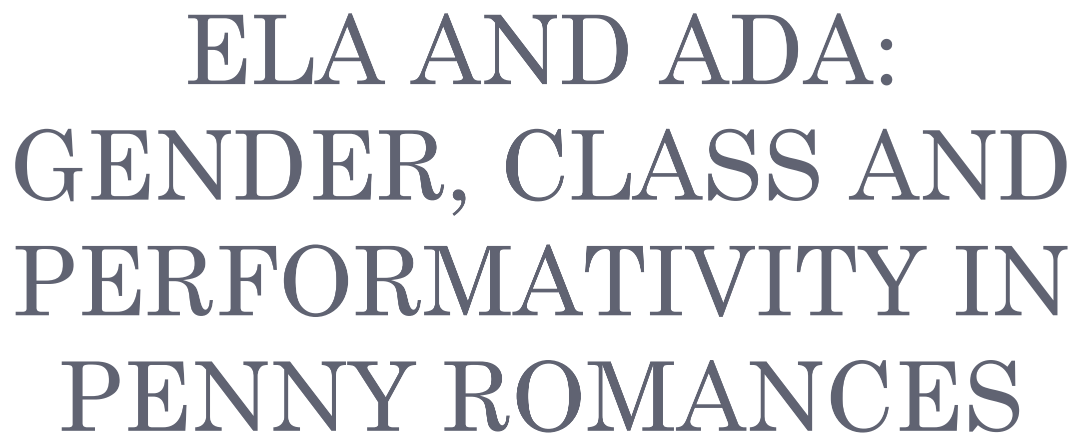

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ABSTRACT

Two stories serialized in cheap periodicals in the nineteenth century, *Ela, the Outcast* (1839) by Thomas Peckett Prest and *Ada, the Betrayed* (1843) by James Malcolm Rymer, are analysed using gender theory informed by Joan Scott and Judith Butler. These stories were read primarily by a working-class audience, and the aim of this thesis is to uncover how notions of gender, class, and race pervade these texts, in order to learn more about the broader discourse on these topics among the working class. From the analysis follows that the dominant way of looking at middle-class gendered relationships, separate sphere theory, is merely one of many cultural symbols within these texts. Additionally, gender is constructed in conjunction with class and race, which gives rise to contrasting expressions of gender and gender roles. Within the texts a difference is made between sex, which cannot be transgressed, and gender, which can be expressed in varied ways and is of a performative nature. Though embedded in the language of the dominant middle-class discourse, the two stories contest it by employment of contrasting cultural symbols and meanings.

INTRODUCTION

Most people interested in English literature have heard of Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, or the Brontë sisters. These literary giants all published in the 1840s and are still read today. In contrast, only a handful of people nowadays know the names of Thomas Peckett Prest and L.M. Rymer, who published their stories in the same time and place, yet have been forgotten and overlooked by literary circles and academia. Unlike Dickens and Thackeray, Prest and Rymer wrote almost exclusively for a working-class reading public. Within cultural history much effort is made to give voice to those whom have traditionally been neglected in historical writing, and a field in which there is still room for non-canon and so-far under-researched voices is the literature of nineteenth-century England. Setting aside what the cultural elite consumed, which has been poured over by countless historians and literary scholars, surprisingly little has been written about what the working class read. As Louis James writes in *Fiction for the Working Man* (1974), studying what the working class read and "by revealing the extent and nature of the field, it throws new light on the lower levels of literature that inevitably shifts the perspective of the total scene."[1] To this end, several scholars have started analyzing penny-issue magazines that were the primary reading material of the working class from the 1830s onwards. This thesis will contribute to this

[1] Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man. 1830-50* (Harmondsworth 1974), xv.

emerging field of research by analyzing two stories originally published in penny magazines in between 1839 and 1845.

While books at the start of the eighteenth century were expensive, under the influence of cheaper printing technologies such as machine-made paper and the rotary steam press, the cost of printing dropped significantly.[2] This development gave rise to new forms of writing and publishing, and starting in the 1820s the number of monthly journals rapidly increased. At first most of these journals focused on topics such as politics and news, in the 1840s it was fiction that became the most popular content of the periodicals.[3] The low price of this form of literature made it available to those people with less expendable income – the working class. According to the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson, the English working class was formed primarily at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, as "most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers".[4] This class-consciousness is closely related to penny fiction; penny papers were consumed almost exclusively by the working class, as the papers were seen as inferior by middle classes, and therefore play an important role in the construction and perpetuation of working class reading culture and ultimately working class identity, as "working class communities (…) had their own distinct culture and literature."[5]

Literary historian John Springhall, who discusses penny dreadfuls, magazines written for a target audience of young boys starting in the 1850s, argues that these have mostly been analyzed with regard to class differences. In a 1990 article on penny dreadfuls he notices a lack of scholarship on "how far post-1850 cheap serialized fiction genuinely reproduced the "mechanic accents" of nineteenth-century English working-class life or, perhaps less romantically, served only to reinforce the dominant middle-class culture."[6] He proceeds to attempt to formulate an answer to this question by studying the contents of a number of penny dreadfuls published by Edwin J. Brett, paying attention to the values expressed within their text. Springhall's article gives a good example of how power struggles between classes can be expressed in popular culture. He writes:

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[2] James Eli Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature* (Chichester 2009), 11.
[3] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 25.
[4] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York 1966), 11.
[5] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 1.
[6] John Springhall, " 'A Life Story for the People'? Edwin J. Brett and the London 'Low-Life' Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s", *Victorian Studies* 33:2 (1990), 224.

> The history of English penny dreadfuls signifies the continuous but necessarily uneven and unequal struggle by the dominant culture to disorganize and incorporate popular culture in its own image: constantly to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms.[7]

To Springhall's analytical approach I propose to include an additional dimension: that of gender; and, I will focus on earlier penny fictions from around the 1840s. I will combine his approach and argument that penny magazines in the nineteenth century are a place of contest in which the dominant culture strives to appropriate the expression of popular culture with a gender perspective.

The method used for the analysis of the two case studies is informed by Michel Foucault's concept of discourse. Whereas power has sometimes been interpreted as something that works top-down in society, Foucault argues that power circulates throughout society. The metaphor he uses for this phenomenon is that of a capillary or grid.[8] A discourse analysis attempts to uncover how power relationships are expressed in society, how they are embedded in language and practices. Foucault was not so much interested in what was considered "true" in any given time and period, but more how something *became* considered "truth."[9] This lends his theory well for a feminist analysis which does not attempt to discover what men and women *are*, but rather, how ideas on men and women become accepted, naturalized, and taken for granted within a certain time and place. Notions of gender difference are closely related to power – Judith Butler, for example, argues for its disciplinary power and calls it a "regulatory fiction."[10] I will conduct a discourse analysis of the two texts to learn more about how power, gender, and class are enmeshed in them, which in turn illuminates what kind of discourses circulated in the working classes, the primary and intended reading public of the texts. This thesis thus draws from poststructuralist thought, built on the assumption that written texts are literary artefacts, and a critical reading of such texts gives insight into representations and the construction of social categories.[11]

Gender theory will be explained more in-depth in the first chapter of this thesis. In short, gender studies work from the assumption that gender is a social construct and can therefore by used for analysis. A key figure in gender theory is American historian Joan W.

[7] Springhall, "A Life Story for the People?", 245-246.
[8] Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge 2007), 61.
[9] Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow 2006), 89.
[10] Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 63.
[11] Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London 2004), 91.

Scott, who in the article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986), argues for studying gender in its historical context. According to this article, feminist scholars should not see the man-woman binary as fixed or permanent, but deconstruct the terms of sexual difference.[12] In other words, Scott calls for a breakdown of categories of gender rather than taking the biological difference between men and women as a starting point for analysis. This criticism is useful to keep in mind when using a gender approach to a historical case study, because it is only by historicizing and deconstructing notions of gender that one can connect concepts of gender to broader society at a historically specific time and place. Therefore Scott's definition of gender is that "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."[13] I will use a theoretical framework informed by Scott and more contemporary gender theory to analyze two penny romances written in early nineteenth century to gain insights in how these cheap fictions influenced or reinforced power relationships, which I would argue following Scott are thoroughly intertwined with notions of gender. The main question this thesis will answer is therefore: "how do notions of gender inform power relationships within the narratives of *Ela, the Outcast* and *Ada, the Betrayed*, and how do these relate to the discourse on gender among the working classes around the time of their publication (roughly 1839 to 1845)?" More specifically, do these notions of gender incorporate and express dominant (middle-class) ideologies, or do they present a subversive or alternate ideology? I will apply the technique of "close reading" to a number of scenes from both texts. The scenes are chosen because they either explicitly refer to gender or sexual difference, or because conceptions of gender are particularly at the surface of the text. When a character for example claims to be a woman, this is a good starting point for a gender analysis, because it raises the question what a woman is, and what meaning the word "woman" takes in that context. The advantage of this methodology is that it goes beyond interpreting the main plot points of the narrative, delving into how gender works in the deeper layers of the text.

This analysis will be conducted against the background of a persistent tradition of historical scholarship on the role of women in the nineteenth century, succinctly outlined by British historian Amanda Vickery. In "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?" she critically assesses this narrative: the gendered separation of a public and a private sphere which

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[12] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review* 91:5 (1986), 1065.
[13] Scott, "Gender", 1067.

supposedly structures the lives of middle-class women in the nineteenth century.[14] This narratives traditionally assume a suppression of female agency, and see women as confined within the domestic sphere. Vickery argues for a more nuanced view of the strict spherical system, pointing out that the language of the separate spheres and womanly duties was used by female contemporaries to support activism.[15] This leads to the question whether the rhetoric of the separation of spheres is also used within the two case studies presented in this thesis, and if so, whether this rhetoric is presented in a way that enforces this separation, or whether it can also be seen as a site of subversion, turning the trope on its head to expand rather than limit the female role.

To answer the questions outlined above, this thesis features a case study of two domestic romances: *Ela, the Outcast: or, the Gipsy of Rosemary Dell* (1839) by Thomas Peckett Prest and *Ada, the Betrayed* (1845) by L.M. Rymer. These two stories were two of the most popular penny serials of their time, and are comparable in genre, style, and were both published by Edward Lloyd, arguably the most prominent publisher of penny papers explicitly marketed to a working class audience in the 1840s. In the second chapter of this thesis, more attention will be spent on terminology such as "domestic romance" and "penny romance", and why these two stories are appropriate subjects. On a more practical note, these serials were reprinted throughout the years due to demand and are therefore still accessible in the twenty-first century. I propose to analyze these two texts using a discourse analysis such as conducted by Springhall for later penny-issue magazines, paying special attention to gender relationships as they are theorized by Joan Scott. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the field of research defined by Fraser, Green and Johnston in *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*; to "pursue the many ways that representations of gender inform the dominant themes in Victorian culture and society conducted through the periodical press."[16] In particular, I am interested in how in these texts gendered meanings are created, what cultural symbols are invoked and to what end. What gender ideology lies at the foundation of these works?

First, I will expand on gender theory, discussing key works on gender and the nineteenth century and showing how this thesis fits within this field, before presenting my own analytical framework drawing from Joan Scott's gender theory. Subsequently I will briefly touch on the historical context of early nineteenth century London and its publishing

[14] Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History", *The Historical Journal* 36:2 (1993) 383, 401.
[15] Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?", 400.
[16] Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge 2003), 197.

culture, especially in relation to the working class. Then I will apply this framework to *Ela, the Outcast* and *Ada, the Betrayed* in the succeeding chapters, paying particular attention to how gender informs power structures inside the texts. Are these romances an expression of the ideal of the domestic woman in a limited private sphere, meant as an example for the female reader and thus consolidate the dominant ideology, or do they subvert them in some ways? Ultimately, the aim is to shed some light on the ideological content of what members of the literate working class in the early nineteenth century read, which in turn informs us about the lives of these men and women.

CHAPTER 1: GENDER THEORY AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

The issue of identity has been poured over by philosophers, poets, psychiatrists and others for centuries, as historian Roy Porter writes in the introduction to the book *Rewriting the Self* (1997).[17] From the 1960s onwards, new social movements formed based on forms of identity politics. The interest in elements that constitute identities, such as gender, sexuality, and race, sparked renewed academic interest in identity formation. Inspired by the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, in the early 1970s courses on women's studies were founded in universities by feminist scholars.[18] Originally aimed at uncovering the history of women, which had been systematically neglected in historical scholarship, women's studies encountered the problem that the history of women could not be added to traditional historical narratives without issue. The aim of the feminist historical enterprise became less about uncovering untold stories, but in reshaping analytic frameworks themselves.[19] Central to this endeavor is the assumption that there is a difference between biological sex, "understood as the material and unchanging ground of one's identity", and gender, "a socially constructed series of behaviours that code one as male or female, but that vary across time and space in such a way as to reveal their constructed nature."[20] By separating the two, the category of gender can be analyzed in its social, historical, and political context. Some subsequent theorists, such as Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, have argued that sexual difference itself is a social construction. For historians, gender has become an increasingly important subject of study under the influence of poststructuralism in the 1980s.[21] Gender theory is constituted by a political as well as a theoretical dimension, being both the starting point for political activism as well as academic analyses. As Anne Emmanuelle Berger writes in *The Queer Turn in Feminism* (2014), gender theory is not one unified theory;[22] gender theories are highly diverse both in its theoretical approaches as well as their aims.

[17] Roy Porter, *Rewriting the Self* (London 1997), 1.
[18] Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 2.
[19] Ibidem, 3.
[20] Ibidem, 3.
[21] Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 143.
[22] Anne Emmanuelle Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism. Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender* (New York 2014), 9.

In this chapter, I will briefly outline how several key figures who have worked with gender theory since the 1980s, mainly Joan Scott and Judith Butler, and how they have deconstructed concepts of “woman” and “man”, questioning their basis in biology and therefore opening up gender as category of analysis. Taking a small jump forwards in time, I will give a short overview of contemporary gender theories, limiting myself to two theoretical approaches that are relevant to this thesis. Subsequently I will discuss Joan Scott’s theory posited in the article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in 1986 in light of recent developments. I will discuss the criticisms the article has garnered since, and keeping these in mind, posit an analytical framework inspired by Scott which can be used when analyzing the two case studies in later chapters.

DECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

In the article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” published in the *American Historical Review* in 1986, American historian Joan Wallach Scott argues for studying gender in its historical context. This article has become the most widely read article published by the journal, something Joanne Meyerowitz attempts to explain in the article “A History of ‘Gender’” (2008).[23] At the time of publication, feminists had begun to use the term “gender” to signify a social construction of differences between the sexes. Gender was becoming more prevalent as an analytical category. Because “gender histories” also included some tentative forays into the history of men and masculinity, this caused anxiety among some feminist historians who saw this inclusion as “a conservative retrenchment, a quest for respectability, or an abandonment of the study of marginalized and oppressed groups.”[24] In her article, Scott argues that this broadening of gender history beyond “women’s history” is in fact necessary to reinvigorate feminist history, which had at the time of writing, been “stuck in a descriptive rut.”[25] Scott writes that unlike words such as “sex” or “sexual difference”, gender rejects biological determinism, and makes it possible to talk about differences between what is perceived as masculine or feminine without seeing these characteristics as innately male or female.[26] Gender as a social construction, then, separated from a biologically determined sex,

[23] Joanne Meyerowitz, “A History of ‘Gender’”, *The American Historical Review* 113:5 (2008), 1346.
[24] Meyerowitz, “A History of ‘Gender’”, 1347.
[25] Ibidem, 1347.
[26] Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, 1053-1054.

allowed feminist scholars to "talk about the ways in which differences of anatomical sex had come to mean different things at different times."[27]

Scott's argument for studying how masculinity and femininity are constructed in a discourse pacified scholars who thought it would be too limiting to focus on women separately within women's studies; they argued that "women and men were defined in terms of one another, and no understanding of either could be achieved by entirely separate study."[28] For the study of history the new category of gender, together with that of race and class, would present a re-examination of existing historical scholarship, resulting in a new history "that included stories of the oppressed and an analysis of the meaning and nature of their oppression."[29] In practice, however, Scott noticed that outside of feminism the history of women garnered little attention. She interpreted this as a failure in turning gender into an analytical category with the "analytic power to address (and change) existing historical paradigms."[30] Gender theory should not just aim at analyzing the relationship between male and female experiences in history, but should also make a connection with current practice.[31] In other words, by analyzing gender relationships in the past, we can gain knowledge of how gender works in human social relationships in general. According to Scott, the gendered hierarchical relationship between the masculine and the feminine and the corresponding language legitimizes other relationships of power, such as between colonizer and colonized or between nation states.[32]

Another key gender theorist is Judith Butler, author of *Gender Trouble* (1990). This highly influential work presents a theory of "performativity": Butler argues that gender roles are *performed* rather than that they are an expression of a pre-existing identity. This allows Butler's theory to account for historical specificity and variability, because how gender is performed is contingent to the society it is performed in. In the 1999 preface to the book, Butler writes that "*Gender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions."[33] She draws from French poststructuralist thought, using the theories by French intellectuals such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig.[34] *Gender*

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[27] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?", *Diogenes* 57:1 (2010), 7.
[28] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", 1054.
[29] Ibidem, 1054.
[30] Ibidem, 1057.
[31] Ibidem, 1055.
[32] Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender'", 1347.
[33] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York 2007), viii.
[34] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, x.

Trouble problematizes the stable conception of the term "women", following Denise Riley's critique of the category of "women". [35] She writes that, "[r]ather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety."[36] Conceptions of what it means to be a woman are culturally and historically specific – being a woman does not mean the same thing in every context. Additionally, gender intersects with other ways of constructing identities, such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Therefore, "it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained."[37]

What Butler's and Scott's theories have in common is their critical approach, which is essential if gender is to stay a politically useful category for analysis. Rather than simply categorizing what is seen as feminine or masculine, taking the opposition between women and men for granted, the point is to "interrogate all the terms and so to historicize them."[38] As Scott writes in an article from 2010 revisiting her influential 1986 "Gender" article:

> I think gender continues to be useful only if (…) it is taken as an invitation to think critically about how the meanings of sexed bodies are produced in relation to one another, how these meanings are deployed and changed. The focus ought to be not on the roles assigned to women and men, but on the construction of sexual difference itself.[39]

A difference between the two is that Scott puts more emphasis on cultural symbols and meanings, an approach that brings Roland Barthes' signifier and signified to mind; Butler, on the other hand, looks more towards larger socio-political processes with shape gendered difference.

The core of Scott's argument in "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis" can be summarized by the following quote: "We need a refusal of the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference."[40] Scott was inspired by Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which has

[35] Denise Riley, *'Am I That Name?' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London 1988).
[36] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 4.
[37] Ibidem, 4-5.
[38] Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?", 9.
[39] Ibidem, 10.
[40] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", 1065.

been used to expose previously thought stable categories as social constructs.[41] After structuralists such as Ferdinand de Saussure argued that we cannot grasp reality through language, poststructuralists like Derrida took this argument a step further and argued that even language itself is unstable and its meanings uncertain and multiple.[42] Structuralist readings rely on binary oppositions – oppositions which, according to poststructuralists, are central to the operation of language, but not stable. By using the technique of "deconstruction," poststructuralists attempt to uncover how these unstable binaries "uphold the 'logocentric' illusion that they convey a stable and coherent meaning."[43] Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" is one of the first reflections on the uses of poststructuralist techniques for feminist scholarship.[44] She calls for a breakdown of categories of gender rather than taking the biological difference between men and women as a starting point for analysis. In other words, she draws from poststructuralist thought to discover how the categories of man and woman are seen as having a stable and coherent meaning. This criticism is useful to keep in mind when using a gender approach to a historical case study, because it is only by historicizing and deconstructing notions of gender that one can connect concepts of gender to broader society at a historically specific time and place. She adds that the perceived differences between sexes involve four interrelated elements: culturally available symbols, normative concepts "that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols", politics and social organization, and subjective identity. [45] I will take the matrix that these four elements form as basis for an analytical framework, as outlined below.

While Scott herself has turned towards psychoanalysis to explain the construction of sexual difference, gender studies has developed in several directions in the last few decades. I will pay attention to two approaches in particular are important to consider briefly before I will propose an adapted Scottian analytical framework, updated to incorporate recent developments in feminist theory. These two approaches are informed by queer theory and intersectionality.

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[41] This includes categories such as the Subject itself, as James Heartfield describes in "Postmodernism and the Death of the Subject" (2002).
[42] Downs, *Writing Gender History*, 89-90.
[43] Ibidem, 90.
[44] Ibidem, 90-91.
[45] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", 1067-1068.

CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The first of the theoretical approaches I will discuss in this section is queer theory, which gained popularity in the 1990s. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is seen as one of its foundational texts, especially the notion that sex and sexuality are constructed culturally and historically; for example, "homosexuality" does not have the same meaning throughout time and across cultures. In a poststructuralist rejection of binary oppositions that seemed to underlie much of gay and lesbian theory, such as the dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual, between ruler and ruled, queer theory attempts to resist assimilation into a binary system.[46] As sociologist Steven Seidman writes, one of queer theory's aim is to analyze the "Hetero/Homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations,"[47] to borrow Foucault's terminology. Queer theory questions the naturalized position of heterosexual relationships in society; but also other "static" identities such as race are examined – notions of race, according to queer theorists such as Soibhan Sommerville, Linda Alcoff, and Tim McCaskell intersect with ideas about sexuality.[48] On the whole, it can be said that queer theory "queers" elements related to static identity and a "true self", resisting closure; and by extension, queer theory itself resists being defined comprehensively. To be defined is to be limited, seems to be the underlying assumption. From a theoretical perspective the strength of queer theory therefore lies in its flexibility and constant questioning of its own terms. Queer theory focusses on concepts such as the "drag queen" or other phenomena that disrupt heteronormative binaries. [49] This thesis is inspired by queer theory in its goal to question static identities, and its interest in moments when binaries are transgressed or broken down in the text. The gender binary is conceptualized as a place of conflict rather than taken as a given or "natural" opposition.

The second theoretical approach, intersectionality, attempts to transcend disciplines. As sociologist Sirma Bilge writes in an overview of contemporary feminist outlooks on intersectionality, it "refutes the compartmentalization and hierarchization of the great axes of social differentiation through categories of gender/sex, class, race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation."[50] Ange-Marie Hancock was the first to formulate intersectionality as a

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[46] Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York 2003), 47.
[47] Steven Seidman, "Deconstructing queer theory or the undertheorization of the social and the ethical" in: *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics,* eds: Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge 1995), 128.
[48] Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 57.
[49] Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism,* 27.
[50] Sirma Bilge, "Recent Feminist Outlooks on Intersectionality", *Diogenes* 57:1 (2010), 58.

paradigm rather than just a content-based specialization.[51] It brings together two strands of feminism, both of which are concerned with difference: black feminist theory and poststructuralist feminist thought.[52] An intersectional approach attempts to incorporate all categories of difference into one analysis, but the "relationships between these categories are variable and remain an open empirical question".[53] The aim is to uncover and explain structures of power, both on a macrosociological (how inequality impacts on individual lives in unique configurations) as well as on a microsociological level (how systems of power shape and maintain inequality). Though intersectionality draws from Foucault in the circulation of power structures in society, the link between the two should not be taken for granted; as Bilge argues, especially in the United States intersectionality is based on black feminist thought, "at the heart of which the neo-Marxist tradition remains predominant."[54]

The goal of intersectional analyses are to contend hierarchies and exclusivity. Because of its roots in black feminist thought, intersectional approaches are often focused mainly on the intersection between gender and race.[55] Intersectionality has been a key word in feminist thought in the last decade or so because of its anti-racist and inclusive promises, but some have argued that it lacks a clearly defined methodology.[56] There is a general consensus in feminist scholarship that identity is formed in intersections, but there is no such agreement on how intersections should be studied in practice. This thesis supports the fundamental argument of intersectionality that "social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands,"[57] and in its analysis will therefore pay attention to how different categories such as gender, race, and class work together.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Returning to Scott, the matrix of four elements as mentioned in her 1986 article (culturally available symbols, normative concepts that provide interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, politics and social organization, and subjective identity) can be used as a framework

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[51] Ange-Marie Hancock, "Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm", *Politics and Gender* 3:2 (2007) 203-213.
[52] Bilge, "Recent Feminist Outlooks", 60.
[53] Ibidem, 59.
[54] Ibidem, 61.
[55] Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality", *Feminist Review* 89 (2008), 2.
[56] Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality", 4.
[57] Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, "Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality", *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5:3 (2004), 76.

for gender analysis. Scott points out that it is important to pay attention to all four, as they are interconnected. An analysis incorporating these four elements abstains from historical reductionism by scrutinizing historically contingent symbols and normative concepts. Additionally, an analysis gains salience from its connection to broader issues and insights into social constructions and divisions of power in general; as Scott argues, in this approach "gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself."[58] It is important to note that Scott did not set out to write a methodological treatise for gender analyses.[59] It is written more in the spirit of asking questions which contest presuppositions that had previously been taken for granted; it is a way to guide one to ask questions which will lead to new ways of thinking.[60] This exploratory attitude is especially pertinent when investigating gender, as "gender is precisely that which is being produced and organized over time, differently and differentially, and this ongoing production and mode of differentiation has to be understood as part of the very operation of power."[61] In this thesis the matrix will be applied to a literary text instead of actual history, and will serve more as a flexible interpretative tool to asking relevant questions rather than a rigid grid through which to read the texts. The aim is to trace gender through interplay between the elements of the matrix, rather than making every scene fit within the matrix.

Scott's theory has also garnered criticism, for example from women's historian Judith Bennett, who argued that Scott's theory does not leave any space for the experience of women themselves and their material reality.[62] She writes that:

> The hard lives of women of the past; the material forces that shaped and constrained women's activities; the ways that women coped with challenges and obstacles – all these things can too easily disappear from a history of gender as meaning.[63]

Though a just caution, a Scottian analysis need not necessarily obscure the very real challenges of women in history. One can argue that the struggles women face are not prior to cultural and political formations, but are rather shaped by these. As such, an analysis of the meanings created and enforced by these formations should also include the experiences of the

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[58] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", 1069.
[59] Joan W. Scott, "Unanswered Questions", *The American Historical Review* 113:5 (2008), 1423.
[60] Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed, "Introduction" in: *Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's Critical Feminism* (Bloomington 2011) ed. Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed, 3.
[61] Butler & Weed, "Introduction", 3.
[62] Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender'", 1347.
[63] Judith Bennett, "Feminism and History", *Gender and History* 1:3 (1989) 258.

subject of these forces, and more particularly, how they influence and shape their lives. Since this thesis deals with fictional women rather than real ones, there is little danger of their material reality being dismissed in any case. Another pitfall of Scott's theory is that its focus on difference can obscure those instances where there is no difference between genders, which are important as well.[64] Linda Gordon put this flaw even more strongly, writing that Scott's perspective is "marked by the otherness and absolute silencing of women".[65] In a response Scott writes that Gordon's rejection is a rejection of the poststructuralist theory it is based on, and "rhetorically reduces analyses of cognitive processes to apolitical 'psychoanalytic or linguistic concerns' (in opposition to an undefined, but unquestionably superior, 'social and political theory') and conflates signification (the way humans construct and express meaning) with 'language'."[66] Gordon was not the only one who rejects this linguistic approach, and much critical commentary came from historians who questioned the linguistic turn.[67]

I propose to use Scott's four dimensions as a starting point to analyze two penny romances written in the nineteenth century, not only to uncover what the working class read,[68] but also to gain insights in how these cheap fictions influenced or reinforced power relationships, which I would argue following Scott are thoroughly intertwined with notions of gender. Rather than taking a gender dichotomy of male/female as a starting point, I will analyze whether and how gendered distinctions are expressed in the two romance stories – an approach Scott has argued for in her later articles.[69] From the assumption that "gender as a category never works alone"[70] and taking into account that there are many different ways in which power relations come to be, as argued by intersectional approaches, I will also take other categories of difference into account, most notably class and race. As the historiography, which will be discussed below, points out, class is an important factor of difference in nineteenth-century England, and as such should not be neglected in an analysis of power structures in a nineteenth-century text. Additionally, as literary theorist Edward Said has famously argued in *Orientalism* (1978), notions of race and exclusion pervade English literature in the nineteenth century. I do not wish to follow Said's polarizing distinction

[64] Marc W. Steinberg, "The Re-Making of the English Working Class?", *Theory and Society* 20:2 (1991), 185.
[65] Linda Gordon, "Response to Scott", *Signs* 15:4 (1990), 852.
[66] Joan W. Scott, "Response to Gordon", *Signs* 15:4 (1990), 859.
[67] Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender'", 1348.
[68] This is the focus for works such as Fraser et al.,*Gender and the Victorian Periodical,* and Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven 2002).
[69] Such as Scott, "Unanswered Questions", and "Gender: Still a Usefull Category of Analysis?".
[70] Butler & Weed, "Introduction", 4.

between the West and the Other, but will consider if and how race plays a role in the power matrix together with gender and class in the two stories. I will treat these two texts not as representative of how power is distributed in English society at the end of the 1830s and the beginning of the 1840s, but as part of a discourse on power hierarchies and gender distinctions. As such, the two case studies gives insight into one way in which power and gender work – this does not mean this is the only possible reading, nor that it was necessarily the dominant way in which nineteenth-century readers would interpret the texts. This would require research into the reader's reception of the stories, while this thesis limits itself to the texts themselves.

The two texts that are studied are fictional, and as such do not necessarily represent "how things were", but I argue that they incorporate cultural symbols and meanings from the cultural vocabulary of its time. The analysis will therefore move between the texts themselves and their place in the time and place they were written in. Useful in tracking down which cultural symbols are referred to in the texts is historian Walter Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (1957). This book attempts to map the often contradictory "general ideas and attitudes about life" in the Victorian period, focusing mainly on middle-class and upper-class circles.[71] In this thesis Houghton's book will be used mainly as reference work on dominant discourses in Victorian society, keeping in mind that revisions on the attitudes on particular groups have been published since. To narrow down what this analysis can add to the extensive scholarship on Victorian society and nineteenth-century gender conceptions in England in particular, I will now turn to what has already been written on the subject and how my thesis fits within the field.

[71] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven 1985), xiii.

