

Transnationalism, Translation, and Transgression in the 'Heinemann International Library' (1890-97)

KATHY REES

ABSTRACT: The Heinemann International Library was a transnational publishing venture of the 1890s. This 'library' comprised twenty translated novels, representing the cultures of eleven countries, the work of fifteen writers and nineteen translators, and was targeted at English-speaking readers in Britain, Europe, Australia, and India. In the context of Benedict Anderson's theory of the nineteenth-century rise of nationalism, Heinemann's 'library' represents a counter impulse that unites diverse literary cultures and forges new relationships between them. One commonality is the presence of the fictional woman-reader who appears in ten of the HIL novels. In each case, she is depicted reading a French novel, the impropriety of which was a cultural commonplace in Victorian public rhetoric. This figure is constructed either as a passive symbol absorbing the text to demonstrate a nation's vulnerability to the influence of the Other, or as an active force interrogating and creatively recreating narratives. She functions as *mise en abyme* for the actual reader, modelling alternative ways of reading. In this way, Heinemann's 'library' extends the debate not only about attitudes to the French novel, but also about the status and agency of women.

KEYWORDS: Transnationalism; Woman-reader; Translation; Victorian Francophobia; New Woman



INTRODUCTION

To travel in a foreign country is but to touch its surface. Under the guidance of a novelist of genius we penetrate to the secrets of a nation, and talk the very language of its citizens.¹

IN 1890, EDMUND Gosse, editor of the Heinemann International Library (hereafter HIL), invited readers to enter into the 'secrets' of different nations through a newly-launched series which would eventually total twenty translated novels. The process of translation, Gosse enthused, would allow readers to access 'the inner geography of Europe,' and to experience 'the interior life of other countries.'² During the final decade of a century that had witnessed the rise of nationalism and the tightening of national borders across Europe, and at a moment when Francophobic attitudes dominated British public rhetoric, William Heinemann, with Gosse at the helm, initiated a transnational publishing project that promised to dissolve the notion of national language as a shibboleth. In this article, I focus on the fictional figure of the woman-reader, who appears in no fewer than ten of the HIL volumes. As Kate Flint, Jacqueline Pearson, and Catherine Golden have demonstrated, the 'woman-reader' abounded in Anglo-American nineteenth-century novels and paintings.³ My approach differs in its analysis of her figuration within a European rather than a transatlantic context, and explores why, in these ten HIL novels that expound the themes, cultures, and traditions of very different countries, these woman-readers are engaged with specifically French texts.

HEINEMANN'S TRANSNATIONAL VENTURE AND FRANCOFOBIC RHETORIC IN BRITAIN

Since Heinemann's library represents a cultural, material, and economic object produced by transnational collaboration, we might compare it with Paul Jay's evocation of the world's first printed book: 'a marvellously globalized event since the technology

¹ Edmund Gosse, 'Editor's Note'. The lack of pagination was deliberate to allow the insertion of this four-page note either with prefatory material or end pages of the first eight HIL volumes. It was thereafter omitted.

² Ibid.

³ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Catherine Golden, *Images of the Woman reader in Victorian British and American Fiction* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2003).

was Chinese, the book an Indian Sanskrit treatise, and the translation the work of a half-Turk.⁴ As I have discussed elsewhere, the twenty HIL novels, originating in France, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Poland, Italy, Spain, Austria, The Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Russia, represent the work of fifteen writers.⁵ Although many of the nineteen translators were British, there were also Norwegian, American, Bulgarian, and Polish linguists. William Heinemann was himself a transnational figure, of half-British and half-German Jewish descent. Educated partly in London and partly in Dresden, he developed a strong cosmopolitan outlook and worked in the European book market for a decade before setting up his own publishing house in London in 1889, aged 27. Heinemann's 'library' was retailed in far-flung locations, as is evident in the half-page advertisement in the endpapers, listing booksellers who stocked the volumes in Paris, Nice, Leipzig, Vienna, St Petersburg, Rome, Florence, Turin, Stockholm, Christiania, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Calcutta.⁶ This distribution network may reflect Heinemann's European contacts, generated by his regular presence at the Leipzig bookfair, but also such calculations as the absence of export tariffs within the Empire.⁷ The desire to forge transnational links between cultures and literatures was thus facilitated by technological advances in the production, distribution, and consumption of books.

Heinemann's marketing strategy for his project targeted a middle-class readership. In his Editor's Note, Gosse describes the HIL as 'a series of spiritual Baedekers and Murrays', referring to the well-known nineteenth-century travellers' handbooks widely used by educated middle-income groups.⁸ The low price of the HIL books, retailing at either 3s 6d (cloth-covered) or 2s 6d (paper-covered), is comparable with *Bohn's Libraries* of British and translated texts, published at mid-century, though

⁴ Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 39.

⁵ Kathy Rees, 'The Heinemann International Library, 1890-7', *Translation and Literature*, 26 (2017), 162-81. For details of titles, authors, translators, and publication dates, please see Appendix to this article, pp. 180-81.

⁶ Oslo was named 'Christiania' until 1925.

⁷ John St John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing, 1890-1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990), p. 77; Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Publishing for a Mass Market, 1836-1916* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 33.

