Feminist Sensibility

Introduction:

The chapter focuses on feminist sensibilities in Late Victorian fiction as it is significant to comprehend the sensibilities espoused by the women characters, in the fin de siècle era. Late Victorian fiction has been an important critical focus for feminist scholarship and the novels may be perceived as the melting points of ideological conflicts and attitudes towards woman’s nature and role. The focus on Feminist sensibility in the sensational novels and in the new woman novels; a topic that has been ignored in literary criticism stimulate curiosity to discern how Grand and Braddon’s women characters evoke sensibilities that come closer to modern theorists definition of feminism. Such focus also goes to enunciate how in the late Victorian era novelists aimed to portray the new woman who resembles the modern woman in her zeal and mission. Feminism or feminist sensibility was an alien concept in the Victorian period, yet their creation comes closer to the latest feminist theories. The depiction of active and vibrant woman corroborates attempts to deconstruct the sentimental ideal of manliness and femininity. They link the question of femininity to womanly will power, and such depiction marks a shift from a sensitive heroine to a new ideal. The chosen novels give a survey of the social world and also give an insight into characters and events. The political and social forces that led to the transforming of society as a whole are depicted in the novels. The woman in these novels becomes an adventurous eve this opens up the vistas of an emancipatory world but she is also confined in the patriarchal world because,
If sense excludes women sensibility confines them—yet offers a radical challenge to patriarchy; a challenge which it must repress...the prison of sensibility is created by patriarchy to contain woman; thus they experience desire without law, language without power. (Jacobus 15)

The question of ideology confining woman took a serious turn in the late Victorian era. The depiction of woman in Hardy’s novels and the feminist sensibility they evoke is a sound reply to the biased analysis that a male writer lacks the genuine presentation of woman’s trauma. Rosalind Miles observes, “Hardy was especially good at dealing with woman’s grief and experience of sorrow as they feel it rather than as it looks from the outside to men.” (27) The feminist sensibility evoked in the works of Braddon, Grand and Hardy, confirm the need to reinvent female identity. The novelists castigate the double standards which victimized women and concentrate on some important issues like gender inequality, the act of silencing, social resistance, subjugation and transgression. To Grand and Braddon the traditional understanding of masculinity had become unfashionable and the feminine traits that describe woman as weak, inferior were seen as the makers of vehemence and challenge. Their portrayal of the lesbian and homosexual affairs in the Victorian era insinuate their impulse to celebrate women’s identity in a patriarchal society and women’s urge to deconstruct the traditional belief in heterosexuality. A careful scrutiny of the novels show how these novels present the feminist sensibility in women by providing a radical insight into class, gender, marriage, woman’s politics, and place in society.
Feminist sensibility

One of the radical changes that Victorian era witnessed was the rising consciousness of women about their political rights and potentialities. The awareness created in social and political circles gave rise to sensibilities which saw the emanation of feminism. The sole concern of feminist sensibility was to see how the society perceived women and to exonerate women from cultural constraints. Feminist sensibilities are concerned with how difference is invested with oppression that exists due to hierarchy and gender discrimination. Wollstonecraft’s novel Mary (1788) shows Mary as an independent woman resisting hierarchy and conventional wisdom. She represents an energetic, unconventional, opinionated, rational female genius which helped to develop an emerging feminist discourse. Florence Nightingale’s Cassandra (1854) challenges the cultural notion that women are passionless, and lack intelligence. Cassandra was a ferocious attack on the family, it mirrored the plight of women of her class in mid 19th century Britain. Showalter classes Cassandra among those which provide new possibilities for women. Oscar Wilde observes that by the 1890’s the development of women’s assertion was intense, and the mainstream press had to reckon the sprouting body of women writers where such sensibilities were subtly voiced. In her breathtakingly bold novel, Maria (1798) Wollstonecraft initiated the celebration of female sexuality at a time when sensibility meant to many to offer too much political power to women and emasculate British men. It is also affirmed that feminist sensibility to Wollstonecraft depicts a thinking and a rational being when she says,
Whose grandeur is derived from the operation of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion; but drawn by the individual from the original source…Maria is not the typical feminine fiction generated by a wounded heart but a portrayal of woman as she is. (qtd in Conger 124)

Haanah Moore and Wollstonecraft were engaged in a debate whether sensibility was a positive or a negative attribute. The patriarchal society privileges men to enjoy benefits simply because they are male. The emphasis on social and political reforms by the suffragette is crucial in shaping the feminist sensibility. The female avant-gardism endeavored to construct a world of her own. Under the system of patriarchy, woman’s identity is inferior to man and this eventually resulted in woman’s deprivation or lack of identity. The dominant order and theories (Freud and Lacan) defined femininity as, ‘lack’ and ‘non being,’ and ‘absence of meaning.’ Contemporary Feminists like Cixous, Irigaray ridicule the definition of the dominant order but it’s interesting to discern that Victorian writers confirm this through their presentation of women characters and this evidences the contemporary relevance of the Victorian writers thinking. Patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all women and these standards are accepted as natural. Feminism tries to disentangle this confusion, by hinting that women are essentially female but it does not guarantee femininity. The novels present its women as a woman who, “Challenges authoritarian, patriarchal - sited power in [its] interrogation of form, mirroring as it does … the struggle of a heroine who is both “exiled from and enclosed within the patriarchal structures.” (Harman & Meyer xxix)

The chapter attempts to show how Feminist sensibility is seen in their movement from a position of lack to one of power. The demand for gender equality has been one
continuous struggle starting from the Victorian era to the present century. They oppose social dictatorship and patriarchy such opposition brings a process of questioning, into finding of new kinds of spaces and search for new ways and new rhythms. Feminist dialogic of the late Victorian novels suggests resistance to domination in public and private sphere where women mediate and subvert rigid rules that aim to subdue women. Feminism revolves around ethics of justice and right as against femininity which concentrates on responsibility and relationship. The prerogative of woman’s caring and benignity were momentous for feminists to argue for the importance of woman’s service to polity. Sigmund Freud’s belief that human anatomy produces masculine and feminine traits influenced many thinkers. The late Victorian writers’ perception of woman’s identity may have occasioned because they were termed as the ‘other.’ The chosen novels show a similarity of what Diane Price Herndl describes,

Feminist criticism assumes that women represent different strata of society, an oppressed one. It also assumes that women’s exclusion from the dominant society has made systematic and fundamental differences in the kind of art women make, the way women think and the way women use language. (10)

Nevertheless narratives of woman show progress and decline of such feminist sensibility. Progress is because novelists and women activists were attempting to redefine female identity by striving hard to gain access to the public sphere. Katherine Rogers, Feminism in Eighteenth –Century England (1982) reveals the liberating effect of rationalism and identifies positive developments in fiction. Feminist sensibility as defined by Speranza in her poem, Historic Women (1847) states that woman is no ‘coward fronting fate’, Oscar Wilde’s drama Vera, (1880) for instance, glorified the revolutionary powers of female
character. If Feminism is conceived as a sensibility; we see how fiction helps to discern the shift from objectification to subjectification. Feminist sensibility embodies a skeptical sensibility that questions the dominant ideology that excludes them from inquiry, it lays emphasis on self-surveillance, focuses on individualism, choice and empowerment recognises woman’s greater experience, because “Victorian culture constituted a battleground of competing strategies of transgression,” (Kucich the Power of Lies 3) The gradual evolution of the heroine from the domestic realm to social realm is intriguing in the Victorian novels. The protest against feminine sensibility that subdues them made women reject mastery and essentialism that keeps women passive and meek. Hardy, Grand and Braddon reveal a subtle leaning of the feminist sensibility that is vigorous, challenging and which expresses agility in spirit and mind the women characters are united in one authoritative voice to challenge traditional image of women. Feminist rumination centers on comprehending and defying the hierarchical binary, and opposition between male and female. Many feminists and novelists who supported feminist cause use Michel Foucault’s theory on Power to explain how resistance against patriarchy appears paradoxical. Foucault estimates power as ‘negative’ as it works through ordinance and deterrence; he desires a positive notion of power because it operates through normalization. If as Foucault says resistance against power subtly suggests power this excites one to understand, what may have been the purpose of these late Victorian writers in presenting the resistance of women against patriarchy? Could it be paradoxical? Do these women characters exhibit positive notions of power? Are they striving to exonerate themselves from rigidity without moving out of the patriarchal structure? Where and how is power presented in women?

_Ideala’s Journey to Selfhood an Evocation of Feminist Sensibility_
Grand in Ideala shows the conflict that woman at the turn of the century experienced, Ideala’s infelicitous marriage to the envious doctor exacerbates her conjugal relation. Her impasseive response to his wretched conduct does not reinforce their relationship. She grapples with the decision, whether to resist her overbearing and adulterous husband for another man, (Lorrimer) or to accept an ordained singleton and repudiate the desire for normative relationship. The novel ends with Ideala’s decision to live without the male aid and uplift women from their wretched condition. The narrator Lord Dawne, Ideala’s friend articulates his inability to understand her. The difficulty of Lord Dawne to assess Ideala was the difficulty that men faced to understand women who aspired to find greater meaning during the transition phase. Grand provides broader platform to women presenting them as active agents within the married world. Her women characters protest against men who wish to denigrate women’s position. Evadene attempts suicide, Edith dies of Syphilis (Heavenly Twins, 1893) which she has contracted from her unfaithful husband. But Ideala and Beth daringly oppose the injustice and prejudice of the world. Marriage is presented as a horrible legalized oppression and suppression, and Ideala terms it “a commercial treaty” (50) these thoughts concord with Anglo American II wave feminism. Margaret Ely comments,

Marriage is sanctified rape, said the 1970’s radical feminists, An extreme view, perhaps, but Sue is aware of it, eighty years earlier, in the 1890’s when she says ‘marriage is like being licensed to be loved on the premises (V.i)’ For Sue as for radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin, Susan Griffin, Kate Millet and Mary Daly, marriage legitimizes the man’s desire for sex. (145)
Feminist sensibility in Ideala, is seen in her individuality, her decision to remain out of the marriage circle and aim at liberation from man’s control. She builds her feminist identity at the end as the grand heroic and importantly single woman. The subtle sense of womanly sensibility is seen in Grand making Ideala withdraw from heterosexuality this illustrates her desire for liberation without seeking divorce or re-marriage. The late Victorian novels show women’s disregard for marriage and the failure of society to restore the faith that man and woman had lost in marriage. The fact that women began to analyse marriage and her position in the marriage circle was alarming for it shook the very age old beliefs in marriage. Ideala, Elfride, Grace are forced into marriage but marriage turns out to be a fiasco. The forceful focus on marriage was significant to Hardy, Grand and Braddon. Angel Clare (Tess of D’Urbervilles) loses Tess owing to his priggish and morbid idealism; Eustacia and Clym are estranged because of their illusions about one another, Winterborne and Fitzpiers, loose Grace metaphorically. Lucy Graham’s exacting desires, her misjudged decisions and George’s failure to satiate her wants brings the rift, Ideala loses Lorrimer because of the gender bias that he nurtures, only Ethelberta succeeds in making her marriage fruitful. Why did these novelists present a gruesome picture of marriage? Did these women expect more than what society offered? Victorian novelist’s comment on the ongoing debates about marriage confirm that the writers’ focus a critical eye on the subject which showed marriage not as a bringer of joy but a contract bound to disillusion both man and woman destabilizing the stabilized patriarchal culture. Modern world may view marriage as a stereotype, but they are still germane to the study of marital relationship in fiction. A cautious scrutiny shows how present notions of marriage are similar to what the late Victorians thought and felt about marriage. It also alerts us to the social
transformations and ideological disputes swirling in the Victorian culture. Marriage nullifies the dominant power of women, the chosen novels show how the power of Clara, Lucy, Aurora, Eustacia, Alicia, Phoebe, is silenced and how marriage has fulfilled woman’s only task viz. the role of a mother and wife. But they also taunt the complacent stereotypes of the separate spheres by deviating from the familiar notions of the ideal and the pure woman or the proper feminine. Complete freedom from the domestic sphere is unfeasible and home becomes an enclosed garden, forceful and unhappy marriage is borne because,

We still live in a framework of familio-religious relations in which the woman is the body to the man’s head. It’s quite astonishing that men, who in their cradle were totally dependent upon women and who owe their existence to this dependence should then take the liberty of turning things around; men exist thanks to women’s intelligence … (Elvy 47)

Marriage is viewed as a step in the wrong direction for women, as marriage laws, world over grant men the right to assert and dominate. Such women as Ethelberta, Eustacia, Ideala, Lucy Grahams embrace marriage in so doing they follow the common practice but their reluctance to adhere to the arbitrary laws of marriage. Their display of wild passion and virulence mark their opposition to the dominant norm. If marriage is considered a trade then women are traded by men and the novels evince it. Ideala’s comment on marriage, ‘marriage without love is an immoral contract’ (110) is open-minded and advanced contrary to the bishop’s adage that “marriages are made in heaven.” (110) To Eustacia, Ethelberta and for Lady Audley marriage means business, Eustacia and Lady Audley achieve partial success but Ethelberta achieves complete success. Helen Cixous states
There is an apple, and straightaway there is the law. With the apple comes the law: woman is punished, since she has access to pleasure, of course a positive relationship to the inside which threatens society and which must be controlled.