CHAPTER 2: GENDER, CLASS, AND READING CULTURE IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century saw far-reaching changes affect the lives of large groups of people. Historian Eric Hobsbawm characterizes the early nineteenth century (the period between 1789 and 1848 to be precise) as the "age of revolutions". Europe, he argues, saw two major overturns: the French revolution, and the industrial (British) revolution.[72] There has been much debate among historians whether the industrial revolution should indeed be called a revolution, and if so, when exactly did it happen? Questions of nomenclature and exact timing aside, scholars agree that English society saw a large-scale overhaul at the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. Hobsbawm argues that what was exceptional about the industrial revolution, is that "for the first time in human history, the shackles were taken off the productive power of human societies, which henceforth became capable of the constant, rapid and up to the present limitless multiplication of men, goods and services."[73] Under the influence of the Enlightenment, which promoted rationality, secularism, and progressive individualism, an industrial capitalist society took shape.[74] The industrialization did not only have consequences in economic terms, it also thoroughly changed the way people lived. While English society was still largely rural at the end of the eighteenth century, by 1851 the urban population outnumbered that of the countryside.[75] The growing cities, fuelled by factories, saw the formation of the English working class. As we shall see, the combination of a changing (and increasingly literate) public with technological advances influenced cultural expressions – in this case, literature.

The penny magazine, a cheap periodical that saw its birth, peak, and decline within the nineteenth century, is a literary artefact closely intertwined with its cultural and historical context. If we say that a story was published in a penny magazine, what does that mean? What function did these periodicals have in English society? How, where, why, and by whom where they read? All these questions are pertinent when analyzing texts taken from these magazines.

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[72] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London 1962), 14.
[73] Ibidem, 43.
[74] Ibidem, 34-35.
[75] Ibidem, 23.

Though there might not be much information on how particular texts were read,[76] it does show what place these kinds of texts took in society and public discourse. In this chapter I will answer these questions by exploring the literary climate of the early nineteenth century, in particular the popular, or "lower" literature – it is not what the cultural elite read, but what the average literate working man or woman read that is of interest here. As becomes clear from these distinctions, class is of import in understanding the penny periodical in its cultural context. Therefore I will also briefly discuss what is meant by the term "working class," and who constitutes this collective. This definition is important because of the inherent paradox of cheap periodicals: though they are almost invariably published by middle-class publishers, they are consciously and explicitly written for and marketed to a working-class reading public. This class consciousness that underlies the production of the works deserves attention in order to understand the references to class that are made within the narratives. Apart from class, it has been recently argued that gender is also constitutive to the production of the periodical, an argument which I will also pay attention to. The goal of this chapter is to place the two texts that will be analyzed in-depth in the following chapters within the history of the penny magazine. It will show why periodicals in general and these two stories in particular deserve scholarly attention, following from the argument that they take an important place in public discourse and function as both an expression of conflicting ideologies of gender and class as well as propagating them.

PENNY PRESSES: CHEAP LITERATURE FOR THE MASSES

Before discussing what has been written about gender and Victorian periodicals in the nineteenth century, it is relevant to consider a brief outline of the scholarship conducted on Victorian periodicals in general and their place within the broader literary studies. As pointed out in the introduction, periodicals have not received the same amount of scholarly attention as the novel has.[77] In the following an overview will be given of what has been written about periodicals, but first it is important to briefly review the terms and definitions. "Periodicals" are the umbrella term for all publications that would appear periodically. In the Victorian era magazines were sometimes specialized, but could also publish an eclectic combination of news, fiction, poetry, didactic or opinion pieces. These publications ranged from the very

[76] A book that shifts the focus to reader's reception of the nineteenth-century working classes is Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven 2002).
[77] An oversight noted by Springhall in " 'A Life Story for the People'?", among others.

cheap (called "penny magazines" or "penny presses" because one copy would cost just a penny) to more elaborate publications meant for the well-to-do. The penny magazines would often contain serialized fiction, most often simply referred to as "serials"; a story would be published one chapter at a time periodically. If a serial was highly successful, it could be collected into a single volume after its run had ended. The cheap serials that were the primary literature of the literate poor were sometimes called "penny dreadfuls" colloquially after their often sensational and gory content.[78] As John Springhall points out, the term "penny dreadful" in Victorian studies is somewhat misleading in that it lumps different publications meant for different reading publics together. To avoid confusion of terms, I will follow Springhall's distinctions of terminology. He proposes to reserve the term "penny bloods" for the early serials aimed at an adult readership and which often incorporated supernatural or other Gothic elements into their narratives from the 1830 and 1840s, mainly published by publisher Edward Lloyd, while using "penny dreadfuls" for the magazines published for a youthful audience since the 1850s.[79] This thesis therefore studies penny bloods, as both *Ela, the Outcast* and *Ada, the Betrayed* are published around 1840, and were written for an adult reading public.

Books at the start of the eighteenth century were expensive. The industry surrounding the written word was concentrated in London, where newspapers, magazines, and books were written, printed, and distributed.[80] In 1808 more than forty magazines were published regularly in London, often revolving around a specific subject such as law or mineralogy.[81] Under the influence of cheaper printing technologies such as machine-made paper and the rotary steam press, the cost of printing dropped significantly.[82] Additionally, though London's position as the news capital had always been strong because of its road system and post office mail coaches, the rail network further bolstered this position.[83] Thirdly, as will be discussed more in-depth below, literacy increased throughout society, opening up a larger market for literature.[84] These developments gave rise to new forms of writing and publishing, and in the 1820s the number of monthly journals rapidly increased. To illustrate this printing boom, one can look at the amount of newspapers and journals printed at different points of time. While the London guide to newspapers and journals listed eighty-eight different ones in 1808, by

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[78] Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature*, 13.
[79] Springhall, " 'A Life Story for the People'?" 226-227.
[80] Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century. A Human Awful Wonder of God.* (London 2008), 225.
[81] White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, 226.
[82] Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature*, 11.
[83] White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, 226-227.
[84] Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 5.

1826 this amount had been doubled. The *Penny Magazine,* a weekly established in 1832 reached a circulation of 150,000. These monthly journals combined essays and reviews on a broad number of topics, including politics and science, alongside serialized fiction. In the 1840s, a survey mentioned by historian James Eli Adams reported over twenty cheap magazines focusing solely on fiction circulated in London.[85] These magazines all cost less than a twopence, most of them even less than a penny.

The most comprehensive account of penny magazines, the periodicals costing around a penny, has been written by James. In *Fiction for the Working Man* (1974), he provides a historiography of cheap periodicals that were read by the working classes in Victorian England between 1830 and 1850. In this book he addresses several important topics, including how the periodicals were produced, by whom, how they were circulated, what sort of writing they contained, how and where they were read by which groups of people. Drawing on a great wealth of primary texts, his book provides a fantastic starting point for any analysis of penny magazines. An issue central to James's book is defining who exactly the "working class" entails. He argues, however that, in the first half of the nineteenth century

> the problem is less acute than it would be even ten years later, for the working classes were closely unified by political and class feeling, and poverty meant that the price of literature largely determined the class of the reader, the poor buying the penny part, the middle classes feeling cheap literature had a social stigma.[86]

James seems to define "class" in the tradition of E.P. Thompson, who in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966) describes class as something that is not a "structure" or even a "category", but as something that is created by humans and is expressed in human relationships.[87] According to Thompson the English working class was formed primarily at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, as "most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers."[88] Thompson studies the working class from an explicitly Marxist perspective, seeking to uncover how workers "constructed a consciousness of their own interests as opposed to the interests of those who sought to dominate them."[89] This class-

[85] Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature*, 11.
[86] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, xvii.
[87] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9.
[88] Ibidem, 11.
[89] Steinberg, "The Re-Making of the English Working Class?", 174.

consciousness is closely related to penny fiction, as the quote from James alludes to. Penny papers were consumed almost exclusively by the working class, as it was seen as inferior by the middle classes, and therefore plays an important role in the construction and perpetuation of working class reading culture and ultimately working-class identity, as "working class communities (…) had their own distinct culture and literature."[90] From the perspective of class difference, the periodical poses an interesting issue: if penny presses contribute to a working class self-consciousness of working-class interests, how should we then interpret the fact that they are published by middle-class publishers, who had different and maybe even oppositional interests?

James studies the periodicals from a sociological perspective, "with the social, economic, and historical background always in mind, and with a strict attention to chronology."[91] In the article "Open and Closed: the Periodical as a Publishing Genre" Margaret Beetham takes a literary approach and focuses on the paradox inherent in the periodical: on one hand a single issue has a short shelf-life, but on the other, periodicals as a genre were highly influential and pervasive.[92] She writes that the periodical as a publishing genre "emerged from the 19th century as the characteristic modern form of print, immensely prolific and various and playing a central role (…) in intellectual, literary and political history".[93] She is concerned with the physical artifact of the periodical, arguing that the "aspects of texture, size and weight (…) are so important to what a periodical means."[94] However, historians are posed with an issue inherent to the periodicals, which is that they were perishable. They were printed on cheap paper, which does not stand the test of time well, and often the paper was reused after the magazine was read. Only a small fraction of the original issues published in the nineteenth century have been preserved in archives or libraries. Some of the successful stories have been collected into a single volume which were made of higher quality paper and therefore sturdier and more resilient for the passing of time. For a historian, as Beetham points out, the original form of the magazine, including for example the advertisements which were omitted in collections, are important as well. Sadly it is not always possible to acquire the originals. In the case of the two serials analyzed in this thesis, it indeed proved impossible to retrieve the original magazines. It takes the reprinted

[90] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 1.
[91] Ibidem, xv.
[92] Margaret Beetham, "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 22:3 (1989) 96.
[93] Beetham, "Open and Closed", 96.
[94] Ibidem.

and collected versions as its source material, aware of the limitations these sources pose. It means that the stories can only be analyzed for content, and not how they might have interacted with surrounding advertisements, for example. This need not be an issue for the aim of this thesis though, which takes the fiction text itself as its subject, seeing the text as a field for the production of discourse.[95]

THE WORKING CLASS READING PUBLIC

To what extent did the lower classes have access to publications? Historian Jerry White writes that though the prices of these magazines were high at the start of the nineteenth century because of the expense of stamps, paper, and other duties, workers had access to them in pubs and coffee shops, or could hire daily newspapers by the hour from news vendors.[96] By the 1820s, there were twenty-eight circulating libraries in London, and several "reading rooms" and "newspaper rooms", all places where those with less disposable income could read newspapers and periodicals. In the 1830s, middle-class campaigners protested against the "newspaper stamp", a tax that made newspaper too expensive for individual households to purchase. They saw this as a tax "on knowledge as a block on reform and education."[97] Their war against the newspaper stamp was successful, as its price was reduced to a penny in 1836. This resulted in a further increase of publication output: by 1844 seventy-nine newspapers, around sixty weekly periodicals and more than two-hundred monthly periodicals were published in London. Many of these were cheap enough to be within reach of those of modest means, and the continuing popularity of reading rooms ensured access to reading material for the literate throughout London society. It should also be noted that literacy in the nineteenth century was more widespread than is commonly assumed, (though it was not until 1870 that literacy education was made compulsory under the Forster's Education Act) since the early eighteenth century major educational movements strove to teach children and adults to read.[98] Under the influence of many different privately funded projects including reading and discussion groups connected to churches, private schools, evening classes, or even spontaneously formed lower-class gatherings.[99] Those who could read would also read aloud

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[95] This approach is similar to the one outlined by Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 16.
[96] All numbers of publications in this paragraph are from White, *London in the Ninteenth Century*, 226-230.
[97] White, *London in the Nineteenth Century*, 229.
[98] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 2.
[99] Ibidem, 4-5.

to those who could not.[100] Overall, we might conclude with Louis James that the "workers wished to read and would find means to do so."[101] A weakness in James' book is that it does not incorporate differences in reading habits and expectations that might exist between men and women.[102] In the following gender will be added to the division of class outlined above.

WOMEN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

What position did women take in nineteenth-century society? In the introduction, Amanda Vickery's "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?" was introduced. She writes that the dominant way of looking at the changing role of women in English society has been with the framework of the "separate spheres". This framework distinguishes a polarity between the home and the rest of the world. Put roughly, the "domestic sphere" is thought of as female, and its counterpart, the public sphere as male. A key work in this tradition is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes* (1987). They argue that class and gender are two categories that always work together, and that, influenced by Evangelical religious thought, separate spheres for men and women shaped the nineteenth-century social world.[103] The spheres are thought of to organize gender relationships between men and women, implying a hierarchy and effectively restraining women to the enclosure of the home, preventing them from participating in the public sphere. Though this distinction is centuries old, Vickery argues, "the systematic use of 'separate spheres' as *the* organizing concept in the history of middle-class women is of more recent vintage"[104] – it became thus in the hands of feminist historians in the 1960s. Throughout her essay, Vickery challenges the separation of spheres as the determining conceptualization of woman's role in the nineteenth century.

The idea of separate spheres is closely linked to class. As Vickery writes, after the 1950s, "The rise of the ideology of domesticity was linked (…) to the emergence of middle-class cultural identity. It was separate gender spheres which allegedly put the middle in the middle-class."[105] Problematic about the separate spheres framework is that it is based on three

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[100] It is of course hard to measure how often this occurred, but the account of a factory worker mentioned in James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 9, who was being paid by his fellow workers to read aloud while they worked is illustrative to the phenomenon.
[101] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 9.
[102] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford 1993), 33.
[103] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850.* (London 1987), 450.
[104] Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?", 383.
[105] Ibidem, 387.

sources: didactic literature, the feminist debate in the nineteenth century, and post-Victorian complaints.[106] However, there is little evidence that these prescriptive rules were truly *enforced* in Victorian society. As Vickery writes, "the extent to which shifts in public morality actually stripped women of important powers and freedoms is (…) obscure."[107] As such, though the language of the spheres was pervasive and is relevant to involve in any analysis of the role of women in nineteenth-century England, its importance should not be overestimated. Seeing the separation of spheres as constitutive of women's lives obscures the way women could shape their own lives in spite of or even using the separation rhetoric. Historian Mary Poovey takes a middle position in the separate spheres debate; in *Uneven Developments* (1988), she argues that "both men and women were subject at midcentury to the constraints imposed by the binary organization of difference and the foregrounding of sexual nature."[108] The separate spheres ideology did inform social institutions, she writes, but it should also be noted that the ideological formation was "uneven," by which she means that the dominant middle-class ideology "was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations."[109] She argues that the supposed appropriate spheres informed institutional practices such as a division of labor based on sexual difference and unequal economic and political rights,[110] and therefore should not be dismissed, but also reminds us that the framework is continually being reconstructed and revised rather than being a monolithical and irrefutable system.

An interesting alternative point of view on the sphere framework is presented by Ina Ferris in the book *Rewriting the Victorians* (1992). In a chapter on the rhetoric of gender in nineteenth-century novels and critical discourse, Ferris analyzes a review written by Richard Hilt Hutton in 1858 as a representative mid-nineteenth-century text. Rather than from the domestic/public sphere paradigm, which is both a spacial and metaphorical organizational concept, Hutton makes a distinction of surface and depth.[111] Women only have access to surficial existence, the daily and the "visible". Women as writers, according to Hutton, are

[106] Ibidem, 389.
[107] Ibidem, 398.
[108] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago 2009), 22.
[109] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 3.
[110] Ibidem, 8-9.
[111] Ina Ferris, "From trope to code: the novel and the rhetoric of gender in nineteenth-century critical discourse", in: *Rewriting the Victorians. Theory, history, and the politics of gender*, ed. Linda M. Shires (New York 1992), 27-28.

