

## **Alien Women: Strong Victorian Binaries and Feminine Norms in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles**

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### **Abstract**

In the Victorian novel, gender-based social norms ordered appropriate behavior. Female bad actions were not only judged according to the law, but also according to the idealized conception of femininity. It was this absolute cultural measure and how far the woman violated the feminine norms of society, that defined her criminal act rather than the act itself or the injury her act strengthened. When a woman deviated from the Victorian norms of the ideal woman, she was branded and labeled. The fallen woman was viewed as a moral threat, an infectious disease. During the Victorian era, the view of women as being fallen or pure, good or bad became mixed with other notions of duality such as strange or familiar, and bestly or civilized. In this society the woman who was not considered to be completely pure and without blemish fell into the category of the fallen woman. This article examines the notion of the fallen woman in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. This novel narrates the fate of a young, single and innocent girl who is tempted by a man more highly placed than her socially. In this situation, the irreversible mistake brings shame and estrangement. Left alone in her sorrow and guilt, the woman sees no hope of a better life: death is the only solution to her difficult situation. The woman goes through a fall; a change in the state of being, a fall from innocence to social banishment.

**Key words:** Binaries; Feminine Norms; Victorian; Fallen Woman

### **Introduction**

Historical texts, the pictorial arts, and literature reveal that the Victorian society enforced a strict polarity on woman. There are lots of classifications, but all have the same meaning; angel/demon, virgin/whore, virtuous/fallen. The Victorians had very high expectations from women. They portray her role as a loyal and comforting wife, and loving mother who promoted peace and harmony within the family. The home became a holy place if she would follow those prescriptions about an ideal woman.

The Victorian polarity left no room for mistakes: a woman who was not considered to be completely pure and without blemish, fell into the category of the fallen woman. Whether she lost or was doubted of having lost her virginity, social condemnation was exactly the same. Victorians based their conviction of guilt on natural law: "A woman is physically changed when she has had sexual intercourse ". Consequently, the young girl who makes or is forced into a wrong has no future ahead of her: she will be looked down and pointed to as a warning for those who are still "pure". As Sally Mitchell writes "A woman who falls from her purity can never return to ordinary society." (1); her fall is incurable but only because society insists it so. The woman who falls from her purity repeats the sin which was dependable for Adam and Eve's exile from Eden. Eve was tempted by the Satan, and banished to live a life of suffering and trouble until death. Such is the fate of every fallen woman.

In England's Victorian period gender-based social norms dictated appropriate behavior, and when a woman deviated from the Victorian's ideals of perfect woman, she was stigmatized and separated from society.

Because female wrongdoing represented an infectious, the insulting woman is removed from respectable society. Female wrongdoing is represented as a threat of imbalance to an otherwise balanced society, and whether the woman is guilty of sexual misconduct or a criminal offense she is removed. Whether her releasing is by execution, natural death, institutionalization or transportation, each woman is removed from her family, and ultimately from society as a whole. This fact carries with it the hint that the woman who commits sin is viewed as beyond hope. She is not restored to her family, and she is not joined into society. Even if she is not punished by the justice system, she is punished by removal from the sphere of respectable society. The contamination that ruins her character is not allowed to trickle in one way or another into a society that prides itself on being morally pure.

Reading, understanding and accordingly appreciating Victorian novels require a deep awareness of the social and cultural beliefs and ideologies existing in that particular period of history. The ideal Victorian woman or the 'angel of the house' was defined by her role within the home because the family served as a shelter for the "preservation of traditional moral and religious values" (Zedner 12). The qualities valued by Victorian society in the ideal female were humility, innocence, purity, nobility, self-sacrifice, patience, simplicity, passivity, and altruism. The middle-class Victorian woman was to have no ambition other than to please others and care for her

family (Zedner 15). According to the Victorian ideal, a woman was to be "a monument of selflessness, with no existence beyond the loving influence she exuded as daughter, wife, and mother" (Auerbach 185).

The woman of the nineteenth century held a position of duality within Victorian culture. She was either Madonna or Magdalene, pure or ruined, familiar or foreign. Within this cultural construct, the criminal woman was defined largely by her leaving from the ideal Victorian woman who was passionless, pure, innocent, humble and self-sacrificing. Comparing the Victorian ideal, the woman who violated the idealized conception of womanhood, whether by sexual misbehavior or criminal act, was viewed as deviant and unnatural. She represented an unsettling strangeness that both reject and fascinated the Victorians.

