

WOMEN, ROMANTIC LOVE AND THE COMPANIONATE MARRIAGE IN THE FICTION OF MRS GASKELL AND M.E. BRADDON

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The nineteenth century was increasingly marked by middle class hegemony. As the historian François Bedarida wrote, “the . . . achievement of the bourgeoisie was to have imposed their scale of values on society” (53). Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the increasing *embourgeoisement* of society with middle-class domestic ideology becoming a central principle of social organisation.

One result of the dominance of bourgeois domestic ideology was the emergence of a continuing discourse on two inseparable elements: the Woman Question and the Marriage Question. Since marriage and motherhood were regarded as the only socially acceptable options for women, debate on the role and position of women inevitably involved debate on the proper basis for marriage. The concept of marriages of prudence and money was increasingly superseded by the ideal of the marriage of free choice based only on the dictates of the heart. Writing in 1884, Friedrich Engels placed marriage within the capitalist context of contracts between “free” and “equal” people:

The rising bourgeoisie . . . increasingly recognized the freedom of contract also in marriage. . . . And on paper, in ethical theory and in poetic description, nothing was more immutably established than that every marriage is immoral which does not rest on mutual sexual love and really free agreement of husband and wife. In short, the love marriage was proclaimed as a human right, and indeed not only as a *droit de l'homme*, one of the rights of man, but also, for once in a way, as *droit de la femme*, one of the rights of woman. (111-13)

While there were nineteenth-century “conservative and censorious moralists” who viewed marriage for love as “nothing less than a plank in the subversive feminist platform” (Gay 99), modern critics and feminist thinkers have recognised romantic love as a powerful means of maintaining male supremacy and female subordination. As Anne Mellor notes, “the cultural production of a woman . . . defines her subjectivity solely in relation to a man. [She] can conceptualise her own existence only as the object and creator of love” (109). So “if the burgeoning ideology of romantic love loosened the constraints of patriarchy, with its respect for the child’s individual choice of a marriage partner, it also emotionally blackmailed the woman into even deeper bondage to her husband” (Eagleton, *Rape of Clarissa* 16). By defining women solely in terms of their relationships to men and by sanctioning only marriage and motherhood as acceptable female life choices, bourgeois domestic ideology gave predominance to romantic love and the ideal of the companionate marriage in women’s lives.

In theory marriage for love may have seemed to indicate more female freedom, but in reality it involved a transformation of externally applied parental force into the more powerful and less easily broken force of an internally assimilated romantic ideal.

As Eagleton notes in *The Significance of Theory*, “no dominant political order is likely to survive very long if it does not intensively colonize the space of subjectivity itself. . . . Power succeeds by persuading us to desire and collude with it” (36-37). Thus the ideal of female love became one of the most potent weapons in the battle for female subjugation. Love “has become, defined by men, a total submerging and submission of woman’s self to the physical and emotional service of man” (Rowland 124).

In *The Subjection of Women* (1861) John Stuart Mill, castigating the lack of any real options other than marriage for women, observes that:

The general opinion of men is supposed to be, that the natural vocation of a woman is that of a wife and mother. I say, is supposed to be, because, judging from acts—from the whole of the present constitution of society—one might infer that their opinion was the direct contrary. They might be supposed to think that the alleged natural vocation of women was of all things the most repugnant to their nature; insomuch that if they are free to do anything else . . . there will not be enough of them who will be willing to accept the condition said to be natural to them. (32-33)

Although he claims that leaving women with only one choice—marriage—is Hobson’s choice, Mill nevertheless supports the ideology that marriage is women’s natural vocation, writing that he does not “think that anyone in reality” believes women do not want to get married.

But do women want to get married, and are they aware of the subordinating effects of romantic love? In *Resisting Novels* Lennard Davis writes that “novels do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology. . . . Ideology constitutes the sum of that which a culture needs to believe about itself and its aspirations as opposed to what really is. . . . Novels make sense because of ideology; they embody ideologies; and they promulgate ideology” (24). If novels embody ideology, what do the novels written by women about women reveal about love and marriage?

