Petticoat Government: Female Rule in British Fiction, 1870-1890

By

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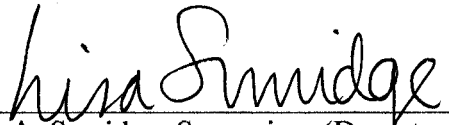

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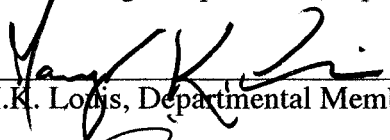

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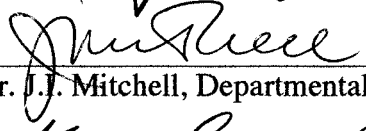

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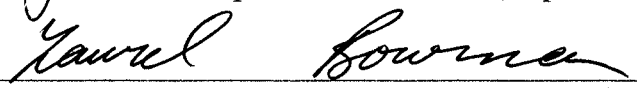

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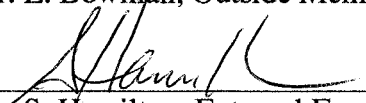

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes constructions of women holding political power in British fiction from 1870-1890. It focuses in particular on four speculative fictions that depict women ruling: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), Walter Besant's *The Revolt of Man* (1882), H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), and Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett's *New Amazonia* (1889). These texts not only manifest their authors' particular socio-political contexts, but also reveal a pervasive construction of female rule as sexual, unnatural, and destabilizing—a construction that is particularly significant in a period when women were making persistent and successful assaults on male power monopolies, and a woman also happened to be on the British throne. As speculative fictions, these texts also reveal Victorian emotional reactions to changing power dynamics.

The four texts here studied intersect with late-Victorian feminism and the reactions against it—the highly complex variety of disparate and intersecting political, legal, occupational, intellectual, religious, and scientific movements for and against women's empowerment. Bulwer-Lytton's wish-fulfillment vision of the subjection of dominant women presents a fantasy of female rule as an impossibility, since the biological clocks of his large and intelligent amazons drive them to 'naturally' submit to men. Besant's speculative fiction essentially serves as a cathartic nightmare fantasy—a safe medium through which to face, ridicule, and dispel Victorian fears of women's increasing political power. Female biology on one hand and male divine authority on the other hand dispel the nightmare of female rule. In Haggard's fantasy, female rule is characterized as illegitimate, tyrannical, and amoral, but also strong and competent. His

depiction indicates a cultural shift towards growing acceptance of women's political power. Finally, Corbett (the sole feminist author studied here) presents an image of a progessive state ruled by women in order to contest male supremacy and validate women's inclusion in politics. Although few of these texts are extensively studied today, they all have considerable value as speculative fictions that reveal Victorian emotional and political reactions to the concept of women in government.

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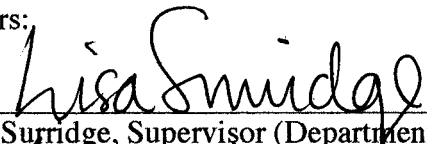

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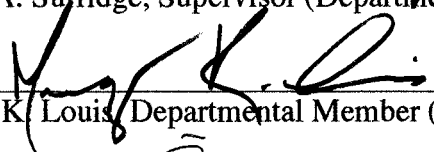

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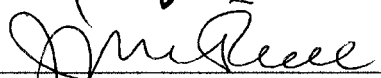

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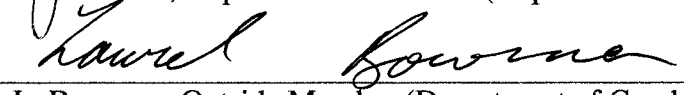

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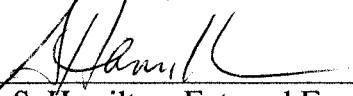

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people provided exceptional support and guidance to me in researching and writing this dissertation. My supervisor, Dr. Lisa Surridge, gave me constant encouragement and invaluable research guidance and feedback, as did my other departmental committee members, Dr. Margot Louis and Dr. Judith Mitchell. Dr. Laurel Bowman, from the department of Greek and Roman Studies, provided additional feedback. My original supervisor, Dr. Nelson Smith, gave me much needed early encouragement and ideas as I began the process. The British Columbia Institute of Technology generously gave me both financial assistance and time off during which to complete the dissertation, while the University of Victoria graciously supported my early years with a Graduate Fellowship. Finally, my gratitude goes to my partner Jeff Miller, whose ongoing encouragement and support have made this dissertation possible.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes constructions of women in political power in British fiction from 1870-1890, the period (after the start of "first-wave feminism" in the 1840s) when the feminist movement became a powerful cultural force. In this analysis, I focus in particular on four speculative fictions: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), Walter Besant's *The Revolt of Man* (1882), H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), and Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett's *New Amazonia* (1889). My premise is that these speculative fictions, which in different ways depict women ruling, reveal a tripartite focus on sexuality, authority and gendered spheres. These three foci, furthermore, not only manifest these authors' particular socio-political contexts, but also reveal a pervasive construction of female rule as sexual, unnatural, and destabilizing—a construction that is particularly significant in a period when women were making persistent and successful assaults on male power monopolies, and a woman also happened to be on the British throne.

The first of these foci is the relationship between sexual and political dominance. All of these authors share a recognition of the centrality of sexual dominance in gender relations: the three male authors predicate the attainment of female rule on female sexual dominance, and the female author predicates female rule on both sexual equality and female maternal superiority[1]. More particularly, the male authors not only link female

[1] It happens that the male authors studied here express anxiety about female domination, while the sole female author supports female power as healthy and desirable. However, this division of opinion does not, of course, mean that all nineteenth-century British men dreaded female rule or that all nineteenth-century British women embraced it. Historical figures like John Stuart Mill and Margaret Oliphant clearly illustrate that many men advocated increased power for women, while many women actively opposed women's political participation. Thus, the reference to the "male authors" or the "female author" throughout this dissertation are shorthand references to these four authors alone.

rule to female sexual domination, they also represent such dominance as both unnatural and destructive. In different ways, they strive to restore the 'natural' order of male dominance and female submission, and their sexually dominant female characters often ultimately abdicate power, driven by their wombs to submit to men and to reassume their primary reproductive roles. Furthermore, these texts frequently reduce feminism and women's rights to the "right" to pursue a husband. The lone feminist author, Corbett, struggles against such constructions, although her text similarly reveals anxiety over issues of women's sex drive and the common belief that women's reproductive function left them unable to fulfil any other roles, especially those which encroached on male public power. Corbett supports sexual equality and ultimately advocates co-government, yet her fictional society gives women a political power monopoly based on the same reproductive theories that force women to abdicate in the other texts; her New Amazonians insist that women's special maternalism is the justification for female governance. Recognizing a sexual basis to power dynamics, Corbett's fictional society requires the abstinence of elected officials, thus preventing any possibility of a sexual power struggle in either bedroom or parliament by sidelining the female desire which undoes female rule in the other texts. Significantly, given the idealization of the maternal Angel in the House in Victorian culture, the three male authors eschew any acknowledgement of the maternal as a source of effective power. They either associate maternalism with feminine submission (Lytton and Haggard) or reject the notion of a universal and positive maternalism altogether (Besant). Behind these texts lurks the dual image of the Victorian mother—sometimes idealized as the Angel in the House and sometimes feared as a dominating force.

The second focus in these female rule fictions concerns the contested issue of female authority: Did it exist? If so, what were its sources, how was it achieved, and was it deserved? During this period, women were challenging male authority in multiple arenas (legal, political, economic, intellectual, scientific, and spiritual), and many men were rejecting the idea that women could wield authority or were entitled to it. Indeed, ability and entitlement are the common threads running through many of these texts as they speculate on the issue of authority in female rule. Are women able to achieve intellectual advancement equal to men? Can they govern well? Are women entitled to power or even equality? Women's abilities to exercise various traditional forms of authority—political, physical, intellectual, and spiritual—are explored in all four texts. In the first three texts, paradoxes result as the authors both acknowledge and undermine women's authority in these areas. Corbett, on the other hand, struggles against stereotypes of male authority and swings the pendulum vehemently to the other extreme: female 'natural' authority and a stereotype of male corruption and incompetence. Many of these authors, like their Victorian contemporaries, were conflicted on the issue of women's rights, recognizing the necessity of some reforms yet fearing the collapse of male power and social and political stability. Their representations of women's (in)ability to wield authority illustrate this internal conflict. Crucial to all four texts is the issue of entitlement—how do ruling women earn their power and do they deserve it? Is female authority 'natural'? The prevalence of these issues reflects Victorian fears of women usurping male jobs, votes, and legislative powers and the frequent contrast by Victorian authorities such as Darwin between the numerous 'great men' and the few or nonexistent 'great women.' This obsession with naturalizing and proving male authority and

simultaneously delegitimating female authority furthermore reveals widespread fears of imperial and economic decline—a calamity which anti-suffrage politicians warned would be greatly hastened by the chaos resulting from female suffrage. The male authors emphasize usurpation, misgovernment, and regression in their depictions of female authority, sending a clear message that female authority is both unnatural and undeserved. This notion that women misuse power is ancient, as noted in Joan Bamberger's study of myths about matriarchal societies. Corbett attempts to escape this trap with a reversal—she asks what have men done to deserve their power? By turning the tables, she contrasts her image of successful female rule with descriptions of the suffering and chaos produced by male authority through the ages.

The final focus of these texts is gender boundaries. How does female rule alter or destroy divisions between public and private spheres, between male and female roles? This issue of gender boundaries reveals the most diversity between writers, as each illustrates his/her individual stance on the Victorian middle-class ideology of female domesticity and male public action. Although the fictions by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Haggard ultimately support this ideology, each author takes a different approach to such issues as the sexual segregation of labour, the construction of "home," the notion of female indirect influence, and the economics involved in paid versus unpaid work. However, for all of them female rule represents a contestation of Victorian gender roles; female rule is seen as a *de facto* rejection of the separate spheres.

My goal throughout this analysis of female rule texts is not only to illuminate how these texts reveal their socio-political contexts, but also to reveal how these speculative fictions illustrate emotional reactions to the possibility of female leadership. These

texts—especially those that vehemently reject the effectiveness or validity of female rule—indicate (however indirectly) the growing power of feminism and the growing anxiety over women's increasing power. I believe speculative fiction has special social and aesthetic value because it provides a window into both the dreams and nightmares that arise in times of heightened socio-political change. Speculative fiction is often more illustrative of what the writers *felt* about new ideas than what they rationally *thought* about them. Thus, although the texts by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Corbett in particular reveal strong didactic tendencies, their speculations are emotional explorations of changing gender relations and not simply tracts taking sides in the women's rights debate. This twenty-year period in Britain included massive changes in many areas. One such area was power relations between the sexes, and this was the focus of these four speculative fictions. Thus, all four texts interested me as early emotional speculations on the 'what if' of female rule, regardless of each author's ideological stance on the issue. What these speculative fictions reveal—about their political moments, about emotional reactions to the growing possibility of female rule, and about early stereotypes of female authority—has value to feminist, literary, and political studies today.

Having loosely grouped these four texts under the genre category of 'speculative fiction', it is also important to note genre differences between them. Three of the four texts (those by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Corbett) fall into the broad category of utopian fiction, although each represents a different sub-genre within that category. Bulwer-Lytton's text is typically categorized as an anti-utopia—a text that creates an ostensibly 'ideal' society in order to critique the very notion of a perfect society (and the concept of social engineering) as either attainable or desirable. Besant's text is a role-

reversal dystopia—a satiric vision of an undesirable future that would occur if gender roles were reversed. Corbett's text is the closest to a classic utopia—a society created not primarily as an ideal but rather as a means of critiquing aspects of the author's society. Since the primary goal of most utopian texts is didactic rather than aesthetic, these three texts in particular can be partially read as explicit political responses to the context of the growing feminist movement—although they must also be read aesthetically as speculative fiction (in this case the imaginative exploration of different gender power relations). Over 150 utopian texts representing various sub-genres were published between 1870-1890 in Britain and America alone, evidence of the popularity of the genre at the time[2]. Haggard's novel, on the other hand, is an adventure fantasy or romance rather than a utopian text. Thus, his goal is more aesthetic than didactic, a complex emotional fantasy of gender power relations rather than the complex political exploration of gender power seen in the other texts. However, despite these significant genre variations and authorial goals, all four of these speculative texts respond politically, emotionally, and imaginatively to the growing possibility of women's political power in Victorian England. Thus, these texts not only at times manifest what their authors felt or thought about the growing feminist movement in late-Victorian England, they also reveal broader social hopes and fears about gender power. As speculative fiction—whether satiric, utopian, or fantastic—these texts both embody and release society's dreams and nightmares for popular consumption and catharsis.

This study begins with the historical overview of women's power in Britain from 1870-1890. This opening chapter provides a backdrop for the chapters that follow, by

illuminating the gender power struggles that helped produce each text analyzed. Although each subsequent chapter also further places each text in its particular context, this opening chapter provides an overview of the broader feminist movement encompassing battles on many fronts. Once broadly contextualized, each text is then analyzed in individual chapters, organized chronologically. Chapter 2 (Amazonian Abdication: *The Coming Race*) analyzes Bulwer-Lytton's 1871 satire of an underworld society in which highly powerful seven-foot women sexually pursue men but miraculously abdicate their dominance upon marriage. Bulwer-Lytton's text is a fascinating blend of ridicule, respect, fear, and fantasy, as he creates an all-powerful 'Girl of the Period' to act out a dominance-submission fantasy in marked contrast to his own volatile and unsuccessful marriage. Chapter 2 ('Miss'rule: *The Revolt of Man*) examines Besant's 1882 role-reversal fiction, which he sets 200 years in a future when women have received the vote and then took over the English Parliament. Despite Besant's frequent advocacy of working women's rights during his lifetime, he was firmly against women's suffrage and entry into universities and professions. Although his role-reversal reveals some moments of conflict between his misogyny and his sympathy for the plight of poor women, his text is primarily a diatribe against women's entitlement to any authority outside the home. Even though his didacticism is clear throughout the text, his hyperbolic ridicule of women in power reveals an undercurrent of fear over the rapid changes in gender dynamics during the period. Chapter 3 ("*She* Who Must Be Obeyed": Haggard's Imperial Queen) explores the 1887 romance fantasy *She*. Although Haggard's novel has moments of the satire found in Bulwer-Lytton's and Besant's texts, it is a far more serious

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[2] See Lyman Tower Sargent's *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1985: An Annotated*

exploration of women in power, drawing on the author's subconscious fears and desires. Haggard's queen may often be criticized in his novel, but she is never ridiculed. His fantasy of female rule blends fear and desire, perhaps indicating growing acceptance of (or resignation to) women's increasing access to power. Chapter 4 (Idealizing Female Rule: Corbett's *New Amazonia*) rather fittingly gives the last word to a feminist 1889 utopia in which women successfully rule Ireland. Corbett at times distances herself from the actions of her feminist utopian state and ultimately advocates shared government between men and women, and her vision of absolute female rule attempts to counter Victorian stereotypes of female incompetence. In concluding, I address the political and aesthetic influence of these texts—the legacy they represent to constructions of women in politics today.

Bibliography.

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALIZING FEMALE RULE: WOMEN'S POWER IN BRITAIN, 1870-1890

Introduction

Considering how few female politicians and leaders currently exist in the world, Victorian fears of a hostile female takeover over a century ago now seem paranoid. Yet those fears were mainstream. They appeared in parliamentary debates and popular magazines, and although women's demands for power were often ridiculed or dismissed, an undercurrent of fear runs through British reactions to feminism. Subsequent chapters on each female rule text will provide in-depth analyses of their historical contexts, but this chapter identifies key women's power movements in the 1870s and 1880s that inform all of the texts. Four areas of women's power struggle—political, domestic, intellectual/spiritual, and physical—especially influenced fictional speculations on female rule. The section on political power explores the rise in women's political involvement along with the implications of the actual rule of Queen Victoria. Women's domestic power movements of the time strove for marriage law reforms and also an increase in women's employment options outside the home. These two areas of social change especially threatened male economic dominance, since marriage laws were changing to allow wives to hold separate property, and women were increasingly securing jobs in previously male-dominated fields. The section on intellectual and spiritual power analyzes movements for women's advanced education alongside concepts of women's

moral superiority to illustrate contemporary fears of women's psychological power—the power of knowledge and moral influence. The section on physical power explores contemporary concerns over women's health, strength, and violence that appear in many of these female rule texts. Finally, I have included a fifth section on the scientific attempts to 'prove' male physical and intellectual superiority and hence justify male political dominance. The historical background in these five sections provides a vital backdrop to my later discussions of how Victorian concepts of female sexuality, authority, and gendered roles and spheres influenced these early speculations on female governance. The theme of gender reversal appears in many of the sections below, usually in the form of cartoons satirizing women in men's roles, women in men's jobs, and women dominating submissive men. This reversal—a kind of worried ridicule—illustrates the pervasive fears of female domination during the late nineteenth century.

Political Power: Public Women, Suffrage, and Queen Victoria

Female rule was both a quest and a reality between 1870 and 1890, as women struggled for political involvement during the period and a woman sat on the British throne. This political situation provides the most significant context for female rule fiction. Two of the writers, Haggard and Corbett, show ambivalence or hostility to Victoria's reign in their depictions of female rule, while Corbett and Besant take female suffrage as the catalytic event in their opposing versions of female rule. Even Lytton's text, which depicts female domination rather than female political rule, clearly responded to the beginnings of the female suffrage movement in the late 1860s. Thus, reactions to

both women's pursuit of political power and Victoria's rule provide a crucial backdrop to these texts.

Victorian Women in Public: The Rise of Political Involvement

Victorian instances of localized female political leadership are far less recognized or publicized than the suffrage campaign or Victoria's own rule; however, they are crucial to women's increasing political power during the period. As Jane Rendall points out, the modern historical focus on the female suffrage movement during the nineteenth century "has meant the obscuring of women's broader political culture and history" (1). Women increased both their political awareness and service between 1870-1890, especially in the area of local politics. Although suffrage was still a long way off, the influential entrances of women into other aspects of politics paved the way both for national suffrage and for women's involvement in politics in general in the following century. This influence took the form of women's inclusion in local politics (municipal elections, school boards and poor law boards and positions) and in party politics (liberal and conservative women's associations).

A very significant event for women occurred in 1869: women ratepayers received the right to vote in municipal elections. Although this was quickly limited to unmarried women through a court ruling in 1872, such women still "formed some 12 per cent to 25 per cent of the municipal electorate by the late 1880s" (Hollis "Women in Council" 193). However, although women could use this local suffrage to sway local politics, they

themselves could not be elected to municipal councils until 1907.[3] Although women were thus essentially barred from council office during the period, they became fixtures on school boards and poor law boards. The Education Act of 1870 established school boards, and women could vote for and serve on them (Hollis "Women in Council" 193). Such elected positions required no special marital status, training or investment of money, and thus a wide spectrum of women could run, although those who did tended to be educated and with a good income (Hollis "Women in Council" 195). Four women won in the first school board elections (Elizabeth Garrett, Emily Davies, Lydia Becker, and Flora Stevenson) (Hollis *Women in Public* 228), and nearly one hundred were serving by 1889 (Hollis "Women in Council" 193).

Women's inclusion on poor law boards followed a similar time line. A board appointed the first woman inspector (Mrs. Nassau Senior) in 1873, and the public elected the first woman (Martha Merrington) to the board as a Guardian in 1875 (Hollis *Women in Public* 225, Hollis *Ladies Elect* 205-207, Gleadle 157). Unlike the school boards, these boards restricted access to property-owning single women (Hollis "Women in Council" 195). These positions—more difficult than the school board because they required visits to impoverished areas—often incurred more male resentment, sometimes because the male board members were of a lower social class and thus often more interested in

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[3] There was one brief exception. In 1886 the Women's Local Government Society noticed ambiguous wording that made it possible for women to run for council office in London (Hollis "Women in Council" 203). They put forward one unsuccessful female candidate in 1886, but two successful candidates in 1889: Margaret Sandhurst and Jane Cobden were elected to the London County Council (Hollis" Women in Council" 204). However, this triumph was temporary; Sandhurst's opponent successfully appealed and unseated her, and Cobden was repeatedly thwarted during her three years in office (even being fined for voting in committees) (Hollis "Women in Council" 204). Furthermore, although these two had slipped in because of ambiguous wording, no other woman was permitted to run for council until 1907 (Hollis "Women in Council" 204).

lowering rates than improving institutions (Hollis "Women in Council" 197, Gleadle 158). Nevertheless, the number of elected women increased, and about 80 women served as poor law guardians by 1889 (Hollis "Women in Council" 194).

Significantly, these numbers continued to increase dramatically in the last decade of the century: there were 270 female school board members and 1147 female poor law board members in 1900 (Hollis *Ladies Elect* 486). Furthermore, although acceptance of or resistance to women varied from board to board, by the end of the 80s, women's involvement in these political positions had been primarily accepted and justified as part of a woman's 'natural' sphere of influence. A *Westminster Review* article of 1885, for instance, comments on women as "specially fitted" for poor law guardianship, since "it is only domestic economy on a larger scale" ("The Work of Women as Poor Law Guardians" 387). School board membership was seen as an extension of women's natural role in children's education and poor law guardianship as an expansion of the usual charity work of upper-class women. These early elected women at the local level clearly understood the significance of their roles as the earliest female politicians of their era. Lydia Becker commented on the link between the local franchise and parliamentary franchise in 1879, saying "political freedom begins for women, as it began for men, with freedom in local government," and urging women to "advance from the position that has been conceded to them in local representation" (353). Louisa Twining, an early poor law guardian, was highly conscious of creating an initial positive impression of women in politics; she urged other female guardians to persevere in their positions, since otherwise they would "strengthen the impression that women's work is not lasting nor to be depended on" (247). Thus, these early elected women recognized the pioneering role they

played in politics. The reality of women as elected political agents and as enfranchised political voices—at least at the local level—made women's political power a reality and made the concept of female rule a possibility. Furthermore, after this entrance into local politics in the 1870s, women became more involved in national party politics in the 1880s, significantly expanding both their leadership skills and their visibility as potential political agents. Both Liberal and Conservative parties made deliberate efforts to involve women, by forming Women's Liberal Associations in 1880 and admitting women to the Primrose League (a Conservative party organization) in 1884 (Walker 166). Of course, women had long contributed to electioneering—wives and daughters of candidates traditionally canvassed their neighbourhoods—but the official involvement of women in political parties on an organized, national level began in the 1880s. The political actions of these women gave them leadership skills and acted as an example for other women to follow[4].

"Petticoat Government": The Suffrage Debate

Although women made concrete political gains (in local votes and elected positions, participation in national political parties, and acceptance of women as public speakers), female suffrage at a national level remained an elusive but symbolic goal. Female suffrage represented equality of women with men, including equal political power (although only as voters, since suffrage did not involve legalizing women as electoral candidates). Thus, the movement provoked debate and dissent. It divided

[4] See Patricia Hollis's extensive research ("Woman in Council," *Woman in Public 1850-1900*, and *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914*) for more details on early elected women in Britain during this period.

women's organizations, political parties, and the public, as hopes and fears flew back and forth. Besant's and Corbett's female rule texts, in particular, embody this debate over the suffrage question, as each posits a different post-suffrage future: one dystopian, one utopian, as we shall see in the chapters on those texts.

The pro-suffrage movement in Britain originated with the Kensington Society, a women's group formed out of the active Langham Circle women's group concerned with issues of women's rights such as Married Women's Property and women's education. Formed in 1865 as an "all-women debating society," the Kensington Society included most of the predominant feminists of the period, including Harriet and Helen Taylor, wife and step-daughter of newly elected MP John Stuart Mill (Levine 61-62). Mill had only agreed to stand for Parliament on the condition he be allowed to campaign for women's suffrage (Crow 186). In 1866, three key events occurred to strengthen this fledgling suffrage movement. Firstly, four Kensington Society members (Barbara Bodichon, Jessie Boucherett, Emily Davies, and Elizabeth Garrett) began a petition for female suffrage, collecting 1,499 signatures including Mill's (Kent, Susan 185). Also during this year, Bodichon presented a pro-suffrage paper before the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences. This event was especially crucial since the reading inspired Lydia Becker to become the period's predominant suffrage advocate. She created the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee, which in turn influenced Elizabeth Wolstenholme to join the cause (Kent, Susan 185). Finally, in 1866 the Kensington

Society formed the London Committee for Women's Suffrage (Hollis *Women in Public* 283)[5].

In 1867 Mill presented the women's suffrage petition to Parliament and proposed a Reform Bill amendment to give women votes (Shiman *Women* 123). His amendment lost, 196 to 73 votes (Crow 186). From 1870 to 1883 reformers presented yearly women's suffrage bills to parliament, all of which lost, although the 1883 bill was defeated by the smallest margin: 130 to 114 (Hollis *Women in Public* 282, 285). In 1867 the first women's suffrage organizations were created: the London Committee for Women's Suffrage, the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee and the Edinburgh Society collaborated to form the National Society for Women's Suffrage (Hollis *Women in Public* 283).

However, although this move strengthened and nationalized the movement, the 1870s saw both unification and division over the issue. On the side of unification, all local branches except London formed a central committee on the advice of MP supporter Jacob Bright in 1872 (Hollis *Women in Public* 283). Furthermore, the suffrage journals, such as the *Women's Suffrage Journal* started by Lydia Becker and Jessie Boucherett, helped inform and unite women who had no access to branches or meetings (Hollis *Women in Public* 283). And finally, from 1871 onward, supporters organized meetings, petitions, and speaking tours (Hollis *Women in Public* 283). Conversely, Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDA), since it involved topics considered indecent, split supporters into those willing to incorporate Butler's campaign

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[5] See Candida Ann Lacey's *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group* and Jane Lewis's *Before the Vote Was Won: Arguments for and against Women's Suffrage* for selected documents of the period on the suffrage debate.

into the movement and those who wanted the suffrage movement to remain distant from possible taint (Gleadle 165). Emily Davies distanced herself and the women's education movement from the suffrage issue, fearing the latter would hurt the success of the former (Hollis *Women in Public* 283-84). A division over the enfranchisement of single women versus married women occurred in 1874, when MP Forsyth changed a suffrage bill for all women into one for single women only. Some feminists, although regretting the exclusion of married women, felt that a small step was better than no step at all, since all supporters at least agreed that single women should have the vote. Elizabeth Wolstenholme and others, on the other hand, refused to accept the revised version of the bill (Gleadle 167, Shanley 112). Despite these divisions, however, a movement back towards unification occurred at the end of the 1870s and into the 1880s, as suffrage for any woman (single or married) remained elusive, as Butler's campaign gained respectability and as the National Liberal Federation became officially pro-women's suffrage in 1883, despite internal divisions on the issue (Hollis *Women in Public* 283-85).

The division in the movement mirrored the division in society, as parliament debated the issue repeatedly. In 1870 Parliament offered a range of arguments, such as an ostensibly chivalrous anti-suffrage argument: voting "would plunge [women] into all the trouble, turmoil, heat, and annoyance incidental to contested elections" (Hansard 201: 610). Another common argument that claimed women were too emotional to govern: "enfranchise women generally, and make them a power in the country, and you will find yourselves drifting on a sea of impulsive philanthropy and sentimentalism, where you are now at anchor on the principles of political economy" (Hansard 201: 229). A voting woman would negate the legal principle of coverture, in which a husband legally and

politically represented his wife. Furthermore, as argued in the 1879 parliamentary debates on the issue, since women were naturally dominated by men, women were incapable of independent political action as "a class who are utterly, and, from their very nature, subject to influence" (Hansard 244: 493). Finally, female suffrage opponents feared that if property-owning women received the vote, the floodgates to universal suffrage would open, which in turn would produce chaos (Harrison, Brian *Separate* 33-34). The three illustrations below reveal the different stereotypes, ridicule, and fears of female suffrage. Figure 1 clearly contrasts the suffragette women (depicted as emotionally uncontrolled, older, unattractive) on the left with the attractive, idealized Victorian mother and child on the right. The picture also emphasizes the futility of the suffragettes' actions—they make no progress in their violent assault on the doors of power.

Figure 1. "An Ugly Rush," Tenniel 1870 (Source: Jones 177)

Figure 2 similarly depicts a political woman (this time an elected MP rather than a suffragette) as older and unattractive by Victorian standards, and significantly also gives her trousers, a symbol of male power here intended to ridicule a political woman as 'mannish'.

Figure 2. "The Angel in 'the House,'" Sambourne, *Punch*, 1884 (Source: Newton fig. 23)

This masculinized female politician's stance, furthermore (also implied by the sleeping MP beside her), manifests long-winded didacticism, while the "bluestocking" she is knitting represents stereotypically 'unnatural' female intellectualism. Figure 3 similarly ridicules female governance. An explicit reversal image—the husband minds the children while the MP wife works—it strives to show women in parliament as unnatural and ridiculous in their focus on domestic trivialities. Furthermore, the image emphasizes chaos—the disorder of the female politician's desk and hair on the one hand, and the 'unnatural' combination of male and female dress worn by her daughters on the other—and clearly associates this chaos with women's government.

Figure 3. "The Parliamentary Female" (*Punch* "The Ladies of Creation" 1853). Original caption presents a dialogue in which the father begs his wife to take them all out to the play, but she is far too busy with committees and her "speech on the great crochet question."

In response to these widespread stereotypes, proponents of suffrage offered justifications. Arabella Shore (in an 1877 suffrage society speech) argued that the nation required only property, not intellect, of its current voters, and thus "the possession of property is the only fitness required for the vote" (295). She directly attacked the illogic and hypocrisy of the "Nature" argument so often upheld against women: "It seems that for a woman to manage property, carry on large businesses, be a farmer, a merchant, a parish-overseer, a clerk in various capacities, a municipal elector, or member of a School Board, or even a Sovereign, is not against Nature, but to give a vote for a Member of Parliament is" (295). In this speech, Shore offered further refutations: an interest in politics and voting every few years would not interfere with women's domestic duties; women, in their special roles as mothers, required "a sense of wider responsibilities" to educate their children well; and finally, the current parliament was not founded on

physical strength: "Our Cabinet ministers are not chosen from the men who can knock each other down" (297-301). A debate flourished outside of parliament and suffrage societies, as embodied in a magazine exchange between *Nineteenth Century* and *Fortnightly Review* in 1889. These two articles will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on Corbett, since she names them as the inspiration for *New Amazonia*. However, I will briefly explain their significance here. The *Nineteenth Century* article, titled "An Appeal against Female Suffrage" and signed by over 100 high-profile women, argued that women did not want the vote. The *Fortnightly Review* article "Women's Suffrage—a Reply," responded the following month with support for female suffrage and listed "a quarter" of the 2000 names of women who protested against the *Nineteenth Century* article ("Woman's Suffrage—a Reply" 131-32).

This debate on women's suffrage particularly informed the female rule texts of Besant and Corbett, but must also be understood as the key issue driving fears and speculations about women's increasing political power during the 1870s and 1880s. The following section on women's demands for legal and occupational equality provides additional contexts essential to later discussions of each female rule text.

The Queen and the Reality of Female Rule: Strategies and Fears

As Adrienne Munich points out, "Victoria's presence on the throne highlighted controversies, debates, concerns, and anxieties about differences between men and women" (7). Victoria's rule produced cultural discomfort because she was both wife and queen; she therefore contested the boundary between domestic and public spheres, and she furthermore symbolically (if not actually) reversed the male dominance/female

submission paradigm. Victorian wives, as will be later discussed, were legally subordinate to their husbands. However, since Victoria was the Queen, her husband was legally subordinate to her as her subject. Victoria had both public duties as queen and domestic duties as wife and mother. Thus, her status contested the gender segregation of women at home and men out in the public world.

Although she symbolically embodied female rule and thus female political empowerment, Victoria emphatically opposed women's political movements at the time and even explicitly doubted a woman's ability to rule. She commented on the women's movement: "The Queen is most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Women's Rights' . . . *with all its attendant horrors*, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety . . . It is a subject which makes the Queen so *furious* that she cannot contain herself" (qtd. in Holcombe *Victorian* 9). On the specific topic of female rule, she wrote in a journal, "I am every day more convinced that *we women*, if we are to be good women, *feminine* and *amiable* and *domestic*, are not *fitted to reign*" (qtd. in Munich 190). Here, Victoria captures the paradox that she embodied and which other political women at the time struggled with—the paradox of being both a Victorian woman and a public political figure. By cultural definition and expectation, a Victorian middle-class woman had to be feminine and amiable and domestic, as Victoria points out. None of these prescriptive qualities meshed easily with those associated with rule, such as assertiveness, strength of opinion, and public visibility. Victoria ultimately found a highly successful strategy to deal with this paradox: ruling as an embodiment of ideal Victorian maternal womanhood.

The significance of maternalism as a model for female rule will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

Although Victoria successfully embodied maternal rule by the end of her reign (Munich 193), her obvious sexuality produced many doubts and criticisms of her rule before the mid-1880s. In addition to embodying sexuality by virtue of her evident maternity, Victoria was clearly a woman with sexual desires, who obviously felt passionate towards her husband and who (according to widespread rumours) had erotic friendships with both ministers and servants (Munich 157-58). A queen without a man can be seen as a strong maternal leader (hence Victoria's strong and popular maternal image at the end of her rule), but a queen with a man must naturally—according to law and views of nature at the time—defer to a man's natural rule. Thus, as soon as Victoria married Albert in 1840, pamphlets and cartoons like the one shown below expressed fears that Albert, not Victoria, would rule the country (Thompson, Dorothy 38-40).

Figure 4. Albert Wears the Crown. (Source: Thompson, Dorothy 40)

In contrast to such fears that Victoria's marriage would diminish her authority, at least one street ballad at the time humourously speculated that all women would soon want the special powers the queen had—the right to propose to a man, be his equal or even superior, and not obey him (Thompson, Dorothy 38)[6]. After Albert's death in 1861, the potential existed for Victoria to embody chaste maternal rule, but her long seclusion from public life in mourning, followed by her alleged affair with a servant (John Brown), again provoked critiques of her rule in the 60s and 70s (Thompson, Dorothy 72-73, 106-

[6] Since the Queen did herself for a husband 'propose',
The ladies will all do the same, I suppose;
Their days of subserviency now will be past,
For all will 'speak first' as they always did last!
Since the Queen has no equal, 'obey' none she need,
So of course at the altar from such vow she's freed;
And the women will all follow suit, so they say -

07). Secluded in mourning, she was perceived to not be performing her duties as ruler. In a relationship with a man (according to the dominance-submission paradigm), she could not play a dominant ruler role (see figure below).

Figure 5. "John Brown Exercising the Queen," *Palace and Hovel*, Daniel Joseph Kirwan, 1870 (Source: Munich 161).

Note that not only is John Brown dominant in this cartoon, but also Victoria is infantilized, in keeping with stereotypes and scientific theories of the period characterizing women as childish, undeveloped versions of men. Thus, because of the sexual double standard (male rulers had obviously been highly sexual beings for centuries without much comment), Victoria's rule was most criticized when she was most

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'Love, honour', they'll promise, but never - 'obey'. (qtd. in Thompson 38)

obviously sexual and domestic (as wife, widow, or mistress), and most accepted and popular when she was least sexual. Through most of the 1880s, especially at her golden jubilee in 1887, the apparently desexualized Victoria was popular as a maternal embodiment of British imperialism. As Munich observes in reference to the Jubilee statue of the queen, Victoria here represents a "Massive Mother—Queen of the Masses" (201).

However, although the maternal image was ultimately successful, Victoria's sexuality/maternity not only provoked fears of men ruling over and through her, it also produced fears of tyrannical maternity and sexuality. According to rumours, she ruled her grown children absolutely, and the press (as shown in the figure below) frequently criticized Victoria's domination of her adult son Crown Prince Albert (Munich 165-67).

Figure 6. "A Hint to Wales," T.S. Sullivan, *Life*, 1890 (Source: Munich 166).
Her undeniable sexuality evoked images and fears of a sexual predator. Prime Minister William Gladstone commented that "the Queen alone is enough to kill any man" (qtd. in

Munich 157), and Munich points out the long list of men attached to her who "dropped off, if not like flies, then with an ominous inexorability" (158). In addition, politicians described her as 'meddling' in politics as if it were not her rightful sphere of influence. The republican statesman, Sir Charles Dilke, complained that Victoria interfered "constantly" (qtd. in Thompson, Dorothy 121). In a constitutional monarchy, such reactions against the monarch's interference in government certainly existed prior to Victoria's rule. However, Victoria's gender made her involvement in politics even less acceptable than that of a male monarch, because of the assumption that politics were not a woman's business. When Victoria played the role of the domestic ideal—an asexual, loving, non-interfering mother of her people—her subjects accepted and loved her. Idealized family portraits that depicted her embodying the Angel in the house stereotype contrast sharply with the cartoons previously shown. The portrait below significantly depicts Albert as the dominant member of the family, while Victoria is not only below him but is also focused inward on her family, rather than outward on her public realm.

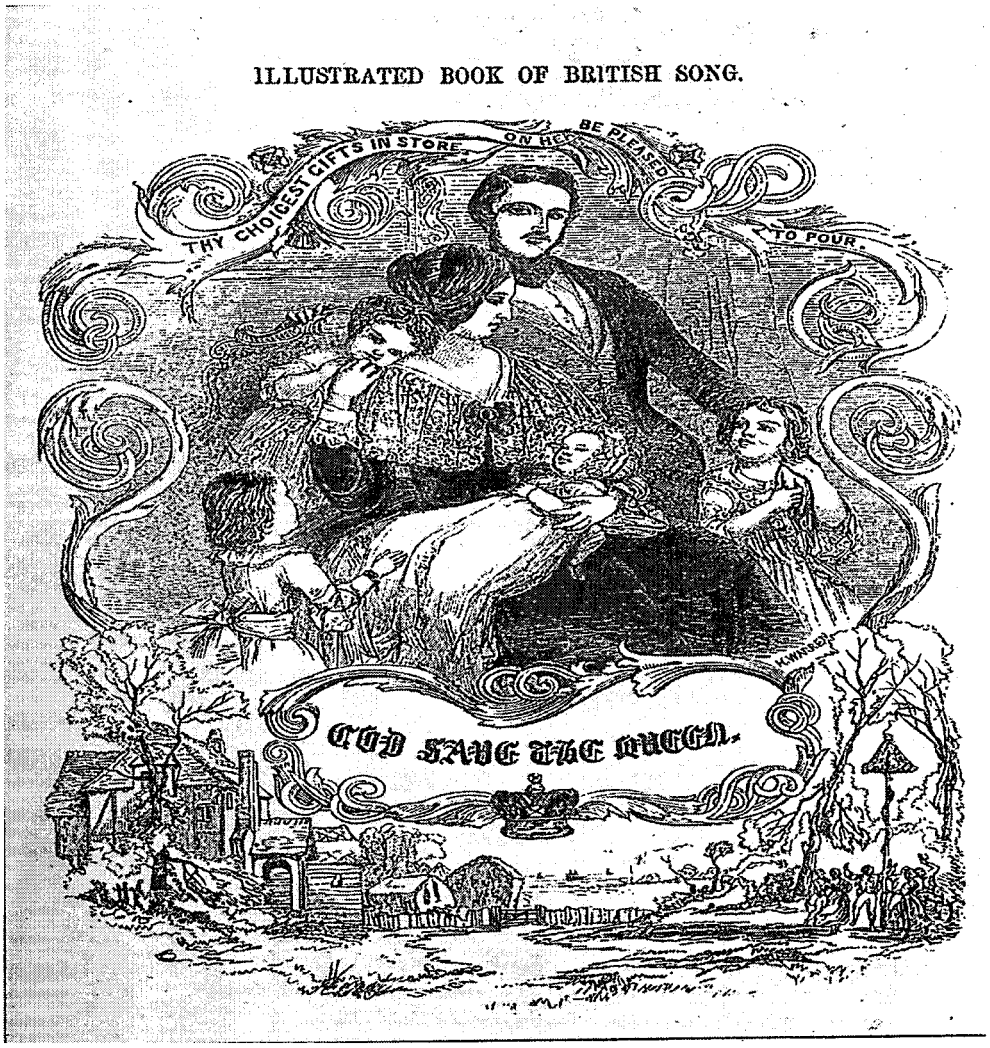

Figure 7. The Family Queen 1842 (Source: Thompson, Dorothy 45)

The texts examined in this study do not necessarily respond directly to Victoria's female rule, unlike Lewis Carroll's (*Alice in Wonderland*) more direct allusions. However, the four texts analyzed here manifest this conflict between women's idealized domestic rule and women's actual political rule—from Haggard and Lytton's portrayals of maternalized domination and female sexual predation, to fears of destructive and unnatural 'petticoat government' in Besant, to idealized maternal government in Corbett.

Domestic Power: The Quest for Legal and Occupational Emancipation

Concern over women's domestic rights is manifest in all four female rule texts, as later chapters will explain. Within the middle-class marriage and home, what are the rights of each party? If there is disagreement, how should it be resolved? Who provides the labour and earnings to support the home and family? I will analyze these specific domestic power relationships in detail in the respective chapters on these texts, but the following historical overview informs those later discussions. The historical context spurring these domestic concerns between 1870-1890 includes two threads: a series of laws concerning women's marital rights and an expansion of middle-class women's paid employment outside the home.

Legal Landmarks: Property and Divorce

Under common law in England during the first two thirds of the century, a married woman had limited legal rights. The principle of coverture, which presented husband and wife as one person, gave the husband extensive rights and responsibilities in the marriage. Wives could not own property, sue or be sued, sign valid contracts, or make valid wills (unless the husband participated in these last two activities) (Shanley 8). Rich women could and did protect property by having special trusts set up, but this was an option for wealthy women only—only an estimated ten percent of wives maintained separate property this way in mid-century (Perkin *Women* 16-18, Shanley 59, Harrison, Rachel & Mort 87). Merely drawing up a trust typically cost over £100 in fees and involved other expenses as well (Holcombe *Wives* 46). Divorce, even after the Divorce Act of 1857, required access to a single court in London and reflected the sexual double

standards of the period: a husband could divorce his wife solely on the grounds of adultery, but a wife needed the grounds of adultery *and* either cruelty, incest or bestiality (Shanley 42, 9). Unmarried or widowed women had the same property rights as men (Holcombe *Wives* 4), but nearly 90% of women were married at some point (Lewis *Women* 3).