During the nineteenth century morality helped to define what made a 'criminal act.' As a result, gender-based social norms greatly influenced societal attitudes towards female wrongdoing. Criminality was often measured by a failure to live up to the feminine ideal of the 'angel in the house.' When a woman violates societal expectations, she was judged far more cruelly than her male partner.

I will also argue that the woman who committed wrongdoing represented a disease to the Victorian mind. Her wrongdoing was viewed as a poison in society, and she was viewed as the medium of infection. The notion of the woman criminal as an infectious disease is reflected in the Victorian novel. She was condemned and banished because of her deviance from the Victorian notion of the ideal woman, and punished by removal from respectable society. Whether she died at the end of her story, was executed, transported, or sent to the mad-house, the criminal woman was obliterated, and the infectious disease was removed from society. The woman criminal was rarely, if ever, 'rehabilitated' and reintegrated into respectable society. She represented a rent in the social fabric of respectable society that could only be restored by her removal.

### **The Victorian Period**

In English literature history, the Victorian Period is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant stages; it roughly coincides with the reign of Queen Victoria who ruled over England from 1836 to 1901. A large number of talented novel writers appeared time such as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, the Bronte Sisters, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy and so on. These famous literary masters created a great many of glorious works in their literary career, and almost all of their masterpieces were well known by the people such as Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

The Victorian Period is also named as the period of critical realism. "The critical realists described with much vividness and great artistic skill the chief traits of the English society and great artistic skill the chief traits of the English society and criticized the capitalist system from a democratic viewpoint" (Liu 261).

Among these famous literary critical realists, there are several woman novelists began to appear in England during the second half of the 18th century. But in the 19th century, some gifted woman novelists made such contributions to the development of the English novel that they have justifiably won their places in the front ranks of the brilliant realists headed by Dickens and Thackeray. These remarkable woman novelists are Jane Austen, the Bronte Sisters, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot.

In the Victorian period, there are some other remarkable critical novelists, and Thomas Hardy is one of the most talented novel writers of them. He was born near Dorchester, the area that later became the famous 'Wessex' in many of his famous works. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is his masterpiece, told readers a series of story about the heroine Tess's tragic destiny. Tess, a simple, innocent and faithful country girl, is at odds with the world which invents trains and machines as well as the nouveau riche likes Alec, she finally becomes a tragic victim of the modern society. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is one typical Wessex novel of Thomas Hardy's most magnificent works, there is an apparent nostalgic touch in his description of the simple and beautiful though primitive rural life environment. And in work, the author expressed an obvious sympathetic attitude towards those traditional characters especially the heroine Tess. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* known as 'novel of character and environment' is the most representative of Thomas Hardy as both a naturalistic and a critical realist writer.

Thomas Hardy, novelist and poet, is one of the representatives of English critical realism at the turn of the 19th century. Thomas Hardy wrote prodigiously, his principal works are the Wessex Novels just as the novels describing the characters and environment of his native countryside, and his novels have for their setting the agricultural region of the southern counties of England. He truthfully depicts the impoverishment and decay of small farmers who became hired field hands and roamed the country in search of seasonal jobs. In his Wessex novels, there is an apparent nostalgic touch in his description of the simple and beautiful though primitive rural

life, which was gradually declining and disappearing as England marched into an industrial country, and with those traditional characters he is sympathetic. Among his famous novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* could be regarded as the summit of his realism.

Among the numerous studies on the representation of women in Victorian fiction, certain texts are noticeable: Marlene Springer's "Angels and other Women", Patricia Stubbs' "Women and Fiction: Feminism in the Novel", and Merryn Williams' "Women in the English Novel". These works have classified and captured the essence of ideologies and beliefs existing in the Victorian period.

Weber (2006) examines how some professional women writers were able to show the degree to which conversations regarding sex and gender were taking place at the end of the nineteenth century. The author notes that in Victorian literature, the cultural mandate that good women be good mothers underwent multiple displacements.

