"Belonging to Another Race of Beings":

Depictions of Fallenness in Gaskell's *Ruth* and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

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1. Introduction

In literature, text and context have always gone hand in hand. As the Victorian era, with its rapidly growing industrial landscape, expanding population and religious reforms, was an age characterized by tremendous change, it comes to no surprise that Victorian novels were influenced by their context and frequently interacted with the "social questions of their day" (Marshall 1). This led to numerous Victorian narratives concerned with matters such as race, class, and gender. Novels with socially relevant and even political topics would often be put under the microscope for the purpose of public debate and eventually, they would become defining for their time (Marshall 1).

This paper will circle back to those Victorian times when there were lots of prevalent ideologies concerning women's nature and her proper role in society, and when her lack of compliancy to these doctrines would be publicly judged (Brooks 91). The perception of Victorian women and sexuality was often approached through the dichotomous pattern of the fallen woman versus 'the Angel in the House'. While both women were very much part of Victorian society, and ultimately of Victorian fiction, each of them epitomized a completely different side of womanhood. Both terms have deeply religious connections – the angel can be linked to the figure of the Virgin Mary (Watt), while the fallen woman's origin can be traced back to the Biblical story of Genesis, specifically to the figure of Eve (Clifton 1). As Eve, through seduction by the evil serpent, gives into her temptations and eats from the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, she loses her innocence and is punished by God. Thus, Eve serves as the archetype of the fallen woman, since she is seduced into "sinning against the patriarchy, her Father and husband" (Clifton 1).

Along with these nineteenth-century ideologies concerning women's place in society came a code of female purity (Brooks 91), one that the angel adhered to, but the fallen woman did not – however not always by the latter's own choice, as will become clear in the following sections of this paper. The fallen woman challenged the period's cherished institutions and was condemned by society for doing so. As sexual mores in both Victorian life and literature were in flux, leading to an increased interest of both writer and reader in issues concerning gender and sexuality, she became an "outright obsession" (Clifton 1) and quickly developed into a familiar figure in literature that often served as a lens through which society was looked at (Brooks 92; Silkü 101; Auerbach 1).

The aim of this paper is to examine the concept of the fallen woman – specifically who she was, how she fell, what the various attitudes towards her were and what the ultimate consequences for her fall were. The first chapter will therefore provide the reader with relevant historical background on the aforementioned dichotomy of female identity and the perspectives on female sexuality that spurred the fallen woman's demonization and exclusion from society. To give an as nuanced and extensive overview as possible, I will explore nineteenth-century articles and nonfictional works by Victorian scholars, authors and medical doctors as well as applicable scholarship that stems from the twentieth and twenty-first century. Understanding the concept of the fallen woman as well as the overall view on Victorian womanhood, will hopefully lead to a greater understanding of the case studies that I will present in the following sections of the paper.

In the next chapter, I will formulate my own stance on fallenness and substantiate my arguments by analyzing two social realist novels written in the Victorian period that each portray a different fallen heroine with a different story: *Ruth* (1853) by Elizabeth Gaskell and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) by Thomas Hardy. The focus here is to investigate, by way of close reading,

how these heroines reached their fall and were potentially pushed to it by outer forces, which often seem to be dismissed. I argue that the (sexual) act that precedes the fall, is not what fundamentally causes it. While reading my chosen novels, I instantly observed that the heroines – Ruth and Tess – rather appear to be a product of their own environment, greatly influenced by outer forces, instead of simply being deviant figures eager to disrupt Victorian ideologies.

The chapter that follows will expand my view on fallenness further. The main point of focus here will be the perspectives of other characters on Ruth and Tess once they have transgressed social boundaries. By way of close reading, I will illustrate how, through exterior gaze, both Ruth and Tess become labeled by others, which ultimately adds to their fallen identity and leads to its "fracturing" (Anderson 2). I argue that fallenness only really comes into existence once public judgment is placed on a woman and her actions, and she is categorized by others as deviant, impure and ultimately, as fallen.

My research aims to offer a deeper comprehension of gender and morality-related historical concerns that are mirrored in the social, cultural, and moral norms of the Victorian era. A study like this can bring forth valuable insight into the period's gender roles and power dynamics, and how society's view on women was greatly influenced by the extent to which they conformed to these well-entrenched ideologies. The history of the fallen woman can provide us with an opportunity to look at how behavior was managed, how sexuality was defined in the past, and in what ways Victorian society and fiction interacted with the questions of their day (Nead 36). However, not only does it allow insight into the past, it may also help us assess the way in which we construct and define gender dynamics and sexuality today. Through my case studies I intent to illustrate the complexities that surround fallenness, how it intersects with other factors of social life, such as class disparity and legal systems, and how it is essentially a social construct that

comes into being through outer forces and exterior perspectives. By understanding the role of the

fallen woman in both society and literature, one may reach a greater understanding of both

historical and ongoing issues concerning gender and morality.

2. Historical Background

As I have stated in my introduction, the fallen woman was often juxtaposed to the figure of 'the Angel in the House'. Essentially, this dichotomy was about a model of "female identity" (Brooks 91) with both figures embodying an entirely different side of Victorian womanhood. I will explore both these figures in the following section: what did they entail and more importantly, what were the overall attitudes towards them?

The term 'the Angel in the House' was first coined in the 1850's, in a narrative poem with the same title written by Coventry Patmore. Inspired by his wife Emily, Patmore meticulously describes all the extraordinary qualities that make the female protagonist of the poem, Honoria, the ultimate wife (Kühl 172). A good wife lives to please and love her husband unconditionally and is always anxious to help him bring out his best self (Kühl 173). She devotes herself to the family, knows no selfishness, no anger and is inherently good:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
>
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
>
> Of his condoled necessities
>
> She casts her best, she flings herself.
>
> (Patmore 53)

Though one might think, based on the excerpt above, that Patmore wrote this poem as a code of conduct for women, its real purpose was to serve as a handbook for men. Though this ultimately implies that the poem's overall audience was male, it also means that his detailed description of the perfect housewife eventually influenced the way women were perceived and

their role in society was questioned. As Sarah Kühl states in her essay "The Angel in the House and Fallen Women", when Patmore's poem was first published, the reviews were overall unfavorable, and even today, it is still not regarded as a great piece of literature but rather "as a valuable piece of evidence of social history" (172). Despite the poem's negative reception, it did eventually spark the interest of the Victorian public, helping the poem to a newfound popularity and its title becoming synonymous with the ideal Victorian housewife (Kühl 173). Notwithstanding that lots of ideologies concerning the ideal housewife already existed, due to Patmore's poem, there was now a term for it.