Reformers focused most on the issue of married women's property during 1870-1890. The quest for women's property reform included prolonged campaigning and two major parliamentary Acts (1870 and 1882). Reformers primarily wanted to remove the law of coverture and give married women legal identities as responsible persons. Many women and men pointed out the conflict between coverture and the basic principles of liberal theory (from Hobbes and Locke), which posited people as free agents entering into contracts with consent and without giving up their autonomy (Shanley 10). In "Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors: Is the Classification Sound?" (1868), Frances Power Cobbe pointed out that coverture placed married women in the same legal situation as the mentally ill, felons or children. Property-law reformers also emphasized the inequity of the law by pointing out that rich men, including many MPs, already gave married women their own property, since they set up trusts to protect their female relatives. This inequity was highlighted in an 1856 report comparing common law and equity in relation to married women's property, and this report was also printed in *Westminster Review* (Shanley 59, Perkin *Women* 16).

The first Married Women's Property Act (1870) had been drastically altered from the original drafted by the reformers. It passed through the lower House intact, but came up against entrenched opposition in the House of Lords. Lord Westbury, for example,

argued a woman might waste her money on jewelry rather than household expenses, or, even worse, "lavish" her money on some man "for whom she had greater affection than for her legitimate lord" (qtd. in Holcombe *Wives* 174-75). Similarly, Lord Shaftesbury, normally considered a reformer, felt that the bill "struck at the root of domestic happiness, introducing insubordination, equality and something more," and worried that a wife who owned the home could use her property rights to remove her husband and let in whomever she pleased (qtd. in Holcombe *Wives* 175). Despite these concerns, many in the House of Lords acknowledged that women should be protected from the worst cases of spousal predation. Therefore, they altered the bill in committee to allow married women limited and specific access to certain kinds of property—to address the issue of inequity between rich and poor wives, rather than the inequity between women and men (Holcombe *Wives* 176-77). For instance, married women could now control their own earnings as well as specific types of investments and inheritances, although inherited money, as opposed to property, was subject to a limit of £200 (Harrison, Rachel & Mort 89, Holcombe *Wives* 179-80). This substantially altered bill had many flaws, such as leaving coverture intact and failing to protect several sources of income (Stetson 72-73, Perkin *Women* 305, Holcombe *Wives* 178-80). Therefore, the most active supporters of the original bill saw the passing of the 1870 Act as an impetus to renewed campaigning and vowed to continue the struggle "to secure to women the same rights to their own property and earnings which are enjoyed by men" (Wolstenholme qtd. in Shanley 104, Stetson 78-79).

Some success was achieved with the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, which gave married women control over their separate property without the restrictions of the

1870 Act. Shanley argues that this Act was "the single most important change in the legal status of women in the nineteenth century" (103). However, this Act, like its predecessor, did not overturn coverture. Lord Selbourne made what he called "mere trifling alterations" to the original wording (Hansard 267: 316). However, these small changes in wording crucially changed the tenor of the bill from emphasizing a married woman's equal and independent rights to emphasizing a married woman's rights only in respect to her separate property (Stetson 88, Shanley 126). Under the new wording, wives still could not make legal contracts outside of those affecting their separate property and they could not be liable for debts beyond the amount of their separate property (Shanley 126-27, Stetson 90).

Women's control of property was clearly feared as an overturning of coverture. If coverture were overturned, then a major barrier to women's suffrage would be overturned. As Shanley observes, "both proponents and opponents of reform linked married women's property and the question of women's suffrage" (109). Under coverture, since husband and wife were represented in the person of the husband, the husband was the property owner entitled to the vote (non-property owners were not given the vote until 1884). Thus, these legal reforms of married women's control of property were very much a part of the struggle for female power—and explicitly linked to fears of female rule.

Although women's control of property was especially crucial, the Matrimonial Causes Acts of 1878 and 1884 further raised the issue of a wife's rights. Most importantly, they highlighted issues of spousal violence (which I will later discuss in the chapters on Lytton, Haggard, and Besant). The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 acknowledged assault as legal justification for a woman to leave her husband.

Specifically, if a court proved that a husband assaulted his wife, she could then apply for an order for a legal separation, the rights of a single woman, custody of the children, and support payments from her husband (Shanley 167-68). Frances Power Cobbe's 1878 article, "Wife Torture in England," provided one impetus for this Act (Shanley 166), but James Hammerton notes that parliamentary debates occurred before the article was published, and that Cobbe herself had previously been campaigning for reform on this issue (64). The act sent a revolutionary message prohibiting wife-beating, but (as with the property acts) the wording was significantly changed to limit women's autonomy. The draft bill enabled a woman to obtain a protection order "upon her application," if her husband had been convicted of assault (Cobbe "Wife-Torture" 83). Lord Penzance, who took up the cause after reading Cobbe's article, sanctioned the court to issue the order only "if satisfied that the future safety of the wife is in peril" (Penzance qtd. in Shanley 169). Thus, as Shanley points out, control over the order moved from the wife's request to the court's discretion (169). Because of this wording, judges could send wives back to abusive husbands, and extensive evidence shows that judges rarely granted separation order requests (Shanley 172-73). Mabel Crawford (in her1893 article "Maltreatment of Wives") comments on and gives examples of "the unwillingness of magistrates to release ill-treated wives from thraldom to a tyrannical master" (296)[7]. Furthermore, although wife-beating apparently declined, extremely light sentences were often given to convicted offenders—an injustice *Punch* critiqued in 1879, satirically commenting on the "poor fellow" whose death sentence for kicking his wife to death (as opposed to the six month's

[7] See also other *Westminster Review* articles critiquing the enforcement of marital cruelty laws: the anonymous"The Law in Relation to Women" (1887), Lee Meriwether's"Is Divorce A Remedy?" (1889), and Matilda Blake's "Are Women Protected?" (1892).

imprisonment sentence for matrimonial assault) was commuted ("A Really Hard Case?"). Judges justified such sentencing by referring to the wife's language or behaviour as provocation even in cases of extremely brutal assault or murder (Shanley 170-73). Thus, although the Act had the symbolic effect of denouncing spousal assault and giving women the right to escape, in practice women remained legally tied to abusive husbands.

The 1884 Matrimonial Causes Act concerned the issue of conjugal rights. Under the Divorce Act of 1857, if one spouse left the home, the other spouse could request a writ for restitution of conjugal rights (Shanley 177). If the absent spouse did not comply or show the necessity of the absence, she or he would be liable to imprisonment (Shanley 177). Under this Act, the remaining spouse had to wait two years to apply for a separation order (Shanley 179). Feminists criticized this system of mandating "conjugal rights". Since there was no legal acknowledgement of marital rape, the ability to force a spouse to return to the home (or face imprisonment and loss of property and custody) gave a husband complete control over his wife's body. Conversely, the original Act also allowed women deserted by their husbands either to force their return or to acquire a separation (after two years). The 1884 Matrimonial Causes Act replaced the prison penalty with the removal of this waiting period. In other words, if the remaining spouse filed for restitution of conjugal rights and the absent spouse did not comply or show justification, the remaining spouse could immediately claim desertion and apply for a separation order, support payments and custody (Shanley 179). On the surface this seems a potentially positive benefit for wives, but the origins of these changes reveals the opposite. The Act was a response to a divorce case in 1883 in which a man (Captain Weldon) provided his wife with full financial support and consideration of her comfort but refused to live with

her. She applied for restitution of conjugal rights and the court was forced, under the law, to send him to jail (Shanley 178-79). The impetus for the alteration was thus, as Shanley points out, not an improvement for wives, but for husbands:

> The image of Captain Weldon languishing in jail because he could not tolerate living with his wife was more than Parliament could bear, although earlier in the century a Suffolk woman had been allowed to die in prison when she refused to return to her husband. (Shanley 179)

Thus, these two laws relating to divorce during the 1870-1890 period, despite their reforms, also point to the continuing control of husbands over wives. However, in the context of the female rule texts, as will be later discussed, these laws also show both increased critique of marriage laws and a parliamentary response of attempting to shore up male power at the most basic level—a husband's preeminent rights over a wife's in marriage.

"Redundant" Women and the Expansion of Women's Employment Options

The issues of surplus women and working women intermingle especially in Besant's and Corbett's competing visions of a society ruled by women. However, fears of increasing numbers of women, especially the numbers of unmarried (legally independent) women, can also be seen as echoes in Lytton and Haggard, as they struggle to naturalize women's containment in domesticity and dependence. Thus, the issue of female numbers and female employment—widely debated at the time—is also a crucial backdrop to my analysis of fictions depicting female governance.

The notion of the "redundant" woman originated when an 1851 census "revealed that as many as 30 percent of all English women between the ages of twenty and forty

were unmarried" (Murray 48). Since the census also showed six percent more women than men in this age category, that left more than a million women without husbands (Murray 48). The Victorians viewed these population statistics as exposing a "redundant" woman problem, not because of any substantial change in percentages, but because of the large numbers involved and the highly visible plight of impoverished middle-class single women (Vicinus 27). These numbers were indeed large: 600,000 to 700,000 more women than men during the 1870s and 1880s in England and Wales, and a third of all women (1.5 to 2 million) unmarried (Vicinus 293-94). Although statistics show that seven out of eight women could expect to marry and that only about 40,000 middle-class women remained single, the middle classes nonetheless considered this a problem (Vicinus 26-27). Both Holcombe and Vicinus comment on the disproportionately extensive commentary on the plight of the poverty-stricken, underpaid middle-class woman in comparison to the media coverage of working-class women's poverty (Holcombe *Wives* 14, Vicinus 26). Articles proclaimed the seriousness of this problem of "redundant" middle-class women, whereas in reality it paled beside the much larger numbers of single working-class women whose wages and working conditions were worse than those of their middle-class sisters. With the exception of Corbett, these female rule authors are primarily reacting against the encroachment of middle or upper-class women on the sphere of middle or upper-class men. Like their fellow privileged Victorians, they seem unconcerned with the plight of the unmarried, poorly paid, lower-class "redundant" woman[8].

[8] Although Besant was very concerned with the plight of poor women in his philanthropic activities, his anti-suffrage fiction *The Revolt of Man* is focused on critiquing middle and upper-class women's 'invasion' of the male public sphere.

The 1851 census prompted two especially well-known articles on the topic: Harriet Martineau's "Female Industry" (1859) and William R. Greg's "Why Are Women Redundant" (1862). Martineau's article is "frequently credited with having first shocked the public into an awareness of the problem of 'redundant women'" (Holcombe *Victorian* 10). Greg's article was "reprinted and quoted many times during the following decade" (Murray 48). Martineau's essay used the census data to argue that large numbers of women could not count on male financial support and must therefore be provided with the means to support themselves (Holcombe *Victorian* 11-12). Greg's essay, conversely, characterized unmarried women as "wretched" and leading an "incomplete existence" and recommended single women to emigrate to where there were surpluses of men to marry them (436-37). Greg's essay provoked a rebuttal from Frances Power Cobbe ("What Shall We Do with our Old Maids") the same year, in which she sarcastically compared his expensive solution of deporting "440,000 females" (and driving them into loveless marriages) to one of "making the labours of single women remunerative, and their lives free and happy" (595). Greg inspired other feminist critical responses, including Jessie Boucherett's "How to Provide for Superfluous Women" of 1869, which rebelliously recommended that more men emigrate and leave their jobs for women (56). In a similar response to Greg, Mary Taylor's "Redundant Women" of 1870 scathingly exposes the agenda in Greg's proposal as a selfish wish to keep women dependant on men's needs, rather than allow women to support themselves in traditionally male fields (60-61).

Since most agreed a problem existed and the plight of these poor unmarried middle-class women must be ameliorated, the question became one of how. Greg and his

supporters emphatically opposed, while Harriet Martineau's allies (including John Stuart Mill, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Bessie Rayner Parkes, and other supporters of the Langham Place group) advocated increasing women's access to paid employment. These women and Jessie Boucherett founded the highly influential Society for Promoting the Employment of Women in London in 1859 (Levine 150, Holcombe *Victorian* 6). This group did public-relations work, started branches throughout the country, and set up projects to train and employ women (Holcombe *Victorian* 16). Their widespread and publicized activities (like those of legal reformers) foregrounded women's increasing demands for economic power and independence from men.

Statistics from the 1871 and 1881 censuses show that 300-600 paid female workers existed for every 1000 male workers in various age categories (Lewis *Women* 148). Furthermore, the same censuses indicate that slightly less than one third of all women worked in paid employment (Crow 318), but that women made up one third of the total labour force (Lewis *Women* 147, Holcombe *Victorian* 213). However, particularly in the case of married women, these numbers are quite likely too low, since married women were especially likely to find 'under-the-table' sources of income at home, such as taking in boarders or working in an occasional, temporary fashion; such activities would not likely have been reported to a census taker for fears of tax collection on unreported income[9] (Tilly 125). Thus a very substantial portion of women (mostly in the working class) worked for wages to support the family in late nineteenth-century England.

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[9] Although tax was only payable on incomes of £150/year or more, the reintroduction of income tax in 1843 (Cross 239) might have made many nervous about reporting income.

To conform as much as possible to gendered stereotypes of 'natural' duties, and to avoid competition with men in shared fields, women typically pursued certain types of "women's" work. For instance, lower-class women primarily worked in either domestic service or the textile industry (Lewis *Women* 156). Laws such as the 1842 Mines Act, which banned women from the pit, excluded women from areas deemed unfit (Crow 109), while several trade unions worked to exclude women from their fields (Lewis *Women* 174-75). At the 1877 Trade Union Congress Annual Conference, a speaker argued that men should "use their utmost efforts to bring about a condition of things, where their wives should be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood against great and strong men of the world" (qtd. in Lewis *Women* 175). Thus, men increasingly resisted lower-class women's employment, especially in traditionally male fields. Middle-class women had more employment options, but also more social controls over what a "lady" was allowed to do and still be seen as respectable (Zimmeck 157). The list of acceptable fields included governessing and teaching, nursing, shop assistant work, and clerical work (Zimmeck 157). The 1871 and 1881 censuses again usefully illustrate the extent of female employment in these areas. Women made up nearly three quarters of all teachers during this period, virtually all nurses (male nurses were only occasionally employed in asylums), and one fifth of all shop assistants (primarily in shops supplying food and textiles) (Holcombe *Victorian* 203-09). Female clerks are an interesting category, as the numbers are small during this period (1-3% of all clerks being female), but rapidly increasing—by the 1911 census, 94% of all business or commercial clerks were women (Holcombe *Victorian* 210-11). Two areas of the civil service rapidly became dominated by women: the telegraph branch

(see figure below), which the government took over in 1870, and the job of post office clerks (Holcombe *Victorian* 211-12).

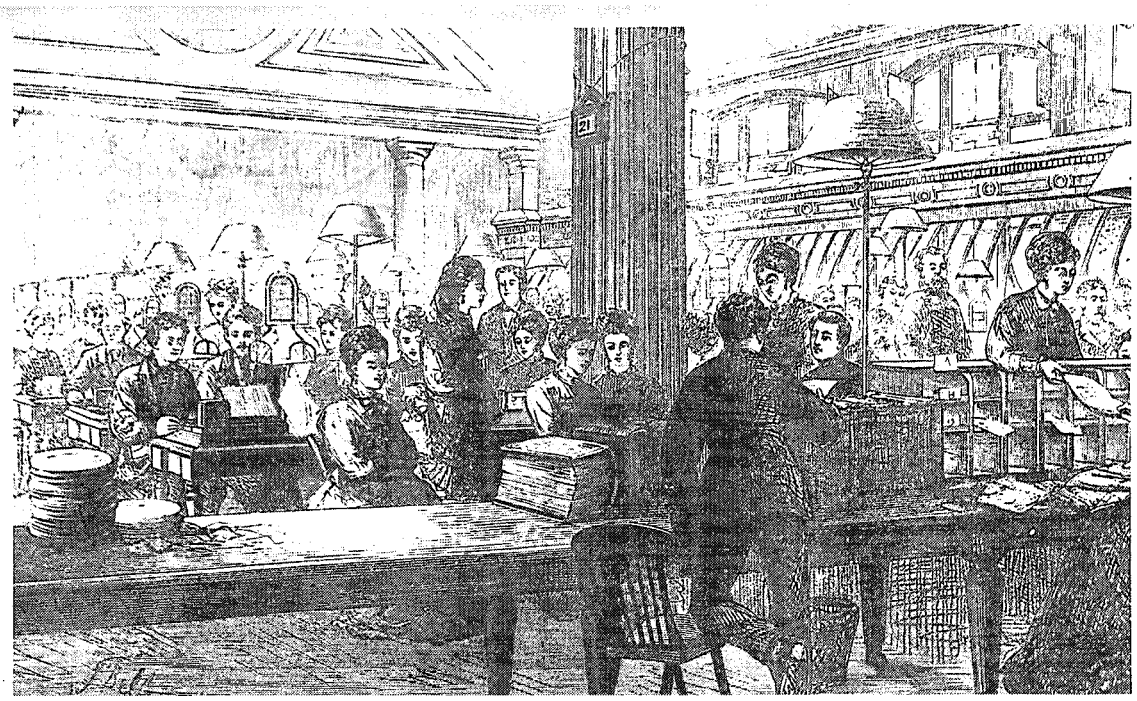

Figure 8. Telegraph Office. *Illustrated London News*, 1874 (Source: Holcombe *Women* 167)

Although these censuses contain no separate statistics for the different branches of the civil service, women in the civil service nearly doubled from 6.3% (3,521) in 1871 to 11% (6,581) in 1881 (Holcombe *Victorian* 211).

Women integrated fairly smoothly into employment areas like teaching and nursing (already characterized as 'feminine'), and clerical and retail jobs (rapidly expanding fields needing cheap labour). However, this smooth integration did not apply to professions such as engineering and law, from which women remained barred until the 1890s and the 20th century respectively (Crow 322). In medicine, moreover, women fought a fierce battle for inclusion in the 1870s. England lagged behind other countries in allowing women access to the medical profession: the first certified woman doctor in the

west (1858) was Elizabeth Blackwell, an American, and the first British woman doctor, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1865), had to train in Paris and only managed to be certified as a physician in England through a back door that was immediately closed after her (Murray 223). Sophia Jex-Blake pioneered the quest for women's admission into medicine in the late 60s and throughout the 70s, through an arduous and expensive process of court challenges (Jex-Blake 693-95). In 1878 medical education, training, and certification became available to women in England (Jex-Blake 695). The resistance to women's access to medical training is well embodied in an anonymous *Lancet* article of 1878: "Woman as Doctor and Woman as Nurse." This article argues that women are 'naturally' suited to nursing and are 'unnatural' as doctors: "in the one character [doctor] she is as awkward, unfit, and untrustworthy, as she is at home, capable, and thoroughly worthy of confidence in the other [nurse]" (227). The author is primarily horrified at the certification of women doctors because a doctor plays "the first or leading *rôle*" (227). Women are naturally suited to the "subordinate" role of nurse, the writer argues, and thus "the craze of women to become physicians and surgeons" is an "evil influence" that will lead to a nursing shortage, since men are unable to perform this subservient job (227). As with women's suffrage, cartoons like the one below satirize such an 'unnatural' reversal of natural gender roles, in its depiction of policewomen and a female justice system that mandates marriage (the original caption explained that the policewomen were arresting a man for refusing to marry).

Figure 9. Policewomen. Robida cartoon ("A Revolution of Gender Roles") 1880. (Source: Burstyn fig. 7)

The key issue throughout this increase in women's legal rights, independence and employment is that of dominance and submission, highly relevant to the female rule texts of the period. Although marital law reforms were achieved throughout the 70s and 80s, they always stopped short of granting a wife equal rights. The growing numbers of "redundant" women created a situation where vast numbers of women remained unmarried and thus outside of a husband's control. Those who welcomed women's employment outside the home, only did so under certain conditions. This dual struggle (between women's quest for legal and economic independence and men's fight to maintain dominance) is thus clearly a crucial backdrop to speculations on female rule. Each female rule text responds differently to this domestic dominance-submission struggle, in ways I will examine in detail in later chapters.

Intellectual and Spiritual Power: Mental Achievements and Moral Domination

During the 1870s and 1880s in England, male superiority was increasingly under attack. In the intellectual arena, women successfully challenged men in the fight for increased access to advanced education. On the moral front, feminists took the Victorian stereotype of the morally superior domestic "angel" and used it to question male domination and the exclusion of women from power. Throughout the century, the placement of women on a spiritual pedestal was recognized by women as a potential source of female power and control. While the issue of women's potential intellectual and spiritual power will be analyzed in more detail in each subsequent chapter, an understanding of this increase in women's intellectual and spiritual power between 1870-1890 in Britain provides an important context for these speculations on female rule.

Educational Equality: The Movement and Reactions

The movement for increased female education operated on several levels: education for middle-class girls, for lower-class girls and women, and higher education for women. Not all of these areas are relevant to a study of female rule texts of the period, and the issue of women's medical training has already been discussed. The movements for advanced academic education for women are most relevant, since the texts in this study consider women's intellectual authority as a requirement of governance. Unsurprisingly, moreover, the movements to give women higher education produced the most resistance, since college and university women posed a direct threat to the paradigm of male superiority by demonstrating that women were as intelligent as men.

Higher academic education for women was the primary goal for Emily Davies and other activists and also the greatest point of resistance by educational authorities. Thanks in a large part to Davies, women entered the previously male domain of higher education in the 70s and 80s, despite considerable resistance. In 1869 she created a women's college near Cambridge which later became Girton College, where the students studied the same courses and finished them in the same period of time as the male Cambridge students. Davies argued in 1868 that the current education system for men was indisputably better than that provided for women, and therefore, until more was known about the actual intellectual differences of the sexes, it made practical sense to start improving women's educational lot by applying the male system to them: "to make the education of average women only as good as that of men, would be a step in advance of what it is now" (Davies 123). In 1871 a competing institution, Newnham College, opened. Anne Jemima Clough, its first principal, advocated a different educational model from Davies's. Rather than force women to follow exactly the same program as men, when many of them were unable to achieve this because of economic or family constraints, she allowed her students to follow programs suiting their individual needs (Hollis *Women in Public* 135). In 1879, similar separate and unaffiliated women's institutions were opened at Oxford: Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall. Slowly, some male institutions began to admit women; the University of London admitted women to degree programs in 1878 and to university governance in 1882. Other institutions, such as King's, Westfield College, Royal Holloway College, Bedford, Queens, and Victoria University followed suit. Although women were allowed to attend lectures (with chaperones) at Oxford and Cambridge, these institutions refused to grant them degrees or

fully admit them on an equal basis until well into the twentieth century (Oxford in 1925, Cambridge in 1947). Cambridge did, however, allow women to take its honours examinations (tripos) beginning in 1881 and Oxford permitted this in 1884 (Burstyn 159-60). Women proved their abilities in these examinations, most notably in 1873 when Annie Rogers placed highest in Oxford's local entrance examinations for classics (Holcombe *Victorian* 48). By 1891, 422 women were taking Bachelor's degrees (Bryant 88).

This increasing encroachment of women into the domain of male intellectual life caused a predictable conservative backlash, and their success there especially threatened male dominance. Joan Burstyn's study of the opposition to this entrance and success, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, identifies several threads. Two of them, scientific attempts to "prove" women's inferiority and their biological incapacity for certain pursuits, will be examined in detail in the last section of this chapter. Two others, however, are particularly relevant to the higher-education issue and will be addressed here.

The first thread of opposition related to economics. Families saw education as a preparation for public sphere work and thus resisted "wasting" money on their daughter's minds. Girls would not need advanced studies in classics or mathematics to fulfil their destinies as wives and mothers. Sara Burstall, a Girton graduate in 1881, commented on this economic barrier:

> The case of the girl of intellectual power born in a poorer home is even far more desperate than that of the girl of means; she has far less chance than a poor boy of getting to college at all, and generally has a heavy burden of domestic duties. If there is any money, it is spent on the boys. (71)

Emily Davies attempted to counter this prejudice against 'wasting' money on a girl's education in 1878: "I believe it could be shown that even on purely commercial principles, to give a girl a University education is not a bad investment of capital" (145). A *Saturday Review* article of 1877 protested against equal higher education for men and women: "In its earlier stages education is general, in its final stage it is, or ought to be, a preparation for the calling in life; and to send men and women to the same Universities is to pronounce that their calling in life is the same" (qtd. in Burstyn 53). As John Ruskin argued in 1865, many believed that while a man needed to learn a topic "thoroughly," a woman "ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasure, and in those of his best friends" (149). Opponents of women's advanced education argued educated women would flood the professional employment market, work for lower wages, and thus put many men (who supported entire families) out of jobs, creating economic disaster for the nation (Burstyn 59).

The other thread of opposition came from organized religion, particularly from the religious authorities who ran the educational institutions like Oxford and Cambridge. Burstyn links the religious outcry against women's higher education with the desire to preserve the dominance of the clergy in those institutions. If women gained full access to Oxford and Cambridge, they would as graduates gain a role in their governance. Since no female graduate would be a member of the clergy, the clergy would thus increasingly lose its power over university governance. The extreme tardiness of these religious universities to accept women fully (Oxford in 1925, Cambridge in 1947), long after the secular institutions had done so, persuasively supports Burstyn's theory. This theory also explains the sermons vehemently preached against women's higher education at the time.

After Oxford permitted women to take honours exams in 1884, John William Burgon preached a sermon there entitled *To Educate Young Women Like Young Men, and With Young Men—a Thing Inexpedient and Immodest* (Burstyn 100). At Cambridge in the same year, Christopher Wordsworth preached a sermon entitled *Christian Womanhood and Christian Sovereignty*. He dedicated this sermon, significantly, to his daughter Elizabeth—the principal of Lady Margaret Hall (Burstyn 100). Since Wordsworth had long been an opponent of women's access to higher education, the sermon was intended to discourage rather than encourage women to take the exams now permitted to them (Burstyn 100). Notably, it warned that immodest publicity, such as sitting public examinations, "may haply produce the hard features, the roving eye and bold stare, the loud speech, and the unquiet demeanour of a vainglorious display, of forward boldness and obtrusive effrontery" (qtd. in Burstyn 107). These university sermons were echoed in lay speeches. William Withers Moore, the president of the British Medical Association, referred to Biblical authority in an 1886 speech: "Woman was formed to be man's helpmeet, not his rival; heart, not head; sustainer, not leader" (qtd. in Burstyn 104). Moore's speech clearly echoes the *Lancet* article previously discussed in its attempt to keep women from practicing medicine and confine them to the subordinate role of nursing. This quotation contains the core religious opposition put forth against women's access to higher education or indeed virtually any form of public power—Biblical authority. Clergymen and the lay community alike turned to the Bible for proof of male superiority.

Angelic Crusaders: Feminism and Victorian Stereotypes of Female Morality

Paradoxically, women of the period had a very strong spiritual/moral basis for their fight for power, in the idealization of the domestic Victorian woman. The creation of separate spheres for men and women, particularly for the middle classes, involved the idealization of women in the domestic sphere. This helped to console middle-class women for the gradual loss of agency (and action) that industrialization produced, as the norm increasingly became male wage-labour outside the home and female unpaid labour or leisure within it (Shiman *Women* 5). Those who approved of such gender segregation and worked to celebrate and justify it, like John Ruskin, created an image of women as "incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise . . . . with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable modesty of service" (138-39). Women were depicted as guardians of morality, unselfish and pure beings working tirelessly to serve their families and society. Scientists attempted to prove these special differences. In an 1887 article on "Mental Difference between Men and Women," George Romanes argued that biology gave women their "affection, sympathy, devotion, self-denial, modesty; long-suffering, or patience under pain, disappointment, and adversity; reverence, veneration, religious feeling, and general morality" (658). Thus, the domestic woman, known at the time as the "Angel in the House," was praised and revered as a force for good in the home. But even Ruskin's 1865 celebration of women's special domestic role acknowledged that women's special morality made them agents of change outside the home:

> There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered. Men, by their nature, are prone to fight; they will fight for any cause, or

> for none. It is for you to choose their cause for them, and to forbid them when there is no cause. There is no suffering, no injustice, no misery in the earth, but that the guilt of it lies with you. . . .it is you only who can feel the depths of pain; and conceive the way of its healing . . . (171)

While Ruskin clearly intends women to perform such public service from the home and through their husbands, this passage shows the loophole which many feminists discovered. They argued that if women were so very different from men in their unselfishness, their goodness, their service, and their morality, and if these qualities were so essential for making the world a better place, then surely these qualities should not be wasted on the domestic sphere alone.

During the 1870s and 1880s, many feminist activists drew upon this notion of women's special qualities to advocate their inclusion in the public sphere—politics, education, and employment. Specific feminist campaigns have already been discussed in relation to domestic and political power, but this notion of women's essential spirituality and morality must be here emphasized as a powerful force in late-nineteenth century feminism. The many female-led reform movements of the day, such as the Social Purity movement, the Temperance movement, and the increasing validation of women's church movements to alleviate poverty and disease helped make women's access to public sphere activities more acceptable, because women's involvement in philanthropic activities was seen as a natural application of their moral mandate.

The movement to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDA) and related Social Purity movement illustrate how this idea of women's moral mandate and superiority gave them access to public sphere training and power. The controversial Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 allowed the forced detention and examination of any

woman suspected of being a prostitute. Created out of fears of venereal disease, they attempted to control the deviant prostitute rather than her male customers. The anti-CDA campaign of 1869-1886, which helped create the later Social Purity campaign, involved multiple organizations and tactics and was significant in two different ways. Firstly, it placed both focus and blame for the current prostitution problem on male sexual incontinence, rather than female sexual deviance. It thus contested the view that deviant female sexuality caused male immorality, and therefore reinforced the opposing view of women's moral superiority by presenting women as pure victims of male immoral license. Josephine Butler, the founder of the anti-CDA organization the Ladies' National Association (LNA) and the dominant figure throughout the campaign, wrote that the Acts were unacceptable because "it is unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences" (431). Throughout the campaign Butler and others astutely focused on arguments that emphasized the sanctity of marriage and the family and used religious language to criticize male sexual license (Mort 92-94).

Secondly, both anti-CDA and Social Purity campaigns fostered the growth of the feminist movement. Mort comments on the link between these campaigns and feminism as a movement:

> In the years from the repeal campaign to the suffrage movement women's struggles were a major force in sexual politics. Women's organizations and feminist leaders emerged as a powerful pressure group whose influence was felt by male politicians and professionals at the level of the state and in public debate. By no means all purists identified with feminism, but the rapid growth of the women's movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cannot be understood without reference to the purity crusades, which drew thousands of women into the political arena for the first time" (117).

The anti-CDA movement very quickly gained female support and leadership, from a range of women such as Josephine Butler, Ellice Hopkins, Elizabeth Wolstenholme, Elizabeth Blackwell, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Bramwell Booth, Laura Ormisten-Chant, and Millicent Fawcett. Although related and at times blended together, the initial anti-CDAs repeal movement and the later social purity movement had key differences. The initial movement from 1869 until the Acts' repeal in 1886 focused specifically on repealing the legislation, while the later social purity movement (1880s-1890s) focused on eliminating prostitution and the sexual abuse of girls, through control of male sexuality. The latter movement was more popular and respectable as a cause for middle-class women, and was primarily focused on middle-class education of the lower classes on topics of morality.

Mort places this middle-class control of working class morality in the context of a feminist struggle for power at the time. Referring back to the anti-CDA campaign, he argues that the "struggles over the Contagious Diseases Acts need to be read both as a feminist challenge to male power *and* as a battle within the power bloc over the disciplining of the working-class" (Mort 99, emphasis his). Who would control sexuality? Medical authorities from the overwhelmingly male domain or moral reformers from the predominantly female domain? Taken in this sense, the repeal of the Acts seems to signal that women won this particular battle over who was best suited to morally reform the nation. Rescue work and education (as practiced by middle-class women) as opposed to incarceration (as practiced by men) triumphed as the model for moral control at the time.

Additional social reform movements also illustrate women's access to public power through the stereotype of a female moral mandate. The widespread concern with

slum conditions in the 1870s and 1880s inspired women such as Lady Henry Somerset to speak and act publicly on the issue (Shiman *Women* 102). Women led the temperance movement in America, although not in Britain, but many British women actively participated in it (Shiman *Women* 104). Finally, the mainstream churches, concerned with diminishing attendance, sanctioned women's church organizations to take more official roles than had previously been the case. A cleric's wife established the rapidly popular Mothers Union in 1876; Deaconess organizations grew quickly in the 50s and 60s as the Church of England responded to the "redundant" women problem; other similar women's church organizations from the 60s to the 80s involved temperance, Bible study, and nursing (Shiman *Women* 94-99)[10]. The Salvation Army, co-founded in 1865 by Catherine and William Booth, became "one of the few religious organizations of the period to acknowledge women as equals and encourage them in leadership positions" (Shiman *Women* 105). Its popularity meant that the many women who joined gained public speaking and leadership experience and training. As with many other religious movements like Methodism, this initial equality disappeared as the organization became more institutionalized and conservative.

Thus, a stereotypical concept of women as especially moral and service-oriented created a bridge for women between the domestic sphere and the public sphere. Frances Power Cobbe realized the potential of this bridge early on, strategically co-opting philanthropy as part of woman's sphere at the beginning of her 1862 article "Female Charity—Lay and Monastic":

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[10] See also Brian Heeney's *The Women's Movement in the Church of England, 1850-1930* and Susan Mumm's *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain.*

> Whatever else may be doubtful respecting woman's 'general worth and particular missionariness,' it is pretty well conceded that she is in her right place teaching the young, reclaiming the sinful, relieving the poor, and nursing the sick. (774)

Women's mandate to reform society through their superior morality allowed them to increasingly escape the domestic sphere to increase their domestic power (through legal and employment advances) and political power (through maternal rule and political influence), as discussed in previous sections. The cultural acceptance of women's moral superiority along with the reluctant acceptance of their intellectual abilities combined to create a sense of female power that greatly influenced the female rule texts studied in this dissertation.

Physical Power: Strength and Violence

Big, strong, violent women: this image captures some of the essential fears related to the various late nineteenth-century British political, legal and intellectual women's movements, alongside the fears previously discussed. Contemporary movements for women's health and exercise created worries about female infertility and competitiveness, as well as feminist hopes for women's physical emancipation. Highly publicized cases of female murderers, combined with the movements for women's power previously discussed, helped foster the images of potentially monstrous female violence found in some of the female rule texts. Each female rule text addresses the issue of female physical power uniquely, but the contexts explored below will inform the individual analysis of each text in the chapters to come.

The Health and Exercise Movements

Nineteenth-century women's rights activists recognized the importance of improving women's health and strength through exercise. In 1850 Harriet Martineau advocated that girls play vigorously at activities like climbing trees and running (McCrone 15). Bessie Rayner Parkes, another early advocate for women's rights, argued in 1858 that "women should try to become as tall, as strong, as capable of enduring mental and bodily exertion as it is possible for them to be; and till they have attained this maximum point, they have not fulfilled the intention of God" (qtd. in McCrone 15). In 1870 Frances Power Cobbe argued that "we should give ladies work to do, in the first place, if it were only that, in the second, they might enjoy play" (qtd. in McCrone 16). By play, Cobbe meant the exercise and games that give men renewed energy and enjoyment and thus help them be productive in the public sphere. Early women doctors, like Elizabeth Blackwell and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson recommended regular and fairly vigorous exercise for girls, although naturally their opinions as "lady doctors" were often discounted (McCrone 195). In recalling her education at Girton College, Sara Burstall significantly credits the contribution of exercise equally with academics to her success:

> its tradition of exercise and order for twelve academic terms in early womanhood, established the physical and nervous vigour that have carried me through forty-three years' hard teaching service without a break. (89)

The movement in favour of women's and girls' exercise was not supported only by feminists. It became a mainstream movement, widely supported by the medical community at the time. Kathleen McCrone, in studying articles in both the *British Medical Journal* and the *Lancet*, finds that the former, while only sporadically addressing the topic from the 1860s to the 1880s, was consistently in favour of increased exercise for

girls, as long as they didn't "overdo" it and discontinued sports in adulthood (McCrone 196-97). The *Lancet* covered the topic more frequently, but the overall message was the same (McCrone 197-99). Interestingly, the *Lancet* first wrote on the issue "in an editorial response to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*" (McCrone 197). Although the journal did not support Mill's stand on women's rights and powers, it attributed women's ill health to "the absence of proper physical training and healthful out-door exercises, as a relief to the close and stuffy school-room in which girls are too often confined" (qtd. in McCrone 197).

Concern over women's reproductive capacity and the continuance of the race motivated this widespread support for girls' physical education programs. Thus, arguments in favour of girls' sports and exercise made reference to improving the genetic stock and the ability to bear strong, healthy children. McCrone comments on the influence of the Social Darwinist movement of the time. Leading Social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer and George J. Romanes, while they opposed the women's rights movement, consistently supported exercise for girls as a means of "upgrading the maternal and racial quality" (McCrone 204). However, other Social Darwinists argued against physical exercise for girls and women for precisely the same reasons—they believed that exercise would weaken women's reproductive abilities (McCrone 205).

While advocating increased health and exercise for girls, many experts significantly attempted to limit the extent of girls' and women's physical power. An 1884 *British Medical Journal* article advocated girls' sports and games, but cautioned that "violent" exercise was damaging (qtd. in McCrone 196). In general, in the 1880s, *Lancet* articles advocated that girls play racquet sports or swim, but avoid excessive athleticism

or competitive team sports like cricket (McCrone 199). Advocates of women playing team sports looked for precedents, such as an alleged 1344 illustration of female cricket bowlers in a Bodleian manuscript or Robert Southey's 1797 description of an all-female cricket match (Turner 137). McCrone's analysis reveals widespread contradictions among doctors on which sports were good or bad for women, although most joined in disapproval of competitive sports like cricket and football, and of riding astride (200-201). Interestingly, the picture below (which significantly appeared at the beginning of the New Woman era) does not ridicule the women playing cricket. By 1890, exercise for women and girls had become much more accepted and mainstream.

Figure 10. "The Original English Lady Cricketeers" *Illustrated London News*, 1890 (Source: McCrone plate 6)

McCrone notes that the medical pronouncements against competitive team sports for women were far more based on political desire to hold power than biological evidence. In

particular, the strictures on team sports and competition show a fear of female ambition, cooperation and coalition. This contrasts with the approval of team sports and competition for boys and men at the time (McCrone 12). Furthermore, the main emphasis remained on girls' exercise, often with the implicit or explicit understanding that adult women would be busy childbearing or childrearing, with no time or energy to spare for playing games or exercising. Exercise made the female body the most effective reproductive tool—once it had become that tool, female physical power was seen as needless. However, the growing emphasis on women's health and exercise during this period[11]—with its potential corollary of increased strength and size—provides a significant context for Lytton and Corbett in particular, who both create gigantic and strong "super-women" in their female rule texts, a point I will examine in those chapters.

The Ultimate Paradox: The Angel as Killer

A public fascination with murderesses provides an interesting context, particularly with respect to *Coming Race* and *She*, for the role of force and violence in female rule. Female violence as a potential form of authority will be discussed fully in later chapters in relation to each individual female rule text. However, the widespread publicization of female murder in the 1870s and 1880s illustrates a Victorian awareness and fear of female violence that will contextualize my later analysis. Female murderers represented a stark contrast to the image of the gentle, nurturing and passive ideal of Victorian

[11] In the last decade of the century, exercise for girls and women had become quite popular and mainstream—enough so to be satirized in Gilbert and Sullivan's 1893 *Utopia Limited*. Mr. Goldbury's "Song" describes the "magnificent" typical English girl, five foot ten inches tall, who rides to the hounds, plays cricket, golf, and tennis, and also punts, rows, and swims—in addition to the usual dancing, singing and playing music.

womanhood. They also represented a terrifying disruption of the male dominance and female submission paradigm, most particularly in cases where wives murdered husbands. During the 20 years from 1870-1890, 13 widely publicized female murderer cases in Engand shocked the Victorian public—eight of them so famous and compelling that wax effigies of the murderesses were displayed in the Chamber of Horrors in Madame Tussaud's (Knelman 277). Both Mary S. Hartman and Mary Beth Wasserlein Emmerichs reveal some startling statistics on female homicide during the century. Hartman notes that "in England from 1855 to 1874 the annual totals of women tried for murder, which ranged from 12 to 42, twice exceeded those for men and normally were at least half as high, whereas women were only a fifth to a quarter of those tried in assize courts for all felonies" (5). Emmerichs also studied homicide rates in five-year intervals from 1845 to 1900 (100). Her results show that women were charged with homicide 74% as often as men (Emmerich 100). Emmerich goes on to argue that if "all the cases of concealment [the charge used when women were suspected of murdering infants] were added to the homicide cases for our sample years from 1845 to 1900, women would stand revealed as more murderous than men" (108). These statistics reveal what Victorians were increasingly confronting—women's capability for violence.

In her study *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press*[12], Judith Knelman examines the reactions to women who were accused of murder in nineteenth-century England. Her general thesis is that "women who killed were held in lower regard than men who killed, yet were considered more interesting to contemplate" (Knelman 3).

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[12] Although Knelman's book has been criticized (e.g. by Malcolm M. Feeley, *Law and Politics Book Review* 8:10, 386) for her sampling methodology and inconsistent focus, her study nonetheless (as Feeley and others acknowledge) provides information on the little-researched area of Victorian female criminality.

In particular, Knelman points out the recurring need to deny these women agency and strategy in their violent actions: "murder by a woman was so unthinkable in the patriarchal ideology of Victorian England that it had to be explained away as the action of a whore, witch, monster, or madwoman" (230). Female violence was consistently characterized as sexual/biological, inhuman, and emotional, rather than rational. This reaction is in contrast to Knelman's findings, which indicate that, during this period, nearly three-quarters of murders by women were premeditated and less than one-quarter appear to be crimes of passion (9). Even more interestingly, Knelman's analysis indicates that "in comparison with men who killed, women did so more often for money and less often out of passion" (9).