That is where the series of “you -shall-not-enter” begins. (133)

But the Eve is not afraid of knowledge of the apple, of its insides, she enters the ‘you shall not enter’ territory to find pleasure in it but sadly does not exonerate herself and gain the prime position. These women suffer for trespassing, and the writers’ presentation of their women as weak, beleaguered and smothered is an honest delineation of the conditions of the social order. Lord Dawne though considerate, endearing and sensitive to Ideala’s plight is dismissive of Ideala’s affair with Lorrimer when he says, “Have you never felt that what you are doing is wrong?’ … you are infatuated …Ideala how did it ever come to this? ….she interrupted… ‘You are prejudiced’.” (107)

The captivity within the male identified symbolic framework, the variation in male and female voice and the gender politics practiced is well scrutinized by Grand. Ideala’s desire for companionship outside the limits of marriage is disapproved both by Claudia and Dawne (her close associates) Grand’s purpose is to demonstrate how the stringent views nurtured both by man and woman could not transcend beyond the age old bias. Such instances show the subversion of women that the fin de siècle society witnessed. Dawne and Claudia are sensitive to woman’s desire for liberation from male authority but they also know that Ideala has to fight a lone battle. Dawne is opinionated nevertheless he cannot be dismissed as selfish for he perceives danger even in Lorrimer. The choice of a male narrator instills an element of doubt about Grand’s purpose. Was Grand in favour of authoritative discourse? Is it a strategy that aids the artist? Feminists have accused Grand of
placing her woman in the Victorian context and to Teresa Mangum, “The choice of the male narrator problematises masculine authority by playing out a woman’s fantasy out of a man’s fantasy.” (Married Middle Brow 64) The choice of the male narrator makes one perceive Ideala as an object who is molded by the gaze of the narrator. (Beth for instance is admired for possessing bright eyes) Why didn’t writers free woman from the male gaze? Manuel Barbeito’s observation identifies the quandary of writers to alter the set up,

A whole cultural transformation has to take place if this conventional view has to be changed; in other words, if participation in social interaction on equal terms is to become a possibility … recognition at the level of an institutional struggle is also required. (25, 26)

The choice of the narrator is assumed by the feminist critics as a lacuna, nevertheless Grand makes him a reliable narrator as he envisages a public life for Ideala unlike her husband and Lorrimer who limit her intellectual pursuits. Grand releases Ideala from the male gaze, her acquaintance with women reformers in China instills new political cognizance which makes her work with prostitutes. The book ends with a feminist proposal with Ideala devoting herself to a new cause to make women understand that “They have yet to learn to take wider view of things’ …Do not stand in their way… They are running water, if you check them they stagnate.” (140) Ideala is no longer dependent on the omniscient propensities of the narrator. She is seen as an autonomous figure and Grand invokes Irigary’s choice of the perfect woman. “Positioning new values that would essentially be divine which offers new possibility of our autonomy, our salvation, of a love that would not just but glorify us in full self awareness.” (Irigary 43) In making Ideala endure her husband’s atrocities is Grand admitting her failure to work through feminist
issues? Her refusal to share her trauma and her familial conflicts demonstrate her strength and dignity and also urge her not to publicize the defects in marital relationship. Can this trait make Ideala a feminist? Grand’s precarious condition to balance the traditional concept of the feminine and the emerging image of the modern woman is explained precisely by John Kucich.

In all her novels Grand struggles with the late Victorian conundrums about the role of candor and secrecy in woman’s lives, or the centrality of traditional feminine ideals… (“Curious Dualities”196) Complex theorizing of the concept of self sacrifice gains prominence in the New Woman novels than the possibilities for self realization, or satisfaction of the characters. They represent women for whom reading becomes a labour of self–fashioning. Grand’s participation in woman question debates gave her prominence as first wave activist for she explored some of the contradictions involved in dominant definitions of (middle class) femininity and celebrated female desire. Grand’s novels are an evidence of feminist and modernist edge. Evadene Frayling, Edith Beale, and Angelica Hamilton in Heavenly Twins explore the unjust submission of women to husbands and patriarchal dictates. This marks the insurgent power of the New Woman novels. Patriarchy influences these women to subdue the wild, aggressive and opposing nature of women. Ideala’s demand for fidelity from her husband and his failure to live unto her expectation triggers her. She critiques the biased society which expects women to be a passive observer of man’s flaws, her refusal to condone her husband’s faults; (his illicit affairs) are some of the subversions worked out in the novel. Edith in Heavenly Twins blames women for their inertness and self sacrifice, Ideala’s interpretation of manhood shows her astute understanding of the man’s world.
Where is our manhood? Where are our men? Is there any wonder that we are losing what is best in life when only women are left to demand it? Believe me, marriage is the tune to which the whole fabric of society is going to pieces  (50) Grand attempted to subvert the dominant ideology, like Luce Irigaray she attacks the logic of one. She made her fictional women resist the marginalization of woman and also examines how women could exercise her agency to change her fate. She depicts the feminist sensibility which centers on understanding and resisting the hierarchical binary opposition between male and female. Ideala’s views about men comes very close to what Meaghan Morris observes,

…there is only one sex, the male one…according to the logic of the one sex, the feminine sex, is represented as an absence ,a lack, a blank, a minus, or a zero…Irigaray’s project in speculum…is to dismantle that logic, and to subvert those representations.  (46, 47)

Grand and Braddon like Irigary do not argue that biology is destiny but rather scrutinize the effect that various representation of the feminine, and female bodies have had on the destinies of woman. The subjugation of their heroines is based fundamentally on controlled insanity of the male society which aims to control female sexuality and smothering their impulse to free from such rigid ties. This corroborates how Ideala belongs to the progressive phase. Grand makes her heroine exhibit her talent for writing, the women writers wrote to speak about women, about themselves for they realized what Helen Cixous states

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies
–for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself in to text –as into the world and into history by her own movement. (“The Laugh of the Medusa.” 27)

Ideala’s evaluation of her poem ‘The Passion of Delysle’ a proto fin de siècle poem evinces her censure on women writers for their sentimental vein. Her criticism is contrary to the appreciation of the poem rendered by her friends. She by admitting her poem as a diatribe against the female sex writers substantiates her own state, an instance to show how Grand derides traditionalist bias about morality and feminism. The contrapuntal rhetoric of Ideala indicates that the feminist educationist ought to follow a good object. She shows inclination for feminist and social reforms at the same time rejects aestheticism owing to its political mistakenness. The novel displays episodes of conflict as dramatization of the vast cultural scene which reports oppression of women. For instance, Ideala realizes that her husband’s adultery, his seduction of the young girl Marry Morris is not a personal betrayal but the sin of man against woman, charges ‘marriage oath’ as ‘farcical. Her estrangement from her husband helps her to develop her own literary voice.

Ideala thus moves from a position of the traditional woman to the feminist scarred by the traditionalist, from the idealist to the resigned pragmatist, and from a quasi religious savior to a female Christ-figure crucified by both feminists and anti- feminists a multi faceted process which throws into relief the complexity and instability of fin de siècle feminist identities. (Heilmann 54)

Ideala remains a mystery to Dawne, her friends and her lover Lorrimer, such ambiguities made Victorian conservatives call her as the ‘New Woman’ who exhibited sensibilities that were slightly varied and bold. Feminists like Lucy Bland, Sheila Jeffiers and Susan
Kingsley Kent demanded for women’s sexual autonomy which was a curse according to mid Victorian feminists. Women’s clothes appeared to be a part of their bodies during the era and Grand makes Ideala comment about the dress culture in England, (dress hinted at woman’s sexuality.) Ideala’s observation about the Chinese woman binding their feet for it’s their duty to have small feet is similar to English woman wearing corset which binds and cripples woman’s movement. Women bear the torture because their clothes designate their stance. Ideala feels, “My country women bind every organ in their bodies, though they know the harm of it and public opinion is against it.” (136) she reckons the lacuna of the English tradition, which according to her had to be erased before teaching the heathen about the crudity of their culture. While Hardy concentrated on the question of gender equality and divorce Grand avoids such extremism. Ideala refuses to be tongue tied by the social order, and offers a scathing account of their homes. She recounts domestic altercations between husband and wife; she is candid to reveal the Un-Christian behaviour of the professed Christian, when she says “many a noble thought has been expressed in a coat of colour” (52.) Ideala is free from bias as Dawne states “she will let no personal mishap prejudice her personal judgment.” (53) Grand makes Ideala adopt the male strategies of brutal candor and knowledge to condemn oppression. Thus she moves beyond the feminine to the female phase and her journey into self-hood is crucial to reclaim the self that is lost in the labyrinth of social customs and taboos.

**Ethelberta Petherwin Destabilizes the Established Boundaries.**

In *The Hand of Ethelberta*, Hardy continues his study of a woman of marked independence, giving a different kind of complexity to the characterization of the heroine. Her strong social ambition, her strategies to execute her plans sets her apart from the other
women. With Ethelberta Petherwin Hardy presents the story of a woman writer, a poet, novelist, and a story teller who ascends to earn the royal status by hiding her class background from her suitor’s family. She attains literary fame through the disguise she wears, and with the tag Lady Petherwin, a faint air of mystery increases her allure. The desire to win a rich husband in order to provide for her family is exacting and she fulfils it without a male aid. Does this signify negative power? It’s hard to discern but her adept handling of men in her life challenges the scientific belief that women are intellectually inferior. The confusions that surrounded the Victorian women are implied in Hardy’s use of the Hand, suggestive of the making of Ethelberta. It symbolizes both the feminine and feminist attribute. It signifies beauty, creativity and strength and also her indomitable courage determination and optimism. Hardy does not miss any opportunity to invest her with sensibilities that go to describe it as feminist. She had the expertise to counter impediments her zeal and power is not stopped by fate or destiny. Her power to obviate all the hurdles by ingeniously manipulating the situation to her convenience and her impervious, phlegmatic mode is akin to the tact and wit of women in the contemporary times. The Hand of Ethelberta reverses the implication of male hegemony in its title but in his other novels viz. Tess of d’Urbervilles and Jude the obscure Hardy endorses it. For instance, Tess is described as spontaneous, voluptuous, & womanly, and Sue Bridehead is called the New Woman, they meet their progress and decline. In comparison Ethelberta is powerful, gusty, intelligible and individualistic who can face the affronts and challenges of life to reconstruct her surroundings. Francis Galton and Goncourt believed that “There are no women of genius but women of genius are men.” (qtd, Ellis. 420.) this was contested by Isabel Foard in 1899.
It is said that clever men have had clever mothers, but it is not absolutely proved, in a biological sense, that is always the case, or that the mother transmits her mental power to sons more than the daughters. (550, 51)

These observations reflect the debates about woman’s intellect in the era. The gendered binary opposition of genius was presented crudely by the orthodox society which had to be contested by feminists. The creation of female selfhood illustrates Hardy’s awareness of the conflicts and complexities women faced during the era. The image of the woman as the angel in the house or woman as a figure of sacrifice came under fire in the nineteenth century, women sought to gain some recognition. Ethelberta’s dreams and pursuits are feminine, it centers on raising her family to the clan respectability, and she strives to give her raw siblings variety of cultural and social exposure, her endeavor, to fulfill the selfless errand is masculine. Hardy describes her, “By her look …she appeared to belong to that gentle order of society” and commends that “her claim to distinction was rather one of brains than of blood.” (1)

Hardy gives a slight hint of her experimental attitude towards life; she befits the role of a lady without a trace of her penurious background. She is much more than a lady, her refinement, affectations eclectic manner, efficacy at managing the elite crowd, her adroit at writing show that she is a combination of beauty and brain. Her education set’s her above her siblings she pursues the job of a governess, for that was the only task women could pursue. She has the expertise to climb the social ladder and fate does not intervene to stop her. “Life is a battle, they say; …but there is no seriousness in it; ” (104) This extraordinary declaration evinces that ambition is not of the utmost importance to Ethelberta; she is not the social climber like Thackeray’s Becky Sharp (Vanity Fair) or
Braddon’s Lucy Grahams. The detachment of her own ambition goes to explain her psychological makeup. She is ready to lose Christopher who she has a tender regard in order to achieve her mission. Her reply to Picotee’s (her sister) query whether she would have really married Christopher is sharp with collected detachment. “It is difficult to say exactly. It is possible that if I had had no relations at all, I might have married him. And I might not.” (305) The men in her life Christopher, Mr. Neigh, Lord Mountclere, Mr. Ladywell are all passive waiting to adhere to her dictates and demands. Hardy gives the power of choice to Eltheberta, the power to say ‘no’ to man’s affection and endearment. Her witty comments about men’s manner exhibits her acerbity towards men, her reply to Picotee’s response about Christopher’s willful observance to Eltheberta’s wish is packed with irony for tradition does not groom men to be subservient to women.