In Victorian society, the prevailing notion, as can also be seen in Patmore's poem, was that men's place was at work, earning money and looking after the family, while women belonged at home, where they fully submerged themselves in family life, taking care of the children and husband, and devoted herself to household duties (Kühl 173). Moreover, there was the prevailing belief that women's innocence should be protected from the outside world, so by confining her to the domestic sphere a woman would be guarded from possible temptations and harmful influences (Kühl 173). Essentially, there is nothing wrong with this idea, however, it was very common for men to explore their sexual temptations outside of the home – there was a great culture of prostitution during the Victorian era and a spread of venereal disease that was brought into the home by the husband's actions – which does ultimately imply a double standard concerning male and female sexuality (Greg qtd. in Fryckstedt 131). I will explore this aspect more in detail in one of the following paragraphs. Kühl describes that "the more chaste and innocent a young woman, even a wife, was, the more she lived up to the ideal that is also described in Patmore's poem" (174).

In short, the traditional Victorian woman was elevated into an angel-like figure, practically dehumanizing her (Auerbach 7). She embodied chastity and innocence, was self-sacrificial by nature and submitted entirely to family life – she was inherently good. The angel only existed as a daughter, wife and mother, and sought no identity beyond these roles (Auerbach 4). This way, she became emblematic for domesticity, subservience to others and above all, for social and sexual respectability.

As one might sense from the preceding description, the angel was regarded as the 'correct' figure of womanhood. Evidently, as she was juxtaposed to the angel, the fallen woman was then regarded as the 'wrong' figure of womanhood. The fallen woman was a very complex figure and is, therefore, not as easy to define as the angel. In her work *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*, Amanda Anderson asserts that fallenness is "a wide umbrella term, the designation cuts across class lines and signifies a complex of tabooed behaviors and degraded conditions" (2). The term is characterized by its fluidity and can be assigned to a spectrum of feminine identities, ranging from prostitutes, adulteresses and unmarried women who engage in sexual relationships, to actual victims of seduction and sexual abuse, as well as a variety of delinquent lower-class women (Anderson 2).

As one might gather from Anderson's outline of feminine identities that can be linked to fallenness, each of them ties to sexuality. While a fallen woman could, for instance, be a woman who fought for her own social or economic independence through education, or one who did not want to marry or have children, fallenness is inextricably linked to sexuality. As the heroines of my chosen novels – Ruth and Tess – 'fall' through sexual acts, this link to sexuality is what interests me most and what I deem most relevant for further investigation in this section. As I have briefly touched upon before, during the nineteenth century, there were very different social

standards for men and women when it came to sexuality. On the one hand, male sexuality, and the male's desire and pleasure, was not questioned nor condemned – men were sexually active, assertive and spontaneous. On the other hand, female sexuality was believed to merely function for reproductive goals or for the pleasure of the man, which stigmatized women as passive, meek and responsive beings (Nead 26). William Acton, a medical doctor from the nineteenth century, believed that "in respectable women, sexual desire did not exist, and passion for children, home and domestic duties had taken its place" (qtd. in Fryckstedt 131).

To illustrate how drastic the views on female sexuality could be during the Victorian era, I shortly want to turn to the overly radical convictions of Isaac Baker Brown, a nineteenth-century surgeon and gynecologist, and his colleagues. A commonly held belief was that the clitoris was a significant source of 'disease' in the woman's body, potentially causing nymphomania (i.e. uncontrollable sexual desire in women), insanity, epilepsy, depression, hysteria, and dementia, to name a few (Studd 674). Moreover, its excitation could result in the overall deterioration of a woman's mental state and would likely end in coma and death (Studd 673-674). To 'cure' this problem, Brown introduced the extreme concept of clitoridectomy in the 1860's – the literal removing of the clitoris. While Brown's ideas were – luckily – widely criticized, some of his colleagues shared the same thoughts, and though they would not go as far as to actually remove the clitoris, they would however find ways to destroy it (Studd 674). This extremity comes as a surprise, given that the knowledge on female anatomy and bodily functions was already quite well-developed by then. Nevertheless, such radical perspectives on female sexuality, which were supported by scientific professionals, led to the persistence of the stigmatization and demonization of normal female sexuality (Studd 673).

In short, the commonly held belief was that men had healthy and natural desires for sex, which was considered normal and unavoidable, whereas sexual desire in women did not exist, and if it did, it was deemed deviant and pathological (qtd. in Nead 26). However, not only does this illustrate a categorical division between male and female sexuality, it also categorizes female sexuality itself. The fallen woman and angel are further juxtaposed through these beliefs – the fallen woman is stigmatized as impure and evil, the angel as pure and good (Nead 26). As the Victorian beliefs concerning sexuality led to the perception that a woman would not experience any sexual desire, let alone have sexual experience outside of the domestic sphere, the fallen woman ultimately did not fit into the Victorian idea of domesticity and sexual purity, causing her demonization and exclusion from society. In her critically acclaimed work *Woman and the Demon*, Nina Auerbach therefore describes a fallen woman as someone who was "a galvanic outcast, her piquant blend of innocence and experience, came to embody everything in womanhood that was dangerously, tragically, and triumphantly beyond social boundaries [i.e. the boundaries of domesticity and sexuality]" (150). Auerbach further asserts that in transgressing those boundaries, the fallen woman defied three of the most respected and beloved institutions, i.e. "the family, the patriarchal state, and God the Father" (1).

The dichotomous patterns of angel versus fallen woman and 'normal' versus 'deviant' female sexuality, resulted in female identity becoming a matter for public judgement (Brooks 91). This culminated into many different perspectives concerning sexual morality and the fallen woman's treatment. For instance, William Acton, who I mentioned a few paragraphs above, takes his outlook on sexual morality a step further in his book *Prostitution*. While he already helped spread the categorical division between male and female sexuality, he goes on to connect prostitution to any sexual act that does not occur within marriage, ultimately tying it to the idea of

the fallen woman: "All illicit intercourse is prostitution, and that this word is as justly applicable as those of "fornication" and "whoredom" to the female who, whether for hire or not, voluntarily surrenders her virtue" (7). He continues by stating that a deviant woman was always cast out of society and that it was difficult for her to re-enter. Acton places the blame on women's emotional predisposition – for instance, her proclivity to hysteria, melancholia and insanity, or the deterioration of her mental state through sexual acts, as mentioned before. Through tying the fallen woman to prostitution, Acton emphasizes that one step astray was enough for leading a life without opportunities and any chance at redemption.