⁸ Gosse, 'Editor's Note'.

these were mostly prose classics rather than novels.⁹ The entrepreneurial Heinemann eschewed the triple-decker novel, the price of which (£1 11s 6d) reflected the cartel between the established publishers and Mudie's Circulating Library. The success of Mudie's had, for decades, encouraged British readers to borrow novels more often than buy them. However, when people did buy, many liked the idea of a personal home library. As E.S. Dallas remarked, 'there is no reason why a man who has purchased Sheridan's dramatic works should next invest his money in *Wheatley on the Common Prayer*; yet Mr Bohn counts upon his doing so, and treats the public as children of habit.'¹⁰ Like Bohn, Heinemann included in the front- and end-matter of his volumes his ambitions and agenda for the HIL, to encourage readers to purchase the complete series.¹¹ Not only was the neat row of matching yellow spines in a reader's bookcase aesthetically pleasing, but the visual and linguistic uniformity also obscured the intrinsic nationalistic character of the constituent volumes.

Jay's comparison of a society that polices its borders 'to protect its cultural identity' with a society that opens itself to 'cross-cultural contact' provides a set of concepts and terms applicable to this analysis of the HIL:

We tend to link agency to cultural autonomy and to measure cultural autonomy in terms of a society's ability to protect its cultural identity from being watered down or erased by alien cultural forms; but every culture is always shaped by other cultures, and agency has more to do with the intelligent and imaginative negotiation of cross-cultural contact than with avoiding such contact. Agency from this point of view is a function of that negotiation, not its victim. And, clearly, agency is variously enabled and circumscribed by gender.¹²

⁹ Henry Bohn (1796-1884) was a successful bookseller of multi-volume sets of standard works and translations.

¹⁰ [Eneas Sweetland Dallas], 'Popular Literature,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 85 (1859), 96-112 (p. 110).

¹¹ Carol O'Sullivan, 'Translation within the margin: the "Libraries" of Henry Bohn', in *Agents of Translation*, ed. by John Milton & Paul Bandia (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009), pp. 107-29 (pp. 110-11).

¹² Jay, p. 3.

The HIL encouraged cross-cultural interaction by making European texts accessible to English speakers at a time when the National Vigilance Association (founded in 1885) was intent on preventing Britain's 'cultural identity from being watered down' by what it called, in its pamphlet *Pernicious Literature* (1889), the 'poison' of French novels.¹³ Juliet Atkinson and others have demonstrated the gap between public Victorian condemnation of French literature, and its private consumption during the period 1830-1870.¹⁴ While the readership of French novels was restricted mainly to middle-class women trained in modern languages (being excluded from the classical education available to their male counterparts), the authorities could turn a blind eye to their circulation. However, when Henry Vizatelly had Emile Zola's novels translated and made them available to the working classes, public anxiety escalated, and the matter was deemed 'a gigantic national danger.'¹⁵

Censure of French novels was intensified by British hostility to the nation that produced them: that antipathy derived from prejudice against French Catholicism as well as fear of her military might and imperial reach. Memories of heightened anxiety over Napoleon's threat to invade Britain between 1798 and 1805 remained potent.¹⁶ France's republican status was also unsettling for a monarchy which dreaded imitative violent insurrection in its own realm. Revolutionary conflicts engendered a reconfiguration of the social order, leading to general fluidity in the cultural categories of class, gender, and sexuality. Exploration of these themes in fiction offended British moral codes.¹⁷ The perceived superiority of French culture, in terms of its elegant fashion, innovative technology, literary creativity, and legendary cuisine was particularly galling when overtly valorised by British citizens. French literature was also blamed for

¹³ *Pernicious Literature: Debate in the House of Commons; Trial and Conviction for Sale of Zola's Novels* (London: National Vigilance Association, 1889), pp. 6, 11.

¹⁴ Juliet Atkinson, *French Novels and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); John Rignall, "'One great confederation?": Europe in the Victorian Novel,' in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 232-52.

¹⁵ *Pernicious Literature*, p. 5.

¹⁶ Both *The Trumpet-Major* (1880) and *The Dynasts* (1904, 1906, and 1908) by Thomas Hardy revisit this national crisis almost a century after the event.

¹⁷ Novels such as Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830), the story of a feminised Italian castrato, and Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) which raised the possibility of a love affair between two men or two women, initiated France's reputation for literary immorality early in the century.

its innovation; Britons reacted defensively to each new French 'ism' – realism, naturalism, aestheticism, and impressionism – that crossed the channel during the Victorian period.

Francophobic attitudes reached new heights in parliament and the press during the late 1880s, reinforced by the popular discourse of degeneration that was attributed to the morbid mental pathology of French Decadence. As Samuel Smith MP asserted in the House of Commons, this 'noxious and licentious literature [...] corroded the human character [and] sapped the vitality of the nation.'¹⁸ Approaching the millennium, many Britons felt that their nation and their empire were declining with the century, and moral 'vitality' among the young was considered essential to national recovery. That the lifespan of the HIL (1890-97) is bracketed by two censorship trials against publishers – Henry Vizetelly was imprisoned in 1889 for continuing to market translations of Zola despite his 1888 conviction, and in 1898 George Bedborough went to trial for selling the English edition of Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* (1897), first published in German in 1896 – reminds us how unfavourable the 1890s were for marketing translated texts.

