weibliche Vampire bei Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu und Bram Stoker*. Diedorf: Ubooks-Verlag, 2009, p. 22.

It was not that she gave him any token of love, or let drop one word on which he could build, but she was gracious, smiling, and her reception of him was kind, and she would play and sing when he asked her, liking apparently to give him pleasure.<sup>103</sup>

By acting as described, Margaret exhibits the talent to “make homes that radiate light and warmth from their glowing central hearth”<sup>104</sup> without creating an unchaste impression. She simply submits to Mark’s request for some music, but again, she also suffers from her selfless performance as it awakens an unwanted love inside of Mark which on the other hand results in his frustration and her accusation. For this reason, meeting all Victorian expectations to perfection also seems to have a downside albeit it has negative effects on the woman only.

Due to the fact that Margaret is not yet a mistress of the house herself, we cannot make any speculations related to her household abilities, but we can render a judgement on her moral attitude. The first indication for Margaret being a person of very high moral standards can be seen in her decision to cut Robbie dead when meeting in Paris. While Robbie is still in a state of shock, Mark is perfectly aware of the fact that ‘Miss Essex’ has found out about Arsénie. His following explanation clearly illustrates that Margaret is a respectable part of Victorian society and will therefore always live according to its moral standards.<sup>105</sup> In this exact situation in Paris, he even regards her to be the embodiment of the English moral code in France since her step is “severe and virginal and beautiful,” her appearance “fair and slim and English.”<sup>106</sup> And Margaret is indeed the most virtuous woman, the one even the straightforward Gallia seeks for advice,<sup>107</sup> but this is not the end of the

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<sup>103</sup> Dowie, p. 135.

<sup>104</sup> Foster, p. 21.

<sup>105</sup> Compare to Dowie, p. 35.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

story. Albeit it is hard to distinguish where ideality ends and sainthood begins, there are manifold factors that confirm the theory that Margaret is actually too good to be true. Described as a “delicately beautiful, beneficent-faced, and gracious” soul-woman that stands out because of her “persistent beauty of character,” her “immemorial fine forgiveness” and her absolute “guilelessness,”<sup>108</sup> Margaret seems to be ascribed all characteristics an ideal woman could possibly possess. The chance that a real woman meets all of the above-mentioned criteria actually tends towards zero, so that Margaret receives a special position if we add this fact to her alleged aloofness due to her mother’s over-protectiveness.. For this reason, I have to second Galia again who seems to be unable to believe the inhuman purity and perfection her friend exhibits: “You are the being biology will never explain. You keep alive the old tradition about souls, and angels, and saints, and spirits.”<sup>109</sup>

This is also the general problem I have detected in regard to Margaret’s exceptional set-up: Her personality loses more and more of importance whilst her perfection transforms Margaret into an ideal statue, an artwork or object. The base for this was already built when she became the icon of female perfection, a person whose character can be completely summarised by the watchword goodness,<sup>110</sup> but in the end, Robbie Leighton is the thriving force in this process which he began by downgrading Margaret to a child-like level. While Margaret herself likes to promote her divine perception by dressing herself in “Madonna blue,”<sup>111</sup> it is her suitor who fulfils the objectification she had already fallen victim to – a progress her own brother unintentionally started. Although Essex solely wants to point out that his sister embodies the only kind of woman worth of romantic efforts, he finally says the fatal words: “It’s a pity she happens to be my sister, for the sake of argument, but I refer to her merely because she is a picture, an etching of the type —a silver-point.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 169f.

From this moment on, Margaret begins to transform into an object of art and beauty, leaving her human roots more and more behind so that in the end, she is not even allowed to talk for herself anymore. As mentioned before, this is mostly the work of Robert Leighton, a man who never tires to emphasise how much he loves Margaret, but who actually does not care for her feelings at all. For Robbie, it is important that she slowly turns into “an artwork, [...] a text written by masculine self,”<sup>113</sup> and that in this context, the specified ‘masculine self’ belongs to himself. Due to the fact that Margaret is truly too good to be true, too gracious, nice and naive, it is no wonder that she unresistingly accepts her metamorphosis as a result of his bossy attitude. She allows him to drag her around or put her into places he considers worth painting while not complaining even if left unprotected in the blazing sun. Margaret condones all of it, resembling more an object or a patient pet than a grown-up woman. She has obtained the final status of representation: being the projection screen for her future husband.

This also explains the fact that from the moment of their engagement, Robbie is the only one talking. Although Margaret did not speak very much in general, and even less when men were present, she is almost absolutely hushed after her decision for Robbie so that she will soon vanish completely - or at least her voice will. Although Margaret has not yet received any of the sacred positions of mother and wife, she has already adapted the expected behaviour of passivity and social invisibility.<sup>114</sup> Henceforth, it will be Robbie who answers for the two of them, and it will be Robbie who makes the important decision in regard to the future as the individual Margaret and her whole personality no longer exist.

So, if we take all the before-mentioned arguments into account, we can conclude that Margaret has more than one function, although all of them seem to blur under the general category ‘perfection.’ She is not only a wonderful example for the ideal

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<sup>113</sup> Więckowska, Katarzyna. „Levinasian Shadow: Test, Other, Woman.“ *Multicultural Dilemmas: Identity, Difference, Otherness*. Eds. Wojciech Kalaga and Marzena Kubisz. Frankfurt am Main et al.:Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 183-193, at p. 185.

<sup>114</sup> Compare to Schoder, p. 16.

woman, but also a person that appears to utopian to be real. This is also the reason why Margaret is elevated to the status of a saint as she easily excels every other woman, creating a certain air of supernaturalism. Nevertheless, her perfect training in relation to men as well as her goodness can both be blamed for the fact that in the end, Margaret is nothing more than a speechless satellite of Robbie, a beautiful, but hushed artwork. By dint of the exploitation of Margaret's innocence and naivety, Dowie most likely wanted to awake all those lethargic women of her age by demonstrating that living according to this Victorian ideal of femininity does not ensure to get a nice and virtuous husband. Margaret Essex serves as a deterrent example to all those women who completely submit to the role male society imposes on them, to all those that try to play the game by the rules and thus blindly hand over their independence. In this case, Dowie seems to warn, the fate of Margaret Essex will also be theirs. The criticism that is hidden in the ideal character of Margaret, who longs for love, but receives dominance only, does not permit any other way. It is Dowie's own plea for a new and advanced thinking which has to start in the heads of women.

### **3.2 Cara Lemuel, the childlike temptation**

While having a lot in common, Cara Lemuel can be considered an alternative plan to 'Saint Margaret' and the Victorian values she embodies, splitting the two of them into "polarised extremes of 'madonnas' and 'magdalenes.'"<sup>115</sup> Although her initial childlikeness and dependence make Cara look like an ideal woman, Dowie promptly starts to deconstruct this impression by referring to both her immoral lifestyle, and her problematic origin and nature. These references can be found in great numbers during the novel, starting with a broad hint in one of the first chapters:

"Who is this?" [Cara] pointed to Gurdon as though she ought to be told at once of any intruder into the circle. "Friend of mine from England, Gurdon by name. Look here, Lemuel, don't you make love to him." The girl leapt into the air with a high, curious shriek of amusement and delight. She was a round well-developed

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<sup>115</sup> King, p. 10.

creature, but she was light and fearfully agile, and it made a wonderful effect. When she descended, she cut a strange step towards Gurdon, flung both her arms round his head and kissed him on his severe, neatly shaven lips. Then she went off into the gayest, most squealing of laughs. “You see how I begin,” she said, and danced over the floor and swung round and looked at them, and doubled herself up to scream and laugh again.<sup>116</sup>

That Cara seemingly has difficulties to stick to the moral code of Victorian society is emphasised by Robbie’s admonition ‘[D]on’t you make love to him.’ The pure fact that he needs to mention this already illustrates that Cara is not the innocent, little girl she appears to be. Although being only “a girl of about eighteen,”<sup>117</sup> she seems to know perfectly well how to kiss, love and turn a man’s head. Furthermore this text passage outlines the striking carelessness and hilarity that appear natural to Cara. She seems to be unaware of the frivolity that her behaviour entails, as if kissing an unknown man is nothing but a game, something that amuses and delights her. In this early stage of the novel, it is thus complicated to classify Cara. On the one hand, she displays the childish gaiety and naivety of an ideal woman, but on the other side, it is nearly impossible to miss the sexual connotation that underlies her entire behaviour.

In my opinion, Mark encounters the same problem since he talks very pejorative about Cara in the course of the novel, but also discloses his own uncertainty as to which category Cara belongs by calling her both a “minx” and a “wild creature, a child and not a child.”<sup>118</sup> While the first denomination can also mean a coquettish girl, which makes the word lose its negative character, the latter brilliantly sums up the ambiguity of Cara’s whole personality. In regard to her outer-appearance, the impression she leaves, young Lemuel might be mistaken for an ideal woman due to her dependence on either her father or Mark inasmuch as she awakens protective instincts.<sup>119</sup> But beneath her social skin, there lies her real nature, her passion and

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<sup>116</sup> Dowie, p. 23.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 32 and 24.

<sup>119</sup> Dowie, p. 129.

‘savageness.’ This is not only highlighted by the usage of ‘wild creature’ – a term strongly reminding of Eliza Lynn Linton’s ‘Wild Woman’ used for emancipated women “with ‘inverted instincts’ who had degenerated away from [their] natural role”<sup>120</sup> – but also by several other text passages like the one referring to Cara’s unconventional introduction.

Being situated in Robbie’s French studio, it takes Mark by surprise that “a head reared itself at the other end of the heap of clothing,—a head with a good deal of black-brown hair cut short and a pair of very round, very sleepy eyes; two feet thrust themselves out of his end of the bundle and swung to the floor. The figure sat and then stood up and shook herself; she seemed a girl of about eighteen.”<sup>121</sup> The presentation of Cara’s appearance gives way to speculation since her emergence from presumably dirty clothes promptly associates her with filth, impurity and pollution. In a time where dirt and disease were generally linked with the working-class,<sup>122</sup> an emergence from several clothes placed on a divan is not the best possibility to be introduced into a story – especially when this divan is placed in the studio of an English artist’s mistress in ‘wicked’ Paris.

This bad impression is even exacerbated by the fact that neither Cara’s father nor her mother can be considered a respectable part of Victorian society. Albeit we get to know that old Lemuel has once been part of the English bureaucracy, his ambition to get on and marry finally led him to make the wrong decisions. Instead of going for a “salary on a crawling scale, with a pension at the end of it,”<sup>123</sup> old Lemuel gave up this comfortable position and tried to find new ways to get himself into notices. Due to the fact that he ends up posing in Paris, with no wife, but an eighteen-year old daughter, he has evidently failed this attempt which also implies losing his

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<sup>120</sup> Kline, Salli. “The Cultural Context: The Demonization and Criminalization of the Modern Woman.” *The degeneration of women: Bram Stoker’s Dracula as allegorical criticism of the Fin de Siècle*. Ed. Salli J. Kline. Rheinbach-Merzbach: CMZ Verlag, 1992, pp. 79-98, at p. 91.

<sup>121</sup> Dowie, p. 22.

<sup>122</sup> Compare to Gelpi, p. 10.

<sup>123</sup> Dowie, p. 40.

middle-class position. Since he seems to have found solace in alcohol,<sup>124</sup> his fate as fallen member of middle-class is ultimately sealed.

For Cara's mother, an even more significant picture can be drawn. Although only few details are mentioned about her, we get to know that she is no English-woman at all, but a Spanish gipsy.<sup>125</sup> This mere characteristic already marks her as a person outside of Victorian society for two reasons: Her different nationality identifies her as an undesirable alien and potential threat to British identity whereas her gipsy roots are seen as indication for her immoral vagabond life. That she has passed on these flaws onto her daughter, is mentioned several times in relation to Cara's 'otherness' which is not restricted solely to a different moral standard, but also includes her deviation from English appearance due to her brown skin and peculiar Spanish attitude.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the special mention of Cara's girlhood as tambourine player in Seville casts a poor light on the educational skills of her parents. With no one to live according to Victorian values and thus setting an example, it is quite understandable that Cara can never become an ideal middle-class woman.

In addition, it is easily recognisable through direct confrontation with Mark, who is not a member of middle-class yet, but a perfect example of splendid constitution that Cara belongs to another class of people, especially because she falls victim to illness and disease later on. While Mark presents himself as the embodiment of the standard Victorian gentleman – not rich in money, but rich in good genes and perspectives – his mistress is nothing but a fallen woman, a “red flame”<sup>127</sup> to stimulate men's vices. As she is also described as a “simple sort of creature,”<sup>128</sup> we can definitely agree that Cara does not meet the standard that is generally applied to nineteenth-century middle-class women, but is rather associated with “the physical, moral, or intellectual signs of racial and cultural otherness.”<sup>129</sup> Her role in Dowie's

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<sup>124</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, pp. 38f, 44, and 126.

<sup>125</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>126</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>129</sup> Vrettos, Athena. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 145.



novel is thus to define the nineteenth-century's concept of enemy and otherness. Being the mistress of an unmarried man makes her a sexually active and immoral woman, and because this was seen as an undesired trait, Cara needs to be punished from a Victorian point of view. Due to the fact that immorality was considered a "disease of the whole person; but... also ... a disease of the body,"<sup>130</sup> Cara's suffering is nothing more than a visualisation of her moral lapse, a corollary owing to her inappropriate lifestyle.

Nevertheless, Dowie does not depict Cara as a savage woman or a potential threat for the national health since the young woman refuses to reproduce under the given circumstances. The recklessness in regard to progeny that was generally ascribed to the lower classes is thus not valid for her, freeing her from the stigma of unreason and improvidence while also nursing doubts about its correctness. Furthermore, we should not neglect the fact that Cara's liaison with Marc begun by mutual agreement so that partly, he is to blame for his indecent behaviour as well. It seems to be Dowie's message that not the woman alone should be held responsible for being a mistress, but that it takes two to tango. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that women still depended on men's goodwill so that "hundred of women sin[ned] because they [we]re so poor" whereas men, who were in possession of money and position, had "no such excuse."<sup>131</sup> By emphasising that Cara is not the femme fatale she is said to be, Dowie deconstructs the general black-and-white picture applied to underclass's women. Additionally, she exposes men as the real violators of the Victorian code of conduct so that "if the future were left to them, the inevitable result would be racial degeneration."<sup>132</sup> Moreover, Dowie seems not interested in stigmatising Cara at all, but tries to speak in her favour as can be deduced from the mentioning of her "black-brown hair cut short," a criterion of civilisation that was already used to contrast Mark's Englishness with Robbie's French

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<sup>130</sup> Haley, p. 67.

<sup>131</sup> Butler, Josephine Elizabeth Grey. *State Regulation of Vice: Address by Mrs. Butler*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Ladies' Association, 1876, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> Richardson, p. 52.

degeneration. As Cara's short hair is explicitly mentioned from the very beginning, we can take for granted that Dowie included this remark to maintain her ambiguous character. In contrast to her 'dirty' entrance, the shortened hair testifies to Cara's attempt to adapt, to look like a good member of Victorian middle-class, but in the end, she stands in her own way.

Mostly, this is the result of Cara being a very impulsive and passionate person – two characteristics that were not associated with the Victorian ideal of middle-class women. Unlike an educated person such as Gallia, Cara is not able to hide her feelings or to pretend that she is not affected by anything. She is not aware of requiring a social mask in order to be respected by society, but openly exposes her feelings, both negative and positive. This is also the reason why she frankly admits her father's drinking problem to Mark, and it also explains her crying in front of him. Being described as the "simple sort of creature that cried unrestrainedly and exuberantly when she was sorry, even as she laughed when she was glad,"<sup>133</sup> it becomes quite clear that Cara is different from the other women described in this novel. If we compare her to, for instance, Gallia – who could for once be seen as Victorian standard – we can evaluate how important the intensity of publicly shown feelings was for a woman's social status. Whereas Gallia, suffering from severe heartache due to Essex's rejection, is most anxious to appear normal in the presence of her parents and friends by trying to lock out her feelings, Cara openly displays the full range of her emotions. Whether she does not care or is simply unaware of the necessity for such a masquerade cannot be stated, but the result of her deviant behaviour is easy to spot: Gallia, who takes great pains to hide her innermost thoughts from ignorant society, is able to live within Victorian society, but for an open-hearted person like Cara, there is no place in British middle-class.

This fact is also perceived by Mark who – although considering himself to be lured into a liaison by Cara's female charms – is nevertheless able to draw his own conclusion as to where young Lemuel's nature will ultimately lead her. Being "fitted

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<sup>133</sup> Dowie, p. 129.

for ‘the oldest of all professions for women’<sup>134</sup> from his point of view, he stigmatises Cara as prostitute, as someone who can never achieve a respectable position as mother and wife, but is still good enough to be used as mistress. He bases this presumption on characteristic criteria such as “abnormal sensuality” and “incurable lightness” as well as onto outward attributes of her different race like “her dark skin, ripe colour, and easy eye.”<sup>135</sup> To make matters worse, Mark is also informed about Cara’s work as model for e.g. Carlo Deo. Since working women were considered to “release dangerous sexuality,”<sup>136</sup> this point joins the before-mentioned collection of misconducts that finally account for Cara being marked as a loose woman and thus as a degenerate by default. Mark finally uses this newly-constructed identity as justification for his immoral actions, with Cara in the position of seductress and hidden mistress as he considers any permanent function, which respectable members of Victorian society fulfil, to be excluded right from the start by her natural set-up.<sup>137</sup>

On basis of these facts, it seems also reasonable to blame Cara for his seduction to the “dark side of the picture”<sup>138</sup> since it offers Mark the possibility to maintain his self-image while portraying Cara as a female Venus flytrap. Of course, we have to admit that Cara might be initially mistaken as a young, dependent and ideal woman, and that she might also use this fact in order to get men under her spell. This idea can be supported by Essex’s argument that “[p]hysical attraction [was] accountable for all the other marriages in the world,”<sup>139</sup> which means approximately 40-50% of middle-class wedlock, but to me, Cara does not appear to have any ambition for upward mobility through marriage. She might be the ‘bad’ sort of women, the one “to fan the flame of men’s vices,”<sup>140</sup> but she is definitely not proactive. Although it would be very comfortable for Mark to blame both Cara and Mar-

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 130f.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Danahay, p. 7.

