"YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME TO LIFE AGAIN": ROMANTIC AND RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GIRLS' PERIODICALS

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"A great deal of harm is done by overstimulating the imagination by highly wrought fiction" (*Our Bessie* 67). This sentiment, which is expressed in two of Rosa Nouchette Carey's later novels (the other being *Merle's Crusade*), is each time uttered by the doctor, a figure who was frequently used in adolescent fiction to present both medical and moral advice to the reader. In speaking thus through a respected and professionally recognised (albeit fictional) persona, Carey summarises neatly the difficulties with which popular fiction, and more specifically romance, had to contend. The development of the perceived division between "good" and "bad" reading became marked during the late nineteenth century, and this, together with a growing focus upon the person (or persons) of the reader and possible consequences of the activity of reading, saw the romance positioned as a culturally insignificant narrative applicable only to women and of interest only to them. This classification fixed the popular romance firmly within the category of "bad" reading; however, it is noticeable that writers of religious fiction, and particularly that directed at adolescent girls, used a number of the textual characteristics of popular romance as a basis for their evangelical messages. This involved a series of textual manoeuvres as the writers of these "religious romances" demonstrated their awareness of the negative influences which had come to be associated with the romance form; by emphasising the Christian doctrine and behaviours promoted within this application of the romance form, and offering direct authorial guidance to readers, these writers sought to distance their texts from the genre in which they featured and thus allow the reader to consume the product while simultaneously rejecting it—a pattern of response which has characterised forms other than the romance, and was frequently used by the editors of popular periodicals.

Popular fiction has consistently utilised the romance as a narrative which is designed to appeal to both women and adolescent girls and is supported, particularly in periodicals, by illustrations which visually depict the assertions made in the text.[1] Both written text and illustrations attempt to provide women and girls with an understanding of the patterns of courtship and romance which not only define both their gender and status within society, but which also suggest appropriate forms of behaviour by which these definitions can be realised. That these definitions were of key importance, particularly in fiction which sought to address the adolescent market, is not surprising

[1] Periodicals such as *Atalanta* and the *Girl's Own Paper* allocated approximately one quarter of each issue to illustrations. While fiction is copiously illustrated, there are also numerous prints depicting idealised girls in attitudes which are deemed to be representative of their spiritual state. These are accompanied by lines of poetry or exhortatory spiritual commentary acting as comment.

given the major developments in women's work and education, the growth of the suffrage movement and the rise of the phenomenon of the New Woman. These developments, coupled with the construction of theories of female adolescence which offered a medical/scientific discourse against which to position the needs of girls and young women, were not perceived as occurring in isolation but were seen as various aspects of the debate concerning women and their roles within society. Furthermore, it is possible to assert, as Sally Mitchell does in her study, *The New Girl: Girl's Culture in England, 1880-1915*, that "over the years between 1880-1915 both working-class and middle-class girls increasingly occupied a separate culture" which determined a "period of transition between 'child at home' and the assumption of wholly adult responsibilities" (3). This "separate culture" was viewed as a time of crucial importance in which in which all aspects of future development were foreshadowed; consequently much debate centred about the management of this newly-perceived phenomenon. In particular, commentators were concerned with the place that reading occupied within this culture, an issue which received much attention both from Mitchell and also from Kate Flint in her study, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*.

In her comprehensive account of women's reading experiences, Flint correlates the private and social aspects of the activity of reading as it appeared to function in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focusing not only on the texts which were read, but also on material which addressed the experience of reading and offered guidance as to the ways in which reading should be undertaken. This material included medical and psychoanalytical works, advice manuals, biographies and periodicals, all of which offered ways in which female reading practices could be defined. The impact of the broader reading which was urged upon women "despite the anxieties generated by the practice of novel reading" (Flint 38), particularly with regard to the knowledge that this conferred, is significant in analysing the shifts in female reading practice which were identified at this time. In this consideration of the reader, Flint defines "knowledge" in Foucauldian terms as structures characterised by the combination of a group of factors "formed in a regular manner by a discursive practice." Thus the discursive practice itself must be considered in terms of "the types of enunciation that it uses, the concepts that it manipulates and the strategies that it employs [for] there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms" (Foucault 182 qtd Flint 39). Furthermore, as Flint points out, while the validation of knowledge as legitimate or useful depends upon the authority of those who undertake such affirmation, "this does not prevent the challenging of such authority through the assumption and manoeuvring of knowledge in various ways, as with the development of the politically articulate women's movement in the nineteenth century, and with the changes which took place within women's writing for women" (39).