Increasingly, especially in the latter half of the century, the Victorian reaction to female murderers moved from demonization to theoretical speculations based on biology and psychology. For instance, Alfred Swaine Taylor's *The Principles and Practice of Medical Jurisprudence* (1865) "noted that disordered or suppressed menstruation, childbirth, or lactation, 'owing to sympathy of the brain with the uterus,' could be causes of homicidal monomania" (Knelman 256). In 1876 Victorian crime historian L. O. Pike explicitly linked feminism to female criminality. Using Darwinian logic, Pike argued that women were currently protected from temptation and crime through their evolutionary dependence on men; he argued that therefore if women became increasingly independent from men, they would increasingly succumb to such temptation and crime (Emsley 152). According to Pike, "every step made by woman towards her independence is a step towards that precipice at the bottom of which lies a prison" (qtd. in Emsley 152).

Reactions to—and punishments of—the female murderer were also very much affected by the sexuality of the accused. A striking example of this is seen in the contrasting trials and verdicts of Adelaide Bartlett (1886) and Florence Maybrick (1889). Both women were accused of murdering their husbands. Both stories involved the wives' alleged adultery. However, Bartlett was acquitted and Maybrick was convicted. Knelman argues convincingly that a key factor in the verdicts was that Bartlett denied adultery and Maybrick admitted it (118). The judge in Maybrick's case explicitly stated, both before and after the trial, that if she were an adulteress, then she was likely also a murderess (Knelman 238-39). Ironically, from her examination of these historical cases, Knelman thinks it likely that Bartlett was in fact guilty and that Maybrick was innocent (115). Thus, one Victorian explanation of female violence was to associate it with sexuality. Bartlett, who claimed to have had sex only once with her husband for procreation, was characterized as pure—the Victorian ideal who could thus not be violent. Maybrick, who had an adulterous and abusive husband and who was apparently seduced and used by her lover, was seen as impure and thus as violent. This link between female violence and sexuality will be taken up repeatedly in my discussions of the individual texts. Particularly for the earliest author, Bulwer-Lytton, the image of potentially violent, large, highly sexualized women was likely influenced by images of femme fatales in literature and art of the mid-Victorian period[13]. The following and final

[13] For example, see Thackeray's Becky Sharp, Swinburne's images of "vampirish love" in his 1866 *Poems and Ballads* (Allen, Virginia 117), and pre-Raphaelite paintings of sexual predators (e.g. La Belle Dame Sans Merci) by Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Sandys and others. For studies of Victorian representations of woman as evil, see Nina Auerbach's *The Woman and the Demon* (1982) and Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* (1986).

section in this chapter provides an essential base of Victorian theories of female nature and female sexuality, which I will build upon in subsequent chapters.

Controlling Female Power: Biology, Reproduction, and Sexuality

The Victorian scientific community, in response to multiple movements to increase women's power between 1870 and 1890, attempted to control women's power and reinforce male domination. Although each previous section presented both women's attempts for power and the reactions to it, these scientific reactions localize a broader Victorian attempt to justify the exclusion of women from power. Thus, at every turn, whether women were seeking suffrage, legal emancipation, employment, university education, moral reforms, health, or strength, scientists in various fields expanded theories upholding male dominance and female submission. This scientific discourse on female inferiority and the feminist responses to it provides a crucial context for my subsequent examination of female rule texts, since all four texts posit essentialist differences between men and women and different ideas of women's 'nature'.

Victorian Biology: The Science of Defining Female Inferiority

Victorian biological theories (incorporating physiology, anthropology, and evolution) strove to justify women's exclusion from the public sphere. Scientists, specifically craniologists, focused on particularly on the comparative analysis of the weight and mass of men's and women's brains (Tuana 69, Russett 35). The century's leading craniologist, the Frenchman Paul Broca, "collected more information about the contrasts between men's and women's brains than about any other kind of group

difference" (Russett 35). The study of craniology became highly complex and popular: the "number of cranial angles and indices multiplied at a prodigious rate in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s in what may be called the Baroque period of craniology" (Fee 426). Whatever the method, the claims were of 'proof' of female inferiority. In 1869, James McGrigor Allan (a London Anthropological Society member), after reading a translation of Carl Vogt's German study of 1864, concluded the "female skull approaches in many respects that of the infant, and still more that of the lower races" (Allen qtd. in Fee 419). A French scientist, G. Delauney, argued in 1881-1882's *Popular Science Monthly* that women's skulls were closer in volume to gorillas' than men's skulls (Russett 36). As previously mentioned, George J. Romanes's article "Mental Differences between Men and Women" helped popularize these theories of female inferiority. Romanes refers to a crucial "five-ounce" difference in brain weight, and from this difference argues that "on merely anatomical grounds we should be prepared to expect a marked inferiority of intellectual power" in women (654-55). This popular theory of judging intelligence and superiority by brain weight and mass did have its critics. In the last two decades of the century, critics in Germany, England, and America, including Havelock Ellis and the feminist Helen Gardener, pointed out what Elizabeth Fee calls "the elephant problem"—many animals with large brains, such as elephants, were clearly not more intelligent than animals with small brains (Russett 36). However, despite this seemingly obvious flaw in much of the comparative brain research at the time, the most renowned and respected brain scientists still claimed and popularized empirical conclusions. In fact, Fee argues convincingly that "as one index failed to measure up to expectations, another appeared, claiming to hold the solution to all earlier problems. Indeed, new techniques

and measurements began to appear at an even faster rate than others were relegated to oblivion" (427). This increasingly determined quest to "prove" female inferiority runs parallel to women's increasing demands for access to higher education and professions. For example, McGrigor Allan's article was published in the same year that Emily Davies created the Cambridge residences that would become Girton College, while the cranial studies of the 70s coincided with women's entrance into university degrees and politics.

Another powerful and popular scientific theory impacting ideas of women's nature at the time was recapitulation. Broadly, this involved Darwinian evolutionary theory in that it posited parallels between an individual's development and a species' development (Russett 50, Tuana 41). Using this theory of recapitulation, Victorian scientists drew parallels, in particular, between women, children, and other races. In order to rank humans on Darwin's Great Chain of Being, with the European male at the very top of the chain, scientists claimed that women, children, and non-white races were stuck in previous stages of evolutionary development (Russett 52). Scientists compared women to children in terms of their bodily proportions, craniums, and psychological traits, such as being "weak-willed, impulsive, perceptive, markedly imitative rather than original, timid, and dependent" (Russett 54). Darwin and others argued that since women had not been using their brains as much as men for centuries or millenia, male mental abilities had been evolving steadily while female intellects had stayed the same or had even declined (Mosedale, Russett). Typically, the proof of such ongoing inferiority was the list of great men compared to the scarcity of great women (Darwin 410). Scientists such as Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and George Romanes claimed that women could not catch up to men in their evolutionary development. But while it was primarily used to uphold male

dominance, Darwinism also created the possibility of evolutionary reversal. Perhaps the male could cease to evolve or even devolve, while the female could continue evolving and surpass him, as shown in the figure below. Intended as ridicule, this image also embodies a lurking fear of the evolutionary possibility of larger, stronger, dominant women. New scientific concepts of evolution and heredity, while primarily used to reinforce 'natural' gender hierarchies, also created ideas of biology as in process rather than fixed. Thus, perhaps the wife (as seen below) would not always be physically inferior to her husband.

Figure 11. "Mysteries of Heredity" (*Punch* v.94, p.30)

The limited energy theory was the most popular scientific 'proof' offered to justify women's control and containment. Originating in Faraday's First Law of Thermodynamics, this theory drew from physics the notion of a constant, fixed amount of energy in a system. This energy can be transmuted into other forms, such as heat, but the

amount of energy available remains constant. By the latter portion of the century, these theories had been applied to the human body, especially to the female body (Russett 106-116). The limited energy theory gave its proponents a seemingly firm scientific basis for the exclusion of women from the public sphere and its powers. Scientists argued that the complex female reproductive system used up most of a woman's limited supply of energy, particularly during the reproductive years (Russett 117-18). Female education in particular came under attack, since a woman's limited energy was being diverted from the essential reproductive development into intellectual development. Thus, Edward Clarke's *Sex in Education* (1873) contained accounts of studious young women who became ill or barren, as brain and womb battled for shares of her limited energy (Russett 117, 120). Dr. Henry Maudsley's "Sex and Mind in Education" (1874) referenced Clarke's work and similarly warned that "it would be an ill thing, if it should so happen, that we got the advantages of a quantity of female intellectual work at the price of a puny, enfeebled, and sickly race" (472). Menstruation was at the heart of this theory that women's reproductive systems sap their energies. McGrigor Allen, in 1869, wrote "[i]n intellectual labour, man has surpassed, does now, and always will surpass woman, for the obvious reason that nature does not periodically interrupt his thought and application" (qtd in Russett 30). Maudsley similary argued that a woman "for one quarter of each month during the best years of life is more or less sick and unfit for hard work" (480). Herbert Spencer's "Psychology of the Sexes" (published in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1873) tied the theory of female arrested development to this theory of limited energy and argued that the energy needs of the female reproductive system in puberty were responsible for women never attaining the full intellectual development of men (Russett 119). Like Maudsley, he

warned against women trying to develop their intellects beyond a certain level, since this would endanger the race (Tuana 75, Russett 118).

Feminists responded with critiques of these theories. Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson instantly wrote a reply to Maudsley's article, printed in the subsequent issue of the *Fortnightly Review* in 1874. She dismissed his theories by referencing the numerous women who worked all day and never seemed to be regularly incapacitated as he suggested (586). Similarly, the American doctor Mary Putnam Jacobi published *The Question of Rest for Women During Menstruation* in 1886, refuting the theory that menstruation incapacitated women. In response to Romanes's article, the trade union activist and feminist Edith Simcox wrote a rebuttal, "The Capacity of Women," which appeared in the September issue of the magazine. Simcox refuted Romanes's arguments by making the point, now commonplace, that culture and nurture have so vast an influence that it is impossible to disregard them and argue from biology alone in gender differences.

Fears of Extinction: The Birth Rate/Birth Control Conflict

Despite dissenting voices like Dr. Anderson's and Dr. Jacobi's, the declining marriage and birth rate seemed to confirm fears that women's emancipation would adversely affect women's reproductive abilities. Many *Saturday Review* articles in the 60s and 70s, some supportive but mostly condemning, commented on the modern woman's aversion to maternity (Banks 54-55). Michael Mason observes a definite decline in English marriage rates in the latter third of the nineteenth century (50). A change also occurred in the age of marriage beginning around 1870: women were "increasingly older

when they married" (Mason 51). Mason also notes the "accelerating, never-to-be-reversed decline" in the birth rate during the 1870s (53).

Mason argues that middle and upper-class families were "deliberately restricting their fertility, or practicing 'family limitation'" (53-54). J. A. and Olive Banks, in *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*, argue that, among the middle class, a raised standard of living and subsequent focus on leisure and gentility through culture caused this marked decline in the birth rate. After the Great Depression of the 70s, middle-class families had to retrench, and a logical way to preserve their standard of living would have been family limitation (Banks 83).

Investigations by historians such as Banks and Mason clearly point to an increasing use of birth control at the time, but birth control was still socially considered a taboo topic and practice. The Annie Besant[14]-Charles Bradlaugh trial of 1877 indicates this paradox. Besant and Bradlaugh were charged with obscenity for publishing a birth control book, *The Fruits of Philosophy* written by Dr. Charles Knowlton in 1832. On the one hand, the book's sales steadily increased before, during, and after the trial (Banks 91). People not only attended the trial in large numbers, but also donated over £1000 to the defense (Banks 91). Finally, Besant and Bradlaugh, received thousands of letters of gratitude and support, and were popular speakers "during and after the trial and were received enthusiastically in packed halls" (Banks 91). On the other hand, however, newspapers like the *Saturday Review*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Evening Standard*, and *The Times* condemned Besant and Bradlaugh (Banks 90). Leaders in the feminist

[14] Annie Besant was the estranged sister-in-law of Walter Besant, having been divorced from Walter's brother. Walter Besant's disapproval of Annie's feminist activism is indicated by a key action: he changed the pronunciation of his name to distance himself from her notoriety (Showalter "Notes" n.p.).

movement, furthermore, remained silent or disapproving; both Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Elizabeth Blackwell were firmly against the book and birth control in general (Banks 92-93)[15]. Because of the trial, furthermore, Bradlaugh's already rocky political career faced renewed difficulties and attack, and Besant lost custody of her daughter (Banks 89). Thus, although the middle classes were clearly practicing birth control, it remained a taboo subject and those who openly supported it suffered.

In the context of female rule texts from 1870-1890, this birth rate/birth control conflict plays an important role. It embodies, in a sense, the essential conflict of the period. On one hand is the movement to biologically and culturally confine women to a primary role and identity of maternity—woman as womb. Even many feminists did not question the assumption that all women wished to be and should be mothers. On the other hand, the limitation of family size, as well as the movements for women's education, suffrage, employment, and marital rights, steadily worked against the concept of woman as solely and primarily a mother. All the female rule texts studied reveal a conflicted focus on this issue of maternal role and identity in connection to women's possession and wielding of power, points I will examine more fully in subsequent chapters.

The Angel and the Prostitute: Victorian Female Sexuality

Sexuality and maternity, as seen in the previous discussion of Queen Victoria, are related issues. Victorian sexuality has been an interest of twentieth-century criticism, most marked by Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1964), Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Peter Gay's *The Education of the Senses* (1984), and Michael

Mason's *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (1994). Although stereotypes about Victorian sexuality have altered somewhat during the twentieth century—from the concept of Victorians as prudes to an awareness of them as sexualized—two opposing concepts of female sexuality and desire existed during the Victorian era. One view asserted the existence and normality of female sexual desire. The other proclaimed that strong and active female sexual desire was deviant and pathological. This paradox provides a significant backdrop to the female rule texts, since all of them, in varying ways I will later discuss, show tension between these two theories of female sexual desire.

To trace Victorian attitudes towards female sexuality, Mason references a host of sources from mid-century on, including *Lancet* articles that acknowledge female desire and female orgasm (196-98). For example, physicians were sued or investigated for performing operations, specifically clitoridectomies or ovariotomies, which prevented or reduced a woman's sexual pleasure (Mason 175-76, 197). William Acton propounded a different and opposing theory of female sexuality. Although Jeanne Peterson argues against taking Acton as the dominant medical voice for the period, he was nonetheless highly influential, publishing many works on prostitution (1857), the Contagious Diseases Acts (1870), and human reproduction (multiple editions from the 1850s to the 1870s). Acton based his view of female sexuality on theories already noted, such as the limited energy theory, arguing that reproduction and childrearing were so taxing to a woman's energy that "sexual desire is almost annihilated" (Acton qtd. in Mort 79). His now oft-quoted statement that "the majority of women (happily for society) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind" embodies the essence of his view on

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[15] George Eliot, on the other hand, approved of birth control and confided her and George Henry Lewes's

female sexuality (Acton qtd. in Peterson 582). Influenced by Darwinism, Acton argued from an examination of female sexuality among animal species that women had no real sexual desire outside of a desire for maternity (Mort 79). Given this medical theory of 'natural' female asexuality, any behaviour outside of this, such as prostitution, was characterized as pathological. Hence, the Contagious Diseases Acts characterized the female prostitutes as sexually deviant and blamed them for the spread of syphillis. Acton was a very vocal supporter of these Acts, justifying their powers by referencing the rehabilitation of the prostitutes: "the Contagious Diseases Act should be extended to the civil population, for by means of its machinery alone can we discover and detail till cured the women afflicted with syphilitic diseases, and in no other way that has occurred to me can the supervision necessary for enabling us to work a gradual improvement in their lives be obtained" (27). This quotation characterizes female sexual agency as a disease to be cured, a force to be controlled and contained. By attempting to both erase and control female sexual desire, Acton and others were attempting to further reinforce notions of male dominance and female submission. A man had active desire—a woman submitted passively to it. Any woman acting outside this paradigm could be legally imprisoned and "cured" until ready to submit. Although this theory emphasizes a pathological, almost demonic image of female sexual aggression, a different perspective depicted it as humorous, as seen in the figure below. This cartoon satirizes the result of bloomerism (women in trousers), and ridicules the reversal of sexual dominance.

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reliance on it to Barbara Bodichon (Ashton 161).

Figure 12. "One of the delights of Bloomerism - The ladies will pop the question." (*Punch* 1851, v.21, p.192)

The texts by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Haggard all reveal the co-existance of this dual view of female sexual aggression as both frightening and comic. As discussed in my introduction, female sexuality—as characterized by Acton and other Victorians—inextricably intertwines with the depictions of female rule, as these texts repeatedly show their authors' inability to reconcile female sexuality with the act of governance.

Conclusion

This dense socio-political context—that of late-Victorian feminism and the reactions against it—is thus highly complex, encompassing a variety of disparate and intersecting political, legal, occupational, intellectual, religious, and scientific

movements. The four fictional texts studied all interact (either explicitly or emotionally or both) in particular ways with this ferment of movements, as they range chronologically from 1871 to 1889. Bulwer-Lytton's text appeared shortly after Mill's *Subjection of Women* and the initial suffrage debates. Besant's satire was published at the height of multiple women's occupational, educational, and legal reforms. Haggard's adventure fantasy coincided with Queen Victoria's jubilee celebration of 50 years of reign. Finally, Corbett's political text arrived on the eve of the 'new woman' era and its substantial changes in ideologies of sexuality and gender boundaries.

More specifically, each of these fictional speculations on female rule intersects with particular feminist and anti-feminist movements. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the speculative fantasies of Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Haggard manifest contemporary theories of male and female sexuality to posit a female sexual dominance that both creates and destroys female rule. In so doing, they also respond to various movements to empower married women and to rescue their 'fallen' sisters. Their depictions of female rule also reveal a concern with the 'surplus' women who could not be controlled through marriage and who thus threatened the ideology of male sexual dominance. Significantly, these first three authors avoid or reject the notion of maternalism as a desirable political force, despite the emphasis many feminists of the period placed on this. Corbett takes up this notion vigorously, arguing for women's 'natural' political superiority and explicitly contesting many contemporary theories of women's biological inabilities. Corbett furthermore responds to the many marital reform movements by recognizing the relationship between sexual and political power.

In the area of female authority, each author emotionally manifests even more particularly his or her particular contemporary events. Lytton's depiction of giant intellectual women particularly responds to contemporary scientific theories of male and female 'nature' and the creation of the first women's college. Besant's image of female parliamentary chaos, as well as intellectual stagnation and theocratic dictatorship, appears at a time when many contemporaries felt women were usurping male authority on all fronts—political, intellectual, legal, spiritual, and economic. Haggard's creation of an all-powerful and all-knowing imperial queen intersects with Victorian imperialism, women's spiritual authority, and the question of how to control the increasingly educated and emancipated 'new' woman. Finally, Corbett's celebration of female rule brings together the various feminist movements and achievements of these two decades to predict their future result: 'natural' female authority in all arenas.

All four authors also reveal different socio-political contexts in their speculations on gender boundaries under female rule. Lytton evokes personal as well as legal contexts (those of married women's property and divorce) in his depiction of gender equality in the public sphere before marriage, but ultimately presents an idealized Victorian segregation of female domesticity from male public activity. Besant reveals sympathy for Victorian working women in his gender reversal satire, but primarily focuses on the chaos created by women not remaining in their 'natural' domestic sphere, revealing contemporary fears of women crowding men out of jobs. Haggard echoes the Victorian scientific belief in women's primary reproductive role, as well as the belief in middle-class women's private-sphere leisure as 'civilized'. Even his powerful female ruler does not fully escape the 'natural' law of private woman and public man. Finally, Corbett

responds to feminist movements which strove to escape the private and access the public sphere by nearly erasing the boundary between the two. Her state reveals the occasional intersections between feminism and socialism during the period, as well as the feminist movement's frequent focus on public intervention into private issues like childcare, housing, nutrition, and the environment.

This overview of the feminist movements from 1870-1890 paves the way for the later detailed contextualizations by revealing the range and tenacity of these movements and the reactions against them. In the following chapters, the movements overviewed here may be referenced in more detail, as each author's speculative text manifests both emotional and intellectual reactions to women's growing power during the period. The following chapters also examine each author's personal intersections with these movements and counter-movements as further contexts for each fictional speculation on the role of sexuality, authority, and gender boundaries in female rule.

CHAPTER 2

AMAZONIAN ABDICATION: *THE COMING RACE*

> *This young Gy was a magnificent specimen of the muscular force to which the females of her country attain. Her features were beautiful, like those of all her race: never in the upper world have I seen a face so grand and so faultless, but her devotion to the severer studies had given to her countenance an expression of abstract thought which rendered it somewhat stern when in repose; and such sternness became formidable when observed in connection with her ample shoulders and lofty stature. She was tall even for a Gy, and I saw her lift up a cannon as easily as I could lift a pocket-pistol. Zee inspired me with a profound terror...* (*The Coming Race* 114)

Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Zee, a seven-foot-tall woman from a subterranean race who carries a destructive electric phallic rod, embodies a great deal of the angst surrounding the "Woman Question" in 1871. In Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*, a satire on American democracy, Darwinian theory, and women's rights, the female underworld inhabitants (known as Gy-ei) are bigger, stronger, and fiercer than the Ana (men)[16]. They are sexually aggressive, intelligent and have equal access to education and employment. Finally, they have the greatest control over a mysterious electrical power called "vril," a force capable of mass destruction. Given this description, one might expect these superior Gy-ei to rule the underworld. Instead, once married, these immensely powerful women embody the Victorian domestic ideal of womanhood as loving and submissive spouses, happy abdicating their powers to men, both domestically and politically. In order to tempt and secure a mate, each woman must sign a prenuptial contract written by her future husband, in which she signs over her rights. Thus, although in the strictest political sense women do not actually rule Bulwer-Lytton's underworld

society, the issue of female dominance pervades the text; at its heart it addresses the dread of female rule in late-Victorian England.

Bulwer-Lytton's Amazonian plot is simple: an American discovers a subterranean civilization below a mineshaft and is trapped there. The highly advanced, intelligent, and powerful citizens treat him kindly, if patronizingly, until one of their young women (who are exceptionally large, intelligent, and powerful) sexually pursues him. To prevent miscegenation, his hosts condemn him to death—he is only saved by the adoring Amazon, Zee, who restores him to his own world. Bulwer-Lytton composed the novel primarily during 1869 and 1870, when women achieved a multitude of new rights: the right to the municipal vote (1869), to elected school board positions (1870), to college education (1869), and to separate property in marriage (1870). Bulwer-Lytton's satire is the most paradoxical depiction of female rule of the four texts examined in this study because although the Gy-ei are far more powerful than the women in the other texts, they exercise that power the least. The reasons for this conflict between empowerment and abdication will be analyzed in detail below, focusing on how Bulwer-Lytton incorporates Victorian concepts of women's 'nature' into his wish-fulfillment fantasy of domesticated Amazons.

By 1871, the 68-year-old Edward Bulwer-Lytton had achieved fame and success as both politician and writer. A Liberal MP in the House of Commons from 1831-1841, a Conservative member of the House of Lords from 1852-1858, and Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1858-1859, he was made a Baronet in 1866 and given the orders of St. Michael and St. George in 1869. By the end of his life, Bulwer-Lytton was a wealthy and

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[16] These names are from the Greek words for woman (gyne) and man (aner).

established author, having published 65 works before his death in 1873, including novels, plays, speeches and essays.[17] Towards the end of his life, Bulwer-Lytton opposed radical theories and practices, such as democracy, Darwinism, reform movements and women's rights, and he voices this opposition clearly in his last works: *The Coming Race*, *Kenelm Chillingly*, and *The Parisians* (Campbell 19).

In addition to the general conservatism that helped inspire his anti-feminist satire, Bulwer-Lytton's marriage provides an essential context for his depictions of sexual relations in the novel. Bulwer-Lytton married Rosina Wheeler, an outspoken and unconventional woman, when both were 24 years old. The few biographical sources tend to take sides[18], but strong evidence from all sources suggests his responsibility for their initial marital problems, as he spent little time with his new family, insisted on the wet nursing of their first child, was physically abusive, and committed adultery. Financial difficulties also contributed to their marital strife. When Rosina responded with her own extramarital flirtation, their relationship became openly hostile. At this point, mainstream accounts such as those of Michael Sadleir and Bulwer-Lytton's son and grandson become increasingly biased in his favour. Against these mainstream accounts we have the more obscure texts of Rosina's autobiography and the collection of letters and documents by her friend Louisa Devey; the latter text was blocked from publication by Bulwer-Lytton's son, but a few copies survive. The main facts now established by current scholarly

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[17] See James L. Campbell, Allen Christensen, and Robert Lee Wolff on bibliography for studies of Bulwer-Lytton's writing. Christensen's *Dictionary of Literary Biography* entry on Bulwer-Lytton contains a complete listing of the author's publications.

[18] The sources favouring Bulwer-Lytton are the biographies by his son Robert Bulwer-Lytton, his Grandson Victor Bulwer-Lytton, his prodigy T.H.S. Escott, and the early twentieth-century literary historian and critic Michael Sadleir. Those supporting Rosina are her autobiography, her friend Louisa Devey in a collection of letters and documents, and the modern critic Virginia Blain.

research are as follows. Prior to their initial separation in 1833, there are at least two documented instances of Bulwer-Lytton's physical violence towards Rosina. Their 1833 parting was followed by a judicial separation in 1836. Although Bulwer-Lytton initially left their two children in Rosina's care, he removed them and denied her access to them in 1838. She became impoverished and debt-ridden on his initial support payments of £400 per annum and persistently began to request more money, particularly as his wealth increased. He consistently refused this increase. He requested that she grant him a divorce on his terms—that she be cited as the guilty party—but she refused. Under the current law, a divorce was impossible if both parties had grounds. In the late 40s and 50s, through novels, leaflets and her letters to him and his friends, she began a hostile campaign to embarrass him into increasing his financial support. He in turn blocked publication of her works and delayed his support payments. These hostilities culminated during his 1858 election campaign when she appeared on the hustings and denounced him. He had her confined to a mental institution until a public outcry by her friends led to her release. The scandal and subsequent public panic led in 1858-60 to a parliamentary examination of wrongful confinement. To prevent further scandal, Bulwer-Lytton agreed to Rosina's terms and increased her settlement, while she agreed to leave for the continent on a tour with her long-estranged son (see Blain, Campbell, Escott, Kurata, Robert Bulwer-Lytton, Victor Bulwer-Lytton, and Sadleir). These events, involving a woman's aggressive and public rebellion and a husband's attempts to disempower his wife, potentially inform Bulwer-Lytton's depiction of gendered power relations in *The Coming Race*.

The Coming Race was published anonymously in 1871 to popularity and critical acclaim, and it was repeatedly reissued.[19] At Bulwer-Lytton's request, the novel's authorship remained secret until his death in 1873 (Marc'hadour 94). In a letter to his friend John Forster in 1870, Bulwer-Lytton reveals the reasoning for this anonymity: "my notion having been that if [*The Coming Race*] could appear unbeknown, it would create a sensation and have a large sale, but that with my name it would be a failure" (qtd. in Bulwer-Lytton, Victor 2:466). Initial reception was positive, although reviewers occasionally critiqued the novel's somewhat paradoxical depiction of women as powerful yet submissive. *Blackwood's Magazine* expressed surprise that the super-powerful underworld woman was "still more obedient than when she was the weaker" sex ("The Coming Race" 52). The *Examiner* praised the novel's "kindly satire, its gentle moralisings, its healthy humour, and its extensive knowledge," but seemed unaware of the novel's satire on women's rights ("The Coming Race" 560). It failed to comment on the submission of women in the text, instead briefly mentioning that women are presented as "the better half of creation" in the novel who "have fairplay [sic] given to them" in their equality (561). The *Athenaeum* compared the author to Swift and lauded the novel as an "engrossing tale"; it briefly comments on the novel's paradoxical treatment of women: "The Vril-ya women are in some respects the converse of ours: they are larger, stronger, cleverer, and more learned than the males, yet where they love it is their pleasure to obey" ("The Coming Race" *Athenaeum* 649). Once Bulwer-Lytton's

[19] It went through five editions (reprintings) in six months (Marc'hadour 94), and the National Union Catalogue and British Library Catalogues reveal further re-issues in 1872, 1873, 1874,1875, 1878, 1880, 1886, 1888, 1892, and 1893 in addition to many twentieth-century editions. There were foreign language translations during the nineteenth century published in Paris, Milan, Madrid, and Budapest and an English edition published in Leipzig.

authorship of the novel became known in 1873, posthumous reviews of the novel praised its "imagination" and "pure fairy tale" qualities ("Edward Bulwer-Lytton" *New Moulton's* 4947, 4954).

Modern critical responses to *The Coming Race* are few and brief, primarily focusing on the book as utopian writing. Bulwer-Lytton's satire is widely deemed an "anti-utopia" and is sometimes considered the first instance of this sub-genre (Seeber 39). In an anti-utopia, the writer depicts an ostensibly idealized society not only to critique his or her current society (as in classic utopias like Thomas More's), but also to critique the very notion of utopia and expose its inherent undesirability. Bulwer-Lytton specifically acknowledged this purpose in a letter to his son shortly after the book's publication:

> I don't think people have caught or are likely to catch the leading idea of the book, which is this:—Assuming that all the various ideas of philosophical reformers could be united and practically realised, the result would be firstly, a race that must be fatal to ourselves; our society could not amalgamate with it; it would be deadly to us, not from its vices but its virtues. Secondly, the realisation of these ideas would produce a society which we should find extremely dull, and in which the current equality would prohibit all greatness. Of course in the handling of the main idea there are collateral veins of satire or reflection. (qtd. in Lytton, Victor 468)

Thus, the book both satirizes contemporary reform movements such as women's rights and also questions the utopian notion that reform would produce a desirable society. Focusing on the novel's anti-utopian genre, Geoffrey Wagner's 1965 short article concentrates on establishing links between Bulwer-Lytton's satire and later anti-utopias by Samuel Butler and H. G. Wells, although he also spends two pages discussing the novel's reaction to the "new woman" (384)[20]. In the book's centennial year, 1971, G.

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[20] Wagner's terminology is anachronistic here. The term 'new woman' is attributed to novelist Sarah Grand's use of it in 1894—antedating Bulwer-Lytton's novel by 23 years. A more accurate allusion would be to Eliza Linton's "The Girl of the Period" (1868), which I discuss later in this chapter.

Marc'hadour and H. U. Seeber both wrote very short reviews for the utopian studies journal *Moreana*, each touching briefly on the novel's anti-feminist message. Robert Lee Wolff notes how "heavy-handedly Bulwer strikes out" at the "'new woman, or 'girl of the period'" (*Strange* 327). Essays by B. G. Knepper (1983) and Darko Suvin (1984) primarily emphasize *The Coming Race*'s placement in a utopian canon. However, Knepper considers the Victorian contexts of the novel, such as the suffrage debate and Darwinian theory, and observes the novel's paradox: "Oddly, Zee is at once the feminist ideal and the caricature of all feminist ideals" (17). Suvin briefly analyzes Bulwer's "murky phallocratic logic" and offers a new explanation of the novel's paradoxical depiction of women: "Bulwer's deep commitment to the discourse of power is matched by his constant attraction to the discourse of freedom—to the Romantic radicalism of correspondences between warmth, depths, energy, femininity, and equality" (245). This is an insightful reading of the novel's internal conflict between reinforcing Victorian patriarchal power structures and critiquing some of those structures. The final modern study, James L. Campbell's 1986 *Edward Bulwer-Lytton*, notes in passing that *The Coming Race* "associates women's equality with blatant moral looseness" (126). This collapsing of women's rights into the issue of female sexual desire forms the focus of the next section, which analyzes relationships between female sexuality and female rule in *The Coming Race*.

Sexuality and Rule in *The Coming Race*

Female sexuality is the ultimate catch-22 in Bulwer-Lytton's imaginary creation of female super-women. It represents the primary source of women's power in the novel,

but also the primary force driving their submission, as women's sexuality leads them to voluntarily succumb to 'natural' male rule. More than an explicit reaction to any particular Victorian feminist movement or scientific theory, this paradox of submission seems pure wishful fantasy rather than the intellectual satire that also informs *The Coming Race*, revealing the blend of emotional reaction and intellectual critique often present in speculative fiction. In the novel, Bulwer-Lytton equates women's rights with sexual aggression. As Tish (the American narrator and male protagonist) disapprovingly observes when the heroine Zee begins to court him, "so confirmed are the rights of females in that region, and so absolutely foremost among those rights do females claim the privilege of courtship," that no one has the authority to restrain his Amazonian suitor (193-94). The narrator furthermore refers to the widespread pursuits of men by women in this society as "a female's most valued rights" and also reduces the Victorian feminist movement to this single right of sexual choice: "there is one privilege the Gy-ei carefully retain, and the desire for which perhaps forms the secret motive of most lady asserters of women's rights above ground" (203, 70). This reduction domesticates women's rights as a marital issue alone, rather than encompassing the wider public sphere. As the novel also satirizes American democratic society, Anthony Trollope's description of American women in his *North America* (1862) provides a significant parallel. Trollope, at the end of a chapter criticizing the American women's rights movement, concludes that the "best right a woman has is the right to a husband" (265), thus similarly reducing women's rights to marital choice. In this context of women's increasing rights on both sides of the Atlantic, Bulwer-Lytton's hopeful reduction of women's rights to the stereotypical right to

catch a man must have been especially reassuring to anti-feminist readers, as it replaced political with sexual rule.

One of the advantages of speculative fiction is the lack of boundaries—both dreams and nightmares can be taken as far as desired. Bulwer-Lytton's wishful fantasy does not stop with the reduction of women's rights to that of sexual dominance. In *The Coming Race* women's power is further curtailed by eroding this secondary threat of female sexual dominance, as the novel's discussion of underworld marriage contracts illustrates. The super-women in this underworld voluntarily agree to the husband's conditions in a pre-nuptial contract because "where a Gy really loves she foregoes all rights" (205). (This evokes and possibly ridicules John Stuart Mill's public abdication of a husband's powers upon his marriage to Harriet Taylor in 1851 [Perkin 266]). To justify this abdication, Bulwer-Lytton creates the Vril-ya aphorism: "where a Gy loves it is her pleasure to obey" (72). All Vril-ya start life with wings, but Gy-ei, in a gesture of submission, give theirs up upon marriage. Such submission by such powerful women would appear ridiculously unlikely, so Bulwer-Lytton justifies this abdication by reference to "natural" female sexuality:

> love occupies a larger space in her thoughts, and is more essential to her happiness, and that therefore she ought to be the wooing party; that otherwise the male is a shy and dubitant creature—that he has often a selfish predilection for the single state—that he often pretends to misunderstand tender glances and delicate hints—that, in short, he must be resolutely pursued and captured. (71)

Conveniently, men do not need women in this society. There is no acknowledgement of male sex drive—a significant omission considering Bulwer-Lytton's own series of mistresses. Bulwer-Lytton's depictions of an all-powerful female sex drive and a non-existent male sex drive significantly exaggerate contemporary beliefs

to serve his purpose. William Acton is often cited for his beliefs that 'normal' women (e.g. not prostitutes) had no sexual desire, but Acton (as previously noted) is not necessarily the best indicator of mainstream Victorian medical belief. More prominent medical authorities such as Sir James Paget, Sir Andrew Clark, and Sir Clifford Allbutt believed that intercourse was healthy for both sexes (Smith 186). With his portrayal of male sexual disinterest, Bulwer-Lytton was departing from this medical norm. Although two streams of argument existed—one supporting male ability to control desire and one claiming a male physiological need for intercourse—neither upholds an image that matches Bulwer-Lytton's fantasy of men who simply do not seem interested in sex (Mason 222). On the other hand, one stream of contemporary physiological theory indicated a strong desire to 'prove' that men were capable of controlling their desires (223-24). This theory of the evolved male triumphing over his animal body—especially in contrast to the less evolved female driven by her biological desires—appears in Bulwer-Lytton's wishful speculation. Clearly, a male sex drive would dramatically alter the male dominance symbolized in the Vril-ya prenuptial agreement, since men as well as women would then be 'naturally' driven to find a spouse. Thus, the theory of male continence surfaced to justify a fantasy society in which women are biologically driven to mate and men are not, and this fantasy society thus reinforced a Victorian ideology that not only naturalized male dominance and female submission, but also contrasted male 'evolved' rational control with female 'unevolved' emotional chaos.

Bulwer-Lytton further undermines the domestic power of women in a personally motivated reaction against contemporary marital reforms. In the underworld, divorce, rather than increasing women's autonomy, increases male control. There marriage

contracts are only for three years—open to renewal or rejection by either party after that time—and men are allowed to add a second wife after ten years (69). Although Bulwer-Lytton hastens to assure readers that "divorces and polygamy are extremely rare" in this society, he attributes underworld marital happiness to the constant threat of separation or a second wife, which keeps the women in a proper submissive state (70). Since women are biologically driven to need husbands above all else, the threat of divorce or replacement curbs them "into gentle manners" (70). This rather strikingly contrasts with Bulwer-Lytton's own situation in which his wife Rosina was in favour of a divorce, as long as the terms were fair and equal. Furthermore, the Divorce Act of 1857 gave her new divorce options against him, and only his financial control of her prevented a divorce entirely on her terms, since divorce under the 1857 Act still cost an average of £100 (Holcombe *Wives* 105). This new Divorce Act, along with similar marital reforms such as the 1870 Married Women's Property Act, represented slow Victorian erosions of a husband's legal control which contrast sharply with Bulwer-Lytton's hopeful and reassuring fantasy in which powerful women willingly abdicate their marital rights.

Bulwer-Lytton's satiric fantasy also has a didactic purpose; he uses the sex-reversal to critique contemporary female behaviour. In particular, he targets a lack of feminine modesty, as deplored in Eliza Lynn Linton's influential "The Girl of the Period" article (1868) and Anthony Trollope's description of American women in *North America* (1862). Linton's essay upbraided girls for a "fastness" that she compares to prostitutes' behaviour and dress (173). Trollope similarly criticizes the "immodesty" of some American women, who speak as if men were not present and demand male concessions as rights rather than as chivalric favours to the weak (201). In one scene in the novel,

Bulwer-Lytton's narrator makes the following comments on the sex role-reversed courtship behaviour: "as is the modest custom of the males when addressed by females, he answered with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks, and was demure and shy as young ladies new to the world are in most civilized countries, except England and America" (202-03). Bulwer-Lytton's sex reversal, however humorous in tone, uses men to exemplify ideal female behaviour while criticizing both underworld and Victorian female sexual aggression as 'unnatural' and ridiculous.

A more serious context underlies this ridicule of sexual aggression: the late-Victorian pathologization of prostitutes. As I have outlined in Chapter 1, Britain was embroiled in controversy over the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, which placed blame for the spread of venereal disease on prostitutes characterized as pathologically sexually aggressive. This context intersects with Bulwer-Lytton's novel on two levels. Firstly, it underlies the association between female sexual aggression and social threat, since prostitutes (rather than their customers) were blamed for endangering society through the spread of disease. Secondly, the strongly feminist anti-CDA movement organized by Josephine Butler in 1869 embodied women's increasing public voice and demands for justice during this period—especially the transfer of blame from female prostitutes to their male clients. This context intersects with Rosina's public denouncement of Bulwer-Lytton's own adultery, neglect, and abuse and her demands for justice. Thus, although Bulwer-Lytton's tone and genre infuse his novel with humour (as evidenced in the witty depictions of role reversal), his depiction of sexually aggressive women is significantly informed by the immediate context of the CDAs and the movement for their repeal.

The Amazonian heroine Zee explicitly embodies the social threat of female sexual aggression through the issue of miscegenation. Sander L. Gilman describes how art, medicine, and literature posited an uncontrolled sexual appetite in non-white races and "atavistic" women such as prostitutes. As Gilman's essay makes clear, Victorians believed that pathological female sexuality (described in terms of race, evolution, and atavism) not only caused miscegenation, but also produced inferior offspring. The narrator specifically critiques Zee's sexual pursuit of himself as miscegenistic: "by what strange infatuation could this peerless daughter of a race which, in the supremacy of its powers and the facility of its conditions, ranked all other races in the category of barbarians, have deigned to honour me with her preferences?" (170). His answer characterizes Zee's (and all women's) sexuality as a "weakness" that is both uncontrollable and misguided, "a woman's affection for one so inferior to herself" (171). He furthermore links this sexuality to a biological maternal attraction to the weak. Bulwer-Lytton here implies that women's alleged essential qualities of nurturance and maternalism lead to miscegenation. Thus, Bulwer-Lytton presents as destructive the very qualities some Victorian feminists held up as proof of women's superiority and entitlement to public sphere influence. Zee's father's reaction to her desire for the narrator supports this belief that Zee's affection is destructive:

> I grieve for you, because such a marriage would be against the Aglauran, or good of the community, for the children of such a marriage would adulterate the race: they might even come into the world with the teeth of carnivorous animals; this could not be allowed: Zee, as a Gy, cannot be controlled; but you, as a Tish, can be destroyed. (181)

Despite its humorous tone, this passage implies that Zee's misdirected sexuality endangers both her race and the object of her affections. Finally, the novel implies that

the uncontrollability of Zee and the Gy-ei in general caused this potential danger. Their sexuality is a chaotic force that threatens society, race, and empire through its disorder and degeneration. In the novel, female sexuality thus disqualifies women from ruling on two levels. On one hand, it prevents absolute female dominance, since love causes women to abdicate their rule. On the other hand, female sexual dominance threatens society, since women cannot control their own desires to serve the common good. Thus, they cannot be trusted as rulers.