The “angel in the house” may have embodied the bourgeois domestic female ideal but it was an ideal that was increasingly at the centre of debate as the century progressed. Barbara Caine, in *Victorian Feminism*, notes that:

The mid-Victorian world in which [feminists] lived was characterized not only by a range of social, religious, and political ideas and institutions, but also by an intense concern about marriage and family life, about child-bearing and rearing, and about the physical and mental nature of women. The apparent demographic imbalance between men and women, the disinclination of either sex to marry, the problems faced by single women needing to support themselves, the inequities of the marriage laws, the moral consequences of patriarchal marriages and families, the sexual double standard were all subjects of extensive discussion before a women’s movement emerged and hence became part of the framework in which Victorian feminism developed. (15)

In 1836 Caroline Norton initiated public debate on the inequalities between husbands and wives; in 1839 the Infant Custody Act which allowed women to sue for custody of children under seven and to sue for access to children under sixteen became law; in 1854 Barbara Leigh Smith wrote *A Brief Summary in Plain English of the Most Important Laws of England Concerning Women* and gathered a committee (which formed the nucleus of the Langham Place Group) to petition Parliament for amendment of the married women's property laws; in 1870 the Married Women's Property Act was passed. These legal changes, and the debate accompanying them, kept the ideology of marriage in the public forum.

So what happened in fiction as the century progressed towards the ideal marriage, the marriage of choice, the marriage of love? In *Jane Eyre*, first published in 1847, Charlotte Brontë gives the reader her concept of the ideal companionate marriage:

No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness in my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long; to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result. (475-76)

In *Wuthering Heights*, also published in 1847, Emily Brontë espouses a similar ideal of merged individualities. Using a discourse of religion, Catherine confides to Nelly that:

My great thought in living is [Heathcliff]. If all else perished, and *he* remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger; I should not seem a part of it. . . . My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks . . . a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. (83-84)

The physically and spiritually symbiotic relationships, the merging of individuality within a unified pair, described by both Charlotte and Emily had become by 1855, the time of publication of Browning's *Men and Women*, not a lifelong identification but merely a frustratingly fleeting moment of union:

I yearn upward, touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
("Two in the Campagna" Stanza x)

By the 1850s and 1860s the intense identificatory relationships of Charlotte and Emily have yielded to the cooler, more pragmatic realism of Trollope and Thackeray. This is not to imply that the change was purely chronological; both Trollope and Thackeray were publishing at the time *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* appeared, and Gaskell's *Mary Barton* was published in 1848. However, if we accept that novels embody ideology, the continuing public discourse on women and marriage and the evolving recognition of inequalities evidenced in changing legislation kept marriage in the forefront of fiction and enabled, almost encouraged, fictional assessments of marriage within an earnestly realistic framework.

This paper examines the non-romantic view of marriage as depicted by Elizabeth Gaskell and Mary Braddon, two women writing when legislative changes had begun and when the discourse on marriage and the Woman Question was very much a continuing part of public debate. Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton*, was published in 1848 and her last novel was published posthumously in 1864. Braddon's first novel, *Lady Lisle*, was published in 1862 and her last novel, *Mary*, was published in 1916, also posthumously. However, here I will only deal with the novels Braddon published in the 1860s. Both writers deal with romantic love and with marriage, and although Gaskell is usually categorised as a realist writer and Braddon is best known as a writer of sensation fiction—and although Gaskell's life as the wife of a Unitarian minister was more conventionally respectable than Braddon's irregular domestic arrangements as the *de facto* wife of the publisher John Maxwell—their fiction nevertheless exhibits similar attitudes towards romantic love, its role in the continuing subordination of women and the possibility of realising the ideal of the companionate marriage.

Gaskell deals with marriage, not as a separate relationship but as part of the fabric of family life and, unlike Braddon, indeed unlike most of the major Victorian novelists, she deals with marriage in a class-specific way. In Gaskell's *oeuvre* it is among working and farming classes, not the middle and upper classes, that the most successful, in fact the only really companionate marriages are found. If we take Engels's comments into account, these marriages are a reflection of reality rather than of a theoretical ideal:

This human right [the right of free choice of marriage partner] . . . differed in one respect from all other so-called human rights. While the latter in practice remain restricted to the ruling class (the bourgeoisie) and are directly or indirectly curtailed for the oppressed class (the proletariat), in the case of the former the irony of history plays another of its tricks. The ruling class remains dominated by the familiar economic influences and therefore only in exceptional cases does it provide instances of really freely contracted marriages, while among the oppressed class, as we have seen, these marriages are the rule. (112-13)

If we look to Gaskell for companionate marriages we find them among the Bartons, the Wilsons, the Robsons and the Holmans. It is interesting that in each of her successful marriages, the women are working partners, part of the economic fabric of the family. The less successful marriages, the relationships where individual isolation has replaced the identification and absorption of the Brontë novels, are found among the middle

classes where the economic marginalisation of women is reflected in their marginalisation within the marital and family relationships. In *Mary Barton*, for example, the marriage of the *nouveau riche* Carsons (who were initially co-workers of Barton and the Wilsons), has, by the time of the novel, degenerated into the mutually isolated relationship exemplified by many of the middle-class marriages of Braddon's fiction.