<sup>137</sup> Compare to Cunningham 1978, p. 29 and Nordau, p. VII.

<sup>138</sup> Dowie, p. 130f.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

garet for his indecent behaviour, we cannot confirm his half-hearted attempt at explanation. It was his decision to begin the affair, it was his decision to keep Cara hidden in a forgotten part of London, and it was also his decision to prolong their relationship until he has achieved his higher aims. The only real decision Cara can make on her own is to induce abortion, an act that deprives her of a lucrative possibility to achieve financial security, but grants her a tiny spark of emancipation. To consider Cara a manipulative person who is only interested in her own benefit would therefore be incomprehensible, thus breaking the back of Mark's one-dimensional perspective of being the victim of Cara's immoral charms.

Moreover, it seems to me as if Dowie herself tried to deconstruct the picture of Cara as femme fatale that tries to attract Mark. By using adjectives like "naively"<sup>141</sup> or making her sit for a "wood nymph,"<sup>142</sup> Dowie definitely tries to show the natural innocence Cara possesses which is very remarkable if we consider the usual categorisation in working- and middle-class that generally forms the basis of nineteenth-century novels. Nevertheless, Dowie positively arises a certain sympathy for Cara while on the other hand passing the buck to Mark. By dint of this little trick, Cara cannot be seen as a cunning or negative character, but appears more to be an innocent creature reigned by nature.

In summary, it can be thus stated that the character of Cara Lemuel contains a higher potential than perceived at first sight. Due to her extramarital affair, we definitely have to differentiate her from the virtuous Margaret, although it must be admitted that Cara displays several characteristics of an ideal Victorian lady as well. But whereas Mark portrays her as seductress, Dowie subtly draws a different picture of Cara, namely that of a naive and favourable character that had been in the wrong place at the wrong time so as to fall victim to Mark's emotional breakout. Dowie does not try to conceal Cara's weakness for physical contact or her inappropriate lifestyle, but she completely refrains from turning Cara into a scapegoat for

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

male misconduct. Instead, she awakes sympathy and understanding for one of these “poor, poor women in the street”<sup>143</sup> whose natural predisposition and education make it impossible for her to achieve a respectable position within Victorian society, leaving her thus vulnerable to the attractions of being someone’s mistress. It is this hopelessness that draws a parallel to the otherwise completely different Margaret, thus unifying the two women from two different races and classes. They both are destined to “so certainly go one way,”<sup>144</sup> and although they will not pursue the same career, Margaret and Cara will always serve the same purpose: “to delight man, to amuse, tease, and obey him.”<sup>145</sup> They are two points on the same scale, even though on different ends of it.

### **3.3 Lady Julia Hamesthwaite, the frail lady in need**

While Margaret stands for the perfect ideal of Victorian womanhood and youthful innocence, Lady Hamesthwaite can be seen as the aged continuance of this conception because she has not only succeeded in representation and marriage, but also in reproduction. Hence, it would be reasonable to say that she surpasses even Margaret’s conformity, if it were not for her poor health. Her biggest defect in comparison to her younger equivalent is thus not fading beauty or unacceptable behaviour, but a flawed and dying body. Nevertheless, she is able to compete with Margaret for the title of the consummate woman and wife since Lady Hamesthwaite’s life is focused upon two simple things: her husband and society.

That Lord Hamesthwaite plays an enormous role in the life of his wife sounds only natural, but in this special case, it means more than merely affection and respect – it means taking over a representative function for him, and this is the point where society comes into play. As can be seen in chapter V, Lady Hamesthwaite is introduced rather early in the play although personally appearing several pages later. She is first mentioned by Mark Gurdon who includes her “Wednesday Din-

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>145</sup> Kavanagh, as quoted in Foster, p. 17.

ners”<sup>146</sup> in the schedule of his presumably successive career and life. To be invited to this ‘paradise’ seems very fundamental to Mark which emphasises the utmost importance of this event as meetings like Lady Hamesthwaite’s dinners were mostly scheduled in order to keep marriages among middle-class members, as well as to cement one’s own status in society. Of course, we can argue that these points are also valid for the famous ‘Wednesday Dinners,’ but from my point of view, this argumentation leaves out one simple, but significant aspect: that the dinners take place on Wednesdays. Although this fact sounds very trivial, it provides the missing link between Victorian middle-class and the public sphere since the correct timing permits the participation of Lord Hamesthwaite, who holds the politically influential position of the Secretary of State for the Colonies<sup>147</sup>

As mentioned before, Wednesday dinners were no ordinary social events, but special political receptions which were more or less initiated by Lord Hamesthwaite himself or at least planned on his behalf. Therefore, it was just expedient to choose a date he was able to attend which limited the appropriate appointments to a minimum. Because Parliament also met in the evenings, only two possible days remained, one of them being Wednesday.<sup>148</sup> To select a day when public life was at rest, was also quite clever as it gave other politicians the chance to join the dinner parties as well. This in turn was a remarkable advantage for Lord Hamesthwaite since it offered him the possibility to form allies, both in the political and economic sector. All of these little details to pay attention to perfectly outline how much Lady Hamesthwaite dedicated her whole life and strength to the support of her husband with all the resources and capacities at her disposal.

That her help with regard to planning and social skills was actually of great value to Lord Hamesthwaite, and that he depended to a certain degree on his wife and her talent to arrange pseudo-social dinner parties, the Secretary of State for the Colonies is not able to figure out until Lady Julia is no longer present to attend her social

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<sup>146</sup> Dowie, p. 43.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> Compare to Mitchell, p. 153.

duties. Although Gallia has to take over this responsibility for social contacts, she is not yet able to follow the shining example of her mother. As can be concluded from the following quote, Lady Hamesthwaite's death is not only a major loss for her husband and his professional networking, but also for parliamentary work:

What a quiet summer it was going to be! how different from the summers Gallia had always run away from in her mother's lifetime, when a large political party was gathered in the breakfast-rooms every morning, and important talks—talks which were going to colour the Parliamentary business of the day—went forward among the old-fashioned flower-beds.<sup>149</sup>

Although the above-mentioned paragraph refers to political meetings in the summer time, we can be sure that regular dinner parties were almost as or even more expensive, and needed a lot of preparation and expenditure. All of these things were handled and organised by Lady Hamesthwaite herself, an ideal woman who has internalised that an 'angel in the house' should keep to the female qualities of "sweet ordering" and "arrangement."<sup>150</sup> By living according to these values, she is a substantial help to preserve the image of female perfection which was considered essential to maintain British national identity and superiority. Evidence for this can also be found in the explicit mentioning of the tea time Lady Hamesthwaite shares with Mrs. Leighton in chapter VI. Being an expensive since imported good, tea represented imperial power as well as luxury, and therefore connoted the English domestic ideal.<sup>151</sup> Due to the fact that domesticity was associated with women, we can state that Lady Hamesthwaite is perfectly aware of and complies with Victorian expectations so that she contributes immensely to her family's representation as respectable and decent members of the British middle-class, thus preparing the ground for her husband's occupational success.

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<sup>149</sup> Dowie, p. 181f.

<sup>150</sup> Ruskin, as cited in Parker, Christopher. *Gender Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Literature*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995, p. 15.

<sup>151</sup> Fromer, p. 2.

Unfortunately, it is this internalisation as well as the application of the corresponding values that can be held responsible for Lady Hamesthwaite's disastrous physical condition. As we get to know fairly early in the text, Gallia's mother is not a very resilient person, neither physical nor mentally. In my opinion, both aspects can be seen as long-term consequences of her past life due to the fact that Lady Hamesthwaite has completely worked herself into the ground by dedicating her whole life to the motto that "in the end, only duty is a suitable antidote to weakness."<sup>152</sup> Strikingly, Gallia seems to be the only one worried about her mother's unusual prioritisation:

"Do you not think mother looking very well?" Gallia began, after she had rung the bell. "I do; I can't imagine why she should come rushing up here now, of all times in the year, when London never fails to give her that bronchial trouble." "Her social duties, my dear"—Mrs. Leighton began. "But she has no social duties. Of course, if she were anyone else, and I were someone quite different, she would have to get me married and all that, but as it is— Come, it must be admitted that I have lifted the burden of social duties pretty thoroughly off mother's back."<sup>153</sup>

This paragraph almost tells its own tale since it perfectly outlines the key role that society and reputation assumed in nineteenth-century life as can be concluded from Lady Hamesthwaite's deliberate choice to subordinate and sacrifice her personal health to the duty of representation. Due to the fact that it is Mrs. Leighton who promptly contradicts Gallia's statement, we can infer that this priority setting was considered normal for the Victorian era, at least among the older generation. Furthermore, it was virtually expected from women to behave as selfless as Lady Hamesthwaite since they were "responsible for assuring that the private sphere acted as an effective indicator of status in the public sphere."<sup>154</sup> Of course, there were also servants in order to guarantee this aim, but it was nevertheless the

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<sup>152</sup> Calder, p. 13.

<sup>153</sup> Dowie, p. 48.

<sup>154</sup> Gorham, p. 8.



woman's duty to maintain her husband's status at all costs. If this implied that the wife had to push herself to her physical limit, it was considered a necessary evil.

However, I would argue that the negligence of somatic symptoms finally leads to Lady Hamesthwaite's creeping physical decay. Flying in the face of reason, she decides in favour of her husband and the appropriate responsibilities instead of focusing upon her own well-being. If she had stayed away from London, a city considered to be "the breeding ground of deadly disease and dangerous ideas,"<sup>155</sup> Lady Julia might have survived or at least extended her life, but by putting social obligation before her own health, she is signing her own death warrant. Unfortunately, this fact is noticed much too late, and of course not by Lady Hamesthwaite herself, who appears to be a champion of repression:

Again Lady Hamesthwaite was interrupted by the same strange, choking cough. "Now, Julia," Lord Hamesthwaite burst out, bringing his fingers sharply on the table, "this settles it. London is not for you. Don't say a word—I will have my own way about it. Gallia, your mother must go abroad at once. I've been very patient. I've watched this getting worse daily, and I've seen the futility of treatment. No doubt I've been a fool to hold my tongue so long about it. But go she must, and that immediately." "But my dinners, my receptions—the invitations are all out!" poor Lady Hamesthwaite interjected pathetically.<sup>156</sup>

Once more, we can see that Lady Hamesthwaite's view is purely one-dimensional as she has addressed her life to the sole aim of being the perfect representative and social organiser. It takes the authority of her husband to finally make her leave London, but even when this is settled, Lady Hamesthwaite is not able to abandon her social duties. Needless to say, she eventually submits to her husband's orders, not because she realises her catastrophic physical constitution, but because obedience to the husband was an unwritten law of Victorian femininity. Moreover, Lord

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<sup>155</sup> Richardson, p. 17.

<sup>156</sup> Dowie, p. 97f.

Hamesthwaite holds two different functions in this situation: On the one hand, he acts as the male authority a wife has to please and bow to so that any sort of protest against his decisions would be unacceptable, but on the other hand, Lord Hamesthwaite is also the initiator of his wife's representative function. Thus, by forcing Lady Hamesthwaite to go abroad, he does not only impose his decision on her, but also releases his wife from the social task he has once assigned to her.

Unfortunately, this decision is taken much too late so that there is nothing more that can be done for Lady Hamesthwaite. Although Dowie does not explicitly mention which disease Gallia's mother falls victim to, I am very convinced that she suffered from tuberculosis, the leading killer in the nineteenth century, whose symptoms were – among others – weakness and coughing. The chance to survive was not very big even though especially rich people like the Hamesthwaites tried to prolong their life span by travelling to warm climates.<sup>157</sup> That this procedure was not very efficient in regard to Lady Hamesthwaite's aetiopathology can be related to the Victorian ideal of femininity which included "tight corsets and sedentary lives, devoid of fresh air and physical exercise."<sup>158</sup> Particularly tight-lacing was held responsible for several female maladies as it did not only create unnaturally thin waists, but also a certain limitation in regard to elbowroom. For this reason, the effects of a stay at a health resort were rather limited since the women still stuck to the parameters of Victorian society, including its uncomfortable dress code.

Nevertheless, we should not neglect the influence that mental stress can have on the human body. Especially in the Victorian era of uncertainties, people never really felt safe, no matter if related to the British Empire itself or their own health. With contagious diseases showing a very erratic behaviour, it was not even possible for the ill himself to predict "the outcome ... in his own case,"<sup>159</sup> thus causing further stress that only aggravated the general perception of uncertainty. Fuelled by social and political upheavals, the fear of crossing frontiers in an undesired direction was

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<sup>157</sup> Compare to Mitchell, p. 193.

<sup>158</sup> King, p. 19.

<sup>159</sup> Haley, p. 11.

almost omnipresent. For Lady Hamesthwaite, it looks like the combination of these two uncertainties – one with regard to her own medical condition, one concerning her place in society – contributed to Lady Julia’s lack of interest in any real fact or problem.

First of all, she is simply unfit for “any discussion of serious moral problems.”<sup>160</sup> This fact becomes particularly clear during Lady Hamesthwaite’s talk with her daughter in chapter VI when even the allusion to prostitution or any public business results in her complete uneasiness. Indeed, her behaviour is quite easy to explain since any knowledge of public issues also meant being involved in it, thus making it impossible for Lady Hamesthwaite to solely focus upon her function as guardian of the private sphere. By refusing to get any information about life outside of the privacy of her home, Gallia’s mother rigidly adheres to the strict separation of public and private sphere which was preached by the conventionalisation of the ideal woman to an angelic figure as depicted in Patmore’s ‘Angel in the House’ (1854-1862). Furthermore, this ignorance to public issues gives Lady Hamesthwaite the possibility to turn a blind eye to the lower classes and their struggle for life. Afraid of mingling with the wrong people, she almost holes herself up in the private sphere, surrounded by nothing else but what Lady Julia allows to be present: her furniture, servants, family and guests. All of this, she uses to separate herself from the “the rest of the world that did not live at a ‘high latitude,’ the problems that plague classes other than the secure middle class.”<sup>161</sup> It is this mechanism that makes it impossible for Lady Hamesthwaite to listen to her daughter’s description of reality since it would violate the laws according to which her entire life is arranged.

So, as far as the task of representation is affected, Lady Hamesthwaite can be considered a shining example of a Victorian middle-class woman. Unfortunately, we are not able to give her the same credits for her role as mother. Of course, it cannot be denied that Lady Hamesthwaite has succeeded in reproduction, but from a neu-

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<sup>160</sup> Dowie, p. 54.

<sup>161</sup> Fromer, p. 27.

tral perspective, she can definitely not be considered a very good or loving mother. This becomes most obvious through the rather impersonal relationship between Gallia and her, culminating in the sad statement that Gallia “never confided to her mother the thoughts that really occupied her extraordinary brain, and that such peace of mind as Lady Hamesthwaite enjoyed regarding her daughter sprang from this very reserve.”<sup>162</sup> It might be questionable if this has to do with Gallia’s ideas being revolutionary or unacceptable for Victorian society, but from my point of view, the problem also derives from Lady Hamesthwaite’s absolute ignorance.

Albeit Gallia is her daughter and should arise some interest, Lady Hamesthwaite applies the same mechanism to her problems as she has done onto lower classes’: she simply ignores them. It might be the easiest way to tune out all problems which are not related to herself or her representative function, but it also makes it impossible to build up a real relationship between mother and daughter, especially because a parent was normally deemed to be a “moral, spiritual and practical guide”<sup>163</sup> so as displayed by Mrs. Essex. In regard to Gallia, we can state that Lady Hamesthwaite has definitely failed because her daughter neither considers her a confidante nor a consultant. She does not even feel love for her mother as she discovers herself at Lady Hamesthwaite’s coffin:

"What has she meant in my life—sweet woman that she was? Almost nothing! I have hardly known her, really; there has been no communion between our minds, and none in our lives."<sup>164</sup>

For a woman who is considered to hold an important position in her daughter’s life, this is an devastating judgement. Nevertheless, it appears to be nothing to worry about from a Victorian viewpoint since both Mrs. Leighton and her step-sister seem to consider Lady Julia’s job to be fulfilled to the satisfaction of all participants, but when examining the situation from a neutral point of view, it is quite obvious that

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<sup>162</sup> Dowie, p. 53f.

<sup>163</sup> Gorham, p. 48.

<sup>164</sup> Dowie, p. 140.

