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The literary women of the publishing industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

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Samenvatting (Nederlands):

De doelstelling van deze scriptie beoogt een antwoord te geven op de onderzoeksvraag hoe de sociaaleconomische dynamiek van de achttiende- en negentiende-eeuwse samenleving de participatie en vertegenwoordiging van vrouwen in de uitgeverwereld heeft beïnvloed. De scriptie onderzoekt onderwerpen als auteurschap, historische analyse, pseudoniemen en identiteit, geletterdheid en onderwijs van vrouwen, en feministische kritiek. Er wordt gekeken naar zowel primaire (brieven, toneelstukken, essays en fictie) als secundaire bronnen om een grondig inzicht te krijgen in de uitdagingen en prestaties van vrouwelijke schrijvers gedurende deze periode. De hypothese stelt dat maatschappelijke beperkingen de autonomie en creatieve vrijheid van vrouwen limiteert. De scriptie onthult echter dat vrouwen productieve schrijvers van brieven, manuscripten, en fictie waren, bovendien deelnamen aan academische debatten, en ook vaak eens waren met de dominante culture norm. De groei van de uitgeverijsector heeft vrouwen professionele kansen geboden, hoewel loon over het algemeen laag was en er een stigma heerste rond werkende vrouwen. De scriptie bespreekt ook de evolutie van de genderideologie, de vraagstelling van de deelname van vrouwen aan debatten en onderwijs, en de ervaringen van vrouwen in de literatuur. De scriptie richt zich op de dynamiek van sociale klasse tussen vrouwen en de materiële realiteit. Het zet vraagtekens bij het idee dat vrouwen een geïsoleerde groep binnen de uitgeverijsector zijn. De conclusie roept op tot een uitbreiding van het onderzoek naar andere functies van vrouwen binnen de uitgeverijsector, waaronder redacteuren, en verdere nuances. De scriptie pleit voor de volledige integratie van de perspectieven van vrouwen in de uitgeverijsector in onderwijs en de academische wereld, waarbij hun volledige deelname in alle stadia van de ontwikkeling van de uitgeverijsector wordt erkend.

Abstract (English):

This thesis aims to answer the research question of how the socioeconomic dynamics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society influenced women's participation and representation in the publishing industry. The thesis examines topics such as authorship, historical analysis, pseudonyms and identity, women's literacy and education, and feminist critique. It looks into both primary (letters, theatrical plays, essays, and fiction) and secondary sources to provide a thorough understanding of the challenges and accomplishments of women writers during this time period. The hypothesis posits that societal constraints restrict women's autonomy and creative freedom. However, the thesis reveals that women were prolific writers of letters, manuscripts, and fiction, participated in academic debates, and often agreed with the dominant cultural norm. The publishing industry's growth provided professional opportunities for women, though their pay was generally low and there was stigma around working women. The thesis also discusses the evolution of gender ideology, the question of women's participation in debates and education, and the experiences of women in literature. It examines literary women's experiences, as well as the undervaluation of early women writers. The thesis focuses on the interclass dynamics of women and their material reality. It calls into question the idea that women are an isolated group within the industry. The conclusion calls for more research on women editors and a recontextualization of theories about early female writers. The thesis advocates the full integration of women's perspectives in the publishing industry into education and academia, recognising their full participation at all stages of the publishing industry's development.

Keywords: publishing industry, women writers, socioeconomic dynamics, historical analysis, authorship study, feminist criticism, interclass dynamics, gender, eighteenth century literature, nineteenth century literature, Victorian literature, Victorian culture

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The literary women of the publishing industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Introduction

Early female authors have been the subject of extensive research and theorising for more than a century by feminists and literary historians. However, the prevailing narrative may appear to lack nuance, clarity, and the humanity necessary to acknowledge that women are not and have never been a monolith. This thesis began with the intention of researching women who presented their works under masculine pseudonyms, with George Eliot standing as a notable example. However, as the research progressed beyond the domain of “why did women use pseudonyms,” it encountered the questions “why did women not use pseudonyms” and “who else used pseudonyms,” which shifted the thesis’ focus to the prevailing culture of the Victorian era. This led to the conclusion that nothing about Victorian women writers was straightforward, necessitating an expanded approach. As a result, the thesis’s current form focuses on the early years of the publishing industry, with women involved from the start.

Taking that into consideration, it became necessary for this thesis’ purpose to look into the eighteenth century as well. As a result, this study, which recognises that it only scratches the surface of the subject, joins together topics like misogyny, gender ideology, and class to highlight some of the notable achievements of women in the publishing industry during its formative years. The goal is to ensure that the analysis it provides is sufficient to communicate the complexity of women, the written word, and the publishing industry.

This thesis is a project with the aim of answering the following research question: How did the socioeconomic dynamics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society influence the extent to which women participated and were represented in the publishing industry? The hypothesis for this question was that socioeconomic constraints based on sex and patriarchal norms in these time periods limited women authors' autonomy and creative freedom, despite their prominent participation, resulting in a narrower range of literary expressions and opportunities for innovation in the publishing industry. For this reason, the thesis consults both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are contemporary authors' letters, published essays, and two fictional novels, one of which is in epistolary format. Secondary sources include academic essays and books on historical analyses that specifically focus on the rise of female writers, as well as related topics such as women's literacy and education. Their integration and order of introduction were chosen to match a cohesive, chronological structure.

For the sake of a chronological narrative structure, this thesis contains two chapters that each cover a different century. Within these chapters, subsections focus on the most significant aspects of that century in relation to this topic. Compared to the nineteenth-century chapter, the eighteenth-century chapter focuses more on theory, acting as the thesis's conceptual framework. It establishes a historical background, which the nineteenth-century chapter then expands upon to discuss sociological changes from the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the narrative structure of this thesis necessitates a general background before delving into specific examples, making this chapter more theoretical than the chapter on the nineteenth century, which contains more close readings. Because the cultural changes between these periods are relatively subtle and will primarily focus on solidifying or reframing the dominant cultural structure of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, the methodology and flow of the thesis require a phased approach that comfortably settles into more first-hand experiences from contemporary writers. For these purposes, primary sources are most relevant in the nineteenth-

century section because, as the publishing industry grew, so did the experiences and discourse about women writers. This thesis uses authorship studies, historical analysis, and feminist criticism to answer the research question by examining how socioeconomic dynamics affected women's publishing participation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The theoretical framework of this thesis is outlined below.

First, this thesis examines women writers through the lens of authorship studies. Authorship studies investigate literary authors' identities using theory from *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*. As Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor explain in their introduction, the author as a critical concept has regained relevance following poststructuralist ideas about the author's "death" in literary criticism.¹ The author's return to critical concepts coincides with developments in other studies relevant to this thesis' research question, such as book history, periodical structures, gender studies, and sociology. This thesis centres on contextualism, one of Peter Lamarque's three major conceptions of literary authorship. This concept explicitly links the work to the author, making it crucial for the analysis to identify and investigate the author.² The following sources, categorised into two approaches, explore the transition from amateur to professional female authorship.

The first viewpoint draws on Ros Ballaster's "Introduction" and "Critical Review," as well as Jane Spencer's "Drama" from *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690–1750*. These perspectives contextualise the emergence of early professional women writers, their initial financial success as playwrights, and the reception of their works. The second viewpoint is the professionalisation of women writers over the course of these centuries. *The*

¹ Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, ed. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316717516>.

² Berensmeyer, Buelens, and Demoor, "Introduction," 5.

Professionalisation of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain by Betty A. Schellenberg details how women writers became professionals and the obstacles they faced in achieving recognition and financial independence through writing.

Second, the thesis draws on historical analysis, grounded in historical context and material reality, as well as authorship studies. Key sources for historical analysis include Catherine Ingrassia's "Introduction," Mary Waters' "Periodical Writing," Mark Towsey's "Women as Readers and Writers" from *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, and Cheryl Turner's *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*. Class and gender analysis are crucial aspects of historical analysis to properly address the broader social and economic context, which explains the selection of these sources. Shawn Lisa Maurer, for instance, explores how gender and class influenced the experiences of women writers in her essay "The Periodical" from *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690-1750*, and her book *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-century English Periodical*. She focuses on the ideals of the middle class and the roles of working-class women in periodicals. Deborah Valenze's *The First Industrial Woman* is also insightful on material conditions for women and their relation to paid labour, especially in the case of working-class women. This source discusses industrialization's effects and the masculine role of the breadwinner in women's lives. These analyses are consistent with Turner's research, which examines publishing as an industry as well as the specific career of a professional author from the perspective of women.

This thesis also explores the role of pseudonyms and identity in authorship and historical analysis, highlighting their significance not only in shaping the author's perception but also in providing insights into the social context. The thesis draws on Fionnuala Dillane's article,

“Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s: The Victorian Period*, in which she examines how pseudonyms helped women navigate the publishing industry, balancing anonymity and recognition. It also highlights the various possibilities and obstacles that pseudonyms present. In that same book, Alexis Easley co-edited and co-wrote the introductory essays “Intervening in Political Debates: Introduction” and “Making Space for Women: Introduction” with Clare Gill and Beth Rodgers, providing context for how women carved out spaces for themselves in the publishing industry.

Third, women’s literacy and education significantly influenced and motivated their writing, making these aspects crucial to answering the research question. They explore the impact of literacy and education on women’s writing and literary criticism. Towsey’s “Women as Readers and Writers” and Melanie Bigold’s “Letters and Learning” from *The Cambridge Companion to Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* are relevant to education and literacy. After becoming more literate, women participated in literary criticism. Terry Castle’s essay, “Women and Literary Criticism,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 4, the Eighteenth Century*, discusses women’s early involvement in literary criticism, marking their entry into more scholarly and critical roles in literature.

Finally, the thesis also considers answering the research question through the lens of feminist criticism. For this thesis, feminist criticism looks at how literature and culture perpetuate gender inequality, highlighting the perception of women’s inherent inferiority to men in labour and the belief that women lack the same level of life experience as men, thereby diminishing the value and significance of their observations and perspectives. It examines literary barriers for women because of these biases, specifically in publishing and education. The essays “Women Writers and the Female Experience” by Elaine Showalter and “Radical

Feminism” by Ti-Grace Atkinson, a twentieth-century activist, explore how literature reflects and confronts women’s experiences and identities. Atkinson, for example, examines romance as a genre and its relationship to women’s societal standing. Michèle Barrett’s “Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender” in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change (RLE Feminist Theory)* is another important feminist criticism text for this thesis. Gender ideology refers to biological sex roles. These critically examine gender production in culture and how it affects women writers. These sources critique the literary and social dynamics that influenced women writers; they are feminist. Feminist thought and gender ideologies shaped women’s literary production and reception.

Based on this theoretical framework, this thesis integrates multiple studies to answer the research question. Through close reading and comparative analysis with existing theories from different fields, primary sources provide personal and first-hand accounts, representations, or insight into the challenges and achievements of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This allows for a thorough and complex look at the past without overgeneralization.

To conclude, this interdisciplinary approach of integrating secondary sources from authorship studies (analysing professionalisation and women’s identities in the literary business), historical analysis (taking into account the broader social and economic context of the two centuries, such as class dynamics and changing cultural norms), and feminist criticism (highlighting different societal norms and biases towards people of the female sex) allows for this thesis to connect history with a focus on women and socioeconomic factors, such as industrialization, the shift to the two-sex model, the increasing popularity of Cartesian philosophy and Baconian empirical science, Victorian moral values, and class structures, influenced women’s opportunities and limitations in the publishing industry. This thesis also establishes a connection between these studies, illuminating often-overlooked perspectives,

such as the significant contributions of early women writers to domains beyond the novel, including scientific discourse.

This approach systematically examines women's economic tactics and social dynamics, with a focus on the unique challenges faced by employed women, such as in the case of Charlotte O'Connor Eccles.

This thesis also investigates the author's role in censorship, specifically based on sex, its practical implementation, and the strategies employed by women to overcome it. This thesis also includes reception studies, which combine historical analysis with the study of literary criticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, because this thesis spans two centuries, it is a longitudinal study that not only examines historical events but also their changes over time, capturing the growth of women writers alongside the publishing industry, their waves of visibility and influence, and the subsequent waves of criticism for it. This approach highlights that the perceived outlook on women and their writing was not linear, not tied to any one specific coinciding societal change, and was different for every woman, depending, for example, on social class.

This thesis has two chapters on different centuries. Each chapter contains subsections on the century's most notable events. The first chapter will focus on the eighteenth century. It will discuss the reality of women at this time, as well as society's expectations based on their biological sex and social class. It will examine women critics, scholars, and letter and manuscript writers. The thesis examines why women entered professional writing and their other career options during this century. After addressing developments in the late eighteenth century, the thesis examines the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth-century chapter will also examine Victorian gender norms. It lays the groundwork for the following chapters, which will discuss the requirements for female authors and the pressure on women to be men's ethically moral and virtuous guides. First, the thesis considers women's material realities, literary women's responsibilities, women's limitations, and the supposed existence of a 'feminine' writing style. This century will also revisit female education in comparison to previous centuries and understand women's status. The thesis will then illustrate how women have managed to evade criticism for their writing and opinions. Pseudonyms, while beneficial for women, also caused significant drawbacks for female emancipation efforts. The thesis will briefly revisit the nineteenth-century female editor and her work. Before concluding, the thesis will briefly examine the twentieth century.

As previously mentioned, this thesis developed from a focus on a specific group of women writers in the Victorian era to a broad overview of two centuries, while acknowledging that neither a thesis nor a book could fully encompass the nuanced relationship between women and the publishing industry. Nonetheless, the ambitious goal of this thesis is to serve as a comprehensive introduction to the subject, stirring readers' interest in examining more thoroughly the gaps left by this thesis, as well as encouraging additional research into female participation in one of the most influential industries of the modern age.

The eighteenth century

Our Female Author, tho' she sees what Fate
Does the Event of Such Attempts still wait;
With a true *British*-Courage venters on,
Thinks nothing Honour, without Danger won.³

The cited excerpt originates from the opening verses of a play written by Susanna Centlivre at the beginning of the eighteenth century, *The Beau's Duel: Or, a Soldier for the Ladies*. Centlivre started writing at a young age, as Giles Jacob writes in his account of English poets in 1719.⁴ Centlivre lost her father at a young age and enjoyed education in the countryside, where she “was inclin'd to Poetry when very Young, having compos'd a Song before she was Seven Years old.”⁵ She would grow into a commendable and prolific writer, with fifteen plays to her name.⁶ According to Jacob, she had a talent for comedy, especially “in the Contrivance of the Plots and Incidents; the Conduct and Beauty of which, are sufficiently recommended by

³ Susanna Centlivre, *The Beau's Duel: Or, a Soldier for the Ladies.: A Comedy, as Acted at the New Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, by His Majesty's Servants. By Mrs. Cent-Livre*, 2nd ed. (London: printed for W. Mears at the Lamb, and J. Brown at the Black-Swan, both without Temple-Bar; and T. Woodward near the Inner-Temple Gate, Fleet-street, 1715), 9, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0110567064/ECCO?u=radboud&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=5a207703>.

⁴ Giles Jacob, “Mrs. Susanna Cent Livre,” in *The Poetical Register: Or, the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets. With an Account of Their Writings*, vol. 1 (London: printed for E. Curll, in Fleetstreet, 1719), 32, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0113870729/ECCO?u=radboud&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=d273ad5e>.

⁵ Jacob, “Mrs. Susanna Cent Livre,” 32.

⁶ Jacob, “Mrs. Susanna Cent Livre,” 32.

Sir *Richard Steele*, in one of the *Spectator's*.⁷ In his concise description of her life, he notes that despite the loss of both her parents at a young age and the absence of a formal education, her development in terms of capability and expertise has “been meerly by her own Industry and Application.”⁸

This opening to the chapter on the eighteenth century will offer a brief introduction of the publishing industry during this era, including the involvement of women and the controversies surrounding their presence in the industry. Indeed, while Jacob's words reflected respect for Centlivre's expertise, her audience did not unanimously agree. In *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, Catherine Ingrassia makes note of Centlivre's observations of her audience in her 1707 publication, *In the Dedication to The Platonick Lady*. Centlivre writes that her audience's opinion of her plays shifts once they discover they were written by a woman, based solely on “the Esteem they have for the Author”.⁹ Ingrassia elaborates on this in her introduction to the book, stating that a negative attitude towards women writers was partially based on them infringing on men's rights, or, as Centlivre puts it, “because they meddle with things out of their Sphere.”¹⁰

However, the opportunity for women to participate in this field was appealing. The opportunity to earn money from writing outside of patronage effectively eliminated the need for familiarity with the wealthiest individuals or even the judiciary, thereby enabling middle-class women to publish their work.¹¹ The advantages did not stop there, either. For instance,

⁷ Jacob, “Mrs. Susanna Cent Livre,” 32.

⁸ Jacob, “Mrs. Susanna Cent Livre,” 32.

⁹ Catherine Ingrassia, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

¹⁰ Ingrassia, “Introduction,” 5.

¹¹ Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (1992; repr., Routledge, 1994), 87.

according to Ingrassia, women saw the chance to make money by writing, and some authors used their work to create enough income to guarantee more steady employment later.¹² Cheryl Turner writes in *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* that writing, as forms of financial support aside from patronage increased in the period, was fundamental for the increase of works by professional (that is, on the basis of earning money through their work) authors.¹³ The rise of the audience during this period encouraged the growth of every genre in the industry. Literacy increased, and with it, one's finances became the only limiting factor in accessing the written word.¹⁴

The increase of printers and in publishing was partially caused by a change in legislation. In her essay "Scribal and Print Publication," Kathryn King states that after the Licencing Act expired in 1695, which led to the end of pre-publication censorship and the removal of bans on books considered inappropriate, there was a notable rise in the number of printers and printing presses in London and other parts of England.¹⁵ Mary Waters also took note of this in her work "Periodical Writing", wherein she writes that once the Licencing Act expired, limitations relaxed and the number of printers expanded rapidly, making way for a platform for political contentiousness but also competition in the industry.¹⁶ The rise in competition resulted in a reduction in printing expenses, making it more affordable for people

¹² Ingrassia, "Introduction," 7.

¹³ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 87.

¹⁴ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 87.

¹⁵ Kathryn King, "Scribal and Print Publication," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690 - 1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster, vol. 4 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 135.

