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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1. State of Research	6
1.2. Aims and Methodology	7
1.3. Introduction to the Plays Selected	9
2. Women in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain	14
2.1. Separate Spheres, Separate Laws	14
2.2. Pure, Fallen, and New Women	20
3. The ‘Woman Question’	25
3.1. The ‘Double Standard’ in late Victorian and Edwardian Society	25
3.2. The ‘Marriage Question’	31
3.3. Widowhood	34
4. Widowhood in Fin-de-Siècle British Drama	43
4.1. Theatrical context	43
4.2. The Widow as <i>Raisonneur</i> and Companion	46
4.2.1. Mrs. Quesnel	47
4.2.2. Lady Eastney	49
4.2.3. Mrs. Thorpe	54
4.3. The ‘Fallen’ Widow	57
4.3.1. ‘Mrs. Dane’	57
4.3.2. Mrs. Ebbsmith	62
4.3.3. Mrs. Bellamy	71
4.4. The ‘New’ Widow	80
4.4.1. ‘Mrs. Seagrave’	80
5. Conclusion	90
Works Cited	94
Primary Works	94
Secondary Works	94
Abstract	100
Zusammenfassung	102

1. Introduction

1.1. State of Research

The widow frequently features in novels¹ and drama² of the nineteenth century, and, with the development of an extensive mourning culture, she even appears in fashion magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar*. Queen Victoria's prolonged mourning for Albert, the Prince Consort (d. 1861), also contributed to a constant presence of the widow as a conspicuous figure in British society in the late nineteenth century (Bedikian 35). Life expectancy rates and the age gap between men and women marrying meant that widowhood was a likely experience for women. According to the estimates of the Fabian sociologist B. L. Hutchins in her 1911 tract "The Working Life of Women," "one out of every eight women was a widow" in 1901 (Vicus, *Independent Women* 6). Despite the clearly documented presence of the widow figure, widowhood in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain is still an under-researched field in both history and literature, although recent years have seen an increase in research on this topic.

In her historical study *Independent Women* (1985), Martha Vicinus omits widows, reasoning that "their unique economic and social status deserves a separate study" (Vicus, *Independent Women* 6). Others have since sought to fill the gap, and during the last three decades widowhood has received increasing attention. Several scholars have, for instance, examined widowhood in the early modern period³. Others, like Cynthia Curran, have turned their attention to nineteenth-century middle-class widows. Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans' *Women on Their Own* (2008) provide several case studies of widowhood, looking for instance at the economic and political opportunities for widows in the United States in the nineteenth century. The field is evidently expanding, with a number of recent studies covering widowhood in the Victorian and Edwardian period, such as Emma Liggins's study *Odd Women?* (2014), which examines the representations of spinsters, lesbians, and widows in British women's fiction from the 1850s to the 1930s. Most recent is Nadine Muller's forthcoming *The Widow: A Literary & Cultural History (1837-1979)*. Muller seeks to find out

¹ E.g. Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?*; Barbara Hofland, *The History of an Officer's Widow and Her Young Family*; Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*.

² E.g. A. W. Pinero, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*; *Iris*; H. A. Jones, *Mrs Dane's Defence*, to name a few.

³ See for example Allison Levy, *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*; Jane Whittle, *Enterprising Widows and Active Wives: Women's Unpaid Work in the Household Economy of Early Modern England*; Richard Wall, *Bequests to Widows and Their Property in Early Modern England*.

what the “literary and cultural iterations of the figure of the widow” can reveal about the lived experiences of widows, what these representations of the widow might contribute to women’s history in Britain, and, with the significant changes happening in society in nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain, “what gendered anxieties and preoccupations were projected onto the figure of the widow” (Muller, *The Widow*).

Several of the plays discussed in this thesis have been treated in theses by students at the University of Vienna’s Department of English Studies before, such as Clarissa Ruscher’s study of “Issues of Love and Marriage in a Restrictive Society” in Henry Arthur Jones’s comedies, and Katharina Apfelthaler’s examination of the well-made problem plays of Arthur Wing Pinero. Both mention a character’s status of widowhood where it occurs, but neither has further examined this significant aspect. It is time that the fascinating widows of late-Victorian and Edwardian British drama got the attention they deserve.

1.2. Aims and Methodology

This thesis examines how the status of widowhood affected women’s lives in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain through analysing selected dramas of the period by Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and St. John Hankin, and examining their historical context. It focuses on how the representation of the widow characters in these plays contribute to addressing the ‘Woman Question,’ especially in terms of the sexual and moral ‘double standard’ prevalent in society at the time. Female characters in these plays that either are, or pose as, widows will be examined through a close reading of the texts, paying particular attention to their interactions with other characters in the respective plays. These representations provide the basis for a discussion of the emancipatory potential of widowhood, as a status that empowers and enables women to lead independent lives. With its emphasis on widowhood, this thesis sheds new light on the ‘Fallen’ and ‘New’ women in the plays selected, and reveal how these characters embody the contemporary ‘Woman Question’ debate.

The seven women in the selected plays by Jones, Pinero, and Hankin, who either are or pretend to be widows, contribute to the ‘Woman Question’ debate in the late Victorian and Edwardian period by giving voice to criticism of the sexual and moral ‘double standard’ prevalent in society. Through their ambiguous positions as widows, these characters demonstrate how widowhood could enable women to lead emancipated lives, in contrast to

the restricted lives of married women, for instance by serving as a guise of respectability for 'Fallen Women.'

The patriarchal context of the plays selected and the 'Woman Question' lends itself to feminist criticism in order to analyse and discuss the representations of widowhood in the plays. Two pioneering feminist theorists' approaches are of particular relevance to this thesis. Firstly, Simone de Beauvoir's identification of woman as the 'Other,' as opposed to man as "the Subject, the Absolute" in her 1949 study *The Second Sex* is a useful concept for the examination of the representations of widowhood in the plays selected (de Beauvoir 15-16). As all of these plays are written by men, Kate Millett's approach in her 1969 study *Sexual Politics* is also useful. Focusing on men's writing, Millett uncovers representations of women in sexual relationships in which "the women are largely seen as passive and helpless in the clutches of the strong male lovers/writers, who control both the sexual encounters and the points of view from which they are written" (Robbins 64). Similarly, the women characters selected in this thesis will be analysed in relation to the male characters and their male authors.

Relying on feminist approaches concerned with "looking at looking," as Ruth Robbins terms the approach of image criticism, involves the risk of the analysis turning into a dead-end "reality test," by evaluating a work based on whether its representation of women is accurate or not (Robbins 65). This thesis will avoid the latter by seeking to place these representations of widows in their historical context and discuss their possible implications for the debate on women's rights and roles in society, rather than to evaluate the representations found in terms of whether they are accurate and relatable or not. The widows in the plays selected offer a fascinating insight into the changing ideal of womanhood in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, conveying contemporary views on, and variations of, some of the central 'types' of woman: the 'Pure,' 'Fallen,' and the 'New Woman.'

In order to establish a foundation for analysing, discussing, and understanding the representations of widows in the plays selected, a substantial amount of historical context is required. The first two chapters are therefore dedicated to establishing this context, drawing on historical studies such as June Purvis's introduction to women's history in Britain from 1850-1945, Carol Dyhouse's *Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939*, Martha Vicinus's *A Widening Sphere*, and Jennifer C. Kelsey's recent *Changing the Rules: Women and Victorian Marriage*. The first context chapter provides a general background, looking into what the prevalent social ideology and laws at the time meant for women, as well as examining the three above-mentioned 'types' of women. The second chapter then goes on to

examine the ‘Woman Question’ in more detail, considering two of its most central aspects; the sexual and moral ‘double standard,’ and the ‘marriage question.’ Finally, it looks at the conditions of widowhood in this historical context, preparing the ground for the analysis and discussion of the widowed characters in the chapters to follow. Keeping the historical context in mind and relating it to approaches of feminist literary criticism, it is possible to pursue questions such as how the representations of widowhood in the plays selected reinforce or defy patriarchal ideals of women, and address in what ways the representations contribute to the debate that is the ‘Woman Question.’

1.3. Introduction to the Plays Selected

The plays selected for analysis in this thesis are Henry Arthur Jones’ *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) and *Mrs. Dane’s Defence* (1900), Arthur Wing Pinero’s *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895) and *Iris* (1901), as well as St. John Hankin’s *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908). The plays have been chosen for their female characters, who either are, or pretend to be, widows. Taking both protagonists and supporting characters into consideration, six “widows” will be analysed and discussed in this thesis. The thesis analyses the plays in their written, published form; productions and their reception are therefore not considered. As a result, the authors’ secondary text is also part of the analysis. The following provides a brief introduction to the plays and their authors. The thesis will cover the wider historical context, but will then focus on the specific theatrical context just before returning to the analysis and close reading of the selected plays in chapter four.

In histories of the British theatre in the late nineteenth century, Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero are often paired together as pioneers of the British theatre scene of the day, especially due to their success with well-made ‘problem plays.’ Problem plays developed in the nineteenth century as a serious type of drama that aimed to treat controversial social issues, such as prostitution and female emancipation, realistically; this exposition of social issues was meant “to stimulate thought and discussion on the part of the audience” (“problem play”). As Penny Griffin puts it, Jones and Pinero “were the leaders of the rebirth of worthwhile serious drama in England” (Griffin 19). According to Richard Dietrich, the theatre critic William Archer in the early 1880s “noted the promise” of Jones and Pinero, who at the time had barely been produced (Dietrich 40). For his daring new plays problematizing the question of women’s sexuality and ‘Fallen’-ness, especially *The Second*

Mrs. Tanqueray (1893), Pinero was celebrated by Archer as the “champion of the New Drama” (ibid). The New Drama movement emerged in the 1890s from “a desire to experiment with new dramatic forms and to break away from the rigid structure of the conventional ‘well-made’ play that dominated the commercial stage” (McDonald, *New Drama*’ 1). It also aimed for the theatre to reflect “everyday life rather than a closed, unreal, ‘limelit’ world,” as was typical of the commercial theatres of the time (ibid). The ‘New Drama’ movement “flourished” in the Edwardian era, and has since primarily been associated with playwrights such as Harley Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, and St. John Hankin (ibid), while Jones and Pinero instead remain associated with the commercial actor-manager theatres of the West End. Pinero (1855–1934) was interested in theatre from an early age, and began his acting career at nineteen, moving between London, Edinburgh, and Liverpool before establishing himself permanently in London (41). He began writing at about this time too, and had his work produced at the age of twenty-two (Taylor 52). Although Pinero is primarily remembered for his well-made problem plays, he actually mostly wrote farces and comedies, counting a total of thirty-four, against only seven problem plays (Dietrich 42).

One of these seven problem plays is *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895). The widow Agnes Ebbsmith is a young woman with ideals, who has been unconventionally raised and whom life has given some bitter experiences (Dietrich 46). In Venice, she has commenced a ‘life of sin’ with Lucas Cleeve, a married man, whose family do their best to end this ‘sinful’ relationship. Mrs. Ebbsmith also finds female companionship in Venice, as she befriends another widow, Mrs. Thorpe. Their friendship is tested, however, when Mrs. Thorpe finds out that Mrs. Ebbsmith has not been honest about her identity and circumstances, having falsely given the impression that she is married to Cleeve. Her relationship with Cleeve comes under pressure, both from the Duke of St Olpherts, Cleeve’s uncle, and from Agnes’s own doubt about Cleeve’s character and love for her. It transpires that the kind of companionship she has sought from him is not what he, ultimately, wants; rather, he wants her to be a ‘proper’ woman in the sense that she should embrace her femininity and adhere to his taste. Mrs. Thorpe, on the other hand, is faced with the difficulty of choosing to either support Agnes or ostracise her. The relationship between these two widows, and the effects widowhood has upon their lives, will be examined in chapter four.

Iris (1901), Pinero’s first play of the Edwardian era, tells the story of a beautiful and rich young widow, Iris Bellamy, who is restricted by her late husband’s will. She is spoiled and impulsive, and entangles herself in conflicts by frequently changing her mind. One of her dilemmas is the question whether she should marry her rich suitor Frederick Maldonado,

whom she has already refused in the past, or whether she should defy convention by marrying a poor man, Laurence Trenwith, whom she has fallen in love with. She promises first to marry Maldonado, but then runs away with Trenwith, taking him as her lover. Rumours start to circulate in society, and Mrs. Bellamy's reputation is damaged. When she also loses her fortune, society shuns her. Trenwith goes to seek work to earn their living, and in his absence Maldonado steps up as the sympathetic friend and offers a (financially) helping hand. His scheme, however, is ultimately to get revenge on Mrs. Bellamy for rejecting him yet again; he takes advantage of Mrs. Bellamy's vulnerable situation and makes her entirely dependent on him, to the point where she becomes his kept mistress. Her tragic case demonstrates the injustice and the destructive potential of the dominant conceptions of women as men's property.

Henry Arthur Jones (1851–1929) had his first encounter with theatre at the age of eighteen, which inspired him to write his first play, *The Golden Calf* (1869). Jones had been brought up strictly within a puritanical environment and was taught to view theatre-going as a vice (Dietrich 51). His schooling was limited, but he did educate himself “by reading the classics” (50) and also immersing himself in modern science, a combination which may indicate that Jones managed to ‘liberate’ himself from his strict upbringing early on (51). By the early 1880s, Jones managed to establish himself as “a name to be reckoned with in the London theatre” (Taylor 35). Unfortunately, this did not last; as he failed to produce anything “remarkably different from what had gone before,” the contemporary theatre scene came to overlook him and move on to the New Dramatists of the early Edwardian period (Dietrich 58).

In *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), a “realistic social comedy with a light satiric touch” (Dietrich 54), the central character Lady Susan Harabin rebels against respectability and social conventions after she finds out that her husband, James Harabin, has had an affair. Lady Susan refuses to let it go, and goes abroad to get her revenge; she means to pay him in kind. Jones had meant for her transgression to be explicit, but he was discouraged by the actor-manager, Charles Wyndham, and the restrictions of the censor (Griffin 37). Nevertheless, the play strongly implies that Lady Susan does commit adultery. The implication of this scenario, which made the play so remarkable and controversial, was that women were ‘free’ to commit adultery too, as long as they did not get caught. Lady Susan is, however, not the main focus in this thesis's treatment of the play; instead, it is the supporting character Mrs. Quesnel who is of primary interest. Mrs. Quesnel is a young, attractive widow and close friend of Lady Susan, who, among other things, enables Lady Susan to go on her

adventure to Cairo. Their relationship, and Mrs. Quesnel's relationship to the play's raisonneur, Sir Richard Kato, is an interesting one for examining the effects and implications of life as a widow.

Jones' other play which is subject to analysis in this thesis is the well-made, realistic problem play *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900). Here, again, a young, attractive widow features as supporting character, whose relationship to the central character, Mrs. Dane, and the raisonneur, Sir Daniel Carteret, provides insights into the possibilities of widowhood. In this play, however, the central character is also of particular interest to the analysis, as she is a young woman 'with a past,' who pretends to be a widow in order to achieve her goal of establishing herself in respectable society. As a 'Fallen Woman,' she has next to no options, but taking on the guise of widowhood enables her to gain entry into society. In both of these plays by Jones, the question of the moral and sexual double standard, and what widowhood may reveal about it, is central to the analysis and discussion in this thesis.

Another female character who takes on the guise of widowhood is the young, disinherited single mother Janet De Mullin in St. John Hankin's play *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908). St. John Hankin (1869–1909) is counted among the 'New Dramatists,' and is, along with John Galsworthy and John Masefield, referred to as a 'Court dramatist,' due to their primary association with the Court Theatre (Chothia 64). Although Pinero had also been promoted as a "champion of the New Drama," he never truly got away from the form of the well-made problem play. As a result, both Jones and Pinero, though innovative at first, became predictable in their writing, being too repetitive or too deterministic and not changing with the times (Griffin 20). Hankin, however, adhered to the New Drama philosophy that wished "to experiment with new dramatic forms and to break away from the rigid structure of the conventional 'well-made' play" (McDonald, *The 'New Drama'* 1). Hankin sought "to present life on stage as he saw it," and left it to the audience to draw any moral conclusions from his plays (5); this was in stark contrast to the style of Jones and Pinero, who both conveyed strong moral messages in their plays, in line with the dominant social norms.

The Last of the De Mullins, then, is a fundamentally different kind of play from the others selected for this thesis. The play is, as Jean Chothia describes it, "a very direct representation of the preoccupations of the new drama"; it features a tyrannical father whose authority is challenged, it expresses contempt for "middle-class pretensions and limitations on personal freedom," and its heroine conveys a sense of "the impact of the growing feminist movement" (74). Nevertheless, it is thematically related to the other plays selected due to the presence of a 'woman with a past,' who poses as a widow in order to live her 'New Woman'

lifestyle. Janet De Mullin returns to her ancestral home where her father is dying, and, to his infinite grief, the family line is about to die out with him. Janet's eight-year-old illegitimate son brings hope to the old man that the male line might be continued, and the patriarch offers Janet to acknowledge him and allow him the De Mullin name. Janet declines, however, and takes her leave to resume her life as a successful business woman and single mother. The nature of her 'New Womanhood' will be examined in detail, as well as the part her status as a 'widow' plays in reinventing and asserting herself as a New Woman.

2. Women in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain

2.1. Separate Spheres, Separate Laws

In his contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, David Mayer observes:

Theatre – and melodrama in particular – does not happen in isolation but is intimately related to the historical and cultural circumstances in which it appears, so anyone studying this form or considering a particular melodrama must ask certain key questions about its context. (Mayer 146).

Although Mayer is specifically concerned with melodrama, his observation applies to nearly any other genre of theatre. The “key questions” Mayer deems necessary are primarily to do with specifics concerning the dramatic event, such as location, management, actors, audience, and censorship, which, admittedly, are important factors to consider when analysing a play. However, the “historical and cultural circumstances” he mentions involve more than knowledge of the specifics of a production. In order to be able to fully understand and appreciate the plays selected for analysis in this thesis, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the society and culture they are in dialogue with. This means examining the ‘Woman Question’ from a historical point of view, examining women’s position in society, its cultural and ideological framework, and women’s legal status in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain.

Throughout the nineteenth century, an ideology of separate spheres was dominant and assiduously adhered to (Vicinus, *Independent Women* 2). The belief was that there were separate spheres of activity for men and women; women should keep to “the home and the closed community,” whereas men should occupy the public sphere (Delamont 177). This division tied in with the pervasive image of “the family as a social order,” yet, as Mitchell points out, this image in itself “was based on a paradox” (S. Mitchell 16). The man was, of course, perceived as superior, the authority in the family who had to be obeyed, while women ought to be submissive to their fathers and husbands, as they were thought to be in need of protection and supervision (17). On the other hand, women were considered superior to men “in moral and spiritual qualities – and were therefore to be deferred to” (ibid). Despite her moral superiority, however, woman’s inferiority as naturally subordinate, passive, and weak constituted a significant part of society’s perception of her being. Lorna Duffin, in the chapter ‘The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid,’ critically examines the pervasive

view of woman as literally the weaker sex, perceived as “delicate and perpetually prone to illness,” an image supported by the medical science of the time (Duffin 26-27). Duffin sees this medical view as emerging through the Victorian woman’s status as an ideal, which kept her from partaking in any “purposeful activity,” creating the notion that she was altogether incapable (26). Ultimately, this meant that “she must be protected and prohibited from serious participation in society” (ibid).

Woman’s status as an ideal increased in significance and extent throughout the century. As economic growth in the wake of industrialisation saw the expansion of the middle classes, an increasing number of families could afford to keep big households, aspiring to the standards of ‘good taste’ and living set of the aristocratic upper classes. Patricia Branca refers to this development as a “drive for social esteem,” with the middle classes “acquiring [...] the ‘paraphernalia of gentility,’” that is, “large and expensive houses, elegant horses and carriages, a retinue of servants, and elaborate and lavish dinner parties” (Branca 6). The wife was supposed to be a ‘perfect lady’ of exquisite taste and impeccable morals, exemplifying the respectability of the household she belonged to.

In such ideal households, women were consigned to the enclosed sphere of their own home, and, in extension, the homes of the social acquaintances considered appropriate for their company. A woman’s ‘job’ as a diligent housewife was to serve her husband by providing him with a pleasant atmosphere in the home, to relieve him of the stress and noise of the outside world, where he laboured to advance or maintain his social status (Langland 45). The home, in contrast to the busy public sphere, was supposed to be a comfortable sanctuary, where he could seek refuge (Branca 7). The wife was responsible for supervising the running of the household, ensuring that the servants took care of all necessary domestic duties, which she herself was not supposed to perform (ibid).

Moreover, she was supposed to emanate the success and wealth of her husband to the outside world. In social settings, such as going to the theatre, she was on display, her expensive and fashionable dress and jewellery demonstrating her husband’s spending power. Going to the theatre itself was an act of conspicuous consumption; it demonstrated her husband’s ability to pay for her partaking in activities of leisure, a phenomenon which the economist Thorstein Veblen dubbed the conspicuous consumption of the leisure class in his 1899 treatise *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen 57). Fulfilling her role as a status symbol also took place in social settings within the home, by hosting dinners and balls for a select circle of friends and acquaintances, or as a guest at social events hosted by others. Although these events were attended by both husband and wife, responses to invitations, for

instance, were always addressed to the lady, who symbolically had the authority over social occasions (Langland 40). To successfully host a large dinner party was a demonstration of wealth, as both the amount of food and fine tableware would be expensive; not to mention the cost of keeping a domestic staff large enough to serve large parties, at a time when the ‘rules’ of etiquette and household manuals stipulated one servant for each three guests (ibid).

To manoeuvre these social settings, it was necessary to establish and maintain exact rules of etiquette to ensure that everyone performed their part correctly. The publication of etiquette manuals experienced a boom in the 1830s, to “teach individuals the signifiers that would allow them to claim the status that their money alone could not guarantee” (Langland 26). Thus, a complex and minutely detailed set of rules came to determine women’s activities and expected behaviour. Additionally, as will be discussed later, an own set of conventions applied to the cases of widows, especially with regard to mourning. Manuals could only prescribe social conventions; women themselves were responsible for implementing them, and by peer pressure ensuring that anyone aspiring to claim a social status like theirs would also abide by the rules. In this sense, upper middle-class women gained a powerful role of determining who was ‘in’ or ‘out’ of society, as defined in the practices of “introductions, calls, and cuts” (31). Rule-breakers and undesirables, such as ‘Fallen Women,’ could end up completely ostracised.

While social conventions form an important aspect of the ‘laws’ determining women’s lives, it is also necessary to have an understanding of the actual legal status of women, and what legal actions were available to them, in order to understand how a widow’s situation was different. Through the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, women’s rights – or rather lack thereof – in marriage were established. Upon signing the marriage certificate, a woman submitted herself to her husband, along with all her property and what she might earn (S. Mitchell xi). She ceased to be a person recognised by the law – instead, she was considered the property of her husband, who, to a large extent, could do with her, and her former property, as he pleased. Towards the end of the century, women increasingly voiced their thoughts and concerns about the institution of marriage, chiefly concerning their lack of rights, and their confinement to the domestic sphere. As Carol Dyhouse argues, in contemporary feminist discourse the family home was often “depicted as a prison, or a cage” (Dyhouse 15).

‘Feminism,’ as Dyhouse acknowledges, is not easy to define, as it “has carried different meanings for different groups of feminists at different points in history” (Dyhouse 3-4). Who, then, are ‘feminists’ in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain? Women’s

struggle for the vote constitutes “a rallying point” which allowed “feminists of all shades of outlook to find some common ground,” on other matters, however, such as marriage, sexuality, and family life, there existed no consensus of feminist thought or attitudes (4). This thesis employs the term in a broad sense of the word, as an overarching term for a wide group of women’s rights proponents; persons who – in various ways, and with emphasis on various aspects – campaigned for or supported social change to the better for women. Lending the words of Sheila Stowell, ‘feminist critique’ at the time is here meant as “a wide-ranging critique of a capitalist patriarchy that purported to explain and contain women by means of the ideology of ‘separate spheres’” (Stowell 1).

Typically, the social debate about various aspects of women’s lives raging in the late nineteenth century was referred to as the ‘Woman Question’; yet, the feminist critique of Victorian marriage in particular gained such importance that it could just as well be referred to as the “Marriage Question,” as the feminist writer Sarah Grand declared in her 1894 article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (Heilmann xii). The institution of marriage, or the concept of marriage itself, was so extensively debated by feminists and anti-feminists – mostly women on both sides – that a selection of the most notable writings on the topic make up a five-volume anthology, compiled by Ann Heilmann under the series title *The Late Victorian Marriage Question*. The anthology includes original texts from a broad variety of perspectives, covering discussions of marriage in relation to sex, childbearing and –rearing, work, and independence.