"inevitably – and inherently – simply superficial"[112], while men "are linked to the freedom of space, able to leave the temporal world at will (…) to discern underlying laws and systems."[113] This freedom of movement is a metaphorical one, linked to ideas on "true" creativity and the literary sphere. Hutton concerns himself with the novel, which in itself resists being incorporated into the domestic/public framework; novels are typically read in the domestic space of the home, and function within the public sphere and critical discourse at the same time. He makes an inherent and immutable distinction between men and women in a closed system, but one which does not fully overlap with the separate spheres as outlined by Vickery. The domestic/public distinction is one of place and role – where men and women "belong". The surface/depth framework on the other hand is one of experience – men and women experience the world in fundamentally different ways, which then have consequences for what they can and cannot do (or write). Hutton's text, as presented by Ferris, can be seen as an argument for Vickery's critique on the separate spheres. Ideas on the domestic and public do function in Hutton's discourse, but his argument cannot be reduced to the domestic/public dichotomy without losing its nuances.

If domestic/public sphere framework is to be taken as integral to middle-class life – an assumption that should not be made uncritically, as illustrated above – where does that leave the position of working class gender roles? Women, as well as men, worked in the developing factories. Women made a cheap working force, and were employed in for example the textile industry.[114] Because male wages were low under the population boom, women and children would work to provide for the family.[115] It would be restrictive to see women's work only in the light of supporting a family, however. As Poovey writes, the 1851 Census reported that "42 percent of the women between the ages of twenty and forty were unmarried and that two million out of Britain's six million women were self-supporting."[116] Leading up to the mid-century mark, women participated extensively in the labor market, but towards the end of the nineteenth century they increasingly became limited to the domestic sphere. Especially married women concentrated solely on domestic duties: "1911, 90 per cent of wives were not engaged in paid employment, compared with only one-quarter in 1851."[117] Though it is

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[112] Ferris, "From trope to code", 28.
[113] Ibidem, 27.
[114] Neil Raven, "A 'humbler, industrious class of female'. Women's employment and industry in the small towns of southern England, c. 1790-1840" in: *Women, Work and Wages in England, 1600-1850*, eds: Penelope Lane, Neil Raven, K.D.M. Snell (Suffolk 2004), 176-177.
[115] Raven, "A 'humbler, industrious class of female'", 181.
[116] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 4.
[117] Joanna Bourke, "Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914", *Past & Present* 143 (1994), 168.

arguable whether this change from working in factories to domestic work is an advantageous one or not, it can thus be argued that the middle-class ideology of gender roles divided by spheres trickled down into the working-class ideology towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1840s, the time frame of this thesis, that ideology might have already been present as well, but it certainly was not the lived experience of the majority of working class women.

Mindful of this discussion I will not take the separate spheres framework for granted, but rather will analyze what distinctions are brought to the fore in the two stories. Do they present a system of what is considered male and female, either in terms of freedom of space, role, or experience? Does gender dictate one's experience (such as it does for Hutton) and/or does gender follow from ones role (and is therefore "performative")? Poovey argues ideology is experienced differently depending on one's social position, depending on class or race, for example;[118] do differences in class and/or race produce different gendered ideological formations in these texts? To answer these questions, I will be mindful of Scott's matrix of perceived differences between the sexes. This leads to questions such as, what culturally available symbols are invoked in the texts and what meanings do they deploy? How are social relationships organized within the texts? And how are identities of the characters constructed in relation to gender?

GENDER AND THE PERIODICAL

In the introduction to *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (2003), the authors write that "ideologies of gender and class were always connected, always competing and always under construction in writing for the periodicals."[119] So far we have seen how class and periodicals intersect, but what role does gender play in this? In the essays that follow the introduction, different aspects of gender and the periodicals are explored spanning the 1830s and 1900s. In succession, they address gender tensions in the writing subject, the gendered reader and editorship, before broadening the scope to include cultural imperialism and the press in general. One of their core goals is uncovering how journalism in the nineteenth century was a gendered practice.[120] They argue that writing for the periodicals had implications of gender, as well as all the other elements that were of import for the publication process. A perquisite of

[118] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 3.
[119] Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 1.
[120] Ibidem, 11.

their mission is that they help uncover the role of women in publishing, which has largely been forgotten or obscured. They write that "women were active players in many aspects of periodical production throughout the century, often using journalism to build or even finance their careers as novelists, poets, critics, artists, and historians."[121] This work follows in the footsteps of the archival that has been done for example in *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art* (1992) which, amongst other intentions, attempts to recover the work by women writers and artists which have previously been ignored or unacknowledged.[122]

In *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* the periodical is analyzed as a site where conflicting ideologies collide.[123] The essays focus on female authors and editorship, and the gender implications of fashion magazines and other pieces of journalism that were written with a clearly gendered audience, such as those dealing with the "Politics of Home".[124] An interesting chapter is on the "gendered reader". The relationship between the periodical and its readership is a close one, as only those periodicals that are read are ensured a continuing existence. The reading public that is addressed in editorials, letters' pages and advertisements, the authors argue, are invariably gendered.[125] The familiar image of a reader was a female, a "passive, languorous body displaying itself on a sofa and neglecting domestic duties as it "devoured" the texts that fed its romantic and sexual fantasies."[126] Images such as these, the authors of *Gender and the Periodical* argue, express the anxieties surrounding the idea of the female reader. An important characteristic of much Victorian literature is that it attempts to police its reading public, strengthening certain values or instilling difference, alternatingly addressing specific audiences.[127] As historian Kate Flint has argued, the idea of the "female reader" (or "the woman reader") had consequences for many aspects relating to literature, including composition, distribution and marketing.[128] An interesting interaction between the gendering of the reader and the condition of modernity was shaped in the first half of the nineteenth century.[129] Middle-class women had many different (domestic) roles, resulting them to have only short stretches of time in which they could read. It stands to reason that

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[121] Ibidem, 14.
[122] Anthony H. Harrison and Beverly Taylor (eds), *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art* (DeKalb 1992), xii.
[123] Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 11.
[124] The "Politics of Home" in this sense are associated with domestic government and gendered female. See "Gender and the 'Politics of Home'" in Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 100-120.
[125] Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 48.
[126] Ferris, "From trope to code", 18.
[127] Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 49.
[128] Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 13.
[129] Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 52-53.

they would turn to forms of literature that accommodate such a schedule, in other words, stories and articles that are relatively short. This was interpreted quite differently by some contemporary commentators, for whom

> a scatter-brained preference for shallow and inconsequential snippets, an inability to concentrate on anything of weight and substance, was fundamental to female pathology, and was infecting and emasculating modern culture, as exemplified by the huge expansion and regrettable intellectual decline of periodical literature, with disastrous effects on the reading habits of the nation.[130]

While this example is a rather explicit in its misogyny, it illustrates how gendered arguments functioned in critical discourse. As we already saw in the previous chapter that women were associated with the superficial and a lack of (critical) depth, the argument can also be looked at reversely, namely in that readers of what by critics is deemed superficial literature are gendered as female. This is an important point to keep in mind when speaking of the reading public of the two stories covered in this thesis. It is the penny reader in general that is gendered female by contemporaries – that does not mean that these stories were necessarily read by women exclusively or even predominantly. It is crucial to keep a critical distance of these discourses and not unwittingly accept them at face value.

Connected to this point is that there is therefore a tension between the supposed audience and the actual audience of these periodicals. A useful concept in teasing apart this tension is that of the implied reader. Developed by German literary scholar Wolfgang Iser, the implied reader is an abstraction of the signals and clues within a text that guide the reader.[131] Thinking back to the gender matrix by Joan Scott from the previous chapter, an indication of the implied reader can be formed by considering the first two points of the matrix: the culturally available symbols a text uses, and more importantly, the specific meanings these symbols are given in the narrative. The implied reader as a tool for interpretation provides an in-between for the text and the actual audience, reminding us that the ideologies that are conveyed by the text need not be interpreted in that way by its actual readers, and that the audience that is presupposed by the text need not be identical to its actual audience.

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[130] Ibidem, 53.

[131] Luc Herman & Bart Vervaeck, *Vertelduivels. Handboek verhaalanalyse* (Antwerpen 2009), 28.

LLOYD’S SENSATIONAL ROMANCE STORIES

What the collection of essays on gender and the periodical does not cover is an analysis of fiction. Fiction, however, played a significant role in the periodicals of the nineteenth century. Louis James writes that after an initial surge in non-fiction and self-improvement literature in the 1830s, fiction and sensational stories became the most popular content of the periodicals in the 1840s.[132] In particular, it was the “domestic story” or “domestic romance” that “lies at the heart of almost all the penny-issue fiction published during the 1840s”.[133] Defining what a domestic story entails proves to be difficult, as the word seems to be applied to a wide diversity of stories. James argues:

> The term denotes not so much a particular subject, as an approach to the subject. G.D. Pitt defined a domestic romance when he declared ‘the events are brought home to the evidence of our senses, as consonant with scenes of real life.’[134]

Part of a wider development in nineteenth-century literature, the domestic stories in the penny magazines aimed to show “life as it is”. The domestic romance, in its extension, then aspires to show romance as it is, in order to fit with the sentiment of the contemporary readers.

At the end of the 1830s Lloyd’s serializations moved away from what James calls “old romances” to satisfy the tastes of the new town readers. These would include a more “contemporary idiom” which would suit the tastes and lives of workers more. This is part of the development that also gave rise to the domestic romance mentioned above, which was tailored to contemporary tastes as well. One of the three serializations in this new style is *Ela, the Outcast*, written by his close associate Thomas Peckett Prest. Lloyd’s turn to fiction was part of a larger turn to the fiction serials over political and scientific content – and the proportion of fiction magazines would only increase in the 1840s.[135] Lloyd paid his writers a small sum per issue: “when a writer was established as a reliable contributor, Lloyd issued him with specially lined paper, which, covered with average-sized writing, would constitute one penny issue.”[136] This format has consequences for how the stories themselves are written.

[132] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 25.
[133] Ibidem, 114.
[134] Ibidem, 114.
[135] Ibidem, 31.
[136] Ibidem, 37.

Many penny romances are rife with dialogue and repetition, to the point where many conversations are essentially circular. Additionally to being convenient for the writers, James points out that the "limited vocabulary and range of plot in these novels catered for a partially educated mentality."[137] The repetitiveness makes the stories easy to follow even for those with limited reading experience. It is important to note that the romances of Edward Lloyd take a different shape than twenty-first century readers might associate with "romance". While revolving around the notion of romantic love, the serials at Lloyd's are heavily influenced by Gothic literature, incorporating elements of the supernatural and horror. Murder and intrigue are part and parcel in these stories, as we shall see in both *Ela* and *Ada*. The romantic plot is present throughout the story, but the sensational content takes precedence, romantic interactions happening mostly "off-screen".

These characteristics make the domestic romance story a fitting subject for an analysis from a gender perspective. First of all, domestic romances were highly popular and widely read at a certain historical time and place, and therefore embedded within that historical specificity. Second, the subject of the domestic romances is in essence the woman's love,[138] and gives expression to ideas on what it means to be female and male. Third, following Harrison and Taylor I would argue that "literature participates in the larger ideological currents of the society that produces it – and literature in turn produces new ideologies."[139] Within the domestic romance different cultural ideologies can be expressed and be in conflict with each other, similarly as Springhall has shown this to be the case for class ideologies in periodicals from the 1860s onwards. By applying theories from gender studies, and analyzing how concepts of femininity, masculinity, and agency are represented in domestic romances, those conflicting ideologies can be articulated.

Victorian periodicals have received little academic interest, and so far even less has been written about periodicals and gender or domestic romances. Apart from the fact that for a long time academics were more interested in "high" culture rather than popular culture, romances and sensational stories especially have for a long time not been the subject of critical scrutiny. A landmark study that took romance novels and its readers seriously is literary scholar's Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984). Combining textual analysis with ethnography, Radway showed that romance novels, although in subject seeming to instill the patriarchal dominant discourse of heterosexual love being of key importance in a woman's

[137] Ibidem, 38.
[138] Ibidem, 115.
[139] Taylor and Harrison, *Gender and Discourse*, xi.

life, they can also be used in oppositional ways by their woman readers.[140] Rather than seeing the romantic plot as being essentially instilling patriarchal values, this thesis is concerned with how these texts can be read as site of conflicting ideologies, reflecting Victorian society in that there is no one definitive "symbolic economy" as it is always under construction, as argued by Poovey.[141]

Therefore I propose to conduct a case study of two domestic romances: *Ela, the Outcast: or, the Gipsy of Rosemary Dell* (1839) by Thomas Peckett Prest and *Ada, the Betrayed* (1845) by L.M. Rymer. *Ela, the Outcast* was "one of Lloyd's bestselling novels which was still reprinting in 1856"[142], and Ada the "most famous of penny-issue fiction heroines."[143] These two stories make a good case study because both these romances were successful, are roughly from the same period, were written for a working-class readership, and both feature a female heroine. Both were published by Edward Lloyd, who became famous for publishing fiction specifically written for a working-class reading public.[144] Thus keeping in mind what place these stories took in Victorian society, I will now turn to the two serials and analyze them using the gender theory.

[140] Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 18-19.
[141] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 3.
[142] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, 29.
[143] Ibidem, 130.
[144] Ibidem, 28.

CHAPTER 3: ELA, THE OUTCAST

In the first two chapters gender theory and the intersection between gender, class, and the periodical have been discussed. In this chapter the theoretical framework previously outlined will be applied to *Ela, the Outcast*, written by Thomas Peckett Prest. The work is serialized in 104 weekly installments over the span of two years, approximately around 1839-1841. As touched on before, it was a highly successful publication. The British Library reports that the collected edition of this early penny blood in its 18th edition garnered a weekly sale of 30,000 copies.[145] Price One Penny, a peer-reviewed database dedicated to cataloguing penny fictions, mentions the text plagiarizing *The Gipsey Girl; or, the heir of Hazel Dell* by Hannah Maria Jones, a novel by Hannah Maria Jones from 1836.[146] While it would be interesting to see in what ways Prest's adaptation differs from Jones's, this thesis will limit itself to the version by Prest.

Ela, the Outcast features the story of Ela Beranzio, a woman who through several hardships (starting by being seduced and becoming pregnant by the villainous Edward Wallingford) joins a group of gypsies. Through a long, rambling plot containing murders, intrigue, and general mayhem – earning this story the distinction of penny blood[147] – Ela and her illegitimate child Fanny reclaim their place in society. In bound form the story spans over eight-hundred pages, making it impossible to relate all plot points in a succinct manner here. For the purpose of this thesis, I will therefore limit my analysis to a few key scenes in which ideas on gender are particularly at the surface of the text, a method outlined in the introduction. This chapter is structured by relating these scenes to three broader topics, as signaled in the titles of the subsections: separate spheres, the gender binary, and gendered power relationships.

[145] The British Library. Penny dreadful, Ela the Outcast. Retrieved 26-06-2016. http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/penny-dreadful-ela-the-outcast

[146] Price One Penny. Ela, the Outcast. Retrieved 26-06-2016. http://www.priceonepenny.info/database/show_title.php?work_id=79 Possible plagiarization is also mentioned by Edward Lloyd. Resources. Retrieved 26-06-2016. http://www.edwardlloyd.org/resources.htm

[147] Marjolein Platjee. A Matter of Firsts: The First Penny Blood. Retrieved 26-06-2016. www.marjoleinplatjee.com/research-questions/first-entry/

THE GENDER BINARY: GENDER TRANSGRESSION AND THE MOTIF OF THE WITCH

A key feature of Joan Scott's work is questioning the gender binary.[148] A gender analysis should not take the gender binary for granted, but rather deconstruct how a binary comes to be, or, whether it is actually a binary that is at work. In order to discover how gender relations pervade the text of *Ela, the Outcast*, it is useful to see how sexual difference is expressed in the text. Sexual difference in this sense is not merely a summation of characteristics of men and women, but rather looks at how categories such as "men" and "women" are produced by the text. One scene in which a natural difference between men and women is explicitly referred to occurs in the second chapter. A closer look at this scene, especially paying attention to those cultural symbols which are taken for granted, will provide insight in how perceived differences between the sexes become self-evident.