Good gracious, as if a woman’s words are to be translated as literally as Homer! Surely he is aware that more often than not “No” is said to importunities because it is traditionally the correct modest reply…If all men took words as superficially as he does, we should die of decorum in shoals. (129)

Did the rigid patriarchal set up, act as a stimulant to voice Hardy’s dissent? Hardy makes them speak a language that was a taboo. Is Hardy strengthening women’s egalitarian views? Does Hardy echo feminist sensibility in their divided self?

Hardy’s women behave in the conventional and unconventional manner. They were humanly imperfect, unconventionally strong, sexually vital, risk-taking rebels; each was orthodox by Victorian standards of femininity. (Scohenfeld 184)
Etheberta’s divided self gives Hardy an occasion to scrutinize the conflicts and ironies of that divide. Her transition from butler’s daughter to Mrs. Petherwin impedes her because of the divided self. Her acquired status of the Lady is exacting, as it estranges her from her family. Her strategies to strengthen her social status and also elevate her family are materialistic in pursuit though not intellectual. But her creative adept at writing poems, her role as story teller scoring a victory exposes her intellect but also exposes commoditization of culture. Marriage proves profitable to Ethelberta because there is no display of docility or servility, her self-assertion makes her profound. “If a woman did not invariably form an opinion of her choice …there would be no tears and pining in the whole feminine world, and poets would starve for want of topic.” (116) is she ‘gynocritical’ in her speech? Women mediate and subvert rigid rules that are meant to subdue. Patriarchy as Kate Millet in her Sexual Politics (1969) announces.

‘Patriarchy’, which she sees as pervasive …subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women. (qtd Seldon et al. 133)

Public appearance through her campaigns exhibits her optimism and dauntless spirit to fight all odds, makes us contemplate on Hardy’s purpose. Hardy threw up a challenge, he makes Ethelberta enter the public arena and display her expertise at oratory which confirms her power to take speech for herself and in doing so she transgresses all the determinations of class and kin. In the late nineteenth century feminism anticipated radical feminism of the 20th century, which celebrated woman’s ability to live independently. 19th century boasts of women activists who evidenced woman’s drive to contest in public sphere, Lydia Becker’s speeches showed her skill at oratory proving that there was no natural difference
between man and woman. Ethelberta’s act of appropriation within marriage concedes her to become a lady. Faith, Julian, and Picotee rebuke Ethelberta for lacking the feminine voice but she rejects the patriarchal ideology which expects honesty in woman her defense is sharp and aggressive.

But I thought honesty was the best policy?’ said Picotee. [Ethelberta’s response] ‘So it is, for the man’s purpose. But don’t you go believing in sayings, Picotee: they are all made by men, for their own advantages. (119)

Such candid assertion do not show any trace of anti feminist views contrary to what Showalter states of Hardy. Marriage does not silence Ethelberta; she manages the affairs of the estate and the house and also works on an epic poem, inspired by her admiration for the republican poet John Milton. Hardy endeavored to redefine female identity through Ethelberta’s public appearance thereby strengthening women’s desire to gain access to the public sphere. The potency of dispassionate female sexuality evades the ensnaring of the Feminine and subverts the power of the patriarch by utilizing his senility of desire. Deceit and lie are the tools that Ethelberta chooses to gain entry into the noble gentry to believe and accept her as a noble lady. The feminine attributes are manipulated to save her integrity and place. She does not ignore the social advantages of marriage but she by being eclectic in the choice of her man differs from Elfride and Grace. In choosing Mountclere she fulfils her aspirations and such an act subverts the popular notions about woman. (Woman is not adept at choosing their male partner)
Aurora Floyd the Speaking Subject

Braddon’s women are a mixture of both angel and monster in so doing she challenged the Victorian patriarchal tendency of simplifying the depiction of women. In *Aurora Floyd* Transformation from the angel to villainess is indeed a dig at patriarchal society which built up such fixed binaries. Braddon chose a bigamist, a suspected murderer, a sensual woman as her heroine, men in her life suffer (father, lover, husband.) Aurora tells the story of a likeable yet untraditional heroine who becomes entangled in a bigamist marriage and later gets involved in murder mystery bringing scandal to her home and family. Braddon makes devious, erroneous woman her heroine using the liberties that the genre under the pre-text ‘sensational’ gave to her. Auroa’s voluptuous appearance and conduct articulates her erotic charisma. Devoid of Mother’s care and her father’s non-intervention in the mothers domestic sphere influences her development. Her misspent youth (marriage with John Conyers) prevents her marriage to Talbot Bulstrode, a scion of Scottish aristocracy. Rejects Talbot Bulstrode and chooses to marry John Mellish, only to select a man who would not question her past. Braddon releases Aurora from the fallen status by giving the picture of conventional motherhood. Her bigamy, her erroneous past become the focus of curious queries about the nature of femininity, the domestic ideal, the role of marriage and woman’s position. Braddon’s repeated reference to Aurora’s wild and unconventional conduct marginalizes her, she juxtaposes conventional male perception of woman with Aurora’s bold desires, her desire for gambling shocks Talbot “Good heavens! What a horrible lady” (80.) Talbot stands for the customary matrix of the male authority, power and prerogative in his desire for a chaste woman. Did Braddon hint at man’s insecurity or
was she cautioning the wild woman about the affronts such deviance would welcome? Aurora threatens Talbot’s puritan notions, “He wished …Some gentle feminine creature …some timid soul with down cast eye…spotless as her own white robe.” (40) Would fall in love. Aurora, Lucy Grahams, Eustacia are a form of woman seen as an ‘outsider’ figures who inhabit what feminist’s term the ‘wild zone’ Elvy quotes Showalter and Jeanne Roberts who propose,

That there is a female wild zone as there is a male wild zone we know about men’s version of wild zone eroticism, it’s the place’ of the glorious phallic monosexuality, in Helen Cixous’s words, the female wild zone is beyond patriarchal space… (27, 28)

Feminist sensibility can be discerned in the female wild zone which instills wildness in Aurora and hence termed dangerous. Purity and chastity were not only metaphors to check social disorder but also a means to secure the role women played in society. Aurora, Lady Audley, Eustacia in defying the Victorian morality exhibit feminist sensibility and come closer to Julia Kristeva’s definition of the witch. Kristeva writes of the woman as a witch who is thrown to the edge, the boundary between the known zone and the wild zone.

Woman is a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian, taking her jouissance in an anti- apollonian, Dionysian orgy. A jouissance which breaks the symbolic chain the taboo, the mastery... (“About Chinese Woman” 154)

Aurora’s physical appearance and manner shows signs of deviance which script her as unwomanly, her voluptuous and sensual conduct presents her as the desirable and the desired feminine. “The dark –haired goddess, with a coarse straw hat” (42) “so much of
south in her beauty.” (45) “Strange, wicked, unwomanly, bewitching.” (47) Braddon’s morphology of female ingenuity and appearance are empowering and does not simply evoke sexuality but as Showalter predicts the sensationalists - “were less pre occupied with sexuality than with self assertion and independence from tedium and injustice of the feminine role in marriage.” (Literature of Their Own 161) Her relationship with Conyers is palliated as the folly of an adolescent and we see the absence of erotic desire. Aurora like Eustacia, Tess and Bathsheba is rendered in terms of the excitement she arouses in men, sexuality is hardly evident. Can one term this as the new form of the feminine? Aurora’s assault of Softy shows absence of the feminine grace but her revolt fascinates the readers; her dealings with all other men show signs of power illustrating how Aurora actually appropriates the male dominance. Braddon does not trouble her heroine by investing feminine moral traits and Talbot’s comment “There are so many Lucy’s but so few Auroras” (48) undercuts the ideal as boring. Law and society unite to term the deviant woman as dangerous which orientalises her providing a context for her revival and recovery; she must constantly re-form to avoid disruption. Secret histories of Aurora and Lady Audley involve woman’s transgressive past which allows Braddon to challenge the female fictional stereotype of the angel and the fallen. Aurora’s refusal to accept financial aid from her husband subverts the Victorian tradition which considers man as the provider. Display of such sensibilities was termed as wild by the Victorians, pushing woman out of the domestic domain into another domain that houses the rebellious spirit to counter masculine interests. Her nature is contrary to her cousin Lucy. Lucy pleases the male ego through her feminine interests, her choice of books, and docile conduct that makes her an essence of the proper feminine, spotless as her “own white robes” (40)
If Lucy fulfils such (feminine) expectation Aurora defies it, through such presentation Braddon presents varied ways and attitudes women expressed in the fin de siècle society. Aurora’s sexual relationship with Conyers, her absence with the young man from noon to sunset hints at Aurora’s appeasement of sexual urge outside marriage. Constant references to her ‘black eyes’ (41) ‘blue black hair’ (41) shows Victorian codes at work which indicates her emotional volatility and sexual urge which links her with transgressive women like Helen of Troy & Cleopatra. In Cixous’s ‘écriture féminine’ the body is a major source of creative energy, French feminists debate that the depiction of authentic ‘female’ eroticism has not yet been represented by male and female writers. If the French feminists are exact in their assertion then Braddon’s text has failed to present such eroticism. We see female eroticism being created in the gaps and silences of a text. Braddon worked with the same patriarchal structures, codes, constraints as men. Spivak and Emma Perez believe that ‘representation cannot take place without essentialism’ (109) ‘to define woman is to essentialise her’. (Moi 139) Aurora like the mythical Helen of Troy, Beatrice and Cleopatra is an incarnation of the anima which as Carl Jung explains in his work *The Development of Personality* (1954) as something that all male possess. Every man bears with him the everlasting representation of woman, a perfect feminine representation. Talbot, John Mellish, Conyers, Talbot each has a version of the inner feminine figure as Jung calls it. Sexual relations in Braddon’s fiction overwhelmingly conform to the hetropatriarchal model, anything adulterous is viewed with horror by fictional characters in Braddon’s novel and the erroneous woman’s challenge to such response is contrary to the dominant response. Depiction of such a heroine takes Braddon’s art into a new era and she defends her heroine.
If Aurora had been faultless, she could not have been the heroine of this story; for I think some wise man of old remarked that the perfect women were those who left no histories behind them. (qtd Wolff 154)

Braddon makes her woman different, her sensibility is embellished in her sexual unrestraint and social promiscuity, which taunts Mellish’s home, but Braddon releases her fallen status by giving the picture of conventional motherhood, finds methods of expression which the hegemonic discourse perhaps cannot assimilate. Eroticism, death, violence and carnality surround Aurora which indicates the rejection of not only middle class women’s identity but also conditions of women’s lives and the ideology that expressed them. Feminist sensibility in Braddon’s novel is seen in woman’s subversion of the male belief and the denial of patriarchal notion that woman have no purpose and no inner life. Her heroines transgress the moral codes and class structures; they are the speaking subjects with a purpose,

Lady Audley or Aurora provided opportunities for women to speak …took the center stage, a space was created for an independent …female voice in a time and society in which women were idealized into passivity and silence. (Shattock 201)

Braddon is credited for placing the woman in the foreground and addressing the issue of female subordination and preparing a base for the women of tomorrow. Aurora’s fast desires and masculine interest gives her an identity as the deviant woman. Braddon’s purpose in making the boisterous Aurora an object of male gaze is hard to discern. In so doing Braddon subtly articulates the randomness between social codes and the realities
which leaves woman even those who adhere to the social codes disconsolate. If there are inconsistencies, if her woman is overpowered by the male gaze it may be due to the constraints as she herself states, that “She writes within a prescribed genre rather than advancing more radical views about women” (qtd Hedgecock 93) The heroines of her novel voiced the necessity of transformation in regard to liberation from domestic violence. Aurora embraces marriage though it’s brutal, her premarital connection and marriage to Conyers a mere servant marks her transgression but does not make a pressing case for social egalitarianism. Conyers elevation to middle class status is detrimental and Aurora learns marriage to be hateful. Her plan to marry John Mellish shows her desire for heterosexuality which fixes her in the Victorian context. Elvy quotes Adrienne Rich’s response,

