

A Feminist Reading of Victorian Children's Literature

Exploring the Angel in the House, the New Girl, and the New Woman in
Mary Louisa Molesworth's *The Carved Lions* and Edith Nesbit's *The
Story of the Treasure Seekers*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the crossroad between the Angel in the House and the New Woman many Victorian women were on in the late nineteenth century, including authors Mary Louisa Molesworth and Edith Nesbit. The research was conducted through a deep-dive in the biographies of Molesworth and Nesbit and an in-depth analysis of the female protagonists in their children's books *The Carved Lions* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. This analysis demonstrates that Molesworth and Nesbit adopted features of the Angel in the House and the New Girl and New Woman in their personal lives and explored these stereotypes through the female protagonists in their novels. This thesis concludes that Victorian girls and women did not have to choose between Angel in the House and the New Girl or New Woman but could also adopt features and characteristics of both stereotypes.

Keywords: Victorian, Angel in the House, New Girl, New Woman, Mary Louisa Molesworth, Edith Nesbit

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“For she’s so simply, subtly sweet, my deepest rapture does her wrong. Yet is it now my chosen task to sing her worth as Maid and Wife; nor happier post than this I ask, to live her laureate all my life”¹. These are the words Coventry Patmore wrote as part of his poem called *The Angel in the House*. The poem was written in 1854 and illustrates the position of women in Victorian society. The principle of the Angel in the House stated that a woman’s life should consist of marriage, childbirth, and domestic duties. However, around the fin-de-siècle this view on women started to shift and a feminist movement started to take shape that fought for equality between men and women. With this first-wave feminism, the Victorian era finds itself at a crossroad with those who supported the tradition of the Angel in the House, on one side, and those who supported the New Woman on the other side. The New Woman entered Victorian society when more and more women woke up to centuries of oppression and domination of the patriarchy. Those who supported the New Woman found that women should be allowed the same as men, for example, wear trousers and ride bikes. She was, first and foremost, equal to man. In Victorian literature, the Angel in the House can be recognised as a woman who tries to find her place as a wife to better the family. The New Woman, on the other hand, is characterised by exploring certain sexual freedom which can be expressed by her choosing to marry out of love and not out of financial concerns or arrangements.²

In the Victorian era, literature that discussed Victorian stereotypes, such as the Angel in the House and the New Woman was not exclusive to adult novels but was also a theme in children’s literature where there was often a clear difference between genders. Literature aimed at boys, for example, often included adventurous tales whereas literature aimed at girls was confined within the walls of the domestic. Children’s literature for girls was meant to help them prepare for their future roles as Angels in the House.³ Thus, Victorian girls were confronted with the principle of the Angel in the House from a young age.

¹ Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, rev. ed. (1854; repr., Gutenberg, 2014), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4099/4099-h/4099-h.htm>.

² Geneva Korykowski, “The Emergence of the New Woman in Victorian Children’s and Family Literature” (PhD diss., Eastern Michigan University, 2014), 17-18.

³ Anne H. Lundin, “Victorian Horizons: The Reception of Children’s Books in England and America, 1880-1900,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 64, no. 1 (January 1994): 43.

One popular author of children's literature was Mary Louisa Molesworth. Molesworth was a very successful author in her time but her success declined after her death.⁴ She was known for a more conservative and traditional view which is interesting because Molesworth had to shy away from the Angel in the House principal herself when she separated from her husband.⁵ Furthermore, Molesworth made a living with her writing which was an extraordinary career for a woman in the Victorian era. Her book *The Carved Lions*, written in 1895, illustrates Molesworth's view on feminism. This book is known as Molesworth's masterpiece and tells the story of a young girl who is sent to boarding school. The story is narrated by her when she is older and she reflects upon this period of her life that included two stone lions who came to life in the protagonist's dream. Not much literature has been written on this novel and it will be worth looking into whether there is an underlying feminist message or criticism upon the patriarchal society of that time that would then be instilled into young girls of that time. Or if such a message is overruled by Molesworth with the principle of the Angel in the House.

Shying away from this more conservative and traditional view is Victorian author Edith Nesbit. Nesbit was more progressive than Molesworth. She was a supporter of Socialism and was part of the modernist Fabian society. However, Nesbit did not entirely agree with the suffragette movement. For her, equality between men and women should be strived for following socialist ideas. Nesbit was not necessarily a radical anti-feminist nor a radical feminist. Her children's novel *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* written in 1899 centres around the six Bastable children who try to find a treasure. The four boys and two girls succeed in finding treasure by contributing to the search. It will be useful to look at the dynamic between the boys and the girls throughout the story. Similar to Molesworth's *The Carved Lions*, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* could have an underlying feminist message that implies the author's viewpoint on women's position in society and provides an image of what Victorian womanly principles were taught to young girls. It's worth exploring how and if Molesworth and Nesbit moved away from the principle of the Angel in the House and if they included characteristics of the New Woman in their children's literature to educate young girls about another available lifestyle for Victorian

⁴ Yoko Takami, "Mary Louisa Molesworth and Victorian Children's Fiction," *The Semiannual Periodical of the Faculty of Foreign Languages*, no. 61 (2004): 249.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

women. Making this even more interesting, is the fact that both Molesworth and Nesbit were New Women in a sense. Both of them had to work out of financial necessity and both were separated from their husbands, yet they did not completely agree with the suffragette movement.

This thesis explores the role of Victorian female authors Mary Louisa Molesworth and Edith Nesbit in a society that was dominated by the patriarchy. Both Molesworth and Nesbit are prolific authors of the nineteenth century. To get to this position, both women had to make their way in the male-dominated Victorian literary market, particularly within the genre of children's literature. The distinction between boys and girls within the genre is very clear. When Molesworth and Nesbit published their books *The Carved Lions* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* Victorian women found themselves conflicted between the Angel in the House and the New Woman. Molesworth and Nesbit did not agree with the traditional Angel in the House but did also not support the radical New Woman. Yet, both authors were New Women in a way adopting several characteristics belonging to this stereotype and pursuing the writing careers they started out of financial necessity. In the children's novels *The Carved Lions* by Mary Louisa Molesworth and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* by Edith Nesbit, the authors explore the crossroad between the Angel in the House and the New Woman through their protagonists.

Chapter 1

The Angel in the House, the New Woman, and the New Girl

Mary Louisa Molesworth and Edith Nesbit are two prolific children's literature authors of the late Victorian era. Both authors were living and writing in a time where the stereotyped idealisation of the Angel in the House and the radical New Woman divided Victorian society. The Angel in the House is defined as a devoted wife and mother who will concern herself only with domestic duties. The New Woman fought for autonomy in different areas of society, such as literature, education, politics, and employment. Not all women agreed with the radical ideas of the New Woman, nor did they agree with the oppressive ideal of the Angel in the House. Both Molesworth and Nesbit struggled to find a way between these two extremes and displayed characteristics of both women in their everyday lives. The characters in their children's literature also display elements of both the Angel in the House and the New Woman. The genre of children's literature was relatively new in the 1890s and was developed and established following the Industrial Revolution. It was dominated by female authors, who struggled to be taken seriously in the world of literature and publishing. The Victorian female artist is a victim of a male-dominated society that strengthened the gender division between men and women, and boys and girls. Molesworth and Nesbit infiltrated the literary world as female artists and as working New Women, while simultaneously adhering to the stereotype of the Angel in the House. This chapter will provide a framework of the Angel in the House and the New Woman and will explore the position of women who tried to enter the Victorian literary market of the late 1890s to outline the circumstances under which Molesworth and Nesbit wrote *The Carved Lions* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*.