In her book *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*, Craik presents a different outlook on how the fallen woman was treated. She argues against scholars of the time who, much like Acton, advocated for chastity and virtuousness in women (15). To further her point, she even refers to old chivalric tales in which morals were placed on both men and women to such an extreme extent, that people lived in constant fear of losing their virtues, ultimately leading to an individualistic society that forgot about much worse evils outside of their personal life (15). Craik poses the question, rightly so in my opinion, whether one offence should really be the end of someone's life? Ending one's life based on one offence "is a doctrine repugnant even to Nature's own dealings in the visible world" (233). Craik goes on to argue that "it cannot be doubted that even this loss [of chastity] does not indicate total corruption or entail permanent degradation; that after it, and in spite of it, many estimable and womanly qualities may be found existing" (226). While she does not deny the fact that it was difficult for a fallen woman to re-enter society, she takes away the blame from the victim and places it on Victorian society itself and their lack of Christian spirit (qtd. in Fryckstedt 140). In her opinion, the English had no right "to treat as impure what God has not made impure" (220). She exposes the hypocrisy of Victorian England by stating that

most have been shielded from harm through education or other beneficial circumstances, and that as a good Christian, one should help the fallen woman to re-enter society instead of solely condemning her (220). In short, while Acton places the blame on the woman herself and ties it to biological causes, Craik connects her opinion to religion and blames society. Though Craik does not present any ground-breaking new perspectives that drastically challenge the prevailing Victorian male view, she does offer some nuance and poses thought-provoking questions concerning the fate of fallen women. Interestingly, lots of scholars from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries share Craik's thoughts and build on the notion that the Victorians themselves were the culprit in the fallen woman's existence.

In her essay "Women Writing Woman: Nineteenth Century Representations of Gender and Sexuality", written in 2009, Lyn Pykett argues that the fallen woman, being a figure of disruptive female sexuality, was productive for the discourse and practice of controlling and regulating women through precarious moral standards, as well as legal and medical rights (81-82). She was not merely an alternative to conventional, respectable femininity, but rather, "normative maternal Woman was constructed in relation to her deviant other" (81-82). A year after Pykett's essay was published, Rezzan Silkü adds to her statement in his respective essay "Deviant Femininity as a Metaphor for Female Liberation in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*". He asserts that the label of the fallen woman and her negative attributions "were nothing but patriarchal strategies to impose the doctrine of domesticity on Victorian women, by threatening them with the myth of feminine deviance" (100). The intent was to restrain any attempt by women to work outside the home that could potentially lead to women's financial independence, meaning that they would not have to economically rely on their husbands anymore (100). By constructing a model to avoid, i.e. the

fallen woman, the dominant Victorian ideology of domesticity, embodied in the earlier-mentioned expression 'Angel in the House', was able to prevail (100).

It is always important to realize that social standards are often influenced by the period in which they existed. For instance, Lynn Nead makes a distinction between two perceptions of sexuality – essentialism versus historical construct. Essentialism relates to the scientific idea that sexuality is a natural and biologically determined force, one of human's most basic and fundamental drives (26). On the other hand, sexuality is also socio-culturally driven and historically determined (26). One can conclude that in Victorian England, female sexuality's link to essentialism was completely ignored and merely considered to be a construct, e.g. Acton's/ Brown's perspectives. Victorian society created its own social standards concerning sexual morality, which ultimately meant that society itself was the driving force behind their own anxieties and the fallen woman, who was essentially also just a socio-cultural construct. In the following chapters of my paper, I will specifically focus on how fallenness is socially constructed by arguing that a woman's fall essentially only comes into being by two factors: outer forces that push her towards her fall, and the exterior gaze through which the woman's identity becomes fractured, which ultimately adds to her fall.

3. The Fallen Woman and Outer Forces

As I have stated in my introduction, female identity was subject to continuous public judgment (Brooks 91). This is a pattern we can find in both Ruth and Tess's journeys as well. They are repeatedly scrutinized by others, which is fueled by the nineteenth-century code of female purity that automatically condemned the fallen woman without taking into consideration any outer forces that could have potentially driven her towards said fall (Brooks 91). If we circle back to Anderson's statement about the range of feminine identities that can be associated with fallenness (2) – for instance, the adulteress, the prostitute, but also the victim of sexual assault – there seems to be an emphasis on the actions through which these women fell. At first glance, one might conclude that these women fell through the sexual acts – the prostitute for having the job she has, the adulteress for engaging in extramarital sex, and the victim for being sexually assaulted. However, the forces that potentially drove them towards this 'fall' never seem to be considered – perhaps working as a prostitute is the woman's last resort for being able to provide for her children, and perhaps the adulteress finds herself in a loveless marriage she cannot leave (e.g. because of the Victorian period's unfair system of divorce)? For the last example, the victim of sexual assault, there is no need to ask any questions – she is literally assaulted by someone, which is never someone's choice. All these examples are about sexual acts outside of wedlock, which deviated from the standard – and that was, in the minds of the Victorians, enough to condemn these women and cast them out of society without asking further questions or considering the exterior factors that contributed to their fall.

As we have established in the previous chapter of this paper, the Victorian ideal of domesticity and sexual purity (i.e. the Angel in the House) was essentially a social construct, and how this, too, meant that the idea of deviant sexuality and fallenness was also socially constructed – it stood

in relation to the standards of Victorian England, it was a creation of its own time. Fortunately, these conventional perspectives were simultaneously challenged and the Victorian middle-class attitude towards fallen women was not as homogeneous as one might think. Nevertheless, the attitudes that had already been established towards this dichotomy were continuously reinforced through medical, legal, and other social practices (e.g. Isaac Baker Brown's methods) and ultimately remained shared by a sizeable number of Victorian society (Nead 26; Watt). Since the fallen woman was a popular figure in literature, these differing attitudes towards her translated into Victorian literature as well. As George Watt states in his work *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, there was a contrast in approach: "novelists like Gaskell, Collins, Hardy and, to a lesser extent, Dickens, tried very hard to change this convention [related to female identity and the fallen woman]. Unfortunately, many other novelists felt it their duty to uphold it in their fiction". The latter attempted to encourage the female dichotomy through their novels by using a moral voice or representational character that would serve to underline that "the fall, when it comes, will be final" (Watt). This, once more, implies that the fall inevitably had everything to do with the action. The fall, i.e. the action, takes place, and from that moment on, the woman is defined in only one way – a sinner – and is persona non grata. I do not side with the view of this latter group of novelists.