All chapters are prefaced by a few lines of poetry or an excerpt from a play. The second chapter, which principally features Mr. Wallingford and a servant named Andrew, is prefaced by lines taken from the first act of Macbeth. It says: "Though should'st be woman, / Yet thy beard forbid'st me to interpret thou art so!". In Shakespeare this speech is uttered by Banquo at the sight of the three witches. The chapter in *Ela* is highly inspired by this scene from Shakespeare, as Mr. Wallingford meets a witch in the woods, prophesizes that "Sorrow and pain shall triumphant lord / O'er the proud house of Wallingford!".[149] From a gender perspective, the figure of the witch gives clues to how gender is naturalized into sex, which involves the essentialization of biological difference.

The witch is immediately introduced as a woman.[150] As she is subsequently described, she is attributed several conventionally feminine features, such as a dress, with one exception – her beard:

> Her cheek bones were high, her hair black and matted; her skin brown and shriveled, and upon her chin grew a grizly [sic] beard. She wore a dirty dark dress, (…) and her legs and feet were entirely naked.

[148] Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", 1065.
[149] Thomas Peckett Prest, *Ela, the Outcast; or, The Gipsy of Rosemary Dell* (London 1843), 10.
[150] "The object upon which the eyes of Mr. Wallingford, and the terrified Andrew rested, as the tall and bony figure of an old woman, leaning upon the ruined trunk of a tree." Prest, *Ela*, 9.

> In fact, her whole appearance had more the character of the hideous creation of a disordered-imagination, than a thing of life and reality.[151]

Her appearance is unkempt and wild – bare legs and feet, hair loose and unbrushed – but it is the detail of the beard that turns her from a beggar or otherwise unfortunate person, to a witch. In Scottian terms, the culturally available symbol that is employed is that of the witch as a foreboding figure of folklore. While the gendering of the cultural symbol of the witch is interesting as well, I will focus more on how it is employed in this text, especially in relation to the naturalization of the sexes. In other words, I want to focus on how this passage contributes to the conception of there being a natural difference between men and women which stands apart from their (gendered) behavior. Butler argues that the body itself, and the sexual binary, are themselves constructed by cultured meanings.[152]

The witch (or hag) is someone non-human; though traditions vary in interpretation, witches are associated with spirits, the underworld, and forces beyond those of mortals.[153] As such, the witch is not "a thing of life and reality", as written by Prest. His witch is particularly menacing, the "hideous creation of a disordered-imagination"; and this effect is attained by confusing and muddling the apparently uncrossable boundary between the sexes, and in labelling this disturbance as unnatural, enforcing the sexual binary. By taking the external sexual characteristic of the beard, which is taken to be evident of belonging to the male sex, and combining this with the general appearance of a "woman", including performative elements such as the dress, distortion of the category of "woman" is effected. It is the beard which causes the witch's unnaturalness, so it is implied that its reverse indeed *is* natural. The menace of the witch can only be understood in relation to the "intelligible" categories of man and woman.[154] Women without beards are natural, women with beards are not natural and no true women. In this scene, the bodily expression of intersexuality, of any other sex than the binary, becomes threatening and sinister. In the terminology by Butler, one can argue that a woman with a beard is therefore outside of the "imaginable domain" of the hegemonic cultural discourse which this text expresses.[155]

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[151] Prest, *Ela*, 9.
[152] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.
[153] The exact conceptualization of witches differ regionally; Dale M. Blount "Modifications in Occult Folklore as a Comic Device in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream." *Fifteenth Century Studies* 9 (1984) 1, reports traditions in which witches are thought to have been women transformed by fairies.
[154] See Butler's "matrix of intelligibility", in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.
[155] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.

It is the sexual binary itself that becomes threatened under the witch's seemingly incompatible sexual bodily expressions, and though this disruptive force is powerful (and the witch herself has the power to disrupt Wallingford's journey) it is not a stable one. As Butler writes, "specters of discontinuity and incoherence (…) are constantly prohibited."[156] It is therefore unsurprising that as quickly as the "incoherent being" that is the witch enters the story, she leaves it again. As a character who does not fit neatly within the binary framework, she is only there to disrupt and "shake things up", but she cannot truly become part of the story, because ultimately she is unnatural and *impossible*.

SEPARATE SPHERES: THE HOUSELESS WANDERER

The first chapter of *Ela, the Outcast* presents a wealth of information on gender, race, class, and the intersections between these elements. The scene is set in 1791 during a violent spring storm at Wallingford Hall, a manor in the north of England. It introduces a multitude of characters: Mrs. Wallingford, her servants Dorothy and Ralph, Ela, her daughter Fanny, and Dr. Hartley. Absent, though mentioned, is Mrs. Wallingford's husband, Edward Wallingford. The two pivotal characters in the chapter around which all the action revolves are Mrs. Wallingford and Ela – as we shall see, in many ways these two women are positioned as opposites, a contrast strengthened by language that invokes gender, race, and class. First I will discuss how Mrs. Wallingford is characterized, and how Ela is subsequently positioned as her antithesis. This dichotomy is complicated by the character of Fanny, who can be seen as a bridge between the two women, drawing on what they have in common: maternal love. Finally, I will make some observations about the nature of domesticity and the spheres in which the women in this chapter move.

There are different ways in which the reader is informed about a character, and the most obvious one is descriptive text provided by the narrator. Mrs. Wallingford's core characteristic is her being "ever sensibly alive to the distresses of her fellow-creatures."[157] This sensitivity is the common thread through the chapter. It becomes established almost immediately, with Mrs. Wallingford suffering from low spirits considering the consequences of the storm on the "poor, houseless wretches who were exposed to 'the pitiless pelting of the storm'"[158] It is this impulse to help a "fellow being in distress" that is the catalyst of the main

[156] Ibidem, 23.
[157] Prest, *Ela*, 2.
[158] Ibidem, 1.

action of the scene: Fanny arriving at Wallingford Hall, seeing help for her mother who has succumbed to the cold rains outside. The same sympathy induces her to send her servants to fetch Fanny's mother Ada and provide her with the care of a doctor. In addition to being moved to sympathy for those less fortunate, Mrs. Wallingford's identity is linked to her status as a mother and a wife. She attempts to distract herself from the frightful storm by enjoying the "innocent sports of her two lovely children, who were gamboling together at her feet."[159] However, these cannot lift her spirits because she "was deprived of the society of her husband", whom "business of importance had called from home several days past."[160] Mrs. Wallingford is described with words like "amiable", "lovely",[161] "humane," having a "benevolent heart,"[162] and her actions are accompanied by adverbs such as "eagerly", "gently", and "compassionately"[163]. All of these characteristics take shape in relation to others – one can argue that it is only in comparison with those that surround her, most notably her family, that Mrs. Wallingford becomes someone. The characterization is filled with cultural signifiers of the Victorian domestic ideal of the "angel in the house"; a woman whose natural place and goal in life is to serve her husband and children, and guide the household.[164] As we will see, Ela disturbs and defies this clear-cut role of domesticity.

Mrs. Wallingford is part of the upper class, signposted by the prefix "honourable" attached to her and her husband's names. Their estate has several servants, and the impression of a sizable house is given. The contrast invoked with Ela is based on a distinction of class, intersecting with notions of race. As she is carried inside by the servants, Ela is described as follows:

> She appeared to be about thirty years of age; her features were regular and handsome. Her complexion was bright olive, on which the cankerworm of care had set its destructive mark. (…) Her hair was black as the plumes of the raven, and flowed the long tresses over her shoulders. Her figure was tall and powerful (…) Altogether she seemed to have moved in a far better sphere of life than her present appearance bespoke.

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[159] Ibidem, 1.
[160] Ibidem, 2.
[161] "(…) under which that amiable and lovely lady suffered (…)" Ibidem, 1.
[162] "The humane Mrs. Wallingford needed no solicitation on the part of her domestic to urge her to the perormance of an act of charity; it was enough for her to know that a fewllow being was in distress, to arouse all the energies of her benevolent heart, to render them assistance." Ibidem, 2.
[163] "(…) raising her gently from her knees, and gazing upon her compassionately." Ibidem, 3.
[164] Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 341, 348-349.

> Her dress evidently marked her for one of the Gipsey tribe, and yet her handsome features bore that nobleness of expression which rendered her connection to them unaccountable.[165]

There are two narratives working here simultaneously: on one hand, Ela as exotic "Gipsey" (the olive skin and loose black hair, her clothing), and on the other, Ela as a woman of high birth (regular features, a tall figure, a noble expression). In a later chapter, it is revealed that Ela is of Italian heritage, which accounts for her darker skin and hair. In the quote above it seems as if one is trapped inside the other – a woman brought down in consequence of circumstances, an interpretation strengthened by the plot itself as Ela has been "cast out" (of civil society) through the treachery of Mr. Wallingford. That being a "Gipsey" is not a desirable station in life is clearly expressed in Ela's speech later in the chapter.[166] It is because she is a gypsy that has left her exposed to the elements, left insensible in a ditch to be rescued by her daughter seeking help.

An interesting dynamic comes into play when Ela, revived by the doctor's administrations, and Mrs. Wallingford converse. While Mrs. Walllingford's manners continues to be described with adjectives such as "mild", extending Ela the courtesy of friendship, Ela speaks in an "authorative tone", speaks in a "tone of irony and contempt"; she "shrieks" and cries "in a voice hoarse with rage".[167] Ela's bold, direct, and almost mad manner of speech scares Mrs. Wallingford, who at the conclusion of the chapter becomes so "overcome with the power of her emotions" that she faints and must be brought to her room by her servants.[168] The contrast between Ela and Mrs. Wallingford is stark. While Mrs. Wallingford might have been in control of the situation when Ela was brought in, her nerves cannot withstand the onslaught of Ela's overt emotionality. The contrast is one of characteristically upper-class restraint and manners, and the wildness and unrestraint of the exotic stranger. In this passage Ela's behavior is that of an external "Other",[169] an exotic gypsy, almost otherworldly force, impinging on the comfortable domesticity of Mrs. Wallingford's home.

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[165] Prest, *Ela*, 4.
[166] "The baren wild, the rugged mountain, the shade of the oak for her canopy, the rude shelter of the gipsy tent, and the sterile earth for her couch, are now all that Ela the outcast may expect." Ibidem, 5.
[167] Ibidem, 6.
[168] Ibidem, 7.
[169] For women as "Other", see Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 13. For othering and race, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London 2003) xii, 4-6.

Between the two women stands Ela's daughter Fanny. Not only does she act as the literal intermediary of their relationship (it is she after all who causes them to meet), she also takes a symbolic position between the women. Mrs. Wallingford is taken in by the six-year-old girl, who, though in ragged clothing and has a dark complexion, has "peculiarly noble and expressive features", and eyes with a luster "which could not be looked upon without admiration".[170] In the face of Fanny's eloquent plea for help, Mrs. Wallingford's earlier established compassion is called upon. When Ela awakes and bursts into an anger, it is Fanny who attempts to calm her down and persuade her of not hurting Mrs. Wallingford;[171] taking on several roles at once. She implores her mother from a submissive position, grasping her knees, invoking the mother-daughter relationship as means of persuasion. On the other hand she acts as Mrs. Wallingford's protector – a symbolic one rather than the literal way in which she has acted as Ela's protector by saving her from a certain death in a ditch during the storm – creating a dynamic in which Fanny is both the child as well as the parent of both women.

Gender in this passage is not presented as univocal. It cannot be expressed separately from the two other categories of class and race, as we have seen in the oppositional characterizations of the two women. Their status as "woman" is constructed in synchrony with other attributes such as being member of the landed class or being cast out of society, of being a noble Englishwoman or a gypsy. This illustrates the intersectional nature of these axes of difference, showing the "simultaneity of race and gender as social processes".[172] If we move the focus from difference to similarity, one can argue that simultaneous to the category of difference, there is a naturalization of gendered characteristics working in the background. Two of them, most notably, relate to maternal love, and a high state of emotionality. Apart from the fact that both women are mothers, on a deeper level their maternal feelings are mutually constitutive of their gendered presentation as "women". It is no coincidence that both are connected to their children from the moment they are presented in the text; Mrs. Wallingford looking at their play, and Ela seeking out Fanny the moment she awakes. The second characteristic, a high state of emotionality, is one that should be related to the genre of the penny blood and the spirit of the age.[173] Weeping, sweeping declarations, and other heightened emotional states are common in nineteenth century literature, and the sensational

[170] Prest, *Ela*, 3.
[171] "Oh mother, dear mother!" lisped forth the child imploringly, embracing her parent's knees, and looking up to her with supplicating innocence; "do not say such wicked words; do not hurt this poor lady, who has been so kind to us." Ibidem, 6.
[172] Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality", 2.
[173] See for example Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 263.

nature of the penny novel increases their prevalence. Emotionality in itself is therefore not limited to females or necessarily coded as feminine behavior, but it should be noted that emotionality is connected to delicacy in case of Mrs. Wallingford, and interestingly, her maid Dorothy, while Ela's emotions are ones of strength. Dorothy becomes "unable to move or speak"[174] at Ela's ferocious speech; a less severe version of Mrs. Wallingford's complete passivity when she faints at the end of the chapter.

This section provides an alternative view on the "separate spheres" theory, as introduced in the second chapter. If we are to follow the reasoning that Mrs. Wallingford is the embodiment of the "angel in the house" ideal, it would follow that she should be identified with the female domestic sphere. This interpretation of Mrs. Wallingford coinciding with the domestic sphere is corroborated in the text: her interactions with the world outside of her house are extremely limited. In fact, her servants serve as her intermediaries. When shrieks are heard inside the house, Mrs. Wallingford "rang the bell violently" and sends Dorothy to investigate rather than seeing for herself.[175] Only when Dorothy returns with the news of the girl on their doorstep does she proceed to get involved, but even then, she does not leave the house to find Ela, but rather stays behind and "give[s] her orders for the reception of the unfortunate wanderer."[176]

If Mrs. Wallingford embodies the domestic sphere, then Ela breaks these expectations down by effortlessly moving between spheres. In one chapter she travels from outside, into the domestic sphere, and back out again, dramatically leaping through an open window accompanied by a flash of lightning.[177] An interesting interplay of class expectations is at work here. The "separate spheres" are generally conceptualized as essentially middle-class.[178] Though Mrs. Wallingford in some ways is portrayed as upper class, her virtues are middle-class ideals. These ideals are confronted with Ela's otherness – otherness in both class and race. Though this could be interpreted as otherness as dangerous to the status quo of middle-class values, the plot points towards a different direction. Mr. Wallingford did wrong by Ela, and her fury is in that sense justified. It is by Mr. Wallingford's own hand (male, upper-class) that his wife's unhappiness is caused rather than exotic otherness. Ela herself becomes more and more of an understandable, "knowable" subject in the subsequent chapters, as her back

[174] Prest, *Ela*, 6.
[175] Ibidem, 2.
[176] Ibidem, 4.
[177] Ibidem, 7.
[178] Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?", 387.

story is revealed and she is given depth. It is ultimately not Mrs. Wallingford who is the heroine of the story – Ela, who is nothing like the domestic ideal, is.