The Angel in the House is an ideal that was appointed to middle-class Victorian women. She made her first appearance in a poem by Coventry Patmore called *The Angel in the House* (1854). In the poem, Patmore writes, "Man must be pleased; but him to please is woman's pleasure".⁶ As this line from the poem illustrates, the Angel in the House is a woman who is selfless, devoted, and submissive wife and mother.⁷

⁶ Patmore, *The Angel in the House*.

⁷ Joan M. Hoffman, "She Loves with love that cannot tire": The Image of the Angel in the House across Cultures and across Time," *Pacific Coast Philology* 42, no. 2 (2007): 264.

The ideal of the Angel in the House was established following the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle class. The middle class had acquired new wealth and status that allowed them to climb the social ladder. Within this class, it was common that men worked and women upheld the middle-class lifestyle and presented the outside world with their wealth and status. It became a woman's responsibility to establish the social status of her family and she did so in two ways. The first way refers to the term Angel, which implies the woman's close connection to God and her duty to keep her family on a Christian path. One way this was done was by making house-to-house visits to the poor. The second way to establish her family's social status applies to the term House and included running a perfect Victorian household. It was a woman's duty to make the home a haven where her husband and children's well-being is the number one priority.⁸ *The Girl's Own Paper*, a popular periodical of the nineteenth century, wrote in their article "What Girls May Do" that girls "may *not* do any of those things which make them imitators of men ; they may *not* try to break down the God-appointed fence which divides their department in the world's great workshop from the department of men ; by doing so they only lose their own queenliness".⁹ The values of the Angel in the House were instilled in women from childhood and their position in society was clear. However, Patmore's Angel in the House was an ideal, and many women strayed outside the confinement of the Victorian home causing society to change in women's favour.

Contrary to Coventry Patmore's poem is Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792).

Wollstonecraft published this almost sixty years before Patmore's poem making her a forerunner of the feminist movement. Wollstonecraft writes that men should "assist to emancipate their companion, to make her a help meet for them! Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens."¹⁰

⁸ M. Jeanne Peterson, "No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 677.

⁹ Alice King, "What Our Girls May Do," *The Girl's Own Paper*, 1880, 463.

¹⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, rev. ed. (1792; repr., Gutenberg, 2002), <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3420/pg3420.html>.

Wollstonecraft argued that women could contribute much more to society if they would be regarded as equal to men. Towards the end of the Victorian era, more and more women found truth in Wollstonecraft's vindication. Many women preferred education or a career over marriage and life as a wife and mother.¹¹ The previous idea that girls should only receive a basic education consisting of the arts or preparation for married life was challenged by women who continued their education. This continuation of education also meant that they could explore new careers. Previously, a woman's career was limited to governess or seamstress. Now an educated woman had a variety of career options, such as writer, secretary, or teacher.¹² Furthermore, the law changed in favour of women. The Matrimonial Causes Act from 1857 and the Married Women's Property Act from 1882, for example, allowed married or deserted women to be in charge of their own property.¹³ Husbands could no longer claim their wife's property or earnings as their own. Women now had financial independence. Moreover, the Custody Act of 1883 allowed divorced women to have custody of their children, rather than have custody only up until the age of seven.¹⁴ A divorced, single, mother then became the head of the household instead of the man. The gender roles reversed and the new laws gave women more freedom within the Victorian home. Slowly but surely, Victorian society saw the rise of the New Woman and women woke up to centuries of oppression and inequality.¹⁵

Victorian author Sarah Grand was one of the first and most prominent supporters of the New Woman. In *The New Aspect of the Woman Question* (1894), Grand wrote that men were ignorant towards women and put their wants and needs above those of women. On the arrival of the New Woman and her relation to the Victorian man, Grand wrote, "the new woman is a little above him, and he never even thought of looking up to where she has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years, thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy."¹⁶ Grand argued that women were fed up with the misogyny that ruled

¹¹ Korykowski, "The Emergence," 4.

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶ Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *The North American Review* 158, no. 448 (March 1894): 271.

Victorian society and were forced to take matters into their own hands.¹⁷ Women started to advocate for change, equality, and more opportunities, such as a continuation of education and the ability to enter the workplace. Those who disagreed with the New Woman portrayed her as an unseemly man with unconventional habits, such as smoking or riding a bike. The arrival of the New Woman sparked resistance among Victorian society, specifically men. Grand writes that the New Woman is portrayed by opponents as a woman who is: “afflicted with short hair, coarse skins, unsymmetrical figures, loud voice, tastelessness in dress, and an unattractive appearance and character”.¹⁸ The New Woman was thought to be “the end of all true womanliness.”¹⁹ Grand encouraged women all around the United Kingdom to take a stand against the centuries of misogyny and oppression women had suffered. However, not all Victorian women agreed with the radical New Woman.

Victorian female author, Maria Louisa Ramé, who wrote under the pseudonym Ouida, had a very outspoken opinion on the New Woman. According to her, the New Woman is wrong to victimise herself under the patriarchy. Rather, men are victims of women, she writes, “The error of the New Woman (as of many on old one) lies in speaking of women as the victims of men, and entirely ignoring the frequency with which men are the victims of women.”²⁰ She argues that an unhappy marriage is brought about by the woman and not by the man. The man sacrifices himself to the woman by giving her his hand in marriage.²¹ Ouida goes on to argue that the New Woman wrongly leads men to the belief that women have self-respect and rationality.²² Despite her strong beliefs against the New Woman, Ouida’s novels included strong female characters who tried to fight Victorian convention but failed in the end and submitted to the comforts the patriarchy provides.²³ New Women writers took a different approach.

Female writers who adopted the New Woman’s desire for a career entered the male-dominated Victorian literary market. The genre of children’s literature had become

¹⁷ Ibid., 270.

¹⁸ Ibid., 274.

¹⁹ Ibid., 274.

²⁰ Ouida, “The New Woman,” *The North American Review* 158, no. 450 (May 1894): 615.

²¹ Ibid., 615.

²² Ibid., 612.

²³ Pamela Gilbert, “Ouida and the other New Woman,” in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 173.

increasingly more popular throughout the Victorian era and was published in periodicals or books. These publications often strengthened the imposed Victorian gender division between boys and girls. Periodicals, for example, published far fewer editions for girls than for boys.²⁴ Moreover, the subject matter in these stories differed greatly between boys and girls. In both periodicals and books for girls, the stories were centred around the role of the woman and a test of true womanhood in the domestic sphere.²⁵ Boys, on the other hand, read stories that included tests of true manhood in exciting adventure novels.²⁶ Not only was gender division visible within the literature, but it was also visible within the world of publishing itself.