Lady Hamesthwaite has absolutely no reason to call herself a good mother. The best example for this is the fact that she has not educated Gallia according to Victorian values, but let her go her own way. Lady Julia even tries to put the blame on her stepsister, once her daughter's foreseeable peculiarities are irreversible.<sup>165</sup> In addition, she is completely unable to bear her own failure while accepting that Gallia grows out of society, being an outsider due to her otherness in several respects. By acting that irresponsibly, Lady Hamesthwaite also accepts that her daughter might stay a spinster for the rest of her life as neither marriage was introduced as the sole aim of a woman's existence nor the importance of "impressing [men] with [the] complete inability to do anything useful or profitable."<sup>166</sup>

This absolute disinterest in her daughter's future is definitely not compatible with the idea of the sacred and sympathetic mother, but with the one of the social representative. Since Gallia does not live according to the essential code of middle-class, she is only coped with as much as decency demands, but is for the most part ignored. This loveless behaviour in cooperation with the other afore-mentioned findings suggests the assumption that Lady Hamesthwaite – similar to Margaret – is actually nothing more than an object, a social decorum. Her sole function seems to be representation, the display of her "husband's capacity to keep her in leisure and luxury."<sup>167</sup> This can also be applied to her function as mother because her interest is only superficial and related to Gallia's introduction into society. What she seems to forget is the fact that the sacred role of mother and wife was actually incompatible with anything else.<sup>168</sup> Although Lady Hamesthwaite is an expert in social networking and representation, her prime duty should be the complete regenerative aspect as well as the correct education of her daughter. In both tasks, she has failed, leaving the impression of a very cold-hearted and frail woman while entirely keeping to

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<sup>165</sup> Dowie, p. 47.

<sup>166</sup> Harrison, p. 36.

<sup>167</sup> Tosh, John. *A Man's Place; Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven CT & London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>168</sup> Parker, p. 14.

Essex's reactionary view that a woman should not have "more than two interests—herself and the man she marries."<sup>169</sup>

Nevertheless, it is quite remarkable that Lady Hamesthwaite actively defends the Victorian cornerstones of marriage and motherhood against her daughter. Although it seems improbable that the frail Lady Julia was one of the women "who have striven to play their part of wife and mother well,"<sup>170</sup> she definitely belongs to these submissive females that accepted the general relegation of women. Furthermore, she is absolutely absorbed in her submission to Lord Hamesthwaite so that she does not only accept the adulation of men, but also tries to promulgate it.<sup>171</sup> Only in regard to this aspect, Lady Hamesthwaite emerges from her normal passivity and indifference and finally utters an opinion. It would lead too far to consider it her own opinion, but this exception to the rule at least shows that Lady Julia Hamesthwaite is nothing more than a perfect reflection of society: superficial, artificial and very keen on saving the social face.

To put the preceding paragraphs in a nutshell, we can state that Lady Hamesthwaite is a very good specimen of the Victorian middle-class woman. Submissive and obedient, she takes over every task assigned to her by either Lord Hamesthwaite or society. Due to her approval of male dominance, she takes her social duties very seriously, and considers them even more important than her own health or maternal responsibilities. She definitely displays all qualities an ideal woman should hold such as "sacrifice, self-effacement, moral purity, service"<sup>172</sup> and frankly defends this manly-imposed conception. Furthermore, her instable beauty leaves her vulnerable and therefore dependent so that Lady Hamesthwaite is not capable of real work such as housekeeping or the like. For this reason, she is absolutely taken by representing, by being a beautiful object that lives according to the Victorian standard.

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<sup>169</sup> Dowie, p. 166.

<sup>170</sup> Dowie, p. 52.

<sup>171</sup> Compare to Foster, p. 6.

<sup>172</sup> Foster, p. 5.

For all these reasons, the character of Lady Hamesthwaite can be considered an illustrative example of Margaret's future. Due to the fact that both women subordinate their life and personality to their husband's, and act under their orders without resistance, the parallel between Margaret and Lady Hamesthwaite is quite striking. Since Dowie does not inform us about neither Lady Julia's past nor Margaret's future, I consider them to be part of the same type of woman. But whereas Margaret is still young, healthy and insouciant, the years as Lord Hamesthwaite's servant did not leave Lady Julia untouched. Exhausted and exploited, she eventually reaches her physical limits so that in the end, she dies a senseless death as a result of her persistent submission. Just like Margaret, Lady Hamesthwaite appears to serve as a deterrent example in order to raise women's awareness of the importance of their emancipation.

### **3.4 Mrs. Celia Leighton, the acclimatised puppeteer**

Although being twenty years older than her step-sister, Celia Leighton definitely belongs to the same generation of women that was educated the old-fashioned way. But whereas Lady Hamesthwaite is completely absorbed in representing her husband's fortune and position, Mrs. Leighton only creates the outward impression to have subordinated her life to male mastery. There are several situations where she even acts as guardian of Victorian values, as educator of those that are out of tune with middle-class's expectations, but from my point of view, this position turned out to be nothing but a mask. Evidence for this thesis can be given by the fact that instead of handing over her independence to a male member of the family, Mrs. Leighton prefers to act as a puppeteer herself by manipulating especially men so as to gain political influence herself. Since she exclusively operates in the shadows while representing herself as flagship of Victorian values, it is easy to miss how incredibly powerful Mrs. Leighton actually is. This fact mostly derives from the old woman's extreme ambiguity: On the one hand, Mrs. Leighton publicly defends the Victorian values of morality, decency and female passivity, and condemns those who fall through the cracks, but on the other hand, she deviates from the agenda herself due to her personal interest in politics and her weakness for Robbie. In contrast to Gallia, she never mentions or exposes her divergent opinion in public, but we can find several allusions to it in auctorial comments or private talks among

women. For this reason, Mrs. Leighton's role in this story stays rather concealed at first sight so that it needs an intense, second look to become aware of the message Dowie tries to submit through the character of Celia Leighton.

That Mrs. Leighton is perfectly in accordance with Victorian values – at least from an outside perspective – should not be questionable as there are multiple references to her becoming behaviour like, for instance, her mourning being “most tastefully tempered to a garish world.”<sup>173</sup> On the one hand, this unmasks society as exaggerated and artificial by using the pejorative term “garish,” while on the other hand, it stresses Mrs. Leighton's perfect adaptation to the appropriate values. This latter argument in particular requires a complete knowledge and correct estimation of Victorian society that is not commonly possessed. Nevertheless, Mrs. Leighton seems to be perfectly informed about how to behave which is the result of her “belong[ing] to the day when a clever woman of undoubted propriety made a reputation for wit by an audacity that was nicely calculated.”<sup>174</sup> On base of this reference, we can conclude that Mrs. Leighton has some experience concerning correct behaviour in society, and is therefore able to behave according to expectations.

Furthermore, it can be deduced from these findings that Mrs. Leighton knows how to handle society, what to say in public and how much of the truth it is advisable to unveil. This ability to judge is a very useful capability for a middle-class member, especially when personal interests collided with the standard values set up by society. For Mrs. Leighton, a conflict like this arises only by reason of the patronage of her dissolute grandson from whom she publicly dissociates herself:

“You will know that I do not care a rap about Robbie, although he is my only grandson—but I think of the family.” “Just so,” said Gurdon, who knew that Mrs.

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<sup>173</sup> Dowie, p, 149.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



Leighton cared innumerable raps about Robbie, and didn't think for a second about the family.<sup>175</sup>

By dint of this quote, it is evident that she hides the conflict between societal expectations and personal feelings only half-heartedly so that an outsider like Mark Gurdon is able to see through Mrs. Leighton's specious pretexts. The use of the affectionate diminutive 'Robbie' instead of 'Robert' would be one of these broad hints, fostering the impression that Mrs. Leighton only pretends to act according to societal guidelines whereas she actually has her own ideas about certain topics. That Robbie must somehow have violated the Victorian standard is indisputable on basis of the above-mentioned quote – otherwise, Mrs. Leighton would not have to invent pretexts – but this fact does not keep her from supporting her grandson, even though the gravity of his breach increases:

Robbie is coming home. He has not dared to write to your father since the dreadful letter he received about two months ago, the result, I have always been convinced, of an entire misconception. Spain still seems to be a very difficult country to travel in, especially when one leaves the beaten track, as Robbie in his adventurous way naturally hastened to do. He gives me the entire explanation of the gambling episode; and you will remember I endeavoured to assure your father at the time that he was taking too severe a view altogether...He wasted about a week in fruitless endeavours to secure the attention of the authorities, and it was *only then*, when he was at his last penny, that he gambled for *pesetas*—for his dinner really, poor boy—in the low inns and among the gipsies.<sup>176</sup>

From an outside perspective, and taking into account what we know about Robbie up to this point in Chapter XXII, the mentioned coincidences appear very unrealistic. In turn, this means that if the reader is able to see through the flimsiness of Robert's tale, a clever old lady like Mrs. Leighton should be able to do so as well.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 218f.

For this reason, we can impute to her that she simply does not want to see the truth. Instead, she sticks to the socially accepted version of Robbie's Spanish experiences as it gives her the possibility to maintain his status of Victorian middle-class gentleman, justifying her support of him.

Though, we cannot blame Mrs. Leighton for the social mask she wears because it was not only a requirement in order to be perceived as respectable lady or gentleman, but also because "it [lay] in the nature of fashionable society to be dishonest, artificial and destructive."<sup>177</sup> This statement is also supported by several other text references, e.g. Mrs. Leighton's admiration for Margaret's decency towards Robbie, her delusion concerning her knowledge of political business, her public animosity against aristocracy and old family as well as her quality to put her favourites in perspective.<sup>178</sup> All of these four exemplary text references most brilliantly show that artificiality and deception were an essential part of Victorian society, and that they were even used by ideal women like Margaret in order to protect the ones they love.

Nonetheless, although Mrs. Leighton can be seen as the epitome of Victorian double moral standards, this feature alone does not make her an important character a priori. It cannot be denied that she already exhibits a certain authority – namely in regard to social networking and marriages<sup>179</sup> – but in fact, Mrs. Leighton obtains real power due to her ability of unobtrusive manipulation. There are very little characters in *Gallia* that do not fall victim to Mrs. Leighton's skilfulness – one of them being Dark Essex – so that it is no wonder that the list of people she secretly commands also contains male characters of public interest.

The first person that falls victim to Mrs. Leighton's skills as puppeteer is Mark Gurdon. Although it must be taken into account that his visit to Mrs. Leighton in chapter I is made of his own accord, we cannot deny that a certain interdependency

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<sup>177</sup> Calder, p. 13.

<sup>178</sup> Compare to Dowie, pp. 71, 185, 309f, and 186.

<sup>179</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, pp. 267 and 185.

between these two parties exists. Mark, being an ambitious working-class clerk, relies on Mrs. Leighton's courtesy, her social connections and favouring in order to rise both in class and career. Again, this behaviour emphasises how much power Celia Leighton actually possesses although she seems to be bound to the same domestic sphere as all other Victorian women. That this fact is only partially valid can be concluded from Mark's attentive demeanour. In contrast to other characters, he is perfectly aware of his subordinate position which is the reason why he wants to be of use for Mrs. Leighton. Hence, Mark tries to pretend that "she had by chance lit upon a plan he had been turning over"<sup>180</sup> when Mrs. Leighton asks him to drop over at Robbie's Parisian residence. Indeed, she has Mark in her grip as he depends on her connections to important people like Mont Voisin or his superior at the Colonial Office, Lord Gerald Hamesthwaite. Moreover, her appreciation of his usefulness offers Mark the possibility to get to know first Margaret, later on Gallia, his entrance card into the world of respectability. That Mrs. Leighton has a hand in this liaison is not explicitly mentioned, but the moment of Mark's appearance seems all too perfect to be a pure coincidence:

"I often feel," went on Mrs. Leighton, "that Mark Gurdon—who has been in Africa and has his eyes so wide open—could tell me a great deal, but he will only dilate upon the 'Karoo.'" The door opened at this moment, and Gurdon himself almost anticipated the announcement of his name. "So magnetically sympathetic of you to come in just now! your name was upon my lips," said Mrs. Leighton, as they shook hands.<sup>181</sup>

This situation itself leaves a very suspicious reader as everything is so meticulously timed that a coincidence seems to be very unlikely. Besides, the impression that the meeting of Mark and Gallia has been arranged by Mrs. Leighton is even enforced by several ambiguous statements, leaving room for speculations:

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 185f.

“And you are so good as to think my moment has come,” he was saying, smilingly, to Mrs. Leighton, and Gallia watched thoughtfully all the time. “Your moment for what?” she suddenly inquired, and her uncompromising eyes fixed themselves upon him when he turned to her. “My moment to emerge from the covert of mediocrity into the open of—what shall we say?” “Predestination,” said Mrs. Leighton, with a touch of solemnity under her smile.<sup>182</sup>

Although this conversation is officially about Mark’s career and his presumably rise to middle-class, it can also be applied to the current situation. As Mrs. Leighton has just mentioned Mark and his African experiences in the course of her conversation with Gallia, it is his moment to enter the room and be introduced to her niece. By making her acquaintance, and by hopefully winning her love, Mark Gurdon would be able to escape from his average, boring working life into higher spheres, up to a place he and Mrs. Leighton consider to be his destiny. As can be concluded from this short explanation, there is also the possibility to apply the talk about ambition on marrying Gallia. However, all of these events that finally lead to Mark becoming a respectable member of Victorian middle-class are only possible through Mrs. Leighton’s helping hand. She is the one that smoothes Mark’s way, be it by mentioning him to Lord Hamesthwaite, by announcing him to Gallia or by simply ignoring his “dawning ambition.”<sup>183</sup> For this reason, we can definitely state that Mrs. Celia Leighton has power over Mark Gurdon as he depends on her courtesy.

The same is true for her grandson, Robert “Robbie” Leighton. Being a very narcissist bon viveur, Robbie is not able to master his life on his own and is hence more than just dependent on his grandmother’s money and support. That she definitely tries her best to keep his good reputation has been mentioned several times before, but that she has tried to manipulate him as well is a fact that might be easily missed.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

In the first instance, this derives from the latent ambiguity of Mrs. Leighton's statements:

I believe she's the only member of the family who wasn't disappointed when I turned painter. She sent for me when she heard it. She said, "Robert, you are an independent boy, and I like you. Go to Paris. Never mind what your uncle says; he doesn't know Paris. It's the only place to qualify as a human being who understands his world. Be a painter. I don't mind if you are a failure or a success, only don't give it up; stick to it and get all you can out of it. You start on Thursday? Very well. Taste all the flavours of the art life, it is very developing. I will stop your allowance from Thursday. It would never do for you to have money; you would not develop character, you would not see real life."<sup>184</sup>

To Robert, this sounds like an admission to do as he pleases, to live and paint and be happily ever after; but what Mrs. Leighton actually intended with this proposition was an attempt to raise his awareness. She does not react negatively to his plans, and she does not bar him from going to Paris. Mrs. Leighton's way of education is not based upon prohibitions or expostulations, but self-awareness. She has certain reservations against "wicked Paris,"<sup>185</sup> and artists were usually seen as degenerates, but still, she pretends to support Robbie aside from sending money. It seems to be her hope that the poor and uncomfortable life of an artist brings Robbie back home, back in the bosom of his Victorian middle-class family, back to its values of work, thrift and duty.<sup>186</sup> Unfortunately, her education completely fails so that Mrs. Leighton loses an essential part of her influence on Robbie whom she still needs to stake.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>186</sup> Compare to Bivona, Daniel. *Desire and contradiction: Imperial visions and domestic debates in Victorian literature*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990, p. X.

The same mechanism of education Mrs. Leighton applies to Gallia whom she covertly tries to convince that public problems are “not a fit subject”<sup>187</sup> for young middle-class ladies. During Lady Hamesthwaite’s lifetime, her efforts in regard to this are not very fruitful, but after her step-sister has passed away, Mrs. Leighton completely takes over her role as social educator and guide, e.g. by teaching Gallia that an interest in political business is not adequate for a woman in her position.<sup>188</sup> Again, Mrs. Leighton gains a lot of influence through this new function, especially as she is now able to control Lord Hamesthwaite in an indirect way as well. That she already exercises control over Gallia’s father becomes quite apparent through his sponsorship of Mark Gurdon, who is in effect Mrs. Leighton’s favourite:

“You have got to do something for him, Gerald, when he comes home!” Mrs. Leighton said warmly. “Mark Gurdon is a young man I like.” “His future is assured, Celia.” Lord Hamesthwaite made her a little bow; she kissed the tips of her fingers to him in return. “He is not to be kept licking envelopes all his young days,” she went on severely.

From my point of view, the power relation in this situation is unmistakable. Mrs. Leighton, the clever old lady without husband, title or political influence, almost forces her brother-in-law, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to favour Mark Gurdon. She does not politely ask for it – although her tone might lead to this conclusion – but expects her wish to be taken seriously. And Lord Hamesthwaite obeys, obeys without batting an eye which suggests that he is used to do Mrs. Leighton a favour. If this has to do with the passing mention of her involvement in Lady Hamesthwaite’s release from an unfortunate marriage cannot be doubtlessly proven, but it would explain Lord Hamesthwaite’s extreme cooperativeness.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, it provides an adequate explanation for the fact that he is the one to stake Robbie’s life in Paris when his grandmother officially withdrew from this task.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>188</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>189</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 46.

Nonetheless, there are limits even to Lord Hamesthwaite's generosity and obedience, and they are extravagated by Robbie's so-called "gambling episode."<sup>190</sup> When getting to know that his nephew is involved in immoral actions, Lord Hamesthwaite as a person of political impact has no other choice than to stop funding Robbie. As the violation of Victorian moral standards seems to be one of the few things that he is not willing to accept, Mrs. Leighton's clemency plea does not affect Lord Hamesthwaite. For this reason, the clever old lady has to find another way to keep Robbie under her thumb – and this is where motherless Gallia comes into play.