Heterosexuality is not preferred or chosen but has to be ‘imposed managed’, organized, propagandized, and required by patriarchal society in order to enforce woman’s total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to man. (27)

She is not forced to enter the marriage contract but desires; this act separates her from the category of the ideal woman. Her marriage to Conyers, a ‘mercenary wretch’, (354) an unworthy man hints at the impulsive act of the young Aurora and to contradict this trait he is perfectly “handsome” (353) who shamelessly trades upon his beauty to lure passionate girls and Aurora’s comment, “I mistook insolence for good breeding Heaven help me” (353) evinces Braddon’s commentary on unreliability of appearance which is an informing theme in her fiction, which is seen in both man and woman.
Moral codes figuratively fail to keep prurient elements outside of domestic boundaries, and seductive women and rampant promiscuity in fiction amplify this actual transgression. (Hedgecock 95)

Aurora’s class and gender transgression is a mockery directed towards challenging the patriarchal belief. Blinded by passion and egoism she thwarts codes of respectability, explodes the Victorian water tight compartments of the depiction of Madonna/Whore image of woman. Braddon fixes such rebellion with the patriarchal world as Kristeva says, “…revolution must occur within the symbolic (that is patriarchal) language.” (qtd Elvy 34)

Aurora a marginalized woman is assigned tasks in the narrative to expose authoritarian short comings. Subversive representation represents the domestic sphere as a site open to crime and hence to policing, the subversive plot is coded with the conventional one. Aurora as a transgressive female hero is seen as the speaking subject finds modes of expression which implies Braddon’s attempt to give voice to the voiceless. Aurora is described in the narrative as an ‘eastern empress’ (41) analysing this expression from the postcolonial perception she may be called as the ‘orientalised’ colonial ‘other.’ Hence the violent untamable Aurora should be tamed as the European masters tamed the natives. Softy, Ms. Powell, call her dangerous, while the working class spy on her, the middle class guard her (Talbot, Mellish). The policing act by the two classes subdues Aurora’s dominance. Braddon pushed her woman to the center but could not make her rule the male world. To prevent the kind of mimetic interruption such penalization and subjugation of the ‘other’ becomes necessary. The patriarchal masters believe that the defiant must be reformed in order to subdue the marginalized, hence Aurora being violent and the ‘other’ has to be subdued. The depiction of the heroine as a murderer, her depraved manner must be
reformed since women in the patriarchal society are perceived as the ‘other’. Kristeva’s (1986) philosophy says, the woman in the patriarchal world is seen as perpetually at the borderline, the edge, the outer limit, Aurora in spite of her defiance is seen as a victim rather than a victimizer. The paradigms of gender and power are also laid bare in the errant woman’s participation in the confessional narratives. Both Aurora and Lady Audley are made to confess to the male confessor (Talbot, Robert) who regards transgression in the guilty woman as the result of a pathological body not the soul’s sin. Such confessions define truths about Victorian England which saw confessing woman as being caught up in a gendered and sexualized dialogue of transgression and retaliation. The violent Aurora is seen as the mother in the final scene bending over the cradle which signifies woman’s body that is maimed. “Aurora a little changed …unspeakably beautiful and tender bending over the cradle of her first born.” (459) Woman is perceived as a giver but Woman as a murderer destabilizes her ideological conflation (man as violent and woman as the victim) Braddon in making her woman violate the traditional norm accentuates the exoticism of the female killer. Woman’s brutal force centers on the problematics of power and subjectivity. The labeling of Aurora as a bigamist diminishes her speaking power this is the first activity of hegemonic discourse to subdue. Braddon attempts to free Aurora from such hegemonic labeling by transforming her into an angel in the house but Braddon’s suggestion about the emergence of transgressive and self assertive woman capable of destabilizing the age old beliefs does not go unnoticed. Though Aurora yields to the pressure of the society her condition leaves a deep impact on woman for Aurora makes us think. Feminist sensibility is evoked in Braddon assigning both the angelic and demonic ways which hints at what Kristeva states that woman cannot be represented “…as they are something above and
beyond nomenclatures and ideologies.” (qtd Elvy 50) Patriarchy cannot grapple or include the wild or the demonic woman because ideology is the obviousness of culture as men are scared of the powerful woman. Men in Hardy, Braddon, and Grand’s world want women to stay in their place because the sexual relations in fiction occur within the hetropatriarchal ideology.

**Eustacia’s Defiance and Transgression**

Hardy’s creation of Eustacia Vye in the *Return of the Native* has caught the sight of both feminist and conservative critics who shower their commendations and denouncement on the very creation of the rebellious Eustacia. Little did Hardy know that Eustacia would be the topic of discussion in the postmodernist era as well? The story of Eustacia is grim; the vivacious and voluptuous Eustacia lived a desolate life in the murky surroundings of Egdon heath. Forced to live away from Budmouth, reluctance to abide by the heath culture reveals her rebellious spirit and constraint. Her desire for gaiety and fun explains her adventurous spirit but to the heath dwellers it indicates her violent passion. She is thrown in the wild and conditions open to her are erroneous and is forced to fight such conditions with little tact for discipline. Her marriage to Clym Yeobright ends in despair, marriage does not liberate her from Egdon Heath. Men (Clym and Wildeve) in her life say no to her wish but death releases her from Heath. It’s a sad ending for a vivacious woman who dreamt a life of fun gaiety and glamour. Her story is an instance to show the troubled existence of woman in the nineteenth century. Eustacia’s exquisite sensibility, strong feelings and her astuteness marks her as an intellectual, a quality that estranges her from the Heath culture. Is Hardy hinting at the position of the ‘other’ though such depiction? Penny Boumellha analyses Eustacia’s condition as,
Eustacia is marginalized by society spatially – she lives a little apart from the rest of the Egdon inhabitants. And when Eustacia and Clym are married they live in isolation from the community. (Thomas Hardy and Women 53)

John Peck sees Eustacia “as an outsider figure someone who will never fit in with the society” (87) this estranges her from the other women characters, for e.g. Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright. Hardy describes her attributes in an elaborate set-piece which combines classical metaphoric allusion and stock 19th century romanticism,

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with little preparation…..to see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its beauty….she had pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries… (55)

She is not a goddess but has the makings of one. The exotic collection of relations combine to create a sense of unease that reflects her remote place on the Heath. Hardy not only confers feminine description but also traces the rebellious spirit, which go to explain her individuality. “At one time or another Hardy suggests that she is a goddess (Aphrodite Probably) in her power and capriciousness, a Titaness in her mystery, and a Cleopatra in her pride, her passion, and scorn of consequences.” (Deen 120)

The ‘Queen of Night’(chapter vii) sequence appears to critics as the narrator imposing too much aesthetic, mythic and symbolic weight. Such views reveal the dual standards of critics who allow male characters to have mythic treatment (Michael Henchard compared to King Lear) but not for female ones. Lance St. John Butler states “Lengthy description of Eustacia is both a failure and a success.” (44) The feminist sensibility in Eustacia is
depicted in her rebelliousness which is tragically self-destructive. Egdon Heath is her Hades, a ‘black chaos’. (24) Her forced position on the Heath forces her to accept things she would otherwise scorn. Her promethean identification with fire makes her symbol of man’s rebellion against limitation. It was unethical for a woman to have tall claims; Eustacia commits a grievous error in nurturing erotic desires and aspiring gaiety and glamour she consciously uses her beauty exposing her throat to Wildeve, “Have you ever seen anything better than this” (63.) Eustacia’s conduct goes against the feminine norm against the Victorian morality. She does it deliberately, willingly, as she believed in exhibiting her beauty, yet she refuses to get engaged in domestic love; she deviates from the familiar ways of Victorian description of the proper feminine. The conflict between her conscious determination to resist the Heath and her unconscious absorption in the landscape is the conflict that any woman who is caught between tradition and modernity would encounter. Eustacia’s desire for marriage is bound by her selfish passion to escape from Egdon. It is selfish if viewed from the Victorian perspective which is narrow and biased but fair enough from a modern perspective. Eustacia’s desires are the desires of a woman aspiring joy and happiness, and it was only through marriage that one could achieve self-hood in the world of the ‘other’. Eustacia’s violent reaction to Clym’s desertion of her insinuates her wrath and frustration.

‘He’s not great for me’ to give myself to…he does not suffice for my desire…if he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte…O, the cruelty of putting me into his ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured…” (293)

Her verbal dexterity to imprint her poignant thoughts explains the power Hardy gave her to present the unrelenting power of society that curbed the potentiality of a vibrant
woman. D. H. Lawrence terms Eustacia as the binding force of the novel inspite of her reiterating nature. “In Hardy and Tolstoy; the lesser, human morality system is actively transgressed …whilst the greater morality is only passively, negatively transgressed.” (qtd Steele 29) Her transgression plays a key role in the novel; her endeavors to transgress were bold but smothered by the greater morality. In contrast to Eustacia, Thomasin is steeped in transparent light which shines. “… as if the flow of her existence could be seen passing within her.” (33) While Eustacia suffers because of her rebellious nature, Thomasin survives. Why did Hardy think of such a plan? Was Hardy an anti-feminist? Was he cautioning woman like the hard-core patriarchs”? It is hard to decipher, he is elusive, avoids being judgmental. Hardy presents the Victorian world as he saw; he perhaps was helpless like Eustacia. Her masculine claims and Thomasin’s feminine desires are juxtaposed to inform that the Victorian society saw women who defied the male hegemony and women who adhered to the Victorian norm. Hence, Thomasin is seen as the rational centre of the novel accommodated within the social structure and revealing human folly in other characters. And Eustacia who defies the Egdon tradition is seen as the ‘other’. We see the evocation of the feminine and the feminist sensibilities in these two women characters that show the merger of the docile and the rebellious. Such depiction is seen in both Hardy and Braddon. Does it hint at the emergence of the feminist and the existence of the feminine, a reality that made comprehension of woman’s nature difficult? Who does Hardy prefer the feminine or the feminist? The rustic men, regard Eustacia as someone special and the women regard her as the witch both these opinions estranges Eustacia. Eustacia’s vibrancy is muffled by the male order, her dreams and passions are never actualized by Clym. The reality of Clym and the world of Paris force her to face disastrous
consequences. Thomasin sacrifices her love because she is pliable, reluctant to defy Mrs. Yeobright. She is a typical Victorian woman who conforms to the Victorian morality a contrast to Eustacia whose desire was modern, progressive and vital, and Hardy asks “Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath?” (57) Hardy by resisting the gender norms and classification of his time corroborates that he was ahead of his times. It’s a hope that future society would pay less attention to such construction. Lawrence’s assessment of Eustacia describes what the present day critics would term as feminist sensibility in a woman.

She is of a novelistic Italian birth, loves first the unstable Wildeve, who does not satisfy her, then casts him aside for the newly returned Clym, whom she marries. What does she want? She does not know, but it is evidently some form of self-realization; she wants to be herself, to attain herself… (Qtd Steele 23)

She is individualistic, a New Woman, and Clym’s inability to respond to her desires, caught up in his grandiose schemes for educating the natives makes him a New Man of the 19th century and hence both meet their defeat. Her grandfather’s comment “If Eustacia had less romantic nonsense in her head it would be better for her” (90) sounds sensible but impossible for a woman caught between the traditional and the modern world to actualize her wants. Is Hardy in support of the dominant thought or mocking at it?