As I have stated towards the end of the previous chapter, I argue that the fall of a woman is established by two exterior factors: outer forces that push her towards her fall, and the exterior gaze through which the woman's identity becomes fractured, which ultimately adds to her fall. In this chapter, I will focus on the first exterior factor, the outer forces. In her essay "New Woman, Fallen Woman", Kristina Brooks argues that the relation of women to a standard that juxtaposes the angel and the fallen woman should be redefined and that the outer forces that push women

away from the ideal and towards their falls should be equally explored (92). I unequivocally agree with Brooks' statement. While the act is inevitably part of the fall, I do not believe it is what fundamentally causes it. Fallenness entails much more than just the action – in my view, a woman's fall is based mainly on outer forces that can be, but are not necessarily, part of the sexual act itself. In both *Ruth* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, such outer forces are very much present, however, they are not acknowledged as the culprits while the heroines – Ruth and Tess – are consistently considered the sole wrongdoers that should be blamed for their actions. I argue that the fall of these heroines is wholly based on outer forces. In the following sections I will therefore investigate how both Ruth and Tess reach their fall – what outer forces can be discovered and how do they push the heroines to their falls?

3.1. Outer Forces in *Ruth*

The first novel I will discuss is *Ruth* by Elizabeth Gaskell. When the story opens, the reader meets fifteen-year-old Ruth Hilton, an orphan and apprentice dressmaker for Mrs. Mason. Ruth is seduced by the gentleman Henry Bellingham. When Ruth is cut from her apprenticeship, he promises her a new life in London, however, the moment he gets bored of her, Mr. Bellingham leaves her behind in Wales. At that point, Ruth is unfortunately already pregnant with his child and left in distress without anyone to rely on. Luckily, she meets the kind-hearted Mr. Benson and his sister Faith, who decide to take her to their hometown to live with them. To help her redeem herself and avoid social condemnation, the Bensons propose a new identity, and Ruth becomes Mrs. Denbigh to the public, a young, pregnant widow who has been tragically left behind. Essentially, Ruth is pushed to her fall by two main outer forces: first of all, by her dependence on

others for economic reasons and overall livelihood, and secondly through Mr. Bellingham's self-centered actions.

      As I have stated in the previous paragraph, Ruth works as an apprentice dressmaker for Mrs. Mason after she loses both parents. Ruth's background illustrates that she has no family to depend on, ultimately lacking economic benefits and not having the opportunity to gain any economic freedom on her own either. As William Knox states in his survey on *British Apprenticeship between 1800 and 1914*: "the apprentice was a member of the working class, but due to the educational aspect of his labour he was not seen as a wage-earner but as a worker/pupil. Learning rather than labouring, in fact, was how his work was thought of" (i). Even though Ruth performs labor, she does not have any earnings and is limited to the financial aid of her legal guardian that was appointed to her after her father's death. Moreover, Ruth's overall livelihood further depends on her apprenticeship, as it provides her with a roof over her head and daily meals. Brooks argues that the home and family were essential prerequisites of a protected or 'good' reputation and that a woman's lack thereof would make her a more likely subject to catastrophe (91). As this is exactly what Ruth lacks, it can be concluded that these factors only add to the probability of her fall and a sense of imminent doom is implied from the start of the novel.

      Mr. Bellingham, Ruth's seducer, is a second major force that pushes Ruth to her fall. However, his push resembles more to a well-calculated blow as he was very aware of Ruth's fragile position from the moment he met her. Though their encounters start off quite innocent, the reader is quickly made aware of both Ruth's and Mr. Bellingham's feelings toward one another. For instance, after having met Mr. Bellingham for the first time at a hunt-ball where Ruth was mending dresses, and he gave her a flower as a token of gratitude for repairing the dress of his dance partner, Ruth's interest is portrayed in the following excerpt:

One figure flitted more than all the rest through her visions. He presented flower after

flower to her in that baseless morning dream, which was all too quickly ended. The night

before, she had seen her dead mother in her sleep, and she wakened, weeping. And now

she dreamed of Mr. Bellingham, and smiled.

(Gaskell 19).

Ruth's dream of Mr. Bellingham illustrates a sense of innocence and perhaps naivety,

while Mr. Bellingham's interest is formulated with a completely different undertone:

There was, perhaps, something bewitching of the union of the grace and loveliness of

womanhood with the naïveté, simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child. There was a

spell in the shyness, which made her avoid and shun all admiring approaches to

acquaintance. It would be an exquisite delight to attract and tame her wildness, just as he

had often allured and tamed the timid fawns in his mother's park.

By no over-bold admiration, or rash, passionate word, would he startle her; and, surely, in

time she might be induced to look upon him as a friend, if not something nearer and dearer

still.

(Gaskell 31)

This passage offers insight into Mr. Bellingham's intentions. He intends to win Ruth's trust

and interestingly compares it to the process of winning the trust of a fawn, a young deer, which

ultimately tells us something about how he perceives Ruth. He desires to attract and tame her

wildness, implying that he is acting out of self-consideration and considers Ruth as a challenge for

him to conquer. Mr. Bellingham stands in stark contrast to Ruth's innocence, and it becomes clear that he is plotting a scheme. The idea that he's plotting something is further stimulated when he tries to convince Ruth to walk to Milham Grange – the home where she grew up:

> He was revolving plans in his head for giving her this pleasure, and he had also his own in view. If they went in any of his carriages, the loitering charm of the walk would be lost; and they must, to a certain degree, be encumbered by, and exposed to, the notice of servants.
> (Gaskell 39)

Again, Mr. Bellingham is acting out of self-centered motives. He will give her the pleasure of visiting her childhood home, but only if it aids his own objectives. His desire to be seen by servants and his motivation to design a plan that will serve this desire, clearly indicate a hidden agenda. As Ruth is vocal about how she misses her family and longs for departed times, Mr. Bellingham knows very well how to play upon her sentiment and character, which makes an action such as taking her to Milham Grange effective in the process of winning her trust. Moreover, he tells Ruth multiple times to consider him a brother: "Tell me everything, Ruth, as you would to a brother; let me help you, if I can, in your difficulties" (Gaskell 37).

Mr. Bellingham evidently knows that Ruth has no one to confide in or rely upon, so he makes use of her fragile position by acting as a brother to win her trust even further. On their way back from Milham Grange, Mr. Bellingham's scheme reaches its goals when they are seen together by Mrs. Mason, who decides to terminate Ruth's apprenticeship after her 'misbehavior' – a win for Mr. Bellingham, as he had hoped to be seen together on their walk. At

this point, he fully takes advantage of both Ruth's position and character, and his intentions

become abundantly clear, however, perhaps not yet to Ruth herself.