Having failed to convince Lord Hamesthwaite herself, Mrs. Leighton uses her niece in order to shelter Robbie at the Surrey country house, thereby reintegrating him into Victorian society. Again, the word choice is a very harsh and imperative one that does not permit questions or opposition: "I want you to have him at the Hall at once, if you can; you will find him full of delightful stories, and you will persuade your father to be more lenient to him than he has been before."<sup>191</sup> The demand from Gallia is clear and plain, and no matter if we consider Mrs. Leighton's method to be furtive or not, we have to admit that in the end, she achieves her objective to make Robbie a respectable member of society again.

For this reason, and for her general quality to use people for her own good, I deem Mrs. Leighton to be a shining example of an influential middle-class woman. Being intelligent enough to hide her true colours, she is able to pursue a comfortable and respectable life within Victorian society, pretending to be busy with lunches, furniture or coupling. She might look like a clever old woman from the outside, but deep within, she knows perfectly well which mask to wear, and which strings to pull. In contrast to Lady Hamesthwaite, who stands out due to her absolute dependence on and dedication to men, her step-sister has found her own way to achieve power, influence and independence. Although she is also used by men like Mark Gurdon, she holds a superior position than most women of *Gallia*, which is the result of her own cleverness and ability to manipulate. Turning its artificiality against Victorian soci-

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 218f.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 218f.

ety itself, Mrs. Leighton achieves partial emancipation while never officially violating the Victorian ideal. For this reason, and due to the immense power the widowed woman possesses, I consider Mrs. Leighton to be one of the most underestimated characters of *Gallia*.

### 3.5 Gertrude Janion, the superficial shopping girl

In regards to the story plot, the character of Gertrude Janion is definitely not of utmost importance, but concerning Dowie's draft of the Victorian woman, we have to admit that she is definitely more than just a marginalia. Mostly, this results from her absolute mediocrity which makes Gertrude the figurehead for the anonymous mass of wealthy, lackadaisical middle-class women. Together with characters like Lady Mary Mortimer, Gertrude represents a new type of womanhood whose prime concerns are superficial pleasures like fashion, gossip and subscription balls. Since these women lacked a certain life-task, something useful to spend their money and time for, their constant search for distraction led to their rash judgement as vulgar and egoistic. For Dowie, however, they fulfilled more than the role of superficial display dummies.

Nevertheless, we have to begin with the obvious fact which is in Gertrude's case her pronounced aestheticism. It is indisputable that she has a weakness for fashion and make-up, that surely bestows a superficial touch on her, and she seems to excel in this domain since she is able to "cut out women with three times that sum at disposal."<sup>192</sup> This is extremely remarkable since nineteenth-century fashion was very body-hugging so that dresses had to be bespoke. With trends and seasons changing periodically, fashionable clothing was hence an extremely expensive task.<sup>193</sup> Unfortunately, there is also a negative touch to being perfectly dressed since an exaggerated examination of fashion could also be seen as "female moral frailty."<sup>194</sup> This might also be the reason why Gertrude is perceived rather negative by other

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>193</sup> Compare to Mitchell, p. 138.

<sup>194</sup> Beisel, p. 14.



people who reduce her personality to this salient hobby horse. Furthermore, her outer appearance also provides an indication on Gertrude being rather average and therefore representative for most Victorian women. The fact that she dresses on £250 a year while other women spend much more money on their looks is only a minor hint to this thesis, but subtly emphasises that Gertrude is not as exaggerated as perceived at first sight. In matters of corporality, she can neither compete with Margaret's beauty, nor with Gallia's health, so that she needs several aids in order to be perceived at all:

She was a small, very neatly built person; nothing was exaggerated about her figure. Nature had been friendly towards her, ... had given her a beautifully modelled throat, bust, and arms: the throat and arms she left alone and was glad of; the bust she enhanced artificially, in obedience to the prevailing notion that a young woman shall not await nature's own development. With regard to features, she had nothing to complain of; she was not really pretty, and so the effect of prettiness which she never failed to make was all the more meritorious ... Certainly, her eyebrows were most piquant. As to complexion, she would tell you frankly that she had always found the "Norwich man" best of anyone ... she would exclaim, in her very high, shrill little voice. Perfect frankness about these various aids to beauty was Miss Janion's line.<sup>195</sup>

As can be learnt from this quote, Gertrude is a very average woman. She has no pretty or interesting face, no physical assets that speak in her favour or attract men's attention. Since wedlock – presumably into a higher stratum – was the purpose of middle-class women in general, Gertrude has no other option than to assist her own perception in order to compete with maidens like Gallia and Margaret. For this reason, she artificially enhances her bust, uses make-up and other aids in order to make a pretty impression, and speaks in an unmistakable voice about all these little manipulations. Of course, this might lead to the assumption that Gertrude is a very superficial person who cares for nothing else but the perfect appearance, but in

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<sup>195</sup> Dowie, p. 162f.

fact, she is only another victim of the Victorian dictate to become housewife and mother.

This pronounced female life aim is also the reason why Gertrude has a predilection for subscription balls. For contemporary readers, this seems to be no critical point, but for readers of the Victorian era, Essex's subliminal accusation was almost impossible to miss.<sup>196</sup> In general, there was nothing to despise about subscription balls since they were officially held in order to raise money for a philanthropic project like an orphanage or hospital, but in reality, this argument was mostly used as pretext. What really mattered to middle-class people was that they were given another chance to "display new found wealth" while being provided with good food and drink, music and – the most important point for Gertrude – "an opportunity to wear their best clothes."<sup>197</sup> So, if Essex sneers at the Janion girl for being a regular guest at subscription balls, this can be accounted to the superficiality of these events which he directly transfers to Gertrude. And Essex is not the only one with these prejudices; at least Margaret seems to share his opinion as she "deplore[s]"<sup>198</sup> having met Gertrude.

Yet, this superficial aspect completely ignores the fact that Gertrude attends these subscription balls not only to display her dresses. We surely have to admit that she likes to be pretty and attract attention, but we also have to state that subscription balls served the same purpose as other social events: they were created in order to establish any sort of tie within middle-class members, be it of economical or romantic nature. Since Gertrude's exaggerated manners and her alleged vulgarity made her an unappreciated guest at dinners like Mrs. Leighton's or Lady Hamesthwaite's, subscription balls appear to be her only possibility to meet an adequate suitor. Due to the fact that life was celebrated at those balls, Gertrude can also be

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<sup>196</sup> Dowie, p. 166.

<sup>197</sup> State Library of New South Wales. "Subscription Balls." Homepage of State Library of New South Wales, 2012. Date of last access: 18.05.15.

[http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover\\_collections/history\\_nation/gold/miners\\_life/balls/](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/gold/miners_life/balls/)

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<sup>198</sup> Dowie, p. 163f.

sure that her future husband will be a rich member of Victorian middle-class who likes spending money as well. As she claims to be flattered by Lord Shillinglee, a man of “enormous wealth and no fixed political opinions,”<sup>199</sup> who fits this description to perfection, Gertrude’s plan seems to have worked out.

Due to her otherness in regards to Victorian standards, Gertrude’s social position is comparable to Essex’s who is a tolerated, yet not accepted middle-class member. This assumption also explains why Gertrude is allowed to join Gallia and Margaret on their walk although the latter is not happy about this fact. Nevertheless, she cannot reject Gertrude – on the one hand because the Janion girl never asked for permission, and on the other hand because rejection would mean a big social affront. In the Victorian era, it was essential to keep up the social mask and to always be polite. ‘Gentility’ was the magic word in this context as it was “not a clearly definable quality but revealed itself in nuances that clearly distinguished members of the established and dominant classes from those who still bore traces of their upwardly mobile progress. Throughout the nineteenth century, whether one was gentle or vulgar continued to be a hallmark of social status.”<sup>200</sup> For Margaret, this means accepting Gertrude’s companionship, no matter how silly her chitchat is; for Gertrude, this statement means a certain insecurity concerning her social status since at least Essex considers her to be “incurably vulgar.”<sup>201</sup> Compared to Margaret, who strictly sticks to Victorian conventions and even covers Robbie’s indecency, Gertrude wears no social mask of gentility which also enables her to be brutally honest about people, visual aids or the like. Her mask of complexion has the sole purpose of covering her personal insecurity.

Of course, this uncertainty derives not only from Gertrude’s average looks and the low self-esteem she tries to conceal, but has also to do with her financial background. As mentioned before, it is also possible to see Gertrude’s vulgarity as an

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>200</sup> Gorham, p. 8.

<sup>201</sup> Dowie, p. 166.

indication for the fact that her family is no 'old money,' but has just advanced to Victorian middle-class. Presumably, this movement to a higher stratum was performed by earning a certain amount of money and wealth, but it was not necessarily attended by acceptance. Although money opened the doors to the middle-class's world of influence and receptions, it was not the decisive factor. Instead, the internalisation and application of corresponding values like decency or duty were of paramount importance, but since this code of conduct was almost unknown to nouveau riches, acceptance was mostly refused to the first generations. In Gertrude's case, this is also justified by her family's dissolute and idle lifestyle which she frankly exhibits:

I do think life,—I mean domestic life,—is beautifully easy now; one needn't do a thing oneself, one can get someone in! At home we are always getting people in. Papa has his masseur every day; mamma has her nursemaid—I mean maid-nurse; Alfred has his electric shock person and galvaniser—he can't raise a slipper before eleven, when this person comes, and afterwards he's awfully larky until it wears off. Ella Lane, who lives next door, shares my hair man, who comes in. We get in the butler; we get in a woman—I think she's a lady—to do the flowers for parties. One needn't really have any trouble nowadays, or do anything; one can always get someone in.<sup>202</sup>

Not only is it normal for Gertrude to get in other people to work for her, but most of them even have to come to the Janions' house in order to perform their job. None of the people Gertrude mentions are normal servants like the Hamesthwaites or Mrs. Leighton employ, but are specialists that can be considered additional expenditure only rich people were able and willing to pay. Furthermore, Gertrude emphasises that all of these people – nursemaid, masseur, electro shock person or the like – are really needed in order to bear everyday life. That this statement contains a slight notion of superficiality and idleness – a true marker of the ideal Victorian lady<sup>203</sup> –

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 173f.

<sup>203</sup> Compare to Crow, p. 24.

I consider indisputable since it also signified middle-class's view in general, mirroring the assumed stability of class through the capability to remain static.

That there was still a certain anxiety to lose this exclusive status – especially among social climbers – becomes most apparent through Gertrude having issues with working-class in general and prostitutes in particular. As already explained in the previous sections, the Janions seem to have just ascended to Victorian middle-class. Since it was more likely to move downwards – namely to fall to the working-class due to indecency or pauperisation – Gertrude is extremely focused to display her family's wealth by dint of dresses, styling and subscription balls. Nevertheless, the Janions' status is not yet settled as it is with people of 'old money,' so that it could always be revoked by losing either their fortune or their social reputation. This is also the reason why Gertrude tries to win Lord Shillinglee's love albeit she publicly denies any interest in him. Comparable to Mark, who uses Gallia as entrance ticket to the world of Victorian middle-class, Gertrude intends to use Lord Shillinglee in order to cement her family's membership. To do so, she does not really need his money, but in fact the acceptance shown to him. Since Lord Shillinglee is even contemplated by Mrs. Leighton as potential husband for her niece, tying the knot with him would grant Gertrude a permanent membership of Victorian middle-class as well the accompanying luxuries and privileges.

Nevertheless, Gertrude has not yet reached her goal of advancement so that any working-class person who is not part of her domestic staff becomes a reminder to her own origins as well as about a possible fall. Due to the fact that Victorian middle-class kept expanding, the individual social position was under constant change, thus making it important to severely separate from any undesired influence as illustrated by Gertrude's harsh reaction in the following text passage:

“And what would you do with people like that in your world?” said Miss Janion, pointing to the brilliant barouche, which was turning opposite them in order to take its beautiful occupant to the corner in time to see the Duchess. “Who is it?” inquired Gallia innocently. Miss Janion informed her with some ceremony. “I really know her well by sight,” she added, “because we both get our hair at the

same shop—there is really no one like Hugo for hair-pin fringes.” “I have no quarrel with her,” Gallia replied, with a certain bitter quiet. “Vile creature!” sputtered the Janion girl.<sup>204</sup>

Of course, one might argue that it is not clearly stated who sat in this barouche and to which class she belonged, but if one considers that a) the person is mentioned in the context of eugenic breeding, b) it was mentioned beforehand that she “would have been (so she always declared) a marchioness in actual fact, if divorce were on a sensible basis in this foolish old country,”<sup>205</sup> and c) Gertrude explicitly mentioned that she knows the woman only by sight and considers her vile, it becomes quite obvious that the person in the barouche can only be someone who is not interested in reproduction, not rich enough to be seen as middle-class member, and also not moral enough to be considered good company. Paired with Gallia’s statement that Gertrude should have “the greatest possible reason to be grateful to her whole class and to pity them,”<sup>206</sup> we can draw a parallel to Gallia’s talk on indebtedness in chapter XI so as to end up with the conclusion that the owner of the barouche is most likely a working-class member, presumably a prostitute.<sup>207</sup>

If we take this interpretation as basis for our analysis of Gertrude, her extremely negative reaction to the ‘vile creature’ becomes more than understandable. For a parvenu like her, the prostitute is nothing more than a threat, the embodiment of a possible fall to a lower class due to immoral behaviour. At least, this would explain the intensity of Gertrude’s outburst, the vehemence with which she despises this woman. Unlike Gallia, who was perfectly unaware of this person’s existence, Gertrude moves in the same circles and is therefore particularly scared to degenerate back into working-class. With the fin de siècle being a very instable period during which people like Max Nordau forecasted the “Dusk of Nations,”<sup>208</sup> Gertrude’s

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<sup>204</sup> Dowie, p. 177f.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 165f.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>207</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>208</sup> Nordau, as cited in Ledger, Sally. “In Darkest England: The Terror of Degeneration in Fin-de- Siècle Britain.” *Literature and History*. Volume 4. Number 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 71-86, at p. 72.

anxiety of a social comedown is not an individual case, but was significant for most middle-class members.

Another situation which can be looked at from two sides, and was significant for several middle-class women, is Gertrude's intense occupation with tea. As displayed in chapter XVIII, the ceremony at five o'clock in the evening seems to be the highlight of Gertrude's day, making it impossible to think about anything else:

“Oh dear, I believe I want my tea!” exclaimed Miss Janion, with the same manner, and certainly in the same key, that a green paroquet would have made a similar remark [...] “There's nothing I look forward to with the same yearning anticipation as tea. I begin about three o'clock; I tell myself how delicious tea is going to be; at four, I console myself by thinking that I can ring for it a little early, and that will be a quarter to five. I don't think there is anything that excites me more than the thought of tea; and how beastly it always is when it comes!”<sup>209</sup>

The most obvious conclusion the reader can draw from this statement is that Gertrude Janion is not only superficial, but that she also has nothing else to worry about. If the coming closer of tea time keeps her busy for more than two hours, she seems to be unaware of real problems like poverty or disease, or private tasks like organising receptions, thus turning her into an idle, ignorant, and simplistic person. But what this interpretation misses is the fact that Gertrude's ecstasy about tea time does not necessarily entail her superficiality; it also illustrates the extreme boredom especially women of rich middle-class families suffered from. Due to the fact that working-class servants took over most domestic tasks, these women were doomed to be nothing else but beautiful display dummies that lacked a certain occupation or distraction. For this reason, they clung to the everyday habit of drinking tea which served both as fill-in for the gap between lunch and dinner, and as representation of wealth and national superiority due to its expensive import from Asia.<sup>210</sup> Further-

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<sup>209</sup> Dowie, p. 171.

<sup>210</sup> Compare to Fromer, pp. 4 and 8.

more, it also explains the passion which women like Gertrude dedicated to their outer-appearance or any kind of gossip: they simply had nothing else to do. In Gertrude's case, she definitely knows whom she owes this complete inactiveness to:

It's men who, by chaffing women about tea-drinking, have got up the idea of tea being such a godsend. There's a conspiracy among men to make women stick to tea and think they like it. Hear men sighing, 'Ah, I wish I dare,' when they steadily refuse it day after day. Catch them taking any! [...] It's a woman's bitterest disappointment,—tea and men.<sup>211</sup>

For a person who is commonly deemed a superficial specimen of womanhood, this is a very critical utterance which suggests that there is more behind the character of Gertrude Janion than meets the eye. By putting her down on base of the first, superficial impression, we would definitely underestimate the Janion girl. Although she might not be as clever as Gallia, or as cunning as Mrs. Leighton, Gertrude is by no means an imbecile. She certainly has a weakness for beautiful things and amusement, but she is also intelligent enough to read men's face. This is not only constituted on the paragraph quoted before, but is additionally stressed through her little monologue in chapter XXX. Not only does Gertrude reveal that a man's proposal follows a certain structure that makes it extremely predictable, she also uses a very suggestive way of explaining the details. This actuality is very hard to miss due to Robbie having a "perfect paroxysm of laughter" and Margaret "blushing like a nectarine,"<sup>212</sup> but again, the subtext of Gertrude's statement, namely a disapproval and challenge of male dominance, is commonly ignored. Especially the last part of her monologue perfectly outlines this fact since Gertrude wants to deny her husband the longed for absolution for his former vices, therefore intentionally depriving him from this essential of a proposal. In combination with her before-mentioned criti-

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<sup>211</sup> Dowie, p. 170f.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 309 and 308.



cism about the female assignment to tea, her character suddenly gains a certain revolutionary potential.

Gertrude might not be as flawless as Margaret or as frail as Lady Hamesthwaite, but still, she contributes a lot to the representation of the anonymous mass of Victorian middle-class woman. The Janion girl stands for all females whose families have risen from working-class and who are therefore not yet accustomed to middle-class values and etiquette. They care more for self-display and showing off their newly acquired wealth while remaining ignorant to the 'old' middle-class despising them. Furthermore, their fear of degenerating back to the working-class is the thriving force to all their actions.