The activity of reading, then, can operate as a site in which both writer and reader manoeuvre in attempts to construct and assess not only the representations of the text, but also the responses of the ideal reader who is implicitly invoked by the writer, and from whom the actual reader is forced to seek direction, even when their own

response is directly invoked. Thus, "the same texts . . . may elicit complicity or resistance; the same reading subject, for that matter, cannot be relied upon to be a stable identity, responding in a predetermined way to each text that she encounters" (40). It is this "slippage" between text and reader and the potentially disturbing dynamic that could result from this which preoccupied so many of the commentators who assessed women's reading practices.

The female reader, it is asserted, was expected to identify with the characters and events found in her reading in ways which were apparently not assumed of male readers. Both Victorian and Edwardian commentators declared that there were discernible links between what was read and the effects that it had upon the reader. Thus in 1875 Leslie Stephen wrote that "the songs of a nation, to quote once more the poor old truism, affect men's manners more than their laws" (92), referring explicitly to the belief that an individual's public and private personas were directly influenced by their reading. Clearly, this influence could be easily be adverse rather than beneficial, and given women's supposedly strong identification with their reading matter, they could be seen to be particularly at risk from inappropriate or harmful texts. The peculiarly internalised nature of these potential dangers was emphasised in the frequently cited association between eating and reading which appeared in a variety of contexts; Ruskin referred to it in *Fors Clavigera*, Charlotte Mason in *Home Education* likened solitary reading to "secretly indulged gluttony" (232), and J.E.C. Welldon stated that "intellectual health, like physical, depends not upon the amount of food consumed, but upon the digestion" (217). In an explicitly female context, Lady Laura Ridding's 1894 article in the *Woman at Home* focused extensively on a metaphor of consumption, with the female reader "rejecting the strawberry ices of literature" in favour of "a wholesome variety of food-well cooked, well digested, nourishing" (29).

The internalised disturbances produced by the inappropriate consumption of harmful material focussed observers' attention on the complexity of the reader's role. (To continue the analogy; the food must be actively consumed, but the processes of digestion cannot ordinarily be affected by the eater's subsequent actions.)[2] Janice Radway's analysis of twentieth-century romance and its readership emphasises this passivity in the identification of the reader and the romantic heroine, suggesting that the reader's vicarious relationship with the romantic hero requires her to "do nothing more than *exist* as the center of this paragon's attention" (97). However, this extreme passivity clearly involves the "temporary but literal denial of the demands that women recognise as an integral part of their roles as nurturing wives and mothers" (97). As Flint suggests, given the possibilities that this raises, that while Victorian commentators emphasised the extent to which reading appropriate material influenced the development of "certain desirable 'natural' faculties," they simultaneously acknowledged that "the misuse of women's intrinsic attributes for sympathetic identification did not just carry with it the

[2]The internalisation of experience and the extent to which this was seen as essential underscored the successful management of female adolescence features largely in studies of adolescence undertaken during the early 1900s. See for example G. Stanley Hall's monolithic text of 1904, *Adolescence: its Psychology, and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education.*

possibility that she might be led astray, but constituted in itself a transgression of the proper function of her innate characteristics" (70). Certainly the passivity of the reader, as analysed in relation to the romantic text, offered a model of reading which could be emulated with regard to other textual discourses, provided of course that these texts offered subject matter which would not initiate the "transgression" referred to by Flint. The concern surrounding the ways in which women and girls could be adversely affected by their reading indicates an acknowledgment of a paradoxical engagement with the text in which the supposedly desirable and uncritical passivity of the reader could produce an undesirable identification with the subject matter of the text.