A prominent figure in the British armoury against alien cultural forms was the vaunted figure of the innocent Young Woman (invariably capitalized) who served as a benchmark to judge the acceptability or inadmissibility of fictional content. Despite protests by George Moore, Thomas Hardy, Henry James and many others, English novels had to be tailored to the moral sensibilities of this fictive Young Woman.¹⁹ The ideology of separate spheres divided men and women according to their allegedly 'natural' attributes, and because men were considered intellectual and analytical, and women emotional, irrational, and impressionable, it followed that certain reading material was deemed unhealthy for the latter. Victorian commentators voiced fears that improper texts, as exemplified by Zola's realist novels, would excite a woman's imagination or expectations beyond what was compatible with daily life, so that she

¹⁸ *Pernicious Literature*, p. 5.

¹⁹ George Moore, *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals* (London: Vizetelly, 1885); Walter Besant and others, 'Candour in English Fiction', *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, 51 (1890), 311-18; Henry James, 'Nana', in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. by George Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 236-243.

would ignore her duties and become dangerously sexualized.²⁰ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson gestures at this in *Det Flager I Byeti ogpaa Havnen* (1884), published in the HIL as *The Heritage of the Kurts* (1892), in which Norwegian schoolgirls are shocked to discover that their friend, Tora Holm, is pregnant: 'You see, she had been in France; she knew a great deal more than we others.'²¹ French culture was a shorthand intimation of transgression.

THE WOMAN-READER AS A SYMBOL OF NATIONAL VULNERABILITY

Benedict Anderson theorises that, during the nineteenth century, the idea of the nation became imaginable. He connects the growth of nationalism with the rise of the novel, arguing that the novel and the newspaper provided countries with the symbolic form they needed in order to be understood by the people. The single print language unified fields of communication, and enfolded readerships into shared experiences, generating the sense of belonging to an 'imagined community' with borders that were 'inherently limited' (finite) and 'sovereign' (authoritative).²² Viewed in relation to the countries represented in the HIL, Anderson helps us to envisage each volume as the linguistic and cultural product of an imagined nation-state. Writers collected and codified the traditions, rituals, and ideologies of a nation that was increasingly being presented as a unified entity. The figure of the woman-reader was an ideologically-weighted cipher by which writers could transmit political warnings or critiques to their fellow-citizens. As I shall show in the following examples, the threat of the foreign Other – characterized in the form of French texts – is a consistent theme of such veiled critiques.

I start with the translation of Ivan Goncharov's *A Common Story*, which appeared mid-way through the HIL project, in 1894. Originally published in Russian as *Obyknovennaya istoriya* in 1847, it is the earliest of all the HIL texts, most of which appeared in their original languages during the 1880s and 1890s.²³ When we first meet Goncharov's woman-reader, the matronly Maria Mihalovna, she is 'buried in the perusal of a French novel,' the choice of verb here underlining her comic but ominous

²⁰ Flint, p. 282.

²¹ Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, *The Heritage of the Kurts*, trans. by Cecil Fairfax (London: Heinemann, 1892), p. 268.

²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edn, (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 5-6, 44-45.

²³ See Appendix to my article cited in Footnote 5.

engrossment.²⁴ Maria's text is *Les Memoires de Diable* by Frédéric Soulié, a story based on the Faust legend, published as a roman-feuilleton in 1837-38. The feuilleton originated as the magazine section of the nineteenth-century French newspaper, which serialised stories of crime, sexuality, and sensation, generating huge public excitement. In *Les Memoires*, the Devil luxuriates in instances of adultery, prostitution, incest, and murder. It is a work of 'uncompromising brutality' in which any hint of goodness is revealed to be a mask of hypocrisy covering hideous vices.²⁵ When Soulié's romance circulated (in French) in Britain during the 1840s, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (hereafter EBB) discussed its gruesome contents in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, making a chiasitic jest about its contents: it 'begins with a violation & a murder, & ends consistently with a murder & a violation [...] The smell of all this sulphur has scarcely passed out of my nostrils!'²⁶ Browning and Mitford revelled in their 'naughty' reading of 'naughty books' by Soulié and the like, knowing how deeply ingrained was British disapproval of French writing.²⁷

Maria reads uncritically – she is a naive provincial woman who blandly accepts Soulié's atrocities: 'Then cook came up; I talked to him for an hour; then I read a little of *Memoires de Diable* ... ah! What a pleasant author Sully is! How agreeably he writes! [...] I never noticed how the morning slipped away.'²⁸ The consumption of Soulié makes her crave more. As Thomas Carlyle declared, 'every bad book begets an appetite for reading a worse one,' and Maria later voices her intention to read Honoré de Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin* (1831), another novel about human vice and greed.²⁹ Goncharov is critiquing Russian Gallomania, which had diffused across the country via the Russian

²⁴ Ivan Goncharov, *A Common Story*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London: Heinemann, 1893), p. 88.

²⁵ Harold March, *Frédéric Soulié: Novelist and Dramatist of the Romantic Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), p. 173.