Victorian women suffered under the internalised misogyny of that time. When this started to shift and make its way towards the New Woman, many women tried to make careers as authors. Middle-class women who were confined to the Victorian home often took up writing as a hobby. Consequently, women started to publish their work and eventually female writers dominated the Victorian English novel market.²⁷ Nevertheless, novels written by women were critiqued because they were not subversive enough and lowered the status of (children's) literature.²⁸ It was believed that women did not fit in the male-dominated literary world, rather they were outsiders to this world.²⁹ Female authors were not expected to excel. It was thought that a woman's maternal instinct would prevent her from being an artistic genius.³⁰ James Payn wrote in his piece *The Compleat Novelist* that: "It is amazing how many of our story-tellers, and especially of the female ones, begin story-telling without having a story to tell (...)".³¹ As a rebuttal to such beliefs, the female artist in novels written by women would often be represented as an artistic genius and used this character to express their struggles on the literary work floor.³² The female artist is often a feminist who invades masculine space and whose gender imposes an obstacle

²⁴ Ann Ackerman, "Victorian Ideology and British Children's Literature," (PhD diss., North Texas State University, 1984), 104, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc330655/m2/1/high_res_d/1002779498-Ackerman.pdf.

²⁵ Lundin, "Victorian Horizons," 42.

²⁶ Ibid., 42.

²⁷ Nicola Diane Thompson, "Responding to the woman questions: rereading noncanonical Victorian women novelists," in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

²⁸ Ibid., 8/9.

²⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwomen in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 48.

³⁰ Ibid., 139.

³¹ James Payn, "The Compleat Novelist," *The Strand*, 1897, 34.

³² Thompson, "Responding to the woman questions," 142.

rather than a strength.³³ She challenges the societal framework imposed on Victorian women and the notion of art as a whole.³⁴ In children's literature, feminism was expressed through the New Girl.

Children's novels of the 1890s often included a New Girl character. By this time, women had gained more freedom and opportunities and were able to raise young girls under these improved circumstances. This gave birth to the New Girl. The New Girl occupied a new space in-between the young girl living with her parents and the married woman. This space was often filled with a continuation of a girls' education and developed into the genre of boarding school novels, which became popular halfway through the Victorian era. The novels were highly consumed by girls who were not in education. The characters in these books are often portrayed as New Girls. Moreover, this character tends to have New Woman features, such as short hair or a tendency to keep up with the boys. At the turn of the century, younger girls shifted towards the New Girl by displaying typical boy behaviour because they were aware of the privileges boys had, such as independence and freedom.³⁵ Girls were not afraid to play rough and be wild and acted this way deliberately.³⁶ The New Girl redefined female identity for young girls and guided them away from the Angel in the House.

In the Victorian era, women were often caught between the Angel in the House and the New Woman. Where the Angel in the House's sole focus would be on her duty as a wife and mother, the New Woman fought for more freedom, equality, and opportunities. Once the New Woman infiltrated Victorian society, many women started taking their chances in the male-dominated literary market. Careful to identify as a New Woman, keeping the backlash of society in mind, women writers often created New Woman characters but distanced themselves from the New Woman completely.³⁷ Writing children's books became very popular among women writers and feminism was expressed through the New Girl who occupied a new space in the life of a young girl and where she could enjoy education and adhere to certain

³³ Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 50.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁵ Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 103-122.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-117.

³⁷ Ann Ardis, "Organizing women: New Woman writers, New Woman readers, and suffrage feminism," in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 196.

behavioural patterns and outside appearances to strengthen the feminist image of the character. Both Molesworth and Edith Nesbit found themselves on the crossroad between the Angel in the House and the New Woman and their novels *The Carved Lions* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* express this dilemma by incorporating both female stereotypes.

Chapter 2

Mary Louisa Molesworth and *The Carved Lions*

Mary Louisa Molesworth is one of the most prolific children's authors of the Victorian period. Her success can be attributed to her contemporary, realistic stories that children could relate to. The protagonists of her books are young girls who often go against Victorian convention and are marked by self-development, self-sacrifice, and individuality.³⁸ Molesworth was very aware that the principle of the Angel in the House was impossible to live up to and her books did not hide this idea. Her child heroines are often wild and struggle to submit to Victorian conventions.³⁹ Her characters often feel unloved and undervalued and these feelings are always portrayed through the eyes of girls.⁴⁰ Molesworth, like many Victorian women, was on a crossroad between the New Woman and the Angel in the House. As a child, she was a member of the wealthy middle class and she married young into an aristocratic family, only to separate from her husband eighteen years later and follow the path of a New Woman as a single mother who had to provide for her children and take on the role of father and mother. Thus, Molesworth embarked on a successful literary career that would set her name in stone for years to come. In 1895, she wrote *The Carved Lions*, which is regarded as one of her masterpieces. The novel falls within the new genre of boarding school novels. At boarding school, the New Girl protagonist Geraldine encounters a masculine sphere defined by the New Girl, while at home she only encounters a feminine sphere dominated by the Angel in the House.⁴¹ The book is written from the perspective of a much older Geraldine as she reflects on her childhood and her time at Miss Ledbury's boarding school. As a child, Geraldine develops New Girl characteristics throughout her time at boarding school, but she later returns to the ideal of the Angel in the House, as was typical for Molesworth's children's novels. *The Carved Lions* by Mary Louisa Molesworth considers the feminine sphere Geraldine encounters through the principle of the Angel in the House and the masculine sphere through Geraldine's portrayal as a New Girl.

³⁸ Mary Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children's Classics*, ed. Isobel Armstrong, (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2008), 44. Google Play Books.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴¹ Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge, 1981), 88.

Mary Louisa Molesworth was born in Rotterdam in 1839. When she was two years old, her family moved to Manchester where they soon became part of the middle class.⁴² In Manchester, the family was neighbours with William Gaskell. Gaskell was, among other things, a pioneer regarding the education of the lower class and he became Molesworth's teacher, giving her lessons on various subjects, while Gaskell's wife, Elizabeth, encouraged her to write. Unfortunately, Molesworth's childhood writings have been lost and their subject matter remains unknown. Her education came to an end with a two-year stay at a school in France. Such an absence was unusual for a young girl like Molesworth and the reason behind it is unknown. When she returned, she met her future husband Richard Molesworth.⁴³ They married in 1861 and Molesworth became part of an aristocratic family. Richard was known to have a bad temper and outbursts of rage. Throughout the marriage, Molesworth would give birth to seven children. Only three years into the marriage, Molesworth knew she had made a mistake by marrying Richard.⁴⁴ She remarked he was "snobbish, unsociable and idle, his temper terrifying and unpredictable."⁴⁵ Yet, Molesworth did not leave him. During this time, she established a close friendship with poet John Warren. In 1868, Molesworth wrote to Warren on the state of her marriage, she wrote, "My autobiography came to an end several years ago. It died and I buried it & it was the best thing to do. I became practical and middle-aged very young. My deepest experience of life is not of a kind that would ever make romance."⁴⁶ Molesworth felt that by marrying Richard she had lost all her individuality and freedom. She had become an Angel in the House and spent her days being a dutiful wife and mother. Moreover, as Victorian convention prescribed, the Molesworth's followed the typical family structure where Richard worked and was the main provider, and Molesworth was responsible for the housekeeping and upkeep of the family's aristocratic social status. In 1879, Molesworth re-gained the autonomy she felt she had lost in her marriage when she separated from Richard. By then, the family had moved to France and Molesworth continued to live there with her family while Richard returned to