Despite Bulwer-Lytton's emphatic opposition between female sexuality and female rule, he complicates his own anti-feminist message in a single striking passage. The narrator analyzes his lack of attraction to Zee, a "lofty type of the noblest womanhood," and critiques the male dominance/female submission paradigm of sexuality: "Is it that, among the race I belong to, man's pride so far influences his passions that woman loses to him her special charm of woman if he feels her to be in all things eminently superior to himself?" (170). Although his answer seems clearly to be "yes," the mere posing of this question, and his implied shame, strike an important note. Despite the novel's repeated undercutting of women's power, this passage resonates as a marked critique of man's 'natural' dominance. Separated from and constantly challenged by a very vocal, intelligent, and strong wife, Bulwer-Lytton takes a small but significant moment in his cathartic fantasy of powerful yet submissive women to question why men will not allow women to be superior. For once his answer has nothing to do with female biological imperatives, but everything to do with male emotional conditioning. In this one moment, Bulwer-Lytton echoes his youthful reform ideals and a letter he wrote to a woman friend in 1826:

> The greatest compliment a man can pay to a woman is to remember that her mind is equal or superior to his own; and this because men have some vague idea that women are not to be reasoned with—all folly, but then men are such fools. (qtd. in Bulwer-Lytton, Victor, vol.1, 153)

Bulwer-Lytton's wishful transformation of sexually aggressive, powerful women into submissive wives encapsulates philosophical and scientific debates over sex differences—essentially the classic nature vs. nurture debate—during his lifetime and particularly during the period immediately before the publication of *The Coming Race*. A primary impetus was likely John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Mill argued against the prevailing notion that nature (e.g. a biological drive to mate and reproduce) dictated women's submissive and domestic role and character: "What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others" (29). The Victorian era produced many theories 'proving' that women's biological nature was primarily domestic and reproductive, theories which upheld the paradigm of male dominance and female submission. Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, James McGrigor Allan, Luke Owen Pike and William Acton, among others, all presented or supported such theories in the years surrounding the *The Coming Race*[21]. However, in his opposition to these theories of female natural biological submission, Mill challenged his opponents to put their beliefs to the test:

> What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. What they can do, but not so well as the men who are their competitors,

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[21] For example, Darwin's *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (published two months before *The Coming Race* in 1871), Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (1869), James McGrigor Allen's "On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women" (1869), Luke Owen Pike's "On the Claims of Women to Political Power" (1869), William Acton's *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects...* (1857) and *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (multiple editions 1857, 1862, 1865 and later).

> competition suffices to exclude them from . . . . If women have a greater natural inclination for some things than for others, there is no need of laws or social inculcation to make the majority of them do the former in preference to the latter. Whatever women's services are most wanted for, the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducements to them to undertake. (35-36)

Mill exposed the underlying weakness of the opposite camp in the debate. If women were indeed naturally subordinate to men, then presumably no controls were necessary to ensure they would remain so. A multitude of controls, on the other hand, implied that men believed that women would not be inferior unless their development was actively blocked. Into this debate between nature and nurture steps Bulwer-Lytton's tale of the sexes that magically resolves all problems by accepting Mill's challenge while reinforcing the Victorian status quo. No laws or controls restrict the women in Bulwer-Lytton's underworld. Nature alone—in the form of their overpowering drive to mate—dictates their abdication of female rule in favour of submissive domestic roles.

Authority and Rule in *The Coming Race*

Bulwer-Lytton's paradox of female sexual dominance and submission mirrors his conflicted stance on the authority of his subterranean super-women. Sexual aggression and submission only address part of the threat of female rule, and Bulwer-Lytton's fantasy both magnifies this threat and subverts it. Authority represents another avenue of female dominance. Although Bulwer-Lytton's women do not rule politically, they nonetheless have sources of authority in the novel—physical power and intellectual superiority. Bulwer-Lytton's own life and actions can be read as symbolically mirroring a contemporary paradigm shift from male physical authority over women to male scientific authority over women, as Bulwer-Lytton's early physical violence towards Rosina

preceded the combination of physical and medical control involved in confining her to a mental asylum. Alternatively, of course, Bulwer-Lytton may have been simply using the means available to control his wife. Significantly, violence, strength, and intellect are the sources of authority that both empower and disempower his super-women in Bulwer-Lytton's satire of women and power. In Bulwer-Lytton's hopeful fantasy, no environmental controls such as lack of exercise or education restrict women, so that nature alone stands responsible for their lack of authority. Bulwer-Lytton thus uses speculative fiction here to 'prove' female inferiority. In the Victorian world, allowing women to become strong and educated was highly risky. What if they did not then 'naturally' submit to men? What if they were not 'naturally' inferior? In his fantasy, however, the experiment succeeds: physically powerful and intellectually brilliant women submit to male dominance.

The following early description of the women's physical superiority in *The Coming Race* contains many implications for women's authority, and I will therefore analyze it in detail:

> Whether owing to early training in gymnastic exercises or to their constitutional organization, the Gy-ei are usually superior to the Ana in physical strength (an important element in the consideration and maintenance of female rights). They attain to loftier stature, and amid their rounder proportions are embedded sinews and muscles as hardy as those of the other sex. Indeed, they assert that, according to the original laws of nature, females were intended to be larger than males, and maintain this dogma by reference to the earliest formations of life in insects, and in the most ancient family of the vertebrata—viz., fishes—in both of which the females are generally large enough to make a meal of their consorts if they so desire. Above all, the Gy-ei have a readier and more concentrated power over that mysterious fluid or agency which contains the element of destruction, with a larger portion of that sagacity which comprehends dissimulation. Thus they can not only defend themselves against all aggression from the males, but could, at any moment when he least suspected his danger, terminate the existence of an offending spouse. (67-68)

The underworld women can defend themselves from male violence and assert certain "rights" because of their superior size and strength. Knowing Bulwer-Lytton's own history of domestic violence, this passage is especially disturbing for its implications regarding Victorian women. Since Bulwer-Lytton's female contemporaries do not have superior strength, this passage implies that their demands for "rights" have no basis and they have no defense against male aggression. A passage later in the novel, explaining the difference in surface and subterranean "Rights of Women" supports this: "it is idle to talk of rights where there are not corresponding powers to enforce them; and above ground, for some reason or other, man, in his physical force, in the use of weapons offensive and defensive, when it comes to positive personal contest, can, as a rule of general application, master women" (227). Although Bulwer-Lytton seems to take some comfort from this reasoning, there is perhaps an undercurrent of fear here that women are not always smaller and weaker—a fear satirized in the following cartoon.

A DISCUSSION ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS.

SIR HERCULES FITZANAK ADMITS THAT WOMEN OCCASIONALLY RIVAL MEN IN INTELLECT AND CHARACTER, BUT CONTENDS THAT THEIR INFERIORITY IN STRENGTH AND STATURE WILL PROVE AN INSUPERABLE BAR TO THEIR EVER BEING PLACED ON A FOOTING OF EQUALITY WITH THE STERNER SEX. MISS MILLICENT MILLEFLEURS SAYS NOTHING, BUT THINKS A GREAT DEAL.

Figure 13. Size Matters. (*Punch* 1875, v.69, p.25)

The surface implication of Bulwer-Lytton's passage quoted above is that strength and force equal power—female superior force equals female dominance, and male superior force equals male dominance. However, in the underworld society, "all notions of government by force gradually vanished from political systems and forms of law" (56), and Bulwer-Lytton specifically satirizes democracy and revolution as rather 'barbaric' uses of governmental force long abandoned by the 'civilized' Vril-ya (81). Thus, both the underworld female physical authority and the surface world reform movements are linked

to a barbaric evolutionary past and deflated. Since every underworld citizen can use vril power to destroy any other citizen, no one in the society ever uses physical force to compel another, and thus female physical force cannot function as a source of authority. Paradoxically, Bulwer-Lytton wins on all fronts here, by claiming that male force upholds male authority in Victorian society, yet female force does not produce female authority in the 'evolved' underworld society. Although Bulwer-Lytton satirizes Darwinian theory frequently in this novel, he is thus not above using evolutionary theory to make a point when it suits his purpose. During the 1860s, theories of a matriarchal evolutionary past were popular, as propounded by German cultural theorist Johann Jakob Bachofen in his popular 1861 book *Das Mutterrecht* (The Mother-right). Bachofen posited an evolutionary theory of culture that progressed from a matriarchal prehistory to an ultimate patriarchal evolved state[22]. This clearly parallels Bulwer-Lytton's underworld image of less evolved Amazonian force submitting to an evolved male rule. In a similar vein, Sir Richard Burton's study of contemporary matriarchy in *A Mission to Gelele* (1864) negatively portrays African warrior women as ugly, ferocious, and ultimately the cause of their country's problems; he also significantly emphasizes their promiscuity and their submission to patriarchal rule. Both these texts not only theorize female sexual aggression as characteristic of a less advanced evolutionary stage[23], but also depict female

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[22] At least one feminist, Mona Caird, referenced this theory of matriarchal pre-history. Unlike Bachofen and Bulwer-Lytton, however, she describes this early period as proof that women created civilization and as an idyllic society destroyed by male possessiveness and violence ("Marriage" 189). Significantly, her 1888 depiction of matriarchal pre-history emphasizes female entitlement to both independence and governance.

[23] As discussed in the previous chapter, many reputable nineteenth-century scientists such as Paul Broca and Carl Vogt propounded theories that characterized non-caucasian races and women both as less 'evolved' than white males.

physical strength and authority as similarly negative and unevolved—all themes that appear in Bulwer-Lytton's satire on female rule.

The long quotation above has other significant implications for paradoxically empowering and disempowering women. First, it speculates that environment and training can play a significant role in the development of size and muscle, regardless of sex. This calls into question theories of male superiority based on size and muscle. Bulwer-Lytton's mention of gymnastics in this quote provides a specific context for his depiction of large, strong women. Although the novel was written before the later mass popularity of gymnastics in girls' schools, Frances Buss's North London Collegiate School for Ladies instituted gymnastics training in 1866 and there were early forms of gymnastic fitness clubs for women in London in the 1860s and into the 1870s, such as Madame Brenner's German gymnasium (McCrone 63, 103). Furthermore, several publications advocated female physical education through gymnastics.[24] This rising popularity of exercise for girls and women clearly helped inspire Bulwer-Lytton's depiction of physically dominant women in his acknowledgement that exercise could dramatically increase women's size and strength. The quoted passage above also allows Bulwer-Lytton to simultaneously target feminism and Darwinism, as the Gy-ei comically reference the geological record of ancient species (fish) as proof of female physical superiority.

The final portion of the passage attributes the ultimate physical power—violence —to women, but simultaneously domesticates that violence so that the degendered

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[24] Archibald McLaren's *A System of Physical Education, Theoretical and Practical* (1869), Franz Bernard's *The Physical Education of Young Ladies* (1860), Lucie Brenner's *Gymnastics for Ladies* (1870), and James

physical power at the beginning of the passage becomes reassuringly gendered and less threatening by the end when the women's superior control of destructive vril force is limited to the destruction of an "offending spouse" (68). The act of associating female violence solely with self-defense or wifely annoyance contains it as domestic rather than political. Furthermore, a later passage on the powerful vril wands reassures readers that even this domesticated female violence has been eliminated: "In the wands of wives and mothers the correlative destroying force is usually abstracted, the healing power fully charged" (112). The Vril-ya even popularly believe that "by long hereditary disuse, the Gy-ei have lost both the aggressive and the defensive superiority over the Ana which they once possessed," although the narrator does not advise testing this hypothesis (69). Despite Bulwer-Lytton's satire of Darwinian theory, this underworld belief parallels Darwinian and Lamarckian theories, which argued that unused traits die out in species (Mosedale 7). Bulwer-Lytton thus depicts female physical authority (size, strength, and violence) only to undercut it as domesticated, unevolved, and impotent.

This give and take of female physical authority occurs throughout the novel, as the Gy-ei are depicted as both physically dominating men and submitting to them. The origin of the underworld prenuptial contract presents this paradox. In ancient Vril-ya history, a woman "in a fit of jealousy" killed her husband, resulting in a mass emigration of terrified men (63). The despairing women (recall their overwhelming biological need to mate) killed the murderess and "entered into a solemn obligation amongst themselves to abrogate . . . their extreme conjugal powers" (63). This passage juxtaposes male rational dominance (the men bargain with the women to make their return contingent on

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Chiosso's *Gymnastics, An Essential Branch of National Education Both Public and Private* (1854)

female submission) with female emotional submission (women's absolute need for men motivates both the murder and their subsequent abdication of force as a form of power).

Bulwer-Lytton's fantasy further reinforces this dichotomy between male reason and female emotion. Both sexes perform the same tasks in childhood regardless of gender, but for destruction of dangerous animals "girls are frequently preferred, as being by constitution more ruthless under the influence of fear or hate" (66). Here female violence is further disempowered by confining it to young girls (less threatening than violent adult women) and by associating it with instinctive emotionality rather than rational strategy. The potential uncontrollable threat of female emotionality (fear and hate) is safely deflected on to dangerous beasts, rather than men—on to a childhood task rather than an adult power struggle. Bulwer-Lytton's frequent attempts to defuse the threat of female violence parallel the Victorian media and courtroom horror over what must have seemed like a rash of female violence. Significantly, accused female murderers (several of whom killed their husbands) actually outnumbered their male counterparts in the 1850s, the decade of Rosina's most concerted and vehement campaign against her husband (Emmerichs 101). Furthermore, in 1870 (while Bulwer-Lytton was writing *The Coming Race*), Margaret Waters, after killing at least 20 infants left in her care, became one of the last women executed in England (Knelman 170). Judith Knelman notes the Victorian impulse to characterize female criminality as insanity associated with female reproductive functions (3-7), and then juxtaposes this with the facts of many cases—nearly three-quarters of the century's murderesses "were guilty of premeditated

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(McCone 122, *n*5-8).

crimes, and 48 per cent stood to gain financially" (9). The Victorian unwillingness to accept the strategic nature of female violence parallels that of Bulwer-Lytton.

Bulwer-Lytton may also be projecting his own violence on to women here. Carol Christ identifies a theme of Victorian unease with male action and sexuality in works like Coventry Patemore's *The Angel in the House* and Alfred Tennyson's *The Princess*. I believe this theory also applies to an unease with male violence as unevolved and hence 'uncivilized'. Bulwer-Lytton clearly, as already shown, dismisses violence as a legitimate tool of power in the novel and displaces it from the evolved men on to the unevolved women—a displacement also present in the historical works by Burton and Bachofen. However, Bulwer-Lytton's own domestic violence refutes that displacement. A deposition signed by three servants in support of Rosina's suffering in marriage recounts Bulwer-Lytton's "brutal rages," which included kicking Rosina and banging her head against a stone floor and on another occasion charging her with a carving knife and then biting her cheek all the way through (Devey 324). These incidents support a reading that Bulwer-Lytton in *The Coming Race* displaces his own violence (and by association all male violence) on to women in an attempt to reinforce contemporary theories which opposed (white) male civilized advancement with female 'savage' regression.

The female heroine, Zee, embodies all Bulwer-Lytton's angst over female authority in the novel, through her utter domination over the narrator. She "curtly" gives him orders and sends him to sleep by pointing a finger at his forehead (40,48). She is a "magnificent specimen of the muscular force to which the females of her country attain" (114). She has "ample shoulders" and a "lofty stature" and is both "formidable" and "stern" (114). When the narrator sees her "lift up a cannon as easily as I could lift a

pocket pistol" and then make a roomful of objects "obey her command" and move, she fills him with a "profound terror" (114). Unlike the many satirical scenes ridiculing women's rights and powers in the novel, this scene is serious in tone—Zee's character (as female protagonist and romantic interest) is often depicted without humour or ridicule. Thus, this scene stands as an embodiment of female domination—Zee is here absolutely all-powerful. Increasingly in the novel, however, Bulwer-Lytton characterizes her power as maternal, thus once again confining female dominance to the private sphere: "She said not a word, but, taking my arm with her mighty hand, she drew me away, as a mother draws a naughty child" (212). Although this maternalization defuses the Amazonian threat on one level, it also evokes a marked theme of dangerous maternalism in mid-Victorian literature, as described in Joan Manheimer's "Murderous Mothers: The Problem of Parenting in the Victorian Novel" as well as other criticism. Dickens, Eliot, and Thackeray (among others) offer numerous negative maternal representations ranging from neglect to murder, and such representations are not confined to prose alone (see, for example, Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* and Tennyson's *The Princess*). In addition to the maternalization that simultaneously domesticates Zee and evokes threatening maternal dominance, her sexual pursuit of the narrator represents threatening female sexuality. However, as she falls in love with the narrator, she becomes increasingly submissive—her image changes from authority figure to helper. Suddenly, she is no longer commanding, but instead frequently drops her scholarly pursuits for the more feminine role of "healer" and "nurse" (168). Chapter 21 becomes a veritable lecture on the 'natural' inclinations of women: "the main cause of my attraction to her was in her instinctive desire to cherish, to comfort, to protect, and, in protecting, to sustain and to

exalt" (171). Zee symbolically kneels before the narrator and offers a life of platonic love, since physical love is forbidden due to laws against miscegenation (219). Although he rejects her, she ultimately saves his life and returns him to the surface world, her sexual desire and pursuit of him having been transmuted into "a mother's passion"[25] (246). Thus, the powerful and potentially violent Amazon becomes the Victorian Angel in the House; Zee is frequently described as angelic after her domestic transformation in the latter chapters of the novel.

Zee also embodies the second source of female authority in the novel—intellectual power. Bulwer-Lytton's novel appeared when the movement for women's higher education was achieving its first successes. Cambridge allowed girls to take its local entrance examinations in 1863, and they proved themselves equal to boys in all topics but mathematics (McWilliams-Tullberg 123-24). London University created special examinations for women in 1866. The Royal Commission on Secondary Education of 1864-68 recommended that secondary education for girls be expanded and funded. The first women's colleges near Cambridge were founded in 1869 (Girton) and 1871 (Newnham). Women were admitted to the University of Edinburgh's medical school in 1869. Bulwer-Lytton's depiction of female intellectual authority must be read against this backdrop of recent demands for—and access to—women's higher education.

Zee's superior intelligence is initially unchallenged. She is an "erudite professor in the College of Sages" who is described as "more intelligent" than her authoritative and

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[25] This maternalization of Zee responds to Victorian concerns in the late 1860s that women were no longer valuing or choosing motherhood, as indicated in a series of *Saturday Review* articles by Eliza Lynn Linton and others in 1868. See, for example, "What is Woman's Work?" (February 15 p. 197), "Modern Mothers" (February 29 p.268), "The Future of Woman" (March 28 p.410), and "Woman and the World" (April 11 p.479).

powerful father, Aph-Lin (55,41). However, Zee's (and all Gy-ei) intellect is both built up and cut down in a single section of text that neatly upholds female intelligence and yet genders it in a way that 'naturally' preserves male dominance:

> Zee, whose mind, active as Aristotle's, equally embraced the largest domains and the minutest details of thought, had written two volumes on the parasite insect that dwells amid the hairs of a tiger's paw, which work was considered the best authority on that interesting subject. But the researches of the sages are not confined to such subtle or elegant studies. They comprise various others more important, and especially the properties of vril, to the perception of which their finer nervous organization renders the female Professors eminently keen. It is out of this college that the Tur, or chief magistrate, selects Councillors, limited to three, in the rare instances in which novelty of event or circumstance perplexes his own judgement. (62)

Zee can be as intelligent as Aristotle, but her gender dictates a fascination with impractical, "subtle," and "elegant" subjects. Biology seemingly dictates a feminine obsession with the impractical, and thus the threat of female intellectual authority is reassuringly diffused in *The Coming Race*. Both the Gy-ei's and young Victorian ladies' "superiority" is attributed to their domestic confinement and leisure: the men are too occupied with "matter-of-fact occupations," or "actively engaged in worldly business," to achieve such "refinement of intellect" (67). Female intellect is "refined" and operates outside the "duller" (but more powerful) public sphere (67). In addition to such representations of their intellectual impracticality, Bulwer-Lytton also subtly questions the validity of women's pursuit of knowledge: "An An cares less for things that do not concern him than a Gy does; the Gy-ei are inquisitive creatures" (146). This passage raises the stereotypical spectre of women 'meddling' in areas beyond their domain,

evoking examples such as Pandora and Eve (146). Notably, a *Saturday Review* article in 1868 characterized suffrage feminists as women

> of meddlesome instincts, with innate capacities for intrigue, delighting in manoeuvre of every kind, and consumed by vanity and the desire to render themselves conspicuous above others, who crave to make speeches from the hustings, and to lead a triumphant body of patriotic and quarrelsome females to the polling-booth. ("Female Suffrage" 485)

This denouncement of female demands for authority and power not only as "meddlesome," but also vain and "quarrelsome" typifies responses such as Bulwer-Lytton's to women's authority. In his rejection of an equal female intellect, Bulwer-Lytton most clearly reveals the anger and anxiety that lurks beneath his subterranean fantasy of submissive super-women.

Bulwer-Lytton does not negate the potential usefulness of female education, however. Female knowledge which serves others is contrasted positively in the novel with negative images of impractical and meddling female knowledge. Rather than live her life obsessed with impractical knowledge, Zee applies her brain in acceptably feminine occupations; she nurtures her people with "all the resources of her lore" (168). She willingly forsakes her studies to help the sick, and "even in the exercise of her scientific acquirements there was a concurrent benevolence of purpose and will" (168). Zee is especially praised when she uses her female intellect to support male intellectual authority:

> Was some veteran sage of the College perplexed and wearied with the toil of an abstruse study? she [sic] would patiently devote herself to his aid, work out details for him, sustain his spirits with her hopeful smile, quicken his wit with her luminous suggestion, be to him, as it were, his own good genius made visible as the strengthener and inspirer. (169)

While Zee has the superior intellect in this scenario, Bulwer-Lytton portrays female intelligence as ideally subsuming itself in support of male intelligence. This notion of 'good' and 'bad' women's knowledge and education parallels the early responses to women's demands for higher education—the attempts to confine women to separate levels and topics from men. Despite Emily Davies's successful efforts to educate women in exactly the same way as men, many educational authorities resisted this for a variety of reasons:

> Those who deplored anything that smacked of competition between the sexes, those who believed the standard of teaching in girls' schools to be too low to produce successful candidates for the university local examinations, and those who wished to prevent women from becoming qualified for the professions added their voices in favour of special examinations. (Burstyn 153)

Thus the physical and intellectual surface authority of Bulwer-Lytton's subterranean super-women dissipates throughout the novel, which reinforces male rule, as primarily seen in his representation of "the thews and the learning" of Zee (117).

Ultimately, the novel presents an image of female authority significantly similar to John Ruskin's concept of women ruling indirectly through men. The novel's example of an underworld domestic wife, Zee's mother Bra, voices this philosophy:

> "You see, my dear Lo," continued Bra, "that precisely because we are the stronger sex, we rule the other, provided we never show our strength. If you were superior to my son in making timepieces and automata, you should, as his wife, always let him suppose you thought him superior in that art to yourself. The An tacitly allows the pre-eminence of the Gy in all except his own special pursuit. But if she either excels him in that, or affects not to admire him for his proficiency in it, he will not love her very long; perhaps he may even divorce her. But where a Gy really loves, she soon learns to love all that the An does." (207)

This passage vividly embodies Bulwer-Lytton's conflict on the issue of women's power in the underworld. On the surface, Bra implies a power situation where women rule from

the shadows, manipulating the rather childish men by praising their hobbies and skills. In other words, men are a puppet government, controlled from behind the scenes by women. Were this true and supported elsewhere in the novel, *The Coming Race* would truly be a novel of female rule. However, women's power is consistently undercut in the novel to keep them from having political control over their society or their men. Even in this passage, the real power dynamics imply the Victorian reality: men alone make the decisions in the public, political sphere while the women stay at home and learn to "love all that the men do."

Gendered Spheres and Rule in *The Coming Race*

Having undermined female dominance on so many levels—sexual, political, physical, and intellectual—Bulwer-Lytton's novel seems an anxious Victorian fantasy that ridicules women's emancipation and advocates women's proper submissive domestic role. However, despite the patriarchal wish-fulfillment aspects of the fantasy, his speculations on female authority cannot help but suggest shifting gender boundaries between public and private. Simply by changing gender roles and depicting female dominance, the female rule novels in this study dramatically alter concepts of gendered roles, despite many of their attempts to re-establish a Victorian 'norm' by their conclusions.

In keeping with his general pattern of representing female dominance only to undercut it, Bulwer-Lytton dramatically de-genders roles only to emphatically re-gender them. The degendering is manifest in economic, educational, and vocational equality between the sexes. For example, both sexes enter the public sphere immediately after

infancy, and children provide the essential labour in this classless society: "There is no class of labourers or servants, but all who are required to assist or control the machinery are found in the children" (62). Although child labour among the working classes was still the norm (although increasingly limited by government controls in the 1840s and the 1860s)[26], Bulwer-Lytton's depiction here stands out because these classless children are well paid and educated—the whole intention of this child labour is to ensure that "every child, male or female, on attaining the marriageable age, and there terminating the period of labour, should have acquired enough for an independent competence during life" (160). This statement, made without humour, strikingly contests the Victorian economic norm of men earning money in the public sphere to support women confined to the private sphere. Bulwer-Lytton's own refusal to provide Rosina with increased financial support (until forced to agree to her demands in 1858) reveals a biographical motivation for his approval of independent incomes for each sex. Without negating Bulwer-Lytton's progressiveness in advocating independent incomes for women, it is nonetheless true that Bulwer-Lytton might be responding here to his own bitter experience of Victorian female economic and legal dependence in his depiction of a child labour that produces economic independence for life. The tasks and training of these children, furthermore, are emphatically ungendered: girls "perform the offices of work and labour impartially with boys" (66), and "all arts and vocations allotted to the one sex are open to the other" (67). All children attend the College of Sages and decide their own vocation for themselves (65). Although the sexes are segregated during the period before maturity (age 16 for women and 20 for men), as children they intermingle "as familiarly as if there were no

difference of sex" (100). Although the perfected underworld society is ultimately depicted as rather dull and frighteningly alien to human nature, Bulwer-Lytton does not satirize this childhood gender equality. As previously discussed, one of the goals of his speculative fantasy on female power is to remove all restrictions on female development, so that women's ultimate 'natural' submission to male dominance becomes an answer to Mill's arguments that male environmental controls prevented women's advancement.

Yet Bulwer-Lytton also may be acknowledging here a strong movement to educate girls and boys more equally in the early years. Although the previous section shows his denial of the usefulness or practicality of women's higher intellectual abilities, the Royal Schools Commission's findings in the late 1860s showed the shocking lack of education among girls and recommended more equality in education between the sexes at the secondary level (Crow 150, Murray 227). The previous Newcastle Commission into elementary schools from 1858-61 revealed that girls and boys were equally poorly educated at the elementary level, so changes were already underway to rectify this (Kamm 158-62). Furthermore, Bulwer-Lytton's own circle of acquaintances contained numerous highly intelligent women such as his wife Rosina, Lady Caroline Lamb, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Harriet Martineau, and this may have affected his depiction of girls' and women's education in the novel. His 1826 letter to a female friend (already quoted) acknowledged women' s intellectual equality or even superiority, however much he undercuts this in the novel. Finally, the issue of 'redundant' women raised in the previous chapter—particularly a concern in the 1850s and 60s as the results of the 1851 census were disseminated—is neatly disposed of by this child labour and equal access to

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[26] For example, the Children's Employment Commissions of 1842, 1843, and 1862 and their subsequent

training and vocations which give financial independence and occupations to all. Even beyond this gender equality, in the novel Bulwer-Lytton somewhat surprisingly hands over the medical profession to "widowed and childless" women (131). There is no record of Bulwer-Lytton's opinions on women's early entrance into medicine (Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell in 1858, Dr. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson in 1865, and women's entrance into University of Edinburgh's medical school in 1869), but his unsatirized depiction of women doctors in the novel seems to indicate a surprising acknowledgement of women's abilities in that field, although he confines the profession to those women without husbands or children. Interestingly, a *Punch* cartoon (see below) the year following the publication of *The Coming Race* appears to respond directly to Bulwer-Lytton's acceptance of female surgeons.

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reports for improving conditions, and the succession of Factory Acts throughout the 1840s and the 1860s.

THE COMING RACE.

Doctor Evangeline. "BY THE BYE, MR. SAWYER, ARE YOU ENGAGED TO-MORROW AFTERNOON? I HAVE RATHER A TICKLISH OPERATION TO PERFORM—AN AMPUTATION, YOU KNOW."

Mr. Sawyer. "I SHALL BE VERY HAPPY TO DO IT FOR YOU."

Dr. Evangeline. "O, NO, NOT *THAT!* BUT WILL YOU KINDLY COME AND ADMINISTER THE CHLOROFORM FOR ME?"

Figure 14. Woman Surgeon. (*Punch* 1872, v.63, p.113)

The surgeon in the cartoon, like Bulwer-Lytton's woman doctors, is eminently capable and requires her male colleague as an assistant only.

Thus, outside of marriage, there are no gendered divisions in Bulwer-Lytton's underworld—both sexes equally participate in vocational and educational activities and every underworld citizen has economic independence for life, regardless of sex. Despite

Bulwer-Lytton's subsequent reinforcements of Victorian gender ideology in the novel, these radical changes stand as critiques of the confinement and economic submission of Victorian women in the domestic sphere. Since speculative fiction often reveals writers' feelings as well as thoughts—allowing writers to float and play with ideas that they may otherwise be reluctant to embrace—perhaps these anomalous elements in the text are indications that Bulwer-Lytton on some emotional level did support some emancipation of women from the domestic sphere.

Ultimately, however, the novel explicitly supports a division between male and female spheres. First, the ostensibly consensual underworld households are under patriarchal rule—the father decrees the rules of his house (50, 59). Secondly, once married, women embody Ruskin's ideal of the woman competently but submissively 'ruling' at home. The novel's one example of an underworld wife, Zee's mother Bra, reveals this:

> Bra, Aph-Lin's wife, seldom stirred beyond the gardens which surrounded the house, and was fond of reading . . . . But her love of reading did not prevent Bra from the discharge of her duties as mistress of the largest household in the city. She went daily the round of the chambers, and saw that the automata and other mechanical contrivances were in order, that the numerous children employed by Aph-Lin, whether in his private or public capacity, were carefully tended. Bra also inspected the accounts of the whole estate, and it was her great delight to assist her husband in the business connected with his office as chief administrator of the Lighting Department, so that her avocations necessarily kept her much within doors. (173-74)

This passage contains much to reassure Victorian readers that, once married, dangerous Amazons like Zee lead stereotypically domestic lives: reading novels, supervising the home, and helping their husbands with their important public work. The indirect female influence exemplified by Bra parallels a contemporary political argument that women's

indirect power made political power unnecessary. In the House of Commons debates on female suffrage in 1870, anti-suffragists claimed that women already had "immense political influence," but that "the sphere of their influence is at home" (Hansard 201:213). Although supporters of the bill countered with arguments that women's influence did not equal political representation, Barbara Bodichon's 1866 response to this common argument critiques it most thoroughly:

> An assertion often made, that women would lose the good influence which they now exert indirectly on public affairs if they had votes, seems to require proof. First of all, it is necessary to prove that women have this indirect influence—then that it is good—then that the indirect good influence would be lost if they had direct influence—then that the indirect influence which they would lose is better than the direct influence they would gain. From my own observation I should say that the women who have gained by their wisdom and earnestness a good indirect influence, would not lose that influence if they had votes. ("Objections to the Enfranchisement of Women" 115-16).

Bulwer-Lytton's reduction of all women's rights to domestic sexual choice thus participates in a contemporary debate over domestic female rule and political female rule. Fears of women in government were at the core of parliamentary resistance to female suffrage; opponents in both the 1867 and 1870 female suffrage debates repeatedly argued that suffrage would produce female members of parliament, to them a calamitous result (Hansard 187:838; 201:214, 226, 612). A final note of reassurance in the novel also nullifies the threat of 'redundant' women mentioned above; due to the women's sexual aggression and overwhelming desire for mates, "such a phenomenon as an old maid does not exist among the Gy-ei" (70). Thus, despite their alleged power and dominance in so many areas, and despite initial gender equality both occupationally and economically, all the underworld super-women voluntarily abdicate and retire to the domestic sphere, content to 'rule' indirectly through their husbands in a reassuringly Victorian manner.

Conclusion

Bulwer-Lytton's satirical fantasy of female dominance and submission intersects his personal and political contexts in numerous interesting ways and provides a window on fears of female rule during the late-Victorian age. His depiction of sexually aggressive women parallels contemporary concerns over prostitution and miscegenation, while his characterization of such women as both unevolved and biologically driven to mate parallels Victorian scientific theories 'proving' men's evolutionary superiority and women's inescapable focus on finding a mate. Bulwer-Lytton's image of large and intelligent amazons willingly abdicating their power to men evokes the numerous political and scientific arguments proving the 'natural' basis for male authority and negating female authority. Given Bulwer-Lytton's personal experience with marital reforms of the period, his fantasy of complete male control in marriage is unsurprising and even his advocacy of economic equality between the sexes is thus understandable. His friendships with many highly educated women of his day perhaps motivate his support for equal education and vocational choice between the sexes in the novel, although he ultimately supports the domestic confinement of women upon marriage. His wistful vision of the subjection of dominant women presents an emotionally reassuring fantasy of female rule as an impossibility, even given an equal or superior female strength and intelligence, because women's biological clocks will always drive them to 'naturally' submit to men—even to the point of abdicating all rights and retiring to the private sphere, content to use their restricted authority in the service of their men.

CHAPTER 3

'MISS'RULE: *THE REVOLT OF MAN*

> *When they were tired of abusing me, they began upon each other. No reporters were present. The Chancellor, poor lady! tried in vain to maintain order; the scene—with the whole House, as it seemed, screeching, crying, demanding to be heard, throwing accusations, innuendoes, insinuations, at each other—made one inclined to ask if this was really the House of Peeresses, the Parliament of Great Britain, the place where one would expect to find the noblest representatives in the whole world of culture and of gentlehood.* (13-14)

The quotation above, from Walter Besant's 1882 satire *The Revolt of Man*, depicts British parliament under female rule in 2082, 200 years after the attainment of female suffrage. In Besant's futuristic novel, women control money, professions, and men through an oppressive regime that mandates male domestic submission and labour and forces national worship of the Perfect Woman. Men waste away in the home from overwork—producing goods as well as rearing children and running the household. Old women force young, attractive men to marry them; they also monopolize the professions, while young women toil in despair over their studies, longing for lovers and barred from advancement. The government teeters on the verge of ruin, increasingly undermined by infighting and corruption. Into this mess steps a "masterful" (35) man of the old breed, aided by "wise" submissive women (161), lovestruck girls, and rebellious men, to restore the original order of things: male dominance, female submission, and the rightful worship of "the PERFECT MAN—the DIVINE MAN" (170).

To create his worried ridicule of female governance, Besant constructs a simple plot. In the England of the future (which is under female rule), the young heroine and politician Constance is barred from marrying the 'strangely' masterful and aggressive

Lord Chester (who happens to be the true heir to the British throne). Similarly, throughout the country, other young women long for husbands and grow restless at the misgovernment that denies them both love and advancement. Older women, with the exception of the 'strangely' wise and docile Professor Ingleby, monopolize the jobs, power, and men. To restore the 'natural' order of things and rescue England from this misgovernment, Professor Ingleby (guided by her Bishop husband and his secret patriarchal movement) organizes a revolution led by Chester to reclaim the country for both patriarchy and monarchy. The tyrannical women rulers are forced to acquiesce, and Constance and all the other young women willingly and joyfully abdicate public power to gain husbands and return to the domestic sphere. The text thus reiterates the abdication theme found in Bulwer-Lytton's satire. Significantly, the sexual desire of women again underlies their inability to govern and their 'natural' return to a submissive and domestic role.

Besant's fearful satire of female rule was popular. Besant's preface to a new edition in 1897 comments that the book had "gone through many editions: it has, in fact, remained *alive* for fourteen years" (v, emphasis his). In his *Autobiography*, Besant mentions the novel only briefly, but comments that it sold about 9,000 copies in the first five to six weeks (212), once favourable reviews appeared in the major magazines.[27] Besant was a well-established popular author, having published 26 books before *Revolt* and over 70 works after it (Machann 38-40). As Fred W. Boege observes, Besant was "banqueted, lionized, knighted, institutionalized, being more in the public eye, perhaps,

[27] An examination of the Library of Congress National Union Catalog and the British Library catalogues reveals that *Revolt* went through eight republications in its first year alone. Furthermore, the popularity did

than any other author of his time" (250). He was actively involved as a reformer in social causes during his day, particularly the plight of the London poor—the subject of some of his most popular novels, such as *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, published the same year as *Revolt*. The scanty current scholarship on Besant focuses on *All Sorts* or other social cause novels, on Besant's activism for authorship rights and copyright reform, or on his lecture "The Art of Fiction" as the inspiration for Henry James's far more famous response. Wim Neetens argues that Besant merits critical attention because of his popularity: "Novels like Walter Besant's should be interesting to us precisely *because* they are less 'literary'—less sophisticated about their strategic displacements, silences and suppressions, more open about their propaganda content" (248-49, emphasis his). Although Neetens's analysis focuses on *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, his argument for studying Besant's novels equally applies to *Revolt* and its focus on the Victorian "Woman Question."

Walter Besant published his satire of female suffrage and female rule anonymously. He never recorded his reasons for this initial anonymity, but he admitted authorship when the book became a success shortly after publication (*Autobiography* 212). Besant may have chosen initial anonymity because the book departed from his previous work in two ways and thus took a risk. Besant's previously popular novels had been co-authored with James Rice, who died in 1881. *Revolt* and *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, both published in 1882, were Besant's first novels written without Rice, and he may have been concerned about their popularity. *All Sorts*, not anonymous, was similar in genre and approach to his previous work—a popular Victorian triple-

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not end with this first year of publication—the National Union Catalog shows that other reissues of *Revolt*

decker novel format, with a Dickensian social-problem plot (Neetens 249). *Revolt*, on the other hand, was a role-reversal satire, a new genre for Besant and a genre less commonly used in the period. Besant's novel participates in a comic female takeover genre originating with Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*. It also participates in a kind of Swiftian satire, but with a twist. In reversal satires like Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) or Annie Denton Cridge's American feminist satire *Man's Rights; or How Would You Like It* (1870), the primary goal is to show an exaggerated opposite in order to satirize and expose the norm. However, in Besant's reversal, the object is to ridicule the possible (female rule) and to reinforce the 'naturalness' of the norm (male rule). Interestingly, a Mrs. J. Wood published an obscure but similar satire of sex-role reversal in America also in 1882—*Pantaletta: A Romance of Sheheland.* Seemingly, the ridicule of the women's movement in the papers of the day (as previously illustrated in cartoons) inspired these authors to use the role reversal satire genre to ridicule rather than instruct or expose.

Revolt is emphatically misogynistic in its depiction of disastrous female rule and its claims that women are incapable of creating or advancing new ideas. Contemporary reviews applauded this theme. The *Athenaeum* heartily approved of *Revolt*, calling it "a happy idea well worked out" ("Novels of the Week" 537). The American *The Nation* was slightly more critical but still approving, calling it "harmless, if commonplace," with "a sufficient amount of love and adventure to carry the reader through the satire" and make it "readable" ("Recent Novels" 505). Other reviews noticed an internal conflict between the book's misogynist message and its paradoxical moments of critiquing the plight of Victorian women. As the *Saturday Review* observed, despite the novel's "direct and

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were published in 1883, 1890, 1896, 1897, and 1901.

severe onslaught on women's rights" *Revolt* also manages "to insinuate a good deal of criticism by way of back stroke on the less justifiable peculiarities of the existing position of women. An undercurrent of 'How would you like this yourself?' runs all through the book" ("The Revolt of Man" 534). The *Spectator*, although praising the novel as "entertaining," ridiculed the illogic of Besant's two main premises—physically stronger men are cowed by weaker women, and women are intelligent enough to run a despotic regime for 200 years but somehow incapable of "the comparatively common-place task of maintaining the trade and manufactures of the nation they had subdued" ("The Revolt of Man" 1383-84). The *Women's Suffrage Journal* in 1882 critiqued the novel's contradictions, calling it "a chameleon-like production" with an unclear "true intent" (qtd. in Knies 213). These reviews, although primarily positive, thus notice a disruption in Besant's overall misogynistic message—a contestation that reflects Besant's own real conflict over the Woman Question, between his respect for women's abilities and sympathy for women's plight on the one hand and his hostility towards many women's movements such as suffrage, education, and entrance into male fields of work on the other.

As Earl A. Knies indicates, Besant thought and wrote a great deal on the "Woman Question," as shown in novels such as *Revolt* and *The Rebel Queen* (1893), his sequel to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* ("The Doll's House—and After," 1889), and his regular column ("The Voice of the Flying Day") in the women's court magazine *The Queen* between 1892 and 1900. Many of these writings are emphatically anti-feminist—they oppose women's suffrage, university degrees, and entrance into the professions. However, mixed with the misogyny is a thread of support for women and their abilities. Given Besant's

substantial popularity during his lifetime, it is thus surprising that his responses to the women's movement have received no critical attention with the exception of Knies's essay "Sir Walter Besant and the 'Shrieking Sisterhood,'" which provides an excellent survey of Besant's writings on the issue as well as a brief summary of *Revolt* and the reactions to it.

Besant's conflict on the Woman Question is unmistakable. On one hand, he opposed women's suffrage, Cambridge degrees, and invasion of the male work world, and he idealized the self-sacrificing mother and argued that women owed their countries "the duties of maternity" (qtd in Knies 227). On the other hand, he was "a constant champion of women—at least those who were forced to work" (Knies 211). He exposed the suffering of working women, from seamstresses to factory girls, and campaigned for better working and living conditions for them (Knies 229). Essentially, as Knies summarizes, "Besant clearly would have preferred that women remain at home, but no one argued more strongly for fairness when they could not or would not stay there" (229). Besant's very real philanthropic attempts to help working women, such as exposing phosphorus contamination of factory girls and helping set up the Woman's Labour Bureau (Knies 228-29), are in direct conflict with his vehement objections to their invasion of male work areas. Throughout 1893, for instance, his *Queen* column lectured against women entering male fields, driving down wages, and stirring up "Sex hatred" (qtd. in Knies 224). However, in a column the same year he also acknowledged that although such working women were possibly "injuring civilisation [sic]," their right to work "cannot be suppressed or taken from them without violent oppression" (qtd. in Knies 226).