Nevertheless, we also have to admit that these women are nothing else but the victims of a male-dominated world. Having nothing else to occupy with but fashion, parties, or tea time, it seems logical that they were almost bored to death. In contrast to other characters in *Gallia*, Gertrude knows at least that she owes her suppression to mankind and its power over her which gives her the possibility to work against male domination. Although her actions are only minor ones that are smiled at, and which solely take place in the private sphere, they can be seen as Dowie's idea that even the most average middle-class woman has some emancipatory potential inside her.

### **3.6 Mrs. Miles, the hard-working charwoman**

Unlike Gertrude, who – in default of a definite life aim – clings to vanities like fashion and gossip, Mrs. Miles has more serious problems to care about. Being located at the very bottom of Victorian society, she is not able to fall back on influential friends, her family's fortune or several servants. Instead, she is responsible to make her own living which means hard and honest work in order to guarantee her family's survival. This fact places her in stark contrast to all other women described in this chapter who were never confronted with such existential problems although they were indirectly affected as well. Due to the fact that Mrs. Miles can be seen as a placeholder for all working-class women – which is also emphasised by the ab-

sence of a first name – she represents the enormous mass of domestic servants who helped simplify middle-class's life, but were never really appreciated for their work.

How important Mrs. Miles and others of her class actually were for Victorian society, especially for middle-class ladies, becomes most obvious when we consider the different rules and roles that were applied to those two concepts of women that were both assigned to the private sphere. It begins with the fact that middle-class ladies were not only ignorant about housekeeping, cleaning or other household tasks, they were also absolutely incapable to manage these tasks on their own:

The mechanism of housekeeping was a dead letter to Gallia; she had no idea of the time and trouble, the myriads of small duties, that go towards managing a house. If she had known, she would have been filled with a very wholesome and active contempt for half of the accepted *formulae*; she would have instituted a sweeping simplification. Just at that moment, passing down the stairs, her eye fell on a soft-headed brush with a brass attachment in the middle of its abnormally long handle, and a wonder as to its use seized her suddenly, and she paused in idle irony with her hand on the balustrade.<sup>213</sup>

At this point, Dowie perfectly illustrates the helplessness of middle-class women concerning any real work as well as their dependency on more proficient personnel. Although modern women like Gallia longed for individual freedom and self-determination, they tended to forget that emancipation does not end once they have freed themselves from the ties of male domination; it also means autonomy in all areas of life which entails total independence from servants, butlers and maids as well.

That this freedom is not yet an option worth thinking about is also the explanation for Gallia's beneficent behaviour towards Mrs. Miles. Although the age of the charwoman and hence also her growing unfitness is mentioned several times, Gallia

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

herself nurses the injured woman. This is particularly remarkable as she is not only part of the upper middle-class, but also a strict eugenicist. Nevertheless, Gallia feels responsible to help the capable and reliable charwoman – a behaviour that can only be explained by dint of the term “indebtedness.”<sup>214</sup> Due to the fact that middle-class women were denied any physical exertion, they were also denied proper house-keeping so that working-class women had to take over these “physically demanding tasks.”<sup>215</sup> Gallia seems to be aware of this fact as she takes matters in her own hands instead of leaving poor Mrs. Miles to her housekeeper. She seems to know the value of this hard-working creature for the continuity of her own class, thus trying to foster this useful specimen of working-class whose high employee morale and conscientiousness remain intact even on the sick bed.

For this unbroken sense of duty, we should give Mrs. Miles credit since it was a value Victorian middle-class usually laid claim to. Even though the old woman has been injured severely in her accident, she keeps on talking about “poor Missie”<sup>216</sup> she has to care for and who has asked Mrs. Miles to send a letter for her. She appears to have a guilty conscience, now that she is unable to complete all her tasks, which definitely highlights Mrs. Miles’s reliability and steadiness. The old charwoman even makes the impression as if she would have tried to fulfil her duties despite her being in a very bad case, had not Gallia taken over this task from her. This is also emphasised by Mrs. Miles’s own proud statement: “If you’ll believe me, my lady, I’ve never ‘ad a day’s illness nor a day’s ‘oliday since I was married.”<sup>217</sup> In my opinion, this also shows how desperately working-class woman needed money, hence also jobs to make a living. In any case, the extraordinary diligence with which Mrs. Miles handles the tasks that were assigned to her, make her a strikingly pleasant character of the working-class.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 15,

<sup>215</sup> Parker, p. 17.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

Moreover, Mrs. Miles is generally pictured as a nice and good-hearted person. Not only does she house Cara after the landlord has kicked her out, but she also looks after the poor girl, even offers to nurse her while Mark is away. She is also worried about the impact on Mark's reputation which the exposure of his relationship to Cara could mean, and therefore waits for Mark's explicit authorisation before calling a doctor. Besides, Mrs. Miles shows compassion, interest and respect for all her fellow men even though she has serious problems on her own, the biggest one being the fact that she had to take over the role as breadwinner of her family. Evidence for this can be found in the mentioning of the "strings of her three aprons,"<sup>218</sup> suggesting a certain busyness, as well as the fact that she seems to be charwoman for the Hamestwaites, Cara, and Gilford as well.<sup>219</sup> That Mrs. Miles still offers to look after Cara although she apparently has a lot of work already at hand, can be either explained with compassion or a desperate financial situation. This latter argument would also be supported by the general view that "working-class characters [we]re frequently debt-ridden – but from the effects of improvidence rather than extravagance – and drunk."<sup>220</sup> In Mrs. Miles's case, this assertion is only partially true as it is her husband who has fallen victim to alcoholism so that she was forced to "took to charin', which was wen Miles took to drink."<sup>221</sup>

At first sight, the ambiguity of this statement might be missed, but it is not clear if Mrs. Miles's work as charwoman is a direct reaction to her husband getting drunk and therefore being incapable to earn a living, or if he has started drinking after she has started charring. The latter possibility would be in accordance with the general middle-class opinion that working wives were not meant to exist. Of course, a certain need of female servants cannot be denied, but violating the golden rule of the wife as 'angel in the house' was deemed to be the root of all evil. The worst scenario middle-class members could imagine to happen were "children improperly fed and cared for, a disordered house and a lack of hot dinners which might drive

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp. 220f, 210 and 126.

<sup>220</sup> Young, p. 48.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

the husband to drink, a general disintegration in family life.”<sup>222</sup> That this ‘disintegration’ has taken place at the Miles’s is indisputable, but whether the whole situation is the charwoman’s or her husband’s guilt remains debatable. If we stick to the notion of the male-dominated English society, we will have to blame the woman, but compared to the drunken coachman that is her husband, Mrs. Miles definitely appears to be an untypical, since virtuous specimen of her class.

Although being a very helpful person with an extraordinary working morale, we have to admit that Mrs. Miles deviates from all other characters within *Gallia*. This fact derives not only from the fact that she has assumed the man’s role as breadwinner and hard worker, but can also be ascribed to her social background. In contrast to Cara, who has degenerated into working-class due to her father’s fatal decisions, Mrs. Miles can be easily identified as member of the lower classes since she speaks a non-standard English that clearly marks her. While other people of presumable low degree cannot be identified through their language, Mrs. Miles’s usage of slang words as well as her cacoepy indubitably expose her working-class origins. This manifests itself very clearly in chapter XXI where the hard-working charwoman first appears in person:

“An’ I ‘eard a sound,” continued the good woman, who had detailed at least one family reminiscence in the meantime which Mark’s ear had failed to catch, “like you was polishin’ one of them parky floors with a clawth, an’, aoh my! it was ‘er a-draggin’ ‘erself along the wall and floor to hopin the door.”<sup>223</sup>

On base of this paragraph, we can easily spot that Mrs. Miles has not enjoyed any sort of higher education. Among other things, she omits consonants (as in “polishin’” or “‘eard”), uses incorrect pronouns (“one of *them* parky floors”) and verb forms (“you *was*”) which makes it hard to follow her narrative in all details. Fur-

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<sup>222</sup> Calder, p. 73.

<sup>223</sup> Dowie, p. 212.

thermore, this non-standard English stigmatises the Hamesthwaites' charwoman as outsider since "those within the nation who persisted in the use of other forms, eccentricity, perversity, ignorance and uncouthness were the terms now used to account for their speech."<sup>224</sup> Dowie, at this point, sticks with the cliché of the "coarseness of lower-class speech [being] typically rendered in dialect" which should also represent the "relative distance of a particular character's experience and sensibility from the norms of bourgeois life."<sup>225</sup>

Nevertheless, Mrs. Miles is extremely useful for Mark during Cara's illness – last but not least due to her knowledge as to a doctor's whereabouts. While he is absolutely overextended with the entire situation, it is Mrs. Miles's experience with illness in general and abortions in particular that enormously contributes to Cara's recovery. She is not only strong enough to carry the diseased girl back to the sofa – which can be seen as a passing mention of Mrs. Miles's deviance from the female norm – but also provided Cara with "strengthening stuff she needs"<sup>226</sup> for which the old charwoman has even been at the chemist's. That she has taken money from Cara's purse to purchase this elixir, Mrs. Miles mentions without hesitations, and she is very anxious to show Mark that not more money than needed is missing.

Moreover, she seems to be the only person – except for the doctor – who knows what is the matter with Cara and what could be done in order to help her. While Mark is absolutely ignorant of the origin of Cara's illness, the "sharp look from the faded eye of Mrs. Miles"<sup>227</sup> insinuates that she knows more about this issue. Since he is unable to give a full account of Cara's illness, Mark desperately needs Mrs. Miles who also promises to nurse his mistress at the night. For all these tasks, she never asks for additional money even though she has a family and several jobs to care for as well.

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<sup>224</sup> Kumar, Krishan. *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 221f.

<sup>225</sup> Young, p. 48.

<sup>226</sup> Dowie, p. 212f.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212f.

The only negative point which we cannot free Mrs. Miles from is her subliminal racism, a necessary evil for a member of nineteenth-century England. While social researchers like General William Booth were convinced that “the foul and fetid breath of our slums is almost as poisonous as that of the African swamp,”<sup>228</sup> the denizen of these ‘slums’ were very anxious to be distinguished from foreigners. This is also the reason why Mrs. Miles explicitly mentions Cara’s otherness which can only be explained by matters of skin colour or her different behaviour. The charwoman does not refer to this fact in bad faith, but in order to put Mark’s mind at ease by ensuring that “wot I’ve ‘eard these furrin natures ‘as it easier.”<sup>229</sup> She considers Cara’s differentness to be an advantage in regard to the pain she suffers, thus making it easier for Mark to cope with Cara’s agony. It seems thus reasonable to assume that Mrs. Miles is not as prejudiced as other people, but only slightly affected by the stereotyped thinking of Victorian society that is definitely ingrained in her thinking.

Furthermore, the charwoman also demonstrates a slightly negative side of her personality for which society cannot be held responsible: She is an enormous chatterbox. Albeit her fall from the rope-ladder was serious enough to make her lose consciousness, Mrs. Miles is not hushed through the pain in her hips. It even seems to make her more talkative, maybe because she was never noticed as individual and is now flattered by Gallia’s sudden attention. Unfortunately, Mrs. Miles’s excessive loquacity slightly beclouds her very positive impression. Not only that she points out the connection between the mysterious letter of ‘poor Missie’ and Mark Gurdon, she also gives away confidential information of their relationship in exchange for Gallia’s undivided attention. Paired with her “pride of ailment”<sup>230</sup> that keeps Mrs. Miles from lamenting, this behaviour emphasises how unimportant and invisible the poor woman normally seems to be. Being the one to ensure her family’s survival, Mrs. Miles herself becomes insignificant. She is neither thanked for her

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<sup>228</sup> Richardson, p. 25.

<sup>229</sup> Dowie, p. 212f.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222f.

work, nor truly cherished so that her hard and constant work is taken for granted by both her family and employers. Generally ignored and reduced to a cogwheel in the Victorian system, Mrs. Miles's sole purpose in life is work and duty. Since her husband suffers from heavy drinking, the money she earns suffices only for the basic needs. Wrapped in "poor outer clothing, multifarious in strings and pins,"<sup>231</sup> Mrs. Miles can therefore be seen as representation of the typical working-class woman as characters of this class "must be rough in speech and dress."<sup>232</sup>

### 3.7 Gallia Hamesthwaite, the exception from the norm

In the preceding sections, we have discovered six different types of women: the ideal and the fallen, the superficial and the hard-working, the silently suffering and the socially adapted. All of these women represent a small part, a facet of the nineteenth-century image of femininity so that we might be tempted to consider the sum of them a complete picture. But if we do so, we will leave out the most important character of this story, the one that exhibits the full spectrum of resistance against these "various incarnations of the Victorian 'Old Woman,'"<sup>233</sup> and has therefore been chosen to become the eponym of this novel: Gallia Hamesthwaite.

Being the personified deviance from the norm in matters of dress, behaviour and attitude, it is only logical that Gallia does not belong to any of the six types of women mentioned before: She is neither as innocent as Margaret, nor as morally objectionable as Cara, she neither lives for fashion like Gertrude, nor for manual work like Mrs. Miles, and she has neither dedicated her life to social duties like Lady Hamesthwaite, nor to secretly pulling the strings like Mrs. Leighton. So if she is not likely to fit into one of these categories, Gallia seems to play a different role, both in Victorian society and Dowie's scheme. This is also emphasised by the fact that Gallia herself seems to be unaware of the added value she has for society as she constantly struggles with the position accredited to her. It begins with the battle

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 223f.

<sup>232</sup> Young, p. 48.

<sup>233</sup> Dixon, Ella Hepworth. *The Story of a Modern Woman*. Ed. Steve Palmer. Broadview Press, 2004, p. 21.



against her own femininity, and her abhorrence to married women and babies. Since she “resented [femininity] fiercely” and “subdued every sign of it,”<sup>234</sup> Gallia seems reluctant to accept her fate as someone’s wife and mother which is also stressed by her initial decision to not get married.<sup>235</sup> This refusal of her own gender echoes also in her public image, her inappropriate but comfortable dressing, her freedom of expression, and her preference for intellectual activity.

Furthermore, it explains why Gallia is unable to bear Essex’s rejection, the way he ‘played’ with her feelings before turning her down. Cursing her own passivity as “vulgar reticence,” she longs for a chance to be more straightforward in order to shake off the shame she feels for letting Essex use her “like a hired creature.”<sup>236</sup> Again, Gallia revolts against the female and passive role that is ascribed to her during the scene in the palm-house because it contradicts her self-conception. Although she still seems to search for her place in society, Gallia knows exactly which position she does not want to hold. This is also elucidated by the activeness she displays concerning love and companionship. Not only has she sent Essex some “strange letters”<sup>237</sup> during his stay in Greece, she also violates the rule of female passivity by confessing her love to him.<sup>238</sup> The enormous physicality Gallia thereby exhibits is quite striking and joins all the other indications for her being an atypical middle-class woman since she almost forces Essex to listen to her confession. Both her hands on his shoulders, her finger raising his chin so that their glances meet, it is obvious who is the active part in this situation, and who is the one that has to follow the instructions. As Essex is also “forced to converse in her own key with Gallia,”<sup>239</sup> this extension from verbal to physical activeness can be considered the next step on Gallia’s way to free herself from a precast destiny, culminating in the application of eugenic standards to her own life.

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<sup>234</sup> Dowie, p. 59.

<sup>235</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>238</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 84f.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Moreover, Gallia is initially dissatisfied with the fact that women were not allowed to show interest in public affairs. Whereas her mother and aunt are completely absorbed in social duties like organising dinners or receptions, Gallia cares more about the British Empire and its future, giving thoughts to complex problems like the State regulation of Vice.<sup>240</sup> By doing so, she infringes not only upon the gendered division of public and private sphere, but also upon the general ignorance of middle-class people in regard to the lower classes. Her displayed frankness arouses both protest and indignation, but although Mrs. Leighton tries to take corrective actions in order to bring her back on track, Gallia insists on her opinion that women can actively contribute to the state's wellbeing. She definitely knows that this kind of participation differs from the one that is possible for men, but Gallia seems most convinced that to "read and think about" public problems would give women the possibility to "assist [their] settlement."<sup>241</sup>

This renunciation of female passivity, even related to national problems, is also responsible for Gallia's ultimate decision to subordinate her individual happiness to the big picture. Although her feelings for Essex are based on romantic or at least intellectual attraction, she actively decides against him and his flawed genes, and in favour of the physically attractive Mark. The fact that the latter is accepted by society, and thereby smoothes Gallia's way back to the fold is a nice side-effect, but in comparison to the additional benefit this wedlock has for the nation's continuance, it is nothing of importance. Nevertheless, this free choice of spouse goes hand in hand with Gallia's general deviance from the Victorian norm. Her pursuit of female participation, of finding a way to have an impact on public or national affairs without obvious participation makes her the exception to the standard image of a nineteenth-century middle-class woman. For this reason, and due to some textual references, it seems reasonable to assume that the character of Gallia was created to represent the *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon of a New Woman, although slightly modified after Dowie's fancy.