As they are so intertwined, it is both difficult and counterproductive to try and isolate any single issue related to the discussion of marriage or categorise one issue as somehow taking precedence over the other. Nevertheless, one of the issues most central to the critique of marriage was “the notion of women as the property of the male” (Dyhouse 16). Married women had, legally speaking, “no identity apart from their husbands” (Holcombe 4). Until the 1870 Married Women’s Property Act was passed, women, upon marriage, lost all their personal property – everything from stocks to clothing – to their husbands, and lost managerial rights of their real property, such as land or buildings (Combs 141). The husband was legally entitled to dispose of the personal property at will, and “could even will it away at death” (143). Some personal property, however, falling under the sub-category ‘paraphernalia,’ could revert to the wife upon her husband’s death. As for any real property, it continued to belong to her, yet she was not allowed to manage her property or control what happened to it. This responsibility fell to the husband, who was also entitled to any income

made from the real property, such as rents. In practice, the only limitation he faced was that he could not “dispose of [her] real property without her consent” (ibid).

Already in 1855, reformers campaigned and collected 3000 signatures for a petition to Parliament, documenting “the hardships caused by the law” with respect to property for married women (Holcombe 10). A year later, in March 1856, their petition was presented in Parliament and elicited a sympathetic response from several MPs. The Liberal MP for Devonport, and member of the Law Amendment Society, Sir Thomas Erskine Perry, was central to the promotion of the cause in Parliament (9). Perry introduced a Married Women’s Property Bill in 1857, which “was based on the recommendations of the committee of the Law Amendment Society over which he had presided” (11). The bill was simple in its provisions, yet it aimed high: married women would be able to acquire, hold, and dispose of property – real and personal – just as unmarried women could; they would be able to make contracts, sue, and be sued, and would be liable for their own debts themselves, in contrast to husbands previously being liable for their wives’ debts (ibid). Despite passing its second reading “by a vote of 120 to 65,” opposition to the bill was strong and it was subsequently dropped (ibid).

The 1860s saw a new wave of reform activity and the foundation of several women’s suffrage committees in major English cities. In 1866, John Stuart Mill, on the request of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, presented Parliament with “a petition asking for women the right to vote” (Holcombe 13). The issue of married women’s property was once more addressed as the hardships the legislation imposed on women was cited as an example of the grievances women must be enabled to remedy through gaining the vote (ibid). In 1867, a bill almost identical to the one drawn up by Perry a decade earlier was introduced in Parliament (14). Those in favour of reform saw great potential for the bill’s effect on society, as

it would lead to “an increase of respect for women and of real respect,” so much more valuable than the conventional politeness that was so easy to pay. With an independent status a woman of the better classes would be able to exercise her wisdom and judgment as she could not do now against the “arbitrary authority” of her husband, and a woman of the humbler classes would no longer be considered a “mere drudge” without any rights [...]. (16)

Nevertheless, opposition remained strong, and it would still take another four years until a bill was successfully passed. The one that finally made it through Parliament was not what it was originally meant to be, following its modification by the select committee of the Lords. With serious reductions and replacements of provisions, however, it was passed, and in 1870 the

Married Women's Property Act was finally enacted (20). Despite its imperfections, it constituted an important step forward.

With the passing of the Act, women who got married after 1870 gained the right to "own and control certain forms of property," which enabled them to choose where to place their investments, making it possible to "shift wealth-holding to forms of property that they could both own and control" (Combs 141). According to Beth Combs, this was the reason why the Act was celebrated as "a major achievement of the women's movement" by those that had worked to reform the common law to strengthen women's rights. In her study on the impact of the Act on wives' property ownership and share in the household wealth, Combs compares the patterns of wealth-holding of women married before and after the Act by linking wealth-holding data to census information (*ibid*). She finds that women who got married after the Act's passing "seized the opportunity" to "gain a measure of economic independence" by transferring their wealth-holding to property forms that they were now entitled to manage themselves (159). Although the Act was still far from establishing equality between men and women, the degree of economic independence it provided married women with was an important step towards greater overall independence for women.

In total, Parliament saw eighteen Married Women's Property bills introduced in the years between 1857 and 1882 (Holcombe 26). The Act of 1882 replaced that of 1870, and added further provisions and clarifications of the previous Acts passed up until that point. The 1882 Act brought the married women's property legislation to an unprecedented level of equality between men and women. Women who got married after its coming into effect (1 January 1883) retained as their separate property "all property from whatever source which [they] owned at the time of marriage and which [they] acquired after marriage" (24-25). Furthermore, women who had got married before the Act came into effect "were to have as their separate property all property they acquired" after that point (25). It was also established that with respect to their separate property, they could sue and be sued, enter into contracts, and dispose of their property as they please (*ibid*). Yet, despite all this progress with regard to property, marriage remained an unequal business; the domestic ideology continued to confine women to the enclosed private sphere, women's bodies were still not their own, and the moral and sexual double standard allowed men outrageous transgressions. Looking at the conditions of women's lives in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century, whether single or married, is important in order to understand what, by contrast, being a widow meant for women at the time. The following chapters examine these conditions further, and widowhood specifically, before the cases of the widows in the plays selected are analysed in chapter four.

2.2. Pure, Fallen, and New Women

Within the social context described above, three ‘types’ of women developed and were frequently depicted in the arts of the period; visual arts, poetry, novels, and drama all provide examples of representations of these types of women. The angelic ‘Pure Woman,’ the sinful ‘Fallen Woman,’ and the modern ‘New Woman’ were all powerful images reflecting views and developments in Late Victorian and Edwardian society. In reviewing fiction and drama produced throughout this period, a shift in the representation of these three becomes evident; this is also the case for the women in the plays selected for analysis in this thesis. To recognise this shift, from a restricted one-dimensional ‘Pure Woman’ to a more dynamic and emancipated ‘New Woman,’ it is necessary to know what these three types represented, and how they were established.

As Sally Mitchell states, “[n]ineteenth-century thinking and writing about women is informed by the idea of feminine purity” (S. Mitchell x). The feminine ideal of the period, then, is the ‘Pure Woman,’ and the other types must be understood in relation to it. This ideal has already been mentioned in the previous section as the woman fulfilling her role as the ideal wife; obedient and subordinate to her husband, belonging to him and him alone, confined to her designated domestic sphere, and as innocent as possible in the ‘ways of the world,’ she is everything a woman of the Victorian period ought to be (Hoffmann 264-265).

More than anything, women were valued for their moral and sexual purity, which was defined as natural to a woman; she had no sexual desires, or if any, only weak ones (S. Mitchell xi). This purity was, however, extremely fragile as a result of its exaggerated valuation. In order to preserve it, extreme measures were needed. The prevalent opinion at the time was therefore that women ought to know as little as possible about matters of sex. The effort to keep women ignorant about sex would even go so far as that a doctor advised that young women approaching marriage should be told nothing, “for if they knew they would not marry” (xii). On the other hand, men were thought to be naturally driven by sexual instinct, and were free to act on their sexual desires without any loss of virtue⁴. The fragility of a woman’s purity constituted a significant part of the reasoning for the need to protect her from knowledge about sex and matters considered to be in the male domain (x, xii).

The ideal of womanhood represented by the ‘Pure Woman’ is also referred to by another label; for her angelic virtue and occupation of her ‘right’ place in society, the domestic sphere, this ideal is also referred to as the ‘Angel in the House,’ named after

⁴ This sexual and moral double standard will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Coventry Patmore's poem (Christ 146). In addition to woman's purity, Carol Christ identifies woman's passivity as another 'angelic' virtue for which women were exalted (152). These two ideals are in the poem combined with "an ambivalence toward masculine action [...] and masculine sexuality" (ibid). Christ suggests that the worship of woman as an angel arises from man's need to "find and worship a creature that he conceives to be free" from conflicting desires – "the necessity of achievement and his denigration of it, [and] the desire to touch a hand and the remorse for having done it" – "and thus find some salvation from them" (ibid). Just as the perfect wife was to keep their home in such a way that it offered relief for the husband returning from the active sphere of work, woman's angelic nature would serve as a salvation for man from his own sinful nature.

While man's sins were considered to be rooted in his nature, woman's sins were considered completely contrary to her nature. Since she was held to be without sexual desires, any sexual transgression of hers "had to be deliberate; a conscious and knowing choice of evil over good" (S. Mitchell xi). For a woman, such a transgression constituted a 'fall' from her elevated, angelic nature, as well as a fall in terms of her social status; thus, the sinful, morally transgressive woman becomes the 'Fallen Woman.' In the epigraph to her introduction, Mitchell quotes William Gayer Starbuck from his 1864 novel *A Woman against the World*, which succinctly describes the dominant thought of mid- and late Victorian society:

When a woman falls from her purity there is no return for her – as well as may one attempt to wash the stain from the sullied snow. Men sin and are forgiven; but the memory of a woman's guilt cannot be removed on earth. Her nature is so exquisitely refined that the slightest flaw becomes a huge defect. Like perfume, it admits of no deterioration, it ceases to exist when it ceases to be sweet. Her soul is an exquisitely precious, a priceless gift, and even more than man's a perilous possession. (qtd. in S. Mitchell x).

A woman's peers would be her harshest judges, and would, in their desire to uphold perfect moral standards and respectability in their circles, ostracise the Fallen Woman; she would no longer be received in respectable society, and was condemned to a life in isolation, or even death, as conventions of art and literature in the Victorian period "ordain that a woman's fall ends in death" (Auerbach 30) Thus, in the popular imagination, the Fallen Woman became "a creature whose nature it is to fall" (ibid).

The Fallen Woman became a popular motif in fiction at the time. The narrative was usually governed by stereotypes due to the expectation of her death as the only 'solution' to her fall. In the 1880s and 90s, drama also took up the theme of the Fallen Woman and examined the problem of how society dealt with transgressive female figures (Carlson 417).

As will be discussed in more detail below, plays by Jones and Pinero explored new approaches to the morally and sexually transgressive woman, and while some of these late nineteenth-century plays did adhere to conventions and end in the Fallen Woman's death, others gave her life.

Although there could be many reasons for a woman's 'fall,' the black and white view of women's innocence and purity allowed for no other differentiation; she was either pure or she was fallen. Whether she was "a successful courtesan," a "passionate adulteress," or a "seduced innocent," she was, in the end, quite simply a Fallen Woman (Leighton 111). However, the more male and female sexualities were problematised and discussed in society, the more realistic treatments of the Fallen Woman became in fiction as well. Similarly to how drama explored other options, novels also questioned "whether degraded prostitutes could ever be purified and reclaimed into a better life" (Liggins, *Prostitution* 43). As Fallen Women were associated with prostitutes due to their sexual transgression, a change in the representation of prostitutes enabled a change of perspective of Fallen Women. With time, then, the harsh black and white divide was put under scrutiny.

As the tendency of unconditionally and unquestioningly adhering to the ideal of the pure woman decreased, by questioning for instance the sexual and moral double standard, it not only enabled a more sympathetic view of Fallen Women; it also gave rise to the New Woman. The New Woman got her name from Sarah Grand's essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' in 1894, and it caught on through its dissemination in the periodical press (Ledger 9). Woman was no longer restricted to being the 'Angel in the House,' and similarly, the term 'New Woman' does not signify only one female identity:

She [the New Woman] was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women's movement. (Ledger 1)

The New Woman emerged as a character in novels from the 1880s onwards, and increasingly also in drama. What she stood for depended on the stance of each New Woman novelist⁵, who could have widely different ideas about what a New Woman ought to be like (Ledger 10-11). However, she was typically associated with the most modern developments and movements in society; she was "sexually transgressive, [...] heavily implicated in socialist politics, and [...]"

⁵ The term 'New Woman novelist' here refers to writers of 'New Woman Fiction,' "a term used to describe late 19th-century writings which foreground the ideas and actions of the 'New Woman'" ("New Woman Fiction"). Some examples of New Woman novelists include Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and Grant Allen (Ledger 11).

a force for change” (6). She was an emancipated woman, or at least on her way to emancipation, who had agency, opinions, and a will of her own.

The New Woman was, however, not welcomed by all. For those who opposed women’s increasing rights and opportunities for independence, she constituted a threat. From around the 1850s and into the 1890s, Britain had a ‘surplus’ of women in its population, which meant that many women would not be able to marry (Ledger 11). According to the 1891 census, just under 2.5 million women were unmarried, “in a total population in which there were approximately 900,000 more females than males” (ibid). Single women, then, would have to fend for themselves, and, most importantly, be enabled to do so. Women had been conditioned to become perfect wives, but as it became clear that marriage was not an option for everyone, the need for a broader, more sensible education became apparent, one that would equip women with the skills to enter work and earn their own living (12). The development of the ‘New Woman,’ then, is in part due to the circumstances created by the so-called ‘surplus’ of women, as well as political issues – such as women’s legal status and suffrage – and social issues – such as society’s sexual and moral double standard.

If woman was to become independent to such an extent, it simultaneously meant that she was taking on a more masculine role in society by entering the active sphere of work, and thereby also becoming exposed to the ‘ways of the world’ that had so carefully been kept from her, such as politics, social debates, and sex and sexuality. Opponents of the New Woman took to both vilifying and ridiculing the type in order to quench her growing influence in society (Ledger 12). The New Woman was turned into a caricature, and was frequently featured in the magazine *Punch*, where she was intentionally represented as an undesirable woman (Gardner 5). Unmarried, often by her own choice, the New Woman was seen as representing a threat to the whole institution of marriage; not getting married, or, even worse, advocating ‘free love’ were seen as serious threats to the stability of Victorian society (ibid). Eliza Lynn Linton, fervent opponent of the New Woman, described her as:

‘a woman [who] does anything specially unfeminine and ugly ... A woman who smokes in public and where she is forbidden, who dresses in knickerbockers or a boy’s shirt, who trails about in tigerskins, who flouts conventional decencies and offends against all the canons of good taste.’ (qtd. in Ledger 16-17).

This description of the New Woman could also have been the description of a stereotypical suffragette, as the New Woman in many ways was a forerunner of the suffragette (Gardner 6). Although many despised her for what they believed her to represent, the image of the New Woman was also a beacon of hope for those women who wished for the independence and

opportunities she had. In a traditional view of society, where the ideal woman was the Pure Woman, the New Woman was everything a woman ought not to be. Instead, she represented a new model of womanhood for a new era.

The 'Pure,' 'Fallen,' and 'New' women are important concepts for the purposes of the analysis in this thesis, where the representation of widows will be discussed in relation to these. Previously, we have seen how women's lives were dictated by an idealisation of their passive role in the prevalent ideology of separate spheres, which again becomes evident in the idealised image of woman as the 'Angel in the House,' as opposed to the perceived threat of the image of the transgressive 'Fallen Woman.' In the following chapter, the conditions of the lives of the three types of women that have been introduced in this chapter will be examined further with regard to the sexual and moral double standard, the question of marriage, and finally, the conditions of widowhood.

3. The ‘Woman Question’

3.1. The ‘Double Standard’ in late Victorian and Edwardian Society

It was not only in terms of property legislation that married women were set so profoundly apart from men, with no rights by default, and only a few hard-won rights gained eventually, such as the right to separate property and the right to the custody of children; the other aspects of institutionalised inequality were, first, the lack of divorce laws, and, second, the legitimising of the moral and sexual double standard through the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 and the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864. One standard of morality applied to women, another to men, and accordingly determined their accepted sexual behaviour, and what legal consequences or actions could follow from it. This developed into one of the most widely discussed topics by feminists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and formed a significant part of the public debate on the ‘Marriage Question.’

Until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, divorce was a practically impossible ordeal for women, requiring a Private Act to be passed in Parliament in order to achieve a divorce legally. This was an option only for the wealthiest, and a way to bypass the ecclesiastical courts, which would not grant divorces due to “the medieval canonical view that marriage was indissoluble” (Holmes 604). Most such Private Acts granted divorce to the husband “on the ground of his wife’s adultery,” whereas “only four acts were passed at the behest of the wife” (ibid). However, adultery alone was not a sufficient reason for women to be granted divorce from their husbands; in the four cases mentioned, the additional conditions that constituted a serious enough offence for the wife to be in the right to petition for a divorce included incest, bigamy, and cruelty (ibid).

The aforementioned reasons came to be some of the matrimonial offences defined in the divorce laws as the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act was passed. A man could file for divorce with the single reason of adultery on his wife’s part, whereas a wife who wished to divorce her husband would have to cite and prove an additional reason, such as “cruelty, desertion, bigamy, incest, rape, sodomy, or bestiality” (Branca 7). It is important to note that ‘cruelty’ meant “*extreme* cruelty” (Kelsey 186), ‘desertion’ meant desertion for a period of two years, and ‘rape’ meant the rape of *another* woman (138); rape within a marriage was considered non-existent as the wife had given herself to her husband by signing the marriage contract (209), in other words, by law, he was entitled to his conjugal rights and to claim these

at any time. Furthermore, if a wife had run away from her husband, he could legally force her return to him, and was also fully in his rights to lock her up, should he see such measures fit (ibid). The potential for abuse was extensive, and as the law nevertheless a priori favoured and protected the husband's rights, wives seeking a divorce were hard pressed to provide the evidence of such extreme circumstances that would allow the case to go in her favour.

The disturbing cases of wives suffering under the physical abuse of their despotic husbands are, however, not the main concern of this chapter and only serve to illustrate the separate standards in practice at the time. The focus of this chapter is rather this concept of a separate standard of morality for women, and what this meant for them in terms of their legal status and social conventions. Around mid-century it was widely accepted that women were fundamentally different from men sexually in the sense that they, allegedly, had no sexual desires, whereas feeling and acting upon sexual desire was a defining feature of male sexuality. Therefore, it logically followed that for women to commit adultery was an altogether unnatural act – there would have to be something fundamentally wrong with her to feel such desires and act upon them – while a man's act of adultery was simply in his nature (Holmes 606).

That is not to say that a man's adultery was condoned, but it is telling that contemporaries described it as “a lapse” in a man's case and “a fall” in that of a woman, or even “a surprise of the senses” for the man, and “an error of the heart” for the woman (Holmes 606). Moreover, a distinction between a single occurrence and continuous adultery was made. As Holmes recounts in her article, many witnesses giving testimony in the Royal Commission's discussions in 1857 expressed the view that a man's “single act of adultery should not be grounds for a wife to divorce her husband” (607). In other words, one single act as reason for divorce was considered too harsh on the men, but one act was enough in the case of a woman. Seeing men's and women's sexuality as so profoundly different from one another constitutes part of the overall pervasive concept of men as superior and women as inferior which became evident in practically all aspects of society, as we have seen previously with the ideology of separate spheres and the issue of married women's property rights. In accordance with such a view of women, men's adultery was to be tolerated. Women were, after all, considered morally superior and hailed for their innocence, and were therefore allegedly more forgiving, too (607).

To admire a woman's tolerance was to emphasise and support the view of women as angelic beings, whose most appealing qualities were her innocence, chastity, submission, and obedience. One virtue that stood out in particular as especially admirable in this image of the

ideal woman was self-sacrifice. In their combination, all of these ideal qualities and virtues meant that women were conditioned to forgive their husbands. Alternatively, if they could not find it in themselves to forgive, they were strongly encouraged to feign ignorance of their husbands' adultery. Trying to live up to the virtue of self-sacrifice, women were reluctant to admit abuse or to come forward with complaints; instead, they kept their heads down and suffered in silence. Although the Matrimonial Causes Act introduced in 1857 made divorce easier to achieve than before, it was not necessarily easier for women (Holmes 608).

It was not only woman's inherently different sexuality that made her adultery more serious. It was also argued that a woman's adultery was far more serious as it introduced the problem of inheritance in the case of any illegitimate children resulting from the adulterous union (605). If a wife had committed adultery, any children she might bear shortly afterward were of questionable parentage and therefore considered a serious threat to a man's honour and property interests, as well as the future inheritance of his legitimate children (Kelsey 133). The fact that a man's act of adultery could potentially bring illegitimate children into other families, however, was not acknowledged; the responsibility for such an act was placed with the woman who bore the child, while the biological father in this case was not legally bound to take any responsibility for his illegitimate children (114-115).

In the case of legitimate children, however, responsibility for, and rights to the custody of, the children primarily belonged to the father. They were, like their mother, legally the property of the husband; just as he could choose to lock her up or force her return if she had left him, he could withhold them from their mother should he wish to do so, for instance to put pressure on her to obey his authority. According to the Custody of Infants Act of 1839 a wife could apply for the custody of her children up to the age of seven; this was later raised to the age of sixteen with the passing of a new Act in 1873 (Holmes 609). Until the 1873 Act wives guilty of adultery were by default rejected as custodians for their children, but with the repeal of the 1839 Act child custody legislation took a step towards rooting out double standard (609).

As both the issue of so-called "spurious offspring" and laws regarding child custody reveal, the double standard was clearly rooted in the property interests and sense of pride of the husband, and thus supported and upheld by arguments emphasising the threat illegitimate children posed to property. The most evident connection between property interests and a wife's adultery, however, lies in the view of the woman as her husband's property. In a divorce action, the husband could sue another man for damages on the grounds of "criminal conversation" with his wife (605). The implication was that through adultery, the wife's

‘value’ decreased and the husband should be compensated for his loss; his property interests were the priority. In contrast, a wife seeking a divorce could not sue another woman for damages (ibid). Assessing the wife as property that may decrease in value and therefore be compensated economically added to the general idea that a wife’s adultery was more serious than a husband’s, as it had more severe consequences.

Although the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 was challenged by several early activists for women’s rights at the time – perhaps most famously in the individual cases of Caroline Norton and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, which Jennifer C. Kelsey examines in detail in her book on women and Victorian marriage, *Changing the Rules* – it remained in place until 1923, when it was finally rejected by passing a new Act making the grounds of divorce equal for men and women (602). Opposition to double standard grew over the years, and experienced an upsurge of outrage and public debate with the passing of the notorious Contagious Diseases Act of 1864. It was the first of three statutes legalising mandatory sanitary inspections of prostitutes in towns where military forces were stationed, in a move to prevent venereal disease from spreading in the military (Dyhouse 160). The Act was passed quietly and quickly, and first enforced in eleven named military towns to mend a dire situation; according to official numbers for 1860, “as many as 369 men per 1000 were affected” by venereal disease, known to derive from the soldiers’ extensive encounters with prostitutes (Kelsey 218-219).

Instead of focusing efforts on the treatment of the soldiers and prescribing restraint and caution on their part, the Act effectively placed the entire blame and responsibility on the prostitutes who may or may not be infected. Once again, the double standard was made blatantly obvious; men’s sexual desires and fulfilment of these desires were wholly natural and, although some acknowledged the aspect of sin in men’s sexual affairs, it was maintained that men were victims of a weaker sense of morality and could not help their sinful ‘lapses.’ In effect, the law meant that the police could force any woman in the named cities suspected of being a prostitute to be subjected to an examination by a doctor to determine whether she was infected with venereal disease or not (Kelsey 219). If found to be infected, she would be taken to a so-called *lock hospital* where she could be confined for up to six months, until she was considered cured (ibid). Refusal was futile, as she would then be brought before a magistrate and could face imprisonment (ibid).

Two major concerns arose from this practice which gave opponents of the Act, and, more generally speaking, opponents of the moral double standard, strong and logically sound arguments to confront the legislators with. Firstly, there was the concern that by removing and

punishing infected prostitutes the government ensured a supply of healthy prostitutes for the use of the military, thereby implying that prostitution was necessary for the benefit of men. Secondly, it was a major health concern not only for military men, but for their families; an infected man could pass the disease on to his wife and children conceived after the infection – although targeting the prostitutes might to some extent prevent the disease from spreading, the men who had already been infected could still infect others. According to Victorian moral standards, women should know as little as possible about sex. With the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Act, however, women spoke up against the justification of prostitution, the hypocritical double standard, and the dangers imposed on the innocent family members of ‘sinful’ men.

In 1869 two women combined their forces, and on the initiative of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was founded with Josephine Butler as honorary secretary and leading campaigner (Walkowitz). The association had an open letter published in *The Daily News* on New Year’s Day in 1870 titled “A Solemn Protest,” featuring 120 signatures of prominent women of the time (Kelsey 227). As Kelsey recounts, “it demanded the end to the laws ‘for it is unjust to punish the sex who are the main victims and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause’” (ibid). Butler travelled around the country and lectured those who would listen on the details and implications of the Acts, winning much support for the repeal campaign. Butler and the Ladies National Association had successfully made the double standard the focus of public attention and subjected it to thorough criticism; men’s sexual behaviour and morality were being publicly questioned, and the Acts condemned (229).

Associations like Butler’s and other purity associations contested the widely accepted notion that “[m]en needed an outlet for their sexual impulses” and that resistance to these impulses was unhealthy for the man (Kelsey 221). It was even argued by supporters of the acts that prostitution contributed to the safety of other innocent women in society by providing an outlet for the male impulsive sexuality; in other words, prostitutes were necessary for men to have access to, in order to avoid sexual abuse (ibid). Before the Acts were passed, the plan was to examine every soldier for venereal disease, but this idea was abandoned due to the premonition that the soldiers would prove hostile to such a practice (222). Targeting marginalised women was much easier to put into practice. In her campaign tours, Butler also lectured at universities and encouraged male students “to accept the need for sexual self-control and personal responsibility,” as well as to join purity associations, or even

reform societies formed by men urging the reform of attitudes towards male sexual behaviour (228).