I believe that Thomas Hardy adopted a challenging stance towards the institutionalized codes of the time regarding the ideals of femininity which resulted in presenting him as one of the forerunners of "New Woman" fiction. His revolutionary attitudes are tangible in his fictional prose where he tries to challenge the Victorian ideals of femininity. By creating non-conformist heroines, Hardy took the first step to move away from the institutionalized codes of the time on behalf of femininity. In effect, Hardy attempts to challenge the Victorian ideological discourse of femininity through focusing on his fictional women's flaws which comes into conflict with the time's conception of a pure woman. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), as a typical example of his fiction, is representative of Hardy's vision towards the Victorian ideal of femininity through the "Fallen" Tess.

#### **Tess of the d'Urbervilles**

Tess Durbeyfield (Tess of the d'Urbervilles) is the clearest representation of the fallen woman's fate. Hardy begins with her first fall and guides her through every miserable consequence of social condemnation to her final death. Tess's original fall determines a continuous downfall for her: it causes her separation from her legal husband and a return to her tempter which leads to murder. But as the subtitle ("A Pure Woman") suggests, Hardy's goal is to prove that Tess is pure, by emphasizing that her desire is separate from her physical self.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a word that functions as a chain of events which are complexly connected. In *Tess*, Hardy presents a superior human and realistic character by emphasizing her beauty, her sensitivity and her loving nature. Yet these qualities can be found in the average country maiden. Tess, however is superior to the women of her class by her intelligence (she has reached the highest level of education available to her; and her desire for knowledge is visible in her relationship with Angel), her pride and honor', her individuality and independence. Tess is different. This is displayed by the narrator, and it is voiced by several characters. Her father calls her "queer" and her mother thinks her an "odd maid" because, contrary to the average sixteen year old, she is not interested in plans to capture a husband. Alec himself says that she is "mighty sensitive for cottage girl". Tess has her own code of morality and honor, one which her mother cannot understand. She refuses to kiss Alec and later to marry him, because she does not love him.

Unfortunately the qualities which give Tess attractiveness are precisely those which cause her suffering. Tess experiences three falls in which she moves from the state of innocence to that of non innocence. Her quality of being unsuspecting and her beauty are responsible for the first: Alec's seduction. Secondly as a consequence of her truthfulness and sense of justice, Angel deserts Tess when he discovers her past. Thirdly, she unknowingly reconverts Alec from a preacher to a dandy, thereby causing her eventual return to him as his mistress. Moreover, due to her pride and independence, Tess prefers the pain of vigorous physical labor and humiliation rather than ask either man for assistance. Each of Tess's falls is preceded by her refusal or hesitation to do what others want her to do, and followed by hardship and suffering as a result of her inevitable yielding. As Mary Childers writes, Tess "always does what she says she will not do ... she is proven to be one of those women who say no until they are forced to say yes". Tess's falls and troubles are due to her inability' to state her own will. Because of her goodness and her "caring for those she loves, Tess becomes, their victim.

Tess Durbeyfield'S most remarkable quality is her strong sense of family responsibility which in turn causes her whole tragedy. Tess is not only a motherly figure to her siblings; she is also parental figure to her mother and father. In the fourth chapter, after having put the children to sleep, Tess goes in search of her parents and brings them home. She is critical and blaming of her parents' behavior, and they feel their shame in her attendance: "...hardly was a reproachful flash from Tess's dark eyes, needed to make her father and mother rise from their

seats, hastily finish their ale, and descend the stairs behind her...". (p.66). She is the hard worker, the responsible one, and the only one with a sense of direction, order, and morality in the Durbeyfield household.

Tess Durbeyfield's initial fall is merely due to unfortunate circumstances. She had resisted Alec's advances for a long time. She would never have accepted a ride home on Alec's horse if it had not been an escape from the Amazon sisters' aggression. The seduction or rape itself is omitted from the 'narrative'. The narrator speaks compassionately and lovingly of Tess and wonders why she is doomed to such a fate:

Hardy lets the natural setting itself present the fall, which is much more effective and artistic than if it had been narrated. Moreover, the setting reflects the internal state of the narrator and of the characters. The fall occurs in an atmosphere of confusion. "The Chase was wrapped in thick darkness" (p.118) and the growing fog "enveloped them" (p.114). Such words as "wrapped" and "enveloped" suggest Tess and Alec's inevitable union in this setting of doom. Furthermore, Alec loses his way because of the blackness of the night, just as he loses control over his passion for Tess. Tess's condition is also in accordance with the dark and foggy atmosphere. The narrator stresses her "absent-mindedness" and "sleepiness" (p.114); "she was inexpressibly weary" and "overcome by actual drowsiness" (p.115). And, Tess is actually asleep when Alec d'Urbervilles approaches her. Therefore, Tess's powers of resistance are not at work. This point and the whole scene in fact, are comparable to Maggie Tulliver's boat ride with Stephen Guest. Like Stephen, Alec half willingly and half unwillingly loses his way. And, both men take advantage of the woman's lack of resistance. During the fall, Tess's will and body are dissociated or rather both are dormant. Alec takes her by force: Furthermore, a field worker comments later on this incident: "'A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't, I reckon. There were they that heard a sobbing one night last year in The Chase; and it mid ha' gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along '" (p. 140).