¹⁶ Mary Waters, "Periodical Writing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 226.

with limited financial resources, particularly women, to access and acquire periodicals compared to books.¹⁷

More printers also resulted in an unprecedented increase in job opportunities within the book industry.¹⁸ In addition, this broadened the definition of feminine labour, as women now participate in a variety of professions, including printing, publishing, book retailing, bookbinding, and paper manufacturing, which have historically had a higher proportion of female employees.¹⁹ Paid authorship became a popular way for women to make money during the Restoration period, especially after successes from the likes of Aphra Behn in the 1690s onwards.²⁰ The expansion of the publishing industry provided women with means where they could earn wages, enabling them to attain a certain level of independence.²¹ The publishing industry allowed them to pursue self-fulfilment by expressing their thoughts and engaging with the public sphere through written text.²² Furthermore, the publishing industry provided women with increased opportunities to explore various literary techniques, which encouraged the exploration of innovative forms, styles, and genres.²³

It is a recurring critique that the eighteenth-century female writer is not addressed with sufficient nuance, as female authorship is interconnected with a multitude of social factors, including the rise of the publishing industry, education, class, and gender ideology.. In *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Betty A. Schellenberg

¹⁷ Waters, "Periodical Writing," 226.

¹⁸ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 135.

¹⁹ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 135–36.

²⁰ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 136.

²¹ Ingrassia, "Introduction," 8.

²² Ingrassia, "Introduction," 8.

²³ Ingrassia, "Introduction," 8.

first commends late twentieth century feminists for the recovery of female writings in the centuries before but cautions against the generalisation of these sources. She writes that the women at the time ironically reinforced assumptions about women in the eighteenth century, all but entirely erasing the woman's agency in favour of highlighting her oppression.²⁴

The chapter on the eighteenth century will divide this chapter into sub-chapters that explore several aspects of the conversation. The upcoming sub-chapter will examine the experiences of female authors, as well as the experiences of women involved in literature more broadly. The subsequent sections will examine the increase in female literacy, the disapproving attitudes towards women's involvement in traditionally male domains, such as criticism, the effects of the expiration of the Licencing Act in 1695, the emergence of women earning income through their literary works, and the impact of social class on women's decisions regarding print or manuscript publication. This chapter will also discuss women's letter writing, women's intellectual heritage, the wide variety of fields in which women were involved, and the growth in output of novels by women writers throughout the century, before moving on to the nineteenth century. As such, this thesis will first examine the distinctions in women's expected societal roles during the eighteenth century, specifically focusing on the variations among women from different social classes.

Women: biological sex and social class

²⁴ Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2005; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2008), 14-15.

This sub-chapter will examine the cultural dimension of biological sex, focusing on its changing perception during the eighteenth century. It will also look at the growing division between the sexes and the didactic role middle-class women played in promoting this process.

It is essential to first understand different viewpoints on the biological differences between men and women, as they form the foundation of social gender-based division. In the introduction to *The History of British Women's Writings*, the fourth volume about the years 1690-1750, Ros Ballaster refers to Thomas Laqueur's argument that the eighteenth century was a period when the mode of how people thought about the sex binary was shifting. He argued that the two-sex model replaced the one-sex model, which viewed the female body as inferior to the male body on a hierarchical scale.²⁵ The two-sex model holds that the female and male bodies are distinct and opposite.²⁶ Ballaster explains that the shift in the model, as perceived by political historians and literary critics, coincided with the societal divisions between knowledge and identity, the separation between the public and private spheres, and the distinction between home and work.²⁷ This also influenced how people started looking into the different political parties instead of concerning themselves with the divide between the monarchy and the state.²⁸

The dynamic between the classes changed significantly in the eighteenth century, which coincided with the development of expectations of women's behaviour. Before assessing women's perceptions in professional environments such as the publishing industry and paid authorship, it is necessary to first assess the status of women in the workforce as a whole to gain a better understanding of the relationship between women and labour in general. Turner

²⁵ Ros Ballaster, "Introduction," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690 - 1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster, vol.4 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

²⁶ Ballaster, "Introduction," 4.

²⁷ Ballaster, "Introduction," 4.

²⁸ Ballaster, "Introduction," 4.

explains that women from the middle class played a significant role in the early phases of the industrial revolution. However, this would change during the eighteenth century.²⁹ Ballaster emphasises that it is during this historical period that this new idea of ‘gender’ first took definitive shape. She says that gender is a concept that was created during this time in England to stand for the mutually exclusive qualities of ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood,’ but that ‘gender’ is only noticeable when the thing that distinguishes someone, namely being female, is present.³⁰ Some of the origins of this way of thinking about sex and gender can be traced back to the English Civil War. The enduring fear of another war had a lasting impact on people’s minds, leading to a cultural change. People prioritized commerce over the military, civility over competition, and domesticity over national pride.³¹

‘Gendered’ perceptions encompassed more than just the two sexes. The context of gendered perceptions was broader, particularly in writing, which included topics such as commerce. Writing about foreign countries and extravagance was thought to be derogatory and associated with femininity. Writing about foreign countries and extravagance was considered derogatory and associated with femininity.³² Positive perceptions of consumerist femininity, which associate commerce with economy and moderation, counter negative perceptions. People are viewing trade in a more ethical manner. Socialising, trading, and producing are gaining popularity. While conservatives like Pope saw the feminization of commerce as a sign of social decline, Republican Whigs like Joseph Addison, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and later Daniel Defoe saw it as a sign of civilisation and civility.³³

²⁹ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 41–42.

³⁰ Ballaster, “Introduction,” 5.

³¹ Ballaster, “Introduction,” 5.

³² Ballaster, “Introduction,” 10.

³³ Ballaster, “Introduction,” 11.

In her book *The First Industrial Woman*, Deborah Valenze argues that women's employment in traditionally feminine professions contributed to sex-based social segregation.³⁴ Labour considered 'women's work' included reaping, spinning and miscellaneous tasks such as the farmer's wife processing dairy,³⁵ but also "brewing, weaving, baking, and candle making"³⁶, most of which were overhauled by industrialisation. Valenze asserts that the industrialisation of the eighteenth century, widely acknowledged and considered beneficial to the nation's economic prosperity, initially appreciated women for their contributions.³⁷ However, during the period of industrialisation, women had less opportunity to start their own businesses due to rising costs.³⁸ In addition, the perception of work within society also shifted, resulting in a growing separation between economic and domestic labour.³⁹ Shawn Lisa Maurer, in her essay "The Periodical", highlights the challenges faced by women in the face of the growing gender ideology, which was more complex than commonly portrayed in narratives of that time. First, she acknowledges that scholars primarily on the upward mobility of bourgeois women to the status of the ideal embodiment of femininity, representing the epitome of domesticity. These women were characterised as apolitical, primarily concerned with reproduction, and embodying traditional femininity. Bourgeoisie men, on the other hand, were characterized as productive, politically engaged, and, consequently, masculine. This, in turn, further defines the separate spheres occupied by different sexes.⁴⁰ However, the fact that the

³⁴ Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

³⁵ Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 3.

³⁶ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 42.

³⁷ Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 3.

³⁸ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 42.

³⁹ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 42.

⁴⁰ Shawn Lisa Maurer, "The Periodical," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690 - 1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster, vol. 4 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 158.

woman from the middle class were so prominent in this discussion was a clear indication of her extensive involvement in both the industry and the profession. Journals frequently highlighted noticeable differences between men and women, often explicitly acknowledging them separately, but in reality, their lives were more interconnected than their representations suggested.⁴¹ The paradox is that these women were participating in activities that are typically believed to be under men's sole authority while promoting the opposite.

This shift in ideology had an effect on the material reality of working women, particularly on middle-class women. Valenze writes that middle-class women frequently urged other women into the lifestyle that was considered to be the most desirable in society.⁴² She shows how things changed in the Victorian era in the century that followed, when people frequently disparaged factory women and painted them as people who spoke crudely, engaged in frivolous activities, and had a loose ethical standards.⁴³ Their labour was no longer acknowledged or valued, and women in other professions were sparsely mentioned unless there were calls to limit their involvement in the workforce.⁴⁴ In contrast, the majority of women could expect to marry or partner with a man and become mothers. They authored didactic or religious books for lower-class women, portraying the middle-class woman as morally superior, with the sole purpose of her employment being philanthropic.⁴⁵ They wrote didactic or religious books for lower-class women in which middle-class women were portrayed as morally superior and, if engaged in employment, her labour as solely intended for philanthropic purposes.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Maurer, "The Periodical," 158.

⁴² Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 11–12.

⁴³ Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 3.

⁴⁴ Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 3.

⁴⁵ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 66.

⁴⁶ Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 11–12.

Although these writings expressed an adverse opinion of lower class women, they were also notable for the didactic writing style. It should be noted that this style of writing for women seemingly emerged at the same time as the increase in organised philanthropy by women.⁴⁷ This further shows that the concept of the ‘woman writer’ cannot be fully understood from a single disciplinary perspective.⁴⁸

Shawn Lisa Maurer also authored a book of her own, focusing on the perspective of men. In *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-century English Periodical*, published in 1998, Maurer had already emphasised that gender ideology is primarily a creation of the bourgeoisie and heavily influenced by social class. She asserts that the socioeconomic context of the wealthy middle class, where the man could be the sole provider, facilitated the lifestyle of marrying a submissive, sexually chaste, and unproductive wife. This was also the only morally meaningful approach he might use to demonstrate his masculinity.⁴⁹ The upper classes were not directly interested in this gender ideology that divided the roles of men and women, as neither men nor women in the aristocracy were required to work for a living. However, the working class, regardless of sex, was required to actively participate in labour to afford their basic needs.⁵⁰ The emergence of periodicals, which criticised the aristocratic way of life while praising the virtues of the middle class, played a role in promoting social mobility for traders and reinforcing the distinctions between men and women.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 13.

⁴⁸ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 13.

⁴⁹ Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-century English Periodical*, 1998, 7.

⁵⁰ Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical*, 7.

⁵¹ Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical*, 7–8.

The lower-class women, as well as some less affluent middle-class women (who predominantly served as domestic servants to upper-class women), regarded this new influential form of middle-class womanhood as the modern standard for appropriate behaviour. The middle-class woman held a position below the upper-class woman in terms of social standing, but she was gradually becoming the ideal role model for lower-class women to strive for.⁵² Both male and female authors portrayed the middle-class woman as a role model and featured her in cautionary tales or unambiguous instructive texts, while they viewed lower-class women as “lost” or morally corrupt.⁵³ Although the working class endured prejudice from the middle class despite their need to work, it is worth noting that many women from the upper class did not prioritise writing as a significant endeavour. In *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689–1762)*, Lewis Melville described the aristocrat Lady Mary Wortley Montague as a learned woman of high class who, in contrast to other young ladies of rank, “loved to exercise her pen.”⁵⁴ In spite of her generally recognised beauty, Lady Mary was not particularly well-liked and viewed as “strange,”⁵⁵ according to Lewis Melville. He would suggest “that her good looks brought young men to her feet, and that her tongue drove them away.”⁵⁶ He observes that there has never been a time when a woman who is intelligent, learned, and witty has been popular.⁵⁷

Although few written works from lower-class women have survived, with the notable exception of ‘labouring poets’ such as Mary Collier and with gentry not yet being accustomed

⁵² Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 11–12.

⁵³ Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*, 146–47.

⁵⁴ Lewis Melville and Mary Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, eBook (The Project Gutenberg, 2004), chap. I, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10590/pg10590-images.html>.

⁵⁵ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. II.

⁵⁶ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. II.

⁵⁷ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. II.

to publishing for the general public, women in general produced more than just didactic literature. To the dismay of numerous male peers, the eighteenth-century woman was in fact just beginning her intellectual journey. As women gained access to an expanded range of literature, they naturally had more to say about it.

This subsection examined the transition from the one-sex model, which did not fully recognise women as independent individuals, to the two-sex model, which acknowledges women as a distinct sex separate from men. After the English Civil War, there was a notable rise in the prominence of activities such as commerce and discussions about foreign countries, which had previously been viewed negatively as feminine. Initially, working class women were valued for their occupations that were traditionally associated with femininity during the industrialization period. However, they gradually faced criticism and disapproval due to the bourgeois lifestyle's rising popularity.

The learned woman: reader and critic

While women's opportunities increased, so did the scrutiny of their behaviour. This subchapter will look deeper into Centlivre's thoughts on the criticism of women and their involvement in sectors beyond conventionally female roles. It will also provide the reader with examples of how women navigated these male-dominated domains, their resistance to critique, and their contributions to the preservation of written records.

It begins with increased awareness and ability among women. Elizabeth Mure, a woman who lived from 1700 to 1790, had witnessed the difference in women and their access to

education in her life, so writes Mark Towsey in “Women as Readers and Writers”.⁵⁸ Mure observed the limited access women had to knowledge, as they had few books available to them and even fewer that they were able to read.⁵⁹ According to her, a woman who had only read the works of Pope, Addison, and Swift, along with a limited knowledge of history, would have been considered a learned woman.⁶⁰ Ironically, as noted by Terry Castle in “Women and Literary Criticism,” Jonathan Swift was dissatisfied with women’s condition and their role in the transformation of traditional aesthetic values, attributing their decline to feminisation.⁶¹ In his 1704 work “The Battle of the Books,” he authored a passage describing the nastiness of the female critic as a malignant and grotesque goddess:

She dwelt on the Top of a snowy Mountain in Nova Zembla; there Momus found her extended in her Den, upon the Spoils of numberless Volumes half devoured. At her right Hand sat Ignorance, her Father and Husband, blind with Age; at her left, Pride her Mother, dressing her up in the Scraps of Paper herself had torn. There was Opinion her Sister, light of Foot, hoodwinkt, and headstrong, yet giddy and perpetually turning. About her play’d her Children, Noise and Impudence, Dullness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-Manners. The Goddess herself had Claws like a Cat; Her

⁵⁸ Mark Towsey, “Women as Readers and Writers,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21.

⁵⁹ Towsey, “Women as Readers and Writers,” 21.

⁶⁰ Towsey, “Women as Readers and Writers,” 21.

⁶¹ Terry Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 4, the Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, vol. 4 (1997; repr., Cambridge University Press, 2005), 437.

Head, and Ears, and Voice, resembled those of an -Ass; Her Teeth fallen out before; Her Eyes turned inward; as if she lookt only upon herself;⁶²

Swift expresses his dissatisfaction with female critics, citing two main concerns. First, he accuses them of not thoroughly reading the volumes they critique, describing their engagement as incomplete (“Volumes half devoured”).⁶³ Second, he argues that female criticism arises from moral corruption and is rooted in both “Ignorance” and “Pride”.⁶⁴ The incestuous male figure symbolically represents ignorance, while the mother figure symbolizes pride, a feminine trait. She is sister to “Opinion,”⁶⁵ who is assertive and seemingly giddy, which may appear as a positive trait, but in truth, so he writes, does not ever settle down. Female criticism, he writes, breeds “Noise and Impudence, Dullness and Vanity, Positiveness, Pedantry, and Ill-Manners.”⁶⁶ The female critic both results from these qualities and nurtures them herself. Additionally, the author symbolically portrays the female critic as a deformed creature who is self-centred.

These descriptors are severe, but their presence is not unexpected given the significant discourse surrounding female criticism. The central topic of discussion revolved around the question of whether women possessed the authority to critique (male) literature at all.⁶⁷ Jonathan Swift viewed women as “the ill-judging Sex,” incapable of recognizing quality, and

⁶² Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 437.

⁶³ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 437.

⁶⁴ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 437.

⁶⁵ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 437.

⁶⁶ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 437.

⁶⁷ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 434.

instead preferred “Noise.”⁶⁸ Castle writes that a significant portion of the complaints stemmed from jealousy on the part of the male writers, who perceived the female as being overly ambitious without the authority of belonging to the male sex to support it.⁶⁹ Naturally, women were aware of the protests made by men. Women were actively participating in the deliberate critique of the prevalent male bias in literature.⁷⁰ Several women responded to criticism by publishing their critiques of men, highlighting their condescending tone, their tendency to publish anything regardless of its quality or talent, and their celebration of mediocrity, while marginalizing female genius.⁷¹ For example, in a verse letter (a popular form in small, exclusive literary coteries), Jane Brereton enjoyed sharing her “dullness” with a few close friends, snidely remarking that male writers often share such work with a large audience.⁷²

Naturally, this did not mean that women were entirely in favour of giving up on their duties as women, whether out of a caution to placate men or out of true conviction, but women did argue for there to be a greater nuance in the discussion. For example, Martha Bartlate writes to her niece, Harriet Seamore, with a tone that may suggest she aims to moderate her young mind a bit. Bartlate writes in a letter published in 1780 that she “acknowledge[s] that reading, and the improvement of our minds, demand our *first* and *greatest* care.”⁷³ However, she continues, this would not be sufficient to replace “the numerous *useful* employments of a

⁶⁸ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 434.

⁶⁹ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 437.

⁷⁰ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 451.

⁷¹ Castle, “Women and Literary Criticism,” 451-52.

⁷² King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 131.

⁷³ Martha Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” in *Dialogues and Letters on Morality, Oeconomy, and Politeness, for the Improvement and Entertainment of Young Female Minds. By the Author of Dialogues on the First Principles of Religion*, vol. 1 (London: rinted and sold by John Marshall, and Co. No. 4, Aldermay Church Yard, Bow Lane, 1780), 112, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0115848092/ECCO?u=radboud&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=72fa95ab>.

woman in the domestic line.”⁷⁴ To Bartlate, reading and the overall improvement of the mind, is a matter of leisure or refinement that is “to little purpose” if it had not taught Seamore “to submit with *pleasure* to those less entertaining, but *absolutely necessary* employments” to the most crucial duties of her and her niece’s “sex and station.”⁷⁵ In addition to urging her niece to continue with her duties, Bartlate observes that they appear to be accustomed to “many hours” of “mixed society,” which are incompatible with reading for leisure because this is typically a private activity.

Of course, Bartlate attests that it is “shameful to waste [these hours] in idleness,” which calls for a more “useful” occupation that “in no ways interrupt conversation.”⁷⁶ She concludes strongly with: “[W]e should be thankful that out business and amusement may thus be pursued together.”⁷⁷ The reader may conclude that it was proper, and even the woman’s “business”,⁷⁸ to focus on “all kinds of housewifery”, such as needlework.⁷⁹ People viewed reading and learning as a form of relaxation or sophistication, secondary to a woman’s duty. As such, reading is an overall positive way to spend time and cultivate character, as long as it does not obstruct the woman’s primary occupations, suggesting a nuance to the discussion, perhaps to appease society that reading would not make women abandon their primary duties but only add to their value.

Indeed, language held a certain significance to the eighteenth-century woman, and for some, it was even a field of resistance. After all, Melanie Bigold asserts in her essay “Letters

⁷⁴ Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” 112.

⁷⁵ Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” 112.

⁷⁶ Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” 112.

⁷⁷ Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” 112.

⁷⁸ Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” 112.