²⁶ EBB to M.R. Mitford, 27 Nov. 1842, (letter 1063), *The Brownings Correspondence: An Online Edition* <<http://browningscorrespondence.com>> [accessed 15 May 2021]. Simon Avery notes that it is increasingly common in critical work on Elizabeth Barrett Browning to abbreviate her name to EBB, to accommodate her family name, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, and her married name, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2011), p. xiv).

²⁷ EBB to M.R. Mitford, 21 Nov. 1842, (letter 1057).

²⁸ Goncharov, p. 90. First ellipsis as original.

²⁹ Carlyle quoted in Frederick Harrison, *Carlyle and the London Library* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1907), p. 67; Goncharov, p. 110.

aristocracy since the 1750s. When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, the Europeanized nobility had more in common with the invading troops than with their own peasantry. To British readers, Maria would have presented as an idle woman whose indulgence in the superstitious and sensational caused her to neglect her domestic duty. She does not even have the prudence to conceal her reading matter from her daughter, neighbour, or servant. By contrast, more knowing and artful British characters like Thackeray's Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) or Trollope's Lizzie Eustace in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871) are quick to hide their French novels from public view.³⁰ 'Naughty' books should not be read blatantly.

The shameless display of reading crude and bawdy French novels is a theme in *Żyd: obrazy współczesne* (1866) by Józef Kraszewski, published by Heinemann as *The Jew* in 1893. Against the background of the 1863 Polish Insurrection against Russian rule, Kraszewski depicts the scheming of the impoverished Jewish Polish Madame Wtorkowska (née Weinberg). She is intent upon securing a rich husband for her daughter, Emusia, from among the Russian officers then occupying Warsaw. Pandering to the Russian partiality for French culture, Madame Wtorkowska reads Paul de Kock, and displays French romances in the reception room 'to show acquaintance with current literature.'³¹ She is indifferent to Emusia's reading choices 'provided that the book was written in French, in an elegant style.'³² The calculating Emusia lounges at a window, the classic threshold between private and public space, shamelessly engaged in a Féval novel, thereby signalling her availability to the highest bidder.³³ Again, EBB's playful comments convey standard British attitudes to these French writers: Féval is only 'a little indecent' but de Kock is 'intolerably coarse' and 'very *nasty* – he splashed the dirt about him, like a child in a gutter.'³⁴ In imitation of a Féval heroine, Emusia is 'a *bacchante* [reveller]' dressing 'in black lace, light and *négligée* [abandoned]' and her 'toilet was so *décolleté* [revealing]'.³⁵ These French words, conspicuous in the source

³⁰ Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 121; William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 767.

³¹ Józef Kraszewski, *The Jew*, trans. by Linda da Kowalewska (London: Heinemann, 1893), pp. 352, 233.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³⁴ EBB to Isa Blagden, mid-March 1857, (letter 3975); EBB to M.R. Mitford, 13 March 1844 (letter 1567); EBB to M.R. Mitford, 29 March 1844 (letter 1585). Emphasis original.

³⁵ Kraszewski, pp. 243, 215, 233.

text within the Polish print not simply by their italicisation but by their orthographic distinctness, were transferred verbatim into the English translation, thereby retaining their suggestive connotations. There is a strong sense of showiness here. First, the conspicuous placement of French books to impress Russian visitors; second, Emusia's tableau of her reading self at the window; and third, Kraszewski's insertion of italicised words that stand out within the Polish Lechitic print. Performance underlines the tactic of the Wtorkowska women-readers: they make a show of their Francophilia in order to forge lucrative connections with Russian military-men. French novels are sensual invitations to the enemy Other.

According to Anne O'Neil-Henry, Paul de Kock's work spread across Europe as 'a sort of Bourdieusian marker of poor taste.'³⁶ In *El Maestrante* (1893), translated as *The Grandee* (1894), the Spanish writer, Armando Valdés, mocks the chaste pretensions of the Countess of Onis by claiming that, 'the account of the first night of her marriage, whether true or false, was worthy of figuring in a novel of Paul de Kock.'³⁷ The institution of marriage is, by De Kock's name, reduced to lascivious farce. Valdés despairs of the Parisian seduction of the Spanish upper middle classes, and in *La Espuma* (1890), published as *Froth* (1891) in the HIL, he caricatures the over-consumption of French novels by an aristocratic woman-reader, Marquesa de Ujo, who:

Uttered, or to be exact, she exhaled a series of exclamations over a new French novel: 'What exquisite scenes! What a sweet book! When she says, "Come in if you choose; you can dishonour my body but not my soul." And the duel, when she receives the bullet that was to have killed her husband! How beautiful it is!'³⁸

For the Marquesa, the most prominent textual features relate to the body and its ephemeral sensations of pleasure and pain in sex and death. Her taste is so jaded by formulaic sensational French plots that she can specify neither writer nor title. Valdés's clear critique of the corrupting influence of French novels as a threat to national identity translates easily, confirming British prejudices.

³⁶ Anne O'Neil-Henry, 'Paul de Kock and the Marketplace of Culture,' *French Forum*, 39 (2014), 97-112 (p. 97).

³⁷ Armando Valdés, *The Grandee*, trans. by Rachel Chalice (London: Heinemann, 1894), pp. 64-65.

³⁸ Armando Valdés, *Froth*, trans. by Clara Bell (London: Heinemann, 1891), p. 245.