Despite significant popular support and the formation of a large movement working for the enlightenment of young men as well as women on the true content and consequences of the Acts, as well as general education about sexual behaviour and morals for both sexes, the Contagious Diseases Acts were not repealed until 1886 (Kelsey 232). The outrage its enactment sparked, however, contributed to an important development in the beginning late Victorian feminist movement. Women, or rather, respectable women, were not supposed to be knowledgeable about sex, or admit to their knowledge or speak openly about it; provoked by the unjust and immoral practice of the law, educated middle-class women rose to the occasion and educated themselves and spoke up in public about prostitution, venereal disease, and forced medical examinations, and questioned man's sexual behaviour and right to women's bodies for his own use (237).

The women's rights activists who were involved in the social purity movement of the 1870s spoke out against the double standard which prescribed one morality for men, justifying their "sexual exploitation of women," and another for women, emphasising their purity and mercilessly punishing them if they failed to adhere to the moral standard set for them (Jeffreys 195). The overarching goal of the movement was to eradicate prostitution altogether, by reforming those who were responsible for creating the demand for the supply, and through rescue work to help 'fallen women' to lead a respectable life. The final goal was a unified moral standard for men as well as women. On the other hand, the late nineteenth century also saw the development of sexology, which countered feminist arguments about male sexuality on many points (199). Sexologists maintained that man's sexual urges were biologically conditioned and could therefore not be controlled, contrary to the feminist purity movement's central claim (*ibid*). They did create a somewhat wider understanding of women's sexual pleasure, however, which previously had been considered irrelevant, or even non-existent; now, women were supposed to "respond sexually to men's sexual initiatives and their preferred practices," while male dominance was kept intact (*ibid*). The contrasting approaches taken to both men's and women's sexualities are evidence of a growing discussion, and with the increasing breaking of taboos, new ground was made, and women found new occasions to speak up and challenge the social and sexual order; a challenge which fundamentally arose from rejecting moral double standard. With this backdrop, it is possible to recognise how the widows in the plays selected question and challenge the sexual and moral double standard.

3.2. The 'Marriage Question'

The moral and sexual double standard was but one of the many pressing issues with regard to women's lives which were heavily debated under the collective term for this social debate, the 'Woman Question.' As has already been mentioned, this debate included the discussion of women's legal status and rights, especially in marriage, and later increasingly the question of women's right to vote, role in society, and possibilities for education and work. In short, it was a question of women's rights to the same civil liberties that men enjoyed – a question of the emancipation of women (Bell 80). Some of the important aspects of this central question have already been addressed in the previous sections, such as married women's property rights, their right to divorce, the inequality inherent to the moral and sexual double standard, women's sexuality, and the issue of prostitution. Many of these aspects were subordinate to marriage, and as a result, the institution of marriage itself became a target of criticism and debate. An understanding of contemporary debates on the institution of marriage forms an important backdrop to the plays to be analysed in the following. This section looks into one of the most radical discussions of the 'marriage question' and its contemporary reception.

Throughout the 1880s and 90s the writer Mona Caird published several articles criticising patriarchal society and promoting equality for women. Most famously, she condemned marriage as "a vexatious failure" in her 1888 article simply entitled "Marriage" (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 70), and thereby provoked a storm of readers' replies sent to the *Daily Telegraph*, which had invited the public to comment on Caird's assessments (Heilmann, *Marriage* xxvi). In 1897, Caird collected her essays and published them under the title *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman*. After receiving over 27,000 replies, the editor Harry Quilter compiled a selection of replies and published them in book form as *Is Marriage a Failure?* (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 70).

In the article, Caird denounced "marriage and prostitution as institutionalised violence against women," and propagated women's rights to self-determination of their own bodies, and right to divorce on equal grounds as men (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 70-71). For Caird, marriage and prostitution were at the centre of a "religious, economic and political system" with the purpose of "maintaining male power" by the exploitation of women as property (70). As for the ideal of self-sacrifice and the instinct of motherhood, which were both allegedly natural to women, Caird held these to be "deliberate stratagems deployed to keep women safely imprisoned within the narrow boundaries of their sphere" (71). Because women were not free to decide over their own bodies and fates, she argued, 'enslaved' mothers would

‘infect’ their daughters with the same “physical and mental deficiencies.” In the end, then, marriage caused a “united degeneration,” or, at its worst, a degradation of womanhood as a whole (70).

One of the greatest faults of marriage was, according to Caird, dependence, which she saw as “the curse of our marriages, of our homes, and of our children, who are born of women who are not free – not free even to refuse to bear them” (Caird 134). Caird advocated ‘free marriage’ based on mutual respect for each other’s individuality and freedom, regardless of sex; according to her, the marriage of the future ought to be a union more like that of two friends who choose to live together (Caird 145). Caird argued that men and women must realise and accept “that so long as affection and friendship remain between a married couple, no bonds are necessary to hold them united; but that when these cease, the tie becomes unbearable, and no law ought to have power to enforce it” (Caird 109). Marriage might be redeemed from its state as a ‘vexatious failure’ if it were to be based on full equality between both parties.

Radical as many of Caird’s views were at the time, she nevertheless received much support from readers; many agreed with her proposal that divorce should be allowed on equal grounds for both sexes, even if only based on the simple reason that they wanted to divorce each other, without having to cite cruelty or adultery (Heilmann, *Marriage* xxvii). In formulating the question ‘is marriage a failure?’, the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* encouraged readers to give their personal opinions in reply to Caird’s article. Several responses were of a personal nature, recounting readers’ own experiences of marriage as examples and arguments in agreement or disagreement with Caird. The question of ‘equal’ divorce seems to have been especially easy for readers to relate to and voice their agreement with, with some putting forward their complaints of marriages where the partner suffered from insanity, or turned out to be an incorrigible drunkard (Quilter 21, 26-27).

Advocating more independence for women was, from the 1880s onward, no longer any outrageous or even unusual standpoint. Concerns about women’s lack of independence and rights had been raised much earlier, especially in the 1860s with the rise of a nation-wide reform movement which resulted in the first Bill attempting to achieve women’s suffrage. However, debates on women continued to uphold a notion of women’s ‘natural instinct’ for motherhood and self-sacrifice, both of which Caird severely criticised. Criticising especially motherhood might be one of the reasons why some contemporaries found it difficult to side with her entirely, even though they might agree with other points of her criticism of marriage.

Attacking motherhood was unprecedented and, as Heilmann puts it, “too much even for an enlightened audience” (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 72).

Motherhood came to be very strongly idealised throughout the 1890s and into the Edwardian period, even by authors and playwrights of New Woman fiction and plays (McDonald, *New Women* 39). McDonald refers to this development as “the cult of maternalism,” which tied in with the movement of eugenics concerned with the decline in birth rates and alleged impending race degeneration (ibid). It was proposed that women ought to have more children, and the importance of motherhood replaced the importance of the image of the ‘perfect lady’; instead, the ideal was for a woman to be a ‘perfect mother’ (ibid). The prevalent thought among Caird’s contemporaries, then, was the complete opposite in terms of her thoughts on motherhood and women’s role in society as mothers.

It would seem that Caird’s views were too radical, even for the fairly progressive “Men and Women’s Club”, founded by the eugenicist Karl Pearson in 1885 (Woiak). The club was devoted to the discussion of men’s and women’s sexualities and relations, and aimed to have an equal number of men and women as members, committed to open and uncensored discussion of sexual topics, taking turns to present “papers for discussion at monthly meetings” (Dyhouse 162). Several prominent female thinkers of the day are recorded as partaking in the meetings, although they may not necessarily have joined as full-time members (ibid). Caird was one of them. She attended at least one meeting in 1887 on birth control, but never received an invitation to join as a proper member (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 72). Even within such a club, free-thinking as it was, the men dominated the discussions and the women evidently found it challenging to voice their opinions, sometimes out of embarrassment, other times because “the men indulged in rhetorical oratory” (Dyhouse 163). Despite their differences, Caird was often associated with Pearson and his club; something which it would seem the individual members had no issue with (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 72). Caird undoubtedly provoked much enmity with her radical views, but, on the other hand, also found many like-minded supporters.

In a patriarchal society, there could be no hope for equality between the sexes. Solving the ‘woman question,’ for Caird, therefore, was a matter of restructuring society as a whole, and marriage was a fundamental part of this structure, which needed mending. The barbarity of patriarchal society was reflected in the barbarity of marriage; it was based solely on “sheer rule of force and the ruthless exploitation of the weaker by the stronger” (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 86). In order to achieve a future where men and women would be equal, and for women to find their rightful independence, Caird emphasised the need for a complete reformation of

the institution of marriage, the need for women to gain the right over their own bodies, and the right to decide how many children they would have (67). Caird suggested such reforms to be implemented for instance through child care facilities and the introduction of wages for housework, which would enable women to achieve economic independence (74). With such modern ideas for the emancipation of women, it does not seem out of place to call Caird ‘a woman ahead of her time.’ The conditions of marriage and debates about it at the time will in the following be contrasted with the conditions of widowhood; combined, these aspects provide an important backdrop to the characters subject to analysis in the next chapter, with regard to the widow characters’ experiences of marriage, remarriage, and motherhood.

3.3. Widowhood

Like marriage, widowhood was strictly regulated, with laws and social conventions in place that defined women through their husbands and to ensure their continued confinement to a limited sphere of action. Scholarship on widowhood has tended to emphasise ‘the widow’s plight,’ pointing to the desperate economic situation many widows found themselves in, many of whom were on Poor Relief (Curran 218; 235). Others have promoted the concept of “the widow’s might”⁶ (Bell and Yans 7), focusing on the emancipatory potential of widowhood. While many widows were financially destitute, it has also been found that most widows were heads of households, and others were able to avoid financial ruin by living with “spinsters or female relatives” (Liggins, *Odd Women* 36).

A widow’s position in society and the question of what effects widowhood had on her life is a complex matter that has received contradictory treatment in scholarship. As a backdrop to the analysis of the widow characters in the next chapter, this section examines the status of widows in Late Victorian and Edwardian society; through the death of their husbands, this status was ambivalent, being neither that of married women nor that of spinsters. Taking moral and social conventions, legislation, and social status into account, the following will provide an important foundation for the discussion of Pinero’s, Jones’s, and Hankin’s fictional widows.

Previously, it has been mentioned how women, upon marriage, lost their personal identities along with nearly all their property. A married woman became a *‘feme covert,’* as

⁶ “The Widow’s Might” was, for instance, the title of a Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis spring 2004 conference, which presented three papers “addressing dissimilar historical circumstances [which] reached congruent conclusions about the exercise of power” by widows (Bell and Yans 7).

opposed to her previous status as a *feme sole*, under what was “known as the doctrine of coverture” (Combs 143); she lost her legal independence and was placed under the protection and authority of her husband. In widowhood, however, she was again ‘sole,’ and “enjoyed the same property rights as men” (Holcombe 17). As to the matter of property controlled by the husband during marriage, paraphernalia, such as clothes and jewellery, automatically reverted to the widow upon her husband’s death; real property could also revert, provided it had not already been disposed of or willed away, which after the 1870 Married Women’s Property Act required the wife’s consent. Traditionally, English Common Law entitled widows to a dower upon the husband’s death, which typically made up one third of the husband’s real property (Biancalana). With the 1833 Dower Act, however, the husband was enabled to ‘opt out’ of leaving a dower for the wife; simply by stating his wish in his final will, he could free himself of “the ‘burden’ of dower” (Buck).

A widow’s financial situation, then, depended largely on the property she had prior to marriage and what was done to preserve and increase said property, as well as how much her husband was inclined to leave her, or, how much he actually had available to leave her. With the changes brought to the legislation on married women’s property holding by the Act of 1870, a wife could control her “earnings from any trade or occupation carried on separately from her husband,” as well as “her personal property” if invested in savings-bank accounts, stocks, funds, or shares. The new legislation also entitled her to keep “personal property and sums of money under £200” which had been willed to her (Combs 145). If an affluent woman invested her personal property well and had ensured a management of her real property in her interest, she could provide well for herself in widowhood.

Such changes to the law were, however, of little use to those who had no such property to begin with. In her article “Private Women, Public Needs,” Cynthia Curran examines the plight of middle-class widows in nineteenth-century England. The developments of the Industrial Revolution meant that a majority of middle-class men were “white collar workers and professionals who labored for a modest income” (Curran 220). Without any real property, their income provided for their families; having enough in life was hard enough on a low average income, making it last for the widow after a husband’s death was practically impossible. There were only a few organisations to support widows in need, and these were typically reserved for widows of men in specific professions, only providing for the short-term needs of destitute families (223). Left with little or nothing, widows were indirectly forced to find employment in order to provide for themselves and any children they might have had from their marriage.

In a society dominated by the ideology of separate spheres, work was not easy to come by for women. The widow “felt the constraints of the domestic ideology: she was required to remain hidden from public view, but monetary problems created a conflict with this important factor in middle-class membership” (Curran 228). Work, on the whole, was considered improper for a woman, and if she must work, only few options “considered suitable” were available (229). Through her status as a woman who had fulfilled society’s expectations in marrying and bearing children, the widow’s participation in the labour market was sanctioned, but only for the purpose of supporting herself and her dependents; she was not to “be ambitious for anything beyond a bare subsistence” (ibid). Curran finds that the lack of provisions for widows – through the high cost of life insurances, the limited organised assistance available, the restricted labour market, and the domestic ideology rendering widows practically ‘invisible’ – “indicates that the domestic ideal was too important to the Victorians to admit its failures” (234).

The domestic ideal also featured strongly in the development of Victorian mourning culture. Widows were expected to immerse themselves in a prolonged state of grief and social isolation, signified by wearing ‘widow’s weeds’; as Christopher Noble puts it, “loss was her occupation” (qtd. in Alexander 608). Although she was no longer married to her deceased husband, society’s idealisation of marriage required her to be symbolically married to him even in her widowhood; thus, a widow’s mourning of her husband had to occur “publicly, rigorously, and formally,” regardless of whether her mourning was sincere or not (609). Alexander refers to this as “[t]o *perform* the work of mourning” – an apt description, as for some the compulsory act of mourning may indeed have meant putting on a performance of grief because they did not experience the death of their husband as a loss (ibid, emphasis added). Similarly to the ways in which etiquette manuals found a large market in middle- and upper middle-class wives eager to position themselves in good society, the same domestic ideals created a market for etiquette manuals for mourning (610). The importance of demonstrating status remained as important in widowhood as it had been in marriage.

The manufacture of textiles deemed appropriate for mourning dress was facilitated by Britain’s flourishing industry in the Victorian period. Combined with the keenness of the expanding middle-class to demonstrate and affirm their status as part of respectable society, this meant that the kind of mourning dress a widow wore became increasingly important. As a result, the etiquette manuals and fashion magazines “scrambled to codify and classify who should wear what sort of mourning, for whom, and for how long” (Alexander 610). Typical mourning dress was the so-called ‘widow’s weeds,’ “an ensemble of black dress, veil and

bonnet” (Bedikian 38). Widows were expected to wear this form of clothing for two years in order to be socially acceptable (ibid), but it could be required for as long as four years (35). If a widow failed to observe the strict etiquette of mourning dress, she risked being chastised and ostracised (38). Queen Victoria’s prolonged mourning contributed to establishing mourning as a widely observed ritual (35).

Mourning a deceased husband was organised into three stages, each with specific prescriptions as to what the mourning widow could wear. The first stage of mourning began immediately after the death of the husband and lasted one year and a day; in this stage, the widow was only permitted to wear “fabrics that lack color and luster,” and could only be decorated with black crepe trim, as the lack of decorative elements was supposed “to show how a mourner was consumed with her deep sorrow” (Bedikian 38-39). At the one-year and a day mark, the second stage of mourning began, which lasted about nine months, during which the widow was allowed to exchange “some of the heavy crepe” for jet jewellery and other trimmings (39). In the succeeding three-month third stage of mourning, she could make further changes to the stern black wardrobe. Upon completion of the third stage, the widow entered half-mourning, which was required to last for a minimum of six months, but could last for a lifetime, depending on the widow’s choice (ibid). Apart from its restricted colour options, including only appropriate colours such as mauve, white, and grey, half-mourning dress followed the fashion styles of the day and allowed for the ‘normal’ variation of accessories to go with the wardrobe (ibid). Widow’s weeds thus not only had the potential of signalling a widow’s status in terms of wealth and social position, but also indicated the stage of mourning she was in.

Even if a widow did not mourn her husband privately, the rigid rules of mourning culture meant that, if she wanted to maintain her social position among her peers, she would have to carefully observe every stage of mourning with decorum. It was thought disrespectful to the deceased to remove the widow’s weeds earlier than the designated mourning period (Bedikian 35). Thus, in widowhood as in marriage, a woman was subjected to the critical observation of her peers, who might elect to ‘cut’ her from their social circles if she did not adhere to the rules of etiquette. The widow was sexually ambiguous by representing both the ideal of propriety and the fact of experience. Society knew that she was not the innocent virgin, as an unmarried woman would be; instead, she was sexually experienced. Such strict rules, however, also provided a possibility for manipulation; if a widow relocated to somewhere where the particulars of her life and the time of death of her husband were not known, she could reinvent herself through her dress. In her article “Death Becomes Her,”

Rebecca N. Mitchell examines the progressive potential of Victorian mourning dress and culture; she finds that while “widow’s fashion could be read as a symbol of bereavement,” which was the most straight forward purpose of the weeds, “it could also signal a woman’s new availability or sexual experience” (R. Mitchell 598). Half-mourning, for instance, would indicate that her mourning was almost at an end, and that she might be available for remarriage. Both Alexander and Heath observe such a potential for manoeuvring in the case of Anthony Trollope’s character Aunt Greenow, who is a wealthy widow, in his 1864/-65 novel *Can You Forgive Her?* (Alexander 613-614; Heath 129).

A widow’s manipulation of the rules and materials made available to her enabled her to usurp the restrictive mourning culture put in place to confine women to the established patriarchal structure of society (R. Mitchell 606). This usurpation was achieved by using the “extensively codified rules of mourning wear” to convey ambiguous messages about her status, and “[b]y finding pleasure in mourning and shopping for mourning attire” (ibid). In taking control of her situation of mourning, the widow is no longer “cast as ‘a feminized victim of masculine (economic) aggression,’” quite in contrast to the view of widows as passive victims of personal tragedy (605).

Instead of conceptualising mourning as inherently disadvantageous for the widow, the period of mourning can also be seen as a period “ripe with possibilities for the expression of myriad, possibly contradictory pleasures and miseries” (R. Mitchell 609). The potential for change and a new start which widowhood could represent in fiction was frequently depicted through the metaphor of the chrysalis (ibid). Within a hard case of stern, black mourning dress a married woman was transforming into an unmarried woman who steps out and claims her new independence (609-610), reminiscent of a butterfly, as in one of the examples Mitchell quotes:

a widow had “worn the weeds and acted the disconsolate widow to perfection for the exact space of one year, and then, like a butterfly coming out of its chrysalis, she had exchanged the cap for a becoming headdress, and the black dresses for greys and lilacs.” (Allet, qtd. in R. Mitchell 610).

A (wealthy) widow could thus emerge from mourning as an empowered woman, free to enjoy an independent life of her own design.

Although the domestic ideology with its idealisation of the institution of marriage would propagate marriage as the only suitable vocation for women, widows were not encouraged to remarry. They had already achieved the goal of womanhood and instead ought to continue to honour their husbands through their mourning. Despite the fact that she might

only be at a midlife stage, perhaps even still of childbearing age, the widow “was expected to surrender her own matrimonial chances and cede the field to the younger generation” (Heath 74). This attitude is reflected in works of fiction and popular culture of the nineteenth century, such as Frances Trollope’s *The Widow Barnaby* (1839), and the prospect of a middle-aged widow remarrying was also mocked in caricatures in *Punch* (Heath 116). Statistics show that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, widowers at the age of twenty-five were approximately twice as likely to remarry as widows of the same age (118). At the age of forty, the chance of widowers remarrying was four times higher than for widows (ibid). A double standard was evidently prevalent also in the case of remarriage.

Society warned widowers not to ‘love’ their sorrow but rather ‘bear’ it, and advised them to get their ‘wounds healed’ as quickly as they could (Heath 119). Widows, on the other hand, were discouraged from remarrying, and thus “their identities remained tied to their dead spouses” (ibid). A widow’s remarriage, it was thought, invalidated her love for the husband she had lost, or even proved that “such love never existed;” the same was not the case for widowers, who were free to remarry as they pleased without being subjected to any stigma or being accused of devaluing their love for their deceased spouse (ibid). It was considered natural that men should wish to, and therefore also be allowed to, remarry, due to their “need for companionship, sexual and otherwise” (ibid), whereas such motivations were not even thinkable for widows.

It would seem, however, that attitudes toward widows remarrying got more relaxed in the course of the nineteenth century, as more rights were secured for women from the 1860s onward. This shift in attitudes is, for instance, to be traced in the fiction of Anthony Trollope, as Kay Heath argues in a comparative study of widow narratives by Anthony Trollope and his mother, Frances Trollope (143). Heath finds that Frances Trollope’s early widow narratives from the 1830s and 40s exploited and questioned “the trope of the remarrying midlife widow as the feminine grotesque” (ibid). The 1860s narratives authored by Anthony Trollope, however, appear to be greatly influenced by the rise of the women’s movement at that time (121); in contrast to the fiction of his mother, Anthony Trollope takes a more sympathetic view of the midlife widow with ambitions to remarry, and thus “transforms and transcends the stereotype in his increasingly valorized widows, fully realized as sexual women and independent adults” (143). Anthony Trollope’s progressive representations of the remarrying midlife widow did of course not constitute a complete shift toward acceptance for such remarriage, and the notion of widows remarrying continued to be frowned upon in the late nineteenth century (ibid). Nevertheless, these representations do suggest that change was

under way, bringing with it a greater degree of acceptance for women's rights, independence, and desires.

Widows were perceived as the 'other' in society, as women outside the approved category of dependent wife, evident by their frequent association with unmarried mothers and spinsters, thought to be in need of social or financial support (Liggins, *Odd Women* 36). In fact, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, most widows managed without external support, by "cohabiting with spinsters or female relatives," as heads of households, supporting themselves, for instance, through work and taking in lodgers, and thus avoiding being dependent on family (ibid). In comparison to spinsters, widows held a favourable position in society due to their status as women who had fulfilled their vocation as wives, and, most importantly, who kept honouring their deceased husbands through their mourning. As such, widows were associated with a "superior womanliness," which "'never married,' unsexed spinsters" lacked (ibid). Society saw widows as deserving of respect and pity, provided that "they remained single and celibate" (Holden, qtd. in Liggins, *Odd Women* 36). As Emma Liggins summarises, widowhood in Victorian society "carried contradictory connotations of power, freedom, respectability, witchcraft, exclusion, invisibility and self-sacrifice" (36). As long as widows adhered to society's rules and conventions regarding the state of widowhood, upholding respectability and celibacy, they "could capitalise on their freedom and reap the benefits of living without husbands" (ibid).

Life without a husband held the greatest benefits for wealthy widows. Although it may be argued that widows could benefit from their independence, regardless of their class and circumstance, it provided more opportunities for those who already had many in married life. A wealthy widow would have no concerns about how to sustain herself, and could perhaps even increase her fortune now that she had full control over her property and the legal independence needed to enter contracts and business. These were achievements "usually reserved for men," but with her new status as widow, a woman could move in the public sphere, "whilst retaining key womanly attributes such as sexual attractiveness and maternal tenderness" (Liggins, *Odd Women* 66). Furthermore, if she should wish to remarry, she could afford to choose who to marry (R. Mitchell 600).

Her sexual attractiveness and, importantly, sexual experience, were crucial elements of what made the Victorian widow so unsettling (Liggins, *Odd Women* 66). Combined with her "availability and status as a property-owning woman of independent means," she constituted, as Nadine Muller puts it, "'the dangerous potential to uphold as well as disrupt traditional gender conventions'" (ibid). In mourning appropriately for her deceased husband, the widow

upheld the institution of marriage, but without him she was also made independent, and this independence disrupted the traditional norms and conventions of gender. A new, single life was possible, a life which spinsters already lived but received far more scorn for; a life which the New Woman wanted, but could only be obtained at great cost. The widow, unlike unmarried women, was entitled to a degree of respect from society, and could thus more easily lead an independent life.

This image of respectability allowed her more freedom of movement than unmarried women. A widow could, for instance, go unchaperoned anywhere she liked, while a young unmarried woman could not go unaccompanied. Emma Liggins relates how the composer Ethel Smyth dressed up as an old widow, “complete with grey corkscrew curls, horn spectacles, a thick veil and some knitting ‘for show only,’” so that she could go to a concert alone as a young unmarried woman in Leipzig in the 1870s (Liggins, *Odd Women* 17). Smyth borrowed a widow’s image of respectability, and could, under the cover of widowhood, enjoy more freedom than allowed to her normally. A widow’s position had its advantages and offered new ways of life for women. As Liggins puts it, the widow’s ambiguous figure could “function as an alternative role model for the unattached heroine” (66).