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<sup>240</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

As base for our textual investigations in order to prove Gallia's deviance from the norm, we can refer to Essex's unusual farewell to a "New Woman, who is yet the old"<sup>242</sup> as first and strongest indication. In this context, it should first be mentioned that the term 'New Woman' had undergone a certain change in the course of time. Whereas we consider this label as something positive in regard to female emancipation and independence, Victorian Britain used it to describe an "unsexed, terrifying, violent Amazon ready to overturn the world."<sup>243</sup> This is also the reason why the term was not used by feminists themselves, but rather by their adversaries. Being a "palimpsest for anxieties"<sup>244</sup> in the 1880s and 1890s, the label has lost its pejorative connotation over the years, but we should nevertheless keep it in the back of our minds that the term 'New Woman' can stand for an emancipated, modern woman as well as for an "exaggerated, parodic, grotesque version of feminism."<sup>245</sup> However, Essex's statement alone already pegs Gallia as possible member of the New Woman Movement, especially because he is a close friend that knows her for several years. For this reason, there must be perceptible indications to suggest Gallia's membership to this feminist movement, although the transformation seems to be incomplete yet.

The most eye-catching characteristic in regard to this is Gallia's clothing. As no detailed description of her dress or outer-appearance in general is given, but solely little remarks that hint at a relatively free and unlaced way of clothing as preached by the Rational Dress Association,<sup>246</sup> it is virtually impossible for the reader to visualise Gallia. For Victorian girls, however, who were "dually literate in ... the language of cloth and the language of print,"<sup>247</sup> Gallia's otherness is easy to detect.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>243</sup> Schaffer, Tallia. "Nothing But Foolscap and Ink?: Inventing the New Women." *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. Eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 39-52, at p. 39.

<sup>244</sup> Kortsch, p. 15.

<sup>245</sup> Schaffer, p. 49.

<sup>246</sup> Compare to Kortsch, p. 79.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 4.

Mostly wearing dresses “so much of herself as not to seem a dress at all,”<sup>248</sup> Gallia rebels against the Victorian dress code of corsages and bodices which also illustrated the female confinement in body and soul. The fact that her favourite colour seems to be violet/purple – the colour of emancipated and feminist women<sup>249</sup> – supports the idea that Gallia’s revolution is blatantly illustrated through her exceptional outfit.

Although Margaret’s influence, and her own apprehension of Victorian society finally change Gallia’s dress style, it can still be considered a marker for her attitude. The “silvery grey and white plumage [that] replaced the black of her earlier mourning months”<sup>250</sup> is therefore not only a randomly selected colour, but additionally points to Gallia’s new and rational lifestyle. Moreover, it puts her in stark contrast to Margaret who is mostly associated with colours like white or gold.<sup>251</sup> The selection of an indifferent grey is hence another symbol for Gallia’s specialness that also emphasises her non-involvement in any common problem of female society. In contrast to Cara and Margaret, who can be seen as representatives of the red and the white flame that signify two antithetic types of women, Gallia is the typical “in-between girl”<sup>252</sup> who does not care for a man’s vices or virtues. She pursues her own plan which does not place her in relation to men so that his past or deeds are of no importance for her.

Additionally to these feminist findings, the character of Gallia exhibits several other clichés with the aid of which an alleged New Woman was said to be identifiable. One of these stereotypes is her habit of smoking – a pure marginalia in *Gallia*, but generally seen as the mark of a “feminist who had ‘gone too far’”<sup>253</sup> – as well as

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<sup>248</sup> Dowie, p. 78.

<sup>249</sup> Compare to Vollmar, Klausbernd. *The Little Giant Encyclopedia of Dream Symbols*. Translated by Elisabeth E. Reimersmann. New York: Sterling Publishing Co. Inc, 1997, p. 461.

<sup>250</sup> Dowie, p. 215.

<sup>251</sup> Compare to *ibid.*, pp. 70 and 247.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>253</sup> Youngkin, Molly. *Feminist Realism at the Fin de Siècle: The Influence of the Late-Victorian Woman's Press on the Development of the Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007, p. 127.

Gallia's passion for horse breeding. Especially this latter hobby horse is of paramount importance for her extraordinariness inasmuch as it does not only ensure the deconstruction of manliness, but also paves the way for Gallia's turn to eugenic principles. However, it were those 'unfeminine' attributes that contributed to the New Woman's stigmatisation as a potential threat for Victorian England since any deviation from the canon of femininity was considered to have major impact on the woman's designated role of wife and mother.

The root cause for this 'perverseness' was generally deemed to be uncensored or provocative reading as provided by e.g. Mill and Spencer which is also the reason why women were not allowed to deepen their education, but were generally admonished to stick with light reading, needlework or music.<sup>254</sup> Living in a period with an enormous female surplus, the fear of spinsterhood was ubiquitous so that the essentiality of a husband became almost bone-crushing.<sup>255</sup> Those women who strove for advanced training or even a university degree were therefore publicly denounced, being a potential hazard to male hegemony as well as the nation's continuance. Both were predicated on the successful operation of women as housewife and mother so that the dissolution of male domination was deemed to trigger the collapse of the British Empire which is also the reason why any sign of female insubordination or self-determination caused a distinct horror among both men and women.

Due to the fact that 'dangerous' sources like Mill and Spencer were not accessible to women of all classes, the New Woman was "essentially middle-class." This is also true for Gallia whose upbringing as only child of the Secretary of State for the Colonies grants her certain privileges like studying in Oxford or access to newspapers. The outcome of this is that she is not only "[i]ntelligent, individualistic and principled,"<sup>256</sup> but also brutally honest in every respect. Even the topic of extra-marital sex is no taboo for her so that she keeps on snubbing society with her in-

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<sup>254</sup> Compare to Cunningham 1978, p. 47 and Dowie, p. 57.

<sup>255</sup> Compare to Foster, p. 7.

<sup>256</sup> Cunningham 1978, p. 11.

genuous frankness, be it her mother and aunt in regard to prostitution or Mark in terms of the acceptance of his secret mistress.<sup>257</sup> This absolute honesty that especially Gallia has internalised was deemed to be the result of inadequate and exaggerated literacy inasmuch as revolutionary authors like John Stuart Mill preached that “women, given opportunities, can equal men in all important attainments.”<sup>258</sup> Gallia already seems to live according to this totally new self-conception that meant the end of all male domination and replaced it with equality. This, in turn, finally allowed women to develop high ideals, new principles and, generally speaking, an own opinion whereas they deprived men of the formerly applied authority over their female counterparts. Furthermore, the dogma of chastity applied to women unintentionally triggered a certain tendency to change the choice of partner into a female instead of male privilege, making the formerly experienced degradation of the wife to a “sexual slave ... unable to engage in self-development or make important life choices”<sup>259</sup> more and more unlikely. This fact can also be observed in the case of Gallia since She is the one to select Mark, she is the one that makes the first step, and she is the one that denies him her love and independence. All of these decision are taken by Gallia herself, but were based on this new self-perception so that in the end, she can claim that “she had chosen to belong to him; and he was hers, she had selected him to be hers.”<sup>260</sup>

Of course, it is only natural that new options also create new problems, most of them still being related to the now outdated idea of women primarily being wives and mothers. With the socially advanced writings of Spencer and Mill, the female life suddenly offered manifold career options so that marriage and motherhood

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<sup>257</sup> Compare to Dowie, pp. 52 and 300f.

<sup>258</sup> Stafford, William. “John Stuart Mill: critic of Victorian values?” *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society*. Ed. Eric Sigsworth. Manchester & New York: Manchester, 1988, pp. 88-101, at p. 89.

<sup>259</sup> Ziegler, Mary. “Eugenic Feminism: Mental Hygiene, the Women's Movement, and the Campaign for Eugenic Legal Reform, 1900-1935.” *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*. Vol. 31 No 1 (Winter 2008), pp. 211-235, at p. 220.

<sup>260</sup> Dowie, p. 296.

were not the sole alternatives anymore. Soon, this triggered the prejudice that “literary ladies [we]re likely to be bad wives,”<sup>261</sup> that they “chose not to have children because they were selfish,”<sup>262</sup> but as Dowie shows through her protagonist’s thoughts, selfishness does not automatically exclude motherhood— as not viable without – wedlock:

A mother has those feelings, which are more than mere love, because she has done something for the child, because she has borne it. She has performed a sort of self-sacrifice, which I have always thought the most subtle kind of selfishness in the world. Motherhood is selfish after all. So it comes in with my belief that the highest sort of selfishness is the only true and good religion—the only one that really makes for goodness. . A woman gets a good deal out of motherhood; more than she does out of marriage: motherhood is, on the whole, better suited to her than marriage, I believe.<sup>263</sup>

Gallia’s reasoning in regard to this attitude also reflects the general opinion of many women, among them also feminists, whereas traditionalists like Margaret Oliphant were unhappy that ‘motherhood’ instead of ‘love’ became the new apotheosis of female fulfilment.<sup>264</sup> The struggle between these two contradicting concepts also affects Gallia as indicated through her conflict with the “dead, dead women who are so strong still” as well as with the “dead men . . . that teach so faithfully.”<sup>265</sup> Although Gallia can be considered a very advanced and modern woman, she is not able to completely unshackle herself from the (male) expectations Victorian society has always imposed upon her. The result is a kind of schizophrenia, an inner conflict between her own ideals and the ones forced upon her, which illustrates that the implementation of a theoretical model is not always a walk in the park. Although

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<sup>261</sup> Foster, p. 13.

<sup>262</sup> Ziegler, p. 217.

<sup>263</sup> Dowie, p. 141.

<sup>264</sup> Compare to Oliphant, Margaret. “The Anti-Marriage League.” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Number 159 (January 1896), pp. 135-149, at p. 145.

<sup>265</sup> Dowie, p. 293.

Gallia is convinced of the correctness of her actions, her doubts and mental references to Essex display her insecurity once she tries to put her eugenic ambitions into action. Aiming for absolute freedom within the limitations of Victorian society, Gallia finally has to realise that she is unable to deny her gender identity:

What chatter it is to talk of being free, or of getting free! as if we ever could!  
Make her the moment and the man, and every woman takes to sentiment smiling,  
as a little yellow fluffy duckling flounders quacking to a pool.<sup>266</sup>

Nevertheless, Gallia is able to find a new way of living, one that does neither entail “the prospect of being anybody's wife”<sup>267</sup> nor the participation in a political movement. As she already lives according to these new rights of emancipation, Gallia concentrates on the duties her sex still implicates, albeit now on her own account. In contrast to dozens of other women who are “wives and mothers only because there is no other career open to them,”<sup>268</sup> Gallia has deliberately decided in favour of this path of life since her middle-class position allowed her to negotiate the terms of her wedlock. Yet, with the focus being shifted to ‘motherhood’ instead of ‘love,’ she considers it no longer her “allotted duty to marry and bear children,”<sup>269</sup> but to make sure that she has chosen the best husband so as to contribute to the continuance of the British Empire by making “better people.”<sup>270</sup> This, in fact, is the real reason for the creation of a character like Gallia Hamesthwaite: the introduction of Eugenic Feminism.

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 290f.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 297f.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>269</sup> Richardson, p. 35.

<sup>270</sup> Dowie, p. 174.



## 4 Essex, Gallia and Mark – an ‘eminently rational’ decision

### 4.1 The importance of being healthy

In order to understand what this label actually means, we first have to talk about the theory of eugenics. Deriving from the Greek ‘eugenes’ which means ‘good in stock,’ this doctrine focused upon people’s health and reproduction in order to increase the nation’s chance of survival. The term itself was coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, a cousin of evolutionist Charles Darwin whose theories provided the fundament for eugenicist thinking.<sup>271</sup> But whereas Darwin followed Spencer in stating that those who survived would be the “select of their generation,”<sup>272</sup> his first cousin did not completely agree with this definition. To Galton, this view neglected the fact that reproduction was the decisive factor in the equation. While Darwin assumed that the fittest individuals were also the ones that reproduced most, Galton was aware of the fact that in mid- and late-nineteenth century, the most fertile ones were the lower classes.<sup>273</sup> Hence, he deemed them to be a jeopardy for the nation’s health since poor and immoral people would soon outnumber the ‘good’ population due to the underclass’s reckless reproduction. The consequential degeneration of the British Empire was considered a major threat that was mostly accredited to the annulment of natural selection caused by public and private charity.

It was Herbert Spencer that finally called for a social Darwinism in order to avoid ill and crippled people to be spared, stating that in the “interests of universal humanity, these harsh fatalities are seen to be full of beneficence.”<sup>274</sup> The underlying vision referred to a eugenic utopia where only those with the best genetics and highest moral standards would reproduce so that all “weaklings in brain, character,

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<sup>271</sup> Compare to Richardson, p. 2.

<sup>272</sup> Strawbridge, Sheelagh. “Darwin and Victorian social values.” *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Thought and Society*. Ed. Eric Sigsworth. Manchester & New York: Manchester, 1988, pp. 102-116, at p. 106f.

<sup>273</sup> Compare to Ledger, p. 73.

<sup>274</sup> Spencer, as cited in Childs, Donald J. *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*. Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 3.

and physique”<sup>275</sup> would be slowly bred out. This “regime of ‘social Selection’ or ‘Birth of the Fittest’”<sup>276</sup> should be achieved by the introduction of health or marriage certificates so as to guarantee that only the best specimen mated. In order to maintain British supremacy, those that had a physical flaw or were suffering from transmissible diseases should not be allowed to receive such a certificate, thus denying them to hand down their disadvantageous predispositions to the next generation. By this means, the nation would have been in complete control of its residents’ health on base of a scientific, as biological, rationale.

The idea about a judicial control of marriage and reproduction, however, remained nothing but a eugenic utopia. Nevertheless, there were people who tried to live in accordance with the criteria of selective breeding – which is the point where feminism appears on the scene. As Darwin outlined in his opus *On the Origin of Species* (1859), there were two forms of sexual selection: male and female (aesthetic) choice.<sup>277</sup> Due to the fact that women were usually defined through their reproductive capacity, only passing from “being a child to bearing one,”<sup>278</sup> this statement of a female right of self-determination might sound odd at first sight, but in fact, it was a logical approach. Whereas men were likely to fall victim to vices and immorality, the majority of women remained virtuous and pure in order to keep their social position.

In contrast to the general perception, eugenic feminism ascribed a certain rationality to women which made them capable of selecting the most healthy and suitable partner for reproduction.<sup>279</sup> This mixture of natural and sexual selection was also mentioned in Darwin’s *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), explaining that women selected their breeding partners on basis of their su-

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<sup>275</sup> Dixon, Thomas. *The Invention of Altruism. Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 313.

<sup>276</sup> Gaskell, as cited in Thomas Dixon, p. 169.

<sup>277</sup> Compare to Richardson, p. 55.

<sup>278</sup> Auerbach, Nina. *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Out-casts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 173.

<sup>279</sup> Compare to Richardson, p. 51.

periority in order to hand it down to the next generation.<sup>280</sup> By applying this theory, the former dependent and weak woman was finally empowered as she became the one to decide what qualities and characteristics were most needed for the continuance of her race. Fertility became thus the weapon of women, combating both national degeneration and their own suppression.

Due to the fact that in nineteenth-century England, health was of such paramount importance that it was almost interchangeable with wealth, the doctrine of eugenics fell on fertile soil. It granted a new segregation criterion that was used to justify the almost insurmountable barrier between lower and upper classes so that good constitution became an essential factor of Victorian middle-class life. In reverse, disease was henceforth associated with “poverty, foreignness, and moral corruption”<sup>281</sup> which were considered potential hazards for the British Empire and its continuance. For the most part, this followed from political and social revolutions, but also from the general perception that Britain was losing control over both its colonies and its citizens. In this “imperialist context of the fin de siècle,”<sup>282</sup> especially the fear of weakening from within stoked fears inasmuch as the fight against ‘degeneration’ prevented Britain from focusing upon the real enemies, leaving the kingdom vulnerable to assaults from the outside. Therefore, the “permanent segregation of habitual criminals, paupers, drunkards, maniacs, and tramps”<sup>283</sup> was considered to be a solution in order to maintain national health. In contrast to the transportation approach in the eighteenth century, when Australia served as “dumping ground for Britain's surplus,”<sup>284</sup> the segregation in the fin de siècle took place on an ideological instead of a geographical level. In the course of the implementation of this ideology, the afore-mentioned criteria were applied, stigmatising immoral and poor people as diseased and degenerated so as to easily identify them.

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<sup>280</sup> Compare to King, p. 24.

<sup>281</sup> Gilbert, Pamela K. *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 53.

<sup>282</sup> Ledger, p. 82.

<sup>283</sup> Richardson, p. 26.

<sup>284</sup> Bivona, p. 115.

This glorification of health and the accompanying demonisation of disease can also be observed in *Gallia* where both play a subtle, but still very important role as illustrated by e.g. Lady Mary Mortimer, who stands representative for the anonymous mass of middle-class people in the following situation. Although she starts the conversation at Mrs. Leighton's with an innocuous question in regard to Mark Gurdon's whereabouts, she promptly shifts to an issue of more importance: "Was it true about his cough?"<sup>285</sup> Situations like this describe how worried the rich and wealthy were that any unfit individual might enter their inner circle by pretending to be in good health. Admittedly, this criterion was never applied to persons who already belonged to the Victorian middle-class – since they were in possession of health's equivalence 'wealth' – but solely to social climbers like Mark whose constitution becomes one of his biggest asset. Based on this newly constructed connection between social and biological identity, the human body was deemed to be "one of the central, and most contested, icons for cultural definition."<sup>286</sup> The immense fear of contamination from the lower classes or environmental influences, that resulted from this new catenation, can also be held responsible for Mrs. Leighton's annual residence at Aix as well as for other odd-looking habits:

"Of course I have brought my own sheets;—I have given up camel's hair and am sleeping in pine wool now. No sheet can be fit to use unless it has been aired for forty-eight hours consecutively." Mrs. Leighton spoke with authority; she was in the habit of changing the material of her sheets in a sweeping fashion about every three months, and invariably carried the latest fad to her friends' houses when she visited.<sup>287</sup>

Although this foible might occur bizarre to present-day readers, it simply reflects middle-class members' anxiety for staying healthy at all costs in order to keep their superior position in society. For this reason, categories and the longing for categori-

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<sup>285</sup> Dowie, p. 67.