⁴² Mary Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children's Classics*, (Devon: Northcote House Publishers, 2008), 48. Google Play Books.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

England. The couple never officially divorced because they knew that was a taboo and would harm their family's reputation.⁴⁷ Thus, after the separation, Molesworth pretended to be widowed. Alone with her children in another country, Molesworth was forced to make a livelihood for her children and writing became a serious endeavour. By separating from her husband and entering a serious career as a writer, Molesworth adopted two qualities of the New Woman. First, she left the marital home behind that was a huge part of a Victorian woman's image, and took back the sexual freedom that defined the New Woman. Forced to provide for her children, Molesworth became financially independent and took a step into the male-dominated world of employment by pursuing a literary career.

Molesworth's literary career started in 1869 when she published her first novel called *Lover and Husband*. The narrative follows a couple in an unhappy marriage and has an autobiographical character. The novel was published under the pseudonym Ennis Graham, a male name.⁴⁸ Molesworth wrote under this name because her father and husband did not agree with her pursuing a literary career. Rather, she should pursue a career in domestic duties but this never gave Molesworth much pleasure. Another reason for Molesworth to write under a male pseudonym is the fact that this made it easier for her to invade the masculine literary space and write freely and vigorously.⁴⁹ She could obey her duties as a Victorian woman and write without being accused of going against social convention.⁵⁰ Molesworth's father passed away before she separated from Richard, and after the separation, she published her books under the name Mrs. Molesworth. By replacing the name Ennis Graham with Mrs. Molesworth, she employs another characteristic of the New Woman. She regained her individuality and freedom and entered the literary world as a woman rather than a man. She broke free from the Victorian tradition that defined intellect and ability through gender. As a children's author, Molesworth became very successful because she could put herself in the position of a child.⁵¹ She wrote, "It is more than the love for children. It is clothing your own personality with theirs, seeing as they see, realising the intensity of their hopes and fears, yet remaining yourself, never losing

⁴⁷ Takami, "Mary Louisa Molesworth," 232.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 233.

⁴⁹ Gilbert & Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 65.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁵¹ Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children's Classics*, 53.

sight of what is good for them.”⁵² In 1895, Molesworth published one of her masterpieces called *The Carved Lions*.

The feminine sphere in *The Carved Lions* is expressed by Molesworth through Geraldine's mother and the governess Miss Fenmore. Geraldine's mother is portrayed as a stereotypical Angel in the House. Until she is nine years old, Geraldine stays at home with her mother who takes care of Geraldine and her brother Haddie, goes to the shops, and focuses on other domestic duties. Geraldine often describes the visits she, Haddie, and her mother made to Mr. Cranston's furniture shop. The entrance of the shop is flanked by two stone lions that Geraldine and Haddie love to play with. Moreover, Geraldine's mother is responsible for her daughter's education. In the Victorian era, education was not available to everyone, specifically not to girls. This is also the case for Geraldine who is educated on the domestic by her mother as were many middle-class girls at the time.⁵³ Towards the end of the novel, Geraldine has a dream vision where it becomes clear that Geraldine misses her mother and the safety and comfort of the Victorian home provided by the Angel in the House. In the dream, the lions from Cranston's shop take Geraldine and Haddie to their mother, Geraldine remarks:

The scene before me was too beautiful, too magically exquisite for me even to succeed in giving the faintest idea of it. (...) The beauty and delight seemed made up of everything lovely mingled together-sights, sounds, scents, feelings. (...) “Is it fairy-land or-or heaven?” (...) and there, seated on a rustic bench, her dear face all sunshine, was mamma! She started up as soon as she saw us and hastened forward, her arms outstretched. “My darlings, my darlings,” she said, as Haddie and I threw ourselves upon her. She did look so pretty; she was all in white, and she had a rose-one of the lovely roses I had been admiring as we ran-fastened to the front of her dress.⁵⁴

⁵² Mary Louisa Molesworth, *On the Art of Writing Fiction for Children*, rev. ed. (1893; repr., Warwick University), 341.

⁵³ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, 75.

⁵⁴ Molesworth, *The Carved Lions*, 116-118.

The environment Geraldine describes is so beautiful that heaven comes to the mind of the reader. Her mother, wearing a white dress, almost looks angelic. Molesworth makes the ultimate reference to the Angel in the House. Geraldine's mother is the Angel in the House, who has done her job so well that young Geraldine struggles to be without her love and care. Geraldine, in her dream vision, is the happiest she has been since going to boarding school. At boarding school, Geraldine is unable to find the love and care of her parental home.

A pseudo-Angel in the House is portrayed by the governess Miss Fenmore. Miss Fenmore often comforts Geraldine when she runs into trouble and is upset. She is closest to the loving home and family life she had to leave behind, she says, "Already I felt that I loved her dearly-her voice was as sweet as her face. (...) I only felt vaguely that there was something about her which reminded me of mamma."⁵⁵ For Geraldine, the softness and kindness Miss Fenmore shows her reminds her of her mother. And when Miss Fenmore leaves the boarding school, Geraldine loses the presence of an Angel in the House, and life there becomes almost unbearable for her. For Geraldine, the feminine sphere of the Angel in the House is key for her childhood and upbringing.

Not only does *The Carved Lions* have a feminine sphere, but it also has a masculine sphere which is expressed through Geraldine's determination to receive an education, the girls at the boarding school who have "boyish" nicknames, and Geraldine's display of individuality and autonomy when she runs into trouble. Molesworth portrays Geraldine as a New Girl through her determination to receive an education. Unlike Geraldine, her brother Haddie does go to school, and Geraldine remarks that she "often envied Haddie, who did go to school. (...) Still, though I did not often speak of it, the wish to go to school, and the belief that I should find school-life very happy and interesting, remained in my mind."⁵⁶ Here there is already a glimpse of the New Girl in Geraldine by her strong wish to go to school. Halfway through the nineteenth century, the education laws changed and girls were allowed to go to school too. For the New Girl, education is a vital element. Education provided a new space between the parental and marital home where she could be independent and have a

⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁶ Mary Louisa Molesworth, *The Carved Lions*, rev. ed. (1895; repr., The Perfect Library, 2014), 5, iBooks.