In the 1901 picture story *A Widow and Her Friends*, illustrator Charles Dana Gibson exemplifies the attractiveness and ambiguous status of the young, pretty, and wealthy widow. The illustrations recount “the trials of a young widow unable to escape the admiring gaze of the men or the scorn of the women around her” (R. Mitchell 604). The young widow, styled as a Gibson girl⁷, is depicted as being the centre of attention in her social circle; she receives positive attention from the men who flock around her, while the women sceptically observe her from a distance, with scorn and jealousy in their facial expressions⁸.

Gibson’s illustrations show the young widow going through various phases of mourning, with an emphasis on scenes of her resuming an active role in society. In one such scene, captioned “Some think that she has remained in retirement too long. Others are surprised that she is about so soon,” she is perceived at her most ambiguous; she is set apart from the other women and, instead, in close physical proximity to the men, who look at her with interest. The title reflects the fine line the widow treads in the mourning process; for

⁷ The term ‘Gibson girl’ is used to describe Gibson’s encapsulation of the 1890s and early 1900s (American) ideal of womanhood: “full-bosomed, wasp-waisted, and dressed in tailored Edwardian style” (Delahunty et. al.). Many of his drawings depicted this idealised ‘type,’ including the illustrations in *A Widow and Her Friends*, London: Jay Lane, 1901.

⁸ See for instance the illustrations captioned “Some think that she has remained in retirement too long. Others are surprised that she is about so soon,” “She is the subject of more hostile criticism,” “The day after arriving at her journey’s end,” and “She goes into colors,” in *A Widow and Her Friends*, London: Jay Lane, 1901.

some, resuming her place in society comes too early after her husband's death. Moreover, her ambiguous sexuality is indicated by the way in which she is depicted: she appears almost naked, seated behind a large flower decoration which obscures the view of her low-cut dress (R. Mitchell 604). In the illustration "Mrs. Diggs is alarmed at discovering what she imagines to be a snare that threatens the safety of her only child. Mr. Diggs does not share his wife's anxiety," Gibson shows how the widow is perceived as a threat due to her 'otherness' and sexual experience. The elderly Mrs. Diggs is alarmed to find her young son apparently courting the beautiful widow, whereas the father, who is also attracted to her, takes no issue with the situation. Gibson's story reflects conflicting views of widows, but also attributes (sexual) power to the widow; "[s]he recognizes her own desire and functions as the object of desire for others" (R. Mitchell 605).

The image of Gibson's young, beautiful, wealthy widow is representative of the type of widows featured in the plays to be analysed in the next chapter. To understand the options available to these characters, their behaviour, the choices they make, and their relations to other characters, it is necessary to keep the historical framework of late-nineteenth-century widowhood in mind. Although the plays only occasionally make specific allusions to mourning routine, it is undeniably a significant backdrop to the actions of the characters. Knowledge of mourning etiquette and its potential implications is therefore necessary for the understanding of these characters. Other social conditions, such as widows' independent legal status and social autonomy, are important aspects that shape the widow characters. As we have seen, the respectable image of the widow could also grant a woman more freedom, as in the case of Ethel Smyth; the following analysis will reveal how several women characters in the plays selected reinvent themselves as widows.

4. Widowhood in Fin-de-Siècle British Drama

4.1. Theatrical context

1890, the beginning of the final decade of the nineteenth century, is frequently taken as an epoch-defining year in the history of the British theatre. Richard Dietrich's critical history of British drama, for instance, covers the period from 1890 to 1950; similarly, Jean Chothia's *English drama of the early modern period, 1890 – 1940* treats almost exactly the same period. Richard Foulkes, editor of the Cambridge volume *British Theatre in the 1890s: essays on drama and the stage* exclusively covers the 1890s, and in several other publications the year 1890 features as the turning point for British drama. One of the reasons why this particular decade stands out is the development of a new and daring theatre culture in Western Europe, highly influenced by the founding of the Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1887, and the controversial realist plays by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen.

The Théâtre Libre was an independent theatre, dedicated to the sort of drama that had either “been rejected as uncommercial or in some way morally offensive,” or had failed to pass the strict official censor, as in the case of Ibsen (Chothia 2). In 1891 J. T. Grein founded the British equivalent to the Libre and other continental precursors, the Independent Theatre, to enable the production of new “plays of high literary and artistic value rejected by the commercial theatre or suppressed by the censor” (Wearing, “Grein”). The Independent Theatre was funded on a subscription basis through the membership of its dedicated audience, which came to include such notables as George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Wing Pinero. In its first year, Ibsen's *Ghosts* was staged, provoking much public debate and criticism. Chothia attributes the importance of Grein's Independent Theatre to its willingness to stage plays that the commercial managers of West End theatres would not risk putting on (Chothia 26).

In fact, these well-established commercial theatres of the West End, such as the Criterion and the St James's, run by the popular actor-managers Charles Wyndham and George Alexander respectively, were at the opposite end of the spectrum of theatrical venues. (Chothia 23). They preferred the works of established playwrights who were almost certain to produce box-office successes and provide central parts for the actor-managers themselves (26). Wyndham, for instance, favoured plays by Henry Arthur Jones which featured characters that were “titled men of the world, cynical but tender” (Read). These included the parts of Sir Richard Kato in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, and Sir Daniel Carteret in *Mrs.*

Dane's Defence, the latter at his very own theatre, Wyndham's, built with the profits of his earlier successes at the Criterion (ibid).

As the success of Jones' plays staged by Wyndham indicates, Jones was a force to be reckoned with in the theatre of the 1890s. Arthur Wing Pinero's collaboration with George Alexander at the St. James's was not equally profitable, although it did see Pinero's great success *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in 1893 (Wearing, "Alexander"). Together, Pinero and Jones "emerged as the leading dramatists of the decade" (Chothia 28). The influence and success of the actor-managers is further exemplified by "the elevated social sphere" they frequented, as well as the knighthoods their efforts earned them (Foulkes 3).

Jones and Pinero both specialised in a particular type of drama which came to be known as 'Society Drama,' characterised by the setting of upper-class drawing rooms, lavish and fashionable costumes and jewellery, which mirrored its elite audience (Chothia 29). Typically, these were well-made plays, written according to the carefully constructed formula devised by the French playwright Eugène Scribe (Cardwell 876). Well-made plays demanded a clear exposition, gradual complication of the plot, a final revelatory and climactic "scène à faire," leading to the ultimate denouement (Chothia 29). The plot of well-made plays is typically driven forward by the obstacles of misunderstandings and mis-communication, such as intercepted letters, overheard conversations, and mistaken identities. Much is left to 'chance,' as characters happen to exit and/or enter at the right moments to create dramatic tension, either by avoiding other characters or coincidentally meeting them (ibid). This is known as the *quiproquo*, Scribe's primary dramatic device, which forms "part of a broader pattern in which the revelation or continued concealment of a secret, the receipt of information by the correct person, or the prevention of its discovery by the person is essential to the proper outcome of the action" (Cardwell 878).

However, these dramas were expected to revolve around some substantial problem in order to be interesting to the audience. On this score, the influence of Ibsen's realist dramas became evident, although in a style adapted to keep in with the good taste of upper and middle-class audiences. The problem on 'everyone's' mind in the 1880s and 1890s was the so called 'Woman Question': an ongoing public debate about the role of women in society, their duties, their rights, and their sexuality. The issue of sex was particularly pressing, and the cases of 'Fallen Women' became a favourite topic in both theatre and literature. As Peter Raby summarises it, "[t]he problem, in short, was sexual fidelity, and the double standard whereby it was apparently acceptable, or even desirable, for a man to sow his 'wild oats,' [...] and then settle down to married life with a good woman" (Raby 186). By taking up such

issues, “[t]he English problem play was launched” (ibid), with which both Jones and Pinero had great success.

Jones’ and Pinero’s well-made problem plays often feature the desperate case of a ‘Fallen Woman’ who has transgressed the moral conventions of society but seeks reintegration into good society. The plot revolves around the central ‘Fallen Woman’ character, who, depending on the play, is portrayed more or less sympathetically, despite her ‘crimes.’ Several of these plays even offer what can be read as harsh criticism of the ‘double standard’ of society, thereby questioning to what extent these ‘Fallen Women’ are truly guilty, and thus directing a critical look at the men who are complicit in their downfall. Although both Jones and Pinero offered such critical perspectives within the frameworks of their plays, they typically toned down their criticism towards the end of a play and made sure to restore traditional social order. While the theatre critic and Ibsen-translator William Archer applauded especially Pinero’s efforts, playwright and theatre critic George Bernard Shaw found Pinero lacking, criticising “the moral and structural conventionality of Society Drama” (Chothia 28).

The kind of realism longed for by Shaw and others was supposed to be propagated by the Independent Theatre, yet this avant-garde theatre society with its 175 members did not survive the decade (Chothia 47, 51). It did inspire a successor, however, the Stage Society, founded in 1899, ready for a brave new era of plays (Hartnoll). Like its predecessor, the Stage Society aimed to provide a venue for plays deemed unprofitable by the mainstream West End managers, or banned by the censor; plays that the members of the Stage Society nevertheless believed to be “plays ‘of power and merit’” (Chothia 51). The Stage Society rejected “the contrived plotting” of well-made plays, and emphasised “realism of language, social setting and event” (Chothia 55). The Stage Society was significantly patronised by John Eugene Vedrenne and Harley Granville Barker’s management of the Court Theatre (Powell xiv), which, in order to evade the censor, introduced new plays “in a limited series of matinées,” some of which “then moved into extended runs in the evening” (Mazer 78-79). Under this management, the so-called ‘New Drama’ found a permanent home in the Court Theatre (McDonald, *The ‘New Drama’* 2). Playwrights who had their plays produced through the Stage Society included George Bernhard Shaw, Harley Granville-Barker himself, John Galsworthy, and St. John Hankin (Dietrich 107).

The collaboration between the Stage Society and the Court Theatre produced a type of drama which is truly worthy of the prefix ‘new,’ generating “a new excitement about theatre” through the “appeal to younger, more socially conscious and politically alert groups” (Chothia

56). In the New Drama, there was room for radical opinion and debate; settings could be far removed from the previous fixture of the upper-class drawing rooms in Society Drama, instead producing realistic representations of the lower strata of society and their concerns. This involved addressing economic, social, and political questions. The ‘Woman Question’ still featured strongly, though not within the limited scope of the ‘Fallen Woman’ problem plays. Instead, the early 1900s saw the rise of suffrage drama as part of the increasingly vigorous campaign for women’s suffrage, through such women playwright pioneers as Elizabeth Robins, who made one of the most notable theatrical contributions to this movement with *Votes for Women!* in 1907 (Stowell 2). The New Drama of the Edwardian period was a drama for the ‘New Woman’ to claim the stage and achieve serious representation and discussion of her life, role, and rights.

4.2. The Widow as *Raisonneur* and Companion

As mentioned previously, Pinero’s and Jones’s Problem Plays typically featured a ‘man of the world’ character for which the actor-managers cast themselves. This character was the *raisonneur*, a rational, experienced man whose insights and commentary provided a stable perspective for the audience to rely on, and contributed to the final revelation(s) in the climactic *scène à faire* (Chothia 29). The *raisonneur* usually functions as the author’s mouthpiece, whose task it is to “set things right,” by advising the protagonists through the action of the play (Griffin 36-37). As Chothia summarises it, the *raisonneur* represented the notion that, “while it might be regrettable, the double standard was an unshakeable fact of public life and social survival depended on recognition of this” (Chothia 38).

While widows are the focus of this thesis, it is useful to consider some of the widows selected in relation to the male *raisonneurs* who feature alongside them. Clarissa Ruscher in her thesis has made the observation that “all the women that Jones provides for his *raisonneurs* are good-looking, young widows” (Ruscher 81). Two such widows in Jones’s plays are Mrs. Quesnel in *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), and Lady Eastney in *Mrs. Dane’s Defence* (1900). In addition to being female counterparts to the *raisonneurs*, they are also sympathetic companions and friends to the plays’ protagonists; this is also the case with Mrs. Thorpe in Pinero’s *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895). In the following, these three widows will be analysed in relation to their respective *raisonneurs*, as well as the women protagonists they support. This section asks in what ways and to what extent the widows

conform to society's ideals of womanhood, and how they challenge or submit to the values represented by the *raisonneurs*. Are these three widows voices of social criticism of society, or staunch guardians of propriety?

4.2.1. Mrs. Quesnel

The first widow we turn our attention to is Mrs. Quesnel, or Inez, as she is referred to in the manuscript of the *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894). She is a young widow of about thirty who makes her entrance at the very beginning of the play when she arrives at the house of her friend, Lady Susan, to offer her support. Lady Susan, as mentioned in the introduction earlier, has made the unpleasant discovery that her husband, Mr. James Harabin, has had an affair, and plans to “pay him back in his own coin” (Jones, *Rebellious Susan* 3). Mrs. Quesnel and Lady Darby, Lady Susan's aunt, advise Lady Susan not to do anything rash, and rather overlook the matter, as it is “no worse than a respectable average case,” in the words of Lady Darby (4). This in medias res exposition cuts straight to the problem that the play addresses, the sexual and moral double standard. The ‘rebellious’ Susan is determined not to suffer in silence as convention would have her do, and instead challenges the enshrined double standard of society.

Lady Susan wishes to get away from her husband, and this is where Mrs. Quesnel, with a widow's privileges, can help. Mrs. Quesnel, as a respectable widow, is free to move about as she likes without any suspicion of lack of propriety attached to her activities, and has planned a trip to Egypt. For Lady Susan, this is the perfect opportunity to get away, and she exclaims, envying Mrs. Quesnel her freedom:

LADY S. Oh, that's splendid! We can go together, and have a good time. Ah, Inez, how lucky you've been! [INEZ *looks surprised*.] No, I don't mean that, dear, but still a widow's position has some advantages, hasn't it? (Jones, *Rebellious Susan* 5).

Here, the “widow's position” is referred to as something clearly positive, as it is only on second thought that Lady Susan checks herself and realises the indelicate suggestion that it seems fortunate to experience the death of one's husband. Other than her initial look of surprise, Mrs. Quesnel makes no further comment on the matter.

Mrs. Quesnel admits that men “are brutes,” but is resigned in her attitude as to what can or ought to be done about it: “[*Sighs*.] I'm afraid they are; but I don't see what we are to do except take them as we find them and make the best of them” (Jones, *Rebellious Susan* 6).

Her advice to Lady Susan is in accord with the play's *raisonneur*, Sir Richard Kato, Lady Susan's uncle. Sir Richard supports Lady Susan's going away, but between himself and Mrs. Quesnel, with the aim that she should "bring [Susan] round to a sensible frame of mind" (33). The play then fast forwards ten months, during which Mrs. Quesnel and Lady Susan have been travelling abroad. Eager to know what has transpired in their long absence, Sir Richard questions Mrs. Quesnel as to whether his rebellious niece has gone ahead with her threat of having an affair of her own. She reassures him that there is no other man in Lady Susan's life.

While she does wish Lady Susan to be reconciled with her husband, Mrs. Quesnel makes no particular effort to achieve this, and finds it "very absurd to make a fuss about other people's love affairs" (Jones, *Rebellious Susan* 39). She is more concerned with keeping Lady Susan's reputation clean and continuously reassures Sir Richard, who keeps returning to the question, that nothing occurred in Egypt. In an exchange between herself and Lady Susan, it becomes clear that even if something had occurred, she would support Lady Susan: "You know, dear, you may rely upon me. I'll say anything to help you —" (50). Mrs. Quesnel demonstrates through the play that she understands how society works, which rules must be adhered to, and therefore also how to use the system in her own favour. In response to Sir Richard, once again asking about Lady Susan's relationship to a certain man she met in Egypt, Mrs. Quesnel responds:

INEZ. What does it matter? You needn't trouble about Sue. We women know the value of appearances. We are awful cowards, and have terrible leanings towards respectability. Sue won't shatter Mr. Harabin's family gods on his family hearth, or burst up Mr. Harabin's family boiler with any new-fangled explosive. And so long as Mr. Harabin's family boiler remains intact, why should you meddle with Sue? I must go and dress. My cloak, please. (Jones, *Rebellious Susan* 90).

Mrs. Quesnel is realistic enough to realise that under the circumstances it would be better for Lady Susan to return to her husband, so that 'appearances' cannot induce further speculation as to what has transpired in Egypt. Her encouraging Lady Susan to go back to her married life, then, is more of a cautionary step for the sake of her safety, rather than an endorsement of the values of society.

Throughout the play, Mrs. Quesnel cooperates with Sir Richard and often agrees with him, but she also challenges him and asserts herself as his equal. When Sir Richard asks her to marry him in the third act, Mrs. Quesnel wishes to know more about his past relationships with women. When he answers that he has really loved "[o]nly once, and that is at the present moment," she immediately dismisses him, retorting, "I wanted to know the truth" (Jones,

Rebellious Susan 91). Experienced with men and love, she sees through him, and offers up an implicit critique of the double standard, as she responds to his ‘catalogue’ of affairs with her own, numbering over fifteen men, challenging him, “Suppose I were to own up to all these?” (93). Shocked, he says he would ask for more details, but admits he would decline to give any about his own affairs. By turning the question on him, Mrs. Quesnel prevents him from asking further questions. In the end, although it is not made explicit, it is implied that she will marry him. This suggests that, although a widow’s position has its advantages, as Lady Susan has pointed out, a widow might still wish to marry for the sake of companionship or securing herself financially for the future. Her inheritance might suffice for the time being, but might not be enough to see her settled independently for the remainder of her life. Even if she will submit to him in the form of marriage, she does not on any occasion submit to his many inquiries into the affairs of both Lady Susan and herself.

4.2.2. Lady Eastney

In his play *Mrs. Dane’s Defence* (1900), Jones has created another widow who features as a supporting character, similarly to Mrs. Quesnel, namely Lady Eastney. The play opens with a party scene at Lady Eastney’s country house, to which she has invited everyone in Sunningwater society. Here, the exposition to the central conflict in the play is made; the obstinate Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, who insists on rooting out any and every scandal, embraces the rumour created by her own nephew, that the newly arrived widow Mrs. Dane is not who she says she is, but rather a Felicia Hindemarsch. Miss Hindemarsch, a young governess with a family in Vienna, is said to have had an affair with her married employer, was found out by the wife who subsequently committed suicide. As a result, the husband went mad and was admitted to an asylum (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 4-5). Despite the nephew, Mr. Risby, taking his allegations back, Mrs. Bulsom-Porter will not let go of the idea he has planted in her head (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 6). The subject of this gossip, Mrs. Dane, will be analysed in the next section; for now, the focus is the friend she finds in the hostess, Lady Eastney.

Lady Eastney makes her entrance about halfway into Act I, described as being “about thirty, bright, fashionable, [and] handsomely dressed” (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 19). Her first exchange with the play’s *raisonneur*, Sir Daniel Carteret, a successful judge and highly respected man in society, already reveals much about their relationship. Lady Eastney makes a joking remark about him seemingly avoiding her, which everyone will put “the worst interpretation upon”:

LADY E. Sir Daniel! Playing truant here! Everybody will be putting the worst interpretation upon it.
 SIR D. What interpretation?
 LADY E. That I've accepted you at last, and that you've come in here to repent and think of the best way of getting out of it. [...] (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 19).

From this short exchange, it is evident that Sir Daniel has been seeking to win her hand in marriage for some time, and that this is a commonly known fact in their circle, as Lady Eastney expects their friends to make assumptions about their behaviour around each other. It also reveals Lady Eastney's availability on the marriage market, although no remarks have been made yet of her widowhood. Yet, the hints made so far in the exposition leave no doubt; the setting of her country house, combined with the party she is hosting and the people she associates with, as well as her being courted by Sir Daniel, indicate that she is a rich, young widow.

Sir Daniel clearly holds Lady Eastney in high regard, not only because he seeks to marry her, but because she is also the person he turns to for help and advice regarding his adopted son's wish to marry Mrs. Dane. Young Lionel Carteret, though not formally engaged, was meant to marry Lady Eastney's niece, Janet Colquhoun, but has set his mind on marrying the attractive widow Mrs. Dane, some years his senior. When asked to help Sir Daniel, Lady Eastney admits that she "can't quite forgive [Mrs. Dane] for taking him away from Janet, and [she] can't quite forgive Lionel" (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 23). Despite having such legitimate reasons for disliking Mrs. Dane, Lady Eastney quickly becomes her foremost champion.

In his article on the *confidant* and *raisonneur* in the drama of Pinero, Rudolf Weiss has identified the pattern of the relationship between the confidant and the protagonist being based on an equal social standing (Weiss 223). Moreover, the confidence between them is typically the result of a long-lasting friendship or them being related (ibid). This would seem to be the case with Jones's characters in *Mrs. Dane's Defence* as well. In conversations between Sir Daniel and Lady Eastney, it is clear that she is his equal in society, and they have been friends for a long time. Her independence and his respect for her allow her to speak freely and honestly with him, and joke with and criticise him depending on the situation. When he reminisces about love stories in his past and rhetorically asks, "[b]ut what's a boy's love?" she retorts, "[t]hat's what poor Janet is thinking" (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 24), thereby implicitly criticising the inconstancy of men's love. She also disregards Sir Daniel's suggestion of 'giving her the right' "to ask [him] for some knowledge of [his] past attachments," stating, "I have already the right to ask you, the right of friendship, and the right of a woman's curiosity" (ibid). In other words, she does not submit to him by awaiting

permission to pose personal questions; if she wants to do something, she will do it, without any special permission.

Sir Daniel, as is typical of a *raisonneur*, accepts and upholds the hypocritical double standard of society, whereas Lady Eastney shows a deeper understanding of the workings of society's rules and conventions, and as a result also criticises it. Sir Daniel is convinced that only the truth matters, but Lady Eastney understands that reputation, and who your friends are, is perhaps of even greater importance than the truth, as the following exchange between the two demonstrates quite clearly:

LADY E. She's [the Duchess] very much interested in Mrs. Dane's affair, and wants to know all about it. We shall find the duchess a useful ally.

SIR D. (*handling the foolscap*). We shall need no ally, except the truth.

LADY E. (*smiling*). Won't you? The truth is all very well, Sir Daniel, but if I had to live down a scandal, I'd rather have a duchess on my side. (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 65-66).

The problem that arises around the question of the true identity of Mrs. Dane forces Lady Eastney and her peers to take a stance either in favour or against Mrs. Dane. While Sir Daniel is extremely cautious about taking a stance until he has seen satisfactory evidence of the truth, Lady Eastney almost unconditionally sides with Mrs. Dane and supports her in her claim. Even when she learns the truth that 'Mrs. Dane' really is only a guise, Lady Eastney continues to support her. The rules of etiquette and social conventions would have her ostracise Mrs. Dane, yet she promises she will receive her if Mrs. Dane should ever call on her (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 125). She also encourages Mrs. Dane to write to her and let her know how she fares (*ibid*). Such gestures justify Penny Griffin's description of Lady Eastney as "compassionate and honest" (Griffin 84).

When Sir Daniel has discovered Mrs. Dane's lie about her identity and demanded that her relationship with Lionel be broken off, Lady Eastney, who also knows the truth, questions the need for the breaking up of the couple. She argues that the truth does not have to come out, as they are the only ones who know, and she is about to secure a formal apology from Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, which would ensure that the scandalous story would not be repeated. At this stage in the fourth act Lady Eastney's critique of the moral double standard becomes especially vocal:

LADY E. Aren't we all humbugs? Isn't it all a sham? Don't we all have one code on our lips and another in our hearts, one set of rules to admonish our neighbours, and another to guide our own conduct? Why should I lecture

that poor woman on her duty to Society? Why should I take her name off my visiting list, and pretend that I can't know her?

SIR D. Because you're a virtuous woman, and she's not. (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 107).

Lady Eastney's challenge of society's hypocrisy does not stop there, and it is interesting to note that she is not submissive to Sir Daniel's matter-of-fact attitude; instead, she continues to challenge him when he puts forward simple, absolute answers. Sir Daniel invokes the double standard when he admits that men also play a part in a woman's affair, but that they cannot help themselves. He is clearly convinced by the prevalent ideology of the time, which, as discussed in chapter two, held that a woman's 'sin' must be deliberate, as she had little or no sexual desire (S. Mitchell xi). Lady Eastney retorts:

LADY E. Oh, aren't you Pharisees and tyrants, all of you? And don't you make cowards and hypocrites of all of us? Don't you lead us into sin, and then condemn us for it? Aren't you first our partners, and then our judges? (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 108).

Provoked by Sir Daniel's excuse, she calls him out on the self-righteous and hypocritical nature of his attitude.