<sup>286</sup> Vrettos, p. 8.

<sup>287</sup> Dowie, p. 305.

sation – as expressed by Essex and Gallia<sup>288</sup> – were omnipresent in the middle-class's consciousness which utterly depicts how instable the static class system was. Especially people from this 'middle layer' had to be in constant fear, not only of degeneration or degradation, but also of diversity in general.<sup>289</sup> Above all, health and its dark twin disease were crucial for the dissociation from other classes inasmuch as the definition of middle-class itself was only possible through the existence of undesired 'others' like Cara Lemuel.

#### 4.2 The successive implementation of eugenic principles in *Gallia*

After this short introduction to the genesis of eugenics, the possibilities it offered to women, and its connection to the topic of health, we can finally turn to the role that Eugenic Feminism assumes in Mérie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia*. Since the eponymous protagonist undergoes the most distinguishable change of priorities concerning this matter, it seems reasonable to direct our attention to the different stages of Gallia's development. Although we know that the pursuit of feminism and equality in both class and gender can be seen as her special passions, it is the decision for a eugenic aim in life that finally satisfies Gallia's idea of usefulness. This can be best observed after her mother's death when the first concrete signs of Gallia's transformation unquestionably state that she has eventually found foothold on a new solution.<sup>290</sup>

For this reason, we need to distinguish between three different phases in Gallia's life: the childhood or youth, which is painfully ended by Essex's rejection and Lady Hamestwaite's death, but during which Gallia develops the idea to abandon love in order to eradicate disease and weakness from British territory; the growing-up, culminating in Essex's 'love' confession which confirms that Gallia is on the right path; and, concluding, the adulthood when she realises her theoretical idea by mak-

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., pp. 168ff and 239.

<sup>289</sup> Compare to Berezowsky, Sherrin Elaine. "Biological Inheritance and the Social Order in Late-Victorian Fiction and Science" (2011). *University of Western Ontario - Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 178-224. Date of access: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014, p. 199.

<sup>290</sup> Compare to Dowie, p. 151.

ing the ultimate decision in favour of Mark. It is this scale of biological and ideological progress that signifies the rising importance of eugenic feminism in Gallia's life.

When contemplating the 'early' Gallia of three-and-twenty, who is portrayed in chapter VI, there is no sign of eugenic feminism as defined in the previous section although emancipatory tendencies are already more than evident. Refusing to submit to the male decision as to "what is the 'proper sphere' for [her],"<sup>291</sup> Gallia directs her attention to public problems like the "poor, poor women in the street"<sup>292</sup> whom she wholeheartedly pities for the one-way-street they live in. Due to the fact that Gallia's middle-class origin grants her the privilege to have more than just a single option in life, she decides to follow her feeling of injustice by simply dropping out of the competition for marriage material. Instead of focusing upon the search for a suitable breeding partner, Gallia thus rejects any considerations in regard to marriage or maternity, presumably accepting spinsterhood in order to simplify both her own and her mother's life:

But she has no social duties. Of course, if she were anyone else, and I were someone quite different, she would have to get me married and all that, but as it is— Come, it must be admitted that I have lifted the burden of social duties pretty thoroughly off mother's back.<sup>293</sup>

Whereas wives and mothers were more or less slaves of the "lord god, [their] husband"<sup>294</sup> at whose mercy they lived, spinsters could have an independent life including privileges like personal possession, signing of contracts, finances, and opinions.<sup>295</sup> Especially the last asset is held dear by Gallia who is not even afraid to be

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<sup>291</sup> Foster, p. 9.

<sup>292</sup> Dowie, p. 79.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>295</sup> Compare to Foster, p. 8.

frank about sex and politics – two topics that were generally considered unsuitable for Victorian women. But Gallia does not stop at this point where she shocks both her mother and aunt by arguing in favour of Judith Butler and other opponents of the State Regulation of Vice. She even goes to such lengths as to demand the general equality of the sexes, knowing full well that this revolutionary idea was commonly associated with the fear of female degeneration through androgyny.<sup>296</sup> Being unable to understand why society applies such double standards, Gallia desperately searches for a way to express her feminist tendencies without violating too obviously the Victorian code of conduct.

How difficult this undertaking actually is, she painfully experiences through Essex's reaction to her straightforward love-confession. Since Gallia is unable to bear the shame of her exposed passivity during the palm-house scene, she decides to tell Essex the truth about her feelings albeit such behaviour was generally considered a male privilege. His response to her frankness, nevertheless, provides a cause for conflict which emphasises that Gallia is not only a "quick clock,"<sup>297</sup> but a fairly revolutionary specimen. She is unwilling to accept that most things within Victorian society – like e.g. love-confession – were a matter of "convention" instead of "apprehension"<sup>298</sup> so that a single individual being like herself was virtually unable to change matters. Unsatisfied with this explanation as it denies her the respect and appreciation she longs for, Gallia thus struggles with British society at large as it seems to fly in the face of reason for her. "Why can you not treat me with the same decency a woman is expected to show a man when he tells her he loves her?"<sup>299</sup> this is the question for which Gallia searches a plausible answer, but which she is unable to find in the positions offered to her by Victorian society. For this reason, after her heart had suffered the unbearable anguish of unrequited love, and her mother's lone death had demonstrated that servitude and obedience are not enough to gain a man's appreciation, a new tendency becomes more and more important for Gallia that completely seems to offer a possibility for emancipation.

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<sup>296</sup> Kline, p. 87.

<sup>297</sup> Dowie, p. 64.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

This new, eugenic way of life which Gallia discovers during growing-up is not accidentally related to health and exercise, but seems to be the direct consequence of Essex's denial and her mother's death. While the first experience can be held responsible for Gallia's turn towards rational instead of emotional love, Lady Hames-thwaite's premature death seems to have had an immense impact on her daughter. Being exposed to the visible signs of ailment and disease, Gallia shortly realises that she is unable to assist in her mother's recovery. Although she tries to nurse the critically ill woman, Lady Julia finally dies in "a fit of beautiful, painless unconsciousness"<sup>300</sup> – a fact that seems to make Gallia wonder about health in general as she even develops a eugenic utopia true to the motto that an ailment need not to be cured if it does not exist in the first place. This logical approach to tackle the problem at its root is attended by Gallia's turning away from emotionality, thus making it comprehensible why she accepts to assume the formerly abhorred function of wife and mother.

Furthermore, the subordination to eugenic principles is nothing more than a continuation of qualities and manners Gallia already acquired in childhood. Although her "free movements, free play of feature, free mode of thought, free mode of dress"<sup>301</sup> once contributed to Gallia's otherness and her branding as presumed New Woman, this high level of activity is now an aspect in her favour if we apply eugenicist standards. Due to her denial of constricting clothes, and a proclivity for regular exercises on horseback, Gallia already brings along certain bodily preconditions which allow her this extension of her before-mentioned feminist lifestyle. "A eugenic girl is a healthy girl, and a healthy girl is an attractive girl"<sup>302</sup> was one of the slogans that the Eugenicist Society preached which conventionalises Gallia to a new ideal of beauty. Based on the "valorization of the most fit animals as the most beautiful man,"<sup>303</sup> beauty was not only in the eye of the beholder, but deftly re-

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>302</sup> Richardson, p. 81.

<sup>303</sup> Lefkowitz, p. 33.



worked along eugenic indications. This process is also observable in Gallia who seems to have changed for the better during her time of mourning:

It was not that Gallia's face was older, but it had altered. Her idle, out-of-door mountain life had made her more beautifully healthy than usual, and her eye, instead of seeming clouded by the impossible problems she had a taste for considering, had the far outward look of a person who had thought through something, who had found foothold beyond.<sup>304</sup>

As can be deduced from the last sentence of this text passage, Gallia has already made her decision at this point of the story which can be seen as the reason for her changed impression. The fact that it has improved her public perception also confirms that her acceptance of eugenic feminism satisfies more than just one of her aspirations as otherwise, the effect upon her outer-appearance would not have been that immense. This can also be traced back to the fact that she has laid the foundation for the application of eugenic principles in her youth, namely by means of her fascination for authors like Mill and Spencer, who did not explicitly limit themselves to feminist articles. Especially Herbert Spencer was – as already mentioned in the previous chapter – actively involved in discussions about evolution and eugenics so that reading his writings can definitely be seen as an active contribution to set the focus on individual and national health.

These preconditions – in combination with the two before-mentioned dramatic experiences – are responsible thus for Gallia's shift from a romantic to a rational approach, from simple feminism to a eugenic variety. During this second phase of developing a concrete concept, Gallia has already identified the root cause of all evil – namely the decreasing health of the British Empire as a result of the existence of weakness and disease – but her plans are still on a solely theoretical level. This be-

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<sup>304</sup> Dowie, p. 151.

comes most obvious during her monologue in chapter XVII where she describes the general problem in nineteenth-century England and her proposed solution:

We may live to see that, but we shan't live to see the real advance; which will be the getting in of fathers and mothers, or rather husbands and wives to be fathers and mothers... I was speaking quite seriously, and if you think, you will see that such a scheme would be eminently rational. The outcome of the present health movement must lead that way. People will see the folly of curing all sorts of ailments that should not have been created, and then they will start at the right end, they will make better people.<sup>305</sup>

Although Gallia outlines the topic of national health in more details, this paragraph can be considered the quintessence of her genetic utopia as it contains the recognised problem – people having all kind of ailments – and proposes a rational solution like surrogate mothers and fathers in order to achieve the eugenic goal of ‘better people.’ Although being elaborated very meticulously, Gallia’s vision about a healthy and secure future is nothing she can put into action yet as the negative reactions of Margaret and Gertrude illustrate. Gallia, however, seems to be aware of the fact that her ideas about saving Britain’s hegemony are far too revolutionary for Victorian society. She is and remains a “quick clock”<sup>306</sup> albeit the intersection between eugenic feminism and middle-class’s values was in fact not small: Both approaches glorified motherhood and family, both had a particular interest to avoid disease and degeneration. Nevertheless, an idea to ‘get in’ mothers and fathers for breeding reasons, which means sacrificing one’s own wishes and dreams to the common good, is something that requires a good deal of altruism not everyone in nineteenth-century England possessed. Even Essex, who is Gallia’s closest friend, an exception to the norm as herself, is unable to understand her ultimate decision which is also remarkable because he represents mainstream eugenics that only dif-

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

ferred from eugenic feminism in its refusal of women's "educational and occupational advancement."<sup>307</sup>

From my point of view, the insight that society is not yet ready for her eugenic ideas actually leads to Gallia's decision to start on an individual instead of a national level. Assured by the love Essex has finally shown to her during their unexpected meeting in the Cloisters of Westminster, Gallia determines to go through with her plan to implement a eugenicist solution to the present health situation. Because her female friends were not amenable to her suggestions for improvement, Gallia has to start the process herself since "national progress [was] the sum of individual industry, energy and uprightness, as national decay [was] of individual idleness, selfishness and vice."<sup>308</sup> Accepting eugenic feminism as her new religion, Gallia thus begins to internalise its principles inasmuch as she entirely turns away from a romantic aim in life. Although her feelings for Essex are still very strong, she does not allow herself to envision a future with him since bonding with such a genetically flawed specimen would not help to improve the nation's health.<sup>309</sup>

Hence, according to the custom of eugenic fiction, *Gallia* considers romantic feelings to be an obstacle for "rational reproduction of the species."<sup>310</sup> Neither morality nor position are important for her anymore, but genealogy and fitness so that a efficiently working Mrs. Miles is carefully nursed and coddled up, a healthy, but immoral Mark Gurdon becomes the perfect husband, but a genetically damaged, yet loving Essex is of no value. It is this hunt for the perfect male essence that determines Gallia's life and can therefore be blamed for her subsequent objectification of men.<sup>311</sup> Motherhood is the career she searched for, the only way to achieve a respectable position in society while remaining as independent as possible; fertility is

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<sup>307</sup> Ziegler, p. 216.

<sup>308</sup> Smiles, as cited in Gorham, p. 3.

<sup>309</sup> Compare to the multiple references in Dowie, pp. 285-303.

<sup>310</sup> Richardson, p. 92.

<sup>311</sup> Compare to Schoder, p. 74.

her weapon in order to receive this autonomy; and eugenics is her religion, the reason why she rejects marrying for both romantic and economical reasons.

With reference to this ‘trinity of eugenic feminism,’ we are now able to find an answer to the pivotal question why Gallia insists on putting her eugenic concept into action with Mark if in fact, her heart still belongs to Essex. From a neutral point of view, this decision appears absurd and illogical as Mark has nothing else to offer but a good reputation, impeccable manners and a promising vita. He is neither physically nor intellectually attractive although Gallia has to admit that Mark is “a person of resource in little things”<sup>312</sup> which emphasises that he might be very useful in certain situations. Nevertheless, he does not even possess enough money to help Gallia climb to an even better position among Victorian middle-class so that the decisive point that qualifies Mark for being the better husband can only be related to the sole property a pronounced eugenicist cared for: a sound body.

Urged to select spouses according to “talent, [...] healthiness and purity of body and mind, rather than to affluence of position and station,”<sup>313</sup> it is at least comprehensible why an egoistic social climber like Mark Gurdon is preferred over an affectionate and intellectually attractive middle-class member like Hubert Essex. The underlying notion which can be held responsible for this dead-hearted decision is called eugenic love, a totally misleading name for the process of replacing love and romance with the rational selection of fine breeding material.<sup>314</sup> That Essex does not meet this criterion of genetic integrity, is already hinted at by dint of the mentioning of his father’s early death.<sup>315</sup> Knowing that Essex suffers from a hereditary heart-disease, it seems reasonable to assume that Mr. Essex has died from this congenital defect which he had transmitted to his son. Although only thorough readers might have noticed this hidden allusion to Essex’s genetic unfitness, Dowie uses his flawed genealogy to support the detections Gallia later on indicates, like undersized

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<sup>312</sup> Dowie, p. 284.

<sup>313</sup> Swiney, as cited in Richardson, p. 50.

<sup>314</sup> Compare to Richardson, p. 8f.

<sup>315</sup> Compare to Dowie, p. 103f.

hands and feet or his curious pallor, which in the end prevent her from deciding in Essex's favour. It is the fear of reproducing blemished or baneful genes that determines Gallia's selection, that makes her forget about love or any of the multiple common interests she shares with Essex. It is the same fear that makes him hide behind a mask of arrogance and haughtiness in order to keep Gallia from falling in love with him. In the end, both reveal themselves as eugenicists, both contribute to the health of the nation, but both of them know that they have sacrificed their own happiness to the common good. All that stands in their way is Essex's disastrous genotype.<sup>316</sup>

Nevertheless, it is this fact that makes Mark's involvement possible in the first place. Because Essex's heart defect and its visible symptoms disqualify him as potential breeding partner, Gallia has to search for a sound alternative in order to serve her nation, and it is no wonder that she finally decides for a man with such a "splendid constitution"<sup>317</sup> as Mark possesses. In this context, it can be considered ironic that of all people, Gallia will marry that man whose absence permitted Essex to attend the fatal evening of Mrs. Leighton's dinner party in the first place. However, due to her focusing entirely upon health and its physical characteristics, Gallia overlooks all the bad qualities in Mark like a certain tendency for self-adulation and haughtiness. From a eugenicist point of view, this is not a big deal since only pure gens and perfect breeding were compulsory whereas sympathy or other personal qualities were just of secondary importance.<sup>318</sup> Whereas female health was mostly measured in reproductive capacity, appropriate characteristics for a physically sound man were considered to be "height, musculature, lung capacity, and athletic prowess."<sup>319</sup> Since Mark claims that he keeps himself fit with boxing and daily horse riding, it is nothing but an implication that he is ultimately chosen by Gallia. Although Mark sees himself as a "successful, honourable, gentlemanly, 'decent'

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<sup>316</sup> Compare to Berezowsky, p. 190.

<sup>317</sup> Dowie, p. 26f.

<sup>318</sup> Compare to Gilmour, p. 4.

<sup>319</sup> Vrettos, p. 127.

kind of fellow [with] a decidedly kind heart,”<sup>320</sup> these are not the crucial factors for Gallia’s decision whose criteria are explicitly based on the demonstration of physical superiority:

His voice was not the only good thing about Mark to strike a girl's fancy; there was a firmness and a faint pinkness about his face which did not suggest a London life in any way, and yet would have been too delicate for a countryman. His eyes were bright and clear—those curious ringed eyes of grey and hazel; his teeth were perfect; not too small, and very white.<sup>321</sup>

This mental ‘dissection’ of Mark, which takes place during their first face-to-face meeting, makes unmistakably clear that Gallia is not interested in neither his moral standards nor his character in general. Her single focus is on finding the best specimen of menfolk with regard to the attributes Galton defined as identification mark. As his characterisation implied “health, energy, ability, manliness, and courteous disposition,”<sup>322</sup> we can assert without difficulty that Mark is – according to this definition – the best choice in order to improve the British health, especially because he also proves satisfactory in regard to “true masculinity”<sup>323</sup> by inseminating his secret lover. This also explains Gallia’s improper reference to Cara during her betrothal with Mark. Even though the discovery of a mistress relationship normally led to social ostracism as demonstrated by Margaret in chapter V, Gallia does not consider Mark’s sexual liaison a deal-breaker, but the incarnate evidence for his fertility so that she makes her decision “not *despite* but *because* of his sexual history.”<sup>324</sup> Thus, by accepting Mark as future husband, Gallia acts completely against

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<sup>320</sup> Dowie, p. 30f.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p. 186f.