certain freedom. Moreover, education meant that young Victorian girls would learn school subjects, such as maths and French, and would no longer focus on learning domestic duties only.⁵⁷ Initially, Geraldine is very excited to occupy this space and to shift away from the traditional Victorian upbringing for girls that teaches girls how to be an Angel in the House. When Geraldine's parents have to move to India for her father's work, the opportunity to receive an education presents itself and she remarks that her

excitement grew even greater when mamma came to the subject of what was decided about us children. Haddie of course must go to school," (...) But about you, my Geraldine." "Oh, mamma," I interrupted, "do let me go to school too. I have always wanted to go, you know, and except for being away from you, I would far rather be a boarder. It's really being at school then."⁵⁸

Geraldine goes to Miss Ledbury's boarding school where the masculine characteristics of the New Girl are expressed through the independence and freedom that is expected from the girls. They have left the parental home and are responsible for their own actions. One of the ways novels like *The Carved Lions* would portray New Girls was by shortening girls' names to more masculine nicknames. During the recreation hour, Geraldine does not know how to approach her peers. This was not unusual behaviour because young girls who had stayed at home for most of their childhood were often very shy around children their age. They were raised to be dependent and their lack of independence pushes them into a corner.⁵⁹ Geraldine is approached by a group of girls and is very overwhelmed by their presence. On one of the girls that speak to her, Geraldine remarks that she "was something of a tomboy, and looked upon also as a wit. Her name was Josephine Mellor, and her intimate friends called her Joe."⁶⁰ By shortening the female name Josephine to Joe and emphasising that she has wit and boyish characteristics, Molesworth stresses girls' adoption of masculine traits.⁶¹ Geraldine herself is given a masculine nickname by her

⁵⁷ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, 9.

⁵⁸ Molesworth, *The Carved Lions*, 40/41.

⁵⁹ Dyhouse, *Girls growing up*, 44.

⁶⁰ Molesworth, *The Carved*, 65.

⁶¹ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, 89.

friend Harriet who refers to her as “Gerry.”⁶² The New Girls of Miss Ledbury’s boarding school are breaking down Victorian convention by letting go of their feminine names.

Geraldine’s New Girl character is emphasised when she runs into some trouble with one of the governesses at the boarding school, called Miss Broom. In the nineteenth century, the idea that childhood goes hand in hand with wildness and disobedience became more and more popular.⁶³ Geraldine is no exception to this. The incident revolves around a letter Geraldine wants to send to her mother. As she is closing the envelope, Miss Broom tells her that Miss Ledbury needs to read the letter before it can be sent. This shocks Geraldine: “Why do you stare so? It is the rule at every school,” (...) “If you have written nothing you should not, you have no reason to dread its being seen.” “Yes, I have,” I replied indignantly. (...) “I have,” I repeated. “Nobody would say to strangers all they’d say to their own mama.”⁶⁴ Instead of being obedient to the adult, Geraldine questions Miss Broom’s authority. She is not afraid to stand up for what she believes in and this scene demonstrates her strong will. Geraldine tries to rip up the letter, but Miss Broom stops her. Geraldine acts like a New Girl by not taking what the adults tell her as the ultimate truth and by standing up for herself. She is disobedient, which is not a characteristic of a future Angel in the House. Rather, it is a characteristic of a New Girl, who questions what she is told and displays a sense of individuality. Later that day, Geraldine is sent to Miss Ledbury’s office and the individuality that she displayed before is turned into submission. This was a very typical occurrence in novels of this kind. Geraldine remarks Miss Ledbury

said the letter should be sent as it was, but she gave me advice for the future which in some ways was very good. (...) What was the use of telling mama that I did not like Miss Aspinall, and that I could not bear Miss Broom? (...) These ladies were my teachers and I must respect them. How could I tell at the end of three days if I should like them or not? I felt I could tell, but I did not dare to say so.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., 82.

⁶³ Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children’s Classics*, 6.

⁶⁴ Molesworth, *The Carved Lions*, 80.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83.

Miss Ledbury's lecture makes an impression on Geraldine and she tries to behave according to the expectations of the school and the governesses but runs into trouble several times. Her New Girl behaviour peaks towards the end of the novel when Geraldine can no longer take the stress of living at the boarding school and becomes very worried about her parents' well-being. A final incident urges Geraldine to run away from the boarding school. During a French lesson with Miss Broom, Geraldine failed to recite a French poem. As a punishment, she has to learn the French poem and recite it in front of Miss Ledbury. However, the stress becomes too much for Geraldine and her mind goes completely blank, but the governesses see it as disobedience of the task she was set:

I've forgotten it," I said. Miss Aspinall gave an exclamation-Miss Ledbury looked at me with reproach. Both believed that I was not speaking the truth, and that I had determined not to say the verses to Miss Broom. "Impossible," said Miss Aspinall. "Geraldine," said Miss Ledbury sadly but sternly, "do not make me distrust you." I grew stony. Now I did not care. Even Miss Ledbury doubted my word. I almost think if the verses had come back to me then, I would not have said them. I stood there, dull and stupid and obstinate, though a perfect fire was raging inside me.⁶⁶

Similar to the previous incident, Geraldine portrays herself as a New Girl by expressing a sense of individuality. She is speaking the truth, but the unbelief from the adults frustrates her, and she remarks that even if she knew the verses, she would not recite them now. Instead of compromising her individuality for submission to the adults' rules, Geraldine takes matters into her own hands. She decides to run away from the school and go back to her parental home. She ends up falling asleep on one of the carved lions in Mr. Cranston's showroom and is whisked away in the dream vision that reunites her with her mother. In the end, it is decided that Geraldine leaves Miss Ledbury's boarding school and is taught privately by Miss Fenmore. By having Miss Fenmore as a governess, Geraldine is in the care of someone who came closest to the Angel in the House she was used to. As an adult, Geraldine became an Angel in the House following the example of her mother and Miss Fenmore. She was married

⁶⁶ Molesworth, *The Carved Lions*, 103.

and had several children and grandchildren. Moreover, Geraldine remarks that she would “never send any child of mine, or any child I had the care of, to a school where there was so little feeling of home, so little affection and gentleness-above all, that dreadful old-world rule of letters being read, and the want of trust and confidence in the pupils, which showed in so many ways.”⁶⁷ According to Geraldine, Miss Ledbury’s school did nothing to emulate a safe and loving environment for its pupils. The governesses were no Angels in the House but were rather strict and unloving towards the girls. Young Geraldine thought that occupying the independent New Girl space would be easier. However, she is unable to do so and longs back to her life before education. A life where her mother was the Angel in the House and a figure she so valued and respected that she became one herself in the end. The New Girl characteristics that she displayed as a child are left behind in childhood. The independence that she was given at the boarding school could never compare to the dependence in a loving home.