Despite such outspoken protests of men's power over women, Lady Eastney continues as an apparent contradiction of herself. In a heated speech, Sir Daniel offers up his views of matrimony and a woman's worth, in perfect correspondence with the actual views prevalent in late nineteenth-century Britain:

SIR D. A man demands the treasure of a woman's purest love. It's what he buys and pays for with the strength of his arm and the sweat of his brow. It's the condition on which he makes her his wife and fights the world for her and his children. (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 109).

The formulations in the quotation above are very revealing; words such as "buys and pays" underline the view of women as objects of a financial value, provided that her "purest love" is kept intact, that the "treasure" is not made available to anyone else. Further, "the strength of his arm and the sweat of his brow" reflect the active and powerful position of the man; he is the doer, the keeper, while the woman is the passive, the kept. His remark about children is also a reminder of the view that a wife bringing an illegitimate child into marriage was considered a far more severe 'sin' than if the man did (Kelsey 133). Yet, with all these indications of what values Sir Daniel holds in high regard, Lady Eastney, the independent widow with a mind of her own, is inclined to accept his hand in marriage. Perhaps most surprisingly to the reader, she tells him after his rant, "I rather like you in a temper. It shows

me that if I marry you, you'd be my master" (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 109). This is an unexpected statement as Lady Eastney very outspokenly opposes the sexual and moral double standard of society. Her statement seems contradictory to her previous criticism, but it implies a discreet observation of that she is conscious of Sir Daniel's true nature. Rather than meaning literally that she approves of him being her 'master,' her ambivalent phrasing allows Sir Daniel to interpret it in his favour, understanding Lady Eastney as a woman who upholds the values he believes in.

Nevertheless, Lady Eastney goes on to secure the formal apology from the obstinate and reluctant Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, which clears Mrs. Dane's reputation in society. In this sequence, the final moment of some tension in the denouement, Lady Eastney takes a leading, active role and orchestrates the whole session culminating in the defeat of Mrs. Bulsom-Porter. The whole while, Sir Daniel is a passive accomplice who supplies short affirmative comments to the analysis Lady Eastney puts to Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, as in the following example:

LADY E. I think that will meet our views, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. Yes, yes. I think so—

LADY E. Mrs. Dane will then bring her action against Mrs. Bulsom-Porter?

SIR D. Yes, I suppose so—

[...]

LADY E. I suppose there is no doubt whatever of the effect upon the jury, Sir Daniel?

SIR D. None whatever, I should say – or upon the judge. (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 115).

Thus, Lady Eastney invokes Sir Daniel's authority, both as a man and a highly respected judge. It is a matter of interpretation whether Sir Daniel's participation in this scheme is unwilling and that he cannot help but answer truthfully, or whether he complies with Lady Eastney's demands of him as a way of trying for her favour. Either way, this puts a question mark on Lady Eastney's behaviour throughout, especially with regard to statements such as "you'd be my master." As a widow, she has an experience with men and courtship that an unmarried woman usually would not have; she knows how to 'play the game' with men. She has a critical view of society, and knows how to appeal to men's ideals of womanhood, and how to use their efforts in courtship for her own gain. Although she criticises the 'double standard,' she seems to have accepted it, and, as Susan Carlson contends, "she has also learned to use it to her advantage" (Carlson 416). In the end, it would seem, Lady Eastney has the upper hand, takes an active role as the leading lady, and upstages the male *raisonneur*, Sir Daniel, by being the character who ultimately completes the 'job' of "setting things right," as a *raisonneur* should (Griffin 36-37).

4.2.3. Mrs. Thorpe

Another supportive confidant character is one of the two widows in Pinero's *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895). Before Pinero introduces the widowed title character, the play's other widow, Mrs. Thorpe, makes her entrance at the rooms of Mrs. Ebbsmith in Venice. Gertrude Thorpe is a twenty-seven year old widow described as "pretty, [and] honest-looking," who, despite being dressed in mourning and having "sorrowful eyes, and a complexion that is too delicate," there is a "natural cheerfulness and brightness" about her (Pinero, *Notorious* 5). The play's exposition reveals that she is a representative of the self-sacrificing ideal of womanhood, as it transpires that she has voluntarily come to Agnes Ebbsmith's aid in nursing Lucas Cleeve, who Mrs. Thorpe at the time believes to be Mrs. Ebbsmith's husband. Rather than considering her own sufferings and sorrows – the death of her husband and her only child – she devotes her time and effort to care for Mr. Cleeve, and especially Mrs. Ebbsmith, who through the course of the play requires even more of her attention and care.

Although Mrs. Thorpe has had her share of harsh experiences in life, she is a rather naïve woman who does not in the least suspect that something is amiss with the couple she has recently befriended. Instead, she is full of praise for the woman she believes to be "Mrs. Cleeve," going so far as to say that "if I were a man searching for a wife, I should be inclined to base my ideal on Mrs. Cleeve" (Pinero, *Notorious* 9). Her praise is founded on values central to the Victorian ideal of the 'Angel in the House,' which she finds in Agnes Ebbsmith's behaviour, such as her "patient, absorbing devotion to her husband" (10). Mrs. Thorpe's innocence and naïveté is further demonstrated by her cheerful gossiping, through which she unknowingly brings about Mrs. Ebbsmith's revelation of the truth about her relationship to Mr. Cleeve. Having overheard someone talk about Lucas Cleeve's wife by the name of Minerva, she puts it to Agnes and asks, "Your husband never calls you by that pet-name of yours. Why is it you haven't told me you're a daughter of Admiral Steyning's?" (26). When told the truth, Mrs. Thorpe immediately prepares to leave and declares, "[y]ou knew that I could not speak to you again after hearing this?" (28). Adhering to the rigid social conventions prevalent in late Victorian society, she is prepared to 'cut' Mrs. Ebbsmith from her circle.

The stage directions at this point mark an interesting turn, as Mrs. Thorpe remains by the door in "a moment's irresolution" before she returns to ask for Mrs. Ebbsmith's full story⁹ (Pinero, *Notorious* 28). She remains with her and listens patiently to the story of a 'Fallen

⁹ Mrs. Ebbsmith's story will be discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on the 'Fallen' widows.

Woman,’ and occasionally only makes brief exclamations or questions to drive Mrs. Ebbsmith’s retelling of her life ahead. Mrs. Thorpe is shocked by much of what she hears, but significantly, in the end, she looks at Mrs. Ebbsmith and concludes:

GERTRUDE. [*Taking her hand.*] What you’ve told me is dreadful. [*Looking into AGNES’S face.*] And yet you’re not a wicked woman! [*Kissing AGNES.*] In case we don’t meet again. (37).

At this point they part, thinking they will not meet again, but Mrs. Thorpe has previously suggested that hopefully she might see her again once she has explained the situation to her brother Amos Winterfield, a reverend. Her affectionate good-bye and resolve that Mrs. Ebbsmith is “not a wicked woman” indicate that she does not adhere so rigidly to social conventions after all. Quite to the contrary, she is prepared to, and wants to, maintain a friendship with the ‘Fallen’ Mrs. Ebbsmith, in spite of conventions telling her she should ‘cut’ her. Similarly to Lady Eastney in *Mrs. Dane’s Defence*, Mrs. Thorpe sees the unfairness of Mrs. Ebbsmith’s situation and sympathises with her, although she does not fully agree with or approve her behaviour throughout.

Mrs. Thorpe does return and maintains her friendship with Mrs. Ebbsmith, and becomes her confidant. She becomes privy to Mrs. Ebbsmith’s fears and emotions, and her scheme of meeting with Lucas Cleeve’s uncle, the Duke of St. Olpherts, who has come to Venice to break up the ‘immoral’ liaison between his nephew and Mrs. Ebbsmith. When Mrs. Thorpe is introduced to the Duke at a later stage, she is reserved towards him, demonstrating her loyalty to Mrs. Ebbsmith, and concludes that he is “rather a bad man” (Pinero, *Notorious* 130). Unlike other typical confidant/protagonist relationships, however, the confidence between these two widows is built up over time. They have not been friends for long, and hesitate to trust each other. As Weiss observes, it is challenging for them to establish this confidence, as they in the beginning disagree on several fundamental issues (Weiss 224). Over time, however, their love and sympathy for each other allow them to overcome their differences.

As the play progresses, their relationship develops further, and Mrs. Thorpe becomes more than a confidant. She not only listens to Mrs. Ebbsmith’s worries and plans, but also begins to see through her and is able to recognise the reasons for her identity crisis (Weiss 228). Mrs. Thorpe at this point begins to act more independently and toward the goal of ‘saving’ Mrs. Ebbsmith from a life as Mr. Cleeve’s kept mistress. It transpires that Mrs. Thorpe’s sympathy for Mrs. Ebbsmith, and her strong desire to ‘save’ her, derives from an

experience of married life similar to that of Mrs. Ebbsmith. She relates the story of her “dreadful, almost intolerable” marriage:

GERTRUDE. After the first few weeks – weeks, not months! after the first few weeks of it, my husband treated me as cruelly – [*turning to AGNES*] just as cruelly, I do believe, as your husband treated *you*. [*AMOS makes a movement showing consternation.*] Wait! Now, then! There was another man – one I loved – one I couldn’t help loving! I could have found release with him, perhaps happiness of a kind. I resisted, came through it. They’re dead now – the two are dead! And here I am, a virtuous, reputable woman; saved by the blessed mercy of Heaven! There, you are not surprised any longer, Amos! [*Pointing to AGNES.*] “My friend, Mrs. Ebbsmith!” [*Bursting into tears.*] Oh! Oh, if my little boy had been spared to me, he should have grown up tender to women – tender to women! he should, he should—! (Pinero, *Notorious* 159-160).

While Mrs. Thorpe paints a dismal picture of married life, she does not really criticise the institution of marriage, as Mrs. Ebbsmith does. Her experience is awful, but instead of focusing her anger on the injustice of the institution – as activists such as Mona Caird did – she rather blames the men they have been married to. She is right to blame them, but her statement that she would have raised her son to be “tender to women” as a solution to the problem shows that she does not see the bigger picture. She continues to adhere to Victorian social ideals, of which marriage is at the centre. This is also clear by her assumption that Mrs. Ebbsmith would want to marry Mr. Cleeve if he could only be divorced.

Throughout the play, Mrs. Thorpe gains some agency and is enabled to act independently, both of Mrs. Ebbsmith and her brother, Mr. Winterfield. Nevertheless, she is a highly conventional woman, who, despite having experienced a horrible side of the patriarchal society she lives in, continues to uphold its values. Her most significant break with social convention is her decision to remain by Mrs. Ebbsmith’s side even when she has learned the truth. This is, however justified in that she, eventually authorised by, and with the help of, her reverend brother aims to ‘save’ Mrs. Ebbsmith from further ‘sin.’ Her own resistance to the temptation of succumbing to the love she felt for another man also firmly establishes her as a ‘virtuous,’ ‘pure’ woman, in stark contrast to her ‘fallen’ friend.

As opposed to women like Mrs. Dane, who pretends to be a widow for respectability’s sake, the three widows analysed so far all have in common that they are in fact bereaved women, their status is undisputed and therefore there is little at stake for them. Through their lives’ experiences, they have learned to be critical, or even cynical, about men, marriage, and love. They are all capable of identifying the sexual and moral ‘double standard’ in society, but vary in their degree of criticism of it; Mrs. Quesnel and Lady Eastney are the most outspoken

ones, whereas Mrs. Thorpe expresses no explicit criticism. Nevertheless, all three perceive the unjust treatment of women, and sympathise with the transgressive women they become (or already are) friends with. The next chapter will take a closer look at the other side of these widows' stories; those of the 'Fallen' 'widows' themselves.

4.3. The 'Fallen' Widow

While the widows analysed in the previous chapter all maintain their respectable positions in society, the three widows analysed in this chapter are variations of the 'Fallen Woman' type. Yet, there are aspects of these characters that undermine this categorisation. Mrs. Dane (*Mrs. Dane's Defence*), Mrs. Ebbsmith (*The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*), and Mrs. Bellamy (*Iris*) all have elements of 'New Woman-ness' about them, to various extent, but, in the end, are punished for their New Woman-like lifestyles and choices. The distinction between a 'Fallen' and a 'New Woman' is, however, a fine line, and this thesis acknowledges the fluid boundaries of the two types. Rather, this thesis treats them as 'Fallen' with regard to the ending of the plays, which condemn these three widows for their social and sexual transgressions. This chapter examines the relation between widowhood and fallen-ness in these characters, as well as their potential as New Women.

4.3.1. 'Mrs. Dane'

The problematic woman that Lady Eastney so selflessly defends, and eventually befriends, is the charming, yet unsettling, Mrs. Dane, in Jones's *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900). She is allegedly a widow, about the age of twenty-eight, and described as "a pretty, soft-voiced, dark little woman," who has recently set up house in Sunningwater and is in the process of establishing herself as part of society there (Jones, *Mrs. Dane's* 6). As mentioned in the previous chapter, she is in fact Felicia Hindemarsch, who, in order to escape the scandal that engulfed her in Vienna, has taken her widowed cousin's identity. Yet, she cannot successfully overcome her past until she has established her new identity among polite society, ideally through a suitable marriage. This is where posing as a widow legitimises her agenda; even as a widow she is met with suspicion by some, but as an unmarried woman with no social references it would be impossible to achieve her goal. Her background is, for instance, one of Sir Daniel's primary concerns, as he questions his son: "[h]as she told you anything of her people? [...] Circumstances? position? [...] There was a Mr. Dane – who was he?" (17).

Interestingly, the text contains no stage directions about her being dressed in any stage of mourning, and a portrait of the actress Lena Ashwell¹⁰ in character as Mrs. Dane, shows her dressed in white.¹¹ Thus, she signals her widowhood primarily through the name of her late husband, and is clearly available for (re)marriage.

Like the beautiful young widow in Charles Dana Gibson's illustration commented on earlier, Mrs. Dane is surrounded by men who take an interest in her, and women who regard her with suspicion, or even contempt. Mr. Bulsom-Porter admires her for having a "pretty face, a soft voice, and a charming manner" (2), and Canon Bonsey is of the view that "a woman with such a face, and such a figure, and such a divine musician, cannot be an undesirable acquaintance" (29). Her most ardent admirer is young Lionel Carteret, who is head-over-heels in love with her, regardless of knowing practically nothing about her. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, on the other hand, is extremely sceptical of Mrs. Dane, whom she refers to mostly as "that woman" (2-3). Yet, in the case of Mrs. Dane, opinions are not split quite as diametrically as implied by Gibson's illustration; her most supportive friend is Lady Eastney, and while Sir Daniel is not mean-spirited like Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, he is, in the end, her strongest opponent.

The opinions of Mr. Bulsom-Porter and Canon Bonsey reveal a set of skills that Mrs. Dane owns; she is clearly capable of convincing people that she possesses a natural feminine charm, and she expertly manoeuvres society with a lady's elegance. Like Lady Eastney, as Susan Carlson observes, she is conscious of the double standards of society, and both "have gained a social power" by converting this awareness "to indirect control" (Carlson 416). Mrs. Dane shows an awareness of what social conventions and etiquette say a woman is supposed to be, as she successfully convinces more and more people that she is, indeed, a "gentle, sweet, and submissive" woman, a typical "Victorian angel," despite in truth being a 'fallen' governess (Fisher 205). To maintain this appearance, she appeals especially to the upper-class men's ideal of womanhood, focusing her efforts on charming them by accentuating her attractive physical features – which, as the quotes above indicate, they have clearly noticed – and demonstrating her talents in areas considered suitable for a respectable, upper-class woman, such as music.

¹⁰ Ms. Ashwell played Mrs. Dane at the premiere at Wyndham's Theater, 9 Oct 1900.

¹¹ Bassano, Alexander. bromide print, 1900. National Portrait Gallery, London. "Lena Ashwell (née Lena Margaret Pocock, later Lady Simson) as Mrs Dane in 'Mrs Dane's Defence.'" Web. 21 May 2017. <<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw53189/Lena-Ashwell-ne-Lena-Margaret-Pocock-later-Lady-Simson-as-Mrs-Dane-in-Mrs-Danes-Defence?LinkID=mp54251&search=sas&sText=lena+ashwell&role=sit&rNo=6>>.

It is revealed early in the play that Mrs. Dane has a hold on Lionel Carteret. When he confesses his love for her and approaches the subject of marriage, the secondary text indicates that “*she shows delight when she sees his drift*” (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 10). She acts innocent and shy with him, pretending she is not aware of his amorous intent (11), all the while delighted at the turn their conversation is taking. At this point, interestingly, she also lies to him about her age, making herself a year younger than she is. Although it is a minor lie compared to the fact that she is lying about her identity to him (and everyone else) at this point, it is the lie that is meant to convey to the audience that she is indeed a dishonest woman. Sir Daniel picks up on the untruthfulness immediately when Lionel tells him her age: “Twenty-seven? I should have said a year or so older” (16). It is essential for Mrs. Dane to secure her position through a marriage with Lionel, yet she behaves coyly with him, presenting herself as an innocent and pure woman, which is what she needs to be in order to be eligible as his wife.

At this early stage in the first act, Mrs. Dane is in control of the situation; she is shown to have Lionel in her grasp, and the men generally like and accept her. Risby identifying Mrs. Dane as Felicia Hindemarth to his aunt, however, has set the forces in motion that challenge her control. Mrs. Bulsom-Porter turns out to be a persistent menace, and, over time, other threats such as the private detective Fendick, hired by Mrs. Bulsom-Porter, and Sir Daniel further challenge Mrs. Dane. Remarkably, even after being found out by Risby and Fendick, Mrs. Dane is able to secure the support of both men by appealing to their sympathy. When confronted with Fendick alone towards the end of Act II, who is about to reveal her true identity, she is overcome by panic and is no longer the elegant, charming, and calculating woman seen earlier:

MRS. DANE. It shan’t be [found out]. How can it? Oh, how can I move you? I’ll give you every farthing I have. Don’t betray me! Don’t betray me! It’s everything to me – my happiness, my life, my all. Oh, don’t ruin me! Hush! (*She looks off right, points him off left, whispering as he goes off*) You won’t betray me? (*She comes back, with an immense effort regains her self-possession, takes a novel, and sits on sofa.*) (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 55).

At this point, she realises there is nothing she can do but appeal to Fendick’s sense of compassion. Fendick later tells her that he is resolved to help her because she “worked on [his] feelings,” and insists that his actions are not to do with money, although she has promised to pay him more than Mrs. Bulsom-Porter to secure his services (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 79). Risby also reveals that it was when he saw her crying that he “felt [he] couldn’t round on

[her]” (76-77). In both of these cases, she is completely at the mercy of two men, yet, for reasons cited as appealing to their emotions by emphasising her ‘feminine weakness,’ they both decide to help her. Her utter helplessness may be regarded by them as a typical trait of the idealised Victorian woman and grants the men a sense of power over her. It may further imply that, although they make no demands now, they may exercise their power over her in the future.

In the above quote of Mrs. Dane, the stage directions state that she regains her self-possession with “immense effort,” which demonstrates that although she has momentarily lost all control, she is still capable of regaining her composure. These skills, however, are further eroded in the ‘cross-examination’ scene between her and Sir Daniel, until all power is taken from her. The downward spiral starts at a point where Sir Daniel has actually become convinced of her innocence, and only questions her further to secure undisputable evidence in order to clear her reputation completely. Mrs. Dane cries of genuine relief that he finally believes her, but her relief is premature. Throughout the scene, the secondary text refers to her as watching him “*furtively and with great anxiety*” (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 85; 87), and she tries several times to get away from Sir Daniel and his questions, without success:

SIR DANIEL. Will you please make me out a list of their names and addresses?
MRS. DANE. Yes, certainly. Shall I do it now? (*Half rising to go.*)
SIR DANIEL. No, by-and-by will do. Now to go back to your cousin, Felicia Hindemarsch. You have no idea where she is now? (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 91).

As her lies become more and more elaborate and she has to admit to not having told the whole truth, Sir Daniel’s suspicion is confirmed and he will not be swayed by her feminine tactics. She tries to get his sympathy, saying that her “head is ready to split” (87), or even ‘confesses’ that he frightens her. The secondary text implies that she has no reason to be afraid of him, as Sir Daniel’s behaviour throughout the sequence is described as being “*calm and kind but very firm*” (93). Jones’s description does not acknowledge that she may have other legitimate reasons for being frightened by Sir Daniel. Nevertheless, this way, she continues her act of the innocent, helpless angel, who is physically weak, and, as she often calls her own behaviour, foolish (82; 93).

Sir Daniel, however, would seem to be immune to her feminine charms, and, unlike Risby and Fendick, will not be moved by any appeal to his emotions or sympathy. His attitude toward her changes dramatically when he is convinced that she is lying. He has previously treated her kindly, although determinedly, but once the truth is out, he uses the kind of

language only Mrs. Bulsom-Porter has used earlier, exclaiming: “*Woman*, you’re lying!” (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 98, emphasis added). Mrs. Dane then finally tells the truth, emphasising her own naïveté and innocence, in a desperate attempt to convince him that she is not a ‘bad woman’ (98-99):

MRS. DANE. I’d been brought up in a village. I was a child in knowledge. I knew nothing of life, nothing of the world. Mr. Trent was very kind to me. He was rich and distinguished and flattered me by his notice. And I— oh, why didn’t somebody warn me? Why did they keep me ignorant? I didn’t even love him, not in that way— not as I love Lionel. I tell you I knew nothing! Nothing! Till it was too late! You believe me, don’t you? (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 99).

Although Mrs. Dane does not speak out against the sexual and moral double standard of society directly, she clearly feels its injustice and questions why women are kept ignorant about sexual matters. The fact that Sir Daniel has had a similar experience as Mrs. Dane, as he once loved a married woman and was willing to give up everything to live with her, exposes his hypocritical behaviour towards Mrs. Dane. Her story, contrasted with Sir Daniel’s, enables Lady Eastney to speak out on Mrs. Dane’s behalf and criticise society’s sexual and moral double standard.

In the end, Mrs. Dane’s options are severely limited. Despite being an accomplished actress, who has convinced almost everyone she has met that she is Mrs. Dane and not Felicia Hindemarsch, and having received a ‘carte blanche’ in the form of Mrs. Bulsom-Porter’s signed apology, she succumbs to the moral codes of society. Instead of taking the apology and the protection it might give her in the future, she tears it up, saying “[...] [d]on’t think I’m ungrateful to you – (*tearing it*) but I sha’n’t trouble to defend my reputation [...]" (Jones, *Mrs. Dane’s* 124). Resigned, she opts for a self-sacrificial role, giving Lionel up for his future’s sake even though he does not wish to give her up. Convinced by Sir Daniel that it is for the best, she becomes a “Magdalen,” a repentant ‘sinner’ (Fisher 207), and thereby perpetuates the sexual and moral double standard of society. Taking her leave from Lady Eastney and Sir Daniel who see her off with promises of friendship in the future, her final words reflect a further move towards embracing angelic womanhood: “I shall see my child tomorrow” (125). As a form of redemption, she will return to her child and thereby prove that she is a ‘good woman,’ who accepts society and embraces self-sacrifice.

4.3.2. Mrs. Ebbsmith

In contrast to Mrs. Dane's willingness to adjust to society's expectations and attempts to gain favour with respectable people, Pinero's Mrs. Ebbsmith (*The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*) is a woman with an independent opinion, and has made a point of speaking her mind, as well as living according to her principles. Unlike Mrs. Dane, Mrs. Ebbsmith is in fact a widow, and her experience of married life is in part what has made her strongly oppose the institution of marriage. Pinero describes her in the stage directions as "a placid woman" whose dress is "plain to the verge of coarseness; [and] her face, which has little colour, is at the first glance almost wholly unattractive" (Pinero, *Notorious* 14). Apart from her "sweet, low voice," there is nothing feminine about her (ibid). These aspects of her character, along with "emancipated habits" such as smoking, reveal her to be "a quintessential New Woman" (Gardner and Rutherford 5, 9). Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who portrayed Mrs. Ebbsmith in the play's initial run, expressed her torn feelings about the character:

The role of Agnes Ebbsmith and the first three acts of the play filled me with ecstasy [sic] ... but the last act broke my heart. I knew that such an Agnes in life could not have drifted into the Bible-reading inertia of the woman she became in the last act. ... To me Agnes was a finer woman. In those days, not so long ago, she was a new and daring type, the woman agitator, the pessimist with original independent ideas – in revolt against sham morals. (Mrs. Patrick Campbell, qtd. in Gardner and Rutherford 9)

Although Pinero has created a thoroughly interesting New Woman character, she is not allowed to live her 'New Woman-ness.' Nevertheless, in the time that she remains 'true' to the kind of woman Mrs. Patrick Campbell felt she was, Mrs. Ebbsmith is a strong critic of the dominant patriarchal system of late-nineteenth-century society.