The possibilities suggested by this textual identification coupled with its attendant demands for emulation on the part of the reader were issues which shaped female adolescent reading in the late nineteenth century. During this period, the romance became an accepted form for girls' stories, with any number of courtship stories appearing from writers such as Charlotte Yonge, Evelyn Everett Green, Rosa Nouchette Carey, Rosa Mulholland and Eglanton Thorne, all of whom at various times wrote specifically for adolescent girls. What is perhaps more surprising is that many of these novels were published by avowedly religious publishing houses such as the Religious Tract Society (RTS) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK): surely the secular form of the romance would be at variance with the evangelical aims of such organisations?[3]

As J.S. Bratton points out, the romance was extremely useful to those evangelical writers who directed their works at children and adolescents. Bratton notes: "The distinctive features of popular romance—the episodic story, sensational, obviously patterned by providential forces, moving through darkness to emerge into the light of rescue, identity and prosperity—were easily moulded. . . . Romance patterns could be made vehicles for . . . Christian significances with little alteration" (69). Thus writers such as the explicitly evangelical Hesba Stretton (1832-1911), Elizabeth Sewell (1815-1906) and Mrs Sherwood (1775-1851) consistently united romance narratives with their evangelical purposes and produced stories of redemption that relied on motifs such as wrongful accusation, displacement, exile, death, discovery of innocence and the resumption of previous status to express their polemical stance. This tradition was maintained by writers such as Carey and Green, but by the 1890s when books directed at the adolescent market were becoming widely available, a less overt mingling of evangelical religion and romance was apparent; although the stories in question can be clearly recognised as didactic, the basis for this polemic is grounded on a nexus of entertainment and exposition. Moreover, this blending of amusement and guidance, both social and individual, is also apparent in periodicals of the time such as the *Girl's Own Paper*, *Atalanta* and the *Young Woman*. Indeed, a number of novels by Green and Carey were initially serialised in these periodicals, alongside numerous factual articles covering a variety of topics; moreover it is a characteristic textual strategy that the

[3]In using the term "evangelical," I am referring to all forms of Protestantism as represented by these writers with an emphasis on the position—or indeed positions—taken by the established church, rather than the strict Protestantism associated with Dissent which came to signify this term.

discourses utilised by both fiction and non-fiction constantly collapse into one another, despite the apparent variety of material that is presented.

While writers such as Green and Carey fully exploited the conventions of romance, closer examination of their work reveals that romantic and religious discourses are constantly merging within the stories and this underpins their dual function as both instruction and entertainment. This merging of discourse is particularly apparent in the context of a periodical such as the *Girl's Own Paper*, published by the RTS, which regarded the spiritual welfare of its readership as of the utmost importance and directed its material to that end. Given that romantic novels were the staple of serialised fiction in the *Girl's Own Paper* (and indeed in all periodicals for adolescent girls which were available during and after the 1890s) it is clear that this use of what would appear to be unrelated discourses allowed both writers and editors to direct a specifically gendered polemic towards its audience. Further examination of the *Girl's Own Paper* reveals that romantic and religious discourses are also jointly present in contexts which do not initially indicate such usage, such as more overtly religious writing, which would appear to preclude the use of the romantic. However, as has been indicated above, these discourses were able to coexist in the context of the novel, so their usage in this avowedly polemical context is entirely appropriate. Moreover, the didactic voices presented by the periodical urge that both discourses are accepted by the reader and applied to her own existence.

The popular version of Christianity thus presented during the 1890s emphasises the emotional aspects of religion as woman's special province; feelings and actions rather than beliefs are paramount, and exhortatory writing is grounded on allusions to the religious nature of female roles such as wife, mother and daughter, the practice of which reveals the extent to which Christianity is present within the life of the individual. Interestingly, it is rare to find an explicit statement of Christian belief directed at women which bases itself upon theological arguments, while those which appeal to emotion are much more common.[4] Given the assumptions which defined the female reader and the ways in which both the individual and society were affected by the impact of her reading, it was important that the roles and attitudes offered to her should be of the utmost rectitude, and should be reiterated in as many contexts as was possible. An examination of specific texts demonstrates the ways in which this was achieved through the intermingling of discourses outlined above.

Volume 12 of the *Girl's Own Paper* (1890-91) contains three articles entitled "The Difference Between Bible Reading and Bible Study" which emphasise the importance of approaching Christian doctrine in a systematic manner. Other specifically Christian material includes writing on Christian activity such as District Visiting (a four-part article), a five-part article on Kate Marsden and her mission to Russia and Siberia, and short pieces on the managing of a girls' guild and the distribution of tracts. Given that the volume numbers 827 pages of text, there does not appear to be a great deal that

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[4]Ruth Lamb's occasional series "In the Twilight Side by Side" (see for example *Girl's Own Paper* xviii 1896-97) uses the settings and language of romance as contexts for a religious advice column which dwells upon the emotional and active aspects of religion while largely ignoring the doctrinal and theological bases of belief.