The Carved Lions by Mary Louisa Molesworth displays Geraldine as both Angel in the House and New Girl by occupying a feminine and masculine space. The Angel in the House is represented by her mother and Miss Fenmore. Geraldine respects these figures so much that she becomes an Angel in the House herself. The New Girl in Geraldine can be defined by her strong desire for education and her independence and autonomy when she runs into trouble with the governesses. Geraldine is not afraid to take matters into her own hands and stand up for herself. Moreover, Molesworth portrays the girls at the boarding school as New Girls by giving them “boyish” nicknames that emphasise their occupation of a masculine space. The crossroad between Angel in the House and New Woman that Molesworth was on, is the same crossroad Geraldine is on. Molesworth’s children’s novels usually ended with the female protagonists following the conventional Victorian path towards the Angel in the House and Geraldine is no exception. The author did not advocate her New Woman ways to younger girls.⁶⁸ Where Geraldine left the New Girl behind for the Angel in the House, Molesworth traded the Angel in the House for the New Woman.

⁶⁷ Molesworth, *The Carved Lions*, 136.

⁶⁸ Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children’s Classics*, 62.

Chapter 3

Edith Nesbit and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*

Edith Nesbit rose to fame as a children's writer at the end of the Victorian era. Among children, Nesbit was known for her wholesome stories, specifically those about the Bastable children. Among adults, however, Nesbit was known for her unconventional lifestyle. Initially, Nesbit wanted to be a renowned poet but her children's books were the ones that made her a prolific writer. Their popularity was partly due to Nesbit's ability to blur the lines between the adult narrator and child reader.⁶⁹ She achieved this by narrating her books from a child's, usually a boy's, perspective.⁷⁰ She created a new kind of child character who aims to be happy and have fun and is released from the moral lessons that were central in previous children's literature.⁷¹ Nesbit, similar to Molesworth, was on the crossroad between the New Woman and the Angel in the House. She was a New Woman in her career and outer appearance, but remained an Angel in the House in her marriage and did not support the feminist movement. Despite enjoying some of the benefits and freedom feminism offered her, she believed that women were inferior to men and so did her husband.⁷² Similar to Molesworth, Nesbit was forced into a writing career to earn money for her family when her husband's business failed and this role as breadwinner pushed her even more towards the New Woman. *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) was immediately well-received by the public. The book tells the narrative of the six Bastable Children who try to restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable through various money-making endeavours. Through the character of Oswald, Nesbit portrays ideas on Victorian masculinity and traditional gender division. Through Oswald's sisters Dora and Alice, she portrays the Angel in the House in the former and the New Girl in the latter. In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Edith Nesbit explores various sides of the Victorian gender division, such as the male perspective, the New Woman, the Angel in the House, and the New Girl.

⁶⁹ Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children's Classics*, 91

⁷⁰ Amelia A. Rutledge, "E. Nesbit and the woman question" in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* by Nicola Diane Thompson, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 229.

⁷¹ Ibid., 96.

⁷² Julia Briggs, *A Woman of Passion: The Life of E. Nesbit 1858-1924* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1987), 231. iBooks.

Born in England, Edith Nesbit (1858-1924) spend her childhood playing outside with her brothers and was not afraid to be a bit rowdy. Tragedy struck when Nesbit's father passed away in 1862. When she was twelve years old, the family moved to Halstead Hall in Kent. In her teenage years, Nesbit started to earn money with her verses by selling them to popular journals. Unfortunately, these early writings were lost. She hated the socially conventional life she lived at Halstead.⁷³ In 1877, she met her future husband Hubert Bland and two years later Nesbit was pregnant with his child. The couple married when Nesbit was already seven months pregnant, which was a taboo in the Victorian era, but Nesbit relished in straying from the traditional path.⁷⁴ In 1881, Bland's business failed and the financial burden of the family fell on Nesbit who earned money through designing greeting cards and selling some of her writing.⁷⁵ In 1885, she published her first adult novel. She encouraged Bland to write as well and the couple became successful writers and published adult novels together under the name Fabian Bland. They were able to live a lavish lifestyle and participated in the cultural and political life of London in the 1880s.⁷⁶ In 1884, Bland and Nesbit were involved in the founding of the Fabian Society, the predecessor of the Labour party,⁷⁷ which advocated for the rights of the working class.⁷⁸ Nesbit enjoyed surrounding herself with this company and its modern ideas. Soon she started to adopt New Woman features in her appearance. She cut her hair short, refused to wear corsets, and instead wore long, flowing gowns or trousers, and she smoked.⁷⁹ Despite her New Woman appearance, Nesbit did not support the feminist movement nor was she involved with the Woman's Group of the Fabian Society. When she was asked to talk about her career for the Woman's Group who found her inspiring, Nesbit gave a speech called "The Natural Disabilities of Women". In this speech, Nesbit did not present herself as a woman with a successful literary career but only presented herself as Bland's wife.⁸⁰ Moreover, in this speech, she argued that a woman's menstrual cycle made women inferior to men. She knew she was on the same intellectual level as men, so she explained women's inferiority with a physical factor,

⁷³ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁷⁵ Sloan, "The Narrative Voice in the Children's Fantasy Novels of E. Nesbit," 38.

⁷⁶ Sebag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children's Classics*, 98.

⁷⁷ Sloan, "The Narrative Voice in the Children's Fantasy Novels of E. Nesbit," 38.

⁷⁸ Rutledge, "Edith Nesbit and the Woman Question," 225.

⁷⁹ Sloan, "The Narrative Voice in the Children's Fantasy Novels of E. Nesbit," 39.

⁸⁰ Rutledge, "Edith Nesbit and the Woman Question," 227.

as did many in the 1800s.⁸¹ Throughout Nesbit and Bland's marriage, Bland had several affairs and several children out of wedlock. The affair that would eventually hurt Nesbit the most was the one with her in-home nurse Alice Heatson. Alice quickly became pregnant with Bland's child while Nesbit lost her fourth child to stillbirth. Unaware that her husband was the father of Alice's child, Nesbit decided to help Alice by passing off Alice's child as her own so that Alice would not be regarded as a fallen woman by society for having a child out of wedlock.⁸² About a decade later, Alice had a second child with Bland whom Nesbit also adopted.⁸³ Only this time, Nesbit knew about the affair but she decided to stay with Bland and have several affairs herself with men who admired her for her literary skill. In 1898, Nesbit and Bland were living in Well Hall, a huge house which they could only afford because Nesbit wrote constantly to pay the bills.⁸⁴ Her children's books became very popular and paid the bills when Nesbit and Bland were living beyond their means. On writing children's books Nesbit wrote, "There is only one way of understanding children; they cannot be understood by imagination, by observation, not even by love. They can only be understood by memory. Only by remembering how you felt and thought when you yourself were a child can you arrive at any understanding of the thoughts and feelings of children."⁸⁵ Nesbit was a firm believer that children could only be understood by adults if the adult was reminded of their own childhood experiences and emotions. In 1899, she published *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, which became an instant success and introduced Nesbit as a talented children's author within the Victorian literary world.