In Gaskell's fiction the middle class, with its clearly defined gender-dependent social roles, is seen as destructive of supportive marital and family relationships. Her middle-class marriages and families are portrayed as agglomerations of mutually exclusive, isolated individuals with little or no communication or contact between members. Working and farming class marriages and families, on the other hand, are depicted as mutually supportive, caring groups. These differences are exemplified in *Mary Barton* by the depictions of the families of the Bartons and Wilsons and the contrast with the family life of the Carsons. The difference is not one of material possessions, although the greater space and number of rooms in the Carson house encourages individual isolation in a way not found in the smaller domestic spaces of the Barton and Wilson houses. It lies in the contrast between relationships of mutual support and concern found in the working-class homes and the individual isolation evident, for example, in the description of an evening in the Carson house. Mrs Carson is "upstairs in her dressing-room, indulging in the luxury of a head-ache," the three daughters are "by themselves in the comfortable, elegant, well-lighted, drawing-room" (354), and Mr Carson is asleep over his newspaper in the dining-room. The separation between the various family members epitomised in the normal, everyday locational separation of those concerned is an outward manifestation of the essentially isolated and separate existences within the family.

Gaskell emphasises the essential differences between the Carsons and their *ci-devant* co-workers, the Wilsons and Bartons, through her portrayal of marital and family reactions to tragedy. Although John and Mary are sincerely grieving when Mrs Barton dies, they are both aware of and concerned for each other. Mary abates her display of grief "because it flashed across her mind that her violence of grief might disturb her father" (58), and Barton is concerned that Mary "must not fret [herself] ill" (58). When the last Wilson twin dies "the mother lifted up her voice and wept. Her cries brought her husband down [from the body of the other twin] to try with his aching heart to comfort hers" (117). By contrast, when the body of Harry Carson is brought home and his sister Sophy tries to put her arms around her father to comfort him, his only reaction is to push her away with the words: "Go! you are not Harry" (260). Mrs Carson, who is so marginalised within the family that she is ignorant of the death of her son since no one has bothered to tell her, is drawn to the scene solely because of the "unusual noises in the house" (261). Again there is no mutual support: "Mr Carson . . . could not leave the dead for any one living" and simply tells the nurse to "take her away" (262). Certainly, when Sophy comes to Carson to tell him that she thinks her mother "has lost her senses," he does go to his wife but it is a conscious effort not a natural, spontaneous gesture. The mutually supportive relationships of the Bartons and the Wilsons (and of the Robsons in *Sylvia's Lovers* and the Holmans in *Cousin Phillis*) has been replaced by a group of isolated, mutually exclusive individuals to whom even a shared tragedy cannot bring a sense of cohesion.

In the middle-class marriage of the Hales in *North and South* Gaskell depicts a marriage begun with mutual love: "Dearest Maria had married the man of her heart" (15). However, by the opening of this novel the companionate marriage has degenerated into a relationship very like that of the Carsons. When Margaret returns to her parent's home at Helstone she becomes aware that "all was not as it should be":

Her mother . . . seemed now and then so much discontented with their situation. . . . The marring of the peace of home, by long hours of discontent, was what Margaret was unprepared for . . . the evenings were rather difficult to fill up agreeably. Immediately after tea her father withdrew into his small library, and she and her mother were left alone. Mrs Hale had never cared much for books. (16-19)

In her last novel, *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell describes several marriages but the two most extensively dealt with are the marriages of the Hamleys and the Gibsons. Gaskell makes it clear that the Gibson marriage, the most central marriage in the novel, is one of convenience rather than love but that the Hamley marriage is supposedly one of love, certainly on the part of Squire Hamley. Gaskell writes that the Hamleys "were very happy" (73), but then proceeds, in words reminiscent of her description of Mrs Carson, to say that "possibly Mrs Hamley would not have sunk into the condition of a chronic invalid, if her husband had cared a little more for her various tastes, or allowed her the companionship of those who did" (73).