Near the end of his life, Besant wrote a book celebrating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee called *The Queen's Reign* (1897) which essentially captures his internal conflict over the changing role of women. In Chapter 5, "The Transformation of Woman," Besant contrasts the simple, loving, sheltered, but highly ignorant and affected girl of the early period of Victoria's reign with the highly independent and educated girl of the century's end. Since his intent here is to show the positive progress during the Queen's reign, Besant tries very hard to accept and even celebrate the emancipation of women. He nostalgically misses the "system of artificial restraints" which created "faithful wives, gentle mothers, loving sisters, able housewives" in the early days of Queen Victoria's reign. However, he decries the ignorance and shallowness of the early nineteenth-century girl and the confinement of women away from "active and practical life" (53). He contrasts this idyllic yet unprogressive state of affairs with the late-Victorian era, in which woman "proved her capacity to take her place beside the young men who are the flower of their generation" (56). However, although he acknowledges women's successes and proven equality of abilities in education and the professions, he undermines this support by commenting several times that women had yet to reach the very top of male achievement: "she has not yet advanced any branch of learning or science one single step..." (56); "...women have never written nobly on religion" (56); "...[women] compose, but not greatly" (58). He ends the chapter, furthermore, with a mean-spirited attack on ugly, masculinized women as an unfortunate by-product of female advancement. Besant also manifests this internal conflict over women's changing roles very subtly in *Revolt* in a few places, but the novel is primarily focused on its indictment of female rule and its reinforcement of male superiority.

Besant's depiction of female rule responds to contemporary issues of female sexuality, authority, and gendered roles and spheres. He reacts against some very particular feminist threats to Victorian patriarchy: a growing female suffrage movement including almost yearly suffrage bills presented in parliament; women's increasing access to higher education at Oxford, Cambridge and University of London; and legal reforms such as the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act and the 1882 Married Women's Property Act. The novel also reflects more general influences: a growing religious unease over the influence of women and Catholicism, fears of political and economic instability, and a movement to reinforce Victorian ideals of masculinity. As with Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Besant's is also a fiction of speculation and catharsis, a reflection of the author's feelings as much as his political convictions. Although his text is more didactic than Bulwer-Lytton's, Besant's misoynistic tale—particularly in his exaggerated ridicule of the ruling women—reveals perhaps more fear and anxiety over changing gender roles than are seen in *The Coming Race*. Unlike Bulwer-Lytton, Besant has no small moments in the novel of questioning women's domestic dependance or the status quo of male superiority. *The Revolt of Man* represents a nightmare future of chaotic and destructive female rule—the overwrought ridicule just serves to make the nightmare less terrifying. Besant's fantasy future is a cautionary tale that also allows him and his readers to face and defuse their fears of complete gender role upheaval—a tale that uses ridicule to eliminate feminist threats and re-establish a norm of male dominance. His caricature of female sexuality both undermines female rule and depicts it as incompetent. He satirizes women's economic, political, intellectual, physical and spiritual authorities as inferior and illusory

imitations of 'natural' male authority. Finally, he presents a parodied alteration of 'natural' gendered boundaries between public and private to further mock female rule.

Sexuality and Rule in *The Revolt of Man*

Besant's sexually aggressive women are neither as comic nor as straightforward as Lytton's amorous Amazons. Adopting the strategy of divide and conquer, Besant's anxious caricature juxtaposes sexually aggressive older women with sexually deprived younger ones, characterizing older women's aggression as unnatural and destructive, while depicting younger women's sexual desire as more passive and natural. In Besant's comic nightmare future, his conflict between old and young women associates female misrule not only with older women but also with 'unnatural' female sexual aggression. Besant's fearful satire evokes Victorian pathologization of the sexually aggressive prostitute, although his comedic genre ridicules rather than demonizes the female sexual predator.

Besant also critiques the Victorian concept of women's maternalism, as his female government is decidedly cruel. As I have already shown, some Victorian feminists drew upon notions of superior female morality and caregiving, especially in relation to a woman's nurturing maternal role, to argue that these qualities would be beneficial in the political sphere. In addition, Queen Victoria's successfully maternalistic rule shows the power of beliefs that women were biologically nurturing. The novel contests the notions that maternalism exists in all women, and that it can or should exist as an actual political methodology. In the context of widespread national dissatisfaction, the female government sends "official orators to lecture on the advantages of oligarchical and

maternal government," but this propagandizing fails to reconcile the public to the government's oppression. The overwork and oppression of men discredit maternalism as a form of government: "These poor creatures presented the appearance of the most hopeless misery. At other times Lord Chester would have passed them by without a thought. He knew now how different would have been their lot under a government which did not call itself maternal" (154). At the end of the novel, after the restoration of male rule, some women whisper that women's nature was "too tender, too much disposed to pity" to rule successfully, while nearby men remember the reality of unjust imprisonment (356).

These sarcastic references to the oppressive female government as maternal or tender clearly critique the notion that a female government would necessarily be nurturing. However, Besant's female rulers fail not so much due to their lack of maternalism but rather because of their excess of sexual desire. Female sexual desire, especially older women's desire, causes the primary political problem that England faces under female government. Because older women monopolize the professions, young women are too poor to marry. Furthermore, these same older women with the most power and money insist on marrying all the young men, thus leaving young women no lovers. Besant thus depicts the goal of female governance as sexual power—women struggle for power only to get men. The ruling women's monopoly of men makes the young women increasingly rebellious, and the novel explicitly opposes young and old women. The only female characters depicted are either in their 60s or older, or in their 20s or younger. Of the older women depicted, two hold the most powerful positions in the government: the Chancellor (a 66-year-old ineffectual puppet leader) and the Duchess of Dunstanburgh (a

65-year-old sexual predator). Sexual desire pervades the characterizations of these women, as the sexually thwarted Chancellor remains single only because "no man would consent to link his lot with so spiteful a person" (57), and the Duchess, conversely, "has buried three husbands" and now proposes marriage to a man of 22 (39). In both cases, such information about their sexuality is always supplied in an immediate context which depicts them as unattractive, corrupt, and bad-tempered. Additional examples of old women marrying young men (who refuse at the risk of life imprisonment) occur throughout the novel. Older women's sexual monopoly of young men and young women's sexual frustration coalesce in an incident that brings about the downfall of female rule and restores male rule. Ergo, female sexuality—particularly the 'unnatural' and uncontrollable female sexuality of older women—unfits them for rule.

A combination of contexts likely produced this demonization of powerful older women and their sexuality in the novel. Besant's ridicule of aging ruling women whose sexual desires prove their downfall possibly responds to Queen Victoria's alleged affair with her servant John Brown. Although the negative reaction to this relationship peaked in the 1860s, the relationship continued until Brown's death in 1883. At the time of the novel's publication, Victoria (age 63) and Brown's (age 56) relationship "strongly resembled a stable marriage" (Thompson, Dorothy 78), but was nonetheless still scandalous because of sexual double standards that not only prohibited women's sexual activity outside marriage but also pathologized older women's sexuality. Dr. W. Tyler Smith's 1848 association between menopause and nymphomania depicted older women as sexually insatiable, due to the influence of the uterus and ovaries (Munich *Secrets* 109; Kent, Susan 42). Victoria's liaison with Brown provoked criticisms of her rule and fears

that Brown was actually ruling through her. Prime Minister Disraeli joked that he needed the approval of both "J.B.s" (John Brown and John Bull) for any legislation (qtd. in Thompson, Dorothy 86). Thus, critiques of Victoria's rule based on her 'unnatural' sexual behaviour parallel Besant's depiction of sexually aggressive female misrule.

Even more significantly, however, the novel's negative portrayal of powerful older women reacts to the feminist movement's leadership. In 1882, the most prominent feminists were in their 50s and 60s: Barbara Bodichon (55), Josephine Butler (54), Emily Davies (52), Lydia Becker (55), Frances Power Cobbe (60), and Anne Jemima Clough (62). Others such as Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and Ursula Bright were in their 40s—an age when many Victorian women would have been grandmothers. Besant's division between young and old women and his association between older women, misrule, and sexual aggression indicate a contemporary battle over Victorian young women. On one hand, Besant and many others struggled to keep young women out of universities, jobs, and politics—often by arguing that such emancipation precluded women's 'natural' roles of love, marriage, and motherhood. On the other hand, these original feminist leaders were not only removing barriers for these young women, but also encouraging them through activism and role modeling to take advantage of these new opportunities and to demand further ones. This, as much as the more specific example of the aging Queen and her lover, likely inspired Besant's strained ridicule of older female rulers as sexually 'unnatural'.

The fear of 'unnatural' sexual desire in older women clearly opposes the 'natural' desire of young women in Besant's comic nightmare, but his message moves beyond this: the novel suggests that female desire in general destroys the government. Constance,

Countess of Carlyon and Home Secretary (aged 20), is shown as an intelligent and eloquent politician—until a man arrives on the scene in Chapter 2. Like Bulwer-Lytton's Zee, Constance abdicates power out of desire for a man. Enter Lord Chester, tall, handsome, and uniquely masterful. The text represents Chester's sexual dominance and Constance's submission as the 'natural' order of things, in contrast to the Duchess's aggressive pursuit of him. Furthermore, only after Chester displays his "bold, passionate, masterful love—over-powering love" for Constance and takes the dominant sexual role, does she admit her own intention to have proposed to him. His sexual aggression makes her feel "so feeble and so small," and makes her love him "the more for his masterfulness" (50-51). She loses all power as his sexual dominance creates her own submissive desire.

Paralleling Constance's abdication, the young English women en masse eagerly hand over the reins to men in exchange for lovers. Female sexuality causes them to abdicate power, as young women sigh over Chester's picture instead of studying (111), join the male revolt to catch young men (285), and joyfully drop their professions to practise "that sweet feminine gift of coquetry" (354-55). Besant thus sends the message that women are so obsessed with sex that they cannot rule effectively, since older women chase younger men (instead of ruling), the younger women long for men (instead of ruling) and the female parliament battles over this lack of men (instead of ruling). Significantly, this chaos in female government precedes the men's revolt, so that the men do not wrest functioning and legitimate power from women, but instead women (because of their sexuality) misuse and abdicate government.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, in his cathartic fantasy of destructive female rule, Besant achieves multiple purposes in his link between female sexuality and female misrule. Firstly, he characterizes the sexuality of women past childbearing age as ridiculous and socially destructive. Secondly, Besant establishes the sexual desire of young women as both natural and paramount, overriding any other concern or occupation in their lives. Thirdly, he establishes that male sexual desire is dominant, in that Constance's desire is explicitly tied to Chester's mastery, and the abdication of power by the girls of England is explicitly tied to their being wooed by men. Finally, he claims that female sexuality controls and constitutes women to the extent that it unfits them for the public sphere, in that it causes the collapse of female government in the novel. For Victorian readers, Besant's reversal fantasy sent the reassuring message that young women would and should naturally choose lovers over education and careers, if the destructive influence and interference of older women (i.e. Victorian feminists) were removed.

Authority and Rule in *Revolt of Man*

Besant explicitly rejects the notion of a legitimate maternal rule in the novel and thus the notion of a biological basis for female authority (in contrast to Corbett's affirmation of maternal rule seven years later). However, in his goal of delegitimating female rule, he focuses on women's inheritance of male authority—the issue of entitlement. Significantly, Besant leaves the essential structure of British government intact and just replaces men with women, in order to imply that, given an already functioning government system, women would destroy it with incompetence. The

message: women have no real or natural authority and thus cannot govern. Yet the women in the novel do have several sources of authority—economic, political, intellectual, physical and spiritual. However, in letting his nightmare of female takeover play out, Besant carefully undermines these authorities throughout by revealing them to be either usurped from men, poorly copied from men, rejected by men, or all of the above.

The female takeover in England begins with female suffrage. Once they have the vote and become the majority of elected representatives (149), women achieve a "Transfer of Power" through "the gradual substitution of women for men in the great offices" (3). Unsurprisingly, the novel parallels the contemporary parliamentary suffrage debates of 1878 and 1879 in several respects: fears of female MPs or of a "revolt against the men" by a female majority (Hansard 240:1832); debates over whether women in politics would necessarily lead to "any great gain to the morality of this country" (240:1824); fears that women's direct political involvement would lead to "women with more masculine minds than womanly sympathies" (244:429); threats that "the more women try to imitate men and to compete with them, the more does our respect for them gradually diminish" (240:1824); concerns over women's religious influences and obsessions (244:477); and debates on the relationship between governance and physical force. Many of these issues relate to women's authority in the novel.

Besant's fantasy of female takeover reveals a core Victorian fear over the repercussons of women's economic independance (a result of the 1882 Married Women's Property Act). The novel explicitly links women's economic control with their political power. In the novel, as soon as women outnumber men in Parliament, they vote for wives

to get control over their husband's wages. This is the "death-blow to the male supremacy" as "Woman, for the first time, got possession of the purse" (150). Here Besant seems to satirize the all-male contemporary British Parliament's control over women's purses, as they consistently resisted women's economic independence in ongoing debates over women's property. In the novel, Constance advocates oppressed men's rights and pities the "married men with property" who "have no protection from the prodigality of their wives" (16). Thus, the side of Besant that genuinely recognized women's suffering and worked to alleviate it may well have approved of limited protection of married women's property, as gained in the 1870 Act. However, the 1882 Act went beyond this—the wording of the original bill would have given married women the legal status of single women (Stanley 125-26). This wording was changed to prevent this before the bill passed, and married women's legal status (in particular their responsibility for their own debts and contracts) remained restricted (Shanley 126). Through the voice of Constance in the novel, Besant implies support for the limited economic independence sanctioned by British Parliament—just enough control to prevent abuse by a profligate spouse, but not enough to give full and equal legal rights. In Besant's contemporary Britain, public opinion was divided on women's economic independence vis-à-vis the Married Women's Property Act. Arthur Arnold's supportive 1878 *Fraser's* article points out the irony of women being considered capable of entering into a marriage contract, but then incapable of handling any other contracts (499). An opposing 1880 *Saturday Review* editorial sarcastically criticized the unfairness of a bill that protected a wife's financial security while making her husband solely liable for all debts and maintenance ("Married Women's Property" 748). In his negative portrayal of women's economic dominance, Besant may

also have been reacting to the reality of an economic downturn beginning in the mid-1870s. In a time of economic recession, most men would have been less receptive to women's increasing economic control. All these issues coalesce in Besant's acknowledgement of the extreme importance of economic power, as his women achieve dominance through 'usurpation' of men's wages. The conflicted message in the novel—sympathy for oppressed spouses combined with hostility towards women's increasing economic (and thus political) control—mirrors the conflict of conservatives in Victorian England, who were torn between preventing women's worst economic sufferings and resisting any progress towards women's equality with men.

In *Revolt*, once women have political control of England, they begin to change the government for the worse in various ways, as Besant's fantasy strives to systematically 'prove' that women cannot effectively exercise authority. Women abolish the Lower House, despite popular support for it, because it had become "something noisier than a vestry, something less decorous than a school-board in which every woman has her own hobby of educational methods" (78). The allusion here is clearly to women's fairly recent (1870) electoral success as School Board and Poor Law Board members, roles which Besant seems to portray here as ineffectual.[28] In the 1878 and 1879 parliamentary suffrage debates, supporters repeatedly cited this precedent of municipal female suffrage and elected positions to support national suffrage for women. Besant's criticism of women's school board involvement here may be a reaction against this argument of

[28] A review of articles on School Boards in the late 70s and early 80s does not support Besant's criticism of women's participation. Several articles refer to some conflict in the London Board over budgeting and proposed recommendations to increase mandatory attendance, but this conflict is not gendered and the articles consulted were supportive in tone. See, for example, E. Lyulph Stanley's "National Education and

precedence. He continues with his description of women's parliamentary incompetence: "the House was continually dissolved—the squabbles about corruption, the scandals in the House itself, the gossip about the jobs perpetrated by the members" (78-79). The *Women's Suffrage Journal* reviewer of the novel commented on the similarity between this depiction and the reality of the current male House (Knies 213). Besant appears to be displacing contemporary concerns over parliamentary fighting and ineffectiveness on to a future women's parliament here. Other compemporary works similarly critique the squabbling in Parliament:

> It is agreed that our system of government by Parliament has been showing of late very ominous defects. They are of the kind that bring nations to ruin . . . (Harrison, Frederic 317)

> . . . I took the liberty of drawing the attention of its readers to the extremely critical state of affairs with regard to the transaction of business in Parliament. I tried to point out that the art of wasting time was become a kind of profession, and that no time was to be lost if that assembly, on whose wisdom and foresight everything depends, was to be saved from inevitable decline and disgrace. (Lowe 727)

Thus, Besant's characterization of a chaotic women's House of Commons must be read against the reality of a chaotic male House at the time. However, in the novel the old male House is remembered as an orderly institution: "A little of the old respect for so ancient a House still survived,—a little of the traditional reverence for a Parliament which had once protected the liberties of the people, still lingered in the hearts of the nation" (78). In his fantasy future, women, not Besant's male contemporary politicans, destroy this venerable part of government.

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the London School Board (*Fortnightly Review* 1878), Alice Westlake's "The School Board for London" (*Macmillan's* 1879), and "Educational Controversies" (*Saturday Review* 1880).

Stereotypically presenting women as quarrelsome chatterboxes, the novel states that "the abuse of liberty of speech" destroys the Lower House (14). Women abuse Parliamentary procedure by replacing it with "screeching, crying, demanding to be heard, throwing accusations, innuendoes, insinuations, at each other" (13). This image, which appears in every parliamentary scene in the novel, reinforces stereotypes of women's volubility, emotionality, inability to cooperate, and general lack of authority. The stereotype was applied to British feminists of the period by Eliza Lynn Linton's reference to them as the "shrieking sisterhood," and Besant agreed with Linton's use of this term (Knies 230). Besant's premise here is that women are incapable of solidarity—they cannot work together and thus naturally their governments fall apart. Significantly, the positive female characters in the novel rationally and eloquently support male dominance. For example, Professor Ingleby is "a woman who, alone among women, held her tongue, and who, when she did speak, spoke slowly, and weighed her words" (4-5). There is no sense of contradiction in the positive portrayal of some women in the novel, no hint that if Constance and the Professor had been running the country, the government would have been smooth and orderly.

Finally, the novel's comic-nightmare speculations on female governance undermine women's political authority by showing their inability to form a stable ministry, a situation that Professor Ingleby criticizes: "These continual changes of Ministry bring contempt as well as disaster upon the country. Six months ago, all the Talents! Three months ago, all the Beauties! Now, all the First-classes! And what a mess—what a mess—they make between them!" (6). Note that the Professor's comments here not only illustrate Ministerial instability (women's inability to 'copy' male

governance), but also ridicule female political trends. A party system based on platforms and policies is replaced with a party system seemingly based on school cliques. This novel was published one year after women won access to the Cambridge honours examinations; Besant (a Cambridge graduate) voted against this access (Knies 212). Women's access to higher education increased dramatically in the years preceding the novel; they had access to Oxford lectures and University of London degrees in 1878 and the new women's colleges (Somerville Hall and Lady Margaret Hall) at Oxford in 1879. Besant's ridicule of female government "fads" simultaneously ridicules women's higher education. The "First-Classes" are merely a clique (and an unsuccessful political party) rather than a sign of serious intellectual achievement, and (as already described) the young college women in the novel spend their time pining for young men rather than studying.

In Besant's exaggerated fantasy of female rule, women are not interested in the active, administrative business of government (or intellectual achievement), but only in verbal conflict (cat fighting and gossiping). Women's lack of administrative action is a part of the novel's central rejection, repeatedly voiced by Professor Ingleby, of women's intellectual authority. They cannot create art (100-04) or music (145), they cannot originate new ideas, they cannot advance knowledge or science (143), they can only receive or reflect while only men can initiate (161). Thus, a female government (and intellect) is necessarily stalled and even regressive. This theme recurs in Besant's writing and harks back to Darwin's 'proof' of women's subordinate intelligence and status by comparing the list of 'great' men with the lack of 'great' women. Besant makes a woman in *The Rebel Queen* ask, "If women are the equals of men, why don't they prove it?" (qtd

in Knies 219-20). In his *Queen* column in 1900 he again comments on the lack of "great" women and argues that, "if after another thirty years of the highest and widest education no scientific leader arises among women, we shall, perhaps, be justified in considering that in woman's work there are these limitations" (qtd in Knies 228). In his Diamond Jubilee tribute to Victoria's reign he similarly argues for women's lack of achievement as proof: "She has proved, not that she is man's equal in intellect, though she claims so much, because she has not yet advanced any branch of learning or science one single step" (*Queen's Reign* 56). Thus, throughout his life Besant repeatedly referred to the "lack" of great women as Darwinistic proof that they were incapable of advancing knowledge and thus achieving absolute equality with men—proof that women are not entitled to rule. This conviction runs throughout his attempt to face, ridicule, and overcome the nightmare of female rule in *The Revolt of Man*. Feminists like Maria Grey (in the 1879 article quoted below) recognized the pervasiveness of the 'great men' theory and countered it:

> It is, indeed, continually asserted that women are naturally incapable of reasoning, of abstraction and concentration of thought, of sustained mental labour; that they have no creative power, no sense of humour, &c., &c.; but as all these allegations have been again and again disproved by the lives and works of women, the only residue of fact seems to be that, in the great competitive examination of life, no woman has taken her place among that small class of senior wranglers recruited throughout the ages at the rate of some half-dozen in a thousand years. When it is remembered under what immense disadvantages, physical and social, women have laboured in attaining the eminence they have indubitably reached in every department of intellectual labour, there seems scarcely any need to assume an innate inferiority to men to account for their never having attained the highest place of all. Be this as it may, the fact that no woman has equalled Homer, Plato, or Phidias, Shakespeare, Raphael, or Beethoven, can scarcely be alleged as a reason for excluding women from the rights and privileges habitually exercised by men, who, assuredly, have as little pretensions to such equality. ("Men and Women" 676)

Besant often repeated his belief (previously seen in Bulwer-Lytton's novel) that woman's role was a subordinate helping one, rather than an originary and dominant one, and that thus women were passive rather than active. This is seen in the lack of female political action and interest in *Revolt*. When the male revolt begins, only the Duchess advocates action—and this is clearly ascribed to sexual jealousy and frustration at losing Chester, rather than to strategic political knowledge and ability. Everyone else in Parliament hesitates to act (297-98). When the revolt succeeds and Parliament passively waits for the triumphant arrival of the male victors, the sole voice for action recommends surrender and comes from a "middle-aged Peeress who had been conspicuous all her life for nothing in the world except an entire want of interest in political questions" (335). This politician who has no interest in politics says that, since female rule is over, the rulers had all best go home (symbolically return to their 'natural' domestic sphere) (335, 337). Thus, 'sensible' women (like this Peeress and Professor Ingleby) recognize the 'natural' order (in which women eschew action), while shrieking, jealous, sexually 'unnatural' women (like the Duchess) act politically, but only in destructive, sexually motivated ways. Of the three sources of female authority explored thus far, economic usurpation (taking men's wages) produces female dominance in Besant's satirical fantasy, but women's political authority is delegitimated as a passive, destructive, and corrupt version of male parliamentary government, while their intellectual authority is a stagnant copy of male achievement. The nightmare threat of female authority is thus dispelled in the fantasy, since the only women depicted as authoritative 'sensibly' abdicate in recognition of natural male dominance.

While Besant's female rulers do not display the physical dominance of Lytton's Amazons, physical force plays a role in his reinforcement of male physical dominance, his approval of male violence, and his erasure of female force and strategy. On the surface, force is a prominent component of the women's dominance over men. As the Duchess comments: "All human institutions, even when, like our own, they are of Divine origin, are based upon—Force. Law is an idle sound without—Force. Duty, religion, obedience, rest ultimately upon—Force" (298). However, Besant's depiction of the Duchess's desire for violence contrasts her extreme rage and culpability with the more stereotypically 'womanly' behaviour of the other female politicians:

> 'And what are we doing?' shrieked the Duchess of Dunstanburgh. 'What are we doing but talk? Are we, then, fallen so low, that at the first movement of an enemy we have nothing but tears and recrimination? Is this a time to accuse me—ME—of forcing the rebel chief into rebellion? Is it not a time to act? When the rebellion is subdued, when the Chief is hanged, and his miserable followers flogged—yes, flogged at the very altars they have derided—let us resume the strife of tongues. In the name of our sex, in the name of our religion, let us Act.' (297).

The other women more passively cry and quarrel, and later only "sadly" agree to send "gallant, if mistaken, fellows to death" (299), while the Duchess lashes out against the man who rejected her sexually, and wants to "loose these fierce and angry hounds [the convict guards] upon the foe" (299). The Duchess's active, strategic violence is undermined as sexual personal revenge, while the other ruling women are prevented from acting by their 'tender' feelings.

Besant undermines women's use of force even further, by showing their dependence on male physical strength. The women use male wardens to control and contain male prisoners; they send the same male guards to fight the male rebels. Thus,

even in their dominance, the women rely upon male physical domination to control men. The single reference to female physical force in the novel ridicules the very concept: "the country police in blue bonnets, carrying their dreaded pocket-books" (135). One wonders if Besant had seen the 1880 caricature of policewomen (shown in Chapter 1). The absolute negation of women's ability to exercise force appears repeatedly in the 1878 and 1879 suffrage debates, as opponents argued that women's inability to be police officers or soldiers barred them from the right of national suffrage: "government rests in the last resort upon force, and the women whom the hon. Gentleman wishes to enfranchise do not contribute to that force by maintaining order at home, or by defeating the enemies of the country abroad" (Hansard 240:1823).

Significantly, no battle forms a part of the successful male revolt in the novel, and this bloodlessness is entirely framed as female abdication of power. Wives take home their soldier husbands (334), and rebel girls scare away the women's army of male Convict Wardens with a trick (321-26). In both cases, women clearly act out of love and fear for their men, choosing lovers over power and thus sending the message that they cannot have both. And lest the Convict Wardens' cowardice in running away detract from male natural force and rule, Besant makes it clear that they had not been well-trained (by women) and their hearts were not in the battle (against their fellow men) (325). Interestingly, Besant, in his preface to the 1897 edition of *Revolt*, attributes the bloodless revolution to female advice. He claims that he read the book while composing it to "two ladies," who offered comments: "Above all I may now acknowledge their advice as to the conclusion of the story. At first it ended in a real battle. 'Let the 'Revolt of Man' be bloodless,' said my advisers. It *is* bloodless. The advice was excellent, and I followed it"

(vi). If this story is true, it offers the tantalizing possibility of a version of *Revolt* which contained a real battle between men and women, rather than the final version that has women abdicating power without a fight. Thus, the image of male physical dominance is upheld despite the female government's use of force as a power tool. Besant's depictions of female force here imply a comforting reassurance of male power for both himself and his anti-suffrage readers—since power rests on (male) force and women are both weak and 'naturally' non-violent, the novel soothes, women are unable to maintain power.

Furthermore, the novel contains a disturbing advocacy of male violence. Chester, the hero of the novel, has allegedly horsewhipped stable boys (90). Although this information is received via a conversation with the Duchess, there is nothing in the text or depictions of Chester's character to make the reader doubt the reality of the violence. People routinely tremble in fear before Chester. As he plans for the revolt and grows nearer to the restoration of male supremacy,

> he would clench his fist and stamp his foot with rage; or his eyes would kindle, and he would stretch out his right hand as if moved beyond control. And he became daily more masterful, insomuch that the women were afraid of him, and the men-servants—whom he had cuffed until they respected him—laughed, seeing the dismay of the women. (113)

This approval of Chester's violence must be read against contemporary debates over the use of violence in government and contemporary ideals of masculinity. In 1879 the Army Discipline and Regulation Act prohibited flogging as a degrading form of punishment. Many articles criticized this Act as interfering "with the safe keeping of the house—the protection and the status of our common fatherland" and argued that flogging was the

only effective means of maintaining military discipline (Forbes 605).[29] Besant presents the Duchess's wish to flog the rebels as cruel and unnecessary, while Chester's cuffing and whipping of servants is praised. Clearly, the Duchess's violence is 'unnatural' (the 'weak' controlling the strong), while Chester's violence is 'naturally' validated as the necessary action of a strong superior towards weaker inferiors. Furthermore, as many modern studies illustrate, late-Victorian masculinity responded to fears of effeminacy and emasculation (perhaps partially caused by the growing women's movement, but also by technological and economic changes that made male muscle increasingly irrelevant) with widespread idealization of masculine independence, stoicism and strength—including a celebration of violence in the form of boyhood battles and military success.[30] However, this idealization of masculine force paradoxically coexisted and conflicted with a conscious distancing between 'manliness' and animalistic brute force. Thus, the parliamentary debates on female suffrage reveal opposition between those arguing that masculine physical force underpinned male government and male political dominance, and those who clearly had different definitions of masculinity:

> The folly really lies in the supposition that we must rely on mere legal restrictions to maintain great natural distinctions, and in thinking that if these legal cobwebs were swept away the condition of the country would be imperilled. I have more confidence in *manhood* than to suppose that the position of men is at all dependent on the exclusion of women from the suffrage. Let us, I say, be more *manly*, let us be more generous to those who are weak, relying not upon our

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[29] The following articles demonstrate the degree of concern the issue of military punishment inspired: *Saturday Review articles* "Discipline Without Flogging" (February 14, 1880), "Flogging Missionaries" (July 10, 1880), and "Flogging in the Army" (March 19, 1881), *Fortnightly Review* "A German View of the British Army" (November 1879), and *Nineteenth Century* articles "The British Army" (August 1879), "Flogging in the Army" (September 1879), and "Experiments in Punishment" (November 1879).

[30] See for example John Tosh's *A Man's Place* (1999), Joseph A. Kestner's *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (1995), James Eli Adams's *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995), and Christopher Lane's *Burdens of Intimacy* (1999). The issue of 'muscular Christianity'--the relationship between Victorian masculinity and religion--will be addressed later in this section.

> generosity, but upon our justice. Let us lay aside those *unmanly* and ungenerous fears to which we should never have lent our ears. (Hansard 44:438; emphasis mine)

Besant's novel adopts the view of the anti-suffrage politicians that masculine claims to 'natural' rule necessarily involved male force.

In a similar vein, the novel shows a disturbing acceptance of male domestic violence. Besant repeatedly refers to wife-beating in the novel, occasionally as a reality, but primarily as a false charge that women bring against their husbands to imprison them for life. Besant's surface point here is that there is no justice under female rule, since a man can be falsely imprisoned merely on false testimony. However, an insidious subtext on the one hand questions the reality of spousal violence by emphasizing false accusations, and on the other hand questions the seriousness of domestic violence as a crime by emphasizing the suffering of the male prisoners as far exceeding what is deserved. Finally, there is a hinted association between a rise in actual wife-beating and public discontent (caused, of course, by female misgovernment). This echoes the contemporary attitudes towards male violence against women at the time. Wife-beaters during this period often made reference to a wife's provocation, just as Besant here implies that female unnatural dominance provokes male violence against women, and thus that male violence against women is preventable if a wife is properly submissive. This message significantly appears a few short years after Frances Cobbe's 1878 article "Wife Torture in England" not only exposed widespread wife-beating but also condemned a legal system that considered a wife's words sufficient provocation for a husband to brutally assault or even kill her. This article helped inspire the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act, which gave judges the power—if a husband were proven

abusive *and* if the judges believed a wife to be in danger—to give wives a protection order and custody and to mandate a husband's financial support (Shanley 169-70). However, later reports indicated that judges typically sent wives back to abusive husbands (Shanley 172-74), clearly believing (like Besant) that wives either provoked assaults or invented them. Thus, Besant's erasure of ruling women's use of force as a legitimate or effective source of authority clearly responds to a very complex socio-political context in which male violence and physical force are upheld as not only the ultimate basis of political power, but also as markers of masculinity and as acceptable means by which 'superiors' exercised control over insubordinate 'inferiors'—be they servants or wives.

Given this erasure of female force, how do women dominate men for 200 years in this society? Theocracy—the rule of a religion based on worship of the 'Perfect Woman'—gives women their primary source of authority. Through 200 years of religious indoctrination, men come to accept their inferiority and the doctrine that women are created to think for the world, guiding the men who do the labour. Besant creates this female theocracy in order to satirize spirituality as a source of female authority. He also uses it to link Catholicism (especially Marianism) with 'unnatural' female rule. The origins of this female theocracy, moreover, reveal that female rule was the result of male choice and error (rather than female action). Finally, the ultimate fall of the women's theocracy characterizes male rule as a divine decree.

Besant's novel repeatedly undercuts women's theocratic rule as ineffective and suspect. Very early in the novel, descriptions of the "pure theocracy" and the "ideal Perfect Woman" are characterized as "mere commonplaces of education" which "nobody

cared much about" (3-4). The sole example of an eloquent 'Perfect Woman' sermon is immediately undermined:

> The sermon lasted nearly an hour. The Dean never paused, never hesitated, was never at a loss. Yet, somehow, she failed to affect her hearers. The women looked idly about them, the men stared straight before them, showing no response, and no sympathy. One reason of this apathy was that the congregation had heard it all before, and so often, that it ceased to move them; the priestesses of the Faith, in their ardour, endeavouring constantly to make men intelligent as well as submissive supporters, overdid the preaching, and by continual repetition ruined the effect of their earnest eloquence, and reduced it to the level of rhetorical commonplace. (125-26)

This depiction reinforces the stereotype of women as obsessively religious and parallels the fears of conservative politicians that enfranchised women would immediately focus on "some particular sect" in their legislation rather than domestic matters affecting women (Hansard 244:477). The passage and the entire novel actively work to counter the argument (propounded by the liberal supporters of female suffrage) that "the admission of women to the franchise would raise the moral and intellectual standard of the country" (Hansard 244:438). Besant's ruling women continually emphasize religion and morality, but their excess (as depicted above) nullifies the effect. Besant took away from his early Calvinistic upbringing a life-long antipathy to religious extremism that clearly informs his negative portrayal of the women's extreme evangelism in *Revolt*. Ultimately, the leaders of the male revolt call the women's religion "the superstition of the Perfect Woman" (169), significantly thus associating it with a host of marginalized religious practices like spiritualism that attracted many female followers. Even within Christianity, women were gaining increasing influence which not all Victorians welcomed. Several *Saturday Review* articles in 1868 expressed fears that clerical wives were usurping their husbands' powers, that the new Deaconess orders were feminizing the Church of

England, and that women were being deluded into thinking their sex was inherently sacred.[31] Although women still had to use male proxies to offer opinions at Church Congresses until 1885 (Heeney 95), they nonetheless were increasingly active in the Church during Besant's time, and this activity produced some backlashes. Ellen Henrietta Ranyard founded the very successful and independent London Female Bible and Domestic Mission; upon her death in 1879 this mission became Anglican and female independence was gradually replaced with male control (Heeney 48-49). Certainly, there was a great deal of hostility among the clergy to the new Anglican Sisterhoods, beginning soon after the first Sisterhoods were established in the 1840s and continuing throughout the century and into the next (Mumm 140-148)[32]. The numbers were indeed significant—an estimated 10,000 women passing through the nearly 100 female communities between 1845 and 1900 (Mumm 3)—and many of these communities resisted male interference or control (Mumm 149-50). Besant's image of female theocracy as destructive parallels common clerical responses to the Sisterhoods summed up by Susan Mumm: "To avoid the inevitable chaos that female control would produce, power over the communities should be vested in the bishop" (Mumm 142). This common argument for episcopal control, voiced by both bishops and laypersons, is voiced in Allen B. Webb's 1883 *Sisterhood Life and Women's Work*, and Besant's story of a bishop's eventual subjugation of female spiritual misrule must be read against this contemporary

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[31] These three fears are reflected, respectively, in "Woman in Orders" (January 18, 1868), "The Priesthood of Woman" (March 7, 1868), and "Affronted Womanhood" (May 30, 1868).

[32] For studies of the Anglican women's movement and reactions to it, see for example Brian Heeney's *The Women's Movement of the Church of England: 1850-1930* (1988) and Susan Mumm's *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (1999).

conflict between many independent Anglican Sisterhoods and male clerical authorities. In the late 1870s, prominent women like Frances Power Cobbe and Catherine Booth, the co-founder of the Salvation Army, argued for women's rights to ministerial equality.[33] Besant's emphatic rejection of women's special moral or religious authority in the novel thus reacts negatively to both the stereotype of women as morally superior and to women's increasing encroachment on the male-dominated church.

The novel's female theocracy must also obviously be read against Victorian anti-Catholicism and the movement sometimes referred to as 'muscular Christianity'. The novel clearly links female theocracy and Catholicism, as both the female rulers and the rebels attribute the transition from Christianity to Perfect Woman worship to an increased religious emphasis on the Virgin Mary (122, 197). Moreover, the Perfect Woman religious practice, with images, incense, and processions is juxtaposed with a "simple," prayer-focused Protestant ceremony—obviously a comparison of Catholic and Protestant ceremonies (188). Although English anti-Catholicism waned somewhat in the latter part of the nineteenth century, many Victorians still viewed Catholicism as a religion of "superstitious belief and idolatrous worship" (Norman 14-15). The "papal aggression" of 1850, when Pope Pius IX established bishops and an archbishop in England, provoked widespread anti-Catholic hostility (Wallis 55-59, Gilley 48-49). The anti-Catholic movement also likely reacted against the cultural popularization of Catholicism, as seen in the "succession of conversions of novelists, poets, and painters to Catholicism" and the sense that "Catholicism had an intellectual cutting edge" (Gilley 47). Fears of increasing

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[33] Frances Power Cobbe's "The Fitness of Women for the Ministry" (April 1876 *Theological Review*) and Catherine Booth's "Female Ministry; or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel" (published with other essays in 1878).

ritualism in the Church of England (partially attributed to women's influence in the 1868 *Saturday Night* articles mentioned above) sparked a Parliamentary Commission in 1867 (Norman 106). In the 1870s, both Disraeli and Gladstone expressed fears of insidious Catholic influences and practices, revealing that anti-Catholicism existed at the highest levels of government (Norman 212, 229)[34]. Ironically, Catholic Archbishop Henry Edward Manning supported some of Besant's own social causes in the 1870s, such as the Salvation Army's social activism (Gilley 52). Carol Marie Engelhardt's essay "Victorian Masculinity and the Virgin Mary" links virulent anti-Catholicism (such as Charles Kingsley's) to the 'muscular Christianity' movement and ties the explicit rejection of the Virgin Mary by Kingsley and others to their fears of effeminacy and their need to establish an unequivocally 'masculine' church. Significantly, the well-known author Thomas Hughes published an influential religious text called *The Manliness of Christ* in 1879 (Gay 102), shortly before *The Revolt of Man*'s depiction of idealized masculine Christianity. Although this text interestingly depicts a more feminized image of manliness than previously illustrated by either Hughes (e.g. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*) or Kingsley (Gay 109), it nonetheless shows the ongoing concern with masculinizing Christianity, in opposition to the feminizing forces seen in the growth of Marianism[35]. Besant's association between Catholicism and 'unnatural' and tyrannical female theocracy

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[34] A House of Commons Select Committee on the Law Respecting Conventual and Monastic Institutions met in 1870 to investigate the legal status of convents and monasteries, but support for the committee's anti-Catholicism changed to eventual sympathy for the Catholic orders' situation, indicating a mix of pro and anti-Catholic opinion at the time (Arnstein 149, 162).

[35] The popularity of Marianism can be seen in several contexts: the pre-Raphaelite images of Mary and the popularity of paintings by Raphael and Murillo in Victorian Britain (Kent, John 45-46); the "classic alleged appearances" of Mary in France in the mid-century (Kent, John 47); and the popularity of Marian poems by Catholic poets like Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson (Volsik 130-34).

thus manifests religious fears of his day, just as his depictions of ruling women's politics and violence reflect concerns over Victorian politics and concepts of masculinity. Besant systematically undermines potential sources of female authority—maternalism, political participation, force, and spirituality—by representing such authority as both 'unnatural' for women and misused by women.

Gendered Spheres and Rule in *Revolt of Man*

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Besant felt especially torn over the gendered public/private debate, between his desire for women to remain in the sheltered domestic sphere and his efforts to improve the lot of working women in the public sphere. His *Autobiography* manifests this paradox. On one hand, his description of his mother reveals his ideal of a highly intelligent and capable woman, contented in her domestic and maternal role:

> My mother was the cleverest woman I have ever known: the quickest witted; the surest and safest in her judgements; the most prophetic for those she loved; the most far-seeing. Her education had been what you might expect in a village between the years 1807, when she was born, and 1825, when she married. But it sufficed—because it was not book-learning that she wanted for the care and upbringing of the children, for whom she rose early and worked late. . . . (*Autobiography* 30-40)

At the end of his *Autobiography*, however, his chapter on "Philanthropic Work" details project after project aimed at improving the lives of working women, ranging from clubs to provide recreation, committees to discuss women's wages, and a national employment bureau system to help them find work (250-55). In the novel, Besant's internal conflict on the issue is clearly manifested even as he tries to dispel the nightmare of female rule with a return to 'natural' gender roles, by simultaneously undermining women's rule and

women's occupation of male fields, while naturalizing the Victorian segregation between male paid public labour and a female unpaid domestic role.

In some parts of the novel, the men do all the work: domestic chores, childcare, plus industrial labour. This implies a slight sympathy for nineteenth-century working women who had to work all day for low wages and then do the domestic chores as well. Certainly, Besant was concerned over the suffering of female industrial labourers, as his *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, published the same year, indicates (Drabble 95). And perhaps, at the beginning of the novel, he hints at sympathy for the plight of such women. Constance, for instance, pities men who "have to do housework and attend to the babies, as well as do their long day's work" (16). But Besant almost immediately begins to blame women for this situation by depicting a pervasive female laziness. While the men are slaving away under a doctrine that says women think and men labour, the women are decidedly not really thinking. They instead "sit about the village pump or in their clubs, to talk unmeaning politics" (23). More specifically, later in the novel, the idle women "wrangle over politics in the street or in some of the squabble-halls, which are always open" (154). This may imply a critique of idle men of Besant's day. However, words like "unmeaning politics" and "squabble-halls" seem primarily intended to reinforce stereotypes of women's quarrelsomeness and political ignorance, rather than (also widespread) stereotypes of Victorian working men's idleness.