Many Spanish writers felt that their identity had been, to use Jay's words, 'erased by alien cultural forms'.³⁹ In particular, they resented the long-standing French hegemony over Spanish art-forms. The so-called 'Anteneo debates' of the 1870s expressed 'a violent, visceral reaction against French literature as a noxious influence and as a purveyor of immorality.'⁴⁰ Spanish literary distinctiveness had been virtually eclipsed by French interests. Many of the commercial publishing houses prioritised the marketing and dissemination of French, rather than native, novels, and most Spanish authors were concerned with translation or imitation rather than with new writing. Valdés's fellow-writer Juan Valera believed that 'after two centuries of servitude and submission, whose reward has only been to be continually called barbarians and ignoramuses, it is high time that we shook off the intellectual yoke under which the French have us. And I want to do something towards this.'⁴¹

To promulgate anti-French feeling, Valera uses the eponymous woman-reader of his *Dona Luz* (1879), which was included in the HIL in 1893. Dona Luz is a desultory reader:

Reclining languidly in her easy chair, she was reading two books alternately. They were the works of Calderón and of Alfred de Musset. She was comparing the manner in which those two authors had put in dramatic action the saying, "There is no trifling with love" - *Ou ne badine pas avec l'amour*.⁴²

Leaning back suggestively, Dona Luz explores ideas about love through two plays, one Spanish and one French. She is comparing *Love is no Trifling Matter* (1635) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, a playwright of the seventeenth-century Golden Age, with *No*

³⁹ Jay, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Gifford Davis, 'The Spanish Debate over Idealism and Realism before the Impact of Zola's Naturalism', *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 1649-56 (p. 1649).

⁴¹ Valera to Menéndez Pelaya, quoted by Alda Blanco, 'Gender and National Identity: The Novel in Nineteenth Century Spanish Literary History', in *Culture and Gender in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, ed. by Lou Charonon-Deutsch and Jo Labanyi (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 120-36 (p. 123).

⁴² Juan Valera, *Dona Luz*, trans. by Mary Serrano (London: Heinemann, 1893), p. 55.

Trifling with Love (1834) by the French dramatist Alfred de Musset.⁴³ Spanish readers of the 1880s would have recognized the implications of juxtaposing the two titles, and certainly, Dona Luz's progress in life and love will be determined by whether she follows the Spanish or the French model. Valera's opposition of two national characters is a common political strategy. As Linda Colley argues, Britain adopted the same tactic, defining itself against France as the Other.⁴⁴ Labelling the French as Catholic, effeminate, superficial, and immoral allowed the British to identify themselves as Protestant, manly, genuine, and principled.

Akin to assumptions made about the benchmark Young Woman, Dona Luz is depicted as highly susceptible to what she reads. As an orphan, she embodies the isolated figure, unsupported and unsupervised. She has no guidance beyond books on the question of marriage. Calderón's play concerns an eccentric courting couple who must modify their attitudes and behaviour in order to find harmony: his moral precept is clearly expressed. De Musset's play about a doomed betrothal prioritises the dramatic effect over the moral message, leaving the audience to retrieve the play's meaning unaided, promoting confusion and uncertainty. Rather than being alert to Calderón's sound wisdom, Dona Luz's languid reading posture suggests her vulnerability to seduction by de Musset. Inevitably, the danger suggested by the allusions is subsequently enacted in the plot. Choosing between two suitors, Dona Luz is distracted from the sincerity of the honourable priest (whose principles reflect a Calderón-directed ethic) by the flamboyance of a duplicitous nobleman (who behaves like a de Musset character). Heartbreak and misery soon follow. For Spanish readers, Dona Luz's fate is a warning against continued thralldom to French culture, while for British readers, the perils associated with unrestricted access to French texts reinforce rhetoric about its regulation.

Solitary and unsupervised reading has similarly negative consequences in Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* (1880), a Danish novel published in the HIL as *Siren Voices* (1896). Jacobsen's woman-reader, Bartoline Blid, is depicted staring into space: 'her thoughts were far away, further than the clouds at which she gazed', while her hands

⁴³ Alfred de Musset, 'No Trifling with Love' in *Comedies by Alfred de Musset*, trans. by Stephen Gwynn (London: Walter Scott, 1891), pp. 111-173; Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Love is no Laughing Matter* (*No hay burlas con el amor*), trans. by Don Cruickshank and Sean Page (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986).

⁴⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003).

'toyed with the small thick book upon her lap. It was Rousseau's *Héloïse*.'⁴⁵ Notorious in its day, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) was black-listed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, for its sympathetic depiction of an adulteress.⁴⁶ Atkinson observes that the effect of characters reading *Héloïse* 'implies a physical seduction', and Atkinson illustrates this by reference to Caroline Grey's depiction of the eponymous heroine of *Sybil Lennard: A Novel* (1846) whose 'languid dreaminess of eye and abstracted look' results from her reading *Héloïse*.⁴⁷ Bartoline is similarly characterised in a vague reverie. Her solitary reading triggers impossible dreams and, as she becomes gradually unable to distinguish between romance and reality, she fails in her roles as daughter, wife, and mother.