To conclude this section, I would like to add a note on race. While Ela is in many ways conceptualized according to racial stereotypes of gypsies, and presented as an inhuman "other" (for example in the description of her as having "rather the appearance of a spirit of evil than a human being"),[179] speaking of the gypsies in negative racist terms is not condoned on the surface of the text. Ralph, a servant of Wallingford Hall, gossips with his fellow domestics about how Fanny's plea for help must be a "scheme to entrap them", and that he had seen "several suspicious looking characters lurking about".[180] This xenophobic remark is objected to on two levels. In the narrative Mrs. Wallingford, whose morals are not to be disputed, feels obligated to "remonstrate them for their cowardice". Secondly, the servants are ridiculed by the auctorial narrator, who proceeds to call them "clowns", who "puff and blow most immoderately to keep up" with Fanny. This interplay of condemning racial stereotypes while at the same time employing them for characterization is one that will return throughout the story several times.

GENDERED POWER RELATIONSHIPS: ON VIRTUE AND VIRGINITY

So far we have discussed gender and its intersection with other signifying categories such as class and race, and an instance in which the sex binary is destabilized. If we are to find out how gender informs power relations, it makes sense to look at an instance of extreme power inequality. A chapter towards the end of the story provides a suitable case study for this, because it revolves around two cases of a man taking advantage of a woman, but with very different outcomes. This allows us to compare the two situations, rather than simply generalizing about the power exchange between men and women on the basis of an abuse. As we shall see, power circulates in surprising ways, returning power to the female victim of the abuse as the culture of feminine virtues is invoked in a different way.

As mentioned above, Ela as a young woman is seduced by Edward Wallingford, who deceives her with a fake wedding ceremony. Later he marries another woman, leaving Ela a destitute mother. Many years of hardship follow from Wallingford's treachery, as Ela lives in

[179] Prest, *Ela*, 7.
[180] Ibidem, 4.

a society in which an unmarried woman with a child is considered a "fallen" woman. She effectively removes herself from society by joining a band of gypsies, who have different cultural norms and where she is accepted despite her child. Ela's daughter Fanny, many years later, is taken prisoner by a villain called Marchese Vivaldi. As Ela narrates the events leading up to Fanny's liberation of the Marchese, a repeating theme is anxiety about them having intercourse, be it consensual or non-consensual. It is Fanny's virtue that is at stake, as Ela says in this passage:

> So great was the confidence that I could place in the strength of her virtue, that I knew she would rather suffer death, than fall a victim to the licentious passions of the Marchese Vivaldi; and I could hear of her death with less anguish, under such circumstances, than that she lived, but that the villain had triumphed in his iniquitous designs.[181]

Before zooming in on this particular passage, it is helpful to understand the cultural and ideological context in which this statement is made; the narrative world of *Ela, the Outcast* closely resembles that of mid-century Victorian society, and follows the same rules and institutions. In effect we are now therefore analyzing the third element of Scott's interpretative matrix: the political and social organization of the society in which subsequently cultural concepts such as "virtue" come into play.

Victorian society is often associated with repressed sexuality.[182] Michel Foucault has argued that this preoccupation with sex is a shift in focus in comparison to earlier times, which now took on a distinct dimension of control. What was to be policed in particular was extramarital sex, which was seen as "the primary area of dangerous sexual activity."[183] Inspired by religious values, sex in general was connected with the corporeal, and subsequently uncleanness.[184] Houghton calls the system of moral censorship that covered everything from pre-marital sex, adultery, and even expressing sexual desire, the "ethic of purity".[185] For women in particular the code of purity was rather restrictive, as the ideal of a woman as "angel" required women to act according to a narrow view of chastity and purity. It is important to keep in mind that the ethic of purity was an essentially middle-class ideal, and

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[181] Ibidem, 787.
[182] Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian society. Women, class, and the state* (Cambridge 1980), 4.
[183] Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian society*, 4.
[184] Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, 354.
[185] Ibidem, 356.

that it was not pursued with equal vigor among all of Victorian society and its subcultures.[186] It was, however, the dominant discourse, and one all readers of *Ela, the Outcast* would be familiar with.

How then does this scene fit within the discourse of purity? There is a clear delineation between the villainous aggressor and she who must withstand it – and this contrast is drawn along the lines of gender. The "licentious passions" of the Marchese in this discourse are masculine – sexual desire is associated with men's base or carnal being, a part of them that should be tamed, and temptation resisted.[187] The Marchese is a bad man because he cannot tame his desires, and attempts to impose them upon Fanny. She, on the other hand, though clearly marked as a victim, is in danger of becoming an accomplice in the crime of impurity. Ada wonders, for example, whether Fanny "had been able to resist the guilty importunities of Vivaldi?"[188] This implies that should Fanny give in to the Marchese's desires, she is to a certain extent at fault as well. It is by sake of her "virtue" that she must hold strong and deny him. This virtue, just as the question of purity itself, is clearly gendered. A woman, in the purity discourse, does not in any way have or express sexual desire, but can be seduced or overpowered by male desire. Looking at the situation from the reverse, however, this also means that Fanny has the power to influence her own fate within the limited parameters of the situation: she can give in, or she can resist. This power is later taken away from her, when the Marchese threatens Fanny that if she did "not consent to become his mistress the following day, he would force a compliance with them."[189] Luckily, Fanny is saved from this fate by her sweetheart Lord Helvendon, and her mother Ela.

In a discourse of purity, it does not matter whether impurity is forced upon a woman or whether she brings it onto herself. Extramarital intercourse leads to disgrace, which Ela calls a fate worse than death several times. Interestingly, on a deeper textual level, the use of force *does* matter, both for the male and the female concerned in the interaction. Though Ela was misled by Edward Wallingford, and his actions are condemned accordingly, their intercourse was not forced, at least not in the language of Victorian society. Twenty-first century readers might strongly question the consent that Ela gives; she is kidnapped and imprisoned in a house for Wallingford to visit, where she ultimately gives in to his entreaties. In the Victorian discourse these circumstances are not of import, however. What is key is that

[186] Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian society*, 5.
[187] Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 354-355.
[188] Prest, *Ela*, 791.
[189] Ibidem, 796.

Ela is given a choice – a choice that the Marchese was planning on taking away from Fanny. On the female end of the equation, the fates of Ela and Fanny are quite different; Ela is forced to live as an outcast for many years, while Fanny happily marries her sweetheart. Though Ela is seen as a victim, nevertheless the fact that she bears the punishment of disgrace for extended amounts of time implies an element of blame. On the male end, the differences between how Wallingford and Vivaldi end up are even more starkly contrasted. Vivaldi is shot in the heart as Ela wrenches a pistol away from one of his henchmen, and he dies instantly. Wallingford on the other hand goes on to have many misfortunes after Ela's disappearance from the apartment he set up for her. Key in his suffering is contrition – he regrets his past wrongs, and ultimately receives Ela's forgiveness: "Heaven knows, that if his sufferings have been half as great as mine, he has been sufficiently punished (…) I do, indeed, forgive you, and may heaven do so likewise!"[190] In this instance power resides with Ela rather than with Wallingford. He does not entreat her to forgive her, and actually, is not even present in the scene until Ela has spoken of her forgiveness. He is at her mercy, and she can decide whether he will be reunited with his family (including his daughter Fanny), or whether he will spend the remainder of his life in further misery.

In this chapter there are therefore two oppositional tendencies. On one hand, conceptualizations of the male and the female are polarized with reference to the ethic of purity, which carries assumptions drawn along the lines of sexual difference. Both Wallingford and Vivaldi act according to this model, putting carnal desires before morality, desires which stem from their male sex. Thinking back to Scott's framework, the symbol of a man enslaved to his desire is here employed to illustrate their villainous nature. Ela and Fanny, following the same logic, act according to two female types: the fallen woman who succumbs to seduction, and the pure angelic woman who does not. In the case of Ela, the seduction produces conflict around her character, causing her to act violently or angrily (such as in the first chapter to Mrs. Wallingford). Fanny's exemplary strength encodes a meaning of virtue and innocence to the reader. Although the system of meanings that make up the ethics of purity thus are followed through, the reunification of Ela and Wallingford stands out. According to the purity discourse once purity has been lost, it cannot be regained. Yet Ela and Wallingford, through suffering and regret, manage to regain both dignity and social approval (as indicated by the joy expressed by various other characters). Though enabled by Wallingford's repentance, what brings this radical change in their destiny about is Ela's

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[190] Ibidem, 803.

decision. One can argue that in order to disturb the division of roles and one-sided distribution of power in the purity discourse, the scene draws upon another cultural symbol, which is powerful enough to go against and upset this system: that of (a woman's) compassion and forgiveness.

We have already been introduced to the theme of sympathy and benevolence in Mrs. Wallingford's characterization. There it was employed to illustrate Mrs. Wallingford's high-class behavior and general kindliness. Her benevolence was largely connected to social inequality, as she lamented the fate of those without a home in the storm, an attitude that was widely idealized in the nineteenth century.[191] Ela's compassion is of a more personal nature, but one can see that it still functions within the same discourse, as Edward Wallingford too is someone in miserable circumstances who is to be pitied. There is a strong connection to emotion and "feeling", which are often seen as both belonging to female sex, or to "come naturally" to them.[192] In this instance, the cultural symbol of the compassionate woman returns power to Ela, making her into an active agent rather than being merely a passive victim. This illustrates that the combining or juxtaposing of different cultural symbols can lead to surprising and subversive texts which do not predictably follow the dominant discourse (in this case, that of the ethics of purity). Though the effects might be seen as rather limited, the return of agency to a powerless victim might be argued to be quite important indeed.

TO CONCLUDE: CONTRADICTING SYMBOLS

In this chapter gender in *Ela, the Outcast* has been analyzed through a "close reading" of three scenes. They were chosen because gender and/or sexual difference was particularly at the surface of the text in these passages, and often explicitly referred to. What these three scenes have in common is that all see some sort of blurring or boundary being crossed in relation to gender and sex. In the section on separate spheres, which features the exchange between Mrs. Wallingford and Ela, it becomes clear that gender is not a category that works alone – it interacts with other categories, most notably class and race/ethnicity, which I interpreted in the light of intersectionality. The text juxtaposes cultural symbols such as the benevolent high-class woman and the exotic gypsy, but also introduces an intermediary in the character

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[191] Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 274-275.

[192] Ferris, "From trope to code", 25.

of Fanny, who transcends the two stereotypes by appealing to that which they have in common: maternal feelings. This is an example of the way in which, by appealing to several culturally available symbols simultaneously, new meanings and a wider range of gendered behavior becomes acceptable. Another good example from this section is the fact that Ela's exotic nature allows her to break through the domestic/public sphere dichotomy at will; a characteristic that is pertinent to the rest of the story as well, as she dons various disguises and moves through all layers of society. It can be argued, therefore, that the spheres in this text are not based on sexual difference alone, but are created in intersection between categories of difference. The same principle of a widening of acceptable gendered behavior is at work in the third scene that was analyzed, featuring the (threat of) premarital intercourse. Here the symbol of a woman's compassion is drawn upon to upset the rather absolute and irreversible power balance between man and woman in the ethics of purity discourse, returning power and agency to the woman.

The limits of the utilization of intersections between categories such as gender, race, and class, or combining gendered cultural symbols to oppositional effect, are shown in the first section, featuring the witch. There seems to be a certain theoretical distance between sex and gender in the text. While there is room in the text for new interpretations of gendered power relationships and the expression of gender, sex itself is immutable. Transgression or distortion of sex, which would upset the category of woman itself, is not acceptable and seen as unnatural. In contrast, Ela's behavior, though it bends many gender conventions such as the separate sphere ideology, is never seen as unnatural, because it can still be explained through gendered language and symbols. The underlying assumption seems to be that although sex and biological difference are "natural" and therefore cannot be changed without dire consequences, the way that biological difference is expressed in gender can take a wide variety of manifestations.

These findings mirror Ina Ferris's argument that the critical discourse in the first half of the nineteenth century does not present a closed system based on sexual difference, but rather a loose collection of gendered traits.[193] In the text of *Ela, the Outcast*, similarly, gender is malleable because it is constituted in intersections between several categories and symbols that can be employed to produce contradicting meanings. In this discourse the separate sphere rhetoric does function – as we have seen, Mrs. Wallingford's characterization thrives on the separate sphere rhetoric – but it cannot be deemed the primary organizational principle, or the

[193] Ibidem, 25.

primary rhetoric in which gendered power relationships gain meaning. This supports Amanda Vickery's argument that the legitimacy of the separation of spheres framework needs to be questioned as end-all conceptualization of women's roles in Victorian society.[194] Within the fictional world of *Ela, the Outcast* at least, the separate spheres rhetoric is one of many that works simultaneously in the text, and is therefore subject to intersections and interactions with other concepts.

This analysis is limited to the ideology that the text disseminates, and does not presuppose how contemporary readers might have interpreted its meanings. Thinking about the implied reader does illustrate what kind of cultural discourses the reader was supposed to be familiar with. [195] Its popularity indicates that the text was successful to a certain extent in suiting contemporary tastes, and it is probable therefore that the cultural symbols employed were therefore recognizable and understandable for its reading public. Results from the analysis of one text cannot be used to produce generalized statements for the entirety of Victorian society or even the working class portion of it, but it does suggest that gender differences were not crystallized in a closed system of meaning based on sexual difference.

[194] Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?", 389.
[195] This concept was introduced in the second chapter. See Herman & Vervaeck, *Vertelduivels*, 28.

CHAPTER 4: ADA, THE BETRAYED

Ada, the Betrayed, or, The murder at the old smithy was published a few years after *Ela, the Outcast*. It first appeared in *Lloyd's Penny Weekly Miscellany* in 1843, and was serialized in fifty-six parts. A collected edition appeared shortly after; the text consulted for this thesis is a reproduction of the 1847 edition. The serial is attributed to James Malcolm Rymer, the author of several other penny bloods, most famously including *The String of Pearls* (1846, introducing the character of Sweeny Todd, who would inspire many adaptations throughout the centuries), and *Varney the Vampyre* (1847). Authorship is often rather muddled for these penny fictions – pseudonyms were rife, and plagiarism and "creative borrowing" only complicate the matter. *Ada, the Betrayed* has also been attributed to Prest, for example, and an American edition of *Ada the Betrayed* bore the subtext "by the author of 'Ella, the Outcast'".[196] In this matter I will follow the authorship as proclaimed by the British Library, who identifies the author of *Ada* as J. M. Rymer, who is a separate person to the author of *Ela*.

Like *Ela, Ada* starts with a stormy night. A mysterious fire wrecks the old smithy, where screams are heard by the villagers of Learmont. A baby is rescued from the fire, but disappears the following day. The story revolves around the conspiracy created by three villainous men: Jacob Grey, Squire Learmont, and Andrew Britton, the smith. Central to this plot is the fate of Ada, who attempts to find out who her parents are and what happened that night at the smithy, where she was found. The narrative routinely checks in with her as she grows up, and ultimately falls in love with Albert Seyton and ends up married. In the last chapter we saw that gender was complicated through the interplay with class, race, and ethnicity. In *Ada, the Betrayed*, similarly, the gender binary is made more complex through an awareness of the performative nature of gender. In the following I will analyze three passages in which this consciousness of gender as something that one *does* rather than it being something that *is*, is particularly visible. Comparable to the previous chapter the division into topics is implemented; one subsection, that of separate spheres, is absent. In the following I will argue that the separate sphere framework does not sufficiently explain the gendered relationships such as they are presented in *Ada, the Betrayed*.