Besant's gender reversal of the spheres is largely designed to confront the nightmare of female rule and expose it as misgovernment, rather than to critique Victorian oppression of women. The oppression of men in the novel moves beyond the extent of the contemporary oppression of women. While Victorian wives clearly lacked

many rights and could be severely punished for disobedience, as discussed in Chapter 1, they were not sentenced to life imprisonment or death for adultery or assault, as men are in Besant's novel. Furthermore, although Besant clearly wished women would stay at home in Victorian England, they were not forcibly and legally confined there en masse, as are men in the novel. In the text, the first female rulers decide that factory work is dangerous for men, because the "association of men together in such large numbers was dangerous" (150). The women therefore take their men home from the factories and set up looms and machines at home, where they can be watched closely and kept from subversive contact with other men. Unmarried men not under a family's control, and sick or infirm men "condemned to celibacy," are kept in barracks and their work is unpaid (153-54). This depiction deliberately exaggerates the control of men so that it seems extreme and unjust in comparison to Victorian society. The parallels between the women's control of men in the novel and male Victorian control of women seem obvious to a modern reader, but this depiction of women's constant supervision and control of male domestic activities would have contrasted sharply with a typical Victorian reader's notions of a woman's freedom to rule the home without her husband's interference.

The novel further reinforces the naturalness of women's domestic role. As the male revolt gets underway, the young women whisper about the old days, when "the women ruled at home, while the men did all the work" (220). They long "to rest, to lie still, to watch the men work" (221). They ask "Who would not prefer liberty and seeing the men work?" (352). Besant's emphasis here on the "rule" and "liberty" of women confined to a subjugated domestic sphere seems a blatant paradox to a modern reader, but

nonetheless conforms to Victorian assumptions that women ruled the home and that the home liberated them from struggle and danger:

> "We shall take our own place—we shall be the housewives; we shall be loving and faithful servants to men, and they will be our servants in return. Love knows no mastery. Yet man must rule outside the house."
>
> "Oh!" Constance could say no more.
>
> "Believe me, this is the true place of woman; she is the giver of happiness and love; she is the mother and the wife. As for us, we have reigned and tried to rule. How much we have failed, no one knows better than yourself." (316)

The 'sensible' Peeress comments to Parliament near the end of the novel, "My dears, submission belongs to the sex who do none of the work" (338). This seems strikingly unfair given Besant's clear awareness of just how hard women in his society worked.

By the end of the novel, Besant restores Ruskin's influential ideal of male public action and female indirect domestic influence, personified by the Professor in her maternal relationship with Chester and her connubial relationship with her husband the Bishop. Although her relationship with Chester seems initially more one of teacher and pupil, her teachings undermine female authority. Furthermore, after her initial instruction, she passes him to her husband for more advanced guidance on male dominance. Once the Bishop, with his "air of Authority" (167) enters the picture, he chastizes Chester's appeal to a woman for instruction:

> "But," said Lord Chester, stammering and confused, "I shall want help—direction—even words. If the Professor—" he looked about in confusion.
>
> "I will find you the help you want. Look to me, and to those who work with me, for guidance. This is a man's movement, and must be guided by men alone." (168)

This transfer of power from the Professor's introductory tutelage to the Bishop's advanced instruction parallels the education paradigm in Victorian England in which women provided elementary education but men provided advanced education. Once the

Professor's education of Chester is complete, her influence operates through her husband, as Chester's friend and fellow rebel Algy makes clear:

> Yes, the Professor was right. She is always right. She glories in her obedience to the Bishop, but—whisper,— we all know very well that the Bishop does nothing without consulting her first, and nothing that she does not agree with. Don't be too sure, dear boy, about the Supremacy of Man. (185)

Once female rule has been utterly discredited—once the nightmare has been safely faced and dispelled—Besant thus feels comfortable acknowledging some indirect female influence from the confinement of the domestic sphere, some notions of equality within the home. Significantly, one of his final images depicts women joyfully abdicating the public sphere, utterly content with their sole remaining domestic power of flirtation:

> They [women] gave in with astonishing readiness to the new state of things. They ceased to grumble directly they realised what the change meant for them.
>
> First, no anxiety about study, examinations, and a profession. Next, no responsibilities. Next, unlimited time to look after dress and matters of real importance.... under the new *régime* every man seemed making love with all his might to every girl. Could anything be more delightful? Was it not infinitely better to be wooed and made love to when one was young, than to woo for one's self when one had already passed her best?
>
> Then was born again that sweet feminine gift of coquetry: girls once more pretended to be cruel, whimsical, giddy, careless, and mischievous; the hard and anxious look vanished from their faces, and was replaced by sweet, soft smiles; flirtation was revived under another name—many names. A maiden loved to have half a dozen—yea, she did not mind half a hundred—dangling after her, or kneeling at her feet. . . . (352-53)

As previously discussed, Besant's other writings reveal his opposition to women's entrance into male professions, and the novel emphasizes female 'misrule' particularly in this area. The oft-demonized older women monopolize crowded professions, leaving the young women without career jobs and the means to marry. This depiction of overcrowded professions clearly parallels Besant's fears (as previously discussed) that

women's entrance into Victorian professions would create crowding, devaluation, and social and economic chaos. Thus, the novel depicts women's occupation of the professions as both disastrous socioeconomically and undesired by the women themselves.

As a final point about divisions between public and private, Besant recognized the dangers of interaction and solidarity in any system in which a dominant group confines a subject one. Just as the initial female rulers separated men to prevent them from plotting or acting together, so at the restoration of male rule do the men forbid women to meet together (343). Although Besant chose a 'bloodless' revolution, he spends many pages in his "Conclusion" describing how the men controlled the vanquished women. He divides female resistance among class and age lines, in keeping with his philosophy of divide and conquer throughout the novel. Lower-class women initially rebel and are subdued by men hosing them with water (343). Besant invalidates their resistance by attributing it to laziness, their longing for "their ancient liberty, when they could leave the husband to work in the house, children and all, and talk together the livelong day" (351). Young higher-class women—those whose emancipation was of most concern in Besant's novel and Victorian England—uniformly abdicate in favour of flirtation, as described above. Older higher-class women, representing the feminists Besant and others feared, are interestingly controlled very carefully in the novel:

> The middle-aged women, especially those of the professional classes, no doubt suffered greatly by being deprived of the work which was to them their chief pleasure. Some compensation was made to them by a system of partnership, in which practice in their own houses and private consultations were allowed some of them for life. (351)

Thus, these women are gingerly permitted just enough power to keep them quiet during their lives and prevent any relapse into female rule. These various final controls of women seem a final indication in the novel of Besant's fear of the growing Victorian feminist movement and the power of determined older women.

Conclusion

Besant's satire of female suffrage and female rule, repeatedly published and read in the 1880s, was a popular and influential rejection of women's movements for legal, intellectual, spiritual, economic and political power—movements that represented a trajectory towards women's equality and the end of male dominance. Besant's speculative fiction essentially serves as a cathartic nightmare fantasy—a medium through which to safely face, ridicule, and dispel Victorian fears of women's increasing political power. His primary strategy to overcome these fears is to divide and conquer. The novel symbolically re-domesticates the younger Victorian women while eliminating the subversive threat of older Victorian feminists. In this strategy, like Bulwer-Lytton, Besant draws upon Victorian notions of a female sexual imperative to create the downfall of female rule—older women destroy the government through their 'unnatural' sexuality, while younger women abdicate power because of their 'natural' sexual drive. Besant, like Bulwer-Lytton, raises the issue of female rule entitlement, but while Bulwer-Lytton delegitimates female authority as unevolved, Besant characterizes it as illegitimately usurped and subsequently misused. The novel is not without dissonance, occasionally revealing Besant's personal conflict between a desire to alleviate the suffering of Victorian working women and a desire to maintain male dominance and gendered

spheres. However, despite its guarded sympathy for the plight of Victorian working women, the novel remains ideologically focused on re-establishing an idealized 'norm' of patriarchal rule. Drawing on theories of women's overpowering sexuality and stereotypes of women's emotionality and passivity, Besant contests contemporary feminist arguments of women's spiritual power and intellectual equality and negates the possibility of female government and authority. His female government, explicitly characterized as caused by anomalous male inaction rather than female action, is an 'unnatural' and unsustainable phenomenon. Female biology on one hand and male divine authority on the other hand together return the nightmare of future female rule to the Victorian reality of male rule, returning the gendered spheres to the 'natural norm': women in the private home and men in the public world.

CHAPTER 4

"*SHE* WHO MUST BE OBEYED": HAGGARD'S IMPERIAL QUEEN

> She *had evidently made up her mind to go to England, and it made me absolutely shudder to think what would be the result of her arrival there. What her powers were I knew, and I could not doubt but that she would exercise them to the full. It might be possible to control her for a while, but her proud, ambitious spirit would be certain to break loose and avenge itself for the long centuries of its solitude. She would, if necessary, and if the power of her beauty did not unaided prove equal to the occasion, blast her way to any end she set before her, and as she could not die, and for aught I knew could not even be killed, what was there to stop her? In the end she would, I had little doubt, assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth, and though I was sure that she would speedily make ours the most glorious and prosperous empire that the world has ever seen, it would be at the cost of a terrible sacrifice of life.* (256)

Haggard's Ayesha, also known as She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, is a 2000-year-old woman who rules an isolated country and tribe in Africa. Ayesha is Haggard's most famous creation and certainly the most powerful and memorable female ruler analyzed in this study. Her intellectual power encompasses all philosophies as well as chemistry and genetics. Her combination of spiritual and sexual power commands the worship of all men who see her. Her authority and ambition have maintained her rule for millennia and pose a considerable threat to other governments. She has the power to kill others by will alone. On a symbolic level, Ayesha shatters Victorian gendered power and sphere boundaries and thus poses a (fictional) threat to British patriarchal rule. Unsurprisingly, Ayesha is removed before she goes too far. Like the powerful women in the previous texts, the all-powerful Ayesha gestures towards submission towards the end of the novel—a significantly colonial submission to one of the three English men (Holly, Leo, and Job) who come to explore and conquer her African territory. Her sexuality thus keeps

her confined—not to the domestic sphere, admittedly, but certainly to a palace of caves in an isolated country. Moreover, her considerable authority—spiritual, intellectual and physical—is subtly undercut throughout by a familiar theme: Ayesha is not entitled to her power. Ultimately, however, unlike those of the previous female rulers, Ayesha's power and ambition are too powerful and uncontrollable to allow the "happy" endings seen in previous novels: voluntary abdication to a traditional domestic role. Instead, death solves the problem of Ayesha.

As with the other novels analyzed, the historical context of *She* certainly illuminates the novel's depiction of a woman wielding political power, and this context will be analyzed below. However, because Haggard's genre is the least political, in that it is clearly an adventure fantasy rather than a variation on the utopian genre, it is less possible or crucial to identify precise intersections between Victorian gender politics and Haggard. As an adventure romance, the novel reflects a general psychosocial context—the Victorian emotional responses to the growing feminist movement. Rather than specifically (or consciously) responding to precise socio-political events, Haggard is *fantasizing* about (as opposed to merely speculating on) the possibilities raised by women's increasing political power. Although Bulwer-Lytton and Besant also manifest emotional responses to women's power in their texts, they also (Besant most obviously) have clear didactic purposes which respond to specific cultural and political events. Similarly, as will be seen in the final chapter, Corbett's text is entirely didactic and focused on precise events in gender politics. Thus, although all these novels speculate on the 'what if' of female political power by imagining female rule scenarios, Haggard's

fantasy text is less a political response to gender politics and more an emotional reaction to shifting gender power.

Despite this more emotional response to gender politics in the novel, there are clearly historical contexts that inform the text. An obvious context for *She* is Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, and Adrienne Munich comments that Haggard's novel "could fittingly be considered an ominous literary monument to Victoria after fifty years of her reign" (198). In other words, Haggard's long-reigning fictional queen (possibly subconsciously) mirrors his own reality of seemingly unending female rule (Victoria had even been queen for 19 years before Haggard's birth). However, it must be emphasized that Queen Victoria alone (given that England had had successful female monarchs before, and given the lessening power of the monarchy in England) would not have inspired widespread fears of a general female political takeover in her subjects. The powerful and growing feminist movement, combined with the reality of a female monarch, produced some cognitive dissonance in her subjects as they strove to reconcile their conception of women—especially wives and mothers—as submissive subjects with the image of politically powerful women. As discussed in Chapter 1, cartoons of the period—humorous speculations on petticoat rule, sexual role reversal, and wifely/womanly weakness—reveal this dissonance.

More than the two novels previously discussed, this novel most closely mirrors the Victorian reality of female rule in a patriarchy. Typically, female rule in a patriarchy happens only very rarely when there are no male successors to the throne. On one hand, therefore, such instances of female rule are not a conscious or sustained threat to male political dominance. The queen is surrounded by male advisors; men continue to hold all

the positions of political power. In Victoria's case, the ideology of male dominance and female submission remained and was decidedly reinforced and advocated by Victoria herself. And yet Victoria's rule, because it was combined with the growing feminist movement, did cause some anxiety. The article "Queens in Procession" in the June 25, 1887 *Saturday Review* (just before the Queen's jubilee procession) lists and comments on England's historic "reigning queens" (e.g. queens who rule in their own right rather than as queens married to male rulers). The commentary hardly constitutes a celebration of female rule: the Empress Matilda's reign is described as "tyranny," and only the reign of Elizabeth I is praised. The article notes and celebrates the fact that Victoria is the only English queen to reach a jubilee (50 years of reign). There is admittedly a tone of pride in the consequent uniqueness of the queen, but also a clear observation that queens do not seem to last very long. The article ends with commentary on Victoria's unique domestic status: "Queen Victoria, strange to say, alone of our reigning queens, has been a mother and a queen at the same time" (905). The final approving image in this catalogue of English female rulers emphasizes this production of Victoria's womb, rather than any achievements of her reign: "For Queen Victoria, therefore, it has been reserved to see children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren about her" ("Queens in Procession" 905). This emphasis on Victoria's reproductive role echoes common Victorian concerns over how women's new positions and powers (in politics, work, and education) would affect woman's true role—reproduction.[36] Haggard's *She* manifests the

[36] However, it should also be noted here that both Victoria and her subjects at times disapproved of her excessive fertility, since it not only seemed extreme (nine children) but was also expensive. The average number of children per family was dropping at the time from 6.16 (1860s) to 5.27 (1880s), although nearly one in five women still had ten or more children during this period (Harrison, J.F.C. 14).

Victorian fears and contradictory feelings aroused by the feminist movement's quest for political power. Queen Victoria successfully alleviated these fears with her characterization of her role as a maternal influence at the end of her reign. Haggard's Ayesha—proud, ambitious, vain, and jealous—conversely provokes these fears of female rule and is killed. Paralleling Victoria's situation, Haggard's *She* depicts a queen ruling a primarily patriarchal society. Admittedly, there are elements of matriarchy in the society Ayesha rules. The Amahaggar women are sexual aggressors and are permitted a more leisurely existence while the men do the main labour. However, as the novel demonstrates, this is only a superficial power, since a "Father" rules each community and every generation or so the men kill the older women to illustrate the true gender relations of the society. Thus, the society Ayesha rules is clearly patriarchal in terms of local governance and gender relations.

According to Haggard, *She* was composed "at white heat, almost without rest" in approximately six weeks during February and March 1886 (Haggard *Days* v.1, p.245). Haggard had just achieved "stunning commercial success" with *King Solomon's Mines* in 1885 (Davidson 113). He commenced a flurry of writing, producing *Allan Quatermain*, *Jess*, and *She* in less than a year (Cohen 97). In addition to the growing feminist movement and Victoria's Golden Jubilee, a late nineteenth-century "growing climate of apprehensions and dissolving certainties" regarding British imperialism provides an additional possible context for the novel (Kennedy 33). A flurry of colonial uprisings and British imperial defeats in the late 1870s and the 1880s, particularly in African territories like the Transvaal and Sudan (Cook 266-67), combined with increasing competition for territory—what *The Times* in the mid-1880s called the "Scramble for Africa" (qtd. in

Eldridge 150). This context partly explains the popularity of Haggard's African adventure stories but also illuminates Haggard's colonial narrative of British men "discovering" an African territory conveniently already ruled by a white queen.[37]

She was initially serialized in *The Graphic* from October 1886 to January 1887 (Ellis 108). Ten thousand copies of the first book edition (1887) sold out in a few weeks, and were followed by many subsequent reprintings and editions (Higgins 105). Critical response was mixed[38] (Cohen 101-102). The *Murray's Magazine*, *Saturday Review*, and *Academy* glowingly praised the book, while the *Athenaeum* and *Blackwood's* disliked it. The *Saturday Review* had perhaps the most relevant observations for this study:

> 'She' herself, with all her years and her wisdom, is only an intensified woman, with a greater passion for love (for the love of one man at least), a greater desire to rule, a keener hatred of rivalry, and a smaller scruple in removing obstacles than the woman who has been limited to a merely human term of years. ("She" 44).

As will be later discussed, Haggard's fantasy constantly reassures readers that his superhuman female creation is "just a woman" and thus to be more desired than feared. This, in fact, is a point of criticism for the *Blackwood's* reviewer, who doubts the realism of a 2000-year-old female ruler who "is still full of all the arts of coquetry as if she were a young lady of the nineteenth century" ("The Old Saloon" 303).

She was praised by contemporary writers and critics such as Walter Besant, Edmund Gosse, James Barrie, Wilkie Collins, Marie Corelli, and Andrew Lang (Cohen 114). Of biographical interest here is an intersection between the three male authors in

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[37] Haggard himself traveled extensively through Britain's colonial territories: Africa, the Middle East, and Canada.

this study. Haggard's acquaintance with Walter Besant is demonstrated through letters, including one in which Besant praised *She* (Haggard *Days* v. 1, p. 249). Less well known is the influence of Lytton on Haggard. Bruce Mazlish traces a clear connection: Haggard accompanied Lytton's nephew to Africa in 1875, and in 1887 Haggard listed *Coming Race* as one of his favourite novels (738). Further, elements from *She* seem also to have their origin and inspiration in another Lytton novel, *A Strange Story*. Mazlish points out several shared themes between *Coming Race* and *She*: an interest in archeology/geology, subterranean settings (much of *She* takes place in caves), and the prolongation of life; a concern with miscegenation and degeneration and the defense of civilization; and a dislike of materialism, democracy, and Darwinism (738-41). Most significantly, however, both books associate power with women (Mazlish 739). Published during the initial decline of the British Empire, both novels depict empires in which women seem to have greater power than men.

Unlike the other texts studied, Haggard's novel has received considerable critical attention. The field of psychology offered psychoanalytic interpretations: Sigmund Freud read and recommended the novel (Mazlish 728), Carl Jung in 1939 saw Ayesha as Haggard's anima and Nandor Fodor in 1949 believed that the novel represented the desire to return to the womb (Cohen 113). In 1981, D. S. Higgins introduced a more personal and sexual analysis of *She*, speculating on the influence of Haggard's sexual repression and tragic love for "Lilly" (Mary Elizabeth Jackson) (90). In the same year, Claudia Crawford offered the first feminist critique of the novel. Crawford draws on theories of

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[38] Reviews appeared in *Academy*, *Athenaeum*, *Saturday Review*, *Spectator*, *Blackwood's*, *Vanity Fair*, *Pall Mall Budget*, *Queen*, *Public Opinion*, *Literary World*, *Murray's*, and *Critic*, as well as in less prominent magazines and in newspapers.

Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida to offer a post-structuralist reading of the novel: its linguistic layering (its multiple translations of an ancient text) and its emphasis on veiling (of Ayesha and a female statue of Truth) demonstrate "the problem of woman herself" as an entity that "cannot be mastered, deciphered, translated—written" (Crawford 86). Subsequent critical analyses by Nina Auerbach (1982), Sandra Gilbert (1983), Susan Gubar (1983), Wendy Katz (1987), David Bunn (1988), Laura Chrisman (1990), Elaine Showalter (1990), Deirdre David (1995), Adrienne Munich (1996), Robert Fraser (1998) and Lindy Stiebel (2001) offer both feminist and post-colonial analyses.

It is a relative commonplace among this critical commentary on *She* that the novel embodies late-Victorian nervousness over the "Woman Question." In other words, the novel is a microcosm of late nineteenth-century fears brought on by the growing movements to emancipate and empower women. Sandra Gilbert, for example, comments on the "power of the female sex that increasingly obsessed male writers in France and England" during this period and calls *She* "a paradigm of the story told by a number of similar contemporary tales, all of which were to varying degrees just the kind of fictive explorations of female power that Haggard's title promised and his novel delivered, and many of which solved what their authors implicitly defined as the problem of female power" (124-25). Norman Etherington more fully surveys all Haggard's depictions of women, noting that over half of his works have a woman's name in the title and analyzing Haggard's pervasive depictions of highly powerful, highly intelligent, flawed, destructive women (*Rider* 77-90). On the one hand, Haggard seemed ahead of his time in his recurring depiction of highly intelligent women (Etherington *Rider* 81). On the other hand, such women never prosper in his novels. In general, Etherington observes,

Haggard's novels send the message that women should "sacrifice themselves for their men and their children" (*Rider* 81). Haggard's fictional super-women like Ayesha reveal his belief that "it was immoral for women to use their brains as men used their brains and to pursue power as men pursued power" (Etherington *Rider* 86). Etherington's analysis of Haggard's treatment of women throughout his fiction is especially useful given the dearth of first-hand insight into Haggard's views of the women (and women's movements) around him. We only have a record of his diaries after 1914, and these provide a rather conservative and sometimes querulous commentary on the early twentieth-century women. For example, a 1919 entry records Haggard's emphatic disapproval of women becoming judges, although he also critiques his own old-fashioned reaction a moment later: "But I speak as a fool . . . We must revise all our ideas about their sex" (Haggard *Private Diaries* 180). This pattern of criticism followed by amelioration and self-analysis is a pattern in other diary entries and in *She* as well, as his narrator Holly frequently passes negative judgement on Ayesha one moment, only to revise that judgement and question his own motives and conclusions the next. Thus, Haggard, like the other authors studied, clearly felt torn between his respect and admiration for women and his fears over the dramatic changes in gender relations. Chiefly, in these diaries, Haggard comments repeatedly on two themes: women going to bars (not only drinking but also smoking!) and women dressing less attractively and more revealingly than in the Victorian period (*Private Diaries* 10, 226, 242, 246-47, 261, 269). Both of these themes interestingly relate to female sexual aggression—a theme repeatedly represented in *She*.

Sexuality and Rule in *She*

Haggard's novel contains the same themes previously seen in Lytton and Besant—that female sexuality precludes effective female rule and that female sexual dominance is unnatural and destructive. Ayesha's sexuality significantly limits her power even before her lover Leo arrives on the scene. She has had superhuman powers and great ambition for centuries, and yet has remained the ruler of a very small and isolated country. Why? She is obsessed with love. Having killed her lover Kallikrates millennia ago, she awaits his reincarnation and return. Despite her immense knowledge and power and her imperial desires and plans, she never leaves her small queendom to search for her lover and perhaps conquer the world in preparation for his return. Instead she only goes through the motions of ruling because of her 2000-year longing for a man. Munich points out the correlation here to Victoria's extended mourning for Albert (272). Just as Victoria's long mourning for her man seemed to cause her to neglect her ruling duties, so Ayesha's long mourning prevents her from achieving the great imperial rule she desires.

Furthermore, as part of the pervasive tug-of-war between fear of and desire for Ayesha that runs throughout the novel, Haggard consistently emphasizes Ayesha's stereotypically "feminine" and sexualized qualities. The novel insists that "after all she was only a woman" (157)—as if she could not possibly be both a woman and an all-powerful ruler. She is characterized as fragile, moody, volatile, and flirtatious. Once she discovers Leo and thus has a lover again, her "womanly tenderness" is frequently emphasized, as if the mere presence of a mate were domesticating her and thus Ayesha the "woman" was triumphing over Ayesha the Queen (272). Near the end of the novel, she declares "I am but a woman" (282). Significantly, her last kiss to Leo is both "a

mother's kiss" and "a benediction" (291), clearly symbolizing a domestic, maternal, and spiritualized sexuality rather than the aggressive and dominant imperial sexuality of Queen Ayesha. These representations of Ayesha's sexuality and nature reflect Victorian paradoxical social and scientific beliefs. For instance, although Darwin in 1871 announced that sexual choice was the prerogative of the female in most species, he firmly asserted that among humans male physical and mental superiority ensured that men "gained the power of selection" (qtd. in Russet 80). Thus, the female sexual aggression in the novel is not only unnatural but bestial in the context of Darwinian scientific theory. Furthermore, although Darwin may have insisted that human females were not the sexual aggressors, other "experts" of the period emphasized women's "nature" as highly focused on attracting men. Ayesha embodies many of the characteristics attributed to women by scientists and sociologists like George Romanes, whose article on the differences between men and women was published the same year as *She*. Romanes drew upon a variety of scientific and anthropological authorities of the period to "prove" that women had less emotional control than men and that characteristics like "coyness and caprice" as well as "personal vanity, fondness of display, and delight in the sunshine of admiration" were feminine (657). Ayesha clearly displays many of these traits, as her desire to attract men is emphasized in numerous scenes in the novel. According to Haggard and many others of his time, women were biologically driven to mate and reproduce—and this function limited their ability to perform non-domestic tasks like ruling.

A significant difference between Haggard's (and later Corbett's) texts and those of Lytton and Besant is that of genre, as previously mentioned. Although there are moments of humour in *She*, it is primarily an adventure novel, not a satire. Haggard's tale

contains tragedy—suffering, violence, and death—and these negative elements are consistently associated with female sexual aggression. More specifically, Haggard's novel of powerful women (like Lytton's) embodies the complex issues inextricably tangled up in the relationship between sex and empire. As Laura Chrisman observes, in the Victorian period, "questions of gender become inextricable from questions of generation, of racial reproduction, familial relations of power" (48). Victorian reproductive control ensured and controlled the population of empire; Victorian racial segregation enforced the boundary between colonizer and colonized; Victorian gender and family roles reinforced and mirrored the imperial power structure of ruler and subjects. Victorian theories of miscegenation were numerous and contradictory, ranging from denial (the gap between some races was too great to produce offspring), to devolution (those of mixed race were especially degenerate), to even the occasional guarded approval of limited interbreeding (a slightly "superior" race could breed with and thus improve one just below it on the evolutionary ladder, but the mixing of greatly "inferior" and "superior" races would deteriorate the "superior" one) (Bolt 23). Haggard, as will be discussed below, supports some of these theories in the novel. His link between miscegenation and female sexual aggression is particularly significant in light of Victorian stereotypes of African women as sexually aggressive (Bolt 137, Gilman 212). In *She*, aggressive female sexuality and miscegenation are explicitly linked in three different relationships: Ustane, a young Amahaggar woman, pursues Leo, the handsome young British protagonist; an older Amahaggar woman pursues the British servant Job; and Ayesha herself pursues Leo. For all of these women, this cross-racial attraction ends in death.

To begin with the most negative example, Job's rejected suitor transforms her spurned sexual aggression into a violent, cannibalistic rage that results in many deaths, including her own. Thus, more violently and vividly than in Lytton's novel, female sexual aggression is linked to both miscegenation and destruction (not to mention cannibalism and general "barbarism"). Ustane's pursuit and possession of Leo is more romantically tragic, but equally self-destructive. Following Amahaggar custom, she pursues Leo and claims him with a kiss. Although Haggard subsequently depicts her as the ideal Victorian loving, nurturing, and submissive mate, her fate is sealed by a combination of aggression and racial difference. Ayesha, admittedly motivated by jealousy, voices the law of miscegenation that spells doom for interracial relationships when she banishes Ustane from Leo's presence and annuls their marriage: "He is not a man of thine own race, and the custom fails" (205-06). Miscegenation is thus presented as unlawful. Ayesha's later murder of Ustane is both a jealous act and a punishment for breaking this law.

Finally, the novel presents Ayesha's own aggressive sexuality as miscegenetic and destructive. On the surface, Ayesha and Leo's relationship is not miscegenetic, as Ayesha's "whiteness" is emphasized constantly. Nonetheless, Ayesha and Leo are not of the same "race." Patently, Ayesha is Arabic, but that is not the official reason for their difference. Ayesha is *supernatural* and cannot mate with a mere mortal. She tells Leo that only when he too bathes in the fire of life and becomes immortal can they be married (250). In a later, similar, conversation, she uses words that show the essential physical difference between them that presently prevents their union: "when once thou art even as I am" (254). Whereas Ustane's error was to ignore barriers of race, Ayesha's greater

crime is to play god with nature. Her own stolen immortality and "secret of life" are already examples of this. However, significantly, it is only when she tries to create a mate for herself, to transform Leo into one of her (unnatural) race, that she is destroyed. A subtle (subconscious) message here is that men and women are different races—they have entirely different natures.

Miscegenation is thus everywhere—heterosexuality is depicted as a relationship between almost incompatible natures. This is obviously not to argue that Haggard intends this message, but instead to point out an emotional thread throughout the novel that contrasts the male and female 'races' and also consistently depicts women as violently destructive and inhuman/superhuman. Every woman in the novel illustrates this. Amenartas, who has magical powers, lures Kallikrates from the priesthood and thus causes his destruction; her revenge message furthermore destroys a long line of her male descendants (30-40). Ustane, although often depicted as submissive, curses and wields a knife in her power struggle with Job over the possession of Leo (168); she also demonstrates clairvoyant powers (93). Ayesha is depicted as superhuman and destructive throughout the novel. Significantly, all women (but no men) are sexual aggressors in this novel, echoing Bulwer-Lytton's fantasy of sexually obsessed women and indifferent men. Unlike Bulwer-Lytton's male characters, Haggard's clearly feel sexual desire, but they do not act on it—men do not fight over women or pursue women in the novel, but instead philosophically accept the women's sexual advances. This clearly further illustrates the novel's subtle characterization of women as a less 'civilized' race according to Victorian notions of civilization, which emphasized rational control over animal nature. The uniformity of female sexual aggression in the novel, combined with the uniformity of

their destruction, implies that women are punished for their nature—a nature entirely different from that of the more 'civilied' males who survive. A miniature Darwinian lesson is implied here, as one race (the male characters) survives and becomes dominant, while the other (the female characters) loses power and is destroyed. The periodic male Amahaggar slaughter of aggressive women embodies this subtle colonial undercurrent of men and women as different races— women periodically threaten the male power structure and men slaughter them. This is characterized as a collective, political and social act in the novel—the quelling of a rebellion by a subject race. This (subconscious) characterization of men and women as different races in the novel—and thus of all heterosexuality as symbolically miscegenetic—makes female sexual aggression an even greater threat, as such (sexual/racial) aggression threatened male Victorian control (of the subject 'races' both at home and abroad). Thus, Haggard's violent destruction of all miscegenation and all sexually aggressive women in the novel is an attempt to destroy the threat that sexually aggressive women represent: a threat to the clear and secure boundaries of sex and race that maintained white male imperial power.

This subtle (and unconscious) implication that men and women are different races (making heterosexuality miscegenetic) is further reinforced in the novel by the strong homosocial and homoerotic elements in the text. Such elements were common in the newly popular adventure novels aimed at male readers. Elaine Showalter argues that "the revival of 'romance' in the 1880s was a men's literary revolution intended to reclaim the kingdom of the English novel for male writers, male readers, and men's stories" and that such novels emphasized homoerotic male bonding and the exclusion of women (*Sexual* 78-80). In relation to *She*, Showalter more specifically points out Holly's "virgin

fatherhood" (*Sexual* 84); the novel emphasizes Holly and Job's jealous hostility toward any woman attempting to come between them and Leo. Even though Job's misogyny is typically characterized as comic in the novel, and Holly's misogyny is somewhat countered by his fascination with Ayesha—an adoration that combines respect, lust and terrror—the novel consistently and ultimately reinforces a misogynistic message (that women cause trouble) and privileges the male bond over all other relationships. The pair-bonding of Holly and Leo in a father-son role (19), as a "Beauty/Beast" couple (21), and even as lovers of Ayesha remains strong throughout and unthreatened by their love of the same woman, a potential obstacle conveniently solved by Ayesha's death. Heterosexual love is significantly fleeting and destructive in the novel, as every single instance of heterosexuality evidences: Amenartas-Kallikrates, Ayesha-Kallikrates, Job-Suitor, Leo-Ustane, Holly-Ayesha, Leo-Ayesha, as well as even the brief mention of Leo's parents' relationship and the symbolic battle between the sexes continually re-enacted by the Amahaggar (as they periodically kill off their women). Thus, Haggard's (unconscious) characterization of heterosexuality as miscegenetic and destructive is part of a pervasive subtext in the novel that valorizes homosocial bonding over heterosexual love, despite the apparent centrality of the heterosexual love story. However, there is also a sense in which the novel presents Ayesha and the myth of timeless yet unattainable love as symbolic—as readers we identify with Holly's unfulfilled desire for Ayesha and we sense something archetypal in the epic story of her own endless and unfulfilled quest for union with her lover. In this reading, heterosexual union is not only destructive but also a symbolically unattainable quest to reunite the unjoinable.

She and its sequels (*Ayesha: The Return of She*, 1905, and the prequel *Wisdom's Daughter*, 1922) are built around a female battle for sexual possession and domination of a male. First the original Amenartas-Kallikrates-Ayesha triangle (briefly described in *She* and later depicted in detail in *Wisdom's Daughter*), then the reincarnated version of Ustane-Leo-Ayesha play out this tale of two women fighting over a man. Since Amenartas calls upon her male descendants to revenge her and kill Ayesha, critics such as David Bunn interpret the Holly-Leo quest as an "archetypal urge towards [male] revenge against women" (17). However, this erases Amenartas's role as a sexual aggressor and the acknowledgement of her struggle with Ayesha for possession of the male (17). Granted, Amenartas's revenge cry is handed down through sons to Leo, but the reincarnated version of the struggle again presents the two women, Ayesha and Ustane, as the actors and the man (Leo) as the passive object. While two women fighting over a man is obviously a narrative staple (usually comedic) in western literature and thus hardly in itself a challenge to patriarchal dominance, the scale of Haggard's version dramatically increases the power of this female battle. In other words, the millennial and imperial scale of this battle make it a challenge to patriarchal power in a way the typical catfight is not. Furthermore, although Leo is not the first passive object of female desire in western literature, his characterization significantly also challenges Victorian notions of masculine superiority. Andrew Lang noted that "There is a difficulty about Leo. He is not made a very interesting person. Probably he was only a fine animal" (qtd. in Haggard *Days* v.1, p.247). Over 100 years later, Daniel Karlin similarly comments that "Leo is represented with relentless consistency as a dumb blond" (xxvi). Thus, he significantly

remains an attractive but malleable pawn in the hands of women who strive to control him as a sexual object.

This female sexual domination of men is significantly (as in *Coming Race*) associated with women's marital rights:

> It then appeared that, in direct opposition to the habits of almost every other savage race in the world, women among the Amahaggar are not only upon terms of perfect equality with the men, but are not held to them by any binding ties . . . . When a woman took a fancy to a man she signified her preference by advancing and embracing him publicly . . . . If he kissed her back it was a token that he accepted her, and the arrangement continued till one of them wearied of it. I am bound, however, to say that the change of husbands was not nearly so frequent as might have been expected. Nor did quarrels arise out of it, at least among the men, who, when their wives deserted them in favour of a rival, accepted the whole thing much as we accept the income-tax or our marriage laws, as something not to be disputed, and as tending to the good of the community, however disagreeable they may in particular instances prove to the individual. (81-82)

Consider all the implications of this passage. Firstly, flexible marriage ties signal not only a "civilized" (e.g. not "savage") race but also women's equality with men. Moreover, such temporary marriages primarily benefit women, since apparently only they desert their spouses (although not as frequently "as might have been expected"). Men do not fight over women and are more rational about conforming to laws, since marriage laws are for the general good. Many of these implications evoke a personal context: the woman Haggard loved was married to someone else, his own marriage was troubled, and his long companionship with friend and literary helper Agnes Barber was suddenly threatened in 1886 by her marrying his brother Jack (Higgins 89-90). Thus, Haggard's personal experiences may have contributed to his fantasy of non-binding marriages and his image of men philosophically accepting marriage laws as necessary evils (as he presumably came to terms with his own disappointments in marriage). Furthermore, since *She* was

written after the major Victorian legal reforms such as the various Matrimonial Causes Acts, Married Women's Property Acts, and Infant Custody Acts, the passage's implication that liberal marriage laws solely benefit women seems significant. A Victorian man like Haggard may have believed such dramatic changes had given women legal control over the marriage process. Haggard seems to exaggerate this new Victorian legal empowerment of wives in his depiction of Amahaggar marriage laws and customs, although his fantasy also incorporates a critique of female fickleness and emotionality in contrast to male rational behaviour.

Significantly, however, Haggard implies that giving women this marital "equality" is a mistake, since allowing women this power seemingly opens the floodgates of dominance as represented by Job's monstrous suitor. Ayesha's sexual domination moves beyond mere marital control to political and even imperial rule, thus implying that even giving women the smallest "right" of sexual aggression is dangerous. Her sexual dominance draws both Holly and Leo to kneel before her—Leo in front of the newly murdered body of his former lover, Ustane (230). Leo and Holly describe their subjugation as "bondage" (241); they are "moths" drawn to the fatal flame, addicted "opium-eaters" (241-42). Significantly, Ayesha herself equates female sexual domination with women's rights. She takes great pleasure at men's kneeling before her out of desire and calls this "dear pleasure" a woman's "only right" (190). However, just as seen in the two previous female rule novels, she symbolically offers to give up her right to dominance by twice kneeling in submission before Leo. The first time, she offers him a dagger to kill her and revenge her murder of Ustane. However, this submission is significantly an empty gesture, as his response reveals: "I am in thy power, and a very

slave to thee. How can I kill thee—sooner should I slay myself" (254). The other example of Ayesha's kneeling is different, however. At the end of the novel, she again professes her love to Leo and there is a change: "Hitherto he had been fascinated against his better judgement, something as a bird is fascinated by a snake, but now I [Holly] think that all this passed away, and he realised that he really loved this strange and glorious creature, as, alas! I loved her also" (283). Leo forgives Ayesha for the murder of Ustane and declares his love. Ayesha's response is submission: "she took his hand and placed it upon her shapely head, and then bent herself slowly down till one knee for an instant touched the ground—'Behold! in token of submission do I bow me to my lord! Behold!'" (284). She then swears a series of oaths:

> "I swear, even in this first most holy hour of completed Womanhood, that I will abandon Evil and cherish Good. I swear that I will be ever guided by thy voice in the straightest path of Duty. I swear that I will eschew Ambition, and through all my length of endless days set Wisdom over me as a guiding star to lead me unto Truth and a knowledge of the Right" (284).

Furthermore, as a "bridal gift," she gives Leo her ruling powers: "dominion over sea and earth, over the peasant in his hovel, over the monarch in his palace halls, and cities crowned with towers, and those who breathe therein" (285). On one hand, like the Gy-ei's abdication of wings and rights upon marriage in *Coming Race*, this scene supports the Victorian legal reality that even a Queen was subject to her husband. On the other hand, Ayesha's characterization makes readers suspicious of her sudden submissiveness. Ayesha significantly only kneels "for an instant." Ten pages later and after her ignominious death, Holly asserts his belief that Ayesha, "strong and happy in her love, clothed in immortal youth and godlike beauty, and the wisdom of the centuries, would have revolutionized society, and even perchance have changed the destiny of Mankind"

(295). This passage, like the one presented at the opening of this chapter, especially reveals the dual dream/nightmare quality of Haggard's fantasy, as he is torn between respect/desire for his creation (embodied in her ability to gloriously transform the world) and fear/criticism of her (embodied in her violent tyranny). Ayesha's submission to Leo is depicted as untrustworthy, an indication of her love rather than a binding promise to give up her rule. Significantly, Ayesha is killed rather than allowed to experience the Victorian "happy" ending of domestic subjugation to her man. It was perhaps too great a risk for Victorian patriarchy to take—to trust that Ayesha would give up her powers for love once she had her (extremely passive) man—and thus the "finger of Providence" intervenes (295).

Authority and Rule in *She*

Ayesha has three primary sources of authority in the novel—physical, spiritual, and intellectual—all significantly related to increases in Victorian women's authority and the reality of British imperialism under female rule. Female physical power takes quite a different form in *She* than in *Coming Race*. Ayesha is not a large woman—she is the physical inferior in terms of size and strength to the men in the novel.[39] Unlike the amazon-sized Gy-ei, however, whose violence was dormant, Ayesha kills in the novel, demonstrating the threat of a very feminized violence:

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[39]A note about the role that race plays in this point is important. Although, regardless of race, Ayesha is not bigger than any man in the novel, all males except the white visitors, Holly and Leo, must prostrate themselves in her presence. Thus she physically towers over and controls her "native" subjects, while the white males both assert and are permitted to assert physical superiority in her presence. The assumptions of racial superiority are obvious and intersect dynamics of gender superiority. (White) Ayesha can demonstrate and enforce physical superiority over non-white males. However, the physical power dynamics between her and white males is more complicated.

> Ayesha said nothing, she made no sound, she only drew herself up, stretched out her arm, and, her tall veiled frame quivering like an aspen leaf, appeared to look fixedly at her victim. Even as she did so Ustane put her hands to her head, uttered one piercing scream, turned around twice, and then fell backwards with a thud--prone upon the floor. Both Leo and myself rushed to her--she was stone dead--blasted into death by some mysterious electric agency or overwhelming will-force whereof the dread *She* had command.