⁷⁹ Bartlate, “Letter XVII.: Mrs. Bartlate to Miss Seamore,” 112.

and Learning” that women’s particular focus on language largely facilitated their increasing ability to participate in society and research. Given that there have been debates about women’s ability to study languages, Bigold specifically cites John Milton’s statement “one tongue is enough for a woman” as an instigator of female pushback. Regardless of social pushback or lack of recognition, women actively pursued the expansion of their knowledge in classical languages, contributed to the development of shorthand, and reintroduced the Anglo-Saxon language.⁸⁰ Bigold also acknowledged the challenges faced by educated women and highlighted the significant impact of women’s writing on the advancement of culture and society, extending beyond the innovative nature of printed materials. They were not only involved in the printing process, but also had a crucial influence on both private and public discussions that shaped ideas and were vital to the progress of the publishing industry due to their expertise in writing, language, and discourse as authors before authorship became a paid profession.⁸¹ Bigold’s essay underlines these women’s remarkable achievements in spite of their lack of formal recognition.⁸² However, the evaluation of the accomplishments and experiences of women writers, as well as learned women in general, solely through the lens of published works would be unlikely to provide a comprehensive and accurate representation.⁸³

However, the resistance to women’s increasing visibility was not unanimous and extended beyond the realm of writing. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there was a growing recognition and encouragement of educated women. This process is

⁸⁰ Melanie Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1690 - 1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster, vol. 4 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 177.

⁸¹ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 173.

⁸² Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 173.

⁸³ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 174.

sometimes facilitated by supportive male mentors or family members. In 1717, Giles Jacob wrote an essay about women and their vices:

If the Women had the same Education, and Opportunity of Conversation, as the Men, there is no Question to be made, but they would many of them be upon an Equality with the Men, in Sense and Management; and we have many Instances in our Female Authors of their bright Genius's[.]⁸⁴

While the passage appears to be hesitant in acknowledging women's abilities, it is undeniably sympathetic towards them. It suggests that women would benefit from better education, as it would reduce their inherent flaws, and that women indeed have thus far shown great ability in writing.

In their critique of literature, the role of women and education was significant. There was a rise in women's interest in becoming educated and knowledgeable members of society. A letter that Lady Mary wrote to Bishop Burnet in 1710 describes her drive to pursue interests that are not associated with the female sex. Under a "pardon for this digression,"⁸⁵ she advocates for women's right to education. She denounces that her aristocratic class forgives silliness

⁸⁴ Giles Jacob, "ESSAY. IX: Of WOMEN, and Their VICIES, With Instructions for Their Behaviour in General," in *Essays, Relating to the Conduct of Life: Upon the Following Subjects. Viz. On Self Government in General. Choice of a Wife. Choice of a Husband. Circumstances of Husband and Wife. Education of Children. The Station of Life Eligible. The Friend and Pretended Friend. The Honest Man. Women and Their Vices, with Instructions for Their Behaviour. Beauty, and Beauties of the Mind. Single Life and Matrimony. Fortune and Chance. Prosperity and Adversity. Hope and Fear. Courage and Cowardise. Passion, and Its Consequences. Slander, and Its Chief Causes. Thought. Flattery, and Its Designs. Gentility. Virtue. The Man Truly Great* (London: printed, for E. Curll at the Dial and Bible against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleetstreet, 1717), 36, <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=ECCO&u=radboud&id=GALE|CB0128672435&v=2.1&it=r&sid=bookmark-ECCO>.

⁸⁵ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. I.

before reading or reasoning. Despite the fact that Lady Mary acknowledges the existence of a woman's "natural defects,"⁸⁶ she is opposed to the manner in which these defects are accepted and the way in which "it is looked upon as in a degree criminal to improve our reason, or fancy we have any."⁸⁷ Lady Mary consistently highlights in her writings that society teaches women to prioritise their outward appearance to the extent of extravagance, often neglecting their minds. In this particular letter, Lady Mary is forthright in her description of how deviating from this cultural standard feels like violating the law. She concludes the letter by stating that she does not advocate for gender equality. She asserts that women should obey and submit to men, and any woman who denies this is rebelling against the laws of the Creator and the natural order.⁸⁸ However, she does advocate for a reduction in the extravagance of traditional female roles and calls for greater encouragement for women to pursue better education.⁸⁹

According to Melanie Bigold in her essay "Letters and Learning," the presence of educated males played a vital role in facilitating the inclusion of women in the intellectual sphere and the Republic of Letters,⁹⁰ an intellectual community that existed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, although certain women who had gained distinction based on their abilities or social status also supported their educated female acquaintances.⁹¹ Even so, women played a significant part in preserving and acquiring knowledge in philosophy and science. Ballaster asserts in her "Introduction" that the majority of written works created by individuals of both genders during this era, regardless of whether

⁸⁶ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. I.

⁸⁷ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. I.

⁸⁸ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. I.

⁸⁹ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. I.

⁹⁰ Bigold, "Letters and Learning," 175.

⁹¹ Bigold, "Letters and Learning," 176.

they were handwritten or printed, predominantly revolve around religious or spiritual themes.⁹² This included a wide variety of written works, such as published prophetic texts, personal diaries, spiritual autobiographies, and memoirs.⁹³ The Quaker movement, with its emphasis on the preservation of written records, had a deliberate strategy for conserving manuscripts and prints, with women playing a significant part of maintaining authority in this context.⁹⁴ Women were expected to record their acts of devotion and prayers as part of their daily routines.⁹⁵ Furthermore, these women could contend that a great masculine force, specifically God, had authorised their public discourse.⁹⁶ As Turner explains, women writers would navigate the boundaries of femininity in order to gain approval, rather than directly challenging it. Not only do they claim to be agents of God,⁹⁷ like the Quakers, but they also actively promote femininity through didactic works, as discussed before in the thesis.⁹⁸ Although this resulted in women receiving more public support, it also restricted their ability to explore new potential or challenge their economic and social status.⁹⁹

While this suggests a constructive partnership between men and women, it underscores the persistent problem of female accomplishments receiving recognition only upon initial approval from a recognized man. Posthumous recognition of women appears to have followed this pattern, leading to the forgetting of many accomplished women over time.¹⁰⁰ Men had the

⁹² Ballaster, "Introduction," 7.

⁹³ Ballaster, "Introduction," 7.

⁹⁴ Ballaster, "Introduction," 7.

⁹⁵ Ballaster, "Introduction," 7.

⁹⁶ Ballaster, "Introduction," 7.

⁹⁷ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 22.

⁹⁸ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 22.

⁹⁹ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ Castle, "Women and Literary Criticism," 455.

authority to determine excellence and ensure remembrance, almost exclusively to the detriment of women. Despite the support women received, most settings largely excluded them from exchanging enlightened ideas.¹⁰¹ To counter this argument, Castle notes that women promote each other's literary works. For example, Lady Mary Wortley Montague often referred to obscure writers, including women, and even though it was evident that Lady Mary did not approve of Lady Vane's ostentatious lifestyle, she wrote positively about her novel *Memoirs*, stating that "[h]er style is clear and concise." Regarding the novels *The Art of Tormenting*, *the Female Quixote*, and *Sir C. Goodville* by Sally Fielding, she wrote: "I suppose they proceed from her pen, and heartily pity her, constrained by her circumstances to seek her bread by a method, I do not doubt, she despises."¹⁰² The thesis previously stated that women would publish their writings to earn money, either to pursue their desired profession or because they had no other options. However, as the praise for letter writers like Madame de Sévigné "bordered on hero-worship,"¹⁰³ it elevated many female critics to a level of admiration that approached cult-like status.

This chapter discussed the prevailing condition of education and literacy, specifically pertaining to women. Elizabeth Mure, having experienced the majority of the century, could confirm the rise in female literacy, enabling them to acquire knowledge directly rather than depending on men to educate them. Women made significant contributions to scientific and linguistic discussions, and evaluating their contributions based solely on their published material would be insufficient to understand their impact. Women, like those involved in the Quaker movement, played a significant role in safeguarding written records. Male family members or mentors were the primary sources of encouragement for women, and therefore,

¹⁰¹ Bigold, "Letters and Learning," 176.

¹⁰² Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. XIV.

¹⁰³ Castle, "Women and Literary Criticism," 452.

their acceptance required their approval. Women certainly uplifted one another, too. Female critics, including letter writer Madame de Sévigné, received a level of respect that resembled hero worship.

Letters and manuscripts

The existence of such respect for letter writers highlights the inclusion of women's writing beyond the realm of fiction. This sub-chapter expands on the previous discussion, initially focusing on letter writing, before delving into another type of women's writing, the manuscript, which, although not intended for publication, holds significant connections with the industry, particularly in relation to social class.

However, before examining the progress of female writers and the evolution of authorship, it is essential to acknowledge the significance of letter writing. The Republic of Letters' primary method of communication was through letters. The fact that individuals who considered themselves to be "Men of Letters" would identify as intellectuals solely based on their interest in literature was in no small part due to the flimsy definition of the title, which allowed women to participate despite facing significant challenges as the female sex.¹⁰⁴ Despite the fact that the Republic of Letters acknowledged the term "Women of Letters" alongside the term "Men of Letters," the meaning of the term was never firmly established. This meant that the term could refer to any woman who had an interest in literary culture, as well as women who contributed to journals on a regular basis or were otherwise public about their

¹⁰⁴Bigold, "Letters and Learning," 176.

authorship.¹⁰⁵ It is not surprising, according to Bigold, that “Women of Letters” were frequently dismissed as meaningless scribblers who had nothing of value to give to society, and that women did not make any substantial contributions to the development of professional and paid authorship. Bigold argues that research in manuscripts, periodicals, and now epistolary exchanges frequently reveals how the narrative has obscured the reality of the period.¹⁰⁶

Contemporary analysis, in fact, considers the dichotomy between print, characterised as dynamic and progressive, and manuscript, characterised as exclusive and sentimental, to be overly simplistic.¹⁰⁷ For example, according to Margaret J. M. Ezell in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, during the rise of print publication, the general consensus was that it was demeaning and immodest.¹⁰⁸ Naturally, this would impact someone’s choice to publish in print or not. As such, manuscript culture remained significant, and women played a significant role in its continued development.¹⁰⁹ It is now recognised that manuscript and print cultures existed together and influenced each other in complex ways. This allowed women from different social backgrounds and regions to have numerous opportunities to publish their works.¹¹⁰ However, studies show that proficient female writers would express themselves creatively in letter writing as well, imitating Madame de Sévigné’s writing style, which became a defining feature of epistolary writing during that century.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 174.

¹⁰⁶ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 174–75.

¹⁰⁷ King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 130.

¹⁰⁸ Margaret J. M. Ezell, “Manuscript and Print Cultures 1500–1700,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, ed. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 119, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316717516>.

¹⁰⁹ King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 130.

¹¹⁰ King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 130.

¹¹¹ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 175.

As a result, people recognised female authors for their proficiency and expertise in letter writing. This not only demonstrates their creative abilities but also strengthens the intellectual arguments they engage in, often focusing on issues traditionally associated with masculinity.¹¹² Women actively participated and showed a keen interest in contemporary discussions, such as those surrounding Enlightenment theories and the Cartesian duality.¹¹³ Cartesian dualism posited that biological sex did not influence cognitive abilities, implying that men and women possessed equal intellectual capacities. As a result, women were actively debating the concept of sex equality through written correspondence. Scholars have generally highlighted the significance of letters from before the eighteenth century; however, prior standards did not view them as the dominant culture of power in any society.¹¹⁴

Just like the letters at the time, not all written works from the eighteenth century were published, Maurer wrote in her introduction to *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690-1750*, and many important writings from that time were not preserved for historians to study today. Various manuscripts have been collected from that period, also from women who claimed not to seek fame or have been motivated to print anything, such as Lady Mary, who wrote to her daughter, Lady Bute in 1753: “[U]pon my word, I had never printed a single line in my life”.^{115,116} Others, in contrast, would submit poems collected through coteries under the guise of classical-sounding pseudonyms.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 175.

¹¹³ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 175.

¹¹⁴ Bigold, “Letters and Learning,” 174.

¹¹⁵ Ballaster, “Introduction,” 6.

¹¹⁶ Melville and Wortley Montagu, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Her Life and Letters (1689-1762)*, chap. XV

¹¹⁷ Ballaster, “Introduction,” 7.

At the same time, although women belonging to the upper classes would reluctantly turn to the publishing industry to reach a larger audience, women from the middle class were reversely drawn to exchanging manuscripts primarily for social reasons.¹¹⁸ Jane Brereton, a middle-class woman, also wrote her letters to those in higher circles than her own, taking advantage of the upper class's perception of print publishing to gain access to higher-ranking classes. In addition to cultivating literary friendships, the practice of exchanging manuscripts provided women with chances for patronage, social assistance, and, for those with ambition, the opportunity to join larger or more prestigious literary networks centred around manuscripts.¹¹⁹ In addition to cultivating literary friendships, the practice of exchanging manuscripts provided women with chances for patronage, social assistance, and, for those with ambition, the opportunity to join larger or more prestigious literary networks centred around manuscripts. The publication of manuscripts and printed works provided women with additional opportunities to share their ideas and circulate their creative work. Within the context of women's writing during the eighteenth century, neither medium was necessarily more prevalent or pivotal than the other. These women of different classes also frequently interacted through the publishing industry, some more voluntarily than others. As a result, there appears to be a parallel between the story of women becoming authors and the publication of manuscripts.¹²⁰ According to King, by the mid-century, the communication of ideas through coterie exchange had seamlessly integrated with the dominant print culture and successfully coexisted with the book trades based in London, establishing mutually advantageous arrangements for those involved in the industry.¹²¹ Friends who were part of the same coterie

¹¹⁸ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 131.

¹¹⁹ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 131.

¹²⁰ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 129.

¹²¹ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 128.

would occasionally copy ideas and then re-distribute them in printed form.¹²² However, amongst all earlier written forms, Turner concludes that the letter was the mode closest to the novel, bridging the gap between personal diaries and autobiographies to texts meant to be available for a wider audience.¹²³

This subsection looked at women's writings outside of (intentionally) printed material. Despite their dismissal as meaningless scribblers, Women of Letters showcased their creativity and scholarship through a variety of writing styles and purposes. Prints and manuscripts existed alongside one another but were distinctive due to their association with class. Upper-class women would frequently refuse to print their works because it would harm their reputation, but they nevertheless would occasionally print their works, knowing it would expose their writing to a wider readership outside of their coteries. In contrast, middle-class women considered writing manuscripts other than print in order to advance up the social ladder. The thesis acknowledges theories that the letter is the closest mode to the novel, bridging the private and the public, making them crucial to discussions about the rise of the publishing industry.

The rise of the female author

This connects the thesis to the women who rose in the publishing industry. This section will examine female professional authorship, including its beginnings, the limitations and setbacks women faced in this sector, both financially and socially, as well as the popularity of women's work and the general increase in approval for fiction. The subsection concludes with two

¹²² King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 128.

¹²³ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 28-29.

notable differences among women writers at the time, as well as an overview of the overall increase in women writers' output.

To begin, the rise of the writing industry was particularly significant in two ways for women, writes Ballaster. It allowed women and other less privileged groups, for example, to make a modest living through writing.¹²⁴ Originally, this was only open to a select few stage writers.¹²⁵ The second factor contributing to the widespread acceptance of the idea about women's reasoning abilities was the increasing popularity of Cartesian philosophy and Baconian empirical science in Europe. Both philosophical traditions place equal importance on experiences and human reasoning, while also advocating for questioning established customs and beliefs.¹²⁶ This result enabled innovative thinkers to challenge the patriarchal divide between women and men. Although they did not support causes such as suffrage, as feminism in this era was not as synonymous with reform and progressiveness as it is today,¹²⁷ women like Mary Astell had the leeway in this climate to assert that customs such as marriage are contractual rather than an inherent hierarchy.¹²⁸

In the book *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690–1750*, Jane Spencer asserts in her essay "Drama" that playwriting was the only avenue in the creative industry with a meagre chance of monetizing written works.¹²⁹ However, Charles II's limitations allowed only two theatrical companies in London to present plays.¹³⁰ Although authors like Aphra Behn, who

¹²⁴ Ballaster, "Introduction," 6.

¹²⁵ Ballaster, "Introduction," 6.

¹²⁶ Ballaster, "Introduction," 6.

¹²⁷ Ballaster, "Introduction," 10.

¹²⁸ Ballaster, "Introduction," 9.

¹²⁹ Jane Spencer, "Drama," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690 - 1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster, vol. 4 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 145–46.

¹³⁰ Spencer, "Drama," 146.

demonstrated her ability to establish a successful writing career,¹³¹ were occasionally fortunate enough to have their plays performed, this was not a common occurrence due to the inherent risk involved in producing new plays rather than relying on well-known and established ones. Certain periods of time did offer more flexibility and opportunities to expand theatrical horizons, but these instances were uncommon.¹³² From the late 1600s to the late 1700s, it can be asserted that no one could make a living solely through the profession of playwriting.¹³³ Moreover, the social disapproval of playwrights and the act of selling their creative works for amusement varied in sincerity. People often linked this disapproval to the idea of offering pleasure and even compared it to prostitution, particularly when the writer was female.¹³⁴ Indeed, criticism towards the female author was common, at least common enough to feature in plays as well. Hillaria, a character by Thomas Baker in his 1703 play *Tunbridge-Walks: Or, the Yeoman of Kent: A Comedy* described in the *Dramatis Personae* as “a Railing, Mimicking Lady” declares:

No, really, *Belinda*, a Poetess is so scandalous a Character; (...) besides, Women-Writers have quite lost their Reputation; for in Love Scenes their Thoughts are so loose, and their Expressions so open, and unveil'd, the Ladies can't be seen at a Performance of their own Sex; and Obscenity in a Woman is so odious[.]¹³⁵

¹³¹ Spencer, “Drama,” 147.

¹³² Spencer, “Drama,” 146.

¹³³ Spencer, “Drama,” 146.

¹³⁴ Spencer, “Drama,” 146.

¹³⁵ Thomas Baker, *Tunbridge-Walks: Or, the Yeoman of Kent: A Comedy. As It Is Acted at the Theatre Royal by Her Majesty's Servants. By the Authour of the Humour O'the Age, A Comedy. As It Is Acted at the Theatre Royal by Her Majesty's Servants. By the Authour of the Humour O'the Age* (London: printed for Bernard

Hillaria, whether intended as genuine criticism or satire, highlights a number of fundamental criticisms of female writers: their scandalous existence in general, their lack of reputation due to their immodesty in romance, and their own stage performances in this genre that are adverse to women who watch it.

Indeed, the acknowledgement and frequent discussion of female-authored works of fiction in the eighteenth century are evident, as suggested by the example given. The general public could not avoid the literary works authored by women, regardless of whether they portrayed female characters as morally ambiguous or from a sympathetic perspective. Since poetry remained the most respected literary form in the field of women poets, women poets had to write in a manly manner with wit, conviction, and aggression.¹³⁶ This necessitated the act of separating themselves from feminine characteristics and adopting an androgynous identity.¹³⁷ This was necessary for both women from lower social classes, such as Behn, and the affluent Philips to gain recognition and succeed in poetry.¹³⁸ However, this widely acknowledged trend underwent a gradual transformation. The novel's popularity flourished in the mid-eighteenth century due to the success of authors such as Samuel Richardson, who effectively demonstrated that prose, aside from poetry, could also be both entertaining and instructional.¹³⁹ These novels depict women in romance genres, ushering in a new era of ethical behaviour. For women, this

Lintott, at the Middle Temple-Gate, Fleetstreet, 1703), 47–48, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0113631003/ECCO?u=radboud&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=676c0249>.