is directly exhortatory or which relates to Christianity and the Church. However, articles which stress the importance of female influence through behaviour and attitude are numerous: typical is a short piece entitled "Society and Going into the World" which includes statements such as: "People of bad character, but nevertheless endowed with many personal charms attract the innocent by these charms into their society and lead them on . . . [women] are so often anxious to show off, to appear to advantage that they are led . . . to behave in as disgraceful manner as they can . . . verily there is great need for reform . . . it is within the power of every girl to do a share of this great work." Moreover, this reform can be achieved "quietly and unostentatiously" using "a quiet gentle manner, strict adherence to the dictates of conscience; avoidance of that everlasting tittle-tattle of neighbours; bravery to speak up boldly for the absent; and, above all, unbounded charity" (Heliotrope 54). Girls and women are clearly the moral guardians of society, but must never become overtly partisan in maintaining the "appropriate" standards as the emphasis on gentleness and quietness in the above quotations shows. Even articles dealing with practical issues such as fashion or housekeeping are written from this perspective; the monthly essays on fashion by "The Lady Dressmaker" are entitled "Dress: in Season and in Reason" and contain trenchant advice on maintaining modesty while dressing sensibly as "the object aimed at is use, not fashion" (*Girl's Own Paper* xii: 202). An article on "A Servant's Wedding Outfit" begins with an account of the emotional benefits of saving: "£20 in the Savings Bank . . . gives one a very comfortable feeling in looking forward to the future (Robinson 507) and extols the spiritual importance of thrift and wise spending even while discussing the practical needs of the small household. "Madge Vaughan's First Dinner Party" blends practical advice with directions on appropriate behaviour in a narrative structure: "Madge had made a wise selection, and one which it would be well for all hostesses to follow. She had asked only those friends whose sympathies and tastes were all in common. . . . Madge was too wise to commit the mistake of hiring waiters . . . who always give one the impression that the host and hostess have strained every nerve 'to do the thing respectably'" (Weigall 439). Instead Madge strives for the "good but simple" and the results of her efforts are an "excellent dinner, [and a] pleasant evening," with approval offered by her oldest and most respected guest, all of which are achieved by Madge's demonstration of the appropriate social standards.

The emphasis upon spiritual and social correctness grounded in the structures of the romance is typical of the adolescent fiction produced during the 1890s and early 1900s. This fiction also displays many of the attributes of a type of writing which Robyn Warhol describes as "striving to close the gaps between the narratee, addressee and receiver" (29). Here, the authors' textual strategies aim to "inspire belief in the situations their novels describe. . . . [The] novelists used engaging narrators to encourage actual readers to identify with the 'you' in the texts" (29). According to Warhol, this identification calls upon the reader "to draw upon personal memories to fill in gaps in the narrative . . . [and] participate in creating the fictional world itself, just as he or she should actively alter the real world after finishing the reading" (36). It is clear that by the 1890s these strategies, which Warhol has identified as characteristic of mid-

Victorian fiction such as *Mary Barton* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, were present in adolescent girls' fiction as "a sign of feminine presence and as a gesture of connection between the worlds inside and outside the text" (205).

How, then, do these strategies figure within the texts in question? Broadly speaking, novels such as *Greyfriars* (1891) and *Olive Roscoe* by Evelyn Everett Green, and *Little Miss Muffet* (1893), *Esther Cameron's Story* (1892), *Our Bessie* (1891) and *Merle's Crusade* (1889) by Rosa Carey present a world in which the characters' actions and attitudes together with the results of their behaviour can be accepted as literally real and universally applicable by their readers. Further, these actions are evaluated using the highly feminised version of Christian discourse referred to above, which involved repeated emphasis upon stereotypical aspects of female religion and romance such as timidity, piety and narcissism. In stressing these aspects, this type of romantic fiction sought to validate itself in a teaching capacity as expressive of the two types of social narrative encouraged in women. Thus all the novels referred to above emphasise the role of woman as the emotional and religious indicator of a "healthy" family life. All depict female adolescence as a time of testing and assessing, each heroine is confronted by or chooses to participate in an unusual or difficult situation, and it is her reaction to this which determines her level of maturity. Female maturity is clearly presented as a state which is achieved by events and tests rather than experience and ageing, in a process which allows for the indefinite prolonging of adolescence until the desired state of mind and soul is reached.