Men imagine, woman has no individual existence, and she ought to always be absorbed in them; and yet they love no woman deeply, unless she elevates herself by her character, above the weakness and inertia of her sex…(Morgan 63)
Eustacia’s selection of models are non-conformist-Napoleon Bonaparte, Pontius Pilate, her unorthodox views present her as a firm contestant to defy arbitrary male rule, (symbolically assumes the male role, cast in the role of a Turkish Knight.) All these are signs of the emerging feminist ideals. Clym’s involvement in love and marital affairs with Eustacia turned out to be disastrous. But patriarchy sympathizes when man fails, Mrs. Yeobright and the Heath dwellers, blame the voluptuous Eustacia for Clym’s downfall. Patriarchy comes to the rescue of man; a fact true not only of the Victorian society but also of the contemporary Indian society. (I.C.R.W.’s report on women prepared in the year 2011 states that 65% of men believe in silencing the dominant woman by assaulting her. This shows that the power of patriarchy in India is a widespread reality.) South African feminist Bernadette Mosala, comments on the main stream thought, “When men are opposed, it is tragedy, when women are oppressed, its tradition” (qtd Beasley  6)

To consider Hardy’s women and his revolutionary ideas as outdated would be erroneous for women are still fighting for complete emancipation. Eustacia’s bold evaluation of her marriage as an accident shocked the Victorian society earned her the title rebellious, spiteful and the ‘improper feminine’. Her remorse and wrath is antithetical to Victorian’s conception of marriage as a sanctified ritual which credits women with grace and dignity. Eustacia had to be subdued because she thought differently in a society that believed in smothering women’s expression. ‘The subaltern cannot speak’ (1988) Gayathri Spivak echoes what Hardy voiced a century ago. Spivak’s statement shakes the feminists from their deep slumber. Flaubert, Tolstoy, Thackeray, show how Madam Bovary, Anna Karenina, Becky Sharp, Tess, Eustacia and Elfride fail to succeed as they had to imitate the dominant discourse in order to survive.
They find themselves up against the established system of human
government, morality; they cannot detach themselves, and are brought down.
Their real tragedy is that they are unfaithful to the greater unwritten morality. (qtd
Steele 29,30)

Eustacia as a new woman poses a social problem for traditional belief which desires to
subjugate women. Her condition validates feminist’s argument about the mainstream
theory that espouses women’s place and her interest as marginal. Her manner subverts the
content, the assumptions and the methods of existing bodies of patriarchal theory. Her
conduct makes the heath dwellers call her the ‘witch’. ‘Witch’ distances her from the other
forms of thought (surveillance to the mainstream culture, Heath culture) in terms of an
impenetrable wall separating her from the irreconcilable tradition. Her urge to prove that
woman is capable of nurturing masculine desires can be seen in her strong disapproval of
Clym’s ways a truth that others (heath community) did not realize.

All persons of refinement have been scared away from me since I sank
into the mire of marriage. Is this your cherishing –to put me in a hut like this
…keep like the wife of a hind? You deceived me-not by words, but by
appearances, which are less seen through than words. (275)

As a feminist writer Hardy perceives her as similar to or different from men. She
has had her own self to advance her cause. Her attempts to liberate herself from those rigid
structures, to free herself from her cabined and wrapped state is an attempt to reinterpret
the status of woman, which many women thought and felt in the transition period. Women
in the fin de siècle society were simply looking to change the world, where women and
men have social, political and economic equality. Hardy’s view is not phallocentric, as Toril Moi’s states, “I see no reason why a man should not proclaim himself a feminist” (qtd Mohan 21) but critics like Elaine Showalter would unquestionably think such male support of feminism, as ‘cross-dressing.’

Elizabeth Cadwell (Beth) Empowered by a cause.

Grand’s novel The Beth Book traces the journey of Beth from the neglected, misunderstood girl to a bold and vivacious writer and activist. Beth’s activities mirrored Grand’s journey from the domestic domain to the public domain. Grand’s purpose in tracing the development of Beth was bounded by a cause i.e. to show the merger of feminist art and activism. One can discern how the cultural protest is presented as a political protest. Beth, (Elizabeth Caldwell) a bright, aggressive, and an inquisitive young girl is subdued by her mother who forces her to emulate ideals of feminine self sacrifice, depriving her of education and urging her to marry. The mother assumes the patriarchal power in smothering the female child due to the strong patriarchal beliefs that is embedded in her which makes her insensitive and irrational about the genuine pursuits or desire of the sensitive child. Beth’s marriage at the age of 16 to a despicable doctor (Dan Maclure) amounts to silencing of the girl by pushing her into another hell. Grand makes Beth different from the girl of the period she condemns Dr. Dan for practicing vivisection on animals, refuses to accept his disregard for woman’s body and contempt for women who he treats for suspected venereal disease. Beth frees herself from the ideology of marriage finds space within herself (room of her own) discovers a community of likeminded souls (in the creative world of books) who encourage her to develop ideas and support her to become the writer, orator and activist. By the late Victorian era the angel became an authorized
representative of the controlling hegemony which according to many feminists was patriarchal and fundamentally imperialist. Grand makes her women challenge or reinforce ideological norms, affirm or deny the position of women in the cultural hegemony such depiction shows the prevalent conditions of the time. Her purpose as a new woman writer was to free women from men’s ideological and aesthetic frame work. A careful scrutiny of the novel shows that Grand’s purpose may have been to re-infuse women into the rightful place as arbiters of artistic, social and religious genius.

Beth Book as Grand’s best novel … is a rich and complex text which investigates the possibilities of Female Bildungsroman, adds to the fictionalization of a new kind of woman heroine and complicates the presentation of women question. (Aranzazu 120)

The creation of a woman of genius (Beth’s fictional alter ego) evinces feminist sensibility in Beth who endeavors to move from the margin to the center aiming to deconstruct the hegemonic structures of gender relations. She acerbates her centrality of what Cixous calls, “Women’s acquisition of speech’ an act of bodily self-imprimatur which writes ‘her story in [to] history.” (Sorties 92) Such renovation can equip Beth to actualize her creative urge as she desires to “write for women” (376) A rhetoric contrary to the masculine cultures and paradigm similar to Cixous’s demand for ‘écriture feminine’ and Teresa Mangum perceives Beth’s urge as, “Beth’s quest for a form appropriate to women’s experience thus becomes part of a larger dilemma for the writer.” (Style of Wars 55) As Mangum outlines, the central dilemma of the novel indicates women writers’ role in asserting their right to be tended toward self-reflection in art. Her novel was didactic, meant to change opinions and Beth Book states Grand’s rebellion against the bias of the
Victorian readers to undervalue female artist on the basis of gender. The potent force that was predominant in Beth’s childhood was smothered by her mother but is reclaimed as Beth grew old. The personal gratification that Beth attains in both private and public sphere shows Grand’s endeavors to credit her heroine for her zealous mission. Beth’s domestic pursuits give her the momentum to express her political views while the ethics of her writing is designed to transform society without violating the norms of the male dominated world. The cultivation of the breathing literary space is crucial for her intellectual growth.

The self exploratory sensually educational process can be coded as an expression of ‘écriture féminine’ replacing Bakhtin’s authoritative discourse of domestication and repression with the internally; persuasive discourse of the feminine. (Heilmann 31)

Beth’s struggle against discrimination may be termed as contributing cultural transformation desiring to transform the ideology that produces it; writing is one of the ways where transformation can happen. The depiction of feminist sensibility is seen in Grand’s depiction of female creativity as elemental and spiritual. Her purpose may have been to discredit the binary opposition between feminine nature and masculine culture. Such revisionist method enabled Grand to place her woman at the center empower Beth to live in her passion and proceed with her mission. “She believed that life could be lived as to make the joys as inevitable as the sorrows” (316) The revival of the voice urges her to pursue her quest which is evidenced in the appropriation of a room of her own, a room that gave her privacy and enable her to ‘study’ to ‘reflect’ (173) The attic is programmed as the space of her interiority, her literary journey begins here, drawing on a rich tradition in woman’s writing. Beth’s narrative stands as the commendable archetype for the
transcendence of the old degenerative order; her estrangement from her husband to make a life of her own makes her a new woman. It has some of the elements of radical feminism that has been reckoned by some of the scholars today. Grand’s heroine believes in her right to learn to work and to love, she examines the life of a new woman. She finds success without sacrificing her new woman identity, different from Heavenly Twins which centers on female sexuality. Ideala and Beth emerge as successful women when compared to Evadene in Heavenly Twins as they possess H.P. Balvatsky’s notion of ‘Adepts’ (Isis Unveiled 1877) who believes, “…adepts are superior beings coming closer to the next stage of racial progress than their fellow beings.” (qtd Heilmann 97) Beth and Ideala can be considered as progressive in the fin de siècle era because they possess three qualities which ‘adepts’ must possess, intelligence, conscience and will, these traits fulfill the thought of the new woman. Lyn Pykett comments, “Grand turned Beth’s secret garret into an emblem of the womb, the locus of individual and artistic rebirth…” (183)

The attic aids Beth to attain fulfillment of her desire to be the author, and orator, the speaking voice in print and action. Woman’s professionalism is important to the new woman such depiction makes Grand’s heroine exhibit feminist sensibilities. Grand appropriated the Bildungsroman to write a story that had close resemblance to her own life. The novel envisages a female utopia where class and gender restrictions do not hinder. She finds in her room her artistic and professional potential urge fulfilled, as it bestows her with intellectual freedom. Beth as a new woman text stresses on the emergence of the woman of genius as Penny Boumellha observes, “Rare instance of a surviving and fulfilled female genius among new woman heroines.” (The Women of Genius 173) 1896 shattered the
narrative paradigms of the previous century and laid the foundation for modernism. Showalter argues,

> Women writers needed to rescue female sexuality from the decadent’s image of romantically doomed prostitutes or devouring Venus fly traps, and represent female desire as a creative force in artistic imagination as well as in biological reproduction. (Daughters of Decadence 11)

To Grand feminist sensibility does not suggest a mere frigid man hater, a prig in petticoats but a woman who is driven by vocation which urges her into political work. Her focus lay in marriage and motherhood and had a tendency to embrace the social purity campaign, which encoded angel in the house. Grand differed from Mona Caird who discussed controversial subjects like coercive marital sex, single motherhood, free love, and child care. Feminist critics accused Grand for placing her heroine in the Victorian context by embracing the conservative sexual ideology which Showalter views as a common feature of the fin de siècle women’s writing. Grand might have missed the radical purpose of Mona Caird’s essays but demonstrates that feminism is not the rejection of the feminine but a blend of both. Such depiction brings Grand’s women closer to post feminist evaluation of women. The 19th century shows how the lives of their authors had become intermingled creating a complex myth at a time when literary works were commonly seen as the expression of the authors experience. This explains Grand’s purpose in advocating the purity concept. Grand positioned the scientific theories (Darwinism and evolutionary theory) to promote feminine sensibility in woman, for e.g. Mrs. Caldwell (Beth’s mother) lays emphasis on the importance of women’s beauty and passivity which is inspired by Darwin’s discourse. Darwin’s disciples concluded that women’s body and mental functions
are inferior to men hence remain passive. Beliefs such as these was irrationally followed by women like Mrs. Caldwell, she denounces Beth for not pursuing feminine interest, “You are so determined not to be like other people that nobody can stand you” (171) the belief in femininity and feminine ideal made mothers train their daughters to be the girl of the period. Beth’s eagerness to learn advanced musical composition is silenced by her mother who abuses her physically and verbally. The denial of deriving artistic pleasure from the artistic formation draws attention to the silencing of girls in puberty. Such depiction makes Ann Heilmann comment, “Grand exorcised her memories of a difficult relation by spotlighting the dysfunctional mothering to which her heroine is exposed.” (29)

Feminist sensibility in Beth is seen in her struggle for a space of her own which is unsupported by her mother and husband. The arrival of Beth is again decisive she is born after Mrs. Caldwell amuses herself watching the killing of the lamb which prefigures her mother’s sacrificial attitude towards Beth. Mrs. Caldwell accepts her husband’s debauchery as the will of God but the energetic Beth defies her husband to make a career of her own. Mother’s attempt to mold feminine traits in her daughter meets its defeat, which signifies the transformation from the feminine to the feminist. Many instances in the novel show how man woman and children nurture the bias that tradition, religion, and science has transferred. Jim, Beth’s brother is the self-appointed spokesman of patriarchy. Jim’s presence gives Grand an occasion to illustrate the irrationality of the patriarchal dogma. Jim’s baseless argument,

‘.Girls have no brains. They scream at a mouse’ we never scream at mice’

Beth protested. ‘Bernadine catches them in her hands…’ [Jim replies] ‘Ah but
then you have had brothers you see,’ Beth argues, ‘how can u say we have no brains if you never teach us? (122)

is a contrast to the sententious reply of Beth. Jim silences Beth telling her not to be “long tongued shrew” (122) Jim’s response shows universal contempt poured on women. Beth “had too much self respect” (263) which Jim fails to reckon. Geroge Romanes in his article Mental Differences between Men and Women (1887) believes that women have inferior intellectual power, and Grand to prove Romanses assertion wrong makes Beth resent gender hierarchy. Grand appropriates the scientific practice of physiological determination in depicting Jim as tactless to confront Beth’s argument. Mrs. Caldwell, Jim, Dr. Dan her husband, Sammy (Beth’s friend), nurture the belief that women are inferior. It is such belief that make Mrs. Caldwell deprive Beth of education advising her “There is no hurry for your education … you can really do a great deal to make yourself attractive in appearance.” (174) Grand echoes Wollstonecraft’s repudiation of the traditional model of female education and draws attention to the fact that Craft’s demand had not been fulfilled. Women were still under restraint as patriarchal beliefs could not be shunned overnight to embrace liberated thoughts but that women desired and worked towards their freedom cannot be ignored.