In a twist of the widow-disguise put on for respectability, Mrs. Ebbsmith is a widow who pretends to be a wife in order to be perceived as respectable. The truth is revealed early on in a conversation between Mrs. Thorpe and Mrs. Ebbsmith, however, and so for the most part of the play her identity as a widow is known to the audience and most of the characters. In this expositional conversation, Mrs. Ebbsmith relates her personal experiences of parental abuse, activism, poverty, and an unfortunate marriage, thereby justifying her current lifestyle to the shocked Mrs. Thorpe. Tellingly, she refers to marriage as "the horrible curse that falls upon so many," and "the choked-up, seething pit" (Pinero, *Notorious* 30). She tells Mrs. Thorpe about falling for a man and marrying at nineteen, despite her resolve as a child that nothing should induce her to fall victim to "[t]he curse of an unhappy marriage" (ibid):

AGNES. Yes, in church — in church. In spite of father's unbelief and mother's indifference, at the time I married I was as simple — ay, in my heart as devout — as any girl in a parsonage. The other thing hadn't soaked into me. Whenever I could escape from our stifling rooms at home, and slam the front door behind me, the air blew away uncertainty and scepticism; I seemed only to have to take a long, deep breath to be full of hope and faith. And it was like this till that man married me.

GERTRUDE. Of course, I guess your marriage was an unfortunate one?

AGNES. It lasted eight years. For about twelve months he treated me like a woman in a harem, for the rest of the time like a beast of a burden. Oh! when I think of it! [*Wiping her brow with her handkerchief.*] Phew! (Pinero, *Notorious* 30-31).

Mrs. Ebbsmith's own experiences of married life have only reinforced her contempt for that institution, and have fostered a growing contempt for the part religion plays in it by legitimising and sanctioning man's rule over woman. She has evidently made it clear that she has no affinity with the church, and so Mrs. Thorpe asks for confirmation when Mrs. Ebbsmith says she married in "St. Andrew's Church in Holborn;" Mrs. Ebbsmith's repetition of "in church" further underlines this complicated relationship with religion and the church. As if incredulous of the fact herself, she must state it three times, and adds to this a description of herself as a "simple" and "devout" girl, "as any girl in a parsonage," shielded from the hard facts of life. Mrs. Ebbsmith has experienced the destructive potential of marriage and its justification through religion, and has since distanced herself from both.

Her resentment of marriage and religion reflects the opinions voiced by Mona Caird, whose critique of patriarchy, as mentioned earlier, located "marriage and prostitution at the heart of a religious, economic and political system based on maintaining male power through exploiting women as either private or public property" (Heilmann, *Mona Caird* 70). Mrs. Ebbsmith also hints at the link of marriage with prostitution, as she says she was treated "like a woman in a harem" for the first year of their marriage. Drawing such comparisons and expressing such harsh criticism of the institution of marriage and its ties with religion, Mrs. Ebbsmith is clearly identifiable as a radical New Woman, whose radicalism is further emphasised as more of her life story is revealed.

In telling her story to Mrs. Thorpe, Mrs. Ebbsmith also reveals details of her background. Her father was "once a school-master" but became known as "Jack Thorold, the demagogue" for writing in "inflammatory journals" and speaking in public about questions regarding labour and trade, and the distribution of wealth (Pinero, *Notorious* 29). She admits to having gotten several of her political ideas from him, and talks of him with fondness despite the violence she has suffered at his and her mother's hands (29-30). In referring to her

father as “once” a school-master, it is implied that he could not hold his job, and Mrs. Ebbsmith’s upbringing is therefore likely to have been characterised by poverty. Her late husband was a barrister (30), who it may be assumed did not earn sufficiently to provide for Mrs. Ebbsmith in her widowhood. As mentioned in chapter 3.3, this was the case for many widows in the nineteenth century, especially middle class widows (Curran 220); insufficient inheritance meant that the widows had to seek work in order to provide for themselves. In Mrs. Ebbsmith’s case, it seems she must have inherited enough to enable her to live independently for some time, which she devoted to her activism and public speaking. Eventually, however, she became destitute and suffered starvation, to the point that she was hospitalised (Pinero, *Notorious* 33). After regaining her strength in hospital, she “took up nursing” and found her way to Rome to work there; this is where she first encountered Mr. Cleeve, whom she was set to nurse (ibid).

Having listened to the story of a most unfortunate marriage, Mrs. Thorpe reflects on the fact of Mrs. Ebbsmith’s widowhood, “[y]ou were free then — free to begin again” (Pinero, *Notorious* 32). When Mrs. Thorpe’s own brutal marriage is revealed later in the play, it becomes clear that this early remark on the benefits of widowhood is meant sincerely; Mrs. Thorpe perceives that for both herself and Mrs. Ebbsmith, widowhood has been liberation. Her remark also demonstrates a kind of optimism that is lost on her friend; for Mrs. Ebbsmith, there can be no new beginning, as she finds that one does not “begin to believe all over again” (ibid). The implication is similar to the prevalent thought of the time with regard to the ‘fall’ of a woman; innocence, once lost, is lost forever. Similarly, Mrs. Ebbsmith’s belief in the institution of marriage, and the virtue of marriage which society dictates that women should strive for, is lost. While Mrs. Thorpe suggests that widowhood constitutes freedom to pursue a new and better marriage, Mrs. Ebbsmith rather perceives it as freedom to speak her mind. She has used the six years since the death of her husband to propagate her opinions of marriage in public, and, as she puts it, “warning women” of falling into “[t]he choked-up, seething pit” (32-33). Free from the bonds of marriage, then, she becomes an activist, and carves out a place for herself in the public sphere, transgressing the established boundaries of acceptable behaviour for women.

Disillusioned with marriage, Mrs. Ebbsmith has turned to a ‘free union,’ similar to what Caird describes in her article “Marriage.” Caird argues that marriage, ideally, “despite all dangers and difficulties should be *free*” (Caird, qtd. in Ledger 21). She writes:

So long as love and trust and friendship remain, no bonds are necessary to bind two people together; life apart will be empty and colourless; but whenever these cease the tie becomes false and iniquitous, and no one ought to have power to enforce it (Caird, qtd. in Ledger 21).

Mrs. Ebbsmith declares that she will only remain with Mr. Cleeve “to help, to heal, to console,” and that they would go their separate ways if one made the other unhappy (Pinero, *Notorious* 35-36). Confident that Mr. Cleeve feels as she does, she explains to Mrs. Thorpe: “[...] [w]e have done with Marriage; we distrust it. We are not now among those who regard Marriage as indispensable to union. We have done with it!” (36). They plan to live openly and “write much together,” and thereby continue Mrs. Ebbsmith’s activist work, creating, and participating in, public debate about the institution of marriage (34). Her strong conviction and ambition identifies her as a New Woman at this early stage, towards the end of Act I.

Throughout the course of the play, however, Mrs. Ebbsmith realises that Mr. Cleeve is only concerned about his own career, and wants Mrs. Ebbsmith to become a more conventional woman. He wants her to support him by being “a double faculty” for him, that is, a second source of power to reinforce his “confidence in [himself]” (Pinero, *Notorious* 46), and expects her to do secretarial work for him, such as copying his manuscripts (58). He also takes issue with her appearance, and has a beautiful new gown made for her, arguing, “[m]y dear Agnes, I can’t understand your reason for trying to make yourself a plain-looking woman when nature intended you for a pretty one” (56). Mrs. Ebbsmith is described as reacting with aversion and disdain upon seeing the new dress, which is of “some beautiful material trimmed with lace, etc.,” (55), with a low neckline and no sleeves (56). Mr. Cleeve clearly wants Mrs. Ebbsmith to fulfil his aesthetic expectations of a woman; in his view, her plain dress is not good enough, as he repeatedly expresses that he does not think she looks her best, and that her current style of dress is one of “perpetual slovenliness” or “shabbiness” (58). Shortly before this exchange, Mrs. Ebbsmith expresses a wish of hers for their union to be “[d]evoid of passion,” whereas Mr. Cleeve clearly desires the opposite (48). To him, she is not an individual in her own right, but is rather defined through her relationship with him.

This kind of ‘othering’ that Mr. Cleeve does to Mrs. Ebbsmith – by seeing himself as the essential, the one who should be doing the writing, dismissing her ideas as ‘mad,’ and objectifying her through expressing an explicit wish for her to be aesthetically pleasing to him – corresponds to the theories and observations Simone de Beauvoir makes in *The Second Sex*:

And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex,’ by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with

reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other (de Beauvoir 15-16).

Mr. Cleeve has claimed to side with Mrs. Ebbsmith in her activism, but, in fact, he does not, and cannot, see her as his equal; his view is the one de Beauvoir describes above. His obsession with her looks, especially, shows how pervasive this view of Mrs. Ebbsmith as a sexual object is. Once again, de Beauvoir summarises the concept perfectly:

In woman dressed and adorned, nature is present but under restraint, by human will remoulded nearer to man's desire. A woman is rendered more desirable to the extent that nature is more highly developed in her and more rigorously confined: it is the 'sophisticated' woman who has always been the ideal erotic object (de Beauvoir 177).

In making explicit remarks about her appearance, and by making arrangements with the dressmaker without her knowledge and against her will in order to change her appearance, Mr. Cleeve clearly wishes to transform her into what he thinks she ought to be. Although he gives in to Mrs. Ebbsmith's protests and does not try to force her to wear the dress, he has made his opinion very clear, and is thrilled when she appears in the dress later, at the end of Act II.

In the time that passes between Mrs. Ebbsmith's clear rejection of Mr. Cleeve's remarks and the dress he has given her, and the moment she appears in the dress, she has been forced to face the truth about Mr. Cleeve. His uncle, the Duke of St. Olpherts, has painted a most unflattering picture of him, emphasising his weakness, his inconstancy with women, and declared that "[t]he real Lucas Cleeve" is "[a]n egoist" (Pinero, *Notorious* 86). The Duke is trying to restore Mr. Cleeve in his old society and career, and as such Mrs. Ebbsmith perceives him as her opponent, yet he does not treat her unfairly and is honest with her. The truth about Lucas Cleeve, however, is not one Mrs. Ebbsmith wants to hear, protesting to his stories, "[n]o, no! untrue! untrue!" (88). Mr. Cleeve reveals his true nature in the conversation between himself and the Duke immediately afterwards; he distances himself from and ridicules her views and ambitions, and expresses his belief that she can be 'tamed,' that the "spirit of revolt in her [...] will die out in time" (93). After their conversation, Mrs. Ebbsmith returns in the new dress:

handsomely gowned, her throat and arms bare, the fashion of her hair roughly altered. She stops abruptly upon seeing ST. OLPHERTS; a strange light comes into her eyes; voice, manner, bearing, all express triumph. The two men stare at her blankly. She appears to be a beautiful woman (Pinero, *Notorious* 98).

She appears as a 'sophisticated' woman, having 'remoulded' her nature according to Mr. Cleeve's desires. Her feeling of triumph here shows that altering her appearance to Mr. Cleeve's preferences is a deliberate and calculated action. She admits to having suspected his character, and says that St. Olpherts' characterisation of him "is not wholly a false one" (Pinero, *Notorious* 103). She has put on the dress in order to keep Mr. Cleeve, by demonstrating to him that she can be what he wants her to be, and that he therefore should stay with her and not go back to his wife and previous life. Mrs. Ebbsmith recognises that she needs to adhere to "the conventional role of beautiful and subservient woman" in order to keep him (Denison 423). In explaining herself to him, she says she resigns herself "to it all," and admits to loving him, in Mr. Cleeve's words, "as simple, tender women are content to love" (ibid). Her resignation is final in the declaration, "I won't oppose you – I won't repel you any more" (104). As one big contradiction of herself, she has allowed herself to be made into an erotic object, and has submitted to a man's authority.

Mrs. Ebbsmith's abandoning of her own ideals and her willingness to submit herself in order to keep Mr. Cleeve may be explained by considering her background and future prospects. Through her poor and violent upbringing, abusive marriage, and later years of activism Mrs. Ebbsmith has experienced harsh conditions. Although the death of her husband provided her with independence per se, she does not have the financial means to live independently. Her relationship with Mr. Cleeve provides her with a comfortable alternative, and this may be something she is reluctant to let go of, in order to protect herself from the destitution and starvation that she has experienced in her past. Her strongest motivation, however, is indicated as being her deep love for Mr. Cleeve. She tells Mrs. Thorpe that she fears this feeling, finding it "humiliating": "[t]he fear lest, after all my beliefs and protestations, I should eventually find myself loving Lucas in the helpless, common way of women—" (Pinero, *Notorious* 68-69). Mrs. Ebbsmith is realising that she has feelings for Mr. Cleeve that are stronger than any attempts at resistance, rendering her "helpless", even against her own principles.

Putting on the dress in order to manipulate Mr. Cleeve into staying with her signals that Mrs. Ebbsmith finally understands what kind of man he is and how she must play the 'game' to keep him. It works in the sense that it absolutely delights Mr. Cleeve and makes him want to stay with her, but it has one significant flaw; she has not considered what it will do to herself. The dress scene, as the climax of the second act, has an immediate impact on her; in the transition between the second and third acts, Mrs. Ebbsmith faints, supposedly while looking at herself in the mirror (Pinero, *Notorious* 107). The indication that she fainted

upon looking at herself in the mirror suggests that she could not recognise herself, and in desperation of seeing the path ahead of her, collapses. She has also not considered that her changed manner would encourage Mr. Cleeve to abandon their plans for the future, or, as he refers to it, “that crazy plan of ours of trumpeting our relations to the world” (115). He ridicules the whole scheme, not realising – or not caring – that she still wants a future of activism and love through a ‘free union.’ Rather than change herself completely, she goes for compromise, but Mr. Cleeve takes her submission literally, declaring, “[t]he work shall fall wholly on *my* shoulders. My poor girl, you shall enjoy a little rest and pleasure” (116). Paying no heed to her wishes, he means to instate her in a form of idealised ‘domestic bliss,’ making her into the ideal of the ‘Angel in the House.’ His words imply that she should be a like an innocent girl who needs to be taken care of, and who should do no work, but only be there for his comfort (116-117).

Listening to his envisioning of their future, Mrs. Ebbsmith reflects to herself, “[m]y marriage – the early days of my marriage – all over again!” (Pinero, *Notorious* 117). The experience of fainting and the subsequent conversation with Mr. Cleeve tell her that she has overestimated her control of her autonomy in relation to him. He pressures her further by making her declare that she “will never be mad again,” and also puts it to her that he assumes she will marry him once he has gotten a divorce from his wife (119-120). Astonished at this proposition, she does not endorse the idea, but answers “yes” in a low voice when asked if she would marry him (122). Throughout the whole conversation, her control and convictions can be seen being undermined. She again whispers to herself, “[m]y old life – my old life coming all over again!” (ibid). The woman who usually loudly protests against the whole institution of marriage has been transformed to a submissive woman who now meekly agrees to marry.

Mrs. Ebbsmith seems to have forgotten that she is an independent woman; although circumstances restrict her opportunities, she has demonstrated an aptitude for adjusting to harsh conditions and has found work in order to provide for herself. It would not be altogether impossible to establish a new life, removed from Mr. Cleeve and his circle, and thereby not surrender her ideals and independence. The other widow in the play, her faithful friend and companion Mrs. Thorpe, must remind her of that. Mrs. Thorpe is suspicious of the change she has gone through, and finds the notion contemptuous when Mrs. Ebbsmith tells her that it is Mr. Cleeve’s wish that she appears more like “[a]n ordinary smart woman,” in Mrs. Thorpe’s words (Pinero, *Notorious* 133). Although Mrs. Thorpe does not agree with Mrs. Ebbsmith’s controversial views of marriage, for instance, she has respect for her stance; in the beginning, she would not judge her and abandon her until she had heard the whole story, and later, after

her friend's change of character, she does not leave Mrs. Ebbsmith without pressuring her on the subject of Mr. Cleeve. In a confrontation toward the end of the third act, Mrs. Ebbsmith tells her of the plans she has made with Mr. Cleeve and the Duke, whose scheme it is to restore Mr. Cleeve to his former life and career by instating Mrs. Ebbsmith as a mistress to Mr. Cleeve in London, in the Duke's words, "everything *à la mode*" (145):

AGNES. [...] The reconciliation [between Cleeve and his wife] goes no further than mere outward appearances. [*Turning away.*] He relies upon me as much as ever. [*Beating her hands together passionately.*] He can't spare me – can't spare me!

[...]

GERTRUDE. I suspected something of the kind. [*Going to AGNES, gripping her wrist tightly.*] Pull yourself out of the mud! Get up – out of the mud! (Pinero, *Notorious* 157-158).

Mrs. Thorpe sees through her, and would rather she returned to her old self than continue as a submissive, kept mistress of Mr. Cleeve's, a condition she alludes to as being sunken in mud. From being an independent woman taking Mr. Cleeve as her lover on the basis of her ideals of a 'free union,' intending for them to be equal in their relationship, Mrs. Ebbsmith turns into a mistress on his principles, sacrificing her independence for his prospects of a career.

After Mrs. Ebbsmith's loss of control and lack of will to defend her principles, she becomes a pawn in the game between the Duke and his accomplices, and Mrs. Thorpe and her brother, Mr. Winterfield. The Duke, the brother, and wife of Mr. Cleeve are willing to sacrifice Mrs. Ebbsmith in order to restore Mr. Cleeve to his former life and career. That this restoration is still possible for Mr. Cleeve is a clear example of the workings of the double standard, which, as discussed previously, allowed men transgressions while women were punished for theirs. Mrs. Thorpe and Mr. Winterfield, on the other hand, are determined to save her from further disgrace and sin. Mrs. Ebbsmith's release from this 'tug-of-war,' finally, comes in the shape of Mr. Cleeve's wife, Sybil, who sees the wrongness of her participation in the scheme when confronted by Mrs. Thorpe (Pinero, *Notorious* 194-195). While Mr. Cleeve's male relatives are prepared to go to any lengths to restore him, Mrs. Cleeve is struck by Mrs. Thorpe's words; "[s]he was worth saving. You have utterly destroyed her" (194). Unlike the Duke who, as a typical *raisonneur*, excuses his partaking in the exploitation of Mrs. Ebbsmith by claiming that he is "simply standing by," Mrs. Cleeve will not 'stand by' and contribute to a woman's fall.

Although Mrs. Ebbsmith has been rendered a passive being in the second half of the play, she is at least allowed a final confrontation with Mr. Cleeve, in which she has made up her own mind and tells him of her decision to leave him in her own words:

AGNES. [...] For what am I? Untrue to myself, as you are untrue to yourself; false to others, as you are false to others; passionate, unstable, like yourself; like yourself, a coward. A coward. *I – I was to lead women! I was to show them, in your company, how laws – laws made and laws that are natural – may be set aside or slighted; how men and women may live independent and noble lives without rule, or guidance, or sacrament. I was to be the example – the figure set up for others to observe and imitate. But the figure was made of wax – it fell awry at the first hot breath that touched it! You and I! What a partnership it has been! How base and gross and wicked almost from the very beginning! We know each other now thoroughly – how base and wicked it would remain! No, go your way, Lucas, and let me go mine* (Pinero, *Notorious* 198).

At this point, Mrs. Ebbsmith finally faces the truth, and admits to her own faults as well as his. The emphasis of the personal pronoun “I” when she speaks of her ambition suggests that she is full of regret that she has not achieved her goal of leading women toward “independent and noble lives” by setting an example herself (ibid). She is disgusted with herself that she has been untrue to herself, and by extension her ideals. While she is far from happy to part from Mr. Cleeve, she seems even more mournful that she has failed to be “the figure set up for others to observe and imitate” (ibid). The partnership she has had with Mr. Cleeve is what she describes as “base and wicked,” rather than her ideals of a free union. Moreover, her telling Mr. Cleeve that she will be going to Mrs. Thorpe’s home, Ketherick, “to think,” suggests that she needs to step away from him, his conspiring relatives, and public life in order to regain control of herself and reconsider the way forward.

The play ends with a seemingly repentant and submissive Mrs. Ebbsmith, who has had all the New Woman-ness taken out of her. It is left open what her way will be, though it is strongly implied that she is returning to religion by retreating to the parsonage of the widow and Reverend so devoted to ‘saving’ her. This is also indicated in her final good-bye to Mr. Cleeve, assuring him that she will remember him in her prayers, once she has “learnt to pray again” (Pinero, *Notorious* 199). Very little remains at this point of the independent, strong-willed New Woman character the play began with, yet, as Ada Mei Fan argues, Mrs. Ebbsmith’s return to religion may be due to her having nowhere else to go (Fan 131). Although she is at the centre of a scandal, she does not end up ostracised; instead, she is allowed a place in the respectable company of a Reverend and a virtuous widow, in a

secluded parsonage in the north of England, where she is unknown to everyone. As Patricia Denison points out, this retreat is not a final destination, nor a final solution (Denison 428). Scandal may find her again, as it found Mrs. Dane, but similarly to Mrs. Dane, her ‘punishment’ for being a ‘Fallen Woman’ is, at least, neither a ‘death sentence’ nor a complete ostracism. Both are exposed, weakened, and reprimanded, yet allowed hope for the future; a hope that for ‘Fallen Women’ is far from self-evident.

4.3.3. Mrs. Bellamy

Another one of Pinero’s ‘Fallen Women,’ and also a widow, is Iris Bellamy in his play *Iris*. First performed in 1901, six years after *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, it is tempting to assume that Pinero may have been pushed to write more progressive ‘Fallen Women’ characters. Yet, while his representation of the ‘Fallen Woman’ type is not wholly unsympathetic in *Iris*, he does condemn the protagonist to an even harsher fate than that of Mrs. Ebbsmith. Unlike Mrs. Dane and Mrs. Ebbsmith, Mrs. Bellamy is a widow firmly established in society. She is extremely rich, and has a close circle of friends completely devoted to her; a devotion which is reflected in their calling her “Divinity” (Pinero, *Iris* 93). Her fall is steep and brutal, and while the play suggests that she should be pitied, it also implies that she herself is to blame.

The conditions of Mrs. Bellamy’s widowhood are established at the opening of the play with a conversation between Miss Pinsent, her companion, and Mr. Kane, her solicitor and trustee. It is revealed that Mrs. Bellamy is twenty-six years old and was widowed five years earlier. Through the death of her husband, she has come into a vast fortune, but the fortune comes with a catch, stipulated in her late husband’s will; if she remarries, she loses her whole income (Pinero, *Iris* 4-5). According to Miss Pinsent, Mrs. Bellamy is occasionally irritated by “the old grievance,” meaning the will, and laments her being “unable to re-marry,” while Mr. Kane suggests that Mrs. Bellamy’s situation is to be envied: “Let her compare her situation with that of other women. Six-and-twenty and independent!” (5). He further suggests that remarrying is not at all impossible, but she would have to marry a rich man to make up for the loss of her own fortune.

The control imposed on Mrs. Bellamy through her late husband’s will reflects the law’s favouring of the man’s property rights, and an enshrined view of women as in need of continuous protection. Miss Pinsent is one of those who questions the practise, referring to it as “so iniquitous an instrument” (Pinero, *Iris* 6). Mrs. Bellamy herself is also vocal about her discontent with the arrangement, telling her solicitor and trustee, Mr. Kane:

IRIS. [Turning to him.] My dear Archie, nothing that you can say upon the subject will disturb me. The threats of that Will seem to me to be weaved into the decorations of my walls. I construe them daily, almost hourly. [Closing her eyes as she recites.] “You forfeit all interest in your late husband’s estate by re-marrying.” I tread them into my carpets. [As before.] “In such an event the whole source of your income passes to others.” The street-music makes a lilt of them. “You have no separate estate; wed again and you cease to be of independent means.” When a stranger is presented to me, I divine his thoughts instantly. “Why, you are the woman,” he remarks to himself, “who loses her money by re-marrying.” [Reclining upon a pillow with a faint attempt at a laugh.] Ha! For the thousandth time, why are such provisions made, can you tell me? (Pinero, *Iris* 13).

Mr. Kane offers, in reply, that such provisions are designed “to protect the widow,” a notion Mrs. Bellamy seems to find ridiculous, repeating, in exclamation, “[t]o protect her!” (ibid). She continues, “[a]h, this safeguarding of women! Its effects may be humiliating, cruel” (14). Although this subject clearly preoccupies Mrs. Bellamy a great deal, so much so that she can recite the will by heart, and she feels severely inconvenienced by it, her most vocal protest is the example above, and she does not continue to bring up the matter. Nevertheless, having these two women question the practice of such wills early in the play establishes property, money, and women’s independence as central themes of the play, tying in with contemporary Woman Question debates.

Despite her discontent with the provisions of her late husband’s will, Mrs. Bellamy lives her life as a widow quite happily and adheres to social conventions. The play starts at the end of the season in society, at an evening where she is hosting her last dinner before going abroad. Conversations reveal that she is a keen theatre-goer, and there is talk of which people she has been spending time with, and where (Pinero, *Iris* 9), revealing that she moves in a large circle. The guests invited to her final dinner party, however, represent a more intimate group, featuring for instance Miss Sylvain and Mr. Croker, who devotedly refer to Mrs. Bellamy as their “Divinity.” Comments are also made on her dinner table looking superb (38), as is to be expected of a wealthy and capable hostess. Mrs. Bellamy is clearly continuing in widowhood the kind of conspicuous consumption expected of her as the wife of a wealthy man, and is thereby keeping ‘in’ with the ‘right people.’