Both *Olive Roscoe* and *Greyfriars* by Evelyn Everett Green focus on the introduction of a hitherto unknown female relation to a household which, despite being wealthy, is clearly not managed appropriately. Despite difficulties both young women by means of their moral worth, correct behaviour and charm are able to reform insubordinate family members (particularly younger girls who are initially extremely rebellious), restructure the household to an appropriately patriarchal order and command love and respect from all about them—all while apparently maintaining a submissive female role and acting as a physical definition of Christian womanhood. *Olive Roscoe* is remarkable in this respect, since the central character Olive constructs her relationship with her older invalid brother on the following terms:

> This was her brother,—the brother next to her in years, the brother most needing a sister's love and care. There was something wanting, she felt, in the mutual relations between Basil and the others of the household. Might it not be that it was given to her to fill a void in his life and to do what sisterly love could do to smooth his rough path and make bright such remnant of life as was left to him? (112)

This "sisterly love" allows Basil to achieve a reconciliation with his other siblings and accept the limitations of his illhealth; Green is clear that this is brought about only through Olive's mediation and stresses that the relationship between brother and sister is one which will be maintained throughout their lives—when Olive marries, Basil will

also find a home with his brother-in-law. *Olive Roscoe* also uses other motifs of romance including the restoration of a child lost in infancy, an encounter with the violent working-classes (striking miners) who are influenced by the noble Christian behaviour of their employer's son, the unexpected inheritance of a baronetcy by an insignificant character, and the marriages of a number of well-matched couples. However, it is made clear that the positive outcomes delineated all result from Olive's Christian attitudes and actions which culminate in her own "reward" of the newly-recognised baronet and a narrative closure of a marriage which is inscribed in paradisaical terms.

Like Olive Roscoe, Esther Egerton of *Greyfriars* is a stranger in the house of relations. In this case, she is asked to take responsibility for her teenage nieces and nephews while their parents are abroad. Her position is resented by these unknown relations, but Esther is in her mid-twenties and has sufficient money of her own to ensure her independence. In *Greyfriars* Green analyses the problems that arise when parents fail to ensure that children are brought up under the influence of specifically Christian teaching and explicitly points out the links between moral failings and their physical results. Thus, Jessie Overton's unsanctioned attendance at a fancy ball results in her own humiliation and the theft of a valuable jewel by her maid who has been placed in temptation by Jessie's actions. These actions result from Jessie's desire "to set everything but her own will at defiance in order to grasp this forbidden pleasure, and now she was reaping the fruit of her own choice" (259). Jessie's brother Dacre instigates a similar situation by his refusal to accept guidance in the management of his groom; the inappropriately friendly relations between employer and servant is deemed by Esther to be the underlying cause of a near-fatal attack on Dacre by this man during the course of a robbery which Dacre's laxness has indirectly permitted. When Jessie and Dacre finally perceive themselves as responsible employers whose actions can adversely affect their servants lives in ways beyond their economic relationships, the regenerative process which Esther has brought to bear on the family is complete and narrative closure is possible. The need for children and adolescents to be directed actively both spiritually and physically is evaluated by Esther's sister Rosamund at the close of the novel:

> You see, they all thought differently from anything in which I had been brought up, and I was weak and timid, and gave it all up and tried not to care. But, Esther, it did not do—it did not answer; and we were punished by seeing the effects of our careless ways upon our children . . . there is only one way in which children ought to be brought up, and that is as our dear mother used to phrase it—in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (386)

This speech is remarkable not only for the articulation of the most desirable way in which to rear children, together with an emphasis on the mother's responsibility (Rosamund blames herself for her weakness rather than her husband's family for their wrong thinking), but goes on to stress that the only possible solution to the family's

difficulties was provided by Esther: "We were so thankful to find you had begun the work here. . . . All the children are improved. . . . I mean to take a leaf out of your book both for myself and the children." Esther's husband Everard also explicitly relates the fundamental nature of the changes to the role that Esther has played: "Changes are not wrought in a day . . . but example is never thrown away, whatever precept may be, and they did see in you a something which attracted them. . . . You have won their hearts; you will always be looked on as a friend . . . and I trust the impression once produced will be permanent" (386). Esther's agreement with this analysis illustrates the extent to which she accepts the spiritual and moral power deemed to be the prerogative of the young woman: "I had my cares and anxieties of course, but . . . I do not think I ever spent a more interesting, or, on the whole, a more happy year then this one has been" (387). Throughout the novel the reader has been directed to accept Esther's viewpoint as correct and to identify with her role as the spiritual guide and "saviour" of the family; by the close of the novel, not only has the Overton family been reformed, but, in accordance with the conventions of romance, Esther has been rewarded for her actions by marriage with Everard Chester, a wealthy gentleman who has been consistently presented as the epitome of Christian living. Interestingly, despite his unassailable position as the male representative of patriarchal Christianity, Everard states explicitly that he could not have achieved Esther's successful results, which are clearly due to her own acceptance of the roles attributed to her.