'Ruth, would you go with me to London? My darling, I cannot leave you here without a

home; the thought of leaving you at all is pain enough, but in these circumstances – so

friendless, so homeless – it is impossible. You must come with me, love, and trust to me.'

[…]

'How, my dearest Ruth? Bewilder you! It seems so clear to me. Look at the case fairly!

Here you are, an orphan, with only one person to love you, poor child!'

(Gaskell 49-50)

Mr. Bellingham makes use of the situation at hand and seduces Ruth into coming with him

to London. The story then jumps a few months ahead and we see that Ruth and Mr. Bellingham's

connection has evolved into a sexual relationship. However, it is not long before Mr. Bellingham

gets bored of Ruth, and when he becomes ill with brain-fever, he uses it as the perfect time to

leave Ruth behind without a word at an inn in Wales.

The question that lingers for me in Gaskell's story, is where one would pinpoint Ruth's

fall? Does she fall the moment her father dies and is left as an orphan? Is it the moment she begins

to meet Mr. Bellingham for unchaperoned Sunday walks? Is it the moment when she is cut from

her apprenticeship and agrees to go along with Mr. Bellingham? Or is it the moment when their

relationship evolves into something sexual? I argue that the outer forces she is confronted with add

up to her fall and slowly but surely push her towards catastrophe. Ruth is naïve; however, she

never had the opportunity to learn about certain social standards. As Gaskell writes: "she was too

young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting the subject of a woman's life" (39). Perhaps, if she had had someone to rely on and to teach her about such things, her future would have turned out very differently. Nonetheless, from my perspective, Mr. Bellingham persists to be the biggest culprit. Not only was he aware of Ruth's innocence and naivety, he also knew about her social vulnerability and romantic susceptibilities and cruelly played upon them for his own benefit (Anderson 127). Still, it remains difficult to pinpoint a clear-cut moment when Ruth ultimately becomes a fallen woman.

3.2. Outer Forces in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

In Hardy's novel, our heroine Tess Durbeyfield is a country girl raised in the village of Marlott. As her large family is poverty-stricken, Tess is pressured to claim kinship with the D'Urbervilles, a wealthy family of which Tess's father should be a supposed descendent. However, this causes disastrous impact on Tess's live as she is sexually assaulted by her alleged cousin, Alec D'Urbervilles. Tess falls pregnant with his child and faces social condemnation. When the baby unfortunately dies at only a few months old and Tess goes through an episode of depression, she decides to move away from her hometown and becomes a milkmaid on a dairy farm. Once on the dairy farm, she meets Angel Clare, an entirely different man than Alec, and they are quickly attracted to each other. However, when Angel asks for Tess's hand in marriage, her past comes back to haunt her, and she is left to deal with its consequences once again.

Tess's fall is, just like Ruth's, stimulated by outer forces. However, while Ruth is pushed to her fall by a lack of family, Tess is influenced by her possession of one, as her family's financial status is one of the driving factors behind her fall. As I have stated in the previous

paragraph, when Tess's parents find out they are related to the wealthier D'Urbervilles, they only have one mission – send Tess over there to claim kin:

> 'There's a great rich lady out by Trantridge, on the edge o' The Chase, of the name of
> D'Urberville. […] That lady must be our relation, and my project is to send Tess to claim
> kin. […] Tess ought to go to this other member of our family. She'd be sure to win the lady
> – Tess would; and likely enough 'twould lead to some noble gentlemen marrying her.'
> (Hardy 27)

Tess does not go along with her parent's scheme at first – at least not until she gets in an accident with her father's horse that turns out to be fatal for the animal. As her father relied on the horse for his higgling business, its death brings even more financial distress to the family and Tess is filled with shame and guilt: "'Tis all my doing – all mine! […] No excuse for me – none. What will father and mother live on now?" (Hardy 33). At that point, her mother plays on Tess's feelings and ultimately influences her into going to the D'Urbervilles to claim kin after all. Thus, Tess becomes a vehicle for securing financial benefits, and a potential brighter and wealthier future for the Durbeyfields. This ultimately means that her family becomes dependent on her, which places a huge burden on Tess's shoulders. As her meeting with the D'Urbervilles eventually ends in catastrophe, her family is in part responsible for pushing Tess to her fall, she essentially has become the product of her own environment. This is further illustrated through her mother's wishes and reactions. Joan Durbeyfield had dreams of marrying noble herself, however, "having been denied the hope of a dashing marriage" (Hardy 83), she appears to push her dream onto her daughter – "the light-minded woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter

almost from the year of her birth" (Hardy 49). Joan gets even more excited about the prospect of

Tess marrying a gentleman than Tess is herself: "He's struck wi' her – you can see that. He called

her Coz! He'll marry her, most likely, and make a lady of her; and then she'll be what her

forefathers was" (Hardy 47).

As I have already touched upon in the concise description of the novel, the second outer

force that pushes Tess towards her fall is Alec D'Urberville, the man who rapes her. From the

moment that Alec meets Tess, his attraction towards her is made very clear – upon seeing her for

the first time, the following is stated: "her rosy lips curved towards a smile, much to the attraction

of the swarthy Alexander" (Hardy 40). During their first encounter – when they essentially do not

know each other yet – he already shows his appeal to her by calling her "my pretty girl" and "my

pretty Coz" (Hardy 41). However, Alec's expression of his attraction loses its innocence quickly,

as he makes multiple, sometimes forceful, advances towards Tess throughout their encounters.

> Tess wished to abridge her visit as much as possible; but the young man was pressing, and
>
> she consented to accompany him. He conducted her about the lawns, and flower-beds, and
>
> conservatories; and thence to the fruit-garden, where he asked her if she liked strawberries.
>
>   'Yes,' said Tess, 'when they come.'
>
>   'They are already here.' D'Urberville began gathering specimens of the fruit for
>
> her, handing them back to her as he stooped; and, presently, selecting a specially fine
>
> product of the 'British Queen' variety, he stood up and held it by the stem to her mouth.
>
>   'No – no!' she said quickly, putting her fingers between his hand and her lips. 'I
>
> would rather take it in my own hand.'
>
>   'Nonsense!' he insisted; and in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in.

(Hardy 42)

The excerpt above takes place during Alec and Tess's first meeting. Though this act seems quite simple and rather innocent, through his insistence on Tess accompanying him on a tour of the grounds and on feeding her a strawberry, Alec's obtrusive behavior comes to light. A certain pattern of dominance and subservience between the two of them is set, and the reader is left with a sense of foreboding. While Tess tries to dismiss his advances and is clear about her feelings towards Alec after that first encounter, he does not fold and keeps forcing Tess into uncomfortable situations. For instance, when Alec and Tess are on their way to Trantridge in a dog-cart, Alec states that he will go slowly if she allows him to give her a kiss. While Tess reluctantly agrees, she dodges aside the moment he tries to kiss her. Alec's true nature appears once again in what follows and through it, a further sense of foreboding is created:

'I – thought you would be kind to me, and protect me, as my kinsman!'