This act of violence significantly uses no "masculine" brute force. It is a violence of look, gesture, will, and nerves. It is is magical, spiritual, and emotional—in other words, associated with stereotypes of femininity. As with the incident of the violent Gy in Lytton's novel, the violence is domestic: motivated by female sexual jealousy. Furthermore, Ayesha's body remains frail and feminine despite her violence. Although Ayesha's murder of Ustane is thus a portrait of feminized violence, her power nonetheless represents a threat to male physical power. In the same scene, just after Ustane's murder, Ayesha's feminine power conquers Leo's masculine brute force:

> With a savage oath [Leo] rose from beside the corpse, and, turning, literally sprang at Ayesha. But she was watching, and, seeing him come, stretched out her hand again, and he went staggering back towards me [Holly], and would have fallen, had I not caught him. Afterwards he told me that he felt as though he had suddenly received a violent blow in the chest, and, what is more, utterly cowed, as if all the manhood had been taken out of him. (227-28)

The internal and mysterious nature of Ayesha's power also marks it as spiritual, despite its very real physical results. Moreover, significantly, Ayesha's physical/spiritual power is not truly hers and not truly female—she is a conduit for male power, raising the familiar issue of entitlement. Ayesha learns of and acquires the power from a man, Noot, its former guardian. Her story echoes popular Victorian versions of the Merlin and Nimue legend[40]: Ayesha beguiles Noot into revealing the power of the Fire of Life (280). The popularity of this usurpation theme clearly illustrates contemporary fears of Victorian

women's increasing "usurpation" of male power in occupational, intellectual, legal, and political arenas. Even mystical/spiritual power, stereotypically associated with the feminine, is in the novel characterized as originally male and thus illicitly acquired by Ayesha. This power is also constructed as masculine because it is described as a "flaming pillar" and Ayesha's union with it is presented erotically. Sandra M. Gilbert describes the fire as a "perpetually erect symbol of masculinity [which] is not just a Freudian penis but a Lacanian Phallus, a fiery signifier whose eternal thundering return speaks the inexorability of the patriarchal Law She has violated in her satanically overreaching ambition" (130). Ayesha's final eroticized union with this undeniably phallic and masculine source of power ends in her destruction, signalling a final masculine triumph over the ultimate female threat. Thus, Ayesha's physical authority—her violence—is both feminized and masculinized: feminized in its motivation (sexual jealousy), application (emotion/will rather than muscle), and control (her frailty); but masculinized in its source (her usurpation of a phallic male power).

The spirituality of female power in these novels, particularly in *She*, is complex, evoking contexts of imperial control, inherent female spirituality, and fears of growing female power. Wendy Katz posits a relationship between spiritual domination and imperial expansion and control in Haggard's books and colonial experience: "The Ayesha books reveal Haggard's awareness of the way in which ideas and images of spiritual superiority can be effective political tools. An image of invincibility maintained the mystery and the sanctity of the alien ruler and kept the colonized peoples at a safe distance" (129). In other words, Haggard and other imperialists of his time recognized in

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[40] See for instance Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, 1859.

spirituality an essential method of colonial control. Hints of this also appear in Besant's *Revolt of Man*, as a female religion is used to control men for 200 years. Katz here indicates a highly significant correlation between Ayesha's method of maintaining authority (ensuring the Amahaggar worship her as a goddess) and the methods practiced by British colonial forces. Ayesha details this methodology of control to Holly: "How thinkest thou that I rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding, therefore it is not by force. It is by terror. My empire is of the imagination " (175). Ayesha describes the attitude of her subjects towards her as one of "worship" and "terror" and often refers to them as savages, barbarians and slaves (145). Mazlish points out the surface similarity between Ayesha and Victoria, between Ayesha's rule and that of British colonial forces: "The white Queen who, in fact, rules over savages is Queen Victoria. Her rule, too, is based largely on imagination; for British regiments are always outnumbered by the savages among whom they exist but whom they dominate psychologically"[41] (737). There is thus a parallel between Ayesha's imperialism and that of the British. Indeed, Ayesha's undesirable brand of imperialism hints at what Katz calls "Haggard's ambivalence to authoritarian rule" and his "awareness of the corrupt and demonic aspect of rule by spiritual prerogative, the intoxication of expansion, and the imposition of social controls on a people by the ideological, or mythological, rendering of the divine mission" (126). Essentially, although Haggard fully endorsed imperialism and colonialism, his portrait of Ayesha shows his (perhaps unconscious) awareness and fear of their dark side: tyranny. The scene in which Ayesha judges and condemns the cannibal conspirators illustrates this ambivalence:

> Then, seated in her barbaric chair above them all, with myself [Holly] at her feet, was the veiled white woman, whose loveliness and awesome power seemed to visibly shine about her like a halo, or rather like the glow from some unseen light. Never have I seen her veiled shape look more terrible, than it did in that space, while she gathered herself up for vengeance. (174)

Here Ayesha's spiritual and imperial power become one, as the supernatural white foreign queen condemns to torture and death the native subjects who worship and fear her (174-75).

It is clearly significant that this embodiment of imperial tyranny is female. Haggard's explicit praise in the novel of Queen Victoria as "venerated and beloved by all right-thinking people in her vast realms" is potentially a little overdone (255)—perhaps Ayesha embodies some Victorian nervousness over a woman with so much imperial control? However, beyond the likely influence of Victoria's reign on Haggard's creation of a spiritual, imperial, and tyrannical Queen, there are other social and political relevant factors, such as a common Victorian view of women as inherently more spiritual and virtuous than men. In his youth, Haggard was involved with some of the spiritualist movements of the 1870s which women (such as Lady Poulett and Lady Caithness) dominated (Cohen 26). Although women were barred from any real power or advancement in the established churches and gradually disempowered in even the marginalized churches, it was nonetheless a common Victorian belief that women were more spiritual creatures than men. Besant's novel similarly displayed this fear of women's spiritual influence getting out of control. Spiritual authority, like other male power arenas, was under threat as women clamoured for increased religious roles and powers in both radical and mainstream Protestant sects and through temperance and social purity

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[41] Mazlish uses the term "savage" here to explicitly illustrate Victorian racial attitudes and terminology—to

movements (Shiman *Women*). Furthermore, as Corbett's text will show, feminist Biblical criticism was also challenging patriarchal spiritual authority.

A relevant context here is the dramatic increase in female missionaries in the last half of the nineteenth century—an increase that at least potentially gave women more spiritual power. According to *Women and Missions: Past and Present*, in the 1870s and 1880s missionary organizations (such as the China Inland Mission, the Church Missionary Society, and the London Missionary Society) recognized the advantages of attracting educated, "surplus" women (especially those with incomes) to missionary service. Peter Williams observes that between 1860 and 1900 women went from "being a negligible percentage of the missionary force to being 50 per cent of the recruits in some British and American societies" (66). Women even began "to outnumber men in some missionary societies, and were clearly a very significant force" by the end of the century (Williams, Peter 43). This created fears of increased female spiritual authority, as some women exercised considerable influence in their isolated missions. Bishop Allan Becher Webb in 1883 insisted that his south African "sisterhood" be kept under his own "personal control" and "not under the irresponsible rule of any woman" (qtd. in Bowie 8). In 1888 a male London Missionary Conference delegate similarly warned that women's missionary work "must be careful to recognise the headship of man" (qtd. in Bowie 8). Male church authorities feared the threat of female spiritual authority at home as well as in the field: organizations like the London Missionary Society (LMS) welcomed the creation of a Ladies' Committee in 1875 while barring them from the LMS Board until 1891 (Williams, Peter 65). Ironically, Victorian women were frequently idealized as a

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indicate the attitudes held by Haggard and his contemporaries that underpinned British colonialism.

force for "civilizing" and improving the spirituality and morality of their men. Women were essential to notions of civilized progress in a period when fears of imperial decline were rife. However, female missionaries (although economically and practically useful) represented yet another step outside the Victorian gender boundaries. Women missionaries threatened male colonial dominance, a threat that Haggard manifests in his depiction of the white Ayesha's spiritual misrule of an African nation.

Ayesha's final area of authority, her intelligence, is crucial both to Haggard's Victorian context and the pervasive sense of the "unnaturalness" of female rule in his fantasy. Her intellectual power is primarily depicted as unnatural because of her great age, as illustrated in a scene when Holly retreats from defending religion against her atheism:

> How little chance . . . should I have against one whose brain was supernaturally sharpened, and who had two thousand years of experience, besides all manner of knowledge of the secrets of Nature at her command! Feeling that she would be more likely to convert me than I should to convert her, I thought it best to leave the matter alone. (193)

Ayesha's intellectual abilities are thus highly and indisputably advanced. However, two key words in this quote, "supernaturally" and "Nature," are keys to the manner in which Ayesha's intellect (and, by association, female intellectual advancement in general) is portrayed as both unnatural and undesirable. Ayesha's intelligence and skill are attributed to two thousand years of life and experience. Only a supernatural woman, in other words, surpasses a man intellectually. Ayesha is thus "unnatural," and her intellectual achievements cannot be extrapolated and generalized to the female population at large. More subtle, however, are the indications that Ayesha's great knowledge and intelligence are unnatural and wrong. Her scientific studies and her amoral philosophies are offered as

further evidence of the illegitimacy of female authority. In the case of her genetic experiments, she mentions that she once created a race of giants, "but after a while Nature would no more of it, and it died away" (154). This is an early hint that Ayesha's intellect disrupts nature. Ayesha's philosophical reasoning is also depicted as morally dubious. She makes an impassioned speech justifying her planned murder of Ustane that combines social Darwinism ("those who are weak must perish") with moral relativism ("out of crimes come many good things, and out of good grows much evil") (203). Holly's internal response paints a picture of the chaos that uncontrolled female intellect would inflict upon the world:

> I felt it was hopeless to argue against casuistry of this nature, which, if it were carried to its logical conclusion, would absolutely destroy all morality, as we understand it. But her talk gave me a fresh thrill of fear; for what may not be possible to a being who, unconstrained by human law, is also absolutely unshackled by a moral sense of right and wrong, which, however partial and conventional it may be, is yet based, as our conscience tells us, upon the great wall of individual responsibility that marks off mankind from the beasts? (203)

Ayesha's materialist ("naught endures but the world and human nature") and relativist ("a knowledge of good and evil as good and evil is to him") musings are juxtaposed with Holly's faith (192-93). Somewhat surprisingly, Ayesha here enters the stereotypically masculine territory of reasoning and philosophy, while Holly defends the traditionally feminine domain of faith and morality. Here Ayesha embodies the negative aspects of Victorian science and philosophy: its erosion of faith. This is highly ironic, since the Victorian scientific movement replaced religion as the dominant justification of women's disempowerment. The feminist Helen Gardener in an 1886 speech observed this replacement of patriarchal religion with "so-called scientific grounds" as a means of denying women equality (qtd. in Russet 189-90). Thus Haggard's depiction of Ayesha

embodying science gone wrong is an especially bizarre representation. The negative elements of late Victorianism—imperial abuses and the erosion of faith by science—are displaced on to a woman, whose destruction symbolically eliminates these threats. However, it should be emphasized that this is but one subtext of Haggard's emotionally complex fantasy of female rule. Ayesha's character can by no means be read as purely negative or destructive—Haggard was clearly fascinated by his creation and that fascination incorporated admiration along with fear. Holly's adoration of Ayesha partly indicates this admiration, as does Haggard's frequent revival of Ayesha in three more novels. Holly's belief that Ayesha's world domination would be gloriously prosperous provides additional support for the duality of Ayesha's characterization—evidence that Haggard's fantasy of female rule contains both dream and nightmare elements.

Gendered Spheres and Rule in *She*

Because *She* lacks the utopian/dystopian genre characteristics of the other female rule novels studied, it also contains the least detail on social structure and information on the gendering of public and private spheres. However, there are obvious ways in which *She* illustrates the alteration of gender boundaries found in the other texts. For instance, Ayesha's rule of Kor while she waits for her man can be read as both public action and domestic confinement. Kor, when compared to the vast scale of British imperial territories, is an isolated little country. Ayesha, as its ruler, can thus be read as an (admittedly powerful, violent and terrifying) representation of the Ruskinian domestic Queen ruling her home. Ayesha's rule embodies the same paradox faced by Victoria—how to fill a (male) public role in a (female) domestic way. Victoria's rule was

most popular when it preserved gender boundaries—when her rule was seen as maternal. Ayesha, with her tyrannical spiritual imperialism, her sexual dominance, and her usurped masculine powers, chaotically jumbles gender boundaries. The private/domestic becomes public (her rule and laws are primarily focused on ensuring the return of her mate) and the public becomes domestic/private (Ayesha studies, experiments, governs from "home" and almost never leaves her caves).

Despite the general lack of detail about Amahaggar society, Haggard does provide crucial information about gender divisions:

> the labour of digging is very great. It is, however, all done by the men, the women, contrary to the habits of most savage races, being entirely exempt from manual toil. But then, as I think I have said elsewhere, among the Amahaggar the weaker sex has established its rights. (89)

The implication that "civilized" women (presumably those home in England) do not perform manual labour is not astonishing, however indicative of class bias. Of interest is the association of Amahaggar women with women's rights, and furthermore the association of easier "women's" work with women's rights and with an advanced society. This mirrors the increasing Victorian emphasis on middle-class women's leisure. As Holcombe observes, "leisured, or idle, wives and daughters had become expensive status symbols for successful middle-class men" (*Victorian Ladies* 4).). As Russet's extensive studies of Victorian scientists and sociologists such as Darwin and Spencer reveals, it was a "commonplace" Victorian belief that the sexual segregation of labour divided uncivilized societies from advanced ones:

> At the apex of the social order stood the societies of contemporary western Europe and America—whose distinguishing sexual characteristic (extensive evidence to the contrary notwithstanding) was the exemption of women from productive labor, that they might better devote themselves to the bearing and

> rearing of children. At the foot stood the primitive cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, whose women, slaves to their men in all but name, toiled unceasingly at the most arduous physical tasks. (131)

Thus, on the surface, Haggard's fantasy implies that the Amahaggar women's leisure indicates the society is advanced (according to Victorian sociological and scientific theory), since it is explicitly contrasted with the customs of "savage races" whose women don't have "rights." However, it quickly becomes clear that women's rights in Amahaggar society are a horrific illusion, as Holly learns from Billali, the male leader (called "father") of his large tribe:

> 'In this country the women do what they please. We worship them, and give them their way, because without them the world could not go on; they are the source of life.'
>
> 'Ah,' I said, the matter never having struck me quite in that light before.
>
> 'We worship them,' he went on, 'up to a certain point, till at last they get unbearable, which,' he added, 'they do about every second generation.'
>
> 'And then what do you do?' I asked, with curiosity.
>
> 'Then,' he answered, with a faint smile, 'we rise, and kill the old ones as an example to the young ones, and to show them that we are the strongest.' (114)

This is the real power dynamic underlying the Amahaggar women's "rights." Women have the right to *play* at equality or even domination for a generation. The men allow them this illusory sense of freedom and power only because the women's true role as childbearer is essential. But those who play at domination too hard (especially the older women whose wombs are no longer useful) are murdered by the men.

There is again an element of displacement (and perhaps warning) here—Haggard's fantasy exaggerates and demonizes Victorian reality. The Amahaggar gender roles are quite similar to those in Victorian England. Amahaggar men perform the public work (manual labour and leadership). Women perform lighter, domestic duties (serving and probably cooking and cleaning). However, despite this allegedly "civilized"

state of affairs, violence results. A key word in the above passage, "worship," provides insight into the misogyny of Haggard's fantasy here. Worship of women in the novel causes women to contest gendered sphere and role restrictions so they become "unbearable." Thus, the problem is that the men treat the women too well—give them too many "rights." The power associated with these "rights" (such as sexual dominance) goes to the women's heads and they presumably abuse it until the men cannot tolerate their dominance and kill them. Once again the supernatural fantasy displaces a critique of Victorian ideology and practice—this time a critique of society's dangerous indulgence of women by giving them both rights and worship—on to a fictional African tribe. Billali voices the dominant Victorian message—women's true value is their reproductive function.

A subtext in Haggard's fantasy here implies here that although social customs may vary, women must not be allowed to stray too far from this essential domestic role, and men as the "stronger" sex must ultimately control women's wombs to preserve civilization. Thus, the novel's emphasis on women's primary reproductive role appears in the context of growing anxiety about imperial power. Although concern over maintaining the population of empire reached a peak in the early twentieth century, this concern was already surfacing in the 1880s. In opposition to the Neo-Malthusian belief that over-, not under-population was the problem, voices like Charles Kingsley in mid-century and J. R. Seeley's 1883 *The Expansion of England* argued that an increasing population was essential to maintain and increase England's great empire (Davin 10). Behind such increasing concern was both the increased imperial competition for territory previously mentioned and population statistics: the censuses in the 1880s confirmed both a falling

birth rate and other records reported a rising infant mortality rate (Davin 10-11). An anonymous *Popular Science* author in 1878 also voiced this message of women's primary role: "Were men immortal and nonreproductive, women's *raison d'être* would disappear" (qtd. in Russet 136). This belief underlies the novel's subtle warning that letting women stray from this primary sphere and role would lead to disaster. The Victorian attempts to keep women confined to domestic sphere roles may have differed in degree from the extreme Amahaggar control of women, but they share a core emphasis on women's reproductive function.

Conclusion

Holly sums up Ayesha's fate as follows: "Thus she opposed herself against the eternal Law, and, strong though she was, by it was swept back to nothingness—swept back with shame and hideous mockery!" (295). Ayesha bathes once more in the Fire of Life that originally gave her supernatural power and longevity, and the fire ages her to a "hideous little monkey" in a kind of Darwinian devolution (295). Thus, it is some conveniently vague Law that saves the Victorian world from Ayesha's imperial rule—presumably the same law that restored male rule in Lytton's and Besant's fictional worlds. Paralleling the advancements of Victorian feminist movements, as they achieved new reforms slowly but steadily throughout the period, each of these authors takes female dominance a little farther. Bulwer-Lytton stopped short of actual female governance, and Besant was careful to characterize female rule as a temporary and doomed error in male governance, rather than the active conquest of men by women. Haggard, however, takes the final step—Ayesha is mistress of her own fate, an active ruling agent. True, her

biology and illegitimacy consistently undercut her rule—sexual desire keeps her passively waiting for a mate, and she relies on usurped supernatural powers to maintain a rule characterized as amoral and tyrannical. However, although Haggard (like Besant) strongly emphasizes women's illegitimate usurpation of male power, Ayesha seems to seize and wield that power with much greater force than Besant's ruling women. Unlike Besant's incompetent female rulers, furthermore, Haggard implies that Ayesha is eminently capable of ruling on an almost infinite scale. In Haggard's fantasy, female rule may be characterized as illegitimate, tyrannical, and amoral, but it most certainly is not constructed as weak or incompetent.

It is interesting here to comparatively examine the differences between the three authors' speculations on female rule—differences that reveal cultural shifts between 1871 and 1886 in attitudes toward women and power. Only 15 short years separate Lytton's and Haggard's novels, but there appears to be a cultural shift between them that is not easily explained by a difference in genres or the personalities of their authors. The birth year and age of each author when he wrote his female rule novel seem relevant: Bulwer-Lytton, born in 1803, was 68; Besant, born in 1836, was 46; and Haggard, born in 1856, was 30. Thus, each of these authors was nearly a generation apart from the others, and age might have given them a very different perspective on the feminist reforms of the period. Although definitive generalizations obviously cannot be drawn from this age data, it seems nevertheless unsurprising that Bulwer-Lytton and Besant were most hostile and resistant to these feminist changes that occurred later in their settled lives—changes that must have seemed more threatening to their accustomed privilege and security. Haggard, having grown up with many of these reforms, seems more resigned to (albeit still

disapproving of) the notion of female rule as a possibility. The fact that Haggard's ruler is a sexual object of desire *because* of her extreme power indicates a shift from Besant's characterization of female rulers as utterly repugnant to Haggard's depiction of a sexy queen.[42] Although male acceptance of female rule as a sex fantasy hardly seems a cause for feminist celebration, it nonetheless seems to indicate an important shift from the outright rejection of women in government seen in the earlier speculations. Haggard gives the possibility of female rule more seriousness and power than did Besant or Bulwer-Lytton.

Ayesha herself has the last word and does not remain defeated by "Providence." As she promised Leo before her death, she returns. Haggard felt evidently bound to his creation of female power, and in his 1905 dedication of the sequel (*Ayesha: The Return of She*) referred to the "chain of 'loyalty'" binding him to her (although part of the attraction was an undoubted pragmatic desire to repeat his original success). In *Ayesha* (1905), *She and Allen* (1921), and *Wisdom's Daughter* (1922), Haggard has Ayesha repeatedly play out the same drama of power and loss, vanity and punishment, glory and defeat. Apparently, once released, such female omnipotence was very difficult to contain or resist.

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[42] Haggard's depiction of feminine power as erotic is of course one of many such fin-de-siecle representations of the femme fatale, as analyzed in studies such as Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* and Nina Auerbach's *Woman and the Demon.*

CHAPTER 5

IDEALIZING FEMALE GOVERNMENT: CORBETT'S *NEW AMAZONIA*

> *'But how comes it that you, a man, should so enthusiastically uphold the only Constitution in the world which has, so far as I know, successfully resisted man's striving for supremacy?'*
> *'Because I am thoroughly satisfied and contented with my lot, and because no country upon earth presents such advantages to her citizens as New Amazonia does. Our women have proved their capacity to govern wisely and well. Our Constitution has found imitators, proof positive that others regard our system with approval. Yet nowhere do we meet with such health and prosperity as in our country, for man's political influence has in all ages proved corrupt and retrogressive.' (111)*

It seems fitting that Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett's *New Amazonia* (1889) should have the last word in this study, since she provides a fascinating rebuttal to the voices previously analyzed. Corbett daringly turns the tables on Victorian stereotypes and asserts the superiority of government by women, although a more moderate co-government is her ultimate hope for Victorian readers. Her fictitious nation, New Amazonia (formerly Ireland), is a land of peace and plenty, full of healthy, highly educated, and happy citizens who live exceptionally long lives. It is also, significantly, a land of scientific advancements such as weather control, widespread electricity, and advanced hydraulic transportation—but without pollution, poverty or disease. However, despite much that seems idyllic to a modern feminist reader, there are horrifying elements (such as extreme state violence) as well. Corbett's vision incorporates and responds to many movements and theories of the time that are controversial today, such as eugenics, animal experimentation, censorship, capital punishment, and various forms of state intervention and control. *New Amazonia* is written as a dream vision—its female narrator

(presented as Corbett herself) falls asleep in a rage over the treatment of women in 1889 and finds herself 600 years in the future, in a country under an elected female government. Although challenging to Victorian patriarchal ideology, Corbett's utopia cannot escape the contemporary constructions of femininity. The previous authors studied felt conflicted between a grudging acceptance of women's abilities and a belief in women's biological limitations. Corbett, a feminist, struggles much more vigorously against constructions of governing women as sexual, unnatural, and a threat to gendered spheres. These same three themes appear in her text, but rather than allowing them to undermine or destroy the female government, Corbett manipulates these cultural assumptions to reinforce her support for women's participation in governance.

Although *New Amazonia* is fiction, it is not a novel but instead a very specific sub-genre of fiction: a utopia. Works in this genre, which originated with Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1516, typically resemble political tracts more than novels, as they are commonly driven by didactic purposes. This element of utopian fiction was also apparent in the texts by Bulwer-Lytton and Besant, which had clear political agendas. Haggard's fantasy text in contrast, as previously discussed, is a more literary and imaginative (and more subconscious) reaction to to the increasing possibility of women in government, rather than a political satire on the issue. As discussed in previous chapters, there are various sub-divisions within the utopia, including anti- (or dys-) topias and utopian satires such as role reversals. Furthermore, utopian scholars like Lyman Towers Sargent distinguish between utopia, literally 'no place', and eutopia, or 'good place'. A utopia is a description of an imaginary but not necessarily idealized place such as More's, created to satirize the author's society, while an eutopia is an idealized place (like that in William

Morris's 1891 *News from Nowhere*) created to illustrate the author's idea of a desirable society. Sargent categorizes *New Amazonia* as an eutopia, but this may not fully describe the complexity of Corbett's structure and purpose. Although Corbett creates a narrator who is ostensibly herself, she also distances this narrator (and thus her authorial voice) in a variety of ways from the 'utopian' or dream vision segment of the text. She does this partly through narrative structure (her conscious nineteenth-century self describes and analyzes her dream vision of the twenty-fifth century), but also through distancing techniques such as her narrator's disapproval of aspects of the utopian society in her dream. Furthermore, she uses a New Amazonian man, John Saville, to mediate between the extreme of female domination and the narrator's goal of co-government. Saville serves two purposes: first, to voice male support for Corbett's feminist ideology, and second, to support Corbett's ultimate vision of a more moderate co-government with men in contrast to her more extreme dream vision of female political domination. These narrative techniques complicate a reading of *New Amazonia* as strictly eutopian. Although Corbett clearly idealizes many aspects of the New Amazonian society, she nonetheless appears to critique the extreme control and scientific rationality of her state governed by women. This technique has two likely purposes, firstly to counter negative stereotypes (e.g. the images of irrational and incompetent female rulers seen in the texts previously studied), and secondly to position her advocacy of co-government strategically as a moderate compromise between matriarchal and patriarchal extremes.

New Amazonia has a formulaic utopian structure. A prologue introduces the narrator and context—in this case the author's feminist rage and subsequent dream. From then on, the text follows the narrator as she experiences and describes the utopian state,

and ends with the narrator's return to her own land. Typically, throughout utopian texts, one or more utopian citizens act as guides, in order to enable long dialogues in which the laws and customs are expounded in question-and-answer format. In Corbett's text, there are two significant guides: the male citizen and ally mentioned above, and a female authority figure (Helen Grey, Principal of a college). The contrast between these two guides is crucial to Corbett's strategic positioning of her narrator as moderate, although her narrator's attitude toward many New Amazonian extremes remains intriguingly ambiguous (as will be later discussed). Corbett does add a non-typical element to her utopia—a diminutive male fellow-traveller, Augustus Fitz-Musicus, who provides humour as "a perfect specimen of the British masher" and is markedly childish, selfish, and frivolously obsessed with clothing (10). Fitz-Musicus is ridiculed as a stereotypical late-Victorian male by both the narrator and the New Amazonian women: "the male biped is the same all the world over,—a conglomeration of conceit and arrogance" (17). However, this anti-male stereotype is significantly countered by the praise of John Saville's "modesty and good sense" and his support of sexual equality at the end of the text. Furthermore, Corbett's narrator, at the end, creates a final symbolic distance between herself and the New Amazonian extreme. The New Amazonian women threaten to kill Fitz-Musicus, and the narrator chooses to save him. Thus, although her scorn of the 'lesser' male remains, the narrator's actions ally her with gender equality rather than an ideology of female superiority.

Corbett clearly identifies the catalyst which inspired her feminist rule utopia: a June 1889 *Nineteenth Century* article entitled "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage" which filled her with "an overmastering rage" (Corbett 1). This article, signed by 104

women, asserted that the majority of women were against female suffrage. A debate ensued. The July issue of *Fortnightly Review* featured "Women's Suffrage: A Reply," a refutation that printed several hundred of the over 2000 signatures received supporting female suffrage. Furthermore, the July issue printed two pro-suffrage articles by Millicent Fawcett and Mary Ashton Dilke. Corbett specifically mentions all these articles, decrying the betrayal by the anti-suffrage authors and celebrating the pro-suffrage replies. Her happiness at the powerful pro-suffrage defenses sends her into a dream, as she imagines Annie Besant (the renowned Victorian feminist and birth control advocate, and the estranged sister-in-law of Walter Besant) as Prime Minister (8). Although Corbett acknowledges this suffrage debate as the primary event inspiring *New Amazonia*, she explicitly identifies several other contemporary feminist issues, such as the problem of ensuring financial support for "surplus" women (33-34); pay inequity (34); the double standard (35); and the injustice of the Contagious Diseases Acts that had finally been repealed in 1886 (35-36).

Very little is known about Corbett's life and work. John Kirk's supplement to Allibone's dictionary briefly describes her Lancashire birth, German education, marriage, and career as a serial writer. *Who Was Who in Literature: 1906-1934* describes her as "the author of over seventy published serials, which include nearly every branch of fiction, and all of which have been written on commission to suit the special requirements of editors." This source also mentions Corbett's numerous novels (at least 16 published in 1881-1922), which a search of the British Library Catalogue confirms. Charlotte Mitchell's entry in *Edwardian Fiction* adds further details on the serials for which she wrote and notes her applications to the Royal Literary Fund after World War I. Some of

her novels ran to multiple editions, indicating a degree of success. These novels were produced by a variety of publishers—*New Amazonia* was simultaneously published by Tower in London and Lambert & Co. in Newcastle-on-Tyne. *Who Was Who* also mentions "several successful plays" by Corbett, although it omits specific titles. Anita Rose describes Corbett as "an outstanding advocate of women's rights and a prolific writer of witty, readable popular novels about the indignities and injustices women suffered in the late nineteenth century" (18). A search of all the major journals (e.g. *Spectator*, *Saturday Review*, *Athenaeum*, *Westminster Review*, *Blackwood's*, *Contemporary Review*) around the time of *New Amazonia*'s publication produced no reviews. A few more obscure papers did review it (*Glasgow Herald*, *Literary World*, *Public Opinion*, *Woman's Penny Paper*), and some favourable responses (albeit generic praise like "amusing" and "curious") were quoted in an ad for the text printed in one of Corbett's later novels, *Mrs. Grundy's Victims* in 1893 (Beaumont 217, 223). The *Women's Penny Paper* (subtitled "The Only Paper Conducted, Written, Printed and Published by Women") favourably reviewed the text, calling it "another clever and entertaining shilling *brochure* by the spirited author of *Pharisees Unveiled*" and "an amusing satire on present conditions" ("Reviews" 118). This review also commented on the "minute detail" and "vigour" of Corbett's text and particularly highlighted the equality, size and age of the New Amazonian women—elements in Corbett's text that were bound to appeal to the magazine's readers ("Reviews" 118).

Corbett remained unnoticed by modern critics until fairly recently. Utopian studies scholars have begun to examine *New Amazonia*, thanks to Lyman Towers Sargent's annotated list of utopian literature in English between 1516-1975, which

identifies Corbett's *New Amazonia* as a "feminist eutopia" (39). Anita Rose discusses the text in her article "Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett's *New Amazonia*: Gender Equity, Science, Utopia" and her Ph.D dissertation (*Reconfiguring the "Other" in Late Nineteenth-Century British Utopian Literature*)[43]. Her article focuses on a significant element in the text—Corbett's co-opting of Victorian scientific theory and ideology for her own purposes. As Rose comments, Corbett "engages the authority of science to reconfigure scientific values and employ scientific discourse in support of a new, feminist utopia" (7). Many studies illustrate the growth of critical interest in feminist utopias.[44] For example, Matthew Beaumont's "The New Woman in Nowhere: Feminism and Utopianism at the *Fin de Siècle*" (2001) singles out *New Amazonia* as an especially significant "call to arms" (222), as Corbett strives "to reach out to an imaginary community of politically active readers with the capacity to affect the future in fundamental ways" (218). Beaumont argues that Corbett idealizes the late-nineteenth-century feminist belief in social reformation through writing, but also notes the "ideological double bind itself indebted to patriarchal orthodoxy" which paradoxically desexualizes women and idealizes their maternal nature (219). In this analysis, Beaumont identifies a key element in Corbett's conceptualization of how sexuality intersects with female government and also a powerful tool in feminist movements of the period: maternal feminism.

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[43] Anita Rose and fellow utopian studies scholar Duangrudi Suksang are currently planning a proposal for an edition of *New Amazonia.*

[44] The analysis of feminist utopian writing by scholars such as Rose has grown steadily recently, as seen by works such as *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations* (1983), *Daring to Dream: Utopian Stories by United States Women, 1836-1919* (1984 and the subsequent 1995 second edition covering fiction to 1950), *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers* (1984), *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (1988), *Feminist Utopias* (1989), *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women* (1994), and *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (1996), as well as numerous articles.

Sexuality and Rule in *New Amazonia*

As seen in Haggard especially, many Victorians felt that women's political power was a threat to women's reproduction. Maternity, it was argued, was woman's primary function, and Victorian scientists like Grant Allen[45], Herbert Spencer, Henry Maudsley, Edward Clarke, Harry Campbell, James McGrigor Allen, George Romanes proclaimed that a woman's reproductive system dictated her entire being, from her energy reserves to her intellectual abilities[46]. However, feminists and anti-feminists alike realized that this argument was a two-edged sword. Theories emphasizing women's special nurturing qualities—her ostensible biological drive to care for others and her superior moral sense—made it possible to argue that this special maternalism could benefit the public sphere. Furthermore, because of the "surplus" of women, not all women could be biological mothers, and they therefore (according to scientific theory) needed to direct this maternal nature into other channels. The three authors previously analyzed all addressed this issue of idealized maternalism in different ways, although Haggard's novel does this on a non-rational level compared to Bulwer-Lytton's and Besant's politically didactic texts. Lytton and Haggard's heroines significantly become maternal only at the moments their heroines abdicate rule to men. Besant, on the other hand, ridiculed and rejected the notion of a positive maternalism operating in all women, as his "maternal" government is a dysfunctional tyranny. Furthermore, all three authors de-emphasized or

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[45] Allen was interestingly both a biologist and a novelist, the author of 'scientific' anti-feminist articles like "Plain Words on the Woman Question" (*Popular Science* 1879) "Woman's Place in Nature" (*Forum* 1899) as well as several popular and controversial 'New Woman' novels such as *The Woman Who Did* (1895) and *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897).

rejected maternalism in favour of an emphasis on female sexual aggression, and this sexual aggression invariably undermines women's political power in these texts. Corbett chooses the opposite path: an emphasis on idealized maternalism and a rejection of a female sex drive. The New Amazonians privilege abstinence and require it of their leaders and highest intellectuals, but this abstinence is paradoxically linked to both maternalism and authority, while physical maternity, although respectable, is a temporary and less powerful occupation.

This emphasis on an essential and idealized maternal nature is typical of a particular branch of the Victorian feminist movement termed maternal feminism. As mentioned above, some feminists of the period saw that the idealization of women's maternal nature provided a strong argument for notions of women's moral superiority and hence the inclusion of women in the public sphere. Dr. Frances Hoggan, for instance, who was the third woman doctor in Britain after Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Elizabeth Blackwell, argued in 1884 that the female maternal instinct (in contrast to the male paternal sense) was "highly developed, and may become sublime" (193). Hoggan concludes from this that "the mother is the parent whose duties and rights predominate throughout the whole animal world" (194). Although Hoggan is in particular responding here to the issue of women's marital and custody rights, other prominent feminists of the period, like Josephine Butler and Frances Power Cobbe, also saw women as "innately nurturant and compassionate and they sought to have these qualities exercised within the public sphere" (Caine 11). In an article on female suffrage, Cobbe pointed out women's "most disinterested, and most tender" love for those around her and also women's greater

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[46] See Cynthia Russet's *Sexual Science* for details of these various theories.

emphasis on "duty and religion" as reasons for increasing women's political power ("Our Policy" 97). This feminist emphasis on women's moral superiority—often referenced as her maternal nature—was not confined to the movement in England. Canadian suffrage advocate Nellie McClung articulates the main argument of maternal feminism:

> All this protective love, this instinctive mother love, must be organized in some way, and made effective. There [is] enough of it in the world to do away with all the evils which war upon childhood, undernourishment, slum conditions, child labour, drunkenness. Women could abolish these if they wanted to. (McClung qtd. in Dean 87)

This belief in maternal feminism runs throughout Corbett's text and is the context for her pervasive emphasis on maternalism as the key element in successful government.

The dominant metaphor for the all-female government of New Amazonia is maternal. The state is referred to as "The Mother" by its citizens throughout the text. Maternal feeling is explicitly tied to ideal government and is possessed by women exclusively. After her dream vision of the New Amazonian future, Corbett writes that "a true and tender interest will never be felt in the units of the nation until our Constitution becomes less that of rulers and ruled, and more like that of mother and children" (130). She further comments: "The truly maternal instinct has no equivalent in the breast of man, and so long as none but men are the people's representatives, even so long will that people be deprived of a thousand rights which a just, earnest, womanly, co-government would give them" (131). Note that here, towards the end of her text, Corbett advocates "womanly co-government" rather than the exclusively female government modeled by the New Amazonian state. However, her syllogism remains intact: 1) maternal

government is ideal government; 2) only women have maternal instincts; 3) therefore, women must participate in government.

Corbett's explicit praise of maternal government towards the end of the text follows many discussions of how The Mother (state) in New Amazonia cares for her citizens. Childhood and early education are state-run (44). There are dietary controls to ensure health (58), open access to ongoing education (123), start-up funds for businesses (129), and judicious help for those in financial difficulty (124). All this is contrasted to a Victorian England that neglects its "children" early in life, and then only steps in to support them when they are irredeemably despairing and dissipated (129). Corbett here is responding to an increase in concerns over poverty in the 1880s, as exposed by works like *Progress and Poverty* (1881), *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883), *The Life and Labour of the People in London* (1886), and *How the Poor Live, and Horrible London* (1889). She furthermore implies a critique of Victorian business practices that produced frequent bankruptcy and imprisonment for debt[47]. The maternal New Amazonian way is presented as both more productive and more cost-effective: early love, care and guidance are advocated instead of belated care and guidance, or costly imprisonment in adulthood and old age. And New Amazonian maternalism does not end with adulthood, but continues throughout its citizens' lives.

Thus, given Corbett's emphasis on the necessity for the maternal instinct in good government, one would imagine that the government in New Amazonia would be run by

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[47] As Barbara Weiss notes, bankruptcy "was something of a cultural obsession for the Victorian middle class" (65), a pronouncement supported by articles like "The Urgent Need for Amending our Bankruptcy Legislation" (*Fortnightly Review*, March 1879) and "The Bankruptcy Laws and Mercantile Corruption (*Fraser's Magazine*, April 1879).

mothers. However, Corbett cannot accept or perhaps even conceptualize a government by married women with children. Although Corbett clearly disagreed with the law of coverture that gave husbands legal control over their wives, she also seems disinclined to envisage a married woman as ruler. Reactions to Queen Victoria's dual identity as wife/mother and ruler reveal a similar public cognitive dissonance—a sense that the submissive/subject position of a wife and mother could not possibly coexist with the dominant/ruler position of a Queen. Wives and mothers hold jobs in New Amazonia, but they cannot hold either political office or "important professorial posts" (81). Furthermore, no woman who has ever been married is eligible for these positions of power. This information confuses the narrator, who asks her New Amazonian guide, the Principal of a College, "Am I to understand from this, that you do not hold the condition of motherhood in honour?" (81). The Principal denies this and her reply illustrates Corbett's delicate sidestepping of the issue of sexuality and female rule: "we believe that perfect clearness of brain, and the ability to devote oneself exclusively to intellectual topics, are inseparable from the celibate state" (81-82). However, the New Amazonian Principal justifies this seemingly unjust prohibition against mothers in government with a theory of celibacy which she explicitly applies to both sexes. No sexual being, male or female, is permitted to hold a power position. It is unclear here whether the New Amazonians view sexual desire or emotional commitment as the danger that would interfere with "perfect clearness of brain." Strong influences here are the Social Purity movement led by Ellice Hopkins and the anti-CDA movements, which exposed and critiqued the double standard of requiring chastity in women but not in men. The chastity of both sexes—"constraint applied more equitably along ungendered lines"—was a goal

of the Social Purity movement popular in the last decades of the century (Levine 87)[48]. Every New Amazonian citizen chooses between sex and power—even the men barred from political office have this choice, since top intellectual positions requiring abstinence are still open to them. However, significantly, Corbett signals her belief in a stronger male sex drive here: "all our most intellectual compatriots, *especially the women*, prefer honour and advancement to the more animal pleasures of marriage and re-production of the species" (81, my emphasis). Corbett indicates her personal stance (a support for male and female celibacy) in the ongoing Victorian debate over male and female sex drives here, as doctors like Lawson Tait and William Acton and numerous *Lancet* articles debated the pros and cons and effects of abstinence on both men and women (Mason 221-26). Corbett's emphasis on celibacy is supported by an emphasis on population control as crucial to New Amazonian success (46-47). She clearly makes the point that this celibacy does not prevent an optimal birth rate, thus allaying concerns over a falling birth rate and its repercussions for the maintenance of imperial power.[49] As a final note, despite Corbett's emphasis on celibacy, she still rejects any notion that marriage and motherhood prevent women from successfully performing other work. New Amazonian wives and mothers hold jobs with "trade agencies" and—even though barred from political power— hold "countless minor offices" (81). Corbett's New Amazonia removes

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[48] See also Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (1995).

[49] Corbett strictly limits the number of children per family by New Amazonian law to four. This reveals an interesting tension between birth rate and population control at the time. As previously discussed, some Victorians were concerned with a decline in the birth rate. However, simultaneously, England's cities were becoming increasingly overcrowded, as three-quarters of the population lived in the cities by the end of the century (Harrison, J.F.C. 15). Corbett seems to attempt a middle ground here, with a fixed birth rate only slighly below that of the period (5.27 children per marriage in 1881), but an emphasis on population control that indicates the growing influence of Malthusian doctrines (Harrison, J.F.C. 14).

the logistics preventing married mothers from working—she eliminates household chores and childcare from everyday lives, by making these state-run occupations. Thus, a working wife and mother in New Amazonia would have the time and resources of a Victorian husband and father (perhaps even more time, since working hours are controlled).