It is the unexpected nature of female influence which locates the nexus of religion and romance within these novels; the untested and apparently powerless nature of many of these adolescent girls and young women achieve results which initially appear to be unattainable, but which are brought about by these seemingly helpless individuals. In exploring this theme, Rosa Nouchette Carey develops the notion that the agent of change may herself be in need of some reformation, but if she accepts her designated role she can also positively influence those around her. Thus Effie Beresford, the heroine of *Little Miss Muffet* (1893), who refuses to change the tomboy habits in which her four brothers have encouraged her is quite plainly at fault, and is sent from her family to stay with her aunt and cousin until she has learnt more conventional behaviour. However, Effie's limitations do not prevent her from offering valuable advice to her cousin's friend Malcolm Gordon: "Mr Gordon, please forgive me if I interfere, but it seems to me you are making a mistake. . . . Could you not sacrifice a few months just to please your mother? . . . One can only have one mother; perhaps you will be glad some day to know that you put aside your own pleasure and thought only of her" (132). Malcolm accepts Effie's advice ("Thank you for helping me to see my duty. . . . You have saved me from a great mistake" [133]), and she is similarly successful in influencing Malcolm's degenerate brother Gilbert after he has suffered a crippling accident. After a visit from Effie,

> [Gilbert] could not shake off the remembrance of her words . . . he recalled vividly the young face and large innocent eyes, with that reproachful expression. . . . "how dare you talk so" her voice seemed

> to say—"to wish that you could die like that, with all your sins, and no time even to say a prayer! . . . How dare anyone wish to die until he has made his peace with God." Yes, after all, the girl was right. (168)

Little Miss Muffet is one of a group of novels by Carey which focus on the influence of the inexperienced young woman. Like Green's heroines, the girls in novels such as *Little Miss Muffet*, *Merle's Crusade*, *Esther Cameron's Story* and *Averil* are all placed in trying domestic situations, either as a result of practical difficulties such as loss of family income, or as in the case of the eponymous heroine of *Averil*, because of unsympathetic family members. Furthermore, all are tested in various ways even while their influence on others is being assessed; thus both Esther Cameron and Merle are employed as a nursery nurse and governess respectively, Effie Beresford has to spend at least six months apart from her family, while Averil Willmot is depicted crippled and slowly dying. However, such is the impact that these young women have that not only do they succeed in changing the lives of those around them, but they all, with the exception of Averil, meet and marry worthy husbands. The link between the willing assumption of potentially unpleasant tasks and the subsequent matrimonial reward is made particularly explicit in *Merle's Crusade*, where Mr. Lucas's proposal of marriage to Merle is explained in the following terms: "His interest had been excited by my choice of work; I had seemed to him more real and earnest and self-denying than other girls, but he had respected me too much to intrude himself too suddenly on my life" (332). It is noticeable that both Merle and Esther Cameron perceive their future homes and relationships as the ideal of earthly life and comment explicitly on the fact that their romances have brought them (in true romance fashion) exactly what they regarded as unattainable—the more so in that both were considered plain and therefore unlikely to marry. Indeed Carey frequently uses the romance motif of the progress of the beautiful but undeserving woman to point a moral. Thus Esther Cameron's pretty sister, Carrie, who wrongly rejects her domestic duties for parish work, is left permanently lamed after a serious illness contracted while visiting the poor. She tells Esther (and the reader) that:

> It was weeks before I found it out, but I think I see it clearly now. We were both in earnest about our duty; we both wanted to do the best we could for others; but, Esther, after all it was you who were right. You did not turn against the work that was brought to you—your teaching, and house, and mother, and Dot—all that came first, and you knew it; you have worked in the corner of the vineyard that was appointed to you . . . and so you are ripe and ready for any great work that may be waiting for you. (227)