Rousseau's *Héloïse* comprises two distinct parts: the first half charts, by illicit erotic dialogue, the growing passion between 'Julie', or 'the new Heloise', and her lover Saint-Preux, while the second depicts Julie's dutiful marriage to Wolmar and their highly-regulated life in the Swiss village of Clarens. The reader's belief in Julie's conversion to virtue is, however, shattered by her deathbed acknowledgement that her love for Saint-Preux had never died. The life of Jacobsen's Bartoline follows a similar trajectory. In Denmark she exists on dreams, but having gone to Clarens to experience 'Julie's paradise,' Bartoline's heart becomes 'filled with the same unsatisfied longing' and she dies.⁴⁸ In her discussion on contemporary responses to *Héloïse*, Jacqueline Pearson suggests that 'if novels have damaging effects on immature individuals, they have analogous effects on societies. In cultures without firm moral values, like *ancient regime* and revolutionary France, novels develop a "pernicious sentimentality" which contributes to the collapse of society'.⁴⁹ For Danish readers, Bartoline's gradual psychological detachment from the community and her identification with the Other would have registered as a betrayal of the ideology of 'det danske folk' ('the Danish

⁴⁵ Jens P. Jacobsen, *Siren Voices*, trans. by Ethel Robertson (London: Heinemann, 1896), p. 110.

⁴⁶ The *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* was a list of books which Catholics were forbidden to read. It was initiated in 1564 by Pope Pius IV, and remained in operation until 1966. New authors and works were continually added to the Index: Rousseau's *Héloïse* would have been included because it contained 'lascivious material.' See Max Lenard, 'On the Origin, Development and Demise of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*,' *Journal of Access Services*, 3:4 (2006), 51-63 (pp. 54-56).

⁴⁷ Atkinson, p. 200.

⁴⁸ Jacobsen pp. 117, 119.

⁴⁹ Pearson, p. 209.

people'), a concept which played a crucial role in nineteenth-century ethnic nationalism in Denmark.⁵⁰ By this parallel, the restrictive measures supposedly protecting the British young woman are shown to be arguably beneficial for society as a whole.

As Jay comments, societies work hard to protect their own cultural identity from being watered down: like *fin de siècle* Britain, many countries sought cultural autonomy, and French fiction provided a powerfully resonating motif to warn against the threat of the Other. Tora Holm's sexual 'fall' is attributed to French influence (Bjørnson). Maria Mihalovna's passive absorption of French grotesquery critiques Russia's indiscriminate devotion to French literature (Goncharov). The Wtorkowska mother and daughter's ostentatious reading of Féval and De Kock signals their ingratiation with the occupying Russian forces (Kraszewski). The Marquesa de Ujo's inanities and Dona Luz's seduction by de Musset highlight the distraction from Spanish tradition caused by cultural vassalage to French forms (Valdés and Valera). Bartoline's Rousseau-inspired dreams foster her disengagement from Danish ethnic nationalism (Jacobsen). Despite the disparate geographical and cultural settings, and the particular historical and political circumstances of the originating texts, there are three common denominators between them: first, a disapproval of French fiction; second, a construction of the woman-reader as a cautionary vehicle; and third, the fact that all the novelists are male. Although their approach could be read as a patriotic defence of their 'imagined community', Jay would argue that the prevention of cross-cultural influence is impossible, and that a negotiation of its influence is preferable to avoidance. By including two female writers in the HIL, Gosse and Heinemann provide an alternative model for interrogating French fiction and reinscribing its contents to produce new narratives, an approach that empowers and enables the woman-reader.

ENABLING THE WOMAN-READER

The agency of the woman-reader changes dramatically in the work of Matilde Serao and Gemma Ferruggia, both Italian. The political role ascribed to their women-readers is not related to a nation-state grievance but concerns the widespread oppression of women – a transnational cause. They are active readers who use allusions to French texts to communicate universal themes and to challenge patriarchal codes. Serao and

⁵⁰ *Building the Nation: N.F.S. Grundtvig and Danish National Identity*, ed. by John Hall, Ove Korsgaard and Ove Pedersen (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), pp. 43, 214.

Ferruggia go against the grain of contemporary Italian women's writing. In conventional post-Risorgimento fiction, the heroine was 'a wife who sacrificed herself for her husband, and a mother who consecrated her offspring to the motherland.'⁵¹ Although Italy was developing into a modern nation-state, the dominant ideology of separate spheres kept women away from the public and political arena, channelling them into domesticity to be undertaken with modesty, submission, and sacrifice. This was especially the case for aristocratic women, whose lives and voices were limited by religious education, arranged marriages, and prescribed social roles. Serao suggests that in such restricted circumstances, reading offers an opportunity and access to texts from other cultures, especially France, that is empowering for women. The Italian women-readers within these works actively apply their interpretation of texts to events in the plot, rather than being ciphers or pawns within an author's propagandist design. Serao's *Fantasia* (1883), published by Heinemann as *Fantasy* in 1890, is a novel where the destiny of the main characters is determined by how well they can read literary allusions. It centres on two young women, Caterina Spaccapietra and Lucia Altimare, whose friendship develops during their schooldays in an aristocratic convent. They swear an oath 'never to do ill to the other, or willingly cause her sorrow, or ever, ever betray her.'⁵² After their respective arranged marriages, this vow of eternal sisterhood is dramatically overturned by its instigator, Lucia, when she seduces Caterina's husband, Andrea Lieti, thereby deceiving both Caterina and her own husband. Lucia is a woman of many roles, poses, and personae, mostly drawn from literary sources. In her apartment she communes with a whole battery of transnational artefacts: the book *The Imitation of Christ* (1418-27) by the German-Dutch cleric Thomas à Kempis; an album bearing a quotation by the British poet, Byron; lines from the Italian poets Giacomo Leopardi and Arrigo Boïto; a photograph of the Hungarian poet Petröfi Sandor; and a terracotta sculpture of Mephistopheles and Marguerite in the German tradition of Dr Faustus.⁵³ Lucia consumes and combines allusions, quotations, and fragments to forge a constantly shifting persona.