¹³⁶ Ros Ballaster, "Critical Review," in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690 - 1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster, vol. 4 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 237.

¹³⁷ Ballaster, "Critical Review," 237.

¹³⁸ Ballaster, "Critical Review," 237.

¹³⁹ Ballaster, "Critical Review," 238.

signified the adoption of formal realism as their preferred style of prose.¹⁴⁰ However, with increased exposure to fiction by women writers, some would come to appreciate their writing despite, or in the odd case, because of, their sex. B at Louis de Muralt, a Swiss author, writes about his observations in France and England, which he then translated from French and published in London in 1726. “The Women in *France* have observ’d that Wit belong’d to them, as much as to the Men,” he writes in his letter.¹⁴¹ Though he still observes that the character of the author does not fit any woman for good reason and she does not possess “Genius,”¹⁴² he does attest that, if women “preserve the Agreeableness that is proper for them, and don’t mix any Thing that is foreign to it,” women writers “have more Delicacy of Wit than Men.”¹⁴³ Indeed, he elaborates that it compliments “a Woman better to say pretty things than it does a Man, as Beauty is more becoming in Women than Men;” he explains that the woman’s tone has the qualities of “Softness”, “Bashfulness” and “a better Grace”, all of which add to writing in the way of being “Ornaments.”¹⁴⁴ Of course, he is of the opinion that this fanciful quality clashes with “Understanding,” but he mulls over it further with the observation that “there are but few [Men] that have Reason enough to be above the Beautiful and the Nice.”¹⁴⁵ Once again, there is this contradictory nature to the woman’s quality: she may be better suited to the fanciful writing, but this ability is in no way particularly valuable, and can even have a negative effect on the more important quality that is male rationality.

¹⁴⁰ Ballaster, “Critical Review,” 238.

¹⁴¹ B at Louis de Muralt, “Letter V.,” in *Letters Describing the Character and Customs of the English and French Nations. With a Curious Essay on Travelling; and a Criticism on Boileau’s Description of Paris. Translated from the French* (London: printed and sold by Tho. Edlin, at the Prince’s-Arms, over-against Exeter-Exchange, in the Strand, 1726), 205, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0104026082/ECCO?u=radboud&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=518054c8>.

¹⁴² De Muralt, “Letter V.,” 205–6.

¹⁴³ De Muralt, “Letter V.,” 207.

¹⁴⁴ De Muralt, “Letter V.,” 207.

¹⁴⁵ De Muralt, “Letter V.,” 207.

Even so, the number of written works by women continued to grow. While the general output of fiction by women writers increased during the eighteenth century, the rise of female authors was not consistent or gradual. Turner identified two phases in the eighteenth century that describe the fiction output rate of female writers during this time. She asserts that in the early years of the eighteenth century, there was a rapid increase, with a peak in 1725, followed by an abrupt drop to a significantly decreased output rate around 1740.¹⁴⁶ There was a gradual increase again until the late 1780s, when there was a sharp increase in women's fiction that lasted into the later decades.¹⁴⁷ She contextualises these statistics by pointing to Eliza Haywood, a key figure during this time period. Eliza Haywood had a significant impact on the surge in women's fiction during the early decades of the eighteenth century because she was a prolific writer of shorter stories, putting out at least thirty-five short novels (roughly 100 pages or less, compared to the customary estimated 200 pages), accounting for approximately 70 percent of the total output of women's fiction during that period.¹⁴⁸

Of those women writers, there was a wide range of wealth and influence in the fields of manufacturing and merchanting. Charlotte Smith and Eliza Parsons, for example, were forced out of their wealth to follow their husbands into poverty. Others were compelled to assume their husbands' income after their separation (Eliza Haywood) or to make up for their husbands' misfortunes (Priscilla Wakefield).¹⁴⁹ Throughout the century, there were two distinct groups of women who wrote: the first consisted of elegant but reserved ladies of the upper class like Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Anne Finch, and the Countess of Winchilsea, who quietly circulated their manuscripts of poetry in coterie. The other group included women who worked in the

¹⁴⁶ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 38.

¹⁴⁷ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 38.

¹⁴⁸ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 38.

¹⁴⁹ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 62-63.

public marketplace, such as Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, and Eliza Haywood. These women not only wrote plays for commercial audiences and other forms of paid writing, but they also invented modern genres like journalism and the novel.¹⁵⁰ Schellenberg observed that the majority of female writers belonged to the lower gentry or upper middle class, typically acquiring their informal yet adequate education under the guidance of their male relatives, especially their fathers or brothers.¹⁵¹ She notes that publishing for financial gain was not unusual, especially among upper-class women like Anne Finch and Lady Mary. As was the case for the aforementioned demographic, publishing was more appealing to women who had fewer opportunities to marry wealthy men, as was the case for the aforementioned demographic.¹⁵²

This subsection delves deeply into the thesis's central theme: women writers as professional authors. Women's access to the publishing industry allowed them to gradually attempt to make a living from writing. This was considered impossible, except for a select few stage writers. However, disapproval of women writers, particularly playwrights, was widespread, with some even comparing them to prostitution. Female-authored writing received a lot of attention. To gain recognition as poets, these women would frequently adopt androgynous identities or write in traditionally masculine styles; the novel did not take off until authors such as Samuel Richardson demonstrated that prose could also be instructive. Novels gradually began to portray women through the lens of ethical conduct. In general, women writers' novel output increased, primarily thanks to prolific author Eliza Haywood, before

¹⁵⁰ King, "Scribal and Print Publication," 128–29.

¹⁵¹ Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 41.

¹⁵² Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 41.

briefly plateauing and then increasing again. Upper-class women typically wrote reserved fiction, while middle-class women published through the press.

Women in the publishing industry

Before gradually moving on to the nineteenth century, the thesis will zoom out once more, this time looking at women and the publishing industry on a broader scale, outside of fiction and novel writing. This subsection examines the chronological journey from theatre to novel writing and its financial benefits, as well as periodicals. Indeed, periodicals frequently cater to women, giving them opportunities to publicly mingle in critical essays and opinion pieces while avoiding formal criticism. However, as this subsection will explain, the periodical eventually shaped itself around the gender divide.

To briefly summarise, this chapter on the eighteenth century has attempted to demonstrate, similar to Turner's description, that there were two important aspects of authorship in this period that benefited women. First, it aided the social advancement of middle-class literary women.¹⁵³ Second, it provided a way for impoverished women to earn money without compromising their social standing by avoiding working-class occupations.¹⁵⁴ While the theatre continued to play a key role in the careers of professional women writers, its popularity was surpassed by prose fiction in the early eighteenth century.¹⁵⁵ However, women had to rely on booksellers or customers for payment; unlike men, they lacked positions or

¹⁵³ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 65.

¹⁵⁴ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 65.

¹⁵⁵ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 28.

patronage for financial support. King concurs that “the most common form of payment between publisher and writer in the eighteenth century was no payment at all.”¹⁵⁶ As King writes, the harsh reality that women authors endured sharply contrasts with the serene and contemplative modern perception of them. Historical portrayals reveal the arduous conditions in which women like Elizabeth Boyd and Jane Barker, who faced disorder and difficulties, worked and accepted the physical strain of writing.¹⁵⁷ King emphasises the importance of incorporating writers’ involvement in print shops, pamphlet shops, and the ink and paper trade, crucial to their writing and publishing endeavours, into the conversation about female writing to ensure a precise representation.¹⁵⁸

Maurer, in her essay “The Periodical,” also touches on this topic. She explains that periodicals have been catering to women since the early 1600s.¹⁵⁹ Editors would directly target their female readers and, as Maurer further explains, this would become a widespread convention across most publications.¹⁶⁰ The magazines featured many formats, including Q&A sections, diary entries, and essays, all of which aimed to establish a sense of intimacy with their readers.¹⁶¹ Additionally, they often encouraged reader engagement by inviting contributions or letters in respond, which provided opportunities for women to get their literary works published as well.¹⁶² Maurer asserts that the act of explicitly including women in the community of readers not only fostered a sense of intimacy but also played a significant role in enhancing the

¹⁵⁶ King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 139.

¹⁵⁷ King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 139.

¹⁵⁸ King, “Scribal and Print Publication,” 139.

¹⁵⁹ Maurer, “The Periodical,” 156.

¹⁶⁰ Maurer, “The Periodical,” 156.

¹⁶¹ Maurer, “The Periodical,” 156.

¹⁶² Maurer, “The Periodical,” 156.

popularity of the periodicals.¹⁶³ Sarah Prescott argues that women's contributions to the periodicals garnered a wider audience as time passed, which, in turn, also made the periodicals more reliant on their female audience. Indeed, there were instances, like in the *Athenian Gazette*, where the phrase 'of Either Sex' was specifically used to acknowledge the 'pressing and numerous' contributions from 'the Fair Sex.'¹⁶⁴ According to Castle, women writers would sometimes publish individual critical essays or controversial pieces, often without revealing their identity. However, the majority of women writers primarily concentrated on crafting less confrontational criticism in the form of short reviews or satirical pieces known as squibs, often publishing them anonymously.¹⁶⁵ It is true that certain genres were more accessible than others; however, women tended to avoid the more formal modes of criticism. Not only was the social pressure against female critics harsh and intimidating, but they also lacked the education in classical languages and literature to participate in philological debates. However, Castle acknowledges that women did enter this field successfully, albeit far less frequently.¹⁶⁶ Periodicals established a dedicated space for "Ladies Issues," keeping it apart from topics typically associated with men, like scientific, theological, or philosophical discourse. This section would typically address queries related to love, marriage, and sex.¹⁶⁷

This increasingly strict gender divide coincided with the rise of the romantic genre, which promoted courtship, marriage, and the relationships between parents and children.¹⁶⁸ In 1992, Ros Ballaster also published a book titled *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction*

¹⁶³ Maurer, "The Periodical," 156.

¹⁶⁴ Maurer, "The Periodical," 156.

¹⁶⁵ Castle, "Women and Literary Criticism," 440

¹⁶⁶ Castle, "Women and Literary Criticism," 438-439

¹⁶⁷ Maurer, "The Periodical," 156-57.

¹⁶⁸ Rosalind Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction From 1684-1740* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

From 1684-1740, which investigates the rise of female writers and particularly the romance genre. The author begins her work by asserting that a formalist approach to this subject cannot create a cohesive resolution. She emphasises the importance of examining the origins of gender identity as a tool for societal management, and how this influenced women's responses, participation, and strategies for navigating this form of control.¹⁶⁹ However, Ballaster writes that most critics have read their works to gain insights into the sociological implications of the period, thereby undervaluing their literary innovations.¹⁷⁰ First, she mentions Jane Spencer, who holds a different view regarding women's writing.¹⁷¹ Spencer argues that women's writing does not necessarily imply resistance to patriarchal society. Instead, she believes that such work may actually reflect a sense of being disconnected from political and economic power.¹⁷² Ballaster adopts the basic premise inherent in the romantic genre, which portrays courtship as the only socially acceptable opportunity for a woman to experience "transcendence" in which a woman's life has no period of significance other than courtship closing with marriage or betrayal.¹⁷³

Maurer points to the Athenian Mercury, which even proposed that these women's topics had a function for "the good and welfare of larger Societies, and the whole Commonwealth."¹⁷⁴ Editors such as Pierre Motteux would reassure their female readers that "[t]he fair sex need never fear to be exposed to the Blush, when they honour this with a Reading."¹⁷⁵ It was clear

¹⁶⁹ Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction From 1684-1740*, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction From 1684-1740*, 19.

¹⁷¹ Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction From 1684-1740*, 22.

¹⁷² Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction From 1684-1740*, 22.

¹⁷³ Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction From 1684-1740*, 35.

¹⁷⁴ Maurer, "The Periodical," 157.

¹⁷⁵ Maurer, "The Periodical," 157.

he wanted his *Gentleman's Journal* to be freely read by women as well. The concept of achieving emotional and sexual fulfilment contributed to this ideology's economic success. Ballaster's essay "Critical Review," which focuses on reviews published in the middle of the eighteenth century, draws inspiration from the proliferation of satirical reviews in the early part of the same century.¹⁷⁶ Subsequently, Ballaster provided her reader with critiques that unequivocally refer to the sexual morality of the works created by these women, based on indisputable Christian moral principles.¹⁷⁷ Even if their contemporaries called out male writers for their morally dubious writings, they would still acknowledge the aesthetic success of their work.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, Maurer cautions against ascribing an ideological meaning to this 'gendered gap' or the perceived fixed separation of genders as represented in print. She concurs with Iona Italia's assertion that it's unclear whether women intentionally established the customary segregation between men and women through gender ideology, or if women themselves took responsibility for its creation.¹⁷⁹ She also expresses criticism of categorising specific magazines or publications as 'women's' publications. Maurer cites Helen Berry's research on the respondents to the *Athenian Mercury's* "Ladies Issues" and finds that the number of male respondents was twice that of female respondents. Maurer argues that the description of a magazine targeted at women distorts reality in terms of what it implies. These descriptions not only hinder the analysis of the male readership, but also elevate the male writers in these publications, thereby promoting gender and class ideologies.¹⁸⁰ Conversely, women

¹⁷⁶ Ballaster, "Critical Review," 236.

¹⁷⁷ Ballaster, "Critical Review," 236.

¹⁷⁸ Ballaster, "Critical Review," 236–37.

¹⁷⁹ Maurer, "The Periodical," 159.

¹⁸⁰ Maurer, "The Periodical," 159.

actively engaged with ‘men’s media,’ and even traditionally masculine public areas like coffeehouses and tea-tables were not as lacking in female customers as assumed by sociologists like Jürgen Habermans and those who share his points of view.¹⁸¹

Finally, given the number of genres involved, the novel can be considered one of the many fields in which women in the eighteenth century participated. King describes the novel as a latecomer in the field of published writing. Although the mode was not entirely respectable, it seemed ideal for women to achieve a certain level of financial independence. However, the novel was merely one aspect of the various fields in which women were involved. Turner succinctly summarised the scope in which women writers participated. These women were:

the provincial poets whose material was issued through subscription; of women who submitted their correspondence, biographical portraits, reviews, social commentaries, and verses to magazines; the writers of polemical and reflective religious pieces and of controversial items on social issues; translators; and authors of travelogues, treatises on education, histories, and of books offering mixtures of prose and verse, recipes, and advice on childrearing, housewifery, and midwifery.¹⁸²

In the essay “Genre Crossings,” King also referred to what has now become practically required in these types of analyses on the woman writer: the recognition of the other fields in which women would engage in, such as “elegies, retirement poems, female friendship poems, scandal

¹⁸¹ Maurer, “The Periodical,” 159.

¹⁸² Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 125–26.

chronicles, scandalous memoirs, amatory romance, Gothic romance, satiric anti-romance,” and so forth, in addition to the novel.¹⁸³

The gradual rise in popularity of novel writing led to the novel genre becoming the primary source of income for women writers, surpassing the income from theatre. Nevertheless, women encountered the harsh realities of not receiving proper compensation and being dependent on both booksellers and customers. In addition to novels, women also engaged in the publication of periodicals. However, they mostly refrained from participating in formal literary or social criticism. This was due to both societal backlash and a lack of education in classical languages and literature. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the actual division between genders was not as pronounced as depicted in the texts. Women engaged in various genres, encompassing both traditionally masculine and feminine subjects. They are highly skilled, experienced, and versatile in the publishing industry.

The end of the eighteenth century: what is changing?

This thesis now gradually shifts its focus to the Victorian era. However, before examining further, it is essential to determine the specific developments that occurred between the late 1700s and the early 1800s. First of all, Turner noted that the reception of women’s fiction had drastically changed in the eighteenth century, stating that women “were amongst the most respected of contemporary novelists, and engaged in the new commercially driven

¹⁸³ Kathryn R. King, “Genre Crossings,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, ed. Catherine Ingrassia (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 86.

‘manufacture’ of words.”¹⁸⁴ However, starting from the mid-eighteenth century and onwards, this age of women’s contributions in general was slowly declining. Additionally, in the nineteenth century, scholars observed that works by earlier writers were no longer being reprinted, as their evaluation now focused on a new moral standard in comparison to the works of contemporary female writers. Literature scholar Margaret Ezell confirms the thesis mentioned earlier regarding the endurance of female literary works.¹⁸⁵ The author highlights the fact that renowned writers like Elizabeth Singer Rowe ceased to be published after 1860. The author also mentions that her grandson’s efforts led to the high-quality reprinting of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s work.¹⁸⁶ Ezell argues that the reprinting of authors’ works was not based solely on the quality of their writing, but rather on the presence of a respected descendant who had a passion for literature, which played a crucial role in ensuring the survival of the works.¹⁸⁷ History once again demonstrates that in this specific society, men determined women’s worth, or their ability to bear offspring who would inherit their ancestors’ names. Scholars only regained interest in women’s early writings in the early twentieth century.¹⁸⁸ This was greatly influenced by the expanding field of literary criticism, which sought new material, and the campaign for female suffrage, which sought evidence of female rationality and proficiency in communication, providing arguments for trusting women with the right to vote.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, 127.

¹⁸⁵ Ballaster, “Critical Review,” 241.

¹⁸⁶ Ballaster, “Critical Review,” 241.

¹⁸⁷ Ballaster, “Critical Review,” 241.

¹⁸⁸ Ballaster, “Critical Review,” 243.

¹⁸⁹ Ballaster, “Critical Review,” 243.

Periodicals, as one of the most interactive forms of writing, provided women writers with a substantial platform for creative, instructive, and frequently political work through letters, Q&As, and reviews.¹⁹⁰ The single-essay periodical, once popular among women, gradually lost its popularity and gave way to the more diverse and anonymous periodical format until the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁹¹ As previously stated, during the later eighteenth century, these periodicals thrived and developed distinct language that marked the difference between the sexes.¹⁹² Although this narrative did not solidify by the time it became well-established, the social structure progressively evolved from that narrative to the prevailing reality. These periodicals provided women with knowledge about consumer practices, affirming their value and attractiveness based on what they were purchasing.¹⁹³ These periodicals brought about a shift in the roles of women in literature and industry. As a result, the industry gradually pushed women towards consumption instead of production.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Maurer, "The Periodical," 164–65.

¹⁹¹ Maurer, "The Periodical," 164–65.