The fact remains, however, that their relationship continues for several weeks after that night in The Chase. "She had dreaded him, winced before him, yielded to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away" (p.130). Her confusion, together with her expected gratitude for helping her family, had led her to comply for awhile. Tess's relationship with Alec can only be explained by saying that she remained in that state of dazedness and confusion for several weeks. But, when she awakens from her daze and returns to clear consciousness, she knows that she must leave him because she does not love him. She would not marry him (if he had asked) to save her reputation. She can only detest herself for having shattered her ideal.

After her first fall, and because of it, Tess creates another ideal for herself: she resolves never to marry. Tess's confession of her past to Angel is a reliving or a repetition of her first fall in more ways than one. In fact, her marriage can be seen as her second fall because of its tragic consequences and because it is a breaking of her second ideal. In this second fall, the conflict between will and body might best be interpreted as reason versus emotion. Despite her Love for Angel, Tess does not want to marry him because she fears a tragic outcome. Tess's resolution to refuse him is evident in her attempt to convince Angel that the other girls (Izz, Marian, Retty) are more worthy of him than she is. She confesses her discordance from the d'Urbervilles line as a reason why he should not marry her, thereby half confessing her affair with Alec by obliquely preparing him to hear it.

After much persuasion from Angel, aided especially by her own "appetite for joy" and by her inability to accept that any other woman might have him Tess accepts Angel's proposal of marriage. But she consents for the sake of Angel's happiness: " 'it is only your' wanting me very much, and being hardly able to keep alive without me, whatever my offences, that would make me feel I ought to say I will' .. (p. 254).

The third fall, which is a direct repetition and continuation of the first, consists of Tess's return to Alec. The prelapsarian interval is identical to that of the initial seduction: Alec agonize her continuously, and she resists, preferring the hard life at Flintcomb Ash to being controlled again. In the pattern of repetition, Mr. Durbeyfield's death replaces Prince's, and the family is left homeless. Not only does Tess feel responsible for members of her family; she also feels that her presence in Marlott is the cause of their situation. Alec takes advantage of Tess's weakness for her family. In fact, Alec d'Urberville and Joan Durbeyfield seem to work together in pushing Tess downhill. Joan complains, " 'O, Tess, what's the use of your playing at marrying gentlemen, if it leaves us like this!'" (p. 447), which echoes her earlier statement: "'why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead of thinking yourself?'"(p.130). Under all this pressure, it is inevitable that Tess yield to Alec. Besides, she has given herself up the good of others; force of repetition makes it easier for her to submit this time. Tess has lost hope of a happy life for herself; therefore, she might as well sacrifice herself once more for her family's comfort.

Tess's murder of Alec can be seen as her last fall. It is important to consider the murder as the only act that she ever commits for herself: " I have done it ... I owed it to you, and to myself, Angel' ". (p.414). In spite of it being an immediate and instinctive act, it is important to point out that Tess had "willed" to do this for a long time. The scene where Tess hits Alec with her working glove (p.411) is a foreshadowing of the murder.

The murder is a justification for the years that she was considered as "fallen" by others and by herself. By causing that stain on the ceiling, hers (the stain of infamy) has been cancelled in her eyes. It is important to note that during the interval between the murder and the capture, Tess is calm, relaxed, and no longer feels guilty - she has obtained her liberation. Her living days were sacrificed for others. By killing the originator of her fall, however, Tess gives up the rest of her life in order to unchain herself from that socially designated label of a "fallen woman". Tess's act is conscious, deliberate, and to a certain extent prearranged (" I feared long ago ... that I might do it Someday for the trap he set for me in my simple youth ... ' ". (p. 474).