⁵¹ Rinaldina Russell, 'Introduction', in *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. by Rinaldina Russell (London: Greenwood, 1994), pp. xv-xxxi (p. xxiii).

⁵² Serao, *Fantasy*, trans. by Henry Harland and Paul Sylvester (London: Heinemann, 1890), p. 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-64, 79.

Lucia's strongest connections are with French texts. From early on, she is associated with *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), a novel that its author Alexandre Dumas *filis*, later adapted into a play. It relates the story of a Parisian courtesan, Marguerite Gautier, who famously signalled her availability to her clients by wearing white camellias for twenty-five days of the month and red ones for the other five days. For British readers, this play had strong resonances, since the play was banned in 1853, remaining under official interdiction for over twenty years.⁵⁴ When EBB enthused over her attendance at the play of *La Dame* in Paris in 1852, she prefaced her anecdote with 'Guess what enormity I have committed lately!'⁵⁵ In *Fantasy*, there is a *sotto voce* schoolgirl discussion about this proscribed book: 'I know of a marriage that never came off,' said one of the girls, 'because the fiancée let out that she had read *La Dame aux Camélias*.'⁵⁶ This furtive exchange is abruptly terminated by Lucia's appearance, a conjuncture which triggers thereafter an association between Lucia and the notorious Marguerite Gautier. Lucia refashions her body so that it becomes increasingly closer to the texture and colours of camellias: her skin attains 'a waxen pallor' and she is invariably 'white-robed', with a mouth that was 'like a red rose' or 'an open pomegranate flower, a brightness of coral'.⁵⁷ Lucia's first dance with Caterina's husband, Andrea, takes place in a room transformed into a garden of camellias where the flowers display an 'insolent waxen beauty, white or red, perfumeless [sic], icily voluptuous'.⁵⁸ Serao intimates Lucia's self-fabrication out of textual fragments. Lucia does not simply imitate Dumas's heroine: she becomes Marguerite Gautier.

Having enticed Andrea away from Caterina, Lucia transforms herself into another 'Marguerite,' this one being Goethe's creation, appropriated by French playwright Michel Carré in *Faust and Marguerite* (1850), and popularised by Charles Gounod's operatic version in 1859. The reader is prepared for Lucia's second alter ego by an earlier episode where, gazing at her terracotta sculpture of Mephistopheles and Marguerite, Lucia craves the excitement of transgression, undergoing a struggle

⁵⁴ John R. Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 82.

⁵⁵ EBB to Anna Brownell Jameson, 12 April 1852, (letter 3033).

⁵⁶ Serao, *Fantasy*, p. 18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 'pallor', pp. 66, 198; 'white-robed', pp. 96, 117, 129, 162; 'red mouth', pp. 90, 199.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48. In Dumas's novel, Marguerite Gautier's preference for camellias is on account of their lack of scent. Perfume troubles Marguerite's consumptive lungs.

between a 'desire of sin' and a 'vague fear of punishment'.⁵⁹ Just as Lucia is now passionately desired both by Caterina's husband and her own, so the operatic Marguerite has two suitors: Faust, the aging scholar transformed by Mephistopheles into a handsome gentleman, and Siebel, a young man who woos her with flowers. To assist Faust's suit, Mephistopheles makes Siebel's bouquets wither at his touch, and it is by allusion to this withering that Lucia taunts Andrea: 'like Siebel, you are accursed of Mephistopheles. Siebel could not touch a flower without its fading and dying. You have kissed me, and I am fading and dying. There are no more flowers for Margaret'.⁶⁰ Lucia's closing declaration in the third person accentuates her adoption of the persona. Andrea, not a reader, feels hopelessly demeaned by Lucia's sphere of reference. Ironically, it is by the exploitation of male-authored textual fragments that Lucia empowers herself and inflicts pain.