The Story of the Treasure Seekers is about the six Bastable children: Dora, Oswald, Dicky, Alice, Noel, and Horace Octavius (H.O.) Bastable. The family is in financial distress ever since Mr. Bastable's business failed and Mrs. Bastable passed away. The siblings are looking for ways to restore the fortunes of the House of Bastable by trying to find treasure. Unlike Geraldine in Molesworth's *The Carved Lions*, the six children do not go to school because their father can't afford it. The portrayal of the Angel in the House and the New Woman in Nesbit's book lies mostly in the dynamic between the children. Oswald, as the eldest boy in the family, often steps up as a

⁸¹ Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 967.

⁸² Seabag-Montefiore, *Women Writers of Children's Classics*, 100.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 102/103.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

father figure and is portrayed as someone who supports the traditional Victorian views on gender. Throughout the novel, it becomes apparent that Dora and Alice are the complete opposite of each other. Dora is portrayed as a young Angel in the House. She feels responsible for the care of her siblings since Mrs. Bastable passed away. Alice, on the other hand, is represented as a New Girl who likes to be wild and rowdy. Nesbit in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* managed to portray the three stereotypes that played a huge role in the gender division of the Victorian era.

Oswald Bastable is portrayed as a boy who was raised with traditional views on gender and values them. He often assumes the role of a pseudo-father for his siblings when Mr. Bastable is away working and, in doing so, establishes himself as the head of the Bastable household, which was a position usually held by men in the Victorian era. Oswald often breaks up his siblings' fights, for example, one between Dora and Dicky when they discuss being bandits: "I'm sure it's wrong," said Dora. And Dicky said she thought everything wrong. She said she didn't, and Dicky was very disagreeable. So Oswald had to make peace, and he said – 'Dora needn't play if she doesn't want to. Nobody asked her. And, Dicky, don't be an idiot: do dry up and let's hear what Noel's idea is.'"⁸⁶ Oswald often steps up when his siblings are fighting and gives them a stern talking-to. His father is his role model and when Dora and Alice tell Oswald that Mr. Bastable looked like he had been crying, Oswald remarks that he's "sure that's not true. Because only cowards and snivellers cry, and my Father is the bravest man in the world."⁸⁷ By saying that only cowards and snivellers cry, Oswald strongly rejects the notion of crying and displaying emotions that were often associated with girls and women only. For Oswald, Victorian masculinity can be defined as a rejection of feminine qualities or characteristics. This is also demonstrated when Oswald and Noel talk to the editor after the children decide to try and have Noel's poetry published. Noel is intimidated by the conversation with the editor and Oswald remarks that "Noel had turned quite pale. He is disgustingly like a girl in some ways."⁸⁸ Oswald blames his younger brother's reaction on him having girly characteristics. Interesting is that Oswald uses the word "disgustingly" to

⁸⁶ Edith Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, rev. ed. (1899; repr., Sovereign Classics, 2018), 10. iBooks.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 35.

describe this. He is not surprised or concerned, he is disgusted that Noel displays emotions Oswald views as girly and weak. This is a very strong statement on Oswald's ideas of Victorian masculinity and femininity.

His views on Victorian femininity are expressed when he describes Dora and Alice. Oswald often remarks that Dora and Alice can't do certain things or act in a certain way because they are girls. He also has an opinion on the New Woman who often expressed breaking free from the Victorian feminine mould through smoking. When the children play war, they decide to smoke the pipe of peace, but Oswald remarks that "the girls are not allowed to have any. It is not right to let girls smoke. They get to think too much of themselves if you let them do everything the same as men."⁸⁹ Oswald's view on the New Woman is one of a traditional Victorian man who does not agree with her adoption of typical masculine features. Therefore, Oswald is quite surprised when he meets Mrs. Leslie who Nesbit represented as a New Woman and seems to be based on Nesbit herself. Mrs. Leslie is dressed in non-traditional Victorian clothing and seems to have the intellect of a man when she talks. Oswald remarks that "she didn't talk a bit like a real lady, but more like a jolly sort of grown-up in a dress and hat."⁹⁰ This is similar to Nesbit who adopted New Woman characteristics in dress and was very aware that her intellect was the same as that of men. Furthermore, Mrs. Leslie is a successful poet, just like Nesbit was a successful children's author. Another interesting element about Mrs. Leslie is her male name, which was also included by Molesworth in *The Carved Lions* who gave her New Girl characters boy nicknames. The name Leslie is androgynous but is preceded by Mrs., which complicates her female character. She is a typical New Woman with the characteristics of a boy and boy privileges similar to Nesbit.⁹¹

In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, the death of Mrs. Bastable places the role of the Angel in the House on Dora, the eldest daughter. The only adult woman in the children's lives is their servant Eliza to whom the children refer as the "General"⁹² Oswald remarks that "A great deal of your comfort and happiness depends on having

⁸⁹ Ibid., 95.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁹¹ Alexandra Jeikner, "Reading the language of attire: Clothing and Identity in Frances Hodgson Burnett, Edith Nesbit and Beatrix Potter," (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2014), 205-206-207.

⁹² Edith Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 7.

a good General.”⁹³ Referring to Eliza as a “General” demonstrates the value and respect that was attributed to women who ran households. Women were seen as the generals of the domestic sphere because that is where they ruled. Eliza, however, is not very domestic nor is she very caring or loving towards the children. Not having a female adult figure to take on the role of Angel in the House has left Dora to carry out this task. Her younger siblings often find her mothering annoying, Oswald remarks that he was “afraid Dora was going to come the good elder sister over us. She does that a jolly sight too often.”⁹⁴ Her father also asks her to take care of her siblings. He asks her, for example, to put H.O. and Noel to bed and when they have a feast for dinner because of a visitor. Moreover, all the children vowed to “not touch any of the feast till Dora gave the word next day.”⁹⁵ This demonstrates the children’s respect for Dora as their pseudo-mother. Dora feels a huge responsibility towards her siblings and tries to keep them on the right path. About halfway through the book, Dora becomes overwhelmed with this responsibility and Oswald finds her crying, he says, “Girls will sometimes; I suppose it is their nature, and we ought to be sorry for their affliction.”⁹⁶ Oswald’s view on Victorian girls comes to the foreground once more through this remark as he refers to crying almost as a disease that only girls carry. Dora is crying because Mrs. Bastable has asked Dora to take care of her siblings before she passed away, Dora explains, “ ‘And when Mother died she said, “Dora take care of the others and teach them to be good, and keep them out of trouble and make them happy.” She said, “Take care of them for me, Dora dear.” And I have tried, and all of you hate me for it; and to-day I let you do this, though I knew all the time it was silly.’ ”⁹⁷ From this point onwards, the children feel for Dora and all the pressure she’s been under to take care of her five siblings while still being a child herself. Dora does not stop mothering them though. She keeps trying to adhere to the ideal of the Angel in the House. Not only did Nesbit portray Dora as an Angel in the House, but she also portrayed Dora as a stereotypical girl who is easily scared and does not like things that are dirty or dangerous, for example, when the children decide to become detectives. Dora thinks this is dangerous and Oswald recalls that “Dora

⁹³ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 93.

said she had had enough of tents, and she was going to look at the shops.”⁹⁸ Through the character of Dora, Nesbit was able to portray an Angel in the House and a stereotypical girl which she completely contrasts with the New Girl character of Alice.