Tess does not deceive herself into believing (as Angel does) that they will escape the law and live happily together. Rather, she awaits her punishment and she is resigned to it. This is clear from her unwillingness to move on; she is tired of walking and hiding. She has done this most of her life, and now by her assertive act she has put an end to it. Her sleeping on the altar at Stonehenge is symbolic both of her sacrifice to others in the past and of her resignation to sacrifice the rest of her life for her liberation. Tess dies a sacrifice, just as she lived a sacrifice. This is why she feels at home at Stonehenge (" 'so now I am at home' ". (p. 427).

There is an essential question that every reader of Tess of the d'Urbervilles must, at least, attempt to answer. The question arises from the novel's subtitle: is Tess a, "pure woman"? Certain critics have argued that a fornicator, unmarried mother, mistress and murderess cannot be called "pure". I believe, however, that murder is the only act that Tess Durbeyfield is guilty of; because it is her only willed act; it is the only time that Tess takes the situation into her own hands. She is not guilty of her sexual relationship with Alec d'Urbervilles, and the ground for her purity lies in what I have mentioned previously: the dissociation of body and will. The body which Alec loves is dissociated from Tess's will. Thus, the distinction is between the physical (sexual) and the spiritual individual.

Tess is a victim of circumstances, social convention, fate, and her own nature (love, passivity, guilt). As a result of the first accident with the horse, her two selves (Tess the individual/Tess the relative: daughter, wife, mistress) have been dissociated. Tess has never existed for herself. Her passivity has caused her to abandon her "self" to others: to her family first, and then to the two men in her life. Her body was given to Alec. And, her mind was given to Angel. Ironically, her yielding to one man ruins her further with respect to the other. That is to say, her previous experience with Alec destroys her hope for happiness with Angel; and the yielding of her mind to Angel contributes to her second submission to Alec. In chapter 46, Tess unknowingly succeeds in reconverting Alec from preacher to the original dandy. It is Angel's philosophy transmitted to Alec through Tess that converts him. Tess is merely a medium separate from her own will. Even Alec says, "'That clever fellow (Angel) little thought that, by telling her those things, he might be paving my way back to her!'" (p. 403). Thus, both men work against each other, but it is the woman who pays.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles provides different reactions to the fallen woman. Joan Durbeyfield's response is a mixture of anger, disappointment and indifference. She cannot understand why Tess left her advantageous relationship at Tantridge. For other country girls Tess's misfortune would have been just another passing incident. They would have married the same man or someone else and continued a normal life. But for Tess, the seduction is a major and tragic event. Her fellow field workers seem to be friendly and sympathetic; they are sorry that it should have happened to Tess of all women. Yet, the fact that they joke about it and sing ballads that reflect Tess's situation, suggests that they share Joan's view: "'T is nater.", after all'"(p. 131). One more child does not bother her, so why should it bother Tess?

Exile is the inevitable fate of the woman who has failed to live up to society's expectation. Tess is unable to remain in Marlott as a result of her fall and pregnancy. She feels the need to avoid mankind in order to hide her shame. At first she remains at home and people begin to suspect that she has gone away. In the fields and on the road, "her bonnet is pulled so far over her brow that none of her face is disclosed" (p. 138), and she later disfigures herself in order to avoid insulting remarks. Tess's existence consists of a continuous moving on finding isolation only temporarily. There is no long term "harbor" for the fallen woman. Tess's walking (she does so much of it) is an appropriate metaphor for her fate: "that long and stony highway" is endless until death.

Furthermore, the fallen woman has a continuous fear that her past will be discovered. The man from Tantridge is a good example of the past haunting Tess. He first insults her at the inn (p. 274) and is repaid by Angel's blow. Later, he frightens Tess on the road to Flintcomb Ash. Ironically, he ends up being her employer, and continues to give her a hard time. This man is evidence of the hardships and humiliations that the woman must endure because of her past. The fallen woman is not free because her past can always be discovered; and discovery is repetition of her fall.

Fear of discovery in turn provokes isolation. Both Talbothays and Flintcomb Ash are isolated from the more populated world both provide temporary protection. Tess never tries to find work in a more inhabited or active area. She always seeks outdoor physical and strenuous labor as opposed to indoor work. Work itself is not only a means of survival and independence; it is also a form of alienation and punishment. This is especially visible at Flintcomb Ash, where Tess seems to seek self-torture through work.