Gaskell's *oeuvre* thus provides a fictional correlative to the statements of Engels quoted earlier by contrasting the mutually supportive, interactive family relationships of the working and farming classes with the mutually exclusive, individually isolating family relationships of the middle and upper classes. It seems that in Gaskell's fiction, despite its apotheosis of home and family, the domestic and family arrangements of the middle classes is inimical to any sustained, interactive marital or familial relationships. Indeed, the most successful and supportive middle-class relationships are those between siblings rather than married couples: Thurstan and Faith Benson in *Ruth* and Miss Matty and her brother Peter in *Cranford* are good examples of this.

Braddon's depictions of love and marriage are more overtly grim than Gaskell's, a fact which could be explained in a number of ways: her writing career began slightly later than Gaskell's, her domestic situation differed markedly, and she began her career as a sensation novelist. For Braddon's women characters romantic love is disempowering and dangerous; for Braddon herself it is egoistic and self-deluding. In a letter to Bulwer-Lytton she writes:

I have begun to question the expediency of very deep emotion. . . . I can't help looking down upon my heroes when they suffer, because I always have in my mind the memory of wasted suffering of my own. I look down upon Othello because he suffered so much, when by packing his portmanteau and writing a few lines to Desdemona to the effect that he had reason to believe her a very wicked woman, and that, in that belief, he had sold his commission and made arrangements for leaving Cyprus, and also for the payment of an adequate income to her, through the hands of his solicitor,—he might have avoided all the

bolster and pillow and subsequent dagger business and lived down his sorrow; lived perhaps to wonder what he had ever seen in Brabantio's whey-faced daughter. Is anybody ever constant to any emotion? (Wolff 16)

Braddon's distrust of love is expressed in fictional form in her novel *John Marchmont's Legacy* [1863]:

Every great passion is a supreme egotism. It is not the object which we hug so determinedly; it is not the object which coils itself about our weak hearts; it is our own madness which we worship and cleave to, our own pitiable folly which we refuse to put away from us. What is Bill Sykes's broken nose or bull dog visage to Nancy? The creature she loves and will not part from is not Bill, but her own love for Bill,—the one delusion of a barren life; the one grand selfishness of a feeble nature. (78)

Certainly Braddon, together with most nineteenth-century writers, deplors commercial marriages. In *The Lady's Mile* [1866] Flora Lobyer (née Crawford) denounces commercial marriage as a form of slavery: "I have no self-respect . . . there is nothing that has ever been written about such marriages too strong or too bitter for their iniquity. We sell ourselves like slaves, and when the bargain is completed, we hate the master who has bought us" (262). Edward Said claims in *Culture and Imperialism* that:

The novel is an incorporative, quasi-encyclopaedic cultural form. Packed into it are both a highly regulated plot mechanism and an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power. . . . Novels . . . end either with the death of the hero or heroine . . . who by virtue of overflowing energy does not fit into the orderly scheme of things, or with the protagonists' accession to stability (usually in the form of marriage or confirmed identity, as is the case with novels of Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot). (84)

If, as Said says, the novel has a "normative pattern of social authority" (84) and is a participant in social conformity and control, then Braddon's novels subvert the pattern. For instance, the commercial marriage from *The Lady's Mile* mentioned earlier is only saved from the scandal of divorce by the suicide of the bankrupt husband. Here instability, rather than stability, is the result.

Even Braddon's portrayals of marriages for love do not support the ideology of the centrality of marriage in female happiness. In *Dead Men's Shoes* [1876] Sybil Faunthorpe marries for love and Braddon depicts the grim reality of a marriage without money:

The time was, not a year ago, when to gaze upon [her husband's] countenance seemed to her like reading a poem. . . . when to watch him across a crowded room was quiet happiness, all-sufficing for an

exacting love—when to hear his voice, gay or grave, was sweeter than music.