'Kinsman be hanged! Now!'

'But I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!' she implored, […] 'And I wouldn't ha' come if I had known!'

He was inexorable, and she sat still, and D'Urberville gave her the kiss of mastery.

[…]

'I don't like you at all! I hate and detest you! I'll go back to mother, I will!'

D'Urberville's bad temper cleared up at the sight of hers; and he laughed heartily.

'Well, I like you all the better,' he said. 'Come, let there be peace. I'll never do it again against your will. My life upon it now!'

(Hardy 56-57)

Interestingly, Alec's kiss is called 'the kiss of mastery', which adds to the pattern of dominance and subservience that has been established between them since the first day they met. Though Alec promises to not attempt to kiss Tess again against her will, he does continue to acknowledge the temptation he feels towards her: "I said I would not come near you; and, in spite of such temptation as never before fell to mortal man, I'll keep my word…" (Hardy 62). By making these promises, he tries to win Tess's trust and in a moment of weakness, when Tess lets her guard down slightly, he violates that trust and breaks his promises by drugging and raping her. The entire passage of the sexual act committed by Alec lacks any consent from Tess. Nineteenth-century English law specifically addressed situations in which a woman was not able to give consent, by being asleep for instance: "If the woman is asleep when the connection takes place, she is incapable of consent, and although no violence is used, the prisoner may be convicted of rape, if he knew that she was asleep" (The Earl of Halsbury, et al. as qtd in Davis 224).

As Alec deliberately brought a druggist's bottle with him and made Tess drink from it, his intentions are clear, he wanted Tess to be unconscious and he is very much aware that she is asleep when he performs the act: "D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. She was sleeping soundly" (Hardy 73). At this point, we are no longer talking about evil intentions, but about a straightforward criminal act (William 226).

As with Ruth, the question again remains where one would pinpoint Tess's fall? And moreover, can one genuinely label her fall as a fall if she had no part in it? The emphasis here is no longer on the actions that are committed *by* her body but is placed on the actions that are committed *to* her body (Brooks 94) which indicates a complexity to Tess's fall. Tess herself and

the sexual act she was, unwillingly, part of, are not to blame – the crisis is fundamentally caused by outer forces.

3.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the outer forces that push both Ruth and Tess to their falls are mainly social, economical, and legal. Social forces can be found in the fact that both heroines must deal with social conventions concerning gender and class. Economical ones lie in the fact that both Ruth and Tess are economically restricted, Ruth by being an orphan and Tess through the influence of family poverty. Ruth is legally influenced by the guardian-ward system and Tess is confronted with literal illegal practices. Their falls are driven by "debased human instincts, in the forms of excessive egoism and financial and sexual greed" (Brooks 95).

4. The Fallen Woman and Exterior Gaze

In the previous chapter of this paper, I argued that a woman's fall is based on two factors. First of all, I stated that the fall is not fundamentally caused by the sexual act that precedes it but is rather established by outer forces that push the fallen woman to catastrophe. Secondly, I asserted that the fall of a woman comes into being through exterior gaze as this essentially labels the woman and adds to her fallen and fractured identity. As I have already elaborated on the first factor in the previous chapter, I will focus on the second one in the following.

As we have seen in the first section of this paper (i.e. historical background), Amanda Anderson states that fallenness is an umbrella term, indicating that there is not just one stereotypical fallen woman. Hopefully this has become clear from the previous section in which I explored the outer forces that caused Ruth's and Tess's fall – though there are some similarities, they both reach their falls in completely different ways. While fallenness comes into being through different actions and different outer forces, Anderson does argue that there is a constant in the depiction of fallenness, namely the "fractured identity of the fallen figure" (2). Anderson explains that a fallen woman faces a loss of character and experiences difficulties to "maintain an authentic, private, or self-regulating identity" (2). My own views are in accordance with Anderson's – once a woman falls, she loses control over her own identity, and she becomes subject for scrutiny. However, as this implies a strong impact of the outside world on a woman's identity, I would more specifically describe a fractured identity as a labeled or determined identity attained through exterior gaze. I want to emphasize the link between personal identity to exterior perspectives here. I believe that someone's identity can only be fractured, labeled, determined, through the perception of others. Once Ruth and Tess transgress a boundary set by society and their respective communities become aware of this transgression, the identities of the heroines become fractured –

they obtain a label to which they are inextricably linked from then on and that determines their past, present and future identity. If we look at it like this, I would argue that fallenness only really comes into existence as soon as public judgment is placed on a woman and her actions, and once she is categorized by others as deviant, impure and ultimately, as fallen. Thus, fallenness does not only come into being through outer forces, it is also stimulated by exterior perspectives. Important here is to remember that these exterior perspectives in the Victorian era were markedly influenced by the dichotomy between angel and fallen woman and the opposition between appropriate and deviant female sexuality. In the following section, I will substantiate the points made above by applying them to the stories of Ruth and Tess and by demonstrating the instances where they are confronted with exterior gaze which ultimately leads to the fracturing of their identity.

4.1. Exterior Gaze and Fractured Identity in *Ruth*

In Ruth's story, numerous examples of her fractured identity through exterior perspective can be found, too much even, which makes it difficult for me to choose only a few examples to elaborate on. However, an interesting first example can be found in the following excerpt:

[…] Ruth, who was always fond of children, went up to coo and to smile at the little thing, and, after some 'peep-booing', she was about to snatch a kiss, when Harry, whose face had been reddening ever since the play began, lifted up his sturdy little right arm and hit Ruth a great blow in the face.

'Oh, for shame, sir!', said the nurse, snatching back his hand; 'how dare you do that to the lady who is so kind as to speak to Sissy!'

'She's not a lady!' said he, indignantly. 'She's a bad, naughty girl – mamma said so, she

did; and she sha'n't kiss our baby.'

The nurse reddened in her turn. She knew what he must have heard; but it was awkward to

bring it out, standing face to face with the elegant young lady.

'Children pick up such notions, ma'am,' said she at last, apologetically to Ruth, who stood,

white and still, with a new idea running through her mind.

'It's no notion; it's true, nurse; and I heard you say it yourself.'