Beth Book serves to deconstruct the nature of argument which underpins the hegemonic structures of gender relations with his bad–tempered grunts and defective powers of ratiocination, Jim as a poor advocate theory of ‘male sex’ as Sammy is with his excessive timidity and bland imbecility. (Heilmann 90)
Beth brings passion and purpose, art and feminism together; Grand interprets it as the joint prerogative of femininity. Beth’s eloquence, her creativity and logical outbursts silences torch bearers of patriarchy. Were the patriarchs successful in subduing women by pushing them to the margins? Are the patriarchs themselves responsible for the birth of feminism? The displeasure and deprival makes woman endeavor to attain coherent social and sexual identity to become independent, body and soul. Feminist sensibility displayed may be is similar to what Cixous writes, “Women should break out of the snare of silence. They should not be coined into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem.” (“Laugh of the Medusa” 25)

Beth’s abnegation is a quality of the New Woman which does not indicate the conformist ideas of a good acquiescent woman. Her urge for writing and her skill for oration give a sense of pseudo jouissance. This illustrates what today’s poststructuralists conceptualise as jouissances; the narrator describes that writing to Beth was like experiencing love without a lover. Beth’s dual function ‘writing’ and ‘oration’ grant her a sense of pseudo jouissance, “Writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writings continuity/ voice’s rhythm take each other’s breath away through interchanging.” (Sorties 92)

Towards the end Beth is engaged in the task of transforming her male colleague (Arthur Brock) Grand presented the reader with the need for romance and companionship; the new man who had none of the moral failing of the old man. (The figure of the romantic image thought only by Beth) Beth’s true love presents her as conventional but her independence to be herself, her artistic verve makes her modern. The novel ends with a spontaneous overflow of emotions which can be interpreted as Grand’s attempt to credit her heroine for
her work by bestowing her with personal contentment in public and private spheres. Arthur Brock’s nonchalance to Beth’s trauma abandoning her to dire poverty and semi starvation, casting feminists as the unsexed crew that shriek on platform show shades of men’s atrocity. Mr. Cadwell, Dr. Maclure, and Mr. James cannot be blamed for hindering women, as they are the followers of the patriarchal dictum. Beth’s disapproval of such conduct by men expresses her egalitarian aspiration and her rigidity in yielding to male dictates. The feminine sacrifice of Beth to save Arthur is both heroic and romantic. But unfortunately even the most sensitive and understanding men such as Arthur is unable to concede the sacrifice made by a woman and it is here that Grand reflects that men cannot be weighed by the same standards as women. Teresa Mangum observes,

In many ways this part of the plot seems to be offered as proof that the new woman retains the qualities of womanhood her critics feared she has lost the abilities to nurture others and to sacrifice to others needs. (Married Middle Brow 189)

Beth yields to the seductive influence of romance and many theorists term this as subjugation and objectification of women. This slight adherence to feminine ideal does not exclude the subversive trait in Beth. Grand portrays Beth’s defiance and presents her as lacking in provocative individualism. Beth says she agrees to marry because she is weak, “I am firm about some things, but I vacillate when I am alone I know I make a mistake, but when I am with other people who think differently, my objection vanishes.” (258) Ambivalence in Beth (servility and independence) hints at the condition of feminists in the fin de siècle society and authors obligation to show the new woman as womanly. The novel complies with traditional modes of writing but ironically implode tradition. Though Grand
mentions Beth’s sexuality she embraced the social purity campaign which echoed angel in the house concept. But her heroines show slight variance from the mid Victorian feminists, George Eliot, the Bronte’s who expressed their rage but failed to offer feminist questions, allowing marriage to answer all discontents. Ideala, Beth, find their voice moving out of marriage, such instances according to critics (Heilmann, Pykett) evince Grand’s feminist views that embraced social renovation and wholesale political transformation. The ethics of her writing is designed to transform society without violating the male dominated world. Such depiction of feminist sensibility was commonly seen in new woman novels. Beth experiences the oceanic feeling similar to what Cixous means, “[r]e[claimed for the women who in writing at once creates, [and] pleasures herself”. (Sorties 90)

Feminist Critics opine that Grand essentialises woman’s duties but also considers transgressing the political boundary as instrumental for political transformation. Ideala and Beth depict woman’s striving to be herself while being constrained by the male gaze. Grand demonstrates Beth and Ideala as women who were naturally noble and morally superior to men, and their mission was to raise men to their own high level, and Ideala remarks ‘men are not fit to guide us’ (85) Beth tells Dr. Dan “I am not going to take you seriously any more … I shall do my duty…but I will submit no ordering and no sort of exaction. Man must be taught to have a better opinion of himself.” (314,316) Feminism to Grand meant such elevation and she attempts to show cultural protest as political protest. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s comment on the strategy of the 19th century women writers helps in defining Grand’s technique “Endeavouring to placate patriarchal hostility while shattering the looking glass of male-gendered plots and femininities.” (45) The merger of feminist art and activism are the modus operandi of Grand to evince her belief in
the peremptory of direct public action which makes woman free herself from the male domain

**Lady Audley a Deviation from the Familiar Notions of the Proper Feminine.**

*Lady Audley’s Secret* forces one to sense how women were giving way to more rational points of view and tried to break the andocentric hegemony. Braddon’s sensitive awareness of the varied affronts of woman probably made her address the women question without being aware of the feminist theories. The novel centers on Lady Audley’s (Lucy Grahams) unconventional female response to gender politics and her attempts to demystify the power of the conventional. Braddon used the sensational genre to debunk traditional image of woman and cracked to rework narrative archetypes to launch her plots. Sensational novel set new standards, violated stereo types by presenting their heroines as clever, deceitful, bigamist, robust and manlike in tenacity. Lady Audley has all these traits which are considered a threat to the chaste notions about women. Lucy Graham’s power to disturb the reader is reinforced through her wiliness and intellect. “She knew how to keep her secrets” (253) Miss Tonks remark about Lucy expresses Braddon’s purpose to alert the society not to consider woman’s silence as her passivity. With the advent of academic feminism it becomes customary to view Braddon’s work from feminist perspective. The novel contributes a conversation about Victorian class and gender struggles; it is ripe for feminist analysis. Lyn Pykett terms sensation novel as stories that reflect modern life. Sensation fiction is showing popular resurgence in the contemporary world. Lady Audley’s Secret telecast on television in America (year 2000) exhibit movie maker’s interest in film adaptations of sensation fiction that evinces the relevance and the plethora of research questions it offers. Braddon makes Lucy suggest to the hard core Victorians why women
nurtured venom; if society termed them as evil it only meant that it was insensitive to women’s troubles. Michael George and Robert, fail to understand Lucy, Michael admires her beauty but is not sensitive to understand or respond to her emotions. Tennyson’s poem Princess echoes a similar thought, “Man to command and woman to obey; All else is confusion.” (1847 Canto.v.) Braddon could be merely assuming her place in the phallocentric paradigm in making George Tallboys blameless, passive not virile. But she does not silence her woman completely but makes Lucy denounce George for her ruin thereby subverting the feminine ethics and challenging the stereo-type image of woman. Braddon intends to suggest that woman could interpret man’s conduct and show that she was capable of estimation. Her progressive views are commendable it also reveals how women writers articulated in the male gendered language to gain publicity because the text was controlled by phallocentric criticism. Helen Cixous observes,

    Everywhere within the discourse, the ordering by binary hierarchy persists…the coupling is always a relationship of violence …intention, desire, authority…examines them, there is no place, whatsoever for woman in the calculation. (Sorties 63, 64)

Today with all the available critical theories we can perceive it as not just a male gendered language but also look for Showalter’s ‘Gynocriticism’ and Cixous’s ‘écriture feminine’ as it is written by woman for women. Braddon shows how in her own way Lucy establishes her identity in the male world she subtly upholds the woman’s place by making Lady Audley usurp the masculine role. She attains authority through deceit and lie and has the verve to unsettle misogynists like Robert Audley. She contains a woman’s heart and a man’s professional brain. Deceit and lie were the tools she adopts to survive and flourish in
the rigid society. Showalter Literature of Their Own, (1977) was the first to claim Braddon as a feminist and she observes, “Lady Audley’s real secret is that she is sane and moreover, representative.” (qtd. Brantlinger 126) a careful observation of her comment takes us back to the Victorian assessment of the mad woman. Woman who defied convention, who questioned the male laws were viewed as insane or neurotic such labeling perhaps cautioned woman not defy the dominant order. Disgruntled women, ambitious and thinking women who indulged in unconventional acts like supporting the suffragette act were sent to asylum. The daring adventures of Lucy are shocking at the same time commending. Feminist sensibility is seen in her fight for survival and in her power to maneuver the situation without the masculine aid. She is far removed from Coventry Patmore’s notion of the proper feminine (Angle in The House) as she subverts this notion by not moving out of the private sphere but by being within the domestic sphere. She deconstructs the several age old binaries that have characterized dominant social and political thinking on gender. Lucy alerts us to the social transformation and ideological disputes swirling in the Victorian culture. She jeopardized the cultural construction not only of femininity but also of masculinity, by raising doubts and queries about women. Did women display masculine traits if so, where and how was masculinity to be constructed? Braddon endeavored to define hegemonic male gender identity by indicating the coercive power of men over women. Like Pre- Raphaelite art, the sensational novel transgressed social and gender boundaries, for instance, it aimed at presenting unconventional beauty in conventional ugliness.

No one but a Pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face … give a strange sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but
Photographs and paintings investigate the feminine traits, the painting presents her as benign domestic angel at the same time suggests something sinister. Such feminine representation in art reflects a consumer culture thriving on artificiality, on beauty aid and miraculous cosmetics. Women like Lady Audley make the best possible use of such society to gain autonomy. Braddon aligns the sensational novel with the pre-Raphaelite modes and sensibilities which enables one to observe the world from a fresh perspective. The painting indicates a neat blend of the innocent and the sensual which reflected women’s status in the fin d siècle society.

Femme Fatale image popularly appeared in the Victorian era, Lady Audley, Aurora Floyd, Magadelon in Collins Woman in White, and Becky Sharp in Thackeray’s Vanity Fair were called the femme fatale. The femme fatale presents how women sought to transgress the stifling world that women were subjected to and the absurdity of culture which catered to conventional norm hampering identity formation. The femme is audacious, brisk and seductive and a versatile actress, who undertakes numerous disguises with chameleon ease. She becomes a harbinger to the emergence of the New Woman movements that substantiated more empowering positions of women during the latter part of the Victorian era. Lucy enters the mainstream culture to earn the title Lady Audley, she is regarded as harmless owing to her reticence and diffidence.

The mid century femme fatale is different from historical figures such as Cleopatra, Salone, Helen of Troy, or Sirens because she does not always bear a
sexuality that is blatantly predatory; instead she represents social and cultural changes the myriad problems faced by Victorian society. (Hedgecock 11)

Lucy is fatal to men in her life, she pre-emptively challenges convention, shocks the Victorian morality by taking a second husband suspecting her first one to be still living. In Lady Audley, Aurora Floyd, we see the combination of predictable and the chaotic which represents the clash between rigid society and the changing societal gender roles. The indecorous behavior of woman declaimed the sensational novels as trash but Braddon by addressing issues concerning irregular liaison, unjust marriage laws, and women question offers scholars a provocative survey of the sensational literature. Her women use the conventional signifiers (docility) as protective armour to conceal their purpose. They desire marriage but do not idealise it; in reality it’s used as a spring board to enter the mainstream (man’s world and the upper class) in so doing they break the class and gender restriction, taunt the complacent stereotypes of the separate spheres. Postmodernist readers are able to discern the rebellious and independent spirit of the female characters which align with the contemporary women. Braddon’s representations of marriage reflect a shift in attitude. Lucy not only acts in accordance with the ideological norms but also defies it and she does it by appropriating male privilege and risking the repercussions of such disruptive behavior. Her marriage is motivated by bargain subverting the very ideology of marriage. Braddon hints at the patriarchal power in the opening chapters, “An old clock-tower, with a stupid bewildering clock which had only one hand” (1) these and other references reflect the Victorian rigidity. The description of the Audley house is both murky and glorious symbolizing the oxymoronic reality of both pain and pleasure.
A glorious place—a place that strangers fell into raptures... a noble place; inside as well as out—a house in which you conveniently lost yourself...a house in which no one room had any sympathy with another. (3)