[196] Dime and Nickel Novels. Rymer, James Malcolm. Retrieved 26-06-2016. http://www.ulib.niu.edu/badndp/rymer_james.html

THE GENDER BINARY: FROM HARRY TO ADA

The performance of gender is central to the development of the titular character of the story, Ada. In the first chapters a character named Ada is curiously absent from the cast. Narrative conventions might give the reader the idea that the titular Ada must be the baby that is rescued from the smithy in the first chapter, but the only young person referred to consistently throughout the following chapters is "Harry". There are some clues to Harry not being quite as he seems, but Ada's identity is not revealed until Chapter XXI, mysteriously subtitled "A Sunny Morning. – The Chamber in the Old House". Encased in language expressing an appreciation for nature associated with Romanticism, the chapter starts descriptive, setting the scene of a dirty and dingy cottage bathed in sunlight. After a paragraph, the character is introduced: "that room into which it shone was the sleeping chamber of the young boy, Harry, and that heart that welcomed its rays was his."[197] Just like the sun rises to illuminate darkness, the mystery surrounding Harry is slowly lifted. Addressing his dog, Joy, he says:

> The world without this gloomy house seems bright and beautiful, but we are prisoners. (…) Gray tells me he is my uncle, and that there is a fearful secret connected with the family that forces him to shut himself and me up in this mysterious manner. (…) Such a tale might suit the ears of a child, but – I – I am one no longer. (…) [T]his disguise, too, which he persuades, begs, implores of me to wear, as he says, for my life's sake; 'tis very strange. These are not the garments of a young maiden as I am. What have I done that I should, thus forswear sex, liberty, sunshine, joy, all that makes life rich, and beautiful to the young?[198]

This speech is literally transformative – where this character was Harry, the boy, at first; it now features a girl. First it featured a child, but now she is no longer one. This proclamation can be best understood in the light of British philosopher J. L. Austin's speech act theory, which influenced Butler's ideas on performativity. In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin argues that saying something can be a performative sentence or performative utterance.[199] That which is said is not merely speech, it also *does* something. It is an act (and

[197] James Malcolm Rymer, *Ada, the Betrayed; or, The Murder at the Old Smithy* (London 1847; reprint Fairford 2015) 98-99.
[198] Rymer, *Ada*, 99.
[199] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford 1962), 6.

is therefore called a speech act), an “explicit” performance. A famous example is the speech-act that occurs during the naming of a ship, in which the words “I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*” become constitutive to the ritual.[200] It is by saying these words that the ship receives its name. Returning to the quote above, I would argue that by saying that she is no longer a child, Ada *is* no longer a child. Somewhat later in the passage, similarly, it is by calling herself Ada that she then becomes Ada.

From a gender perspective this passage is fascinating, because through the speech act, a boy becomes a girl, and a child stops being a child. I would argue that, although the child is called a “boy”, this is to denote an absence of gender rather than that of masculinity. The words “boy” and “child” are used interchangeably, and overall very little to nothing is known of him. The word “boy” seems to denote a default “human” rather than implying masculinity. It can be seen as somehow predating true gendering – as it is when Ada casts aside the label of child that she gains substance, and starts questioning why she cannot express her gender (by not wearing the “garments of a young maiden that I am”). This argument has two consequences: first, it implies that gender gives shape to a person. In a way, it is empowering. Ada, by being forced to pose as Harry, disappears as a character and is only referred to in the vaguest of terms. When she becomes Ada, she becomes a rounded character, with aspirations, dreams, and motivations of her own. Secondly, it shows that there is apparently a state of being which is somehow largely outside of gender: childhood. Ada, quite literally expresses what Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”[201] This “pre-gender” of childhood is still coached in language that brings gender to mind, using the words “boy” and the pronoun “he”, which illustrates the all-compassing power of gendered language. It is impossible to completely escape gender, but as far as it goes, the state of the child is largely an empty slate upon which, once childhood passes, gender becomes inscribed. It is only when she is no longer a child that Ada *becomes* a woman.

It has to be noted that though there is a sense that “underneath” the garments Ada is and always has been of the female sex, this sex can be obscured by ambivalent gendering. As we have seen above, an important aspect of this is in the shape of address – whether one is called “boy”, “child”, or “woman”. The quote also refers to a second indicator of gender, which is that of clothing. Appearance in general and clothing in particular is a social signifier of gender. The significance and transformative nature of clothing is illustrated in the continuation of Ada’s narrative. Learmont and Britton have arrived to kill Jacob Gray, who

[200] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 5.
[201] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London 1953), 273.

has been posing as Ada's uncle and keeping her captive. It is only by grace of a change of clothing that she can make her escape: as Gray says, "you may escape as a girl from those who come here to murder a boy."[202] When she puts these clothes on, she not only looks different, she also behaves differently.

> Now she was attired in the proper costume of her sex, she looked several years older, and the change in her general appearance was so great that even Jacob Gray would scarcely have recognized her.
> She showed no nervousness, no haste, no sign of trepidation as she stepped from the room, and her voice was soft, and musical, and quite calm as she paused (…)[203]

Again the connection between adulthood and gender is made. Donning the clothing of a woman, Ada becomes more woman-like, and it ages her significantly. Setting aside the general dramatic writing of penny romances, it is interesting that the wearing of a dress has the power to transform one's appearance to such an extent that that person becomes nearly unrecognizable. Even more significant is that now Ada wears feminine clothing, she is attributed idealized feminine qualities, such as having a "musical" voice, and embodying calm and dignity. She is now a woman, and now cultural symbols of her womanhood are present in abundance. Overall this passage shows the connection between outward expression and identity. Clothing is not merely an expression of the inner gendered self; such that one being of the sex "woman" would follow that that person wears the clothing befitting the sex "woman". Clothing is central to the performative nature of gender itself. By putting on a women's clothing, one *becomes* a woman; not only is one socially recognized as being a woman (rather than, say, a child), it also works on a deeper level to make one act as a woman; in the terminology of Butler, sex is "performatively enacted signification."[204]

Returning to the subject of power, the scene of Ada dressing (and performing) as woman shows how gender and power go together in this discourse. When Ada stands outside of the gendered binary, as we have seen when she was called "Harry", she is powerless. However, as she proclaims femininity, first through a speech act, and subsequently through gendered performance, she as a character gains agency. As Harry she is held prisoner, but as Ada she walks out of the house she has been kept in. Harry is a passive character, to whom

[202] Rymer, *Ada*, 116.
[203] Ibidem, 118.
[204] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 46.

things happen, but Ada is an active character, having a hand at making her own fate. This theme is foreshadowed in Ada's exclamation that in wearing non-feminine clothes she foreswears "sex, liberty, sunshine, joy, all that makes life rich, and beautiful to the young," as quoted above. It is telling that sex and liberty should be thus connected in one sentence; the discourse that underlies these passages is one in which liberty and power can be found through enacting one's "sex" (which can best be understood to stand for "gender" rather than biological sex, in light of the theory outlined in the first chapter). An interesting situation arises, however, when one *overacts* one's gender – which brings us to a second passage, featuring Mrs. Bridget Strangeways.

THE GENDER BINARY: MRS. STRANGEWAYS AND THE PARODY OF GENDER

An interesting case in which gender, and womanhood in particular, is explicitly called upon by one of the characters in *Ada, the Betrayed* is in Chapter X by Mrs. Bridget Strangeways. This minor character, who is introduced in the previous chapter as a landlady, who "did not belie her name, for her ways were strange indeed."[205] These "strange" ways mostly seem to consist of being rather indifferent to the people residing in her house, "letting to anybody and everybody."[206] In Chapter X, Jacob Gray is being heard making a drunken ruckus by his neighbors, and Mrs. Strangeways:

> made a mental determination and a strong vow that the next morning she would give Mr. Jacob Gray notice to quit forthwith and at the same time take the opportunity of telling him "a piece of her mind," that she would.[207]

Apparently Mrs. Strangeways is in the habit of giving people a "piece of her mind" – a scolding, to be more precise – and it is implied that it is the fact that Jacob Gray is violent towards his ward Harry that brings about her wrath. The intention of a thorough scolding calls to mind a motherly interaction, through which Mrs. Strangeways takes on the role of a dominant mother and Jacob Gray is forced in the role of a receptive and passive child. In a more material sense, she has the power to evict Gray from her premises. This supposed power

[205] Rymer, *Ada*, 48.
[206] Ibidem, 48.
[207] Ibidem, 51.

that she has over Gray turns out to be ineffective, as when she attempts to inflict said scolding she discovers that Gray has already left the house, leaving a note and a sum of money to cover the rent. Having pocketed the rent before others arrive, drawn to the room by her shriek, the scene comes to a head as she exclaims:

> "The villain has run away, as you all see, and cheated a lone and defenseless, delicate female out of her lawful rent. Oh, the wretch!"[208]

This exclamation can be interpreted on several levels, drawing from theories from Scott and Butler. In more ways than one, Mrs. Strangeways here puts on a performance. Not only is she pretending Gray has not paid his rent while in fact he has, she is also pretending – putting on an air. It is telling that she victimizes herself, and to that end invokes gender (female) together with characteristics connected to vulnerability (lone, defenseless, delicate). Attention is drawn to the performance itself because it is so *over the top*. The narrative build-up to this exclamation builds the case that Mrs. Strangeways is many things, but defenseless and delicate are not one of these.

How then to make sense of this performance? Turning to Scott's four elements constituting a matrix (culturally available symbols, normative concepts providing meanings to the symbols, politics and social organization, and subjective identity) we can tease out more information. Mrs. Strangeways' exclamation draws from a readily available cultural symbol: that of a weak, passive woman who needs others to step in and defend her honor; an archetypical "damsel in distress". This symbol is given a new meaning through the information that precedes the exclamation. Rather than the reader readily identifying Mrs. Strangeways with a damsel, this interpretation is closed off. She is in fact powerful and robust, turning the comparison into a parody, and ultimately, a joke. The third element, social organization, is one that underpins the scene. Letting apartments was one of the few ways in which women could respectably make a living in the nineteenth century. She is therefore set up in a position of relative respectability as a person of the sex "woman", and these social conventions dictate the possibilities and limits of such an exchange of power; which is connected to the fourth element, subjective identity. The scene is employed to expose the personality of the character while at the same time being an expression of it. It is clear that

[208] Ibidem, 53.

these elements are all interconnected, together setting up what is ultimately understood as a parody of gender, invoking laughter.

The ridiculousness of the situation is sealed by the final action of the section dealing with Mrs. Strangeways. In her greed, she attempts to lay claim to an oaken chest that is left behind by Gray, assuming that it must contain something of value.

> "Let anybody touch it if they dare." So saying the lady, to make sure of her real or fancied prize, rushed forward and sat herself down on the old, chest with such a thump, that the crazy lid gave way, and with a shriek Mrs. Strangeways fell in a singular position into it.[209]

The joke is the complete reversal of the delicate elegance of the damsel into the clumsy indignity of a portly woman falling through the lid of the chest butt-first, after which she has to be "hauled out by the united exertions of everybody."[210] Before returning to the analysis using Scott and Butler, I would like to take a small excursion into the theory by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian literary theorist who has written on the use of laughter in literature. A central term in his work is that of the "carnivalesque".[211] He argues that like a carnival (such as the Feast of Fools), during which hierarchies crumble and satire, laughter and burlesque reign, a similar phenomenon can be employed in literature. Bakhtin writes:

> The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it – that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age).[212]

A core characteristic of the carnivalesque is that it ridicules that which is held to be sacred. This disruptive force that the carnivalesque exerts breaks down differences – including difference encoded by gender. In this passage the highly regarded icon of Victorian virtue is ridiculed by the grotesque and undignified position of Mrs. Strangeways stuck in the chest.

[209] Ibidem, 53.
[210] Ibidem, 53.
[211] The carnivalesque is extensively applied in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* (Bloomington 1941).
[212] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis 1984), 122-123.

Though Butler is unlikely to have been influenced by Bakhtin, she too sees parody as something that can break down difference. She sees parody, in particular drag, as a way in which heteronormativity can be challenged.[213] If successful, Butler argues, parody can draw attention to the fact that *all* gender is performance.

Though it is doubtful that Mrs. Strangeways' antics are obliterating heteronormativity, it is clear that this comic scene uses gendered stereotypes (the damsel in distress, the nosy matronly woman) and lets them collapse into each other, much like the chest collapses under the weight of Mrs. Strangeways. This breaking down leaves the category of "female" intact, as there is no transgression between the feminine and the masculine, but it does question the legitimacy of female stereotypes. A damsel proclaiming her helplessness might not nearly be as helpless as she seems, and the nosy matronly woman does not always control what happens under her own roof despite her meddling. It opens the discourse for a wider range of female expression, rather than restricting them to narrow idealized categories such as the damsel.

GENDERED POWER RELATIONSHIPS: THE BATTLE FOR KNOWLEDGE

To gain a full understanding of how gender dynamics work in *Ada, the Betrayed* it is useful to see how power exchanges work between men and women. One way of approaching this complex topic is by tracing how information circulates between key persons. Michel Foucault has written extensively on the connection between knowledge and power. His argument seems to be that the two are not the same, but that the one rather produces the other.[214] While Foucault is mostly occupied with disciplinary power, I would argue that unequal distribution of knowledge in general can create power differences. Therefore the tracing of what information is presented to whom at what moment of time in what manner can show what power relationships exist between these agents. Using this tool in the framework of gender theory then informs us of power relationship between gendered subjects.

The most powerful and important piece of information in *Ada, the Betrayed* is one that is confided to a piece of paper: a confession written by Jacob Gray which contains the truth of Ada's heritage, and which implicates himself, Squire Learmont, and smith Britton in a murderous plot. The entirety of the book revolves around this letter and the constant struggle

[213] Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler. From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge 2007), 44.
[214] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The birth of the Prison* (New York 1991), 195-197.

for the ownership of it between the various characters. Depending on in whose hands it falls, it can lead to the conviction of Gray, Learmont, and Britton, and the transfer of Learmont's property to Ada, the rightful heir; or it can ensure the villains to get away with murder and Ada's heritage to stay a secret forever. Two important characters besides those of the four key players aforementioned are Sir Francis Hartleton, a magistrate, and Albert Seyton, Ada's lifelong friend and lover. After Jacob Gray is killed by Squire Learmont and Britton, the letter coincidentally falls into the hands of Albert Seyton, who is captured by Sir Francis on suspicion of Gray's murder. Apart from the major bundle of knowledge that is the letter, another relevant plot is active around this time. The lovers, Ada and Albert, have been separated, and neither knows the other's whereabouts or fate.