(Gaskell 62)

The excerpt takes place at the inn in Wales where Ruth is staying with Mr. Bellingham,

and where he will eventually leave her behind. It portrays the first time that Ruth is explicitly

confronted with the perspectives of others on her relationship with Mr. Bellingham. Harry, the

little child, labels Ruth as 'a bad, naughty girl'. However, it is implied that he has picked up these

ideas from his mother and nurse, which ultimately means that they have been talking about Ruth

and criticize her behavior. Up to this point, Ruth had not thought about the potential consequences

or public condemnation her relationship with Mr. Bellingham might instigate. As Ruth is labeled

by others, a fractured identity is established, and she becomes determined by the relationship.

Interestingly, through this encounter, Ruth's self-perception is also affected: she "stood, white and

still, with a new idea running through her mind" (Gaskell 62).

A second example takes us a bit further into the story, when Ruth has already been living

with the Benson's for a substantial period of time – her son, Leanord has already passed his first

birthday and Ruth has found work as a governess for the Bradshaw family. Before Mr. Bradshaw

finds out about Ruth's past, he treats her very empathically and regards her with great esteem:

Ruth altogether found favour within him. […] He desired Mrs. Bradshaw to pay her every

attention she could; and even once remarked, that he thought her so respectable a young

person that he should not object to her being asked to tea the next time Mr. and Miss

Benson came.

(Gaskell 133)

Ruth gave the Bradshaws the highest satisfaction, as Mr. Bradshaw often said both to her

and to the Bensons; indeed, she rather winced under his pompous approbation.

(Gaskell 174)

However, when Mr. Bradshaw finds out about Ruth's past, his view of her takes a turn for

the worst. He no longer sees the woman he has come to know and has grown very fond of. From

that moment on, Mr. Bradshaw only sees Ruth's sin and strips her completely of her identity, of

any complexity to her character, and in doing so, he ultimately dehumanizes her. He labels her as

an impure, wanton woman: "If there is one sin I hate – I utterly loathe – more than all others, it is

wantonness. It includes all other sins" (Gaskell 277). Ruth is once again labeled with a fallen

identity and thus becomes determined through it anew. Interestingly, Mr. Bradshaw uses

'wantonness' to describe Ruth's sin. Wantonness is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as overly

sexual behavior that shows no care about negative consequences. By using this word, Mr.

Bradshaw's views are linked to the prevalent Victorian beliefs concerning female sexuality that

existed at the time – hence, he becomes a personification of middle-class respectability (Watt).

However, Mr. Bradshaw brings in a very one-sided perspective. To him, Ruth is deviant, impure,

fallen – nothing else. He does no longer recognize – or more accurately, he refuses to recognize –

Ruth's character before he learned about her past and fails to take into consideration the social, economic and psychological forces that shape the fate of the fallen woman (Watt).

So, as we have done in the previous chapter of this paper, one can question anew what actually turns Ruth into a fallen woman? As I have contested in the previous section, I do not believe the act is what fundamentally makes a woman 'fallen', rather it is the outer forces, and, as we have established in the examples above, the gaze of others that cause a woman's fallenness. The example related to Mr. Bradshaw illustrates how Ruth becomes fallen through exterior gaze in an intriguing way. Ruth was essentially 'fallen' the entire time she was working for Mr. Bradshaw, however, she only acquires the actual label once he learns about her past. This implicates that the action is no longer what causes her fall here, it is other people's knowledge and condemnation that causes it.

4.2. Exterior Gaze and Fractured Identity in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Just like Ruth, Tess faces similar social condemnation and is determined through exterior gaze that fractures her identity. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Tess is sexually assaulted by Alec D'Urberville and falls pregnant with his child. Eager to escape Alec's grip, Tess returns to Marlott, her hometown, where she gives birth to a son. In hopes to elevate her spirits and make herself more useful after a depressing period of time at home, she finds work as a field-woman. Tess works among other men and women, and the attitudes of her female peers are particularly interesting to consider here:

> Tess's female companions sang songs, and showed themselves very sympathetic and glad at her reappearance out of doors, though they could not refrain from mischievously

throwing in a few verses of the ballad about the maid who went to the merry green wood

and came back a changed person. There are counterpoises and compensations in life; and

the event which had made of her a social warning had also for the moment made her the

most interesting personage in the village to many.

(Hardy 92)

Strikingly, the perception of Tess by her colleagues is not negative, but rather sympathetic.

However, despite these sympathetic attitudes, she still receives a label and with it becomes

determined. Tess is now considered a 'social warning' and the ballads that her companions sing

suggest to be inspired by her. Moreover, as it is stated that Tess's position has made her the most

interesting person in the village, this implies that she has become interesting to many *because of*

what happened to her, not *despite of* what happened or without it having happened to her in the

first place.

Tess is aware about the labels that her community place on her – i.e. a social warning or a

"liberal education" (Hardy 99) – which makes her mournful. To her, "the past was past; whatever

it had been, it was no more at hand" (Hardy 91). This statement indicates that she is attempting to

make peace with her past – a past that can be considered rather traumatizing – however, it is

difficult for her to do so as she is challenged by social conventions and remains judged by exterior

opinions. The following excerpt illustrates how Tess is not necessarily displeased with her

situation, but the way that she is perceived by the villagers and how they speak about her, is what

makes her unhappy.

Alone in a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not

greatly. If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother,

with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have

caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein.

Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate

sensations.

(Hardy 91)

Judgement is also placed on Tess in her own home. For instance, when her son falls ill,

Tess wants to send for the parson to baptize the little baby, as "her darling was about to die, and

[there was] no salvation" (Hardy 93). However, her father appears to hold a grudge against his

daughter for, first of all, failing at securing their nobility, and secondly, for bringing shame to their

family. By denying her son a chance at salvation and by only considering the shame Tess has

brought to the family, her father ultimately adds to her fractured identity: "No parson should come

inside this door, he declared, prying into his affairs just then, when by her shame, it had become

more necessary than ever to hide them" (Hardy 93).

Interestingly, when we consider the opinions of Tess's little brothers and sisters, who have

not yet been exposed to social and moral standards to a considerable extent, a stark contrast to

Tess's father and the villagers of Marlott is presented. Her siblings do not judge Tess – in their

eyes she has not changed, she simply had a baby. When the baby eventually dies, they even plead

for her to have another one without considering any conventions:

In the blue of the morning that fragile soldier and servant breathed his last, and when the

other children awoke they cried bitterly, and begged Sissy [Tess] to have another pretty

baby.