The house boasts of noble lineage its antiquity which is seen in the handiwork of time. Lucy infiltrates the respectable Audley family, playing the role of the Lady despite her bigamous past and low birth. Braddon awakens the reader to class transgression that was seen during the Victorian era which shows the influence of Karl Marx on writers (Hardy connects the oppression of Tess to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labour.) Lady Audley’s intimacy with Phoebe goes against the upper class ethics that believes in observing the distinction between master and servant. Phoebe is her confidant, she engages in easeful conversation with her. “Phoebe, you are like me, and your features are very nice...I quite enjoy a chat with you... she was a liberal mistress...” (63, 62) Her unconventional behaviour inverts and comments upon social reality, she mocks the conformist’s attitude by maintaining cordiality with Phoebe. Phoebe represents what Lucy once was, she is a pale shadow of Lucy’s beauty and Phoebe serves the lady through her desire for self-advancement. Katherine Montweiler asserts,

Braddon’s novel is figuratively a conduct book for lower-class female reader, one that teaches how to become ‘a Lady Audley’ by pretending to be a member of a class to which they don’t belong. (qtd Hedgecock 12)

The solidarity between Lucy and Phoebe are the vulnerabilities of all social classes, a similarity that bears a point of sympathy. Braddon displays how man, culture, capitalism and commodification are responsible for the waning of class boundaries. Lucy’s tact, her
skillful manipulation of upper class frailties by the sheer exhibition of feminine beauty could inspire any weaker class woman’s aspiration to attain a higher position. Lucy is described as a pliable and tractable doll and Michael Audley prides over for being the possessor of such a beautiful doll but Lucy is much more than a mere doll. She subverts the exploitation of the working class by becoming Lady Audley. Commoditization is an effective tool she uses against the upper class superiority over the lower classes, Pamela Gilbert comments,

Lady Audley’s secret provides a clear working example of how interests, issues, and themes … are subordinated and sacrificed to maintain a classed and gendered hierarchy: Lucy’s values are repudiated in order to allow Robert to adopt “appropriate” adult male values; (9)

Lucy is not committed to anyone and that no affection binds her is proved by two instances which evince her volatile emotions- Her abandonment of her child to actualize her aspirations to enter the mainstream culture, and her contempt for woman who exhibit piety and concern for ruthless and uncouth husbands. Phoebe’s anxiety about her husband’s safety and Lucy’s vituperation and denouncement of Phoebe’s attitude towards her man evinces her contempt not sympathy. “Get up you fool, idiot, coward! Is your husband such a precious bargain that you should be groveling there, lamenting and groaning for him? ” (347) her manner shocks Phoebe because she finds her female anxiety natural in spite of her reservations about Luke. Lucy’s speech may termed as gynocritical, Braddon could make Lucy remonstrate and denounce the feminine adherence to male views because of her single status which proved to the world that women are great survivors and that they do not require the aid of men to establish their identity. The absence of dedication to family is a
subversive trait mocking at the perception of the proper feminine and such a response shows her as a harsh critic of the patriarchal dictates. The narrative concentrates on the development and the intellectual growth of the character, as she states, she is insensitive to love, and she is not an emotional fool but a materialist, an opportunist. Though Phoebe shows such tendencies she lacks the determination of Lucy. Braddon also hints that woman in order to acquire her identity had to pay less attention to sentimental requisite and it is illustrated when the narrator pronounces, “She had scarcely listened to these commonplace details; …had she not her own terrors, …”(326) Where is the self sacrificing proper feminine? Phoebe’s sub plot certainly highlights male violence against women, (Luke Marks’s crude treatment) her problem is too insignificant for Lady Audley because she believes in women’s violence against men. Such virulence arises from the constraints imposed on woman, and because of women’s adherence to man’s dominance for it hampers the dreams of such women who yearn for better conditions and who would undertake horrendous project which is menacing and hazardous. Braddon is in favour of such pretensions, Lady Audley emerges as a symbol; a figure of feminist rebellion and generates a great deal of polemic. Victorian detractors believed that the depiction of Lady Audley, signaled decadence of social values because she subverted the notion that woman were the inferior sex within the superior sex. She represents modernity in the depiction of unusual and aberrant, the portrayal of female identities sometimes supported the conventional ideology (embracing marriage) and other times sought to re-define the female gender roles. The novel exposes the limitation of both men and women to show the inadequacies of marriage by presenting marriage as a risk, not a guarantor of future happiness. One of the features of most sensational novels (Willkie Collins) is that wives do not escape their
disastrous situation through divorce, though divorce acts had been enforced. They address the women question by remaining within the patriarchal structure.

Lady Audley is not a stereo typical sensational villain, her perceptible strength of character obscure her feminine flaws and informs Robert that he has conquered a mad woman, which exposes his flimsy masculinity. Showalter’s susceptible response to Lady Audley’s defeat reflects the condition of woman during the era. It’s not an attack on Braddon but an analysis of the condition of woman who attempted to transgress the well established patriarchal notions. Showalter observes, “Braddon ensured that her heroines were punished, repentant, and drained of all energy by the end of the novel.” (Literature of Their Own 28) The blend of the inevitability and the chaotic is representative of the clash between rigid society and the altering societal gender roles. It’s hard to admit Lady Audley’s defeat; a woman of such veracity is violently handled and wounded by Robert. It’s a nightmarish universe for Lucy where man must curb her potentialities and allow the patriarchal world to confine her within the four walls of an asylum. Lady Audley’s crime is due to hereditary mental illness which she uses discreetly to avoid facing a trial and Robert manipulates this instance to send Lucy to an asylum. Robert out wits Lucy fulfilling the Victorian belief that man excels woman in power and wit. Why did Braddon make her woman the object of male gaze? Lucy admits that the hereditary taint began to show itself at her son’s birth and George’s departure. This revelation ingeniously indicates man’s faults which are not glaring when compared to Lucy’s flaws; her reaction to George’s failure, “I resented it by hating the man who had left me with no protector” (375) why does Braddon shelter George and expose Lucy? Her purpose is not hinted in the story perhaps
women writers were obliged to adhere to patriarchal demands (not to overtly blame man but make subtle references which indicate their vulnerabilities.) because, ,

Authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions…It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must totally affirm it, or totally reject it. (Smith 45)

Robert calls her a trickster, a deceiver (220) these men (Robert & Michael) lack the sensitivity to regard her for what she truly is-an ‘ill used creature’ ‘a victim of unmerited sufferings.’ (375) the negative perception of her situation is the true catalyst. “People pitied me; and I hated them for their pity. … My destiny compelled me to be a wretch.” (376, 378) confessions and retractions to Michael Audley can be viewed as taming the dominant and wild force in her, Robert gets the credit for being a powerful ring master. Rita Kranidis observes

Feminist writers were forced to address some of these censoring voices through their works…feminist literary aesthetic foregrounds narrative attempts to either appease or discredit the conservatives and reactionaries of the period. (XIII)

Feminist sensibility in Lucy could be interpreted in her demand for immense individual autonomy and the reply for such demand is confinement in a mad house sending a warning signal to all deviant and vital women. Her poignancy and pathos falls on deaf ears but her rebuke justifies her rationality leaves Robert speechless as he is guilty. “You have brought me to grave, Mr. Audley; she cried; you have brought me to a living grave.” (417) Much
of Lucy’s power to undermine Robert originates in her ability to camouflage her disease with beauty and happiness which makes Robert insecure and the solution is to send Lucy to the asylum. Dr. Mosgrave makes no disguise of his skepticism when he says, “I don’t believe she is mad…there is no evidence of madness.”(401) later he changes his version and declares ‘she is ‘dangerous’.” (403) thus giving a false diagnosis to help Robert.

Women of the 19th century were forced into madness by patriarchal society and were treated like lunatics for absurd reasons which had been made by male doctors… …madness constitutes an escape from one kind of cage into another. (Schlepphege 11)

Robert’s patriarchal position demands that he renders Lady Audley’s breach of convention, so he promotes himself from the patriarchal nephew to the detective, to the magistrate, jury and jailor of Lady Audley. He subverts his position as a protector of what is right or proper by exposing the foundations upon which patriarchy rests. His subjugation of Lady Audley restores the male voice in Audley’s court. Braddon fulfills the norm to subdue women. Can Braddon’s strategy be termed as feminist?

Braddon’s novel is a sign of the times –the evidence of a certain train of thought and action, of an impatience of old restraints, and a craving for some fundamental change in the working of society. (Pykett xxi)

Lucy is free from guilt and is stoic in admitting her mistakes and allowing the male authority to pronounce judgment which she knows is bound to be arbitrary. Robert in contrast emerges as a coward taking pride in subduing a woman. What Braddon reveals is not the power of Robert but the male politics. Braddon shows how madness was an easy
excuse to absolve a woman from her diabolic criminal activities or cover up her subversive action, not to preserve the myth of ideal of femininity but to preserve the reputation of the Audley family. Lucy seeks to deflate the power of the conventional and the repercussion awaiting such disruptive and overbearingly smart approach is her confinement. “The law could pronounce no worse sentence than this…I do not thank you for your mercy ,Mr. Robert Audley, for I know exactly what it is worth.” (420) Kim Brooks quotes Marta Caminero’s observation to show how insanity in woman has been interpreted by feminists as an act of female assertion and rejection of the traditional image of the feminine.

Critics such as Helen Cixous and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg for e.g. have suggested that the nineteenth century was hysteric in fact enacting a protest against the traditional female role. (qtd Brooks 99)

Lucy’s smothered self hood can be read as typically Victorian she is unable to embrace the feminine element fully except when she is shut in an asylum and meets her death eventually. The only instance to prove her docility in contrast to the power and strength she exhibits in the rest of the story.

Questioning the male laws is termed as feminist assertion by the second wave feminists and post feminists value the feminine notions. The novelists of the era project their women as the feminine and the feminist and a phase beyond that where she wants the society to accept her for what she is. (Ideala and Beth) Eustacia, Lady Audley, Aurora, should be silenced with a Bakhtinan ‘monologism,’ a unified master voice. Novelists attempt to show feminist sensibility in women as energetic, unconventional, opinionated, rational and a female genius which helped to develop an emerging feminist discourse. Lucy, Aurora
Floyd, Isobella, Sue Bridehead, jeopardized the construction not only of femininity but also of masculinity. If woman played the dominant role where and how was masculinity to be constituted? The ruthless ambition of Lucy Grahams is much a comment on the rise of the middle class and the rise of consumer culture in Victorian England. Through the construction of crafty, villainess heroine who is not portrayed as a vampire but an irresistible attractive innocent seeming Pre-Raphaelite beauty Braddon is probably endeavouring to attack Victorian marginalisation and victimization of women at a time when pressure for reform was mounting. Did such attempts by Braddon make critics estimate her novel as subversive?

**Feminist Sensibility Emphasizes Plurality.**

Hardy, Braddon, Mona Caird, Grand, Willkie Collins state that no individual can display stable, unitary selves but are only a combination of the masculine and the feminine traits. This venture undertaken by these writers not only shows their liberal and objective perception but also their concern to erase the distorted view which defined masculine as powerful and feminine as passive. A careful scrutiny of the novels shows how masculinity represents the subversion of gender boundaries. Masculine is derived from the Latin word ‘mas’, means ‘male’. In current popular usage, masculine refers to qualities of man. Feminine is a derivative of the Latin word ‘femina’ which means ‘woman’. Thus by etymology and usage, the terms masculine and feminine are integrally tied to our conception of gender. In Chinese culture Ying and Yang have become popular; it associates Ying with the feminine and Yang with the masculine. The ancient Chinese culture states that men and women go through Ying and Yang phases. It states that the personality of each man and woman is a dynamic phenomenon which results from the
interplay between feminine and masculine elements. But what we see in the later generations is a distortion of it privileging one over the other. Lady Audley smoothly runs what amounts to domestic empire and its various slaves, so that Michael Audley can come and go at will; smoke his cigars, read his newspapers. Most Victorian novelists made their heroines accept the patriarchal ideology of their times. Margaret Oliphant in Miss Majoribanks (1866) makes her woman perform the genteel woman’s work and exhibit her dexterity at embroidery and needle work. Elizabeth Caldwell in The Beth Book is trained by her mother to inculcate feminine ideals of self sacrifice. Her intellect and inquisitiveness was channelized to make an advantageous marriage and in doing so she was adhering to the Victorian domestic ethics. Women desiring to do male jobs were viewed with suspicion. Bathsheba in Far From the Madding Crowd, manages a farm and can be called a high flying female executive. Ethelberta manages a large estate, she earns fame as a story teller, Aurora’s interest in horse race and horse riding subverts the feminine notions. Culture, age, ethnicity, nationality and sexual orientation are largely responsible for the expression of masculinity and femininity.