And now he sits a few paces from her, worn out, weary, dispirited, in sore need of comfort, and she cannot raise her eyes from moody contemplation of the fire. The difference is marked, the reason obvious. A year ago he was an undeclared lover—to-day he is an actual husband. (11)

It is interesting to compare the result of an imprudent marriage, albeit one made for love, with Catherine's reasons for accepting Edgar Linton. "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now . . . if Heathcliff and I married we should be beggars" (82-83). As Catherine realises, when women were totally dependent financially on men, an imprudent choice could be disastrous. It is often in relation to minor characters or peripheral scenes that the dissonances in Braddon's novels are found. Georgina Champernowne is only a minor female character in *The Lady's Mile* [1866] but it is in Braddon's portrayal of Georgina that the dislocations between her appreciation of the nature and effects of female subordination and the ideology which prescribes marriage as the bourgeois domestic ideal and are most evident.

Georgina's first marriage was, on her part, a marriage of convenience which she describes as "slavery": "I had the best and kindest of masters . . . but it was bondage, and I thirsted for liberty" (276). When the novel opens she is in possession of freedom and financial independence. Indeed, she enjoys a "masculine" autonomy and self-determination: "There was no one who had any right to question her actions or interfere with her caprices. . . . She lived her own life, and she chose her own friends" (152-53). In Georgina's second marriage to the artist Crawford, the marital power balance has been redressed in the manner of *Jane Eyre* and Rochester. Georgina has the wealth and Crawford has gone blind. In terms of the overall novel, however, the marriage of Georgina and Crawford is accorded less space than that of Jane and Rochester. Significantly, Braddon uses an inflated, sentimental language to describe the marriage, a language which signals a sub-text opposed to the surface words: "Never was ministering slave more devoted to an idolised master than the elegant Georgina to her husband" (363). If marriage was woman's true destiny, Braddon here uses a pejorative vocabulary to describe it. Apart from its oppressive connotations, the word "slave" resonates with echoes of the two commercial marriages in the novel, Georgina's first marriage and the marriage of Florence and Lobyer. The contrast between the happily independent Georgina Champernowne, a woman fully in control of her own life, and the servile submission of Georgina Crawford subverts the ideal of the companionate marriage.

Braddon foreshadows the slavish submission of Georgina in her depiction of the marriage of Lucy and Bulstrode in *Aurora Floyd* [1863]. In this novel Braddon provides her only extended portrayal of marriages of free choice: the marriages of the Bulstrodes and the Mellishes, one seemingly the pattern of ideological domestic bliss, the other freer and less constrained. Neither marriage, however, is the ultimately mature relationship of "unforced, unmercenary, wholly equal mutual love, of love without power" which Gay notes as "the outermost limit to which few nineteenth-century men, and fewer nineteenth-century women, aspired" (107). The marriages in *Aurora Floyd* concern the eponymous heroine and her cousin, Lucy. Although Aurora does not marry her first love, Talbot Bulstrode, her marriage to John Mellish is nonetheless a free

choice and she “learned to love her husband” (119). Indeed, Mellish is a far better choice for her than Bulstrode with whom she has little in common and who usually considers her behaviour unsuitable and unladylike. Braddon notes that Aurora “tried humbly to fashion her very nature anew, that she might be worthy of [Bulstrode’s] sublime excellence” (109).

On the surface the marriage of Aurora and Mellish is successful. Aurora “had never for one moment regretted her marriage with John Mellish” (142) while Mellish loved Aurora with a love that “was in a manner universal. It was the love of husband, father, mother, brother, melted into one comprehensive affection” (120). The terms Braddon uses to describe the relationship, however, are not those of mature, equal adults but rather of children playing. Both Mellish and Aurora are portrayed as childlike and immature. At the wedding Mellish “alternately laughed and cried throughout that eventful morning . . . it must have been a relief to [Aurora’s father] when Aurora descended the staircase . . . to take leave” (109). Mellish’s feelings for Aurora are described as “a mother’s weak pride . . . a mother’s foolish vanity” (109). Aurora is “a careless, impetuous creature . . . every mortal thing by turns, and never any one thing for two minutes together; happy, generous, affectionate; taking life as a glorious summer’s holiday” (144). Their marriage is a summertime playtime and it is not to Mellish but to Talbot Bulstrode that Aurora turns when the secret of her marriage to the groom, Conyers, is discovered.