(Hardy 95)

However, the most noticeable example of how Tess's identity is fractured and becomes

fallen through exterior gaze can be found in the perspectives of her lover, Angel Clare. After a

year filled with sadness in Marlott, Tess leaves her hometown and finds work as a milkmaid at a

dairy-farm in Talbothays. Once there, she meets Angel Clare, the son of a reverent who desires to

become a farmer and is therefore mastering the skills of dairy-work as the dairyman's pupil

(Hardy 113). During their time on the farm, they get to know each other well and slowly but

surely, they fall in love. Angel stands in great contrast to Alec D'Urberville – Angel is a very soft-

tempered, intelligent young man who, though vocal about his feelings towards Tess, does not act

out of self-consideration and takes his time to woe her in a respectful way. When the reader gets

insight into his feelings towards her, his genuine and honest motivations are clear:

And as Clare was oppressed by the outward heats, so was he burdened inwardly by a

waxing fervour of passion for the soft and silent Tess. (Hardy 149)

Here, in this apparently dim and unimpassioned place, novelty had volcanically started up,

as it had never, for him started up elsewhere. (Hardy 153)

As their relationship develops and they become more and more infatuated with one another, Angel asks Tess to marry him. Tess does not initially agree with his proposal of marriage as she is troubled by her conscience and questions whether she should tell him about her past. Afraid that she will lose him if she does, she eventually agrees to marry him without confessing anything. Interestingly, when they are officially married, Angel declares that he must make a confession to Tess – he confesses that during a difficult time in his life, "he went to London and plunged into eight-and-forty hours' dissipation with a stranger" (Hardy 225). Tess feels a sense of gladness and relief as she believes that Angel's confession has created the perfect opening for her to confess her own past to him: "Oh, Angel – I am almost glad – because now you can forgive me! […] I have a confession, too – remember, I have said so" (Hardy 225). However, Tess's optimism is quickly shattered to pieces when Angel's reaction is not at all what she had hoped for.

> 'Forgive me as you are forgiven! *I* forgive *you*, Angel.'
>
> 'You – yes, you do.'
>
> 'But you do not forgive me?'
>
> 'Forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person; now you are
> another. How can forgiveness meet such a grotesque prestidigitation as that?'
>
> […]
>
> 'I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you.'
>
> 'But who?'
>
> 'Another woman in your shape.'

She perceived in his words the realization of her own apprehensive foreboding in former

times. He looked upon her as a species of impostor; a guilty woman in the guise of an

innocent one.

(Hardy 228-229)

Similar to the example of Mr. Bradshaw in Ruth's case, Angel's perception of Tess shifts

completely. From that point on, her entire personhood has changed in Angel's eyes – she is no

longer his soft and innocent wife, but an impostor, a guilty woman disguised as Tess. Tess's

identity becomes labeled and entirely determined based on her past. Angel, just like Mr.

Bradshaw, does not appear to take into consideration the outer factors that have pushed Tess

towards crisis and places a great deal of the blame on Tess. What makes this example even more

striking is the fact that Angel himself has partaken in a sexual relationship with a woman outside

of wedlock, and as Tess forgives him instantly without any further questions asked, Angel's

identity is not impacted in any way. But when Tess confesses her past sexual experience – actual

sexual assault – Angel cannot forgive her, and Tess's identity is gravely impacted, she has become

fallen. These opposing reactions accurately reflect the dichotomous nature of the Victorian period

and its prevalent double standards.

4.3. Conclusion

The examples I have provided above illustrate how both Ruth and Tess's identities are

shaped by the perspectives of the exterior world. In the examples of Mr. Bradshaw and Angel, a

clear dividing line is established between who Ruth and Tess were 'before' and who they are

'after'. To return to Craik's argument in the chapter on historical background: "it cannot be

doubted that even this loss [of chastity] does not indicate total corruption or entail permanent degradation; that after it, and in spite of it, many estimable and womanly qualities may be found existing" (226). However, it seems that both Mr. Bradshaw and Angel think that a loss of chastity does imply overall corruption. Nonetheless, as I have stated before, both women were essentially already 'fallen', even before their respective pasts came to light. This adds to the complexity of fallenness and adds to the question about where one would really pinpoint a woman's fall? Essentially, a woman only becomes fallen once her 'offence' is acknowledged and is labeled as such by others. Ruth and Tess's identities are fractured by entirely reducing their personhoods to their fall which ultimately leads to their offences becoming their identities. This way, they fall a second time, long after their initial fall – enforced by outer factors – has taken place.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, a Victorian woman's existence was bound by a great deal of societal standards concerning her personal morals and sexuality. The extent to which she adhered to these morals was an important factor in the minds of the Victorians and ultimately categorized her as either an 'Angel in the House' or a fallen woman. I have discussed that the fallen woman essentially stepped outside of Victorian boundaries, however, as I hope I have made clear, this was not always a willing or conscious choice. I argued that the fallen woman often transgressed through the influence of outer forces – for instance through family poverty, sexual assault, manipulative practices, etc. in the cases of Ruth and Tess. Secondly, I argued that a woman's fall is further affected by exterior perspectives and adds to the fracturing and labeling of her identity long after her initial fall.

To conclude this paper, I would like to turn to the moment in Gaskell's novel when Ruth is walking home after the hunt-ball where she met Mr. Bellingham and she takes a moment to reflect on the evening, specifically on how different the lives of the people that attended the ball are in comparison to hers:

> Ruth felt as if a dream had melted away, and she were once more in the actual world. How long would it be, even in the most favourable chance, before she should again enter the shire-ball! or hear a band of music! or even see again those bright happy people – as much without any semblance of care or woe *as if they belonged to another race of beings*! Had they ever to deny themselves a wish, much less a want? Literally and figuratively, their lives seemed to wander through flowery pleasure-paths.
> (Gaskell 18)

She considers the attendees as part of 'another race of beings', as they are notably separated from Ruth based on the class they belong to. However, once Ruth – and Tess – becomes fallen, she is ultimately placed into one sole category of feminine identity and is completely stripped from her personhood or any further complexity to her character and existence. Eventually, she again belongs to 'another race of beings', however, this time to a race that is considered to belong to the bottom half of society. This degrading section of society she is placed in determines her life, and that of other fallen women, to a great extent.

Understanding the complexities of the fallen woman, the factors that add to her fall, and how she is treated, does not only give us insight into how the Victorian period regulated female identity and sexuality, it also helps us to evaluate how these women were incorrectly criticized and scrutinized and adds to the overall comprehension of Victorian society – how power dynamics, class systems, medical perspectives, and so on were managed. Moreover, understanding the past better, can help us reflect on the present and how we organize cultural, social and moral standards today.

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