It is emphasised that seemingly appropriate female work undertaken in the wrong way is clearly not beneficial either to the individual, or to the group; in this instance Carrie's family are made anxious by her illness, she herself is lamed and her parish work is ineffectual. This clearly has ramifications for the figure of the submissive

wife, the model which the adolescent girl is generally encouraged to emulate in texts of this type, and while not wishing to reject this notion, Carey does indicate that extreme self-sacrifice can cause difficulties. Wifely behaviour is inscribed in religious terms, with constant reference to the marriage ceremony, and which appear to supersede the effects on the individuals concerned, but there is a clear implication that both parties have responsibilities to themselves as well as one another:

> Mr Morton was a devoted husband, but he was an autocrat . . . politics was the breath of his life . . . he was a committee man; he worked hard for his party. He was a philanthropist also . . . if he dragged his wife at his chariot wheel, no one blamed him; in these cases the stronger nature rules: the weaker and most loving submits. Mrs Morton was a submissive wife; early and late she toiled in her husband's service. . . . It was a matter of intense surprise that Mr Morton seemed unconscious of this immense self-sacrifice. But her cheerfulness blinded him. How could he know she was overtasked, and often sad at heart, when she never complained, when she sealed her lips so generously? (*Merle's Crusade* 96-97)

Clearly, Mrs Morton is pursuing the recommended model of female passivity in order to further her husband's career as a good wife should, but her submission will result in illhealth and emotional and financial strain on her marriage. Carey displays a similar awareness of potential difficulty in considering the supposedly ennobling role of illness in the life of the adolescent girl; the chronic invalid Hatty in *Our Bessie* (1891) who was "too sensitive for daily life" (121) and whose death is positively welcomed by both her and her family suggests that, as in the case of Mrs Morton, the combining of conventional religious and romantic roles did not always produce an appropriate outcome.[5]

However, such suggestions as these are comparatively rare; the figure of the pure young girl as redeemer is much more prominent and apparently offers both religious and social power to women. However, this redemptive role is available only as a result of female submission, or powerlessness as in the case of Averil Willmot who is crippled and whose imminent death is foreshadowed at the novel's conclusion. Her narrative is wholly spiritual in that she occupies a role as a facilitator and provider, while also inspiring religious devotion in others. It is only in so far as Averil is able to direct the lives of others that her own life is defined, as her words at the novel's conclusion reveal: "My burdens are all lifted, and if the future looks a little lonely, it will not be for long"

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[5]Rosa Nouchette Carey gives a less critical treatment of marriage in *Dr Luttrell's First Patient* (1897). Here, the heroine is married prior to the novel's commencement, but Olivia Luttrell displays the spiritual and domestic qualities required of the model young wife who offers constant emotional and moral support to her husband. Her influence also redeems a rich and reclusive elderly neighbour and reunites him with his son, who was wrongly accused of forgery. In addition, she brings about the marriage of the old man's son to a girl who "has all that his nature needs." Again the romantic ending of perfect harmony is brought about by Olivia's submissive and Christian behaviour which is directly linked to the Gospels.

(Carey *Averil* 371). For this young woman life is structured by romantic and religious discourses which have become virtually indistinguishable and which will culminate in her death. Renunciation and sacrifice characterise both discourses and in *Averil* (as in all the fiction of this type referred to here) both discourses demand scrupulous self-scrutiny on the part of the female protagonist, together with an acknowledgment of humility, even while it is apparent that the girl or woman in question plays a pivotal role in events.

By the end of the nineteenth century religious and romantic discourses had become inextricably linked with the identification and acceptance of female roles and this mingling of discourses is evident in both the popular periodicals and the fiction produced for adolescent girls. Publishing houses such as the Religious Tract Society, and to a lesser extent Cassell and Nelson, saw their roles as offering directives to their readers in a variety of blurring discourses, and provided a space for writers such as Evelyn Everett Green and Rosa Nouchette Carey to produce texts which emphasised the self-sacrificing nature of an idealised female existence while offering their adolescent readers suitable role models to emulate. Further, the terms in which these texts were presented directed the reader to identify with certain patterns of behaviour and encouraged her to reproduce them in her own life. It was made clear to the reader that the most appropriate way for her to organise her life was to enact the types of behaviour required by the discourses of religion and romance: in pursuing the redemptive quest posed by one, she could achieve the courtship proffered by the other.

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