The difference between Alice and Dora already becomes apparent in the first chapter when Dora is mending: “Dora is the only one of us who ever tries to mend anything. Alice tries to make things sometimes. Once she knitted a red scarf for Noel because his chest is delicate, but it was much wider at one end than the other.”⁹⁹ Alice is not as domesticated as Dora, rather she is a New Girl. Nesbit’s portrayal of a New Girl is very different than that of Molesworth. Where Geraldine expresses her identity as a New Girl through autonomy and independence, Alice expresses hers through trying to keep up with her brothers during playtime. This New Girl behaviour was often adopted into literature where the character’s behaviour was approved on the one hand, but undercut on the other hand.¹⁰⁰ This is also the case for Alice. Oswald describes her as someone who will “always play boys parts, and she makes Ellis cut her hair short on purpose.”¹⁰¹ Alice acts and looks like a New Girl, but is always the first one to apologise to adults when the children get into trouble or to alert an adult when there is trouble. For example, when the children play detective, Alice is the one who presents them with a case to investigate and wants to go with Oswald and Dicky to do so. Alice is adamant to go despite Dicky remarking that “he did not think the girls ought to be in it because there might be danger.”¹⁰² The trio hides in a tree and Oswald remarks that “Alice didn’t half like it – and as she is a girl I do not blame her.”¹⁰³ Both Dicky and Oswald assume Alice is scared solely because she is a girl. They can’t decide who should go for a closer investigation. Alice says that it should be her because the whole thing was her idea. Oswald encourages her to go, but Alice is quick to say “ ‘Not for anything!’ And she begged us not.”¹⁰⁴ So, it is decided that Alice will stay in the tree to guard while Dicky and Oswald go investigate. However, as soon as Dicky and Oswald leave, Alice is struck by fear as Oswald tells the reader:

⁹⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁰ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, 109.

¹⁰¹ Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 48.

¹⁰² Ibid., 22.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 23.

“Now you will perhaps expect that at this moment Alice would have cried ‘Murder!’ If you think so you little know what girls are. Directly she was left alone in that tree she made a bolt to tell Albert’s uncle all about it and bring him to our rescue in case the coiner’s gang was a very desperate one.”¹⁰⁵ Once more, Oswald expresses his view on girls by saying that if the reader had expected Alice to be brave, they do not know how girls truly are. The detective scene demonstrates that Alice is partly a New Girl. She instigates her siblings to investigate their neighbour’s house and even joins them. However, when the situation could turn out to be dangerous, Alice becomes a stereotypical Victorian girl, who is portrayed as easily scared and delicate. Despite her desire to keep up with her brothers and their wild ideas, she can never quite go through with it. Alice is a New Girl through her outer appearance and behaviour. However, when push comes to shove, she is portrayed as a stereotypical girl who is easily scared. Through the character of Alice, Nesbit demonstrates that girls can be both rowdy and caring. They can be both New Girl and Angel in the House, as Nesbit was herself. Nesbit was a New Girl in her youth and a New Woman in her outer appearance, however, Nesbit followed ideas that belonged with the Angel in the House, such as her opposition to the feminist movement and her conviction that women were inferior to men.

Edith Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* includes various elements of the Victorian gender division, such as a traditional male view through Oswald, a portrayal of the Angel of the House through Dora, and a representation of the New Girl through Alice. Oswald’s ideas on Victorian masculinity are a rejection of characteristics or features that were often attributed to girls or women. His traditional views cause him to be very surprised by New Woman Mrs. Leslie, who does not adhere to the female stereotype Oswald knows. Dora’s portrayal of an Angel in the House means that she takes on the role of a pseudo-mother for her siblings and often performs domestic duties, such as mending. Directly opposite from Dora is her sister Alice who is a New Girl. She has short hair and always tries to keep up with her rowdy brothers. However, she returns to the Angel in the House and the stereotypical girl when she becomes concerned for her brothers’ safety and runs to get help. Through Mrs. Leslie, Nesbit has presented herself as an adult and through Alice, she has presented herself

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 24/25.

as a child as both Nesbit and Alice were not afraid to play and be wild with their brothers. In doing so, Nesbit proves that Victorian women can be both Angel in the House and New Woman without having to fully commit to one.

Conclusion

Victorian authors Mary Louisa Molesworth in *The Carved Lions* and Edith Nesbit in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* shift from the Victorian principle of the Angel in the House towards the New Girl and the New Woman by exploring both stereotypes through their female protagonists. By performing a close reading of *The Carved Lions* by Molesworth and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* by Nesbit, it becomes clear that the stereotypes of the Angel in the House and the New Woman are not a dichotomy. There was room for both in a young girl's or woman's life. Molesworth and Nesbit explored both sides themselves. Molesworth became an Angel in the House when she married her husband and focused solely on being a wife and mother. However, she started to shift towards the New Woman when she separated from her husband and took back her autonomy and individuality. Moreover, Molesworth was now a single mother and a provider for her children causing her to pursue a writing career. Nesbit pursued a career in writing as well and adopted several New Woman features in her outer appearance. However, Nesbit too was an Angel in the House when she stayed in her unhappy marriage and opposed the feminist movement that developed towards the end of the nineteenth century.

In *The Carved Lions*, Molesworth allows room for Geraldine to be a New Girl in her childhood but puts her on the conventional path in her adult life. This conventional path was also explored by Nesbit through the characters of Oswald and Dora. Oswald supports the traditional Victorian gender division and is surprised to meet the New Woman Mrs. Leslie who seems to be intellectual and does not fit Oswald's stereotype. Dora is the Angel in the House who takes care of her siblings and performs several domestic duties. Alice is the complete opposite. She is a New Girl who plays rough with her brothers, however, as soon as there might be trouble, Alice becomes loving and caring and is not afraid to tell the adults of their predicaments. Both authors allow space for the exploration of the Angel in the House, the New Girl, and the New Woman and neither authors paint any of these stereotypes in a negative light. Geraldine might return to the Angel in the House as an adult, but she looks back on her childhood very fondly and does not seem to regret any of her childhood actions that the adults regarded as disobedience. Thus, young girls were presented with the idea that they did not have to adhere to one specific stereotype. They could be both Angel in the House and New Girl or New Woman, they did not

have to choose one or the other. Based on these conclusions, further research could be conducted into female authors of children's literature who solely promoted the idea of the Angel in the House to see how this internalised misogyny influenced young girls. Moreover, it might be worth exploring radical feminist authors of children's literature of the Victorian era to discover how their novels shaped the feminists of the future. This thesis explored the crossroad between the Angel in the House and the New Woman many Victorian women found themselves on towards the end of the nineteenth century, including Molesworth and Nesbit. Both authors refused to choose left or right, rather they included elements of the Angel in the House, the New Girl, and the New Woman in their personal lives and their novels. Rather than a crossroad, Victorian women found themselves on a freeway where they were free to choose their own paths.

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