¹⁹² Maurer, "The Periodical," 166.

¹⁹³ Maurer, "The Periodical," 166.

¹⁹⁴ Maurer, "The Periodical," 166.

The nineteenth century

I had not read many sentences before my heart sank with a heavy sense of fear and,—jealousy!—the slow fire of an insidious envy began to smoulder in my mind. What power had so gifted this author—this *mere woman*—that she should dare to write better than I!¹⁹⁵

In Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire* (1895), Geoffrey Tempest reads Mavis Clare's—a woman's—writing for the first time, and he realizes, to his dismay, that it is exceptional.¹⁹⁶ In fact, it even infuriates him.¹⁹⁷ He makes a solemn oath that he will, in the event that he is given the chance to do so, compose a scathing review of Miss Clare, with the intention of intentionally misrepresenting and misquoting the work of an "unsexed" being.¹⁹⁸ After all, "what right had [women] to intrude into the realms of art and snatch the laurels from their masters' brows?"¹⁹⁹ Tempest receives mockery and chastisement for his extreme reaction, but his sentiment is not unheard of, and the chapter on the eighteenth century states that it is one of many views held about women writers during the Victorian era.

With this particularly dramatic viewpoint on women writers in mind, the thesis will shift to the nineteenth century, where it will cover some societal cornerstones of women in Victorian

¹⁹⁵ Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire* (1895; repr., Dodo Press, 2009), 158.

¹⁹⁶ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 158.

¹⁹⁷ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 158.

¹⁹⁸ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 158.

¹⁹⁹ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 158.

society before narrowing back to female writers. This section discusses the cultural shift from production to consumption, salary increases for writers, and the growth of the publishing industry. However, concerns about the publishing business, the quality of authors, and a general lack of ethical conduct also grew during the Victorian period. The section closes with a brief mention of the diminishing income-generating opportunities for women, a topic that will be elaborated on in the last sub-chapter on the nineteenth century.

In general, there was a lot of discussion about the professionalism of authorship in the Victorian era. In her book *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, Linda H. Peterson states that authors may begin to receive acceptable recompense for their work as late as the 1820s,²⁰⁰ as before in the eighteenth century the wages were meagre and not reliable. Even in the 1830s, authors received only middle-class wages compared to their publishers, who were often comparatively wealthy.²⁰¹ This chapter continues to trace the substantial expansion of the book industry that occurred after its establishment in the eighteenth century, which coincided with criticism from authors about the state of the publishing industry.

Indeed, Charlotte Brontë, for example, harboured reservations regarding the publishing industry, specifically expressing her concerns to Henry Garrs in correspondence. *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, edited by Margaret Smith, mentions Nancy Garrs, a nursemaid for Mr Brontë in Thornton, and Sarah Garrs, a temporary domestic worker for the Brontë family, who were both younger siblings of Henry Garrs.^{202,203} Brontë warns Garrs about the deceitfulness of the

²⁰⁰ Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 1-2.

²⁰¹ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 1-2.

²⁰² Margaret Smith, "Introduction," in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. III: 1852-1855 (Oxford University Press, 2004), xxiii.

²⁰³ Charlotte Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, by Margaret Smith, ed. Margaret Smith, vol. III: 1852-1855 (Oxford University Press, 2004), 228.

publishing industry. She cautions him against compromising his financial situation, stating it in writing: “Printers and Publishers are hazardous men to deal with: it is seldom an author comes off without loss.”²⁰⁴

Late-Victorian author Corelli was also critical of the publishing industry as well as best-sellers, and she frequently referred to the questionable morality of these works, according to Nickianne Moody in “Moral Uncertainty and the Afterlife: Explaining the Popularity of Marie Corelli’s Early Novels.”²⁰⁵ *The Sorrows of Satan* is told from the first-person perspective by Geoffrey Tempest, who is the protagonist of the story and the person who is subjected to Satan’s temptations. Lucifer, the fallen angel Satan, masquerades as Prince of Wales Lucio Rimânez amid the wicked people of Victorian society. The text discusses a number of literary women, including avid reader Lady Sibyl, who is an atheist and misanthrope who later weds Tempest. The novel focuses primarily on Mavis Clare, a humble Christian writer who, as the pinnacle of morality, criticizes contemporary society. The novel describes how Tempest began his career as a novice writer, a ‘hack’, contributing to daily newspapers with limited financial resources. He has a completed manuscript, but the publishers consider it to be “exceptionally worthless.”²⁰⁶ Tempest attributes his failure to the type of readers that work in publishing houses. According to him, these readers are also writers and know they compete with each other.²⁰⁷ For these reasons, Tempest argues, they would never permit the publication of any work that would jeopardise their own standing; instead, they would encourage the publication

²⁰⁴ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:234.

²⁰⁵ Nickianne Moody, “Moral Uncertainty and the Afterlife: Explaining the Popularity of Marie Corelli’s Early Novels,” *Women’s Writing/Womens’ Writing* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699080500527501>.

²⁰⁶ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 3–4.

²⁰⁷ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 4.

of novels of lower quality in order to further cement their own legitimacy.²⁰⁸ He says there is nothing good or bad about the system, but it is “entirely prejudicial to me and my literary offspring,” which he criticises.²⁰⁹ When Tempest first meets Lucio Rimânez, it is Rimânez who gives him the suggestion to alter the subject matter of his writing in order to achieve greater success. According to Rimânez, Tempest ought to produce “indecent” literature that is blatantly scandalous but not quite explicit enough to “offending advanced women,” which gives Tempest “a good wide margin.”²¹⁰ This could be interpreted as a commentary on the prevalent contemporary sentiment regarding the perceived lax morality of the ‘advanced’ woman. Writers such as Corelli and Brontë seem to have shared the view that publishing and authorship standards had fallen to the point where, on the one hand, publishers were no longer seen as entirely reliable and, on the other, authors’ work was no longer respected, or that any attempt to publish anything with integrity was an idea to have a good laugh at.

In response to the prevailing social climate, the discussion of women’s publishing careers shifted throughout the nineteenth century, focusing on women writers in particular. This had a significant impact on women and how they worked. To fully grasp the influence of gender ideology on these women, it is critical to analyse their daily lives and how they shaped their relationship with work. The thesis now reverts to exploring how the socioeconomic dynamics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society shaped the participation and representation of women in the nineteenth-century publishing industry. This sub-chapter served as a bridge between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to briefly describe the nineteenth-century social climate, including concerns about publishing, authorship, and readership, before focusing

²⁰⁸ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 4.

²⁰⁹ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 4.

²¹⁰ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 30–31.

on women writers and their experiences. This is especially significant considering the notable decline in traditionally feminine occupations during the eighteenth century that persisted during the subsequent century.

Material reality

The thesis will move from a brief overview of the publishing industry to an examination of how socioeconomic dynamics in eighteenth and nineteenth century societies impacted women's participation and representation in the industry. Before the thesis explores women's professions, it is important to place this representation of the woman writer in the context of everyday nineteenth-century life. This sub-chapter will focus on the material reality of the average Victorian woman, what her life would be like, and the opportunities available to her, including a lack of education, financial prospects, social networks, and experience.

The thesis first considers Michèle Barrett and her work "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," in which she explores the connection between ideology and production, specifically focusing on the material circumstances of Victorian women in the literary field. Barrett examined aspects of the systematic approach to analysing gender ideology in literature, such as women not having the same access to resources, housing, employment opportunities, and health care as men.²¹¹ Women frequently had to forego their educational pursuits in favour of their brothers and faced limited opportunities to have their work published.²¹² Prior to the

²¹¹ Michèle Barrett, "Ideology and the cultural production of gender," eBook, in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change (RLE Feminist Theory)*, ed. Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Newton (1985; repr., Routledge, 2013), 15–16.

²¹² Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," 14–15.

Married Women's Property Act 1882, married women had to relinquish their earnings to their husbands.²¹³ Despite this, women were more prolific in creative writing than in musical composition and visual art due to the relatively lower cost of pen and paper compared to musical instruments or artistic tools, limited access to artistic education, and lack of financial support.²¹⁴ The affordability of writing materials was certainly vital in allowing women to maintain a balance between their professional pursuits and societal expectations of their sex. This was due to the fact that they could work from home, and the only tools they needed were writing utensils, paper, and ink, which did not negatively impact their domestic roles. Similar to the eighteenth century, women's unpaid responsibilities were still considered more socially valuable than any professional accomplishments they may have aspired to, unless they were philanthropic in nature. Indeed, the stigma against working class women intensified during the nineteenth century.

According to Patricia E. Johnson's book *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction*, working-class women were facing a contradiction in how they were defined.²¹⁵ On one hand, working as a breadwinner was seen as a masculine role, while on the other hand, the middle-class expectations for women were unachievable for those in the lower class.²¹⁶ This created a situation where working-class women were unable to meet the cultural standards of the time. Especially by the middle of the century, Tory reformer Lord Ashley, with the support of "upper- and middle-class women, working-class men, and even middle-class factory owners," came to the consensus that working-class women needed to be

²¹³ Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," 14–15.

²¹⁴ Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," 14–15.

²¹⁵ Patricia E. Johnson, *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction* (Ohio University Press, 2001), 6.

²¹⁶ Johnson, *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction*, 6.

“returned” to the domestic sphere,²¹⁷ as if saving animals from exploitation and returning them to their natural habitat. Working-class women faced effective exclusion from public visibility and representation in fiction, as their existence contradicted social norms. However, the domestic ideology of the time relied on women from lower classes to work within their own homes and serve as low-paid domestic workers for wealthier households, in order for those women to embody the lifestyle of the wealthy middle class.²¹⁸

However, the reality of the majority of women does not necessarily align with the prevalent social ideology. As cultural historian and literary critic Mary Poovey writes in *Uneven Developments*, many British women in the nineteenth century defied social expectations, despite the widespread reproduction of arguments about the nurturing and motherly traits inherent in the concept of womanhood. Approximately 2 out of 6 million women were financially independent, and 42 percent of women between the ages of twenty and forty were single, according to the 1851 census. Novelists like William Rathbone Greg disapproved of this phenomenon, citing concerns about the ethical immorality of women’s autonomy in relation to men.²¹⁹ According to this perspective, women’s autonomy with regard to men was one of the ethical immoralities that afflicted British society in the nineteenth century.²²⁰ In contrast, Barbara Bodichon and Harriet Martineau, among others, argued for greater female emancipation in education and the workplace.²²¹ This would empower women and afford them the chance to achieve greater stability and independence.²²² Naturally, this was frequently

²¹⁷ Johnson, *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction*, 6–7.

²¹⁸ Johnson, *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Social-Problem Fiction*, 7.

²¹⁹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4.

²²⁰ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 4.

²²¹ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 4.

²²² Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 4.

considered to be against the natural order and a form of disturbance in a woman's preferred conduct.

However, greater financial prospects only facilitated the writing process for women and did not necessarily bring them any closer to the printing press. Indeed, the publishing industry was heavily reliant on social connections for entry. Charlotte O'Connor Eccles, who also wrote under the pseudonym Hal Godfrey, recounts in "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist" her journey to London and her endeavours to establish a writing career. She describes her difficulties in her account of events: "[l]ooking back on that time, I am filled with a curious impersonal self-pity; it seems to me to have been very hard indeed."²²³ She attributes the difficulties she encountered to her inherent nature and life experiences. Her upbringing did not foster a work environment for women, and she lacked the self-assurance to make her demands known to men.²²⁴ Her unfamiliarity with the scene proved to be a disadvantage for her, as did the fact that she immigrated to England from Ireland. Her lack of knowledge about London's publishing scene and her lack of connections led to frequent ostracism, a fact she lamented but acknowledged.²²⁵ As Eccles describes, "[t]he great secret is to have or to make literary friends" and "[w]hen one knows the channels, what to do and where to go, the rest is comparatively easy, and promotion for the most part goes by merit."²²⁶ She claims that women who become members of "The Writers' Club" are able to acquire knowledge in a month that would normally take other women years to learn, especially when they are as timid as Eccles once was.²²⁷ What stands out in this account of events is the fact that Eccles arrived in London and she built her career from the ground up. According to her, this is a vastly distinct experience from that of

²²³ Charlotte O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist," *HathiTrust (Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 1893)*, 830, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015028028366>.

²²⁴ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist," 831.

²²⁵ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist," 831.

²²⁶ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist," 836.

²²⁷ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist," 836.

women from wealthy families or with extensive social connections. Eccles characterises the prevalent challenge women of her time faced: to succeed in the publishing industry without the benefit of pre-existing connections or familiarity with social networks, women had to display a higher level of tenacity than they may have been accustomed to. Eccles appears to be vocal about this behaviour, also known as learned timidity in women, describing it as a criticism of women for being assertive, a learned behaviour that men often lack.²²⁸ She argues that men are assumed to have the capacity to learn any skill, even if they have not demonstrated it yet, whereas women are not given the identical trust that they will eventually acquire a skill.²²⁹ Eccles notes that, in her experience, employers do not view women as valuable investments. She summarises her experience as follows:

One is horribly handicapped in being a woman. A man meets other men at his club; he can be out and about at all hours; he can insist without being thought bold and forward; he is not presumed to be capable of undertaking only a limited class of subjects, but is set to anything.²³⁰

Eccles stressed in this passage that the lack of faith in women's capabilities and the biases built into the working systems ultimately get in the way of their professional growth and opportunities. Eccles had firsthand experience of the challenges that come with being a woman and the process of conforming to societal expectations of womanhood, which she had to overcome to launch her career. She discusses the challenges faced by women when launching

²²⁸ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 831.

²²⁹ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 831.

²³⁰ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 831.

their professions, which she describes as having significantly more obstacles than men encounter at the same stage. These obstacles include the lack of social connections required to enter the industry, the tendency of women to express less assertiveness than men due to their socialisation, and the underlying notion that women are inherently less capable of acquiring skills than men. Eccles points out that, when a woman does get work, “she is largely privileged as to times and places,” but “the aspirant has no privileges: she is a nuisance, an untried unfledged being, very much in the way, and to be got rid of at all hazards.”²³¹

Eccles described the numerous challenges faced by women trying to break into the publishing industry. Another description of this can be found in Charlotte Riddell’s novel *A Struggle for Fame*, which was first published in 1883 and portrays realistic descriptions of the author’s life as a woman in pursuit of a literary career. The novel is described as semi-autobiographical by Patrick Maume,²³² who contributed a written piece about Riddell for the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, which makes its contents especially inviting for this thesis. Several of her collaborators are introduced as characters in the novel. Charles Skeet is portrayed as the character Mr Vassett, and the Tinsley brothers are portrayed as Felton and Laplash. The novel recounts the journey that the protagonist, Glenarva (often referred to as Glen) Westley, takes to become an author. Men did not have such limited financial resources back then, and authors in general were much humbler than they are today. Charlotte Riddell’s semi-biographical novel,²³³ *A Struggle for Fame*, was reprinted in 2004, with Emma Dale providing a brief introduction to the new edition.

²³¹ O’Conor Eccles, “The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.,” 831.

²³² Patrick Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, October 1, 2016, n.p., <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.007676.v2>.

²³³ Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

Having emigrated from Ireland to England, Charlotte Riddell was a prolific writer who is credited with fifty-five various titles.²³⁴ She married Joseph Riddell soon after establishing herself in England. Maume notes that Riddell was a woman who had experience in the financial sector.²³⁵ This was due, in part, to the fact that she worked as her husband's secretary, in addition to her editorial work and position as co-proprietor of the *St James Magazine* from 1868 to 1873.²³⁶ In the course of her involvement in her husband's business endeavours, Riddell was able to acquire knowledge about the Victorian financial world. She then incorporated her observations into the fictional works that she authored,²³⁷ showcasing how women's participation in the material world was not as one-sided as was predominantly portrayed. However, this did not mean a woman's life, or experience, was considered as rich as a man's.

After a few chapters have passed, the protagonist of Riddell's novel, Glen, and childhood friend Mr Edward "Ned" Beattie are talking about one of her novel's, *Tyrrel's Son*, she is given the feedback that it was not "so bad, at all."²³⁸ While she is momentarily relieved, he continues by saying, "No; I considered it good on the whole - good, that is, for a girl. Of course, women can't be expected ever to know anything of life."²³⁹ It was the expectation of women to not experience much of anything of life, their perspectives seemingly considered to be of little value. When challenged, Mr Beattie argues "What can a woman know of life? How is she to get to know it?"²⁴⁰ As previously mentioned, the public domain gradually excluded

²³⁴ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

²³⁵ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

²³⁶ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

²³⁷ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

²³⁸ Charlotte Riddell [Mrs J. H. Riddell], *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, Adobe ePub (1883; repr., Tramp Press, 2014), chap. XI: Evil Days.

²³⁹ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. XI: Evil Days.

²⁴⁰ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. XI: Evil Days.

women, and their access to spaces frequented by men was limited. People regarded the domestic sphere as important, but it was not significant in relation to broader life experiences. As a result, Mr Beattie's question was not entirely unwarranted. These spaces, in which 'life' was lived and experiences were felt, were out of reach for women. Mr Beattie continued: "I'll be bound I have seen more of London since I came over last month than you during all the time you have lived in it."²⁴¹ Due to the prevailing societal narrative that heavily emphasised women's domestic responsibilities, particularly since the eighteenth century, women's participation in public society was limited, and their domesticity was not considered valuable beyond its inherent virtues. As a result, it is unsurprising that men hold the belief that women lack the necessary life experience to express anything of significance. The privilege of experience was reserved for men.

The notion that women lacked experience and rationality in comparison to men was used to justify the belief that men should not expect women to have strong logical reasoning abilities, let alone hold political positions.²⁴² But as Poovey points out, this idea also implied that women would behave virtuously and innocently when they were safe at home and away from male environments, and that they could only develop into rational beings in their own feminine spaces.²⁴³ The man, characterised by his strong temperament and masculine passion, would find his masculine personality nurtured and eventually calmed within the bounds of marriage.²⁴⁴ This served as an explanation for why women experienced relatively insignificant lives despite being crucial to a man's ability to connect himself to his virtue. Indeed, as a novelist, Riddell must have thought similarly about women's experiences and their true calling

²⁴¹ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. XI: Evil Days.

²⁴² Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 11.

²⁴³ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 11.

²⁴⁴ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 90.

in life. As *A Struggle for Fame* draws to a close, the protagonist's husband's, Mr Lacere, health deteriorates, and the two of them live in a small house while having become poverty-stricken.²⁴⁵ As Mrs Lacere finally discovers what she is meant to do with her life, this is the point in the narrative where the conversation of women writers and their purpose is brought back up.