The portrayal of the marriage of Lucy and Bulstrode is more subversive. Bulstrode is described as being “happier with Lucy than he ever could have been with Aurora” (183):

[He is] happy in the choice he had made calmly and dispassionately. He had loved Aurora for her beauty and her fascination; he was going to marry Lucy because he had seen much of her, had observed her closely, and believed her to be all that a woman should be. Perhaps, if stern truth must be told, Lucy’s chief charm in the captain’s eyes lay in that reverence for himself which she so *naively* betrayed. He accepted her worship with a quiet, unconscious serenity, and thought her the most sensible of women. (136)

Both Bulstrode and Lucy seem very content with their bargain. However, through their relationship, Braddon takes the domestic ideal and the ideal of the angel in the house to the point of caricature. Robyn Rowland notes that “by being negated, de-selfed, dispossessed and silenced, women become manipulable” (13) and Lucy represents the self-imposed negation and silencing that maintains female subjugation. Lucy is the female object to the male gaze and is consequently reified by the men in the novel. Bulstrode “looked at her as calmly as if she had been a statue” (41) and thinks of her, in highly significant language, as “a good little thing” (36) and “a pretty, inanimate girl” (54). Even Aurora’s father thinks of his niece as being “for all the world like one of the painted heroines so dear to the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood” (182). Lucy’s assimilation of a dehumanising gender ideal links her, not with an individual painting, but with generic “saints and angels” (133). Just as she has internalised the gender role to the point of losing her individuality, Lucy is a product of her upbringing and education:

She was exactly the sort of woman to make a good wife. She had been educated to that end by a careful mother. Purity and goodness had watched over her and hemmed her in from her cradle. She had never seen unseemly sights, or heard unseemly sounds. She was as ignorant as a baby of all the vices and horrors of this big world. She was lady-like, accomplished, well-informed; and if there were a great many others of precisely the same type of graceful womanhood, it was certainly the highest type, and the holiest, and the best. (41)

Lucy embodies the gender ideal as her marriage embodies the domestic ideal and it is an ideal that Braddon depicts as a sterile, stultifying, indeed cannibalistic relationship, as immature in its way as the relationship between Mellish and Aurora:

Lucy willingly abandoned her own delights. . . . But it was very pleasant to her to make the sacrifice. Her inclinations were fatted lambs, which she offered willingly upon the altar of her idol. She was never happier than when sitting by her husband's side, making extracts from the Blue-books to be quoted in some pamphlet that he was writing. . . . She sat by Talbot's side . . . listening with patient attention to her husband's perusal of the proof-sheets of his last pamphlet. It was a noble specimen of the stately and ponderous style of writing, and it abounded in crushing arguments and magnificent climaxes, which utterly annihilated somebody (Lucy didn't make out who), and most incontrovertibly established something, though Mrs Bulstrode couldn't quite understand what. It was enough for her that Talbot had written that wonderful composition. . . . If he had pleased to read Greek to her, she would have thought it pleasant to listen. . . . It was part of her nature to love in a reverential attitude, and she had no wish to approach nearer to her idol. To sit at her sultan's feet and replenish his chibouque; to watch him while he slept, and wave the punkah above his seraphic head; to love and admire and pray for him,—made up the sum of her heart's desire. (291-92)

Lucy's life is parasitic, she lives vicariously through her husband, not even continuing to read after Bulstrode has stopped: "Lucy shut the third volume of her novel. How should she care to read, when it pleased her husband to desist from reading?" (335). In a scathing indictment of the disempowering nature of female love, Braddon describes Lucy as "one of those pure and innocent creatures whose whole being resolves itself into affection; to whom passion, anger and pride are unknown; who live only to love, and who love until death" (134). Lucy is not a woman but "a creature" and the whole passage from which this quotation is drawn could equally apply to a loyal spaniel.

The marriages portrayed in the fiction of both Gaskell and Braddon fall far short of the Brontë ideal. Are women naturally disposed to marriage as Mill supposed? Certainly, within the confines of the nineteenth century, neither Gaskell nor Braddon could sufficiently disassociate themselves from the dominant ideology to espouse a single life as the female ideal, but it is significant that spinsters such as Miss Blake in

Just As I Am [1880] and Miss Wendover in *The Golden Calf* [1883] are among Braddon's most contented characters, at ease with themselves and their lives, and the unmarried ladies of Gaskell's *Cranford* are neither unhappy nor angst-ridden.

If novels embody ideologies, and women's writings embody female responses to ideologies, then at the heart of the fiction of Gaskell and Braddon lies a deep ambivalence about marriage and romantic love.

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