The closest Corbett comes to discussing human sex drives is when she describes New Amazonian adultery laws. In keeping with Corbett's general downplaying of human sexuality in her fictional state, adultery in New Amazonia includes any sex outside marriage in addition to extramarital affairs. As mentioned above, Corbett critiques the Victorian double standard that presented adultery as a woman's crime and a man's misdemeanor, particularly in reference to inequitable grounds for divorce (a husband only needed a wife's adultery to sue for divorce, while a wife needed a husband's adultery plus additional grounds such as cruelty or incest). In New Amazonia, marriage is "dissolvable almost without cost, upon one or other of the parties to it proving incompatibility or unfaithfulness on the part of the other" (46)[50]. Corbett denounced the double standard of the CDAs that punished prostitutes rather than the men who hired them. Once again, Corbett swings the balance vigorously to the other side to make a point: in New Amazonia the "punishment of the man is infinitely the most severe" (82). A male adulterer is stripped of all possessions and banished from the country (82). A female adulterer "is at once degraded, and never attains to any other position than that of the lowest menial in one of our public institutions" (82). In her emphatic reversal of

[50] Corbett's critique of marriage appears in the context of Victorian debate on the issue. Mona Caird's two articles critiquing marriage as possession appeared in *Westminster Review* in August and November of

Victorian adultery punishment, Corbett had a specific context in mind: the 1889 trial and sentencing of Florence Maybrick for the murder of her husband. Although Corbett does not mention the case by name, her description and denouncement of it are clear:

> It is on record that a judge, when a woman was being tried for the presumed murder of her husband, dwelt with such horror upon the most dreadful fact that she had been unfaithful to her husband, and proved so conclusively that a woman who could be unfaithful was capable of every crime under the sun, that the jury, remembering their interests as husbands must be protected, sentenced the woman to be hanged, although medical witnesses showed that she could not be a murderess, seeing that the cause of her husband's death was a drug of which he was proved to have been a systematic partaker. (35)

The details of the case—the behaviour of the judge, the sentence, and the evidence—clearly exactly match Maybrick's. Furthermore, Corbett's critique is supported by Judith Knelman, who argues convincingly that it was primarily Maybrick's admission of adultery that resulted in her conviction (118). Only the public outcry against her death sentence saved Maybrick (her sentence was commuted to life)—an outcry at least partially motivated by the knowledge of James Maybrick's adultery and cruelty (Knelman 241). Thus Corbett's emphasis on harsh punishment for male adulterers reacts explicitly against the unfairness of Victorian law and custom, and her reaction was clearly shared by many others, as the widespread sympathy and support for Maybrick shows.

Corbett's fiction thus exaggerates feminist reversals for a political purpose. Her dream vision critiques and reverses many Victorian sexual laws and theories while paradoxically emphasizing an essentialist female maternalism that suits her purpose of defending women's entitlement to rule. She rejects notions of sexual dominance in marriage or society, recognizing the political repercussions of sexual power dynamics.

1888. The August article in particular inspired a *Daily Telegraph* call for responses to the question "Is Marriage a Failure?" The paper received 27,000 replies (Bland *Banishing* 126).

She simultaneously highlights and rejects the double standards of Victorian adultery laws by simply reversing the double standard in New Amazonia. In all these critiques and reversals, Corbett reverses sex roles in order to undermine the Victorian system of male sexual dominance. Like many of her feminist contemporaries, she also draws upon Victorian beliefs in women's essential maternalism to support her feminist claim: women's right to rule alongside men.

Corbett not only challenges notions of how extensively female sexuality governed physical and mental ability, but also critiques theories of male sexual dominance[51]. In the other texts studied, female sexual aggression is ridiculed as an "unnatural" extension of a woman's biological functions of mating and reproducing. Such sexual aggression marks female rulers and causes their ultimate failure. Although Corbett emphasizes the maternal drive over the sex drive, she significantly comments on sexual power relations in the context of New Amazonian marriage. In New Amazonia, men and women freely propose marriage according to their emotional inclination (89). In addition, Corbett eliminates the Victorian double standard: in New Amazonia both sexes have to be careful to preserve their reputations by avoiding inappropriate relations with the opposite sex (20). Like the previous authors studied, Corbett thus acknowledges the vital role of sexual power relations to political rule. However, unlike the previous authors who insisted that female government was impossible without female sexual dominance, Corbett divorces women's political power from the issue of female sex drive. All four authors recognize that a

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[51] Corbett's text was published a few months after the dissolution of the Men and Women's Club in 1889, after four years of the male and female members debating issues such as sex drive and marital power dynamics (see Judith Walkowitz's "Science, Feminism and Romance: The Men and Women's Club 1885-1889" and Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast*). The club dissolved because of the "unbridgeable chasm between the desires and aspirations of women and men" (Bland 41).

female government is an improbability (if not an impossibility) under a cultural system of male sexual dominance. However, only Corbett imagines marriage without sexual dominance, and divorces sexual aggression from political rule. Within the text, Corbett asks the Principal who is the "head of the household" (80). The Principal's reply significantly rejects any notion of a husband's dominance:

> 'Whichever of the two happens to be best qualified to direct domestic affairs with the greatest wisdom. Our tenets preach equality in the married state, and as people of uncongenial temperament have no trouble in obtaining a divorce, it is seldom that serious marital disturbances are heard of.' (80-81)

Domestic power relations thus cease to be determined by sex, and instead abilities determine who rules the household. Furthermore, individuals have equal rights under the law. Corbett thus creates a system of supposed general equality under female rule—women alone hold the political power positions, but the sexes are equal in all other areas. Power in New Amazonia rests on a bizarre logic—logic that dictates that women's special maternalism makes them most fit for political rule, but logic that also suggests ability rather than biology should determine other social power relations. Clearly a potential fallacy appears here—why does maternal instinct make women better rulers of the country but not necessarily of home or individual businesses? Essentially, female political power is not only justified by their maternalism. An equal factor is men's incompetence which has lost them the "right" to rule. Thus, male political incompetence combines with women's special maternal political competence to uphold a system in which women rule but gender equality and rule by ability are valued—a rather classic case of having one's cake and eating it too. Having thus gone to the other extreme in depicting female special biological competence and male historical incompetence,

Corbett is free to strategically advocate a middle position of co-government by ability—rule shared equally by those men and women most fit for the job.

Authority and Female Rule in *New Amazonia*

Since Corbett's purpose is to "prove" that women are capable of governance, her female leaders not only hold considerable authority but also wield it successfully. Although the New Amazonian government has some horrific policies, the government's stability and the country's prosperity are undeniable. Unlike Besant's and Haggard's nations governed by women, New Amazonia is no crumbling or isolated dictatorship. The same sources of authority—politics, force, and religion—appear, but Corbett again manipulates Victorian notions of female "nature" and the issue of entitlement to create an image of a highly competent female government. Corbett's vision of female authority is thus a significant challenge to Victorian fears of women's power. Like Besant, Corbett is particularly responding to the women's suffrage movement—the creation of New Amazonia is explicitly attributed to women's achieving the vote. Corbett's narrative describes how, after the "jubilation" of women's suffrage in England and the immediate improvements achieved by giving women the vote, the English government decided to "colonise [sic] Ireland" with surplus women (37-38). This new Ireland was given "home rule" (in the form of the female colonists) and renamed New Amazonia—significantly, only some of the male Irish inhabitants chose to leave while the rest happily enjoyed the new prosperity brought by the female colonists (45-46). Corbett may have chosen Ireland for her vision of female government in order to keep women's political power centrally

'British' (rather than displacing it to the outskirts of empire as did the previous authors studied), although it is interesting that she chose to displace female government away from England. Her textual reference to the situation of 'redundant' women in England indicates her awareness of the female emigration 'solution' to the surplus. Her choice of Ireland also solved the extremely difficult and urgent political problem of Irish nationalism and the recent home rule controversy. The suffering of the Irish due to famine and unsympathetic, absentee landlords had created a strong nationalist movement that Prime Minister Gladstone sought to appease with his 1886 home rule bill (Black 278). This bill was defeated by anti-Catholicism and fears of a disintegrating British empire (Harrison, Brian *Transformation* 97-98), and it "almost destroyed the Liberal party" (Black 279). Corbett thus has a women's government conveniently solve the Irish home rule problem that threatened Parliamentary stability in the late 1880s.

Corbett's carefully constructed representative democracy exposes problems in Victorian politics and rebuts speculations (such as Besant's) that women's political practice would be necessarily either tyrannical or incompetent. The government of New Amazonia is a fairly straightforward electoral and representational system (40). The country is divided into 250 districts, and each district elects a Tribune. The next level of government is 12 "Privy Counsellors" [sic]. Finally, at the top are two Prime Advisors and one Leader. All elected officials are salaried, and all are elected by the population every three years. Interestingly enough, all positions above that of Tribune require previous experience. Specifically, all Counsellors are chosen only from ranks of Tribunes, all Advisors are chosen only from amongst the Counsellors, and only one of the Prime Advisors may be chosen as the Leader. Thus, only those with proven abilities and

experience hold political power. Once their terms of office expire, Leaders are prohibited from seeking public office again for 10 years, in order to keep fresh blood flowing through the government. Thus, Corbett's description of New Amazonian government emphasizes both democratic representation and entitlement. There is thus no room for doubt that these women were not only fairly elected (by both male and female citizens) but they also earn and justify the power given them. Such careful emphasis and design clearly responds to the contemporary British awareness of electoral fraud and the need for reform, as detailed in Charles Seymour's 1915 *Electoral Reform in England and Wales*. A series of electoral reforms between 1870-1890 illustrates the prominence of the issue: the instigation of secret ballot voting in 1872 to prevent undue influence, the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of 1883 to control election spending and punish corruption, and the Redistribution Act of 1885 to make electoral boroughs more representative (Cross 114, 137). Corbett's electoral and political details demonstrate women's political knowledge and ability—they show that women could both understand and do the business of politics very effectively.

Corbett's response to the question of entitlement—what had women done to rightfully deserve, inherit, or earn rule?—is a simple but daring reversal. The narrator's New Amazonian guide, Principal Grey, turns the tables by claiming that men had neither earned nor deserved their power:

> The chief Governmental offices are all appropriated by women, in sheer self-defense, in the first instance, and, later on, because the world's experience goes to prove that masculine government has always held openings for the free admission of corruption, injustice, immorality, and narrow-minded, self-glorifying bigotry. The purity and wisdom of New Amazonian Government is proverbial, and we know better than to admit the possibility of retrogression by permitting male governance again. (80)

Thus the exclusion of men from power is justified both politically as self-defense and rationally as a better system. Conveniently, the initial "self-defense" ban of male politicians becomes a justified norm, as the "purity and wisdom" of female rule is contrasted to the past and present examples of unjust male rule. Male government is characterized as regressive, a retreat from evolutionary advancement. The very same scientific arguments used against female government are thus here turned against their creators. Darwin's catalogue of great men through the ages, justifying male supremacy, is turned into a catalogue of male misgovernment through the ages, justifying female supremacy. Johann Jakob Bachofen's focus on evolution from a matriarchal prehistory to patriarchal civilization is reversed as Corbett depicts patriarchy as regression and matriarchy as advancement. Corbett's narrator furthermore offers contemporary evidence of women's successful rule, referring to the 1888 election and 1889 re-election of a female mayor and an all-female council in Oskaloosa, Kansas which historical records confirm (Corbett 131, Lindquist). Corbett especially emphasizes the re-election, since this confirms the effectiveness of women's governance, and she describes the improvement of Oskaloosa under the all-woman council: "the place has made such wonderful strides in the trifling matters of social morality, sanitation, and prosperity, that it is the wonder of surrounding towns" (131). Thus, Corbett is clearly very aware of the potential problem of entitlement—the justification of women's political participation—and draws on both past history and current events to support her claim that female government can be successful.

Throughout her text, Corbett reinforces the notion that women are entitled to and have shown "proof" of their ability to govern, while men have only proved their political inability. However, as previously mentioned, Corbett's advocacy of female entitlement is ultimately tempered by an advocacy of co-government. Given the strong rejection of female authority and entitlement seen in the previous texts, Corbett's initial strategic movement to the opposite extreme (rejection of male authority and entitlement) helps counter patriarchal ideology and characterize her ultimate message of co-government as a moderate position. John Saville's role is especially crucial here, as he moves from praising women's government and criticizing male government (111) to a more moderate stance 22 pages later: "I would insist not merely upon woman's electoral rights, but upon woman's equal right with man to govern her country. You see, I am not quite going the length of leaving us poor men out in the cold altogether" (133). This shift significantly occurs shortly after the narrator finishes a two-page tirade against Victorian patriarchy in which she advocates a "womanly co-government" (131-32). Thus, Corbett's ultimate goal in addressing the issue of female entitlement to authority is to undermine a male monopoly of authority and characterize women's equality as moderate.

Female physical authority—force and violence—was a recurring theme in the previous depictions of women's political power. The previous authors characterized female violence as irrational and sexually motivated, and often further represented female physical power as unnatural or usurped from men. The New Amazonian female rulers, in contrast, are disturbingly rational in their use of force to eradicate any undesirable elements or people from their society. Although New Amazonian citizens repeatedly assure the narrator that crime is rare, they nonetheless still have some very harsh

punishments on their books, such as whipping and expelling foreign smugglers (88), depriving citizens of rights and property for having more than four children or smuggling (47, 88), and killing incurable and repeat criminals (75). More disturbing than these harsh punishments is the New Amazonian practice of eugenics. Insane, malformed, and illegitimate children are all killed (74, 89, 82). In the initial settlement of New Amazonia, committees evaluated applicants and rejected those who were poor, even slightly sick or malformed, and of "discreditable" ancestry (40-41). Furthermore, medical approval is required for marriage, to ensure only "healthy subjects" produce offspring (46). It is difficult to assess here exactly where Corbett stood on these issues. Certainly, *New Amazonia* was published in the context of a growing social Darwinist eugenics movement begun by Francis Galton and at least partially supported by Herbert Spencer and the Fabian socialist movement, among others (Jones 112). However, in 1889 this movement was extremely new. For possible clues as to Corbett's personal stance, it is interesting to analyze her narrator's depictions of the New Amazonian eugenics. In describing the initial rigorous screening of New Amazonian candidates, Corbett's narrator seems entirely uncritical, implicitly validating the practice of weeding out undesirables (40-41). However, when the actual killing of undesirable persons is described, Corbett's narrator often (although not always) implies or directly voices disapproval. For instance, the narrator is horrified at the killing of illegitimate children: "This information was delivered in such a calm and matter-of-fact tone that I involuntarily shuddered, and hastened to change the subject" (83). However, it is interesting to note that the narrator's horror here is aimed more at the Principal's dispassionate attitude toward this killing than the actual killing itself. In her quest to validate women's ability to wield authority firmly

and rationally, Corbett does not ignore the potential ramification of scientific rationality taken to extremes. Like Haggard, she seems concerned with the moral issues raised in response to Victorian science—the threat to human compassion. Corbett's ambiguous attitude towards infanticide is also seen in other descriptions of New Amazonian eugenics. The killing of disabled children is referred to twice in the text. In one instance, the narrator merely comments that the inspection of all newborns and destruction of "malformed infants" led to occasional "very painful scenes" (46). Again, significantly, the implied critique addresses the suffering of the parents—not the murder of infants. The second and later reference to eugenic infanticide implies no critique at all:

> "I suppose malformed or crippled children are occasionally brought into the world, even here. What becomes of them?"
> "They are at once sent to spend their term of probation in less material spheres."
> "Now, in relation to love matters. With which sex rests the onus of proposing marriage?" (89)

There is no hint that the narrator's abrupt change of subject implies criticism or horror—such jumps from topic to topic are typical in utopian dialogue. A final instance of New Amazonian eugenics involves adults and is revealed in a conversation between Principal Grey and the narrator:

> "When, unfortunately, physical influences work upon the mind in such a manner as to produce the phenomenon called insanity, the Mother at once relieves the spirit of the ties which would effectually prevent the slightest advancement towards the great goal."
> "Kills all insane persons, in fact?"
> "Yes, in mercy and justice to themselves." (74)

Here, the contrast between the Principal's euphemistic statement and the narrator's stark summary seems striking: the harsh word "kills" is not used in any other similar discussion. However, again the possible critique is subtle, and here it is surrounded by the

Principal's rhetoric of "mercy." With all these examples of New Amazonian eugenics, it might be difficult to argue with any certainty that Corbett was either for or against them. Her moments of subtle critique could be aimed more at Victorian scientific dispassion or euphemism than at the actual murders, or perhaps they indicate a complex mixture of support for some eugenic practices and not others.

Although certainly the violence of New Amazonian eugenics would not have been acceptable to many eugenics supporters at the time, Galton himself and others advocated "positive" as well as "negative" eugenics. (Positive eugenics involves active state encouragement of and involvement in improving the species through controlled breeding, while negative eugenics is the more passive individual choice of whether to reproduce or not [Jones 115]). In addition to the growth of the eugenics movement, birth control and Neo-Malthusian theories and practices were increasingly accepted and discussed towards the end of the century, despite the backlash against them shown by the Bradlaugh-Besant trial of 1877 and the flurry of anti-birth control tracts published by religious organizations in the last quarter of the century (Banks 96-100). Corbett's seeming ambiguity on the issue of eugenics is paralleled in her depiction of animal experimentation, when the narrator learns that New Amazonian longevity is produced with the nerves of animals. The narrator's exaggerated horror at the imagined "vivisectional cruelties" performed on the "poor brutes" is sharply contrasted with the soothing reassurance that the animals are fully anesthetized and do not suffer (83-84). These juxtapositions—between a detached and objective "scientific" view of state violence on one hand and a sympathetic tone appropriate to a "maternal" government on the other—are striking.

A final note on violence in New Amazonia involves the issue of war and defense. The narrator is assured that wars, like crime, are a thing of the past, since "a system of international arbitration" is now the norm (87). However, since New Amazonia's prosperity could make it a tempting target, the country is well fortified. Both women and men are trained to fight from an early age, and both sexes would be willingly, even eagerly, mobilized in the event of an invasion (87). This point, combined with the eugenic violence above, is another instance of Corbett reversing cultural constructions of women and violence. Unlike Besant, who clearly upholds male physical supremacy and exclusive access to violence as a political tool, Corbett's text portrays not only matter-of-fact female violence, but equal female physical prowess. Like Lytton's amazons, Corbett's New Amazonian women are seven feet tall, but the New Amazonian men are also described as "magnificent beings" rather than smaller or physically dominated by the women in any way (64). However, Corbett depicts her male counterpart, Augustus Fitz-Musicas, as shorter than herself (he is 5' 3") and also generally inferior. Thus, although the future men and women are physically equal, the contemporary man is depicted as inferior in every way. Corbett also removes restrictions of style that might physically disempower women—New Amazonian women wear a "divided skirt" and keep their hair short (11, 58). Corbett was probably responding to the Rational Dress Society created in 1881 by Lady Harberton (Newton 104). This society strove (without much success) to convince Victorian women to reject the corset and adopt a lightweight divided skirt, displaying a sample outfit at the International Health Exhibition in 1884 and launching a *Gazette* in 1888 (Newton 115). Short hair was extremely rare for women at the time, but the unconventional poet and children's author Mrs. Hubert Bland (Edith Nesbit) was a

notable example (Newton 153). In this way, Corbett eliminates the physical differences between men and women long held as a basis for male rule and dominance. What is more, she specifically critiques factors like corsets and lack of proper diet and exercise that she believes contribute to the oppression of women.

Like Haggard and Besant, Corbett recognizes the importance of religion as a source of authority. In fact, Haggard and Besant both identify religion as the primary means by which the women maintain power over men. Similarly, in New Amazonia, matriarchal religion is an integral part of the government's control. The narrator is informed that the New Amazonian religion was created to resolve the bigotry and chaos born out of multiple religions and beliefs. Furthermore, the government saw an inherent contradiction between past religions based on fear and their own image of an all-caring maternal government. Corbett contests the motives of traditional religions, arguing that "statistics from all the world will prove that more lives have been lost, and more crimes committed, in the name of Religion, than from any other cause" (48). Thus she makes the same argument she used to question male entitlement to rule. What had male rule produced in the past? Corruption and injustice. What had patriarchal religions produced in the past? Death and crime. The New Amazonians worship "The Giver of Life" and preach doctrines of "'Gratitude' to the 'Giver of Life' and the 'Duty' to others of leading a pure and moral existence" (49). Neither the deity nor its priesthood are gender specific, but the marked emphasis on the maternal in this society implies a feminine association to this Giver of Life religion. Thus Corbett creates an implicitly matriarchal religion, which celebrates life and pure morality, which she then contrasts with patriarchal religions that emphasize suffering, punishment, and death.

Probably because the abandonment of Christianity would have shocked some of her readers, Corbett ameliorates this aspect of New Amazonia, including two discussions of Christianity. In the first, the Principal acknowledges that New Amazonians "reverence" the Bible, but only the parts where they have verified its "historical accuracy"—where they note discrepancies, they go to other authorities (93). She points out that Moses and David were human, and therefore fallible. She comments that "Jesus always showed Himself to be woman's true friend and associate" (94). These points are crucial, because through them Corbett not only avoids the censure that a total rejection of Christianity might have created, but also constructs the Bible as a historical document and Jesus as a feminist ally. Having strategically co-opted Jesus for feminism, Corbett moves on to a more decisive critique of Christian practice. In a discussion with a John Saville, the narrator is told that Christianity, in particular the writings of Paul, force women into "[s]lavery" (107). Saville says that New Amazonians could not "as intelligent beings" follow a religion that would involve regression and "instructing their boys in tenets which constantly preached the inferiority and subservience of women" (107-08). In particular, Saville points out the misogynistic tone and content of St. Paul's writings and claims, through historical research, to have proof that St.Paul's writings on women were motivated by "spite" brought on by a woman's rejection of him (108). This revelation is followed by over three pages of critique of Christian practice as antithetical to the actual teachings of Christ—a critique significantly provided by the voice of moderation, John Saville (108-111). In her critique of Christianity, Corbett not only follows the movement towards serious Biblical criticism begun in England with the 1860 Oxford publication of *Essays and Reviews*, she also joins a nineteenth-century (primarily American) sisterhood

offering feminist critiques of the Bible—women like Lucretia Mott, Phoebe Palmer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Antoinette Blackwell, Matilda Gage, Frances Willard, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Anna Kingsford, and Maria Stewart[52]. These feminist Bible critics offered Biblical interpretations ranging from egalitarian, to gynocentric, to matriarchal (Selvidge), and thus Corbett's interpretation participates in a nineteenth-century feminist Biblical reinterpretation. In her vision of female government and its uses of power, Corbett's speculations on religion are especially strategic and innovative. To critique this bastion of male authority so decisively as an authority on women's role and identity, to contest the motivations and accuracy of male Biblical authorities, and to claim the very source of Christianity as woman's ally—these are bold redefinitions and revisions of cultural constructions indeed.

Gendered Spheres and Rule in *New Amazonia*

New Amazonia virtually erases the private sphere that was so restrictive for Victorian women. The private home, although still in existence, is no longer privileged or idealized as a haven—on the contrary, Corbett links the success of New Amazonia to citizens spending as little time as possible in private homes. For example, radio/telephone use is restricted so that people will go out to socialize and attend concerts and lectures, rather than staying antisocially in their homes (117-118). Many Victorians (like Ruskin) viewed the home as the men's refuge from a harrowing public sphere, as well as a protected space for women. Under "maternal" government, the public sphere no longer threatens and destroys, since all are equally cared for. Corbett thus removes the Victorian

need for the private sphere and thus also neatly removes the boundaries that confined women to it. In her depiction of "maternal" government, she implies that the public sphere is a nurturing home, while the private sphere nearly vanishes.

Corbett achieves this erasure of the private sphere by virtually dissolving the nuclear family and by making domestic tasks a matter of state concern. Child care is done by the state, not the mother, and children live separately from their parents (44). Households primarily consist of one or two persons. However, Corbett is careful to avoid implying the dissolution of the parent-child bond. She depicts a close relationship between the grown-up John Saville and the parents who "both doted upon him" (116). She is also anxious to show that homes display the requisite Victorian "air of domesticity" and "simple, solid comfort" (115). Thus, a small glimpse of the familiar Victorian private sphere is given, when she tours a private home and has a "quiet chat" with the married couple (115). However, once this brief glimpse is provided, other than a brief comment that the home "was fitted with every convenience," Corbett emphasizes the highly public elements of a New Amazonian home. Homes are clearly apartments rather than detached houses and are located above a floor of shops—thus closely linking public and private spheres (117). The Domestic Aid Society (state-regulated but privately owned and run) handles all household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, mending, tailoring, laundry, messengers, and table service (119-26). Residents order whichever services they require. Since none of the domestic workers live in these homes and also since the state regulates their training, treatment, and pay, this differs considerably from the norm of the Victorian domestic servant. Domestic service is professionalized and its

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[52] See Marla J. Selvidge's *Notorious Voices: Feminist Biblical Interpretation, 1500-1920.*

workers "occupy a very honourable position in [New Amazonian] social economy" (122). Clearly Corbett's purpose here is not only to emancipate women from domestic confinement, but also to validate domestic employment as important work and to improve the lot of servants (she adds the appealing information that household employers who complain repeatedly without cause about Domestic Aid staff pay extra) (121). Corbett especially emphasizes the reform of domestic service because one-third of all Victorian young women were employed in this field, and (lower-paid) women gradually replaced men in most domestic service jobs by the end of the century (Murray 328). In addition, as Clementina Black points out in 1893, the constant surveillance, long hours, and frequent tyranny of domestic service made the field increasingly unpopular as young women turned to options like factory work instead. The unpleasant life of domestic servants was widely known and discussed; two of numerous examples are Frances Power Cobbe's 1868 article on "Household Service" and Emma Paterson's 1879 article "The Organization of Women's Industry," both of which condemned the treatment of domestic servants. Furthermore, Corbett's emphasis here on fair pay and controlled working hours and conditions clearly responds to the Victorian labour movement and the terrible working conditions of many workers, both male and female.[53]

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[53] A significant recent context here is the match-girls' strike of 1888, inspired by Annie Besant's public exposure of the stark contrast between the company's profits and its poor pay and treatment of female workers (Hollis *Women in Public* 51). When the company tried to get its workers to publicly deny this discrimination, the workers refused and walked out—Besant and others helped them to unionize and achieve better pay and working conditions. This event is also an interesting point of agreement between feminist Annie Besant and her brother-in-law Walter, author of *Revolt of Man*, since they both worked to improve the conditions of these match workers who were dying of phossy jaw, a disease caused by exposure to phosphorous.

Corbett's emphasis here on state control (of childcare[54], household work, education, business, medical services, population, and virtually all other aspects of New Amazonian society) clearly also responds to the Victorian mounting awareness of a social crisis which produced a socialist revival in late-Victorian England. Carol Dyhouse describes the 1880s in England as "a decade of depression fraught with unemployment and social tensions and marked by the revival of socialism" ("Condition" 83). Tracts like Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) emphasized the wretched state of London slums and the need for solutions to a host of problems such as poverty, housing shortages, pollution, and poor sanitation. These problems necessitated (according to Corbett's text and those by other Victorians) public intervention into and control of the private to ensure equitable living standards for all. Impoverished private households became a focus of Victorian concern and intervention, and Corbett's text takes this intervention further and erases the boundary between public and private with her depiction of state control of children, food, and housing. Studies like Anthony Wohl's *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* reveal the horrific extent of Victorian disease, overcrowding, lack of safe housing and sanitation, and widespread pollution—some of these problems would furthermore have been particularly bad in the industrial city of Newcastle where Corbett then resided. Corbett's emphasis on state control of food and diet (including the prohibition of alcohol and tobacco) furthermore responds to two separate Victorian concerns. Firstly, the adulteration of food had long been a concern and danger, and passage of the 1875 Sale of Food and Drugs Act was followed by widespread enforcement and improvement in the 1880s (Burnett 260).

Secondly, the temperance campaigns became highly visible and active (particularly in the north of England where Corbett lived), in response to an 1888 proposed bill to compensate liquor houses whose licences were revoked (Shiman *Crusade* 213-15).

Another possible context for Corbett's emphasis on state control is Edward Bellamy's popular American utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1888). Bellamy's novel, which depicted extensive state control, was "widely read and influential in British socialist circles, contributing to and strengthening that indigenous strain of socialist thought which saw the state as the primary means of effecting a revolutionary transformation of society" (Thompson, Noel 216). Both William Morris and H.G. Wells wrote utopias in response to Bellamy's, so it is entirely plausible that Corbett's utopia was influenced by his as well. Bellamy's novel is not particularly feminist; however, his vision of state socialism may have influenced Corbett's ideal future in which state control solves so many Victorian inequities of sex, class, and income. In Britain, H. M. Hyndman's *England for All* (1881) and *The Historical Basis of Socialism in England* (1883) and J. L. Mahon's *A Plea for Socialism* (1887) and *A Labour Programme* (1888) all explored the benefits of state socialism. As Noel Thompson observes, these three writers "give a central role to the state both in establishing a socialist commonwealth and in fulfilling economic functions previously performed by the market" (217).

Corbett contends that women's public power necessitates dramatic changes in the private sphere; however, there remain a few hints of gender roles in Corbett's text. For instance, in her fictional vision of England after Universal Suffrage, when women increasingly took on "male" occupations, she emphasizes that the women mostly took on

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[54] The Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was passed in 1889, signalling an increased sense of the

"feminine" tasks. Women who became Boards of Guardians, for example, took over "seeing after the babies' feeding bottles, and the mothers' needs, and the old women's baths" (37). Moreover, female school inspectors took on the task of setting and adjudicating girls' sewing examinations, which involved assessing their production of women's underclothing (38). On one hand, Corbett depicts women taking on these "feminine" duties to ridicule men—specifically Victorian men's jealous protectiveness of their "masculine prerogative" of jobs like judging the sewing of underpants and feeding babies (38). Corbett here ridicules the obsessive gendered segregation of public and private spheres, which labeled any duties outside the home (even supervising babies' feedings in an orphanage) as "men's" work. Furthermore, Corbett clearly does not believe in gendering occupations, as she depicts women doctors, engineers, and architects. Corbett's somewhat socialist erasure of boundaries between public and private also de-genders roles and spheres, since she explicitly states that "members of both sexes" work for the Domestic Aid Society (119). Thus, not only does the segregation between domestic and public disappear with the state-controlled professionalization of domestic work, but the characterization of such jobs as women's work also disappears. However, it is also true that, despite all positions of power in New Amazonia being held by women, the sole domestic servant portrayed is a woman and the sole New Amazonian man depicted in any detail is a "mechanician" (105).

In this respect, it is interesting to compare Corbett's feminist utopia to two others published the same year—Mary Bradley Lane's American *Mizora* and the British *Minicoy: The Island of Women* (signed W. L. and serialized in the February and March

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state's responsibility for children's welfare (Davin 50).

issues of *Blackwood's*). Lane's novel depicts an all-female nation in the centre of the earth. She similarly emphasizes great scientific and technical advancement, and one would thus expect to see many women performing a variety of mechanical and scientific work. However, Mizoran women are without exception depicted as Victorian ladies, lovingly supervising their large broods of children, delicately eating fruit and carrying on witty conversation. The sole "scientific" occupations depicted are those of a cook and a chamber maid. *Minicoy* depicts a rural Southeast Asian island under matriarchal rule. There is no depiction of science and technology beyond basic simple tools. Compared to Corbett's erasure of the private sphere, here there is little in the way of a public sphere. The women rule their small domestic communities and households, with an emphasis on food production, clean housing, and happy, peaceful households. The men alone leave the island for long periods to fish. This system of female rule is praised as natural because women are the better household managers and are always completely focused on keeping the family together and cared for. Thus, Corbett's text actually stands out as fairly progressive in its numerous references to women in government, education, and business, even if we never meet any women mechanics or plumbers.

Conclusion

Corbett's *New Amazonia* offers a paradoxically passionate and rational opposition to the speculations on female rule seen in the previous texts. Her co-optation and manipulation of theories of women's "nature" and male supremacy challenge Victorian constructions of female power, as she creates a maternal socialist-democratic utopia in which power is (somewhat) divorced from sexual dominance, authority is ultra-rational,

and gendered segregation of work is unknown. By contesting male supremacy on so many fronts—sexual, political, physical, and spiritual—she attempts to undermine Victorian scientific authority that tried (with increasing fervour) to press women back into their submissive, domestic, and reproductive roles. Through her elaborate and detailed knowledge of Victorian social problems, political systems, scientific theories, and theological debates, she strives to create an image of women in government that negates stereotypes of women as emotional, foolish, ignorant, and vain. Although Corbett's depiction of political women is not unequivocally eutopian, her almost hyperbolic depiction of a female-dominated society strategically paves the way for her ultimate advocacy of co-government. Furthermore, the contrast between different masculinities—the regressive Victorian male, Fitz-Musicus, and the enlightened future male, John Saville—illustrates her hope for an egalitarian future aided by the growing numbers of "our masculine supporters" (134). In keeping with her general challenge of reversal—her exposure of all that is negative about male suffrage and governance, her own words towards the end of her text perhaps sum up her point best:

> It is monstrous to speak of women as being even incapable of voting wisely, when they have already proved themselves capable of governing much more judiciously than men, many of whom seem to recognise no other legitimate result of taking office than squabbling and banqueting.
>
> Certainly in many cases these are about the only matters to which some of our corporate bodies devote their attention, and surely feminine nincompoopity could go no further than this. (131)

Thus, to the Victorian scientific pronouncement by Darwin and others to women seeking emancipation and power—"You cannot do as well or better"—Corbett responds, "We cannot do worse."

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on works which are not typically the subject of literary analysis. Three of the four texts fall into the often didactic utopian genre, which only infrequently produces texts widely considered to have aesthetic literary merit—for example, twentieth-century dystopias such as those by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Despite the lack of literary merit typically found in utopian texts, they are nonetheless frequently studied by scholars for their sociological and political contributions. Textual study is not only about the examination of the few works considered to be 'high' literature, and there is increasingly little consensus over what constitutes membership in that elite category. By including utopian texts or popular culture within literary studies, we expand the study of literature to more fully participate in the enterprise known as 'the humanities,' in which we analyze the interactions between texts and culture at large. This study has primarily explored that interaction and has more specifically analyzed how four speculative fictions from a specific historical period revealed a people's thoughts and fears[55] about changing gender power dynamics. These texts clearly struck a chord in the psyches of the Victorian reading public and thus are worthy of study today, as cultural artifacts that reveal the interrelationship between cultural moments and literary tastes.

By focusing on less typical Victorian fictional genres, this study has also illustrated the significance of works often considered "inferior" in the Victorian canon. Victorian speculative fiction—whether utopian, adventure, fantasy, or science

fiction—was a growing literary sidestream to the steady flow of naturalist and realist novels. Alongside such mainstream authors as Eliot, Trollope, Hardy and James, the growing popularity of Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Conan Doyle (as well as the French author Jules Verne) indicated an increased interest in fictional speculation. These latter authors have received critical attention, but other highly popular speculative authors, such as those examined in this study, have often been overlooked or ignored. This study, along with others, illustrates that speculative fiction was an integral part of Victorian culture—as representative of the latter part of the century as the novels of Dickens or the Brontës are representative of mid-century. Given the typical increase in speculative fiction during times of dramatic social, political, and economic upheaval, Victorian speculative fiction (particularly that produced towards the end of the era) is an especially valuable genre for critical attention.

Haggard's text remains the most read and studied in literary circles, as it is the only fully fledged novel and as it is unquestionably the most complex and compelling text in this study. However, although modern readers may not see aesthetic value in the texts by Bulwer-Lytton and Besant, the popularity and favourable critical reception of *The Coming Race* and *The Revolt of Man* at the time cannot be overlooked. In the case of the first three texts (by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Haggard), all were widely read and re-issued at the time and thus would have had a substantial impact on cultural constructions of women in government at the end of the Victorian era. Even Corbett's more obscure text would undoubtably have had some impact at the time, since she was a

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[55] This is not to argue that Victorian subjects had a single monolithic reaction to an increase in women's power, but rather that these four texts do provide an insight into the highly complex and multiple reactions to the concept of women in governance at the time.

modestly successful writer. In terms of the impact of these texts today, Bulwer-Lytton's text is still occasionally published and read, particularly by those interested in either utopian or metaphysical branches of literary study. Although earlier twentieth-century scholars criticized Bulwer-Lytton's lack of realism (in addition to his admitted tendency to "bombast"), later critics are recognizing the significance of his break from realism in fiction—his experiments with concepts of myth, vision, and archetype that are more akin to the Romantic poets than the Victorian novelists (Christensen "Edward" 75, 86). Besant, similarly, dropped significantly in popularity and influence during much of the twentieth century, but his novels are nonetheless still considered important because they "reveal a great deal about the prevailing ideas of the time, and for this reason they deserve to be studied" (Machann 46). Haggard's novel is frequently published and is read by both scholars and the general public. Finally, Corbett (and *New Amazonia* in particular) has recently attracted scholarly interest, since her utopian text offers a uniquely comprehensive insight into not only early feminism, but also early feminist recognition of the possibilities offered by the utopian genre.

Even without this evidence of the past and present influence of some of these texts, they would still be important scholarly and literary documents for their insight into both ninteenth-century speculative fiction and Victorian constructions of women in government. All four texts bear tribute to the psychological and literary reactions to an increase in women's public power in late Victorian Britain. Despite their opposing views on the effectiveness or desirability of women in government, these texts shared common foci: concerns with how sexuality, authority, and gendered spheres are affected by women holding positions of political power. The first three authors—Bulwer-Lytton,

Besant, and Haggard—offered variations on the construction of women's political power as highly sexualized, unnatural, incapable, unearned, and threatening to gender boundaries. Their fearful speculations on female government were an understandable reaction to the massive changes they witnessed—women's persistent challenges to male power monopoly between 1870 and 1890—and they (like others) drew heavily upon the many 'proofs' of women's subordinate status presented by science. However, each of them (whether consciously or subconsciously) manifests his own particular stance on the issue of female governance in his text—a stance that paradoxically interpolated some sympathy and respect for women's abilities into its overall misogynistic message, just as many Victorian men struggled to reconcile an acknowledgement of women's ability with a reluctance to give up domination. The sole feminist author, Corbett, conversely presents a hopeful speculation on female governance aimed at validating women's inclusion in politics. Her text struggles to counteract the negative constructions of female sexuality and authority seen in the other texts (and in Victorian ideological discourse), and she constructs the erasure of gender boundaries as emancipatory and socially beneficial, rather than threatening.

Although the texts by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, and Haggard seem unlikely candidates for a study of late nineteenth-century British feminism, this analysis nonetheless contributes something new to that field. By analyzing fictional speculations on women in government during a period of increased feminist action, this dissertation provides an additional historical-cultural perspective. This study complements other research into Victorian feminist action, such as the studies of women's political and legal activism cited in Chapter 1 and throughout, by examining some of the dream/nightmare

reactions to female rule revealed in speculative fiction. Such fictional speculations not only reveal cultural reactions to changing gender relations in a particular time and place, but also play a role in identifying cultural definitions of female leadership. Corbett's work, moreover, reveals the attempts by at least one Victorian feminist to contest and redefine the cultural constructions of female rule manifested in the other texts. By combining literary and historical analyses, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach that benefits both fields, by tracing a particular thematic interaction between fictional speculations and historical actions. This study thus contributes to those historical studies concerned with Victorian women in politics, such as those that analyze the suffrage movement and the impact of Queen Victoria. Excellent examples of studies which focus on Victorian women in politics include Barbara Caine's *Victorian Feminists*, Brian Harrison's *Separate Spheres*, Patricia Hollis's *Ladies Elect*, Susan Kingsley Kent's *Sex and Suffrage*, and Lilian Lewis Shiman's *Women in Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England.* Similar in-depth studies of Victoria's rule include Margaret Homans's *Royal Representations*, Adrienne Munich's *Queen Victoria's Secrets*, and Dorothy Thompson's *Queen Victoria.* This dissertation contributes to this area of historical study by relating fantasies and nightmares concerning women in government at the time to the web of women's movements, such as their attempts to gain legal and educational power. Speculations on ruling women during this period react to more than a few specific women's political movements or to Queen Victoria. Such cultural reactions are the product of a much broader historical context of Victorian feminisms. This study identifies and analyzes specific cultural constructions of female rule and places them within this

broader feminist context, illustrating the complex interrelationship between all these feminist movements and the conceptions of ruling women.

My analysis, furthermore, supplements other feminist criticism of Victorian literature by focusing on the theme of women in government. By combining an analyis of this theme with an analysis of the speculative fiction genre, this study makes contributions to Victorian thematic and genre criticism, as it highlights the importance of female leadership as a theme and reiterates the significance of speculative fiction to feminist literary studies. In addition, this analysis functions as something of a 'prequel' to the many excellent studies of the New Woman in literary criticism. Although the New Woman era of the 1890s offers fascinating material for a Victorian feminist critic, I chose instead to focus on the two earlier decades, which witnessed particularly dramatic changes in gender politics. This earlier focus not only examines the complexity of gender power struggles at the time—the wide variety of women's movements—but also more importantly reveals the interrelationship between those political power struggles and the cultural constructions of women rulers in these texts. Without the context of British feminisms between 1870 and 1890, neither the New Woman nor these fictional speculations on women in government would have appeared.

Finally, this study most significantly illustrates an interesting cultural shift. The works I analyzed illustrate a cultural transition (between 1870-1890) in attitudes toward the increasingly emancipated woman: from seeing them as frivolous "Girls of the Period" to more seriously acknowledging their power as "New Women." British women's increasing power—particularly the increase in their political power and leadership roles—was an important factor in that transition. As Victorians (often reluctantly) slowly

came to terms with the notion of public female leadership, the speculative fiction of the period correspondingly began to take that leadership more seriously, as the texts by Bulwer-Lytton, Besant, Haggard, and Corbett illustrate. This shift, revealed in these speculative fictions, marks a cultural 'coming of age' period between 1870 and 1890, a period when gender power was in flux. Female leadership comes of age (at least in speculative fiction), as these texts reveal Victorians subconsciously altering their perceptions. Although Victorians certainly did not view either Girls of the Period or New Women as political rulers in their everyday world, they nonetheless seem to acknowledge this possibility (albeit grudgingly, fearfully, and slowly) in the imaginary realm during this period. In these speculative texts, one sees the headstrong 'Girl of the Period' become a ruling 'New Woman."

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