She had never been so happy before, never – not in her youngest days– not when hope reigned triumphant – not when fruition succeeded to hope. What though they were poor beyond relief? She had all her husband needed. What though the day's work seemed never ended? It was a work of love, into which Glenarva put her whole strength and soul and spirit. The hunger of her nature was at last satisfied. She had her husband to herself; she was all in all to him, in theory and in fact.²⁴⁶

Certainly, the implication appears to be that Riddell agreed that women writers are not naturally suited to the harsh, masculine world of publishing. Despite the impressive nature of Mrs. Lacere's work, her primary vocation lies in caring for her husband. Therefore, she should dedicate her work solely to the welfare of her household rather than pursuing fame, reinforcing the notion that a woman's profession can only stem from necessity or philanthropy.

Corelli's conclusion in *The Sorrows of Satan* suggests that this was a widely accepted message, as it ends on a similar note to Riddell's work. In Corelli's work, Miss Clare continues to be uncorruptible, but Lady Sibyl is a symbol of the perils associated with the learned woman who reads excessively and reads inappropriate material. Lady Sibyl's character develops a more

²⁴⁵ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. XI: Evil Days.

²⁴⁶ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. XI: Evil Days.

sinister disposition as the story progresses. When Tempest notices Lady Sibyl reading a socially inappropriate novel and throws it away, she gradually begins to discuss the contents that she and her fellow high society women have been reading, and how it has tainted her away from a proper moral nature:

[D]o you think a girl can read the books that are now freely published, and that her silly society friends tell her to read,— ‘because it is so dreadfully *queer!*’—and yet remain unspoil and innocent? Books that go into the details of the lives of outcasts?—that explain and analyze the secret vices of men?—that advocate almost as a sacred duty ‘free love’ and universal polygamy?—that see no shame in introducing into the circles of good wives and pure-minded girls, a heroine who boldly seeks out a man, *any* man, in order that she may have a child by him, without the ‘degradation’ of marrying him? I have read all those books,—and what can you expect of me? Not innocence, surely! I despise men,—I despise my own sex,—I loathe myself for being a woman!²⁴⁷

Lady Sibyl, on the other hand, claims that Miss Clare’s (a writer who does uphold her moral character as a woman) novels give her a fleeting glimpse of faith in God, despite the fact that this insight is only temporary. Corelli is known for her social commentary in her works,²⁴⁸ so it is reasonable to see Lady Sibyl’s declaration that she is a repulsive byproduct of her society’s wicked literature as genuine criticism of Victorian society. When compared to the considerable number of other novels being produced, the fact that Miss Clare’s novels are so few in number

²⁴⁷ Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan: Or, The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire*, 183.

²⁴⁸ Moody, “Moral Uncertainty and the Afterlife: Explaining the Popularity of Marie Corelli’s Early Novels,” 198.

may reflect what Corelli believed to be one of the reasons for the inferior quality of mainstream novels, namely that their ever-increasing production rate in the publishing industry has resulted in a decrease in craftsmanship. Women who read works that denigrate their sex and encourage various forms of non-Christian behaviour are similar to those who are corruptible, such as the pitiful Lady Sibyl, who, while married, propositioned herself to the devil and darkened her thoughts through immoral literature to the point where she ultimately committed suicide.

To conclude, this subsection explored the practical aspects of Victorian women's lives, including their restricted access to resources, housing, job prospects, and healthcare. It also addresses the social disapproval faced by women in the working class. The stigma against lower-class women was a logical conclusion, as these women contradicted both societal standards and the realisation that the domestic norm depended on their labour. The lack of available labour and the social stigma associated with working women placed women at a financial disadvantage. However, despite such discouragement, this section also clarified that this ideal was not the predominant lifestyle.

This section examined Charlotte O'Connor Eccles, who also wrote under the pen name Hal Godfrey, and found that, in addition to financial constraints, the workforce did not view women as valuable assets, perceiving them as inherently less capable than men. Eccles also explored the social aspect of women's limitations in the literary industry, recounting how her career began with setbacks such as women's learned timidity and her lack of life experiences, which included never having interacted with women who assert themselves. For instance, the female lead in Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame* is informed that women are unable to express anything significant because they do not have the same authentic experiences as men. These descriptions suggest that women do have a role as authors, however, their primary worth is seen in nurturing their moral character and fulfilling their domestic responsibilities.

Throughout the Victorian era, it became increasingly evident what behaviour was acceptable and unacceptable; in turn, this thesis will examine female authorship and female duty in greater detail.

Literary women and their duty

As such, this subsection will discuss societal criticism of women authors' behaviours and motivations, their assertiveness or 'masculine' behaviour being perceived as unnatural, and the scandalous nature of women deviating from domesticity. The account of Charlotte O'Connor Eccles and the works of fiction by Charlotte Riddell, Marie Corelli, and Maria Edgeworth will be looked into once more to discuss these subjects.

Female authors encountered criticism and scrutiny for their literary works, often receiving criticism according to societal norms and expectations associated with their sex. Despite these challenges, many female authors persevered and made significant contributions to literature during this time period as well. Indeed, women's moral standing heavily influenced their eventual popularity (and, consequently, their chances of making a profit) during the Victorian era, and this section of the thesis will elaborate on this significance. It was expected of female writers that they would be able to write while also maintaining their sex roles, which had a strong connection with domesticity and maternal instinct. As Poovey writes in *Uneven Developments*, if women disobeyed this pervasive social standard, not only would they lose their credibility as writers, but they would also receive social scrutiny.

This suggests a solidification in the British mindset compared to the previous century. This division between paid and unpaid labour (male and female, respectively) served to

reinforce those gender roles.²⁴⁹ The idea that women who pursued material gain were not only reprehensible, but also defying the natural order, as women were expected to prioritise domestic roles, is critical to understanding why women face obstructions when advocating for professional recognition and fair compensation. Eccles, for example, reflects on how the title of her manuscript was met with alarm when she searched for it to be published.²⁵⁰ As she had described, her continued search for employment led her to one of the many Ladies' Employment Bureaux. Following an assortment of questions, Eccles revealed the title of her book, "Modern Men, by a Modern Maid," to which the respectable, elderly woman responded after a brief pause: "I would sooner have my right hand cut off than publish a book with such a title."²⁵¹ The title's meaning remains somewhat ambiguous, as it's unclear if the word "modern" refers to the New Woman or if it implies that the "modern maid" holds judgments about men. Still, Eccles tried to justify herself by assuring the woman that she could read the book without any risk. She openly admitted the book's shortcomings with humility, while at the same time asserting that it was entirely harmless. Although she attempted to defend herself, she was unsuccessful.²⁵²

Another trait that women were discouraged from displaying, as mentioned by Eccles, was assertiveness, which was associated with women deviating from their nature. The third volume of Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame* also noted the temperament expected of female authors. Mr Vassett and Glen, who is now married and goes by Mrs Lacere, fell into a disagreement over a book he had bought to be published, but he insisted that she omit an entire chapter.²⁵³ This chapter was one that Mrs Lacere believed to be essential to the plot of the novel.

²⁴⁹ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 10.

²⁵⁰ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 832.

²⁵¹ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 832.

²⁵² O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 832.

²⁵³ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. II: The New Story.

Following the conclusion of negotiations, Mr Vassett saw that Mrs Lacere is “for a woman and an author most reasonable.”²⁵⁴ There seems to be a well-established expectation that female authors will always be forceful, even difficult to deal with, especially more so than other women who were considered typically agreeable. Nevertheless, the publisher was of the opinion that the book was “a complete mistake.”²⁵⁵ In fact, as stated, Mrs Lacere indeed took a risk by choosing to minimise the romance in her work, with “[l]adies and boys”²⁵⁶ being the primary readership of romance. This further reinforces the theory that novels were not regarded as having an elevated level of intellectual value, and that novelists did not typically write with the intention of reaching an adult male audience. For this reason, it certainly makes sense that Mr Vassett was not impressed with the novel’s finished product.²⁵⁷ There is no doubt that he did not anticipate selling a substantial number of it. It appears that Riddell also comments on the current times in the novel, bringing up a well-known author from her era:

Times in that respect are not much changed; even to this present day the novelist who rings but the changes of one eternal song – the loves of lovely woman – the beauty of lovely woman – the unselfishness of lovely woman – the dress of lovely woman – the lovers of lovely woman – will be the most popular. Where, for example, George Eliot counted her thousands, the Family Herald counts its tens of thousands!²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. II: The New Story.

²⁵⁵ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. II: The New Story.

²⁵⁶ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. II: The New Story.

²⁵⁷ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. II: The New Story.

²⁵⁸ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume III*, chap. II: The New Story.

Riddell was aware of Eliot and recognised her achievements, but she also offered the Victorian writer's point of view, arguing that Eliot did not sell as much as she could have if she had been inclined to write for genres and on subjects that would have appealed to women and boys.

Of course, there is also the clear mention of “the beauty of lovely women,” as this, too, was relevant to women and authorship. In an earlier chapter, Riddell has her characters comment on the assumed appearance of women writers. In the second volume of *A Struggle for Fame*, Glen is well on her way to having her work published while she is in London. Her work was written in secret, but when her previous acquaintances in Ireland found out about it, Mr Beattie was quite frustrated about the fact that she had kept it hidden from everyone.²⁵⁹ Fearing that her writing will be recognised as having been written by her, Glen meets with Mr Lacere to have the book remain unpublished after all.²⁶⁰ She feels vulnerable and as though her freedom has been taken away. Mr Lacere, on the other hand, is hesitant because “[h]e did not feel so sure now as had once been the case that Glen would never make her mark.”²⁶¹ However, he did not want her to be a novelist because she did not physically look the part. Mr Lacere, like many others, may have associated authorship in ladies with middle age and spectacles, but Glen was a pretty young woman with a soft voice.²⁶² Mr Lacere is of the opinion that Glen would have struggled with flourishing as an author, and he would consider it reasonable for her to “abandon a strife he did not believe could conduce to her

²⁵⁹ Charlotte Riddell [Mrs J. H. Riddell], *A Struggle for Fame: Volume II*, Adobe ePub (1883; repr., Tramp Press, 2014), chap. VIII: Ned's Letter.

²⁶⁰ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume II*, chap. VIII: Ned's Letter.

²⁶¹ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume II*, chap. VIII: Ned's Letter.

²⁶² Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume II*, chap. VIII: Ned's Letter.

happiness.”²⁶³ Indeed, the relationship between a woman’s duty and her happiness was inextricably linked, something that could only exist alongside each other.

However, this was not the only argument against women’s authorship, or engagement with literature and reason in general. Additionally, to support women’s professionalism, one had to refute the notion that men and women have distinct cognitive capabilities. In her book, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, Maria Edgeworth explores the topic of literary women through letters written from a variety of viewpoints. Richard Edgeworth, Edgeworth’s father, and his friend Thomas Day are the subjects of the first two letters, which are purportedly between the two men. The first man, whose wife had blessed him with a daughter, is opposed to giving her an unnecessary education. The second man responds to this statement. Since this is Edgeworth’s version of how the conversation might proceed, as this manner of authorship study holds true that the author remains significant in the text, it is intriguing to wonder what she would think about girls’ education as a female author who speaks from a male perspective.

In the beginning of his letter, the second man acknowledges that he would also agree that educated women are probably more likely to be troublesome as future wives and daughters.²⁶⁴ As he continues, he moves on to talk about a specific group of educated women who are referred to as “Literary Ladies.”²⁶⁵ These women, according to him, do not flaunt their knowledge but rather use their intelligence to be helpful and pleasant to those around them.²⁶⁶ In fact, it seems that the strongest argument against girls’ education is the societal aspect. The

²⁶³ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume II*, chap. VIII: Ned’s Letter.

²⁶⁴ Maria Edgeworth, “Answer to the Preceding Letter,” in *Letters for Literary Ladies To Which Is Added, an Essay on the Noble Science of Self-Justification.*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for J. Johnson, in St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1798), 44, <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edgeworth/ladies/ladies.html>.

²⁶⁵ Edgeworth, “Answer to the Preceding Letter,” 45.

²⁶⁶ Edgeworth, “Answer to the Preceding Letter,” 45.

second man explains his friend's objections to his daughter's education by observing that he likely fears his daughter "would be in danger of becoming unhappy, because she would not, amongst her own sex, find friends suited to her taste, taste, nor amongst our's admirers adequate to her expectations" and that she could potentially create many enemies.²⁶⁷ In his reply, the second man claims that because there are now more literary women than there were in the past, loneliness is less of a risk. Furthermore, he contends that women are inherently envious and will provoke unnecessary arguments regardless of one's education. He believes that women who think beyond the folly of their sex, as learned women, may be less susceptible to these bouts of jealousy, and that they can never be the sole source of women's envy.²⁶⁸

On the topic of the daughter's concern that she may not find a husband at all if she is of the witty type, Edgeworth has her character respond by suggesting that the daughter may decide not to marry at all, and that in that case, she should be secure in terms of finances and happiness outside of marriage, and that reading will be the pleasure that stays with her into her old age.²⁶⁹ He argues that as more women enter these ranks and the novelty wears off, the peculiarities of learned women's characters will eventually fade.²⁷⁰ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu also noted that a common complaint among learned women is that they often "parade" their knowledge, and that was also the case here. The father argues with his friend that if he continues to express his disgust, literary women will stop being so extravagant.²⁷¹

The opinions on literary ladies were shifting, which may be what sparked this book by Edgeworth. The father suggests that the girl should not be educated to be "merely a musician,

²⁶⁷ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 46.

²⁶⁸ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 48.

²⁶⁹ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 51–52.

²⁷⁰ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 54.

²⁷¹ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 54.

a painter, or a poet;" rather, he wishes for her to "to give her early the habit of industry and attention, the love of knowledge, and the power of reasoning; these will enable her to attain to excellence in any pursuit to which she may direct her talents."²⁷² This is done under the guise of the father's belief that women are unable to know who they marry and should, as a result, be able to subordinate themselves to her future husband's preferred faculty.²⁷³ About female authors, the father says:

You despise the writings of women—you think that they might have made a better use of the pen than to write plays, and poetry, and romances. Considering that the pen was to women a new instrument, I think they have made at least as good a use of it as learned men did of the needle some centuries ago, when they set themselves to determine how many spirits could stand upon its point, and were ready to tear one another to pieces in the discussion of this sublime question.²⁷⁴

The father portrays women's education in the same light as when men began learning traditionally feminine crafts,²⁷⁵ and as a result, he appears once again sympathetic to women writers, albeit not saying anything as bold as what one might consider a feminist statement, though perhaps protofeminist in nature. One specific viewpoint, possibly belonging to Edgeworth herself, may be interpreted as particularly critical.

²⁷² Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 59.

²⁷³ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 58.

²⁷⁴ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 58.

²⁷⁵ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 75.

The character of the girl's father suggests a frustration that one could imagine being intensely experienced by the literary ladies whom Edgeworth would have considered her peers, as well as by a considerable number of learned women and those who worked in the publishing industry after Edgeworth's time:

But if it be your opinion that women are naturally inferior to us in capacity, why do you feel so much apprehension of their becoming, eminent, or of their obtaining power, in consequence of the cultivation of their understandings? These expressions of scorn and jealousy neutralize each other.²⁷⁶

When writing these letters, Edgeworth echoed the contemporary discourse on the topic by recounting arguments both in favour of and against literary ladies. Edgeworth published *Letters for Literary Ladies* by assuming different personas and creating entirely new identities for herself, all the while promoting her own opinion and maintaining authorship under her own name. She concludes the correspondence between the two men with a note from the father, who is unquestionably in favour of his daughter receiving an education.

Victorian society was not unthinkingly opposed to any suggestion that women possessed similar, if not equal, levels of intellect, as this would indirectly criticise men who pursued success while relying on their wives for their virtue. Religious texts alone were not the only source of this idea's unsuitability; the capitalist and bourgeois authority, which relied on moral superiority, directly felt its impact. As previously discussed, philosophical morality and politics provided the foundation for the notion that women occupied this crucial position within the

²⁷⁶ Edgeworth, "Answer to the Preceding Letter," 86.

home. Naturally, the nineteenth century did not completely eradicate the earlier portrayals of women's employment as synonymous with performing sexual acts, including prostitution. Eccles noted that when a job opportunity came her way, it was specifically for writing "spicy"²⁷⁷ articles. "He showed me some specimens of what he wanted. I couldn't and wouldn't so that fell through."²⁷⁸ After experiencing a number of setbacks, she was under the impression that she had found employment with a gentleman who frequently hired women. After the business meeting ended, she faced personal questions she didn't want to answer. Inquiring about the outcome of Eccles's interview the following day, the agent who had referred her to Mr Dash expressed a little bit of anxiety: "He did not... for instance, try... to kiss you?" It turned out that the gentleman had indeed done so to a previous woman who had complained.²⁷⁹ From that point forward, Eccles reportedly made the decision to only communicate with Mr Dash through written correspondence.

In summary, the previous section stated that women had some leeway in authorship as long as they upheld feminine morality. This section revisited Eccles' account, in which she expressed concern about alarming titles such as her book "Modern Men, by a Modern Maid."²⁸⁰ The woman writer walks on a narrow rope. Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* explores the relationship between women and writing, reinforcing the notion that society generally disapproves of women's labour, but allows it if, as depicted in the novel, the profession is sufficiently respectable to exclude factory work by lower-class women, or if the woman works out of altruism. This discussion, like the one in the previous section, was part of a debate about the public's ethical morality and what they considered appropriate reading material. Eccles also

²⁷⁷ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 832.

²⁷⁸ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 832.

²⁷⁹ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 836.

²⁸⁰ O'Connor Eccles, "The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.," 832.

recounts how a publisher approached her as a female writer, asking her to write “spicy”²⁸¹ works, and how she had to restrict her interactions with an employer who had a reputation for harassing the women he employed.

Another more general conversation that existed simultaneously with women’s authorship was the discussion of women and literary pursuits, which was addressed in Maria Edgeworth’s epistolary novel *Letters for Literary Ladies* in the form of a letter correspondence between a friend and a new father to his daughter. The father expresses his desire for the girl to receive a well-rounded education for the sake of her future husband, or, if she does not marry, to avoid misery.

Literary restrictions

The previous subsection discussed the moral panic surrounding women’s publishing careers. Of course, the fact that these writings could cause moral panic is only possible if they were identifiable as having been written by a woman. The thesis will investigate the debate over determining a feminine writing style, the contents of women’s written work, and the controversy surrounding them in the context of the rise of the ‘Woman Question’ and self-censorship.