Widowed, rich, and beautiful, Mrs. Bellamy has been, and still is, pursued by a number of suitors “ever since she discarded her mourning” (Pinero, *Iris* 22). Several of these men are still part of her circle; some married, like Colonel Wynning, others still hopeful, such as Mr. Harrington and Mr. Maldonado. Mrs. Bellamy has so far rejected everyone, some even

multiple times, but her reasons for this are not made clear. There is no story of abuse as with Mrs. Ebbsmith and Mrs. Thorpe, or a protest against the institution of marriage, along the lines of Mona Caird's writings, as with Mrs. Ebbsmith. Although she expresses frustration at losing her money if she remarries, she has refused at least one man, Mr. Maldonado, who could compensate for that loss. Her reasons, then, are rather pragmatic; even if she marries a rich man, the wealth she comes into is no longer hers, and she loses her independence.

Mrs. Bellamy's love for, and maintaining of, a luxurious and independent life is challenged when she falls in love with the penniless young man Mr. Trenwith. He is a man of twenty-eight, with no particular prospects of a career, and his frequent presence in Mrs. Bellamy's private company has been taken note of in society (Pinero, *Iris* 10-14). Her trustee, Mr. Kane, warns her of the talk that has begun circulating:

- KANE. Allow me to remind you, then, that a lady circumstanced as you are—still youthful, beautiful—
IRIS. [*Touching his sleeve gently.*] Sssh!
KANE. Who is seen constantly in the company of a young man whom she could not dream of marrying, subjects herself inevitably to a considerable amount of ill-natured criticism. (Pinero, *Iris* 14).

Mrs. Bellamy admits she has thought of marrying the poor Mr. Trenwith, to Mr. Kane's astonishment. Mr. Kane, who knows her financial habits intimately, finds the notion of a marriage to a poor man preposterous, telling her: "[y]ou marry a poor man; you with your utter disregard for the value of money! Why, luxury to you is the salt of life, my dear Iris. Great heavens!" (16). Mrs. Bellamy agrees, but adds that she hopes that it is not "sheer worldliness and cowardice" that make her disinclined to marry a poor man. Shortly after the exchange with Mr. Kane, she spontaneously decides to take Mr. Maldonado up on an old promise; a ring he has given her, to return to him as a token of her consenting to marry him. She immediately afterwards informs Mr. Kane, who, astonished, wonders what brought about this change of mind, to which she replies:

- IRIS. I felt the sensation of stumbling, that I must snatch at something tangible [*Closing her eyes.*] I am glad.
KANE. I hope it is for your happiness.
IRIS. It is for my safety. There is now no risk of further scandal should Mr. Trenwith decide to remain in England. (Pinero, *Iris* 30-31).

Her impulsive decision, then, is one of pure pragmatism; by marrying Mr. Maldonado, she would re-assert herself as a respectable woman in society, thereby preventing further talk of scandal about her behaviour.

Meanwhile, Mr. Trenwith has accepted his uncle's helping hand to find an occupation. He is to emigrate to British Columbia to work at a ranch, and hopes that Mrs. Bellamy might, after all, find it in her "to share [his] rough lot with [him]" (Pinero, *Iris* 35). She rejects the idea at once as "[a] mad idea," yet is reluctant to see him go. She instructs him to wait around outside the house until she is alone after the party so that they may talk in private. This occurs after having promised Mr. Maldonado that he may stay behind after her guests have left, again demonstrating her irresolution with regard to the two suitors. When Mr. Trenwith returns, hoping for a passionate good-bye, she informs him of her engagement to Mr. Maldonado. Their conversation reveals that she is marrying him not only to stop scandal, but also because she fears the kind of life she would lead as Mr. Trenwith's wife, admitting to him, "[y]our wife— a farmer's wife— mistress of a log-hut— to work with my hands! I dare not!" (53). Mr. Trenwith exclaims, "[y]ou are marrying him to save yourself from me!" (ibid), then passionately kisses her. Once again, Mrs. Bellamy lets impulse decide, and quickly scribbles a note to Mr. Maldonado, reading: "Forget what has passed between us tonight. It cannot be. I entreat your forgiveness" (54). Abandoning her previous resolve, she now decides on a whim to take Mr. Trenwith with her on her stay in Switzerland.

Earlier that same evening, Mrs. Bellamy is faced with the suitor she has already accepted, Mr. Maldonado, who catches her in an embrace the minute they are alone. The secondary text describes her as "*freeing herself with a gesture of repugnance*" from his arms, repeatedly exclaiming "Maldo!" (Pinero, *Iris* 41). Their conversation quickly drives her to admit to him that she is not marrying him for love:

IRIS. [Regaining possession of her hand.] Maldo—listen!—Maldo—I—I am dreadfully sorry. What I tell you now I ought to have told you before returning your ring—your token. Maldo, I haven't the love for you a woman should have for the man who is to be her husband; in that respect I am as you have always known me. But I will try to do my duty faithfully as mistress of your house, if that will satisfy you. I can promise no more, but I will do my duty—strictly and honourably, Maldo, strictly and honourably. (Pinero, *Iris* 43).

Mrs. Bellamy's blunt statement may be meant to make Mr. Maldonado feel so rejected that he will break off the engagement and spare her the trouble, but, although he is at first offended and angry, he will not be swayed. He understands that she marries him largely for his money, but is content to have her as his wife even without love:

MALDONADO. Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho! [*His laughter dying out—bitterly.*] Why, I suppose I ought to be profoundly grateful to you for your candour. The generality

of women—ha, ha! And better now than subsequent to marriage! And, after all, you give yourself to me—give yourself in a fashion; in the only fashion, it may be—I must console myself with that—in the only fashion in which your temperament allows you to yield yourself. Come, I can't lose you utterly, my dear. I'll be a philosopher and say Thanks. Thanks. [*Returning to her side.*] Thanks.

IRIS. [*In a murmur.*] Thanks, Maldo.

MALDONADO. [*Grimly.*] It's a bargain, then? You to be mine; as much mine as the Velasquez, the Raphael, hanging on my walls—mine, at least, to gaze at, mine to keep from others? [*Her head droops in acquiescence.*] [*Gradually regaining some part of his good-humour.*] And in return I promise that you shall be one of the most envied women in Europe. Oh, you shall attain your ambition; you shall realise what wealth is, steep yourself in it to your heart's content! (Pintero, *Iris* 45-46).

Mr. Maldonado's speech reveals how he, too, then, sees their union in a pragmatic light. After a quick consideration of what marriage entails, he decides it is not such a bad deal after all, as it means that she is 'giving herself' to him by agreeing to marry him. As mentioned earlier, in chapter 3.1, the law entitled a husband to 'conjugal rights,' and to claim these whenever he saw fit. In marrying, then, Mr. Maldonado would gain a sexual power over Mrs. Bellamy, which he could exert with the law on his side against her will.

Moreover, Mr. Maldonado also reveals his view of Mrs. Bellamy as his prospective property in more ways than seeing her as a sexual object. He also compares her to paintings he possesses of the great painters Velasquez and Raphael. Her function, then, like the paintings, would be decorative; she is to be treated as an ornament for him "to gaze at," as he puts it himself. Mr. Maldonado is well aware of the conventions of society, and as a wealthy man what he needs is a beautiful wife to demonstrate his wealth. As his wife, Mrs. Bellamy would be tasked with conspicuous consumption for his benefit. His promise that she "shall be one of the most envied women in Europe" indicates that he will bestow upon her the most exquisite jewellery and gowns, for her to be a living, walking testimony to his spending power. Thus, even without love, Mr. Maldonado sees many benefits of having Mrs. Bellamy as his wife. She is well liked, fashionable, used to a life of leisure and luxury, and used to fulfilling society's expectations of her, and so, once the rumours around her have been stopped, he could hardly wish for a better representative of his power and wealth.

With the note written on impulse after a passionate confrontation with Mr. Trenwith, however, Mr. Maldonado is rejected after all, and Mrs. Bellamy lives a life of increasingly scandalous reputation, with Mr. Trenwith accompanying her wherever she goes. Miss Sylvain, one of her most devoted friends, also begins to take issue with her behaviour, commenting on it to their common friend Mr. Harrington. Mr. Harrington, on the other hand, opposes Miss

Sylvain's criticism of Mrs. Bellamy, complaining of the injustice of the norms of society: "[...] it is simply abominable that close companionships can't exist between reputable men and women without suspicion of wickedness" (Pinero, *Iris* 67). He also alludes to Mrs. Bellamy's condition as a widow:

CROKER. [...] She is still young—yes; yet from the fact of her already having been a wife—brief as was the duration of that experience—she can't be altogether an unwise woman. Is she not to be trusted to give wholesome counsel to a young man without the interruption of a chaperon; is she never to play at mothering—like a sage child with a doll—a male companion belonging to her own generation? [...] (Pinero, *Iris* 67).

Mr. Harrington appears much more sympathetic to Mrs. Bellamy's situation and argues for her freedom to do as she pleases, suggesting that as a widow, she should be trusted to share of her experience without any implication of 'wickedness' attached to her behaviour. While Mr. Harrington vocally opposes society's moral double standard, Miss Sylvain adheres to and upholds it, revealing that if Mrs. Bellamy's case really turns into a scandal, she shall "drop quietly away" (ibid):

FANNY. Goodness knows I'm not strait-laced, Croker; but one daren't let one's laces get too slack. [*Sadly.*] Yes, I should simply have to drop away quietly. What an end——! (Pinero, *Iris* 67).

As the double standard favours men, Mr. Harrington would have nothing to lose through his friendship with Mrs. Bellamy, even if she is engulfed in a scandal. Miss Sylvain, however, as a woman – and especially as an unmarried woman – has everything to lose by being associated with a 'Fallen Woman.'

Through an unfortunate turn of events towards the end of Act II, Mrs. Bellamy's situation is complicated further. Mr. Kane, her solicitor and trustee, has swindled her and run away with her money and that of Mr. Harrington and Miss Sylvain, who also relied on him to invest their money for them. Mrs. Bellamy is now at a new cross-roads; with the loss of her fortune, she can no longer afford to live independently with Mr. Trenwith as her lover. The choice seems easy at first, and early in Act III it is revealed that they have finally become engaged (Pinero, *Iris* 114), yet she is no more suited to be a poor man's wife than before. Mr. Trenwith will go to the ranch in British Columbia as originally planned, but she refuses to go with him, arguing that she must first learn to live with poverty on her own, in order to be ready to join him (141).

The arrival of the news about Mr. Kane has also brought the arrival of Mr. Maldonado, who appears as a knight in shining armour. Once Mr. Trenwith has left, he equips Mrs. Bellamy with a cheque book, informing her that he has opened an account in her name and put “a few hundred pounds—a thousand or so—” at her disposal (Pinero, *Iris* 152), all in the guise of being a friend who wants to help, with no strings attached. She is at first firmly resolved not to use the cheque book, but a conversation with Miss Sylvain’s niece, Aurea Vyse, at the end of Act III quickly changes her mind. Miss Vyse tells her that she is about to go into business with Mrs. Bellamy’s former companion, Miss Pinsent, who was discharged at the end of the season. Miss Pinsent has, however, like so many associated with Mrs. Bellamy, trusted Mr. Kane to invest her savings, and as a result is left penniless (160-161). Their whole business venture is dependent on Miss Pinsent finding money for their start-up. Intrigued and impressed by these young women’s scheme to make themselves financially independent of their families and of marriage, and with a sense of guilt for having discharged Miss Pinsent so abruptly, Mrs. Bellamy spontaneously decides to write out a cheque to make up for Miss Pinsent’s loss. Thus, at the brink of her own fall, she bestows a large sum of it to help two enterprising ‘New Women.’

Although her intentions are good, using the cheque book starts Mrs. Bellamy on a downward spiral; with every cheque, spending money she does not have, Mr. Maldonado’s hold over her increases. The beginning of Act IV finds her established in a handsomely furnished apartment, back in London in the West End, two years later. The apartment is, like the money in the bank, put to her disposal by Mr. Maldonado. He renews his offer of marriage to her, and, questioned about the timing, reveals his grand scheme of revenge on her and Mr. Trenwith for having jilted him. His friendly behaviour and coming to Mrs. Bellamy’s rescue after the news of her money trouble were calculated actions designed to make her dependent on him: “[a]nd as your careering-about abroad, with a young gentleman in attendance, had alienated the friends who could have aided you, I calculated the chances were all my way” (Pinero, *Iris* 173). In his view, marrying now would “make amends” for his treatment of her (175), and, although she is involved in scandal, her social status is not beyond repair and she could still fulfil the role Mr. Maldonado has in mind for her. At this point, Mrs. Bellamy scoffs at the notion of marriage, calling it “a farce!” (ibid), yet promises to consider his proposal.

The fourth act also reveals that Miss Sylvain has acted on her previous threat; she has cut Mrs. Bellamy (Pinero, *Iris* 185). Mr. Harrington is her only remaining loyal friend, who brings her news of Mr. Trenwith’s return. She asks him for help to disguise the truth of her

situation to Mr. Trenwith and bring messages to him, but this is the final straw for Mr. Harrington: “[d]egradation! yes. A hanger-on! a complacent hanger-on! And to-day the common go-between! Ah, you have crushed the life, the spirit, the manhood out of me!” (192). He does her a final service, bringing Mr. Trenwith to her, and then is not seen again.

In the fifth and final act, Mrs. Bellamy is confronted with Mr. Trenwith, who, full of love for her, has come to find out why her letters stopped. When told the truth of what has occurred since they parted two years ago, Mr. Trenwith reacts by “*speaking in a toneless, expressionless voice*”: “I—I am intensely sorry for you, Iris” (Pinero, *Iris* 212). He expresses no rage towards Mr. Maldonado, and expresses no wish to help his beloved. Instead, his behaviour is resigned, and he repeatedly says he is sorry for her, but all the while “*averting his eyes*” and “*always avoiding her gaze*” (215). Mrs. Bellamy’s account of the two years passed reveals that she was completely destitute at the point where she turned to Mr. Maldonado for help; she describes having lodged in a “back room in [a] narrow, grimy street,” and went regularly to the pawn-broker for an income (212). Yet there is no sympathy to be had from Mr. Trenwith, although he was once her lover, and fretted about being complicit in damaging her reputation: “[h]ow dare people? Good heavens! to think I have brought this upon you! What an infamous world!” (51). Now that he is no longer the lover and feels betrayed, she is nothing but a ‘Fallen Woman’ to him, too.

Mrs. Bellamy’s final demise then comes in the shape of Mr. Maldonado, again. He, too, feels betrayed, as Mrs. Bellamy had assured him that all contact was broken with Mr. Trenwith. He has become aware of their planned encounter, however, and has been listening to the conversation between the two. Once Mr. Trenwith has left, he reveals himself to Mrs. Bellamy in a rage, “*his eyes are bloodshot and his face livid*” (Pinero, *Iris* 217). He shouts at her and “seizes”, “grips,” and “pulls” and “throws” her violently, acting out his rage over being deceived. Then, calming down, he points to the door and tells her to leave (221): “[a]t once. This is your punishment, my dear— [...] [t]o drift back to the condition in which I found you a few months since. This is your reward” (221). From a position as a kept mistress, then, she is thrown out on the streets again, with no friends to turn to. As Penny Griffin poignantly summarises Mrs. Bellamy’s end: “When she was the widow of a rich man, society fawned on her; when she was penniless and alone, society, cruelly and hypocritically, looked the other way” (Griffin 151).

According to the theatre critic William Archer, Pinero had intended for Mr. Maldonado to strangle Mrs. Bellamy in the end, but then abandoned this grim ending (Dawick 255). Mrs. Bellamy is not sentenced to die, then, as Pinero’s other ‘Fallen Woman,’ Paula

Tanqueray, in the play *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), who commits suicide. What awaits Mrs. Bellamy, however, is barely a 'better' ending; she has lost absolutely everything, and what likely awaits her is "prostitution and final annihilation" (Griffin 151). Unlike Mrs. Dane and Mrs. Ebbsmith, she has no friends or any kind of network to rely on for support. She has no money to provide for herself, and no means of coming by money other than pawning her possessions, as she has never had to work a day in her life. Her story starts as that of a widow who has every prospect of living a successful independent life, comfortably positioned with a large fortune and a respectable status in society. Due to a combination of circumstances that she cannot influence (the loss of her fortune), and her own ill-conceived choices, friends and suitors are alienated and she is left to the harsh struggle corresponding to what Cynthia Curran describes as the 'widow's plight,' as discussed in chapter 3.3.

While neither Mrs. Dane nor Mrs. Ebbsmith succeed in their attempts to either establish themselves in a secure, respectable position (Mrs. Dane), or achieving an independent 'New Woman'-like life (Mrs. Ebbsmith), they are both left with hope and potential for the future. They are punished for their 'Fallen'-ness, but the plays emphasise that they are not altogether 'bad women,' and they still have friends who will support them. Mrs. Bellamy, on the other hand, is portrayed in a way that implies that she should have known better, and thereby avoided her fall. Miss Sylvain's commentary throughout the play about her relationship with Mr. Trenwith, for instance, clearly shows an awareness of the moral double standard that Mrs. Bellamy may be expected to have too, as they are women of the same class and of similar circumstance. When even Mr. Harrington, who earlier in the play loudly protests against the notion "that close companionships can't exist between reputable men and women without suspicion of wickedness," is prepared to leave her, the implication is that there must be a good reason for it. The three 'Fallen' widows accept their fates with little protest, and while the plays criticise the double standard, they all uphold it in the end. The following chapter examines a different outcome, where protesting against the double standard enables Hankin's heroine in *The Last of the De Mullins* to live a 'New Woman' life, despite her 'Fallen'-ness.

4.4. The 'New' Widow

4.4.1. 'Mrs. Seagrave'

In contrast to Pinero's and Jones's three widows analysed in the previous chapter, the widow in St. John Hankin's play *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908) not only demonstrates 'New Woman' character traits, but also lives this 'New Woman' lifestyle fully, without suffering any punishment for it. Similarly to Mrs. Dane, Mrs. Seagrave is not in fact a widow, but rather pretends to be in order to reach a respectable position in society. Her real name is Janet De Mullin, and she is the estranged daughter of an old noble family, the De Mullins, resident in their family Manor House in a small village in the country side. She has fallen out with the family due to becoming pregnant through an affair with a man whose identity remains unknown to them. The family consists of the patriarch, Hugo De Mullin, his wife, another younger daughter, Hester, and Mr. De Mullin's sister, Mrs. Clouston. At the beginning of Act I it is revealed that Mr. De Mullin is recovering from illness, and that his wife, fearing that he may not survive and assuming that he would want to be reconciled, has invited Janet to come and see them (Hankin 16-18). After an eight-year long absence, she returns with her son, Johnny. Her modern, emancipated life-style is contrasted with the old-fashioned, restricted ways of her family and acquaintances.

Janet is first introduced through a conversation between her mother and her aunt, Mrs. Clouston, who discuss her character and the events that led to her estrangement. Mrs. De Mullin reveals that Janet "calls herself Mrs. Seagrave now," which they speculate is "[o]n account of the child" (Hankin 18). Mrs. Clouston expresses disbelief that Janet could "go so wrong," claiming that it is unprecedented in the De Mullin family (ibid). To explain her daughter's behaviour, Mrs. De Mullin finds it must have been "all through bicycling" (19). Bicycling, like smoking and otherwise travelling unescorted, became a symbol of the 'New Woman' (Gardner 5), often mockingly depicted in magazines such as *Punch* (Richardson 22). The image of the bicycling woman, for *Punch*, represented "the social, sexual and political disquiet caused by women's demands for equality" (24). This opinion is represented by Janet's mother and aunt in the play, as they deem her habit of bicycling the reason for her transgressions. Neither aunt nor mother have ever approved of this habit, but already in this exchange it becomes clear that Janet is an especially stubborn, strong-willed person:

MRS. DE MULLIN. [...] Janet never would do what she was told about things even when she was quite a child. She was so very obstinate. She was

always getting some idea or other into her head. And when she did nothing would prevent her from carrying it out. At one time she wanted to *teach*.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I remember.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said girls ought to go out and earn their own living like boys.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What nonsense! (Hankin 19).

Janet's modern ideas of women working are clearly dismissed as ridiculous by this older generation of women in the family. According to their views, women should not work or in any way be (economically) independent, not even with a job such as teaching, which, for middle and upper middle-class women at the time, was considered respectable (McDermid 109). Janet, however, goes against every rule and convention, and stakes out her own path.

Mrs. De Mullin further explains how Janet, when pressed on the matter of who the father of her unborn child is, refuses to answer, and runs away at the earliest possible moment. Locked in her room, she escapes through the window, bicycles to Weymouth where she then takes the mail coach to London (Hankin 20-21). Again, the bicycle is a key element in enabling Janet to go her own way and defy her family. Having inherited four hundred pounds from another aunt, Janet is able to set herself up in London. Mrs. Clouston comments on this inheritance, "I never approved of that legacy, Jane. Girls oughtn't have money left them. It makes them too independent" (24). In accordance with long-standing property laws deeming women unfit to own and manage property, the money was first under the control of Janet's father who managed the inheritance until Janet was twenty-one. Mrs. Clouston is astonished to learn that Janet claimed her inheritance as soon as possible and took on the management herself: "[r]idiculous! As if girls could possibly manage money!" (25). This notion, it turns out, is completely unjustified, as Janet tells her success story.

Janet has not only defied her family's and society's values, but returns to them a self-made woman. Upon her arrival, the secondary text describes her as

a very handsome woman of six-and-thirty. She is admirably dressed, but her clothes are quiet and in excellent taste, dark in colour and plain in cut but expensive. Her hat is particularly tasteful, but also quiet. Her clothes are in marked contrast to those of her mother and sister which are of the homeliest description and were probably made in the village (Hankin 31).

The dark colour and plain cut of her dress reveals that Janet dresses the part of a widow; the description of her dress may indicate that she is in a state of half-mourning, which typically consisted of clothes of muted colours, and not too elaborate trimmings. As discussed in chapter 3.3, half-mourning, though not required to last more than six months, could last for a

lifetime, and could signal a woman's experience and availability. Though plain, her clothes are evidently costly, and, as the secondary text specifies, set her apart from the rest of her family. Janet's clothes function as a statement emphasising the superiority and success of her values over those of her family, demonstrating that she can afford to be elegantly dressed by earning her own living. Hester, the younger sister, and Mrs. Clouston both comment "*frostily*" and "*acidly*" on Janet's dress, when Janet tells them that she makes a living through a hat-shop, and shows them the hat she is wearing, a product of the shop:

HESTER.	(<i>frostily</i>) It looks very expensive.
JANET.	(<i>looking at it critically</i>) Yes, I own I'm rather pleased with it.
MRS. CLOUSTON.	(<i>acidly</i>) You seem to be able to <i>dress</i> very well altogether, in spite of the shop.
JANET.	(<i>correcting her</i>) Because of it, Aunt Harriet. That's the advantage of being what is called "in trade." If I were a school teacher or a governess or something genteel of that kind I could only afford to dress like a pauper. But as I keep a shop I can dress like a lady. Clothes are a question of money, after all, aren't they?
MRS. CLOUSTON.	(<i>contemptuously</i>) If one is in a shop it doesn't matter <i>how</i> one dresses. (Hankin 38-39).

Mrs. Clouston's remarks imply that even though Janet can afford to dress like a lady, working in a shop undermines this ability, nor is working 'in trade' the 'right' source of income allowing one to dress well: the appropriate place to dress fashionably, she finds, is in society, and not as the owner of a shop. Once again, Janet corrects her aunt, arguing that "it matters a great deal" how one dresses in a shop, as it is part of the appeal to the customers (39).

Act I contrasts Janet with her family and friends and acquaintances that come visiting, such as the curate Mr. Brown, and their childhood friend, Miss Deanes. Miss Deanes comes visiting immediately after the exchange between Janet and Mrs. Clouston about her business, bearing the news that Bertha Aldenham, another of Janet's friends, is engaged to marry Montague Bulstead, whose family has recently bought the neighbouring estate. As the Bulsteads have only moved to Brendon Park after Janet left, she is not supposed to know them. Yet, in a whisper to herself, Janet reveals that she clearly knows the man in question well, referring to him by a nickname: "Monty Bulstead! Engaged!" (Hankin 42). In Act II, three days after the setting in Act I, she is confronted with "Monty" as they meet each other on a path between their families' houses by chance, and their exchange establishes young Mr. Bulstead as her former lover and father of her child. In this conversation, Janet reveals more of her independent, industrious character, telling Mr. Bulstead how she managed in London on her own, and rejects his notion of duty to 'make amends' by marrying her.