When Tess moves to an isolated farm as a milkmaid, she meets and falls in love with Angel Clare, the son of a middle-class clergyman. He subsequently persuades and weds her. On their wedding night, Tess reveals her past to him. Although he tells her he can forgive her, he can no longer love her: "I do forgive you, but forgiveness is not all.' 'And [do you] love me?' [Tess asks in return] To this question he did not answer" (T 260). Angel leaves her, without making adequate provision for her. Heartlessly, he tells her: "If I can bring myself to bear [the shame of your fall]—if it is desirable, possible—I will come to you. But until I come to you it will be better that you should not try to come to me." (T281). Tess is the victim of the anti-female prejudice common in Victorian society. She is stigmatized and ostracized by her husband as well as by society.

The law, coupled with the construction of cultural values, places Tess in an impossible situation. Alec reappears, convincing her that if she will live with him he will provide with her now widowed mother and her siblings. After more than a year's silence from Angel (who has gone to South America), and because of her sense of responsibility to her family, Tess hesitantly agrees to become Alec's mistress. When Angel appears to reclaim her, having decided that he can love her after all, Tess, in a passion, murders Alec in order to be reunited with Angel. It is for this crime that she ultimately pays with her life.

Tess shares none of the negative traits evident in other women criminals in Victorian literature. In fact, Tess "surpasses the conventional woman in looks, intelligence and charm. But because she is working-class and can be labeled as promiscuous, she pays with her life for breaking the law" (Morris 128). While this may be true in a general sense, the fact of the matter is that Tess is executed for her crime of murder, not for her crime of sexual error. The story of Tess "typifies the plight of physically and psychologically battered women who turn to violence as a last resort" (Morris 128).

Tess's position of social inferiority is reinforced by her economic dependence on the men who abuse and take advantage of her. Alec takes advantage of both Tess's innocence and his position of power over her when she is a servant in his household (Morris 134). Later, Angel rejects and deserts her, not making adequate provision for her. As well, Angel, "through his moral rigidity," not only refuses to protect her, but also stigmatizes her through his cowardly act (Morris 130). This places Tess in a desperate financial situation that results in her accepting Alec's offer to take care of Tess's mother and siblings in return for which she must consent to becoming his mistress. Alec reminds Tess, not only of her inferior social position, but of her subservient position in a male dominated society: "T was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife, you are mine!" (T358).

Tess is victimized because she is isolated, has nowhere to turn, and has no protector. Tess's story is tragic, not only because she is victimized by the society that judges her both in the moral and the legal sense, but also because she pays with her life for responding to that victimization with violence (Morris 139). Furthermore, "Tess [...] must die on the scaffold because she has no remorse for her crime. She is not sorry Alec is dead and she does not regret killing him" (Morris 141). In an attempt to regain control over her life, Tess commits murder, thereby effectively sealing her fate.

### **Conclusion**

Thomas Hardy gives a faithful representation of the values and prejudices of his society. The woman who falls pays with a life of hardship and suffering because society does not permit her to return to a normal life. Tess Durbeyfield, who returns to her tempter, is an example of what happens to girls who were wrong. If they are forbidden to get back on their feet, the only options are early death or a life of sin.

It is clear that Victorians regarded female wrongdoing through the lens of social acceptability. Gender-based social norms dictated appropriate behavior, and when a woman deviated from the Victorian construction of the ideal woman, she was stigmatized and separated from society.

Because female wrongdoing represented an infectious disease, the offending woman is removed from respectable society. Female wrongdoing is represented as a threat of instability to an otherwise balanced society, and whether the woman is guilty of sexual misconduct or a criminal offense, in order to re-establish the social order she is removed. It is significant that the female characters are ultimately obliterated from 'respectable society' at the end of their stories. Whether her releasing is by execution, natural death, institutionalization or deportation, each woman is removed from her family, and ultimately from society as a whole. This fact carries with it the implication that the woman who commits wrongdoing is viewed as beyond hope. She is not restored to her family, and she is not reintegrated into society. Even if she is not punished by the justice system, she is punished by removal from the sphere of respectable society.

The labeling of women who do wrong underscores the fact that women were not viewed in terms of the wrong done or the crime committed, but rather in terms of how far they deviated from the Victorian conception of the ideal woman. However, regardless of how female wrongdoing was labeled, whether the woman was viewed as fallen, foreign, mad, or bad, without a doubt, she held a fascination for the Victorians.

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