Understanding the underlying moral panic and how it prevents many writers from writing about genuine experiences or imaginations that do not conform to the ideology of their biological sex is one of the most important aspects of this thesis’ historical analysis. Indeed, Elaine Showalter, a literary critic and feminist, argues that literary works have not adequately

²⁸¹ O’Conor Eccles, “The Experiences of a Woman Journalist.,” 832.

portrayed the female experience. Furthermore, she argues that there is no such thing as feminine writing, and that literary critics often use the term ‘feminine’ in a derogatory manner.²⁸² In “Women Writers and the Female Experience,” Elaine Showalter explains that despite being allowed to have their writings published, these women were still unable to completely convey the female experience in their writing due to their repression in the face of strict gender ideology.²⁸³ However, one could argue that the author intentionally chose this approach, rather than responding to a specific restriction. Indeed, Trevor Ross argues in his essay “Censorship” from *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* that authors censor themselves far more frequently in order to attract readers rather than to avoid upsetting institutions of power such as the government or the Church.²⁸⁴ It is likely that women chose to write to conform, especially if they needed to make a living from their writings, and thus had to focus on reaching a large audience by catering to cultural norms.

Indeed, there was an important correlation between the author’s sex and the value and validity of their work. Charlotte Riddell’s *A Struggle for Fame* could be an example of a novel’s merit being affected by the author being female. Reproved for being a “lowbrow”²⁸⁵ novel, *A Struggle for Fame* was one of the works that was published under Charlotte Riddell’s married name. Within the novel as well, this is brought up when Mr Vassett evaluates Glen’s writing as being “good.”²⁸⁶ However, he presents it in a manner that is consistent with the prevalent

²⁸² Elaine Showalter, “Women Writers and the Female Experience,” in *Radical Feminism*, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (Quadrangle Books, 1973), 393.

²⁸³ Showalter, “Women Writers and the Female Experience,” 391–92.

²⁸⁴ Trevor Ross, “Censorship,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, ed. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 406, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316717516>.

²⁸⁵ Emma Dale, ““Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out,”” Adobe ePub, in *A Struggle For Fame*, by Charlotte Riddell [Mrs J. H. Riddell] (1883; repr., Tramp Press, 2014), n.p.

²⁸⁶ Charlotte Riddell [Mrs J. H. Riddell], *A Struggle for Fame: Volume I*, Adobe ePub (1883; repr., Tramp Press, 2014), chap. IV: An Aspirant for Fame.

understanding of the time period, which is that “young ladies cannot possess the amount of experience necessary to produce a readable book.”²⁸⁷ In a sense, as such, Glen’s novel is considered to be “very good indeed” for a young woman of her age, and Mr Vassett compliments her by saying that, in a few years, she might produce something substantial.²⁸⁸ It should also be mentioned that all of this information is relayed to Mr Westley, her father, while Glen, who is present in the room, receives no consideration.

Frequently, it was crucial to determine whether or not it was acceptable for the text to focus on or revolve around sex-based roles or experiences. These guiding concepts oversimplified the distinction between male and female authors. It is a cornerstone for theorising female authorship.²⁸⁹ The growing emphasis on the ‘Woman Question’ contributed to this theory of female authorship.²⁹⁰ It was about more than just what a woman could write or accomplish; it was also about a woman’s proper place in society.²⁹¹

The serious implications of what women published, once they were in the realm of publishing at all, shaped what women could publish that would still be deemed appropriate for women to write: it had to be of a certain style and subject matter, all of which had to reflect back to ‘femininity.’ Elaine Showalter takes a step towards capturing the spirit of something approaching female creativity: what this supposed female essence is, where it came from, and how this femininity flowed from the writer’s hand to the written word, all for the reader’s mind

²⁸⁷ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume I*, chap. IV: An Aspirant for Fame.

²⁸⁸ Riddell, *A Struggle for Fame: Volume I*, chap. IV: An Aspirant for Fame.

²⁸⁹ Alexis Easley, “Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,” *Women’s Writing* 3, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969908960030205>.

²⁹⁰ Easley, “Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,” 146.

²⁹¹ Easley, “Authorship, Gender and Identity: George Eliot in the 1850s,” 146.

to perceive.²⁹² According to John Stuart Mill, an influential figure in the early waves of feminism, women encounter several hurdles in their goal of developing a distinct style and form of creativity that is unconstrained by male literary standards.²⁹³ He asserts that women's constant influence on men's writings prevents them from having a unique style.²⁹⁴ Showalter responds by pointing out that women had already secured a prominent position in the nineteenth-century literary canon, prompting the discussion on this subject.²⁹⁵

The subject of female writing styles became important only after women's writing became popular and commercially successful in the nineteenth century. The conversation had become quite serious. Showalter describes how George Henry Lewes attempts to define this work of female creative writing through her interpretation of his 1852 publication, "The Lady Novelist." He summarised the feminine style as embodying "sentiment and observation" qualities.²⁹⁶ In the years since, both men and women—which the text will address separately in this chapter—have attempted to pinpoint the exact 'womanliness' of a work.²⁹⁷ Showalter goes on to say that "in 1904, William L. Courtney found that 'the female author is at once self-conscious and didactic'."²⁹⁸ She adds that a few decades later, "in 1965, Bernard Bergonzi explained that 'women novelists... like to keep their focus narrow.'"²⁹⁹ This reflects the same idealised portrayal of women and femininity as (overly) sentimental, preoccupied with trivial

²⁹² Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.

²⁹³ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 3.

²⁹⁴ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 3.

²⁹⁵ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 3.

²⁹⁶ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 5.

²⁹⁷ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 5.

²⁹⁸ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 5.

²⁹⁹ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 5.

matters (such as housework), and possessing a maternal instinct that instils moral values in society.³⁰⁰ Women were aware of the discussion and got involved. However, Showalter notes that women's participation in the conversation was, at times, polarising. George Eliot, for example, identified her maternal affection as the source of the female writer's areas of expertise.³⁰¹ In contrast, Charlotte Brontë responded to Lewes by writing: "I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on these terms, or with such ideas, that I ever took pen in hand."³⁰²

Women were not the only ones who received criticism for incorrectly using a feminine tone in writing. If a man behaved in a manner consistent with a woman's expected behaviour or writing style, he would expect to receive corrections.³⁰³ Nicola Diane Thompson, author of *Reviewing sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, uses the example of Anthony Trollope, who received early praise for his intellectually stimulating works that were considered masculine in nature.³⁰⁴ But when he wrote romance novels, he seemed to understand the female characters better and gave more attention to the characters themselves.³⁰⁵ As a result, he faced criticism similar to that of female authors.³⁰⁶ More accurately, the issue lies with the 'characteristics associated with women,' or the sex associated with femininity, rather than with 'women,' meaning female individuals as people separate from their sex role.

³⁰⁰ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 5.

³⁰¹ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 5-6.

³⁰² Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 7.

³⁰³ Nicola Diane Thompson, *Reviewing sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 109.

³⁰⁴ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 109.

³⁰⁵ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 109.

³⁰⁶ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 109.

However, there was no way for women to opt out. Although a man could compose feminine novels, he would revert to using the masculine voice when necessary. The fact was that women could not do the same; they could not be considered masculine without being morally dubious, with the exception of an effective pseudonym like 'George Eliot'. Ultimately, then, primarily men could maintain their integrity and proficiency as writers so long as they produced writing that reflected masculinity. It follows that the appropriate behaviour of the child-bearing sex is of greater significance than the author's gender. The issue is the forceful application of a spiritual belief about how women should behave. 'Womanhood' is a manner of presenting oneself in society that is both 1) completely unacceptable for men and 2) the only morally sound option for women. Certainly, there are traits that may be useful but are never intellectually valuable.

In essence, women built a substantial platform for publishing but encountered multiple limitations on the content they could publish, primarily as a result of their own self-imposed censorship. Mary Poovey references Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and their use of the phrase 'anxiety of authorship'. Poovey suggests that the sensation of the 'anxiety of authorship' arises from the complex circumstances experienced by women. Women were permitted to engage in writing, albeit under the condition that it did not compromise their immaculate womanhood.³⁰⁷ This viewpoint was reflected on paper in reviews. People frequently label women who use masculine writing techniques as (qualitatively poor) cross-dressers.³⁰⁸ In 1861, the *Dublin University Magazine* issued a scathing statement. In this statement, the author compares women who write in a masculine style or even use a male pseudonym to a "masquerade in garments borrowed from the sterner

³⁰⁷ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 125.

³⁰⁸ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 21-22.

sex” who should not deceive male critics about their “real authorship.”³⁰⁹ The article claims that a female novel, like a woman, is worthless unless it is “pure womanly.”³¹⁰ The author states the following about a woman acting in the exact opposite way and attempting to overcome that restriction: “Striving to copy the man’s free carriage, deep tones, and hard reasonings, she can only succeed in behaving like a better sort of monkey.”³¹¹ Periodical journalists would evaluate novels on morality, value, and validity based on the author’s sex, which would determine whether they praised or criticised the work.³¹² As described by Thompson, Andrew Blake asserts in his book *Reading Victorian Fiction* that these journalists probably did reflect society at large because they were generally from the same social class and shared a similar level of familiarity with the literature as the author, reader, and journalist.³¹³

Indeed, the rigid gendered boundaries in writing were a manifestation of the aforementioned sex roles, which strictly limited what women could or could not do. Women in the literary world, depending on their status as members of society’s political class, may or may not write on specific subjects, whether academic or political. Whether a woman adhered to these gender norms could have repercussions, either in the form of criticism in publications or the financial success of her books. It is crucial to consider the identities of the authors who penned these reviews in these influential Victorian magazines. The reason for this is that there was a significant distinction between women who authored popular books and those who published works of ‘high culture’ in a manner similar to that of men.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 21-22.

³¹⁰ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 21-22.

³¹¹ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 21-22.

³¹² Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 10.

³¹³ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 10.

³¹⁴ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 11.

Linda H. Peterson's book *Becoming a Woman of Letters* also explored the long-standing narrative about women's disadvantages in the literary field, which she argues is an unfavourable generalisation in and of itself. Instead, she argues that the previously identified categories of women writers—those who wrote for popular fiction and those who wrote for critical recognition—were those where a clear division existed.³¹⁵ She addresses female Victorian authorship in this way by focusing on inter-class (the political class of the female sex within the class systems) discussions that are based on labour, economic success, and critical acclaim.³¹⁶ She draws attention to conversations that take place among female writers about topics like whether they should write in a feminine or masculine style, whether they should write feminist works, whether they should participate in the ongoing debate about copyright and royalties, and how to achieve financial success without sacrificing critical acclaim and literary status.³¹⁷

To conclude, this section discussed how the moral panic about women and writing permeated reviews and critiques of women's work. John Stuart Mill asserts that women encounter difficulties in crafting a unique feminine style, free from male literary norms; however, Elaine Showalter contends that the term "feminine writing" doesn't exist and merely serves as a derogatory term for women's work. The description of Charlotte Riddell's work as a "lowbrow" novel upon its release is a common occurrence in this thesis, particularly with women's works. Showalter also refutes the notion that women's authorship was still on the rise in men's work, despite the fact that women had already established themselves in the literary scene by the nineteenth century. The emphasis on the woman demonstrating appropriate

³¹⁵ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 11.

³¹⁶ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 6.

³¹⁷ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 6.

behaviour was more important than whether the author was male or female. Women gained access to the world of publishing as a result, but the author's adherence to womanhood determined the reception of their work, frequently labelling women who used masculine writing techniques as (qualitatively poor) crossdressers. The result was self-censorship among women. Along with the social class divide among women writers, Peterson recognised another divide: those who wrote for the public (popularity) versus those who wrote for critical recognition. This decision, for example, would influence how compelled a woman may feel to follow the strict social rules of femininity.

Anonymity, pseudonyms and avatars

Following the discussion of restrictions on what was socially acceptable for women to publish during the Victorian era, this subsection delves into a common publishing practice of the time: anonymity and the use of pseudonyms and avatars. This section discusses women's complicated relationship with pseudonyms, including their motivations, benefits, and drawbacks.

Indeed, the moral panic surrounding any deviation from this norm was palpable among women, too. Barrett, in "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," points out how Virginia Woolf also noticed this. She writes that Woolf's analysis is particularly significant because it examines the correlation between literature production and consumption, with a specific focus on women's writing. She contends that societal and critical biases against women's writing not only resulted in women using male pseudonyms to gain publication, but also influenced the tone and style of their work.³¹⁸ Fionnuala Dillane writes in "Avatars,

³¹⁸ Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," 15-16.

Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette” that, during her forty-year career, George Eliot reportedly only took on the identity of a female author twice. In both cases, she wrote letters that were roughly a thousand words long each, using the avatar of ‘Saccharissa.’³¹⁹ Eliot created Saccharissa, a fictional persona that detailed her identity, appearance, life, and thought process. It was not a pseudonym; rather, she was an avatar, a separate identity and character that Eliot embodied. In contrast, a pseudonym is not much more than a front for the real author.³²⁰ Riddell, for example, also wrote, like many other Victorian women, under pseudonyms at first. R. V. M. Sparling was the name under which she published her first novel, *Zuriel’s Grandchild*, in 1856,³²¹ which is considered to have been a commercial failure.³²² It was under the name F.G. Trafford that she achieved success, and it was only after she had established a strong enough reputation that she felt comfortable publishing under her married name, Mrs J.H. Riddell.^{323, 324}

As described by Alexis Easley, Clare Gill, and Beth Rodgers later in the chapter “Intervening in Political Debates: Introduction” of the book *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s*, another way authors concealed their sex was by using the editorial ‘we’ when engaging in political debates.³²⁵ This made it easier for them to get their work published. However, male editors eventually imposed stricter content guidelines in order to

³¹⁹ Fionnuala Dillane, “Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s: The Victorian Period*, ed. Alexis Easley, Clare Gill, and Beth Rodgers (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 336.

³²⁰ Dillane, “Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” 339.

³²¹ Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

³²² Dale, ““Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out,”” n.p.

³²³ Dale, ““Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out,”” n.p.

³²⁴ Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

³²⁵ Alexis Easley, Clare Gill, and Beth Rodgers, eds., “Intervening in Political Debates: Introduction,” in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s: The Victorian Period* (Edinburgh University Press, n.d.), 485.

exclude women from their periodicals and magazines.³²⁶ Although it is true that women were able to work in male spaces by using pseudonyms, this also made sure that the prejudice against female-authored comedy, Birch's main area of interest, was never addressed and the women were never given due credit for their contributions.³²⁷ Despite the significant accomplishments women have made in the printing and publishing industry, men have taken actions that hinder their advancement. "Making Space for Women: Introduction," an introductory chapter in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s*, mentions Deborah Mutch, who concluded, based on an analysis of the column space allocated to female writers, that women's issues, concerns, and contributions received significantly less coverage than those of men, even in progressive socialist publications.³²⁸

Fionnuala Dillane contends that women did not consider their concealed identities to be completely ineffective in their activism.³²⁹ Pseudonyms were used by women in order to conceal their identities when discussing subjects that were unrelated to issues pertaining their sex or sex roles that were socially constructed.³³⁰ In her correspondence with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, activist Frances Power Cobbe employed the sex-ambiguous acronym 'F. P. C' and her goal was to increase public awareness of animal welfare.³³¹ Cobbe used this acronym, this pseudonym, to express her true self and overcome the constraints of womanhood, which she saw as a barrier in discussions and arguments. Dillane writes that these avatars and pseudonyms

³²⁶ Alexis Easley, Clare Gill, and Beth Rodgers, eds., "Making Space for Women: Introduction," in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s: The Victorian Period*, 2019, 304.

³²⁷ Easley, Gill, and Rodgers, "Making Space for Women: Introduction," 304–5.

³²⁸ Easley, Gill, and Rodgers, "Making Space for Women: Introduction," 305.

³²⁹ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 339.

³³⁰ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 339.

³³¹ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 339.

became so common that letter pages, such as the *Birmingham Daily Post*, began to print an editorial note requesting all readers to include a name and address “for the information of the Editor” in their letters intended for publication.³³²

Critics, so it appears, suggest that anonymity allowed women to distance themselves from the feminine voice and access power they do not have as women. Though there is little evidence of Victorian women explicitly stating they do so, letters from men in their lives have given women the advice to hide their sex for the sake of impartiality and full integration with other professional writers.³³³ Charlotte Brontë exemplified a double standard in her career when she wrote under a masculine pseudonym. She achieved popularity by publishing *Jane Eyre* under the androgynous alias Currer Bell. Her sisters used the names Ellis and Acton Bell. Her sisters also used the names Ellis and Acton Bell to conceal their biological sex. According to what Charlotte wrote, their reasoning for hiding the fact that they were female was as follows:

Without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what was called feminine, we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice. We notice how sometimes critics use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and their rewards flattery which is not true praise.³³⁴

³³² Dillane, “Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” 339-40.

³³³ Dillane, “Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” 351.

³³⁴ Showalter, “Women Writers and the Female Experience,” 394.

When it comes to the issue of fame, it is possible that this has been a source of unease for female authors. Charlotte Brontë, has her own unique experiences in the literary world, having written under the pen name Currer Bell. She particularly strived to avoid any inkling of fame. In 1852, she wrote to George Smith about publishing her most recent book. If maintaining her anonymity in the book did not present the publisher with any major challenges, she states that she would prefer not to have her pseudonym or any connection to her earlier works appear in the publication of her new work.³³⁵

In 1854, Charlotte wrote a letter to Margaret Wooler, who was the headmistress of Roe Head School, where she had been a student. In the letter, she expressed that she did not anticipate achieving much personal fame.³³⁶ She is under the impression that this is the case because she just recently got married.³³⁷ She contends that when women change their names to those of their husbands after marriage, they find themselves in a less prominent position.³³⁸ However, it seems as though she is saying this with some reluctance. Brontë specifically writes: “but if true domestic happiness replace Fame - the exchange <is> ‘ will’ indeed be for the better.”³³⁹ This novel, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, edited by Margaret Smith, incorporates symbols that indicate that Brontë changed the word “is” to the word “will” on her own while she was writing the letter. It seems she was not yet able to endure the reputational damage that accompanied her marriage.³⁴⁰ This appears to be somewhat paradoxical, considering that Mary Taylor writes to Mrs Gaskell about Brontë while she is under the impression that fame “seemed

³³⁵ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:74.

³³⁶ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:290.

³³⁷ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:290.

³³⁸ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:290.

³³⁹ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:290.

³⁴⁰ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:290.

to make no difference to [Brontë].”³⁴¹ Taylor continued: “[s]he was just as solitary, and her life as deficient in interest as before. . . . She never criticised her books to me, farther than to express utter weariness of them, and the labour they had given her.”³⁴² The name Charlotte Brontë is, without a doubt, one that is easily recalled by a large number of people. However, it is possible that the connection between her accomplishments and the name Nicholls, which she signed her letters with for a brief year before she passed away, does not come equally as naturally to readers.

Not only did this prejudice against female authorship, specifically the intersection of ‘femaleness’ and credibility, exist in the realms of fiction, academia, politics, and activism, but it was also evident in the realm of comedy. The witty woman is inherently questionable from a moral standpoint and has risked censure.³⁴³ Regina Barreca’s study reveals that women excel in crafting self-deprecating jokes within the realm of humour. A woman’s sense of humour was morally suspect, but if the joke targeted her or other women, it lessened the severity of the situation.³⁴⁴ While Alexis Easley suggests that anonymous publication has equipped women to address feminist issues like the Woman Question, Hilary Fraser, Judith Johnston, and Stephanie Green argue that women have faced greater challenges in addressing sex-based prejudiced themes, particularly when they adopt a male voice to maintain anonymity. As Dillane points

³⁴¹ Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:75.