Their affair was abruptly brought to an end by Mr. Bulstead receiving word of his mother being hurt in a carriage accident, which compelled him to leave Janet and see to his mother (Hankin 57). Janet fills him in on what happened after he left, and what she has been doing in the eight years since they last met. He is astonished to learn that she went to London, which she explains she chose because it would allow her to “be lost sight of in a crowd” (60). Like Mrs. Clouston, Mr. Bulstead reacts with surprise upon hearing that she found a job in a hat-shop, clearly thinking it an unsuitable position for her (*ibid*). Janet, however, argues that a hat-shop is a very respectable place to be employed: “[a]lmost too respectable to judge by the fuss two of them made about employing *me*” (61). Society’s moral double standard is exposed when she tells of how she tried for a job in hat-shops and “in the innocence of [her] heart” told her prospective employers her motivation for applying for the job (*ibid*). Hearing her story, the two first shops immediately rejected her, upon which Mr. Bulstead comments:

MONTY. Poor Janet. What beastly luck! Still... [*hesitates*.
 JANET. Yes, Monty?
 MONTY. I mean naturally they couldn’t be expected...
 JANET. Monty!
 MONTY. (*flustered*) At least I don’t mean that exactly. Only [*Stops*.
 JANET. My dear Monty, I quite understand what you mean. You needn’t trouble to be explicit. Naturally they couldn’t be expected to employ an abandoned person like me to trim hats. That was exactly their view. (Hankin 61-62).

Although Mr. Bulstead sympathises with Janet, and feels responsible for the ‘abandoned’ state she is in, he agrees with, and upholds, the double standard which deems Janet unfit for employment. When confronted by Janet for suggesting that the shops were right to refuse her, he becomes “*flustered*,” realising that it is an insult to Janet. He is challenged by Janet, but she does not intend to start a fight; instead, she acknowledges the double standard and its pervasive power in society.

Janet experiences a steep learning curve once in London, and has possibly never felt the effects of society’s double standard as clearly as when she is refused employment for telling the truth about her situation. She builds on this knowledge and learns to live with the double standard, playing by its ‘rules.’ Honesty, though honourable, will not help her secure a job. She takes to lying, and, in order to pass as ‘respectable,’ she chooses to disguise herself as a widow:

JANET. [...] I invented a husband, recently deceased, bought several yards of crêpe and a wedding ring. This is the ring. [*Takes off glove*.
 MONTY. Oh, Janet, how beastly for you! [*Janet shrugs*.

JANET. (*laughing*) Everything seems to be “Beastly” to you, Monty. Brendon and telling lies and lots of other things. Luckily I’m less superfine.

MONTY. Didn’t they find out?

JANET. No. That was why I decided to be a widow. It made inquiries more difficult.

MONTY. I should have thought it made them easier.

JANET. On the contrary. You can’t cross-question a widow about a recent bereavement. If you do she cries. I always used to look tearful directly my husband’s name was even mentioned. So they gave up mentioning it. Women are so boring when they will cry.

MONTY. They might have inquired from other people.

JANET. Why should they? Besides there was no one to inquire from. I called him Seagrave—and drowned him at sea. You can’t ask questions of the sharks. (Hankin 62-63).

Her disguise is successful by taking care to be dressed in full mourning, made of the “several yards of crêpe” she purchased, as is expected of a recently bereaved widow. She pays attention to detail, purchasing a wedding ring. Moreover, Janet is clearly a good actress, pretending to be dismayed when her husband’s name is mentioned. Thus, dressed for and acting the part, she convinces the next employers, and finally finds a position (62). While Mr. Bulstead finds her story “beastly” and wonders how she can joke about it, Janet demonstrates her pragmatic approach, laughing and shrugging it off, explaining; “I couldn’t [joke about it]—then. I wanted work too badly. But I can now—with your kind permission, I mean” (63). She may give the impression that she is unfazed about the experiences she has had, but her comment reveals that the situation was far from a laughing matter; she needed a job, and was willing to go to great lengths to secure a position.

Having successfully established her identity as a widow among people who do not know her as anything else, Janet achieves an unprecedented level of independence in her life. Employed in a hat-shop, she answers to no man, be it father or husband, and earns her own living. She is, however, challenged again when her baby is born (Hankin 63). The first shop with which she found employment “had no room” for her once she was well enough to work after having the child (68). With a recommendation from the employer she found work in another hat-shop, selling luxurious hats to fashionable ladies in society. When the shop went bankrupt because none of the customers actually paid for their hats – they would only order more to appease the shop-owner – Janet invested her capital in the ruins of the shop and became partners with Miss Hicks, the owner (69-71). Contrary to Mrs. Clouston’s belief that women cannot possibly manage money, Janet has managed her inheritance well and managed to increase it by a hundred pounds. She then sued the customers, “half the British aristocracy,” and won back what the shop was owed (71). With such drastic action, Janet

distances herself from the class which she, through her ancestry, is originally a part of. She restructures the shop, and begins catering to middle class women who are not averse to paying in cash (71-72). The shop, she cheerfully tells Mr. Bulstead, is now a success and she even goes “over to Paris four times a year to see the latest fashions” (72). All this is enabled by Janet’s independent status, ability to manage money, and her refusal to adhere by society’s conventions.

Upon learning that their affair has produced a child, Mr. Bulstead immediately expresses his notion of duty towards Janet and the child. Whereas Janet reveals that she intentionally did not write to him about the pregnancy, deciding that it would be “no good,” Mr. Bulstead feels it is obvious why she “ought to have written” to him (Hankin 64):

MONTY. Why? I could have married you, of course.
JANET. If I’d asked you, you mean? Thank you, my dear Monty.
MONTY. No, I don’t. Of course I should have married you. I *must* have married you.
JANET. (*looking at him thoughtfully*) I wonder if you would.
MONTY. Certainly I should. I should have been bound in honour.
JANET. I see. Then I’m glad I never wrote.
MONTY. You’re *glad*? Now?
JANET. Yes. I’ve done some foolish things in my life, Monty, but none quite so foolish as that. To marry a schoolboy, not because he loves you or wants to marry you but because he thinks he’s “bound in honour” No, thank you. (Hankin 64-65).

Although the marriage would have been inconvenient for him, Mr. Bulstead is so convinced by his sense of duty that he seems to feel that Janet has snubbed him and deprived him of his opportunity to do ‘the honourable thing’ and marry her. When she expresses doubt about whether he really would have married her if it had come to that, he insists upon his duty and being “bound in honour,” which makes Janet feel reassured that she was right never to write. Janet is no vocal opponent of marriage as an institution, but she does not see the point of marrying unless it is for love. Towards the end of Act II, Mrs. De Mullin realises that Mr. Bulstead is likely to be the father of their grandchild and confronts Janet about it, who admits to it. Mrs. De Mullin, like Mr. Bulstead, is concerned about his duty to marry Janet, and cannot understand why she refuses to marry him. Janet “*impatiently*” replies, “My dear mother, because I don’t want to, of course” (Hankin 94). Not wanting to is an unknown factor for Mrs. De Mullin to take into account; in her view of society, Mr. Bulstead ought to marry Janet, and what Janet wants is of no consequence, as marrying is the ‘right’ thing to do.

The confrontation between Janet and her mother establishes Janet as a sexually emancipated woman. When she answers Mrs. De Mullin’s questions about details of the affair

with Mr. Bulstead, she reveals that she saw him repeatedly for “[m]ore than a month,” and often “in his rooms” (Hankin 93). For Mrs. De Mullin, there can be no other explanation than that Mr. Bulstead seduced her, yet, as Janet points out, he was much younger than her: “[d]id he? I was twenty-seven. He was twenty. If either of us was to blame, wasn’t it I?” (95). The implication of Mrs. De Mullin’s assumption is that only a man can be a seducer, whereas the woman, regardless of her age, is the seduced. This corresponds to the limited understanding of women’s sexuality at the time. As described in chapter 2.2, women were thought not to have any sexual desire, and, in accordance with their passive role in marriage as the ‘Angel in the House,’ also were expected to be passive when it came to sexual relations. Janet’s reply, then, points out the double standard in this assumption and suggests that women have sexual desires and act on them too, and that this is no different from men. In the final confrontation between Janet and her family at the end of Act III, Janet even calls Mr. Bulstead her “lover,” repeating the word to emphasise the deliberate action and her sexuality: “[...] when I met my lover. Yes, my lover” (124). According to Sally Mitchell, as a result of the pervasive conceptualisation of woman as ‘pure’ in the nineteenth century, there is no “reasonable term short of the clinical or barbarous to describe, as a group, all women who have sexual experience that is not sanctioned by marriage” (S. Mitchell x). Instead, the words used to describe a sexually experienced unmarried woman bear significant implications for the way a woman is seen:

A seduced woman is the helpless victim of a superior male. A fallen woman is capable of sin and therefore responsible for her own destiny. The third possibility, an emancipated woman, uses her body as she pleases for reasons of her own – but we will not find any favorable portrait of her in fiction written between 1835 and 1880. (S. Mitchell x)

To her mother, Janet is “[a] seduced woman,” to society in general, she is “[a] fallen woman,” but of the three terms Mitchell lists, “an emancipated woman” undoubtedly describes Janet De Mullin best. Unlike portraits of the emancipated woman in “fiction written between 1835 and 1880,” Hankin’s portrait of this type of woman is a favourable one. Janet is presented as a strong and sensible character, whose success leading an independent life and propagation of equality between the sexes markedly sets her apart from her family, who appear weak and conservative.

Janet’s affair is, however, not only sexually motivated. In the final confrontation with her parents at the end of Act III, Janet reveals how she longed for a child, “from the time when [she] got too old to play with dolls” (Hankin 126). As the years passed and a marriage

became more and more unlikely, due to the lack of suitors approved by her father, Janet says she “saw herself getting old and [her] chance slipping away” (ibid). In reply to her aunt’s protest that she ought to be ashamed of wanting to have a child without marrying, Janet argues that motherhood is a natural desire as “women had children thousands of years before marriage was invented” (ibid). In her final passionate speech before leaving her family, Janet emphasises the profound feelings related to motherhood, depicting motherhood as the only true fulfilment for a woman:

JANET. [...] Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother. At least I shall have lived. These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and the pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew! If they knew! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you. That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it. That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do. To feel it’s [sic] soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious! (Hankin 127).

Janet finds that she does not need a man to be a father to her son, as she has clearly stated to her mother and Mr. Bulstead by refusing to marry him. She is proud of being a mother and capable of raising her child alone, which, as Jan McDonald argues, clearly implies that she is “stronger and more vital” than her sexual partner (McDonald, *New Women* 38).

At the time that Hankin wrote *The Last of the De Mullins*, a “cult of maternalism” flourished in Britain and Europe (McDonald, *New Women* 39). Although some radical women’s rights advocates, such as Mona Caird, discouraged motherhood as well as marriage, the women’s movement generally encouraged motherhood (ibid). According to McDonald, the women’s movement’s campaign “was linked to that of the eugenicists” in this regard, supporting the claim that “educated and economically independent women would make better mothers” (ibid). It was not only the so-called surplus of women in society that caused fear and debate concerning women’s role in society, but also the declining birth rate, “particularly among the professional middle and upper-middle classes” (ibid). The eugenics movement formed amidst these concerns, and proposed “to improve (or halt the decline in) the quality of the race” (D’Cruze 72), by encouraging ‘breeding’ between people with ‘desirable’ genes, and rooting out ‘bad’ genes. In its most negative and exaggerated form – seen for instance in Nazism in the early twentieth century – the ideology of eugenics is highly problematic, as it led to “sterilization and euthanasia of physically and morally weak individuals,” whose conditions and “criminal and immoral behaviour” were considered to be hereditary and at best

eradicated (Castree, et. al. “eugenics”). The emphasis on improving conditions for women in terms of health and education, in order for them to become good mothers, however, may be argued to be one of the movement’s positive effects (D’Cruze 73). Under these circumstances, the dominant Victorian image of woman as the perfect lady shifted towards the Edwardian image of woman as the perfect mother (ibid). Janet strives to live up to the ideal of a perfect mother, knowing she can never be a perfect lady in society. In accordance with these emerging contemporary values – Janet’s view of motherhood as something absolutely essential to womanhood, and her successfully raising a healthy child – Janet’s ‘fall’ is made a less severe ‘crime,’ and enables her to live more freely than other women who committed similar transgressions, such as Mrs. Dane in Jones’s *Mrs. Dane’s Defence*.

In the course of the play, it becomes increasingly evident that Janet’s values and lifestyle are incomprehensible for, and incompatible with, those of her family, and especially her father. Mr. De Mullin, the conventional patriarch, completely misinterprets Janet’s situation in London and thinks she would be better off moving back to Brendon: “It would take her away from her present unsatisfactory surroundings. It would give her a position and independence—everything she now lacks” (Hankin 105). This is where he is wrong; through her position as a widow and as the owner of a successful hat-shop, Janet is completely independent, and she finds her surroundings quite satisfactory, as she emphasises that she enjoys working in the shop (107). When Mr. De Mullin tries to invoke his authority as a father by demanding that she give up her life in London, Janet once again demonstrates her strong will:

MR. DE MULLIN.	(<i>with dignity</i>) My dear, this is not a matter that rests with you. My mind is made up. Hitherto I have only asked you to return. Do not force me to command you.
JANET.	(<i>fiercely</i>) Command? By what right do you command?
MR. DE MULLIN.	By the right of a father, Janet. By that right I insist on your obedience.
JANET.	(<i>losing her temper</i>) Obedience! Obedience! I owe no one obedience. I am of full age and can order my life as I please. Is a woman never to be considered old enough to manage her own affairs? Is she to go down to her grave everlastingly under tutelage? Is she always to be obeying a father when she’s not obeying a husband? Well, I, for one, will not submit to such nonsense. I’m sick of this everlasting <i>obedience</i> . (Hankin 110-111).

Of the widows’ protests against double standard and the inequality between the sexes that we have seen examples of in this thesis, Janet’s is arguably the most vocal and successful. As a

firmly established independent woman, Janet can afford to speak out against men of authority, such as her father. Her younger sister Hester, on the other hand, still lives meekly by the rules of her father and has little chance of rebelling, as she does not have the independent control over economic means, as Janet does. As a widow and a working woman, Janet has freed herself of society's ideal of the 'obedient woman,' and consequently, she will not submit to anyone's will but her own.

5. Conclusion

For the seven ‘widows’ – that is, five actual widows and two pretenders – analysed in the five plays selected in this thesis, widowhood represents various possibilities. What Mrs. Quesnel, Lady Eastney, Mrs. Thorpe, Mrs. Dane, Mrs. Ebbsmith, Mrs. Bellamy, and Mrs. Seagrave all have in common is that widowhood for them means a greater degree of independence. Jones, Pinero, and Hankin present widowhood as something that grants them all opportunities unique to their *feme sole* status, although some of these opportunities are taken away from them again. Even though the widows do not always reach their goals, they are strong, independent-minded women with agencies of their own.

As we have seen, these seven ‘widows’ may be divided into roughly three categories; the widow as *raisonneur*, the ‘fallen’ widow, and the ‘new’ widow. The most conventional of these widows are Jones’s Mrs. Quesnel, and Lady Eastney, and Pinero’s Mrs. Thorpe, who all serve as female counterparts to the plays’ male *raisonneurs*. These are all actual widows, respectable women who are loved and admired in their respective social circles and who adhere to social conventions. Thus, they are firmly established in society – their right to be in their positions cannot be questioned. Experience of married life has made them aware of society’s and men’s hypocrisy, and as independent women, they are able to comment on and criticise this. Nevertheless, they also realise that they are dependent on keeping ‘in’ with society, even if its rules of etiquette are founded on a moral and sexual double standard. Mrs. Quesnel, Lady Eastney, and Mrs. Thorpe use their knowledge of society to work around it – they criticise it to the extent they can, and adhere to its conventions to secure their respectable positions as widows. Part of this adherence is demonstrated in Mrs. Quesnel’s and Lady Eastney’s willingness to remarry, their suitors being the *raisonneurs* the plays, despite the fact that these men uphold the moral and sexual double standard of society, which both women severely criticise.

Unlike the three ‘respectable’ widows, Jones’s Mrs. Dane, and Pinero’s Mrs. Ebbsmith and Mrs. Bellamy all commit the grave mistake of transgressing the social conventions, and are, as a result, ‘fallen’ women. Mrs. Dane is the only one among them who is not in fact a widow, but merely pretends to be one for the sake of reintegrating into society. Her near-success demonstrates a great potential inherent in the status of widowhood, one that Hankin’s Mrs. Seagrave also takes advantage of. Although Mrs. Dane is found out to be an impostor and a ‘fallen’ woman, she possesses an agency of her own, and the skill and intellect to fulfil her goal – almost. Her story demonstrates how widowhood may be employed to re-

invent oneself in order to cope with a dire situation, and the signed apology and support and friendship she takes away with her, despite her failure, imply that this potential may be fulfilled somewhere else. The time was not yet ripe, but that time would come, as Hankin's Mrs. Seagrave indicates. Where Mrs. Dane admits to being a 'fallen' woman, Mrs. Seagrave refuses to be one, and instead fully lives a 'new woman' lifestyle. She takes up work, manages property, and singlehandedly brings up her illegitimate child. All this she is able to do in the open by successfully passing as a widow. Thus, seemingly adhering to society's conventions by acknowledging that such a life would only be tolerated if she had once been married, she is able to defy society's moral and sexual double standard and 'get away' with it.

There is much 'new woman' potential in Mrs. Ebbsmith's widowhood, too, but this is not allowed to flourish. Mrs. Ebbsmith, an actual widow, has experienced a marriage that confirms the worst fears of women's rights proponents in the late nineteenth century. Severely abused, she has had enough of this 'rotten' institution, and offers a Mona Caird-like criticism of it. Like Mrs. Seagrave, she is sexually emancipated and freely chooses to take a man she loves as her lover. When she becomes more dependent on him and submits to his will, however, the tables turn and she instead becomes his kept mistress. Like Mrs. Dane, she is punished for her 'fallen'-ness, but not altogether condemned; two other widows, Mrs. Thorpe and Lady Eastney respectively, see the good in Mrs. Ebbsmith and Mrs. Dane that others in society refuse to see, and to the best of their abilities help and support them, providing them with hope for the future. Even if that hope is only faint, their stories indicate a shifting view of 'fallen' women. Although convention would not allow Jones and Pinero to give these characters the 'happy ending' that Hankin some years later dared to give Mrs. Seagrave, their increasingly sympathetic representations of these 'fallen' women acknowledge that the world is not quite as black-and-white as the strict social conventions would have it to be. The hypocrisy of the sexual and moral double standard is thoroughly exposed and criticised, and marriage is acknowledged to represent a high risk for women.

The same optimism cannot be applied in the case of Pinero's Mrs. Bellamy. Her case criticises the married women's property legislation of the late-nineteenth century, demonstrating the unfairness of her late husband's will controlling her future as a widow, as could be the case for bereaved women at the time. If she remarries, she loses everything. Mrs. Bellamy is portrayed as someone who is incapable of managing money on her own, yet the reason for the loss of her fortune is the mismanagement and cheating committed by an appointed trustee of the will, a man. Whenever she is spending money, she is shown to spend it either for her own pleasure or to help others. She does not have the instinct for business that

Mrs. Seagrave has, but when she comes into some money at a time of personal ruin, she bestows a large portion of it to some young women who, like Mrs. Seagrave, exhibit an air of 'new woman'-ness about them and mean to make themselves financially independent by going into business. Mrs. Bellamy supports this venture with all she can spare, and demonstrates certain 'new woman' characteristics about herself as well, in taking a man as her lover. Yet, as we have seen, her case ends worst of all. Widowhood, for all its worth in the other widows' cases, cannot help Mrs. Bellamy. Her conspicuous transgressions and the loss of her fortune doom her to be an outcast, who, in the end, has nothing and no one – no Lady Eastney or Mrs. Thorpe to sympathise and care for her, help and support her.

It is a harsh reality that is revealed in Jones's, Pinero's, and Hankin's portrayals of these widows, and their representations correspond closely to the topical issues of the 1890s and early 1900s. Women's place in society is reflected in the ways the widows inhabit or transcend the confines of the domestic sphere; some, like Mrs. Ebbsmith and Mrs. Seagrave, deliberately establish themselves in the public sphere. In this respect, Mrs. Seagrave's case is particularly poignant, as she makes a success of it, and is shown to thrive in this other sphere that traditionally only had room for men. With this character, women's increasing and potential opportunities of employment and financial independence is highlighted and depicted as a desirable advancement in society. The injustice of property laws and the legal status of women, which was widely discussed already from the late 1850s onward and became an increasingly pressing political matter for women's rights activists, is questioned especially through the story of Mrs. Bellamy. Mrs. Seagrave, again, is the most progressive example, demonstrating the benefit for the woman if she is allowed to manage her property herself. The sexual and moral double standard is exposed and criticised by all the 'widows,' whether they have been sexually transgressive themselves or support others that have. Although this double standard continues to be upheld in most of the plays, it is put under heavy scrutiny, and the widows' clear opposition to it highlights it as an out-dated, oppressive convention, incompatible with the emerging fight for equality between women and men. With the exception of Mrs. Bellamy, the 'widows' that have been sexually transgressive are portrayed with an emphasis on them not being 'bad' women because of their behaviour. This positive representation paves the way for the remarkably favourable portrayal of Mrs. Seagrave, whose sexual transgression acknowledges women's sexual desires, albeit within the Edwardian ideological framework of women's desire to bear children.

Widows, in their unique position in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Britain – experienced, yet chaste; confined, yet free; independent, yet 'inferior' – are especially apt as

characters to illustrate, emphasise, and propagate issues and debates that are part of the larger contemporary discussion that is the ‘Woman Question.’ Their experience allows them an insight unmarried women are not allowed, and a freedom and independence to form opinions and express these, whether they choose to do this within the accepted bounds of convention, or defy conventions entirely and criticise them publicly. In the plays selected, widowhood represents *potential* – potential for freedom, independence, activism, employment, or quite simply a new beginning. This potential is not always fulfilled, but it is nevertheless present, hidden among the folds of the heavy black crêpe of mourning. In widowhood, ‘pure,’ ‘fallen,’ and ‘new’ women are all to be found, sometimes in an amalgamation of all three in one, reducing the stark black-and-white divide between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women to the half-mourning shades of grey, moving with the times, and beginning to allow for nuances and a way forward.

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Abstract

The 'Fallen Woman' and the 'New Woman' in the literature and drama of the Victorian and early Edwardian period have been studied extensively, yet the significance of widowhood for 'Fallen' and 'New' women characters merits further attention. This thesis is specifically concerned with how the status of widowhood affected women in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain and how this is represented in a selection of five plays by Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero, and St. John Hankin. With the backdrop of the historical context of the plays, the analysis examined the widows' cases in detail through close readings of the plays, with an emphasis on the contemporary 'Woman Question' debate, highlighting issues such as the sexual and moral 'double standard' dominant at the time. Throughout the analysis, the thesis discusses what widowhood meant for women's roles, rights, and opportunities in society. It concludes that widows, due to their experience and independent positions, are especially apt as characters to illustrate, emphasise, and propagate issues and debates that are part of the larger contemporary discussion that is the 'Woman Question.' These findings suggest that widowhood could, potentially, enable women to lead emancipated lives as 'New Women,' or provide 'Fallen Women' with a new start under the guise of respectability.

Zusammenfassung

Trotz intensiver wissenschaftlicher Bearbeitung der „Fallen Women“ und „New Women“ in der Literatur und der Dramatik der viktorianischen Epoche und des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts blieb die Bedeutung der Witwenschaft für diese Frauenbilder ein zu erforschendes Gebiet. Die vorliegende Arbeit widmet sich insbesondere der Frage wie der Witwenstand Frauen im genannten Zeitraum in Großbritannien beeinflusste und wie er in ausgewählten Stücken von Henry Arthur Jones, Arthur Wing Pinero und St. John Hankin dargestellt wird. Unter Einbeziehung des historischen Kontextes werden die Fallbeispiele der jeweiligen Witwen mittels *close reading* analysiert und – mit Akzentuierung auf gegenwärtige Diskurse zur „Woman Question“ – auf ihre in der spezifischen Zeitepoche dominante sexuelle Normierung sowie Doppelmoral hin untersucht. Durchgängig wird dabei thematisiert, wie sich der Status als Witwe auf die Rolle, die Rechte und Möglichkeiten einer Frau innerhalb der jeweiligen Gesellschaft auswirkte. Es kann dabei aufgezeigt werden, dass Witwen anhand ihrer Erfahrung und erreichten Unabhängigkeit in besonderer Weise dazu geeignet sind, die Themen der „Woman Question“ aufzuwerfen, zu veranschaulichen und zu debattieren. Die Forschungsergebnisse legen nahe, dass die Witwenschaft das Potenzial hat, Frauen emanzipierte Leben als „New Women“ führen zu lassen bzw. „Fallen Women“ einen Neubeginn unter der Prämisse der Achtbarkeit zu ermöglichen.