The spindle around through which the majority of information flows is the magistrate, Sir Francis. Not only is the letter bearing Gray's confession addressed to him, he knows where Ada is (as she has been living in his house) as well as where Albert is. He consciously keeps both Ada and Albert in the dark in regard to this information for a time. Even when both are in his mansion, does not tell Ada that Albert is there, and vice versa. In part this can be explained as a plot device – raising the tension in the reader, who wants to see the lovers reunited – but this explanation is not completely satisfactory. It does not explain, for example, why Sir Francis sends Ada away when he has finally received the confession describing Ada's heritage:

> "Will you leave me?" said Sir Francis. "I would fain read this alone, Ada. Will you grant me that indulgence?"
> Ada rose as she said, –
> "Dear friend, a wish of yours shall ever be a command to me; but remember that, let these papers contain what they may, I can bear to hear it all."
> "Nothing shall be concealed from you, Ada," said Sir Francis, "but – but my own deeply interested feelings would not permit me to read these documents aloud to you at first."[215]

This quote refers to the "extreme excitement and agitation" that Sir Francis shows at receiving this letter, and it is this heightened emotional state that is key to understanding how the spread of information is a gendered practice in *Ada, the Betrayed*.

[215] Ryme, *Ada*, 538.

Before pursuing that argument, however, I would like to spend a paragraph on the character of Sir Francis, and how and why he becomes the center towards which and from where information flows. His title, position as magistrate, and London mansion adverts him as an upper-class individual. In practice this means that power flows both towards him as well as from him. In other words, because of his position people bring him and entrust him with information, for example as when the murder of Jacob Gray is committed the constables come to his house to involve him with the proceedings. Consequently he also has the power and responsibility to act on that information, for example by restraining Albert in a room of his house. This is a self-perpetuating cycle in which people supply him with knowledge, which he can then use and divulge at will – which often enough, he does not. There is a tension between Sir Francis as a magistrate and Sir Francis as a person, or man. As he takes Albert's statement of Gray's murder, he invokes his impartiality: "I am here to do my duty, without favour or affection. My previous knowledge of you I now wholly discard from my mind."[216] Here the two seem to be quite separate, but later in the passage his two roles merge: "while he never, when acting in his magisterial capacity, forgot that he was a man, he now felt the necessity of remembering that a sworn deposition had taken place."[217] That which makes the man and the magistrate meet is emotion. It is his heart that compels him to tell Albert that he believes him, though his office prevents him. Ultimately, it is "with some difficulty" that he "mastered his feelings".[218] Though there is a sense that Sir Francis in some respects transcends manhood, he cannot fully escape his humanity. He can never fully merge with judicial impartiality, nor extract himself from his gendered existence.

Returning to the question of gender and knowledge, the uneven spread of information between Sir Francis, Ada, and Albert takes center stage. The determining factors in the hierarchical nature of knowledge inequality between the characters is social and/or familial position, is informed by gendered practices. Sir Francis's position as paterfamilias is strengthened by the information he gains in his position as magistrate. He is the symbolic father of Ada, who has no other family and resides in his home, and is treated as a daughter would; but as illustrated in the quote above the power he exercises over her is not merely a familial one, and is very much dependent on his office as magistrate. If Sir Francis often takes on a paternal role, then Lady Hartleton, his wife, takes on a nearly invisible maternal one. She is only appealed to when bad news has to be conveyed in a gentle manner. Sir Francis for

[216] Ibidem, 520.
[217] Ibidem, 523.
[218] Ibidem, 523.

example asks her to tell Ada when he expects that Albert has fallen in with the villainous plot of Squire Learmont; he "begged her to communicate the same to Ada as carefully as she could, so as not to shock her sensitive mind too suddenly."[219]

Several assumptions as towards the nature of the relationships between the characters come to the surface here. First of all, bad news has to be broken carefully to Ada because Sir Francis deems her to be rather sensitive emotionally. This is not seen as a negative trait in Victorian discourse, but rather connotes a noble nature, closely related to a feminine ideal of feeling.[220] Secondly, it is assumed that Lady Hartleton is somehow more suited to break the news to Ada than Sir Francis is – for she is a woman. The same motif is used when Albert sends Ada to apologize on his behalf to Sir Francis.[221] Third, this therefore seems to indicate not so much that emotion is something limited to females (as Sir Francis is quite emotional himself on many occasions), but that women are preferable when communicating a message of an emotional nature. Simultaneously, beyond this general gendered distinction, expectations connected to familial roles are at play. The flow of information between husband and wife (or between lovers who are to marry soon) is relatively free, though the husband is definitely in the advantage knowledge-wise. Whenever there is to be contact between other symbolical relationships, such as father and daughter, or son-in-law and father-in-law, an intermediary is sought who is preferably female.

It is clear that flow of knowledge between these characters is complex. Information does not follow simple sexual difference, for example from men to women. It seems rather as if, though gendered expectations are certainly at work here, knowledge diffusion is subject to many different circumstances, the two most important factors being social position in broader society as well as familial position (and age). These two factors do not stand outside of gender, and are co-constructed by gendered notions. Gender for example determines what jobs a person can fulfill in society, as well as what kinds of familiar roles are appropriate. The head of the Hartleton household, Sir Francis, is a powerful man overall, yet it cannot be said that he imposes the power he gains from his unique access to information onto the others top-down. Rather, knowledge and power flow from and towards him in a web-like manner, with Sir Francis at the center and the other characters surrounding him. In this web gender is a key determinant of the route a certain piece of information travels. Sexual difference, however, is not a clear-cut indication of the amount of power or knowledge any given person has – it can

[219] Ibidem, 485.
[220] Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 274-275.
[221] "He will scarce forgive himself, and sends me as his ambassador." Rymer, *Ada*, 537.

be argued that Ada, for example, is often privy to more information than Albert, while Albert certainly knows more than Lady Hartleton.

TO CONCLUDE: BLURRING OF BARRIERS

This chapter analyzed *Ada, the Betrayed* with the same methods used to analyze *Ela, the Outcast*, and looked at how gender is conceptualized in the text in order to expose the underlying ideology. What is especially striking in these three scenes is that two of them explicitly draw attention to the performative nature of gender. The third part of the analysis seems to be the odd one out at first, but I would argue that this scene too contributes a discourse in which gender is not taken at face value. In the first part we saw how Harry is transformed into Ada through a speech act – how a child *becomes* a woman through a self-conscious act of proclaiming gender. Before this speech act Harry was largely obscured and unknowable, and in a way, stood outside of gendered behavior even though he could not completely escape the gendered nature of language itself. Speech is also important in the second scene that was analyzed, featuring Mrs. Strangeways. By claiming herself to be a "lone and defenseless, delicate female" while all narrative signs point towards the opposite, combined with the humorous elements, result in a parody of gender which questions and ridicules a statement such as the one made by Mrs. Strangeways. Speaking is central to the third scene as well, less as an act in itself but rather as a means of conveying information and diffusing knowledge.

What all three of these scenes illustrate is that gender is a complex and fluid system, rather than a rigid set of rules for identity and conduct. An essential term to the way gender is conceptualized in *Ada, the Betrayed* is that of performance. How one behaves, looks, and speaks is all important in expressing and constituting a gendered identity. This has far-reaching consequences for power: when one does not participate in gendered behavior and is effectively put apart from gender, as I have argued in the case of Ada's childhood pseudonym Harry, one is powerless. It is only within the gender system that one gains agency. Within the system, power is not divided equally, as illustrated by the third part of this chapter. Nor is power determined solely on the basis of sexual difference: the situation is complicated by other factors, such as one's role in society and (symbolic) familial relations between the people involved. Mrs. Strangeways shows how one can use (or abuse) the complex matrix of

gendered stereotypes to one's own ends, drawing attention to the fact that to a certain extent, the meanings in this system are arbitrary and not based on any natural characteristics.

With respect to the separate spheres theory, *Ada, the Betrayed* sees a distinctive blurring between the domestic and public sphere. In the third scene, it is shown that although women are assumed to be more suited for conveying emotional messages in a gentle manner, the domestic sphere is not limited to women, nor the public sphere to men. If the diffusion of knowledge is a useful tool to make spheres visible, one can question whether it is appropriate to speak of separate spheres in this context at all. Information continually crosses the domestic/public boundary, and although information is not available equally amongst genders under influence of other mitigating factors, knowledge stemming from domestic and public spheres is not limited to either men or women. In fact, the spheres in general are continually crossed as plots weave in and out of domestic and public matters: one of many examples is Albert, murder suspect detained by a magistrate (belonging to the public sphere) who is brought into the domestic sphere of the Hartleton's home. Ultimately, it seems as if the separate sphere framework does not prove to be much of an organizational power in *Ada, the Betrayed* at all.

CONCLUSION

The last two chapters have been spent on zooming in closely on the two penny romances that are the subject of this thesis: *Ela, the Outcast* and *Ada, the Betrayed*. They have been analyzed using gender theory, informed most notably by Joan Scott and utilizing the concept of performativity by Judith Butler. As we have seen, both these stories complicate the notion of gender in their own distinctive ways. In neither a gendered identity follows immutably from a sexual binary, and in both differing concepts and discourses on gender work alongside each other, creating room for a range of gendered roles beyond a set amount of stereotypes. In this final section I will return to the historical context outlined in the second chapter, and highlight the significance of these texts for historical scholarship on nineteenth-century England.

With regard to intersectionality, both texts argue for an inclusion and awareness of several categories that are interdependent with gender. In *Ela, the Outcast* these categories were most notably class, race, and ethnicity – categories that are integrated in intersectional approaches;[222] in *Ada, the Betrayed* class (or societal position) especially played a major role, while race and ethnicity were less prevalent. Beyond these "large" concepts, smaller meaningful units also caused fluctuations in how gender expressions are conceived. In both texts different gendered discourses, such as the ethics of purity and separate spheres, or gendered stereotypes such as the motif of the unnatural witch, the damsel in distress, the tender maiden or the exotic gypsy are exploited to create new or oppositional meanings that subvert or at least deform the dominant discourses. The theoretical framework inspired by Scott, which explicitly pays attention to how cultural symbols are used and what (new) meanings are created with them within a particular society, is particularly useful in tracing these subversions or divergent interpretations.

Amanda Vickery argued that the impression in historical scholarship that the separate sphere rhetoric was the primary organizational principle in Victorian society was based on three kinds of sources: didactic literature, the feminist debate in the nineteenth century, and post-Victorian complaints.[223] On the basis of these limited sources she questions how far-reaching the rhetoric actually was. Though the findings of this thesis cannot be generalized for all of the penny fiction published in the 1840s, it can be stated that in these two stories at

[222] Bilge, "Recent Feminist Outlooks on Intersectionality", 58.
[223] Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres", 389.

least, the separate sphere framework is not adequate to explain or describe the relationships between men and women. In *Ela* the separate sphere rhetoric is touched upon, especially in the character of Mrs. Wallingford, but is discredited by the contrast with Ela's continuous boundary-crossing. In *Ada* the spheres rhetoric is little touched upon, as the domestic and the public run into each other without any resistance, and it does not appear to provide any hand-hold to understand the power relationships between the characters. Nor do the experiences of the men and women in these books differ fundamentally, as Hutton argued in Ferris's chapter "From trope to code" [224] – there is no distinction between the surface/depth dichotomy in the experiences of the characters. It is questionable whether such binary categories thriving on absolute separation are useful when studying gender in nineteenth-century texts. In the case of these two penny romances, at any rate, gendered meaning seems to be created in intersection with many different elements.

That leaves the question of what these findings can tell us about working class culture in the first half of the nineteenth century. Apart from the obvious conclusion that they enjoyed sensational stories featuring murder, romance, and intrigue, the two stories indicate that in this particular discourse gendered identities might not have been set in stone. It is unlikely that the way gender is conceptualized in these stories were incompatible with the sentiments of its working class audience, as the stories were serialized over extensive amounts of time (*Ela* over two years, *Ada* little over one year) and enjoyed continuous success. The stories use cultural symbols that are likely to have been understood by its readers. These texts suggest that in the working-class discourse, the connection between sex and gender was not (yet) closed off in a deterministic system. In the nineteenth century, the difference between the reproductive systems of men and women were thought to "determine specific, innate mental characteristics."[225] Traces of this discourse can be found throughout the texts – the good example being the natural nurturing and maternal feelings expressed by Mrs. Wallingford and Ela – but in these texts the direct connection between category and trait is not made. Meaning seems to move rather in the opposite direction: maternal feelings make Mrs. Wallingford and Ela female (while in the medical discourse, they would have maternal feelings *because* they are female). The fact that there seems to be an awareness of a distinction between "natural" sex and how it is expressed or enacted – what we here call gender – is in itself striking. The stories illustrate how men and women in the nineteenth century might have legitimized different sorts of gendered roles and behaviors, by drawing from the often conflicting

[224] Ferris, "From trope to code", 27-28.
[225] Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 53.

meanings invoked by cultural symbols. Ela, who disguises herself in order to infiltrate all sorts of social circles, travels alone through several countries, breaks into a villain's house and effectively wrestles with a gun-toting servant, makes for quite a different role-model than the "angel of the house" ideal of Victorian domesticity.

In the second chapter, Radway's study of romance was introduced. Together with other scholars, Radway has argued that "romance actually allows the woman to feel, imaginatively, at the powerful centre of her own life."[226] This is an appealing feeling for women reading Harlequin romances – what would be the appeal of these penny romances for a nineteenth-century working-class audience? Marxist critics of working-class romance fiction have generally seen it as "either a regressive capitulation to popular taste or a sentimental substitute for the 'real' political narrative."[227] I will argue, however, that these romances themselves embody a measure of resistance to the dominant oppressive discourse. Escapism is certainly an appealing factor. Neither of these stories feature characters in a working-class profession. There is little in the stories that would remind a factory worker of his or her day-to-day life. On the other hand, this escape is not achieved by identification or reaching towards a middle-class or upper-class life. Though all main characters end up "well-to-do", it is not upper-class life that is glorified, nor is it displayed in particular – rather, it is a life of relative wealth and freedom (from work) that is aspired to. Both heroines move erratically through classes: Ela is daughter of an aristocrat turned farmer, impregnated by an aristocrat which causes her to be expelled from society and join a band of gypsies, to ultimately being reinstated together with her daughter Fanny as upper-class. Ada's story is more one of a steady ascent, with her starting as orphan of uncertain birth, until with the help of her friends, she receives a large estate. The appeal of these stories is therefore not to be found in self-improvement; there is a large distance between the circumstances of the main characters and those of a working-class audience.

Finally, to return to the core question of this thesis: "how do notions of gender inform power relationships within the narratives of *Ela* and *Ada*, and how do these relate to the discourse on gender among the working classes around the time of their publication (roughly 1839 to 1845)?" This question can only be answered by paying attention to both the gender and the class dimension. Within these two penny romances, the dominant discourse on gender and class are subverted through creative use of cultural symbols. As such, the subversion

[226] Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 32.
[227] Pamela Fox, "The 'Revolt of the Gentle': Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working-Class Women's Writing", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 27:2 (1994), 142.

functions within the “matrix of intelligibility”, to borrow Butler’s terminology.[228] This subversion should not be seen as revolutionary: neither on the gender nor the class dimension do the texts present identity as radically different or as something that should be achieved through change. Instead, they present an alternate state of being, with characters occupying varying gender roles and crossing strict class hierarchies, by appealing to traits from within the discursive vocabulary of the culture in which it functions. *Ela* and *Ada* use the symbolic language of the dominant (middle-class) discourse, but do not generally espouse middle-class values within the text themselves along the gender/class axes. The stories, thoroughly steeped in Victorian values, employ the inherent contradictions present in its symbols, to create a certain fluidity in identity, in which readers might escape their daily life. In the introduction I quoted Louis James who wrote that studying working class literature “inevitably shifts the perspective of the total scene.”[229] This thesis is but a small contribution towards that goal.

[228] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 24.
[229] James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, xv.

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