³⁴² Brontë, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: With a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, III: 1852-1855:75.

³⁴³ Dillane, “Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” 352.

³⁴⁴ Dillane, “Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette,” 357.

out, women who have advocated for women's rights, particularly in the course of *Punch* magazine that she studied, tend to speak with a female voice.³⁴⁵

In some publications, the use of pseudonyms and avatars has negatively impacted women's participation. While men would occasionally use female pseudonyms when writing novels with women as the target audience,³⁴⁶ as described by Robert J. Griffin in his essay "Anonymity and Pseudonymity" from *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, this was not the only reason some men did so. A thorough investigation, as detailed by Dillane, has revealed that male readers of periodicals such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* would assume the identity of female readers in order to provoke male authors with argumentative texts or to incite discussions.³⁴⁷ The instances described in the letters submitted to the *Pall Mall Gazette* are not unique, and it is still not possible to blindly accept the opinions expressed in correspondences sent to publications, as even authors were imitated, such as happened to Mary Elizabeth Braddon.³⁴⁸ Although Dillane briefly considers that the men who wrote these letters may have been cross-dressing or trying to avoid conforming to middle-class masculinity, it is evident that the actual content of these letters, written by men pretending to be women, is predominantly toxic. They often portray the female body in a distressing way, outlining the possible outcomes of women's liberation and public space participation. The primary intention of the letters seemed to be to instigate a state of panic regarding the advancement of women's liberation.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 358.

³⁴⁶ Robert J. Griffin, "Anonymity and Pseudonymity," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship*, ed. Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens, and Marysa Demoor (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 349, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316717516>.

³⁴⁷ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 343.

³⁴⁸ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 347.

³⁴⁹ Dillane, "Avatars, Pseudonyms, and the Regulation of Affect: Performing and Occluding Gender in the Pall Mall Gazette," 348.

Through the lens of social constructivism, a closer analysis reveals the significance of these letters and correspondences, surpassing their perceived harmlessness and humourlessness. The media has a significant impact on public opinion, and instances where men impersonate women can have serious repercussions for the genuine debates on legislation in material reality.

This section covered how women can choose to erase their sex in order to resist the pressure to live up to conventional notions of womanhood. Male editors had the power to change their policies and limit the publications that women could submit. As was the case for activist Frances Power Cobbe, who acronymized her name to 'F. P. C.' to advocate for animal welfare without the 'noise' of social expectations for women, using pseudonyms allowed women to discuss societal issues with the public that, focus-wise, had nothing to do with sex roles. For their publications, Charlotte Brontë and her sisters also used androgynous names. Women also hid their sex in order to avoid unwelcome attention; however, in Charlotte Brontë's case, this was a delicate subject, as it seemed unclear if she really did not mind not receiving proper credit for her contributions.

The prejudice against women's writing went beyond activism, novels, and periodicals. It also existed in the world of humourists, where restrictions on what topics women could joke about ultimately prevented them from specialising in self-deprecating humour. Essentially, women could only be considered humourists if they themselves or other women were the subject of the joke.

In summary, there were drawbacks to the widespread use of pseudonyms. First of all, it denied women the credit they deserved for their activism, writing, and other accomplishments. Another drawback was that men would also pose as women and start conversations about sex roles by creating avatars or using pseudonyms. They would also write letters to publications in which they would purposefully use distressing language about the female body in an effort to

provoke controversy about women and womanhood. These actions would have an impact beyond the printed word, negatively impacting socio-political conversations about women and womanhood.

The end of the nineteenth century

As the thesis approaches its conclusion, it will discuss the end of the Victorian era and the changes in the publishing industry that set the tone for women writers in the following century. For example, the popular format of the novel changed; the first woman received a pension under a new social system for retired authors; and women writers in the past received less and less credit.

The changes in the publishing industry in the late 1800s severely impacted Charlotte Riddell, one of the prominent female authors of the era, and her popularity quickly faded. One of the criticisms levelled against her novel *A Struggle for Fame*, aside from the author being female, included the fact that she still published in the three-decker novel format or in other serialised formats that were prevalent during the Victorian era.^{350, 351} Although this format was never completely suitable for her, as she is described in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* someone who “typically began with the plot conclusion and worked backwards, ran out of space to resolve the characters’ dilemmas and was forced into a hasty round-up,”³⁵² it would appear she could not keep up with the change to the new preferred formatting. Indeed, the three-decker

³⁵⁰ Dale, ““Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out,”” n.p.

³⁵¹ Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

³⁵² Dale, ““Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out,”” n.p.

novel was losing popularity in favour of single volume publications, which were less expensive to produce and thus more affordable general public. Therefore, despite it being true that her style of gritty realism in novels was popular,^{353,354} Riddell's works became less desirable as a direct result of the format in which they were published.^{355,356} For Riddell, the format that had once brought her a great deal of fame and success turned out to be her undoing as the period was drawing to a close.³⁵⁷ According to Dale, Riddell had fallen victim to the publishing market and the continuous industrialization of the publishing industry.³⁵⁸ From 1886 onward, Riddell lived her final years in a manner that was somewhat secluded and without the ability to rely on her copyrights' protection. While Maume writes that Riddell had sold the copyrights,³⁵⁹ Dale reports that Linda Peterson learned that Riddell's husband had borrowed money for his failing business ventures using the copyright to a dozen of Riddell's works as a mortgage,³⁶⁰ leaving Riddell with little savings to spare. However, in May of 1904, roughly two years after the publication of her final novel, she was to become the first author to receive a pension from the Society of Authors. This was in contrast to the customary practice of receiving one-time grants,

³⁵³ Dale, "Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out," n.p.

³⁵⁴ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

³⁵⁵ Dale, "Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out," n.p.

³⁵⁶ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

³⁵⁷ Dale, "Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out," n.p.

³⁵⁸ Dale, "Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out," n.p.

³⁵⁹ Maume, "Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson," n.p.

³⁶⁰ Dale, "Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out," n.p.

which was prevalent during that period.³⁶¹ Riddell suffered from breast cancer from 1892³⁶² until her passing in 1906.^{363,364}

When zooming out to a broader perspective on the nineteenth century, it may be attested that Victorian women who lived in the middle and later years of the century, like Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, faced greater societal expectations compared to Mary Shelley's generation. Margaret Homans describes this gradual shift of pressure throughout the entire century in her book *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-century Women's Writing*. With passages such as “[o]n the maternal bosom the mind of nations reposes; their manners, prejudices, and virtues, - in a word, the civilisation of the human race all depend upon maternal influence” the author points out the profound significance that their cultural community placed on femininity.³⁶⁵ This idea evolved alongside other discussions at the time about bourgeois power and the concept of virtue.³⁶⁶ By adopting this approach, the man is able to pursue ambition, productivity, and economic success without moral conflict, as his wife, supposedly, is mostly unaffected by material wealth and therefore evinces his virtuous life. The transformation of social virtue into a gendered issue is a highly significant development. This transition occurred simultaneously with the shift away from the concept of *noblesse oblige* and an increase in government liberalism.³⁶⁷ The influence of the bourgeoisie

³⁶¹ Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

³⁶² Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

³⁶³ Dale, ““Irish Stories Are Quite Gone Out,”” n.p.

³⁶⁴ Maume, “Riddell, Charlotte Eliza Lawson,” n.p.

³⁶⁵ Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-century Women's Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 153, <https://archive.org/details/bearingword00marg/page/n5/mode/2up>.

³⁶⁶ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 10.

³⁶⁷ Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, 10.

was declining, although they were among the privileged few who could afford to embrace this emerging feminine virtue. This limits women's autonomy and economic independence.

As the nineteenth century ended, it became increasingly difficult for writers who had enjoyed considerable success in the 1890s to maintain their reputations. Although the number of women entering the field as professionals has increased, there is still a lack of recognition for their contributions. Literary historians Elaine Showalter, Lyn Pykett, Talia Schaffer, Gaye Tuchman, and Nina Fortin conducted research into the erasure of women's professional recognition, which Linda H. Peterson references in her book *Becoming a Woman of Letters*. For instance, Tuchman and Fortin observed that the publishing industry marginalised women due to the introduction of a novel format that replaced the triple-decker, a three-volume story format.³⁶⁸ Because this new one-volume novel form was perceived as masculine and associated with 'high culture,' which has been a term that has been used multiple times throughout this thesis, it was more desirable than the triple-decker, which was then considered to be a 'feminine' form.³⁶⁹ Schaffer noted that during the aesthetic movement, men wrote primarily about the achievements of their male friends or acquaintances, effectively excluding women from the canon of recognised literature.³⁷⁰ Pykett made a similar observation about the late Victorian novel, and Showalter also suggested in *A Literature of Their Own* that women's writings, when given credit, dealt with themes and subjects, such as the New Woman, that were politically significant at the time but soon became irrelevant or of little artistic value as societies and politics advanced.³⁷¹ After some time had passed, during the twentieth century, it was commonly believed that a woman's work would eventually lead to the conclusion that she did

³⁶⁸ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 207.

³⁶⁹ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 207.

³⁷⁰ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 207.

³⁷¹ Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*, 207–8.

not have any children, and this led to assumptions that were derogatory regarding her mental health.³⁷²

To summarise, the end of the nineteenth century brought a few changes into the twentieth: the three-decker novel was being replaced by the one-volume novel, which was more affordable and accessible, but was also associated with 'high culture' and masculinity, making it difficult for women to publish in this increasingly dominant format. In 1904, Riddell became the first woman to receive a pension from the Society of Authors, a significant step forward in legal rights; however, rising social expectations limited women's autonomy and economic independence. Political discussions and other social themes that women had written about became obsolete as time passed, and to men who determined the value of written works, women's works were largely worthless, eventually fading into obscurity.

A glimpse beyond the nineteenth century

This chapter on the nineteenth century provided several insights into the harmful consequences of the deeply ingrained concept of gender ideology on material aspects of authorship. Inherently linked to biological sex, gender has taken on an almost mysterious and integral quality. The concept of gender carries both a moral significance and an imperial significance, serving as a means to assert supremacy, as indicated in this chapter. England's contribution to gender ideology should not be underestimated, although it is important to note that radical feminists believe it is prevalent globally. However, England's national aspirations have further intensified the expectations surrounding the maintenance of gender ideology. According to Thompson, this

³⁷² Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 6.

creates an interesting picture over time. She notes that in contrast to Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*, which was acclaimed to the point of idealisation, *Wuthering Heights* by Charlotte Brontë was viewed as masculine at the time of its publication because it was strong and forceful and therefore unfit for the kind of novels women were supposed to write.³⁷³ However, Thompson highlighted that the latter novel, along with Trollope's previously mentioned work (written by a male author with a feminine style), is now being read more often in recent times. While she recognises that contemporary readers may avoid books with overtly patriarchal themes, she also observes that many still avoid traditionally feminine books such as *Evelina* by Fanny Burney because they are considered frivolous and intricately linked to the stereotype of female writers associated with low culture who do not produce anything deemed 'serious'.³⁷⁴ However, further analyses can be made. Romance is typically associated with women; however, this idea can also be derived from entrenched sex roles, which encourages romanticism in women. When viewed through the lens of critical analysis, the entire concept of women as well as the genre of romance can be broken down even further. After all, radical feminism, as written by Ti-Grace Atkinson in her essay "Radical Feminism" in the work *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader* published in 2000, contends that a central principle of gender ideology is the deliberate manipulation of women's beliefs and attitudes through romantic portrayals in the media, with the goal of reinforcing traditional societal expectations of women as wives and mothers, and ultimately exerting control over reproduction.³⁷⁵

The literary contributions of early women writers appeared to regain their relevance. Without a doubt, Atkinson was not the only individual who contemplated the literary

³⁷³ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 109-110.

³⁷⁴ Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, 110-111.

³⁷⁵ Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Radical Feminism," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York University Press, 2000), 88-89.

contributions of early female authors. The desire among scholars from a variety of disciplines to look back into the past in order to comprehend women's experiences throughout history is a relatively recent development in humanity's long history. It emerged in the late 1960s with the resurgence of the Woman's Liberation Movement in both the United States and the United Kingdom.³⁷⁶ These people included psychologists, sociologists, social historians, and art historians.³⁷⁷ Understanding the 'ordinary' women, who frequently vanish completely from our examination of women's material reality throughout history, depends critically on this context in particular. In our examination of the past, it is of the utmost importance for the standard of exceptionality to not depend on any approximation of maleness.³⁷⁸ Showalter also cites Virginia Woolf's examination of her contemporary era, in which Woolf acknowledged the need for a more multifaceted contextualization.³⁷⁹ Woolf argues that the "extraordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman."³⁸⁰ She reiterated the importance of considering the material aspects of women's lives, such as their responsibilities in caring for children, the presence of any support they receive, the availability of a dedicated and private writing space, the presence of domestic helpers, and their financial independence.³⁸¹ She highlights the notable inequalities faced by women from various social strata, especially those from the working-class, a group largely ignored in historical chronicles. Woolf concludes: "[I]t is only when we can measure the way of life and the experience of life made possible to the ordinary woman that we can account for the success or failure of the extraordinary woman as writer."³⁸²

³⁷⁶ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 8.

³⁷⁷ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 8.

³⁷⁸ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 9.

³⁷⁹ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 9.

³⁸⁰ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 9.

³⁸¹ Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 9.

³⁸² Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing: Expanded Edition*, 9.

To summarise, this thesis's section on the nineteenth century focused on the continuation of gender ideology and the sex divide from the eighteenth century, as well as how this affected Victorian women's views and ways of dealing with their careers at the time. Gender ideology influenced women's morality in such a way that it shaped their reception and credibility, rather than dictating whether they could speak at all. During the twentieth century, radical feminists began to discuss the romance genre as a tool for keeping women subservient and romanticising misogyny. The resurgence of the Woman's Liberation Movement in the United States and the United Kingdom fuelled the desire to understand these women in the mid- and late-1900s, emphasising the importance of understanding the 'ordinary' woman in order to understand the 'extraordinary' women.

Conclusion

After a brief look into the twentieth century, this thesis ends. This thesis' aim was to answer the following question: How did the socioeconomic dynamics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society influence the extent to which women participated and were represented in the publishing industry? The hypothesis for this question was that socioeconomic constraints based on sex and patriarchal norms in these time periods limited women authors' autonomy and creative freedom, despite their widespread participation. While the conclusion remains largely consistent with this hypothesis, a nuance has been discovered that necessitates a shift in perspective on this question.

This thesis demonstrates that women were prolific writers of letters and manuscripts both before and during the rise of the publishing industry. As King described, women of lower classes would feel drawn to writing manuscripts to rise the social ladder, while upper-class women would sometimes opt for print, despite its stigma, to spread their works to a wider audience. Bigold also described how women have been experimenting with creative styles and modes while also engaging in criticism and academic debate through letter writing prior to and during the growth of the publishing industry.

The publishing industry has created many professional opportunities for women. Before professional authorship became an option, Spencer noted that the only mode of writing considered sufficient to generate a sustainable income in rare cases was as a playwright, as was the case for Aphra Behn. Despite the fact that professional authorship did not pay well for most people, Turner found that women's writing increased in waves from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, with Eliza Haywood accounting for 70 percent of the total output of women's writing at one point.

As gender ideology shifted and solidified into a rigid view of womanhood based on a woman's ethical morality and detachment from masculine spheres, men and other women questioned whether it was appropriate for women to participate in debates or education at the turn of the century. This trend coincided with the demonisation of the working-class woman, so write both Turner and Valenze, which was both a contradiction to the dominant image of the providing husband and domestic wife, as well as the pillar that supported it as a domestic servant to wealthy women.

This ongoing debate, as well as its silent perpetuation, was prominent and visible in discussions by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Charlotte O'Connor Eccles, as well as in

Charlotte Riddell's and Marie Corelli's novels. *Lady Mary* and *Eccles* both provided insights into their firsthand experiences as literary women in their time. *Lady Mary* advocated for education through letters and commended the works of women writers, and *Eccles* described how, as a woman, she turned out too timid and struggled to enter an industry reliant on connections in a social climate that saw women as inherently less competent than men.

Many early women writers appear to have faded from memory, perhaps due to the historical undervaluation of their works compared to their male counterparts, despite their successes at the time of writing. According to Peterson, although renewed interest arose during the twentieth century, generalization is still a frequent problem researchers tend to drift towards in these discussions.

As such, this thesis not only examined the female authors, but also explored the inter-class dynamics among women during these time periods within the prevailing gendered culture, as well as their material reality and how they were perceived by others in professional functions. This emphasises not only the accomplishments and activism of women, but also provides insight into the daily life and culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It examines not only the female perspective on publishing, but publishing as a whole. Without a doubt, the woman is not isolated from society, regardless of attempts to change that, and any suggestion of such a conclusion is a mistaken one.

To summarise, socioeconomic constraints based on sex and patriarchal norms in these time periods limited women authors' autonomy and creative freedom, however, additional factors should be stressed in this discussion so as not to get a monolithic view of early female writers. This thesis aimed to emphasise the interrelated relationships between women as a distinct class. The purpose of this project was to highlight women's involvement in the publishing industry, challenging the notion that they were an isolated group within the industry

despite their unique challenges. Furthermore, it sought to disprove the notion that women were an isolated group in the publishing industry despite their limitations, and that they had participated in all stages of the industry's development. Indeed, the conclusion is that women from diverse backgrounds, with multifaceted interconnections, navigated a convoluted system that intentionally works against them at every opportunity through various means, depending on their individual standing in society.

This thesis concludes with general suggestions for future research, but it also makes two specific recommendations for additional studies. First, this thesis did not place enough emphasis on women editors who held perceived positions of power and how the dominant gender ideology influenced their perspectives. For this purpose, the thesis would recommend the work "The Editor of the Period: Alice Corkran, the Girl's Realm, and the Woman Editor" by Beth Rodgers in *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s: The Victorian Period*, edited by Alexis Easley, Clare Gill, and Beth Rodgers, a book that may well be relevant in its entirety. Second, this thesis challenges the long-standing theories and narratives about early women writers that have been instrumental in activism against women's oppression, particularly in the twentieth century. It suggests that these narratives may have overlooked women's choices across social classes, potentially to their advantage or disadvantage.

This project may serve as an invitation to fully integrate women's perspectives in the publishing industry into education and academia, recognizing their full participation at all stages of the publishing industry's development. Its objective is to prevent the portrayal of women as a uniform group with a singular role, opinion, or form of activism, or as any collective form of activism at all. Rather than researching women through distinct seminars or segments,

the narrative should change to acknowledge the fact that they have been involved at every stage.

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