The Victorian novelists show how masculinity and femininity are fluid. Gabriel Oak, Bathsheba (Far From the Madding Crowd) Adam Bede, Hetty Sorrel (Adam Bede) Sue Bridehead, Jude (Jude The Obscure) Stephen and Elfride, share a middle space. Gabriel Oak’s patience to tolerate the audacious Bathsheba, Elfride’s manipulation of Smith’s docility, Roberts lack of the essential fit between his name and his actions not only as an attorney but as a man and Jude’s passive adherence to Sue’s demand disturbs the conventional masculine stereotypes. They are a contrast to the sensual masculine men like Troy, Wildeve and Fitzpiers. Lucy’s ambitious and energetic power, her beauty and lady
like conduct shows Lucy’s fluid identity; it makes one wonder what role she is assuming. Judith Butler’s theory on the formation of gender identities welcomes one to put man and woman in the rigid framework Chris Beasley states, “Postmodern feminism is groundbreaking in the sense that it challenges the whole idea of gender divisions as well as men and women’s status as fixed groups.” (100)

This hints that women and men cannot share a common identity which emphasizes plurality instead of unity. Feminist sensibility emphasizes plurality. Butler describes gender as being ‘performative’ (Butler, 1999) because there is nothing real in it, no natural core. Ideala, Beth, Eustacia, Lucy show variation in their nature an identity that is ‘constituted in time’ (Butler 178 ) Christianity believes in the ideals of submission and obedience. “Christ was a man with definite feminine traits…and so he could never be a ‘patriarch’ who ignored women…” (D’souza 159,165) Similarly in Hindu mythology the Ardhanarishwara form of Shiva has masculine and feminine attributes. The androgynous image of Shiva and Parvathi emphasizes that god is both male and female it’s an expression of the non dual-God. It expresses the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe. It illustrates how the Purusha and Prakrithi are united and symbolizes that a combination of the feminine and the masculine makes a perfect being. Late Victorian writers Hardy, Braddon, Grand, Collins, may mean the same in their assertion that no individual can display stable, unitary selves but is a combination of the masculine and the feminine traits. Writer’s description of the feminine and the masculine and a combination of both tempts one to pick such instances where benevolence and violence are found in woman which shows that these are natural sensibilities that a woman experiences. To espouse why Ethelberta, Lucy, Aurora, Beth, oscillate between the image of the angel or
the Madonna, demon or Magadelon, instances from the Hindu mythical texts serve to discern the meaning behind their act. In the Hindu Purana, Sita and Parvathi’s example serve to show that women need the aid of a husband for protection, the Hindu Purusha (male) is seen as the protector. Parvathi not only exhibits benignity but also ferocity and protest. Contrary to her benignity is her creation of Kali. Kali is portrayed as an independent deity devoid of the support of the male deity. Kali’s appearance and manner is truly feministic. Woman’s protest, defiance and compliance to the dominant male order find justification in such mythical examples. It would not be an overstatement to state that women find display of such ferocity necessary in order to be heard. Kali’s example helps to distinguish Tess’s killing of Alec (Tess of d’Urbervilles), Lucy’s and Aurora’s attempt at murder, Ethelberta’s deceitful tricks, as an aggressive move espoused to fight the immoral and potent force. They are termed mysterious by men and such labeling involves men in proportion to unraveling women’s mysteries. The novelists perception of women differs from Aristotle’s view “female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” (Seldon 125) and in, Pre- Mendelian days

Men regarded their sperm as the active seeds which give form to the waiting ovum, which lacks identity till it receives the male’s impress. In Aeschylus’s trilogy, The Oresteia, victory is granted by Athena to the male argument, put by Apollo, that the mother is no parent to her child. (Selden 125)

Braddon, Grand have made their woman give a fair reply to such beliefs that attempt to curb woman. Late Victorian novelists abandoned the muscular witty men, made woman the cynosure of the novel. Masculinity is represented in various guises throughout the mass media. Media provides highly able, alluring role models for men, for instance, James Bond
movies; Bolywood action oriented movies with a few exceptions explore the toughness, triumph, valour and self reliance of men. Women in such movies are presented as mere objects, as pleasure givers. It portrays men as men of steel; such stories socialize men, forcing them to suppress the feminine in themselves. Talented female artists (Shabana Azmi, Rekha, Sharmila Tagore, Smitha Patil) viewed the feminine component and commodification of women seriously. They were critical about the text of such movies which gave less priority to women’s need or cause. The female leads took the Industry by storm; and this stands in relief against the conventional background of male dominated cinema, for instance, movies like Umrao Jaan, Bhumika, Ardh Sathy, Amrapali, etc. were made to show woman as capable and empowered. Instances from contemporary situations are brought to show struggle to attain equality which began in the Victorian era continue, proving that women are still combating against all odds to attain selfhood. Today in the post modernist era Tawakkol Karman’s (the noble prize winner) incessant struggle as the head of the Women Journalists without Chains has awakened women to stand tall and bold. These struggles remind us of the legacy of Victorian women novelists and feminists who fought against male domination form the bedroom to the political platform.

Charles Darwin the Origin of Species (1859) erased the spiritual focus that defined masculinity. It focused more on the commitment to muscle which led to the decline of male domesticity. Many writers celebrated masculinity in their works and it also saw a marked absence of the feminine. (Ballantyne, Rider Haggard.) Contrary to such depiction late Victorian novels show their female characters as powerful to voice their dissent. They make them speak the language that was a taboo. For instance Ideala articulates “Do you think women are less brave? No when they realize the truth they will fight for it. …they
will use the weapons…love, constancy…intellectual strength and will.” (137, 138) The last decades of 19th century and the early 20th century witnessed an indomitable force by feminists to overthrow these notions about masculinity. Ideala challenges patriarchal beliefs when she asks,

They say our brains are lighter, and therefore we must not be taught too much. But why not educate us to the limit of our capacity, and leave it there? Why, if we are inferior, should there be any fear of making us superior? (138)

The chapter shows how women in the chosen novels by choosing to retain their identity go beyond the feminine, feminist to attain the female phase. (Showalter, Feminist Poetics.)

**Lesbian overtones presented as a sign of protest.**

Marriage, passion and intimacy in the Victorian England endeavours to re-institutionalize our entire comprehension of the complexities of Victorian society where lesbianism existed not as an intermittent singularity but as a social incident. Lesbianism did not exist until 1880’s. Martha Vicinus’s gives us a way to reflect how these earlier women might be associated to more recent perception of lesbianism and why such understandings are imperative. She writes, “Virtually every historian of sexuality has argued that the present day sexual identity of both homosexuals and heterosexuals is socially constructed and historically specific.” (433) The late Victorian era witnessed a visible increase in homosexuality, mainly in men; most nineteenth century texts invite homosexual reading. Victorian texts foster the way men and women consolidate the bonds with the same sex. (Proust Marcel, Oscar Wilde) Poets like Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper wrote collaboratively from the 1880’s under the name Michael field. The term lesbianism
is derived from the Greek ‘Lesbious’ a Greek island in the Aegian Sea, native of Sappho a poetess, who addressed her love poem to woman. Nineteenth century sexology did not reify what we now call as lesbian identity; this encourages the study of female and female desire prior to the institutionalization of lesbianism. One can discern suggestions of other forms of sexuality in the chosen novels, for instance, suggestions of lesbianism and homosexuality are alternatives to the accepted pattern. Such acts were viewed as subverting the belief in heterosexuality and bourgeois morality and such an approach became a type of dissent against the tyranny of the Victorian family. Lesbian women were exempted from prosecution because they were not reckoned as socially unsafe as homoerotic in men and also because of their relative invisibility. Woman’s relationship was not viewed seriously it was only when women began to achieve financial independence that marriage was able to dissociate itself from the restraint that marriage and heterosexuality are imposed. Lesbianism crystallized as a repressed identity when women were threatened to seek deliverance from male rule. Simone De Beauvoir defines a lesbian; as, “The lesbian in fact, is distinguished by her refusal of the male and her liking for feminine flesh behaviour.” (142) Writers’ consciousness about lesbianism bears a direct relationship to her consciousness about feminism. It is also termed as the surrender of one’s ego before one’s own sex, free from the male which is an important principle of feminism. Lesbianism serves as a bond between two women who have been deprived of love and have been physically abused by men. “A woman who loves other woman, sexually and, or non sexually appreciates and prefers woman’s culture, woman’s emotional flexibilities……sometimes loves individual men, sexually…” (Walker XI)
In view of Alice walker’s observation of lesbianism it’s easy to assess how Lady Audley’s Secret and Woodlanders circulate the discourse of lesbianism. Subtle reference to lesbian leanings is hinted when Grace and Mrs. Charmond embrace one another when lost in the woods. Similarly, Lady Audley’s interaction with Phoebe reveal lesbian consciousness and such intimacy shows women’s interaction which is free from constraints (domination and subjugation of another). This happens whenever women draws a circle around her psyche saying this is my own territory, it bears a direct relationship to her consciousness about feminism. Feminine appeal not only attracted men but often women themselves. Schroderer perceives autoeroticism in Lady Audley’s behavior, her longing for Phoebe is evident when she is unable to accept Phoebe’s desire to enter heterosexual bondage. Her emotional response might signal an erotic interest but the story does not hint at physical intimacy between the two. Simone de Beauvoir, views lesbian as a,

Female of vigorous, aggressive, exuberant vitality who prefers to exert herself actively and commonly spurns passivity; If her erotic sensitivity is underdeveloped she does not desire masculine caresses. (412)

These are but a mild gender play; subtly hints at their independent spirit which hesitates to include authorities in their interaction, it also hints at their proclamation of revolt that desires to seek independence from the male. Such relationship entails transgressive force which crosses boundaries normally left uncrossed, thereby countering social and sexual taboos. It means their women are breaking through the old private–public dichotomy. It may also indicate the urge to bring private sexual matters into the public domain. It may be a political act as some critics opine, (Susan Cavin 1988) and their action celebrates woman’s identity in a patriarchal world which might have been a legitimate social protest.
But Lady Audley, Grace and Mrs. Charmond may have failed to comprehend their sexual desires as identities because the category of lesbianism first emerged only when sexologists like Von Kraft-, Ebbin Havelock Ellis began publishing in the late 19th century about sexual identities and the term lesbian first emerged in the 20th century. Braddon’s novel also brings to light the homosexual overtones though Foucault dates the birth of homosexuality to 1870. Robert’s relationship with George has homosexual overtones especially as considered in light of his attraction to Clara Tallboys. These instances imply that Victorian era was not as conservative as it has been portrayed. Lesbianism, homosexual relationships were common but they also desired emotional and psychological support of the opposite sex. Hence Lucy, Robert, Grace, Mrs. Charmond embrace marriage.

**Conclusion.**

Late Victorian fiction mirrors the changing values of the Victorian society. Hardy makes Bathsheba in *Far From The Madding Crowd*, utter, “It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs.” (CH.51 405) Hardy recognized the need for a feminine language much before Showalter’s invention of ‘Gynocriticism’ or Cixous’s ‘écriture feminine’. The analysis shows how women characters resist the dominant order but they show positive signs of power because they operate through normalization. The chosen novelists serve a common purpose in showing how the feminist sensibility in their women springs from the fountain head of desire to be treated fairly and judged equally. The novelists endeavored to give voice to the voiceless if they are unable to attain complete success it is because they are still interacting in the male world. They also show how women cannot be devoid of the feminine self; such depiction
may come closer to post feminist stance that feminism is pro-woman without being anti-
man. The novels circulate the discourse of lesbianism, which comes closer to feminism;
lesbian and homosexual suggestions are alternatives to the accepted pattern thereby
subverting the belief in heterosexuality. Braddon and Grand focused on the distasteful
outcomes of traditional masculinity (domestic violence, subjugation of women) and present
it as damaging to man and woman. They find the need to rediscover the loss of masculine
essence in the fin de siècle world. They show that masculinity and femininity are fluid.
Their project is similar to what Irigaray states “particularly concerned with working on
ways to make it possible for women to speak their bodies and sexualities.” (qtd. Morris
47) Ideala, Beth, Aurora, Ethelberta can be called feminist because of their affinity between
the personal and the political female, whereas Eustacia and Lady Audley warn about the
futility of feminist resistance. Julia Kristeva propounds that the “demand for difference into
each and every female whole and finally to bring out the singularity of each woman.”
(“Women’s Time.” 191) The feminist sensibility rests in woman’s urge to explore the
new self through an affirmation of positive values. The writers communicate the need for
creating new spaces and the need to establish the dignity of the female self, (she desires to
see herself as both object and subject.)

Their example should serve, not to warn us against the Victorians but
rather to sensitize us …to the agendas that have dominated the societies …from
which feminism has come. (Caine 17)
Work Cited.


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