<sup>322</sup> Galton, Francis. “Eugenics: Its definition, scope, and aims.” *American Journal of Sociology*. Volume 10. Number 1 (July 1904), pp. 1-25, at p. 2.

<sup>323</sup> King, p. 30.

<sup>324</sup> Cunningham, Gail. “‘He-Notes’: Reconstructing Masculinity.” *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. Eds. Angélique Richardson and Chris Willis. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 94-107, at p. 99.

the female role model which demands a moral revulsion to his immorality that she is able to strip off. Due to this utterly atypical behaviour, it should be indisputable that Dowie “brilliantly and satirically inverts the conventions of gendered response to sexuality”<sup>325</sup> wherefrom follows that Gallia represents a completely new type of woman.

This becomes also apparent through her above-mentioned perception of Mark’s physical assets since it completely ignores his qualities as bread-winner and affectionate husband. By reducing him to a means to an end, to a sperm donor whose genes are the most important part about him, Gallia applies the same method of objectification on Mark that he and Robbie applied on women. That this step evoked a certain resistance amongst nineteenth-century readers is not surprising, but this “degrad[ation of men] to the level of mere animals”<sup>326</sup> was conducive to the general deconstruction of male domination that Dowie promotes by dint of this novel. Moreover, she puts it unmistakably straight that the “undermining of masculine certainties by treating the male body as objects”<sup>327</sup> allowed women both to break free from male chauvinism as well as to obtain control over the terms of their marriages. Since Gallia can be considered the best example in order to verify this statement, we are able to deduce the immense potentiality eugenic feminism contained.

## 5 Conclusion

Ultimately, we can thus confirm that Dowie tried to actively promulgate a new self-image of women which not only replaces men as measure, but also illustrates that emancipation has more than one shape. By choosing to write a novel, which was “much more insinuating”<sup>328</sup> than other literary genres, Dowie also assured that her ideas were read by the female audience she wanted to reach since she considered

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Youngkin, Molly. „The Legacy of Sensation Fiction: Bodily Power in the New Woman Novel.“ *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. Pamela K. Gilbert. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2011. 579-589, p. 587.

<sup>327</sup> Cunningham 2001, p. 101.

<sup>328</sup> Young, p. 3.

women to be the ones to set the new benchmarks of a healthy and emancipated future. That the dissemination of this information can be considered Dowie's main objective is also confirmed by the fact that the analysis of the male gaze in *Gallia* draws a very reactionary image of women that relegates them to the private sphere while simultaneously precluding any involvement in real problems. Reduced to their capabilities as wife and mother, the women's actual value is further decreased by Mark and Robbie since they even deny them a personality. Although both try to convince themselves that they love and cherish Gallia and Margaret, none of them is really interested in their fiancée's qualities. What they truly love is neither beauty nor character, but the future and prospect for which the two women are placeholders. Gallia's money and position would grant Mark the realisation of his political ambitions whereas Margaret's perfection and submission would enable Robbie to continue his dissolute lifestyle. Both women are only used in order to pursue the egoistic objectives of self-fulfilment as the two men are unable to succeed by relying on their own strength. Essex, however, shows respect and care towards his gender counterpart. He even treats Gallia as an equal in terms of intellectual or political discussions, and his rude and vain behaviour ultimately turns out to be nothing more but a mask in order to spare her the life as a degenerate's wife. He does not support the objectification of women applied by Mark and Robert whose egoism and haughtiness expose them as no suitable gentlemen. Both of them lack a moral commitment, but instead of realising their own failure, they try to blame this on women. Considering themselves to be victims nevertheless casts a negative light upon Mark and Robert while it emphasises the virtuousness of women.

These, on the other hand, paint a very heterogeneous picture of the female nature that mostly diverges from the male gaze. Irrespective of Gallia, who assumes an exceptional position in Dowie's composition, all of the women have come to terms with their male-imposed role, but some of them also exhibit emancipatory tendencies in doing so. In the characters of Margaret and Lady Hamesthwaite, we do not need to search for signs of revolution or emancipation since they represent the subservient and ideal type of women who dedicated her entire life to the husband's benefit. Although Margaret is still young and in an early stage of her self-abandonment, it is unquestionable that she will tread the same path of dependence



and duty as Lady Hamesthwaite albeit her premature death suggests that this will not be a persistent one.

Cara's path of life, however, also seems to point to one distinct direction. Being assigned to the role of the immoral 'other' from which the virtuous middle-class society can separate, her open-heartedness and emotionalism bears a huge potential so as to peg her as deliberate temptress. But in opposition to Mark's account, Dowie does not depict her as hot-blooded femme fatale, but as an innocent and mistaken girl so that Cara becomes another victim of men's unscrupulousness. Being one of the poor creatures with only one option in life, her independent decision to induce abortion frees her at least from the reproach of reckless reproduction.

Unlike her, Gertrude knows exactly to whom she owes her miserable position. Being the representative of the nouveau riche, she stands for the mass of bored middle-class ladies that had no real occupation. Living towards the sole prospect of being anybody's wife, she has nothing to distract with but vanities like fashion or tea-time although her superficial and exaggerated behaviour is nothing else but a cover-up of her own insecurities in regard to her mediocrity. Just like Cara, she falls victim to the expectations of a male-dominated world, but is still clever enough to also take vengeance by exposing that men's proposals always follow the same, dull structure. Although she is not able to emancipate herself from men or Victorian society, Gertrude tries to oppose men with all her might like denying them absolution for their dissolute past.

Concerning emancipation, it is the character of Celia Leighton that comes as close as possible to the degree of Gallia's independence. Albeit she publicly submits to the concept of Victorian femininity, the old lady actually controls the majority of male characters in *Gallia*. Operating in the shadows, Mrs. Leighton uses her talent for latent manipulation in order to have a bearing on important things, and is therefore able to act in people's favour or disfavour. This subtle power grants her an exceptional position among Victorian middle-class that can be seen as the base for her achieved independence. Being a widow without position or title, her cleverness and influential contacts enable her to equal men, and attain at least partial emancipation.

The embodiment of female emancipation, although within the limitations of Victorian society, is represented by Gallia Hamesthwaite. Drafted against the 'Old Women' that the other six female characters describe, she succeeds in finding a socially accepted way out of the one-way-street of female submission. Although Gallia has to embrace the role of wife and mother that she detested right from the start, the application of eugenic feminism grants her the possibility to initiate relationships and negotiate its terms. Furthermore, she possesses certain traits which were said to be markers for a New Woman like physical activeness, a mind of her own, and a deviant idea about clothing. Having received an advanced and 'unfeminine' education, it is thus no wonder that Gallia follows her favourite authors Mill and Spencer in rejecting the male-imposed ideas about women inasmuch as they deny gender equality. Since she considers this to be an injustice, Gallia's life is henceforth governed by the pursuit of female emancipation so that double standards are no longer applied.

In this context, Gallia runs through three stages of development until she is able to put her new life concept into practice. Based on the principles of eugenics, she renounces love and emotion in order to contribute to the big picture and to have a positive influence on national health. Due to the fact that her 'eminently rational' approach so as to make 'better' people is not supported by her female friends, Gallia has to start the implementation herself which entails the search for a healthy and promising husband. Since the man she loves is not only a man of letters, but also flawed by a congenital heart-disease, she has to switch to another specimen. From a eugenicist point of view, Mark Gurdon's splendid constitution prevails over Essex's love and affectionate which implicates Gallia's selfless sacrifice of a happy future. Nevertheless, the application of eugenic feminism grants her the independence she longs for without obviously violating the rules of Victorian society. According to her initial opinion that political problems like prostitution are questions "only girls can settle ultimately,"<sup>329</sup> Gallia has found her way to partake in the public sphere. Due to her objectification of Mark Gurdon, and his accompanying degradation to a healthy sperm donor, she puts herself on an equal footing with men,

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<sup>329</sup> Dowie, 51.

thus satisfying both her pursuit of female emancipation and her longing to participate in the improvement of nineteenth-century Britain's health. It is this positive representation of eugenic feminism and its options that can be considered the gist of Dowie's novel, around which the concept of all other characters revolve. Even though the plot starts with Mark Gurdon and the construction of his male identity, the novel is still named 'Gallia' – a broad hint to the fact that the main focus should lie on her.

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# Appendix

## **Plagiatserklärung**

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

Frankfurt, den \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Verena Sinkel

## Précis

In der nachfolgenden Magisterarbeit steht primär die Darstellung der Frau im Fokus, welche die Autorin Ménie Muriel Dowie in ihrer 1895 entstandenen Novelle *Gallia* entwirft. Da sich eben jenes Konzept nicht mit dem Frauenbild des viktorianischen Englands gleichsetzen und sich zudem in mehrere Facetten aufsplitten lässt, gliedert sich diese Arbeit in drei Hauptteile, die sich unterschiedlichen Aspekten der Darstellung widmen. Nach einer kurzen Einleitung beginne ich mit einer umfangreichen Analyse der drei männlichen Protagonisten Mark Gurdon, Robert Leighton und Hubert Essex. Diese Einschränkung basiert primär auf der Tatsache, dass diese drei direkten Kontakt zur gleichnamigen Hauptperson der Novelle haben; jedoch ist ebenfalls ausschlaggebend, dass alle drei eine dezidierte Meinung zum anderen Geschlecht zum Ausdruck bringen.

Während Mark und Robert von einem ähnlichen, da objektifizierenden Frauenbild ausgehen, welches Dowie dazu veranlasst, sie zumindest charakterlich zu Schurken zu degradieren, weist Essex' Verhalten deutlich weniger hierarchische Züge auf. Stattdessen behandelt er seine ehemalige Kommilitonin Gallia als Ebenbürtige und gewährt ihr dieselben Privilegien, die er auch einem Mann zugestehen würde. Zudem unterstützt er seine Mutter und Schwester finanziell, obgleich auch Essex den Sphären der unteren Mittelschicht nicht entkommen konnte. Dass seine öffentlich zur Schau gestellte Arroganz und Grobheit nicht mehr als eine soziale Maske ist, welche er aufgrund eines erblichen Herzleidens zum Schutz vor Heirat und Nachkommenschaft aufzieht, unterstreicht Essex' positiven Eindruck. Im Gegensatz zu Mark und Robert, die Gallia und Margaret für den sozialen und politischen Aufstieg respektive die Zementierung ihres Mittelklassestatus benutzen, scheinen Essex' Gefühl wahr und aufrichtig zu sein, sodass Gallias Hochzeit mit einem anderen ihn zum tragischen Helden der Novelle macht. Selbstlos stellt er sein Leben und seine Zukunft unter die Prinzipien der Eugenik, welche Heirat und Familie aufgrund seines Herzfehlers für Essex unmöglich machen.

Nachdem das viktorianische Frauenbild aus den Augen der Männer gezeichnet wurde, widmet sich der darauf folgende Abschnitt den zahlreichen weiblichen Figuren des Textes. Auch dieser Part beschränkt sich auf eine einstellige Menge an zu analysierenden Objekte, dieses Mal jedoch auf sieben statt auf lediglich drei Personen, da jede der untersuchten Frauen für eine andere Facette des viktorianischen Frauenbilds steht. Diese Anzahl verteilt sich auf fünf weibliche Charaktere der Mittelschicht, einen der arbeiten-

den Unterschicht sowie einen Charakter, dessen Klasse aufgrund seiner moralischen Fragwürdigkeit nicht eindeutig bestimmt werden konnte. Des Weiteren bilden sechs der sieben Personen jeweils Gegensatzpaare, die ihre unterschiedliche Funktion für das England des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts deutlicher herausstellen. Margaret Essex etwa repräsentiert diesbezüglich die perfekte und tugendhafte Frau, den hoch gelobten ‚angel in the household‘, welcher als weibliches Ideal im britischen Königreich galt. Obgleich am Ende eine Liebeshochzeit mit Robert Leighton steht, bleibt von Margaret nicht mehr als die hübsche, repräsentative Schale übrig. Im krassen Kontrast dazu steht wiederum Cara Lemuel, ein aus Frankreich stammendes Mädchen mit englisch-spanischen Wurzeln, das von Mark Gurdon zur *femme fatale* stilisiert wird und am Ende nicht mehr als ein Mittel zum Zweck, nämlich zum eigenen Lustabbau, für ihn darstellt. Einzig ihre Entscheidung für eine Abtreibung unterscheidet Cara von der devoten Margaret, die sich der Entscheidungsgewalt ihres Zukünftigen bedingungslos unterwirft.

Auch Lady Hamesthwaite, Gallias Mutter und Ehefrau des Staatssekretärs der Kolonien, bildet diesbezüglich keine Ausnahme, haucht sie doch ihr eigenes Leben für das Wohlergehen ihres Mannes aus. Zu betrachten als Weiterführung des von Margaret dargestellten Konzepts, zeichnet Ménie Muriel Dowie anhand von Lady Hamesthwaite ein düsteres Zukunftsbild, welches der Frau aufgrund ihrer uneingeschränkten Unterordnung zu blühen droht. Dem gegenüber steht das durch Mrs. Celia Leighton propagierte Frauenbild, das zumindest vordergründig der devoten Hausfrau zu gleichen scheint. Doch auch dieses sozialkonforme Verhalten ist – analog zu Essex – nicht mehr als eine Maske, unter der Mrs. Leighton vor allem ihre ‚männlichen‘ Interessen zu verstecken sucht. Obgleich sie nach außen hin soziale Anpassung demonstriert, ist Celia Leighton die eigentliche Strippenzieherin im Hintergrund, welche Lord Hamesthwaite, Mark Gurdon oder Gallia manipuliert und nach ihrem Willen agieren lässt. Das letzte dieser drei Gegensatzpaare beschäftigt sich mit der Gegenüberstellung der oberflächlich erscheinenden Gertrude Janion, deren Leben von Shopping, Klatsch und Partys bestimmt wird, und der hart arbeitenden Putzfrau Mrs. Miles. Während Gertrudes Faible für Kleider und Schminke sie als Repräsentantin der gelangweilten Masse an Mittelklasse-Frauen prädestiniert, deren einziges Erlebnis des Tages sich auf den Fünf-Uhr-Tee beschränkt, bleibt Mrs. Miles‘ Vorname nicht zuletzt deshalb unerwähnt, weil auch sie als Platzhalter für einen ganzen Typ Frau gesehen werden kann. Doch obgleich Mrs. Miles das Joch ihrer Klasse nicht abzuschütteln vermag und Krankheit, Armut und andauernde Arbeit ihre ständigen Begleiter sind, weist vor allem ihre Tugendhaftigkeit sie als

positives Exemplar der Arbeiterklasse aus. Gesund und arbeitsam ist es Mrs. Miles‘ Aufgabe, den Lebensunterhalt ihrer Familie zu bestreiten, während ihr Mann sich dem Alkohol hingibt. Die feministischen Züge der Autorin finden sich daher eher in dieser Frau der Arbeiterklasse denn in der gelangweilten Gertrude wider, was ein klassenübergreifendes Konzept suggeriert.

Gallia Hamesthwaite, die weibliche Protagonisten, erhält jedoch einen Sonderstatus. Dies liegt vor allem daran, dass sie entgegen dem der anderen sechs gezeichneten, konventionellen Frauenbild agiert und somit für ein neues Konzept Dowies steht. Begründet wird dies vor allem auf ihrer Entscheidung, sich nicht der Männerwelt und den von ihnen verteilten Aufgaben unterzuordnen, sondern mit Hilfe eugenischer Prinzipien zum öffentlichen Leben beizutragen. Der eugenische Feminismus, den Gallia lebt, beinhaltet dabei nicht nur das Lossagen von Liebe und Glück, sondern auch die Apotheose der Mutterrolle. Obgleich dies zu Anfang nicht zu Gallias bevorzugten Rollenkonzepten gehört, entschließt sie sich nach einem entsprechenden Reifeprozess doch für diese ‚Karriere.‘ Anhand körperlicher Anzeichen zum gesundheitlichen Zustand entscheidet sich Gallia daraufhin für eine Zweckehe mit Mark Gurdon, dessen Gene am besten zur Fortpflanzung taugen. Aufgrund dessen, dass Gallia eine gute Bildung genossen hat und schon zu Anfang ein reges Interesse an öffentlichen Problemen wie Prostitution zeigt, liefert der eugenische Feminismus ihr den Ausweg aus dem feminin-devoten Frauenbild hin zu einem aktiven, selbstbestimmten Leben – wenn auch dieses nur in Anbetracht ihrer gehobenen sozialen und finanziellen Lage möglich ist.

Nichtsdestotrotz propagiert Dowie mit dem Ende dieser Novelle eine Loslösung von der männlichen Bevormundung hin zu einem autonom verwalteten Leben, sodass die weibliche Teilnahme an öffentlichen Themen und Problemen wie dem Fortbestand des englischen Imperium wieder möglich wird. Gallia, ob in Form des Buchs oder Charakters, kann daher als Dowies Aufruf zur Emanzipation verstanden werden, als Leitfaden zur Selbstverwirklichung mittels eugenischen Feminismus. „I was speaking quite seriously, and if you think, you will see that such a scheme would be eminently rational,“<sup>1</sup> legt Dowie ihrer Protagonistin im entscheidenden Moment in den Mund und trifft zumindest im unsteten und auf Gesundheit fixierten Fin de Siècle einen Nerv.

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<sup>1</sup> Dowie, Ménie Muriel. *Gallia*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1895. p.174.