Lucia disconcerts Andrea by her continual meta-narrative about their affair, proclaiming that their 'position is to be found in *Madame Bovary*', and that they are merely 'performers in a bourgeois drama'.⁶¹ Lucia identifies so fully with Emma Bovary that she adopts the latter's mystical religious behaviour. Just as Bovary would gaze for a long time at an image of 'poor Jesus falling beneath His cross' and starve herself to 'mortify the flesh,' so Lucia also dreams of 'dying in the ecstasy of the Cross'.⁶² Lucia, however, goes further than Bovary, and recreates herself as the crucified Christ: she bruises herself so that 'four red marks disfigured [her] palm' like stigmata, and she repeats a prayer for 'Hyssop and vinegar, hyssop and vinegar'.⁶³ Lucia's earlier meditation upon Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* prefigures this moment. She has forged her new narrative from these fragments, and by enacting the pains of the crucifixion – the stigmata and the thirst – she claims gospel-derived power. Unlike Flaubert, who colludes with the bourgeois social contract and kills off Emma Bovary as a moral exemplar, Serao gives Lucia an existence beyond the final page of *Fantasy*, consigning her future to the reader's imagination.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 230.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 229.

⁶² Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. by Alan Russell (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 48; Serao, *Fantasy*, p. 59.

⁶³ Serao, *Fantasy*, pp. 100, 228. For 'stigmata' see John 20:27, and for 'vinegar and hyssop' see John 19:28-30.

The appointment of translators for *Fantasy* and the second of Serao's novels, *Addio Amore!* (1887), published as *Farewell Love!* (HIL, 1894), discloses an anomaly arising from separate spheres education. In 1889, when the American, Henry Harland, arrived in London with a letter of introduction to Gosse from his influential godfather, Edmund Clarence Stedman, Gosse appointed Harland as translator of *Fantasy*.⁶⁴ Having had a traditional classical education in 'ancient languages', Harland's Italian was unequal to Serao's idiom, and Gosse had to recruit a co-translator, Paul Sylvester, to complete the task.⁶⁵ Harland may also have felt demotivated by having a woman's novel to translate, an arrangement regarded as unfitting for men. When, four years later, Gosse sought a translator for *Addio Amore!* he employed Harland's wife, Aline, and the book was regarded as having been 'well and readably made'.⁶⁶ This example of the Harlands illustrates the 'whimsical' situation outlined by Emily Davies in 1866, that although 'young men [...] have to conduct foreign correspondence, and travel about all over the world, they are taught the dead languages', while middle-class women who 'rarely see a foreigner [...] are taught modern languages'.⁶⁷ This arrangement makes the regulation of translated works in order to protect the sensibilities of the default Young Woman especially spurious, since 'she' may possess more skills to access the original than her male counterpart. Of the ten books under discussion here, eight were translated by female linguists. Although this seems to reflect the traditionally invisible and inferior status of the female translator, lamented by George Eliot in 1855, the HIL demonstrates a slight shift in her status by the 1890s.⁶⁸ Women like Mary Serrano, an Irish-American authority on Spanish literature who translated Juan Valera's *Dona Luz* (1893), and Helen Zimmern, the German-British editor of *The Italian Gazette* who translated Gemma Ferruggia's *Women's Folly* (1895), accommodated translation work within broader literary careers.

Whether Serao's work was read in translation or in the original, it made 'some stir in this country [England]'.⁶⁹ Walter Butterworth observed in 1893 that of all Serao's

⁶⁴ Karl Beckson, *Henry Harland: His Life and Work* (London: Eighteen Nineties Society, 1978), p. 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 17.

⁶⁶ 'Literature', *Glasgow Herald*, 22 February 1894, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Emily Davies, *Higher Education of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 132.

⁶⁸ George Eliot, 'Translations and Translators', *Leader*, 6 (1855), 1014-15, in *George Eliot Archive* <<https://georgeeliotarchive.org/items/show/95>> [accessed 7 July 2021].

⁶⁹ 'Literature', *Glasgow Herald*, p. 9.

works, '*Fantasy* ... by its dabbling with illicit passion and betrayal of marriage vows, is most calculated to offend the susceptibilities of John Bull and his wife'.⁷⁰ However, commentators on *Farewell Love!* were even more critical, specifically raising the issue of the Young Woman benchmark by claiming that Serao did 'not write for the *jeune fille*', and asserting that 'no Englishwoman could behave quite like Anna'.⁷¹

As in *Fantasy*, the lives of Serao's characters in *Farewell Love!* are shaped by the French texts they read. Anna Acquaviva turns to the poetry of Charles Baudelaire when she discovers that her husband, Cesare Dias, is unfaithful. Dias is reading Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* (1816) and manifests the same indecisive, selfish, and cynical behaviour of its protagonist. Just as in that text, Adolphe's mistress, Ellénore, collapses in fatal despair when she discovers that her lover plans to abandon her, so Anna is driven to suicide after witnessing Dias's betrayal. Anna stage-manages her suicide so that she dies whilst consuming French poetry, literally breaking her heart by shooting herself with Dias's revolver. She persuades her former suitor, the infatuated Luigi Caracciolo, to read aloud Baudelaire's 'Harmonie du Soir,' a four-stanza poem about the heart's journey from earthly turbulence to spiritual rest.⁷² Caracciolo is almost half-way through his recitation when Anna pulls the trigger.⁷³ The Catholic similes in Baudelaire's poem, '*encensoir* [incense]', '*reposito* [altar]', and '*ostensoir* [monstrance: vessel that carries the eucharistic host]' are arranged in order of increasing significance, but Anna kills herself before she reaches the final word, '*ostensoir*'. Anna's experience of treachery means that she can no longer trust male-authored texts, and so she takes her own life before she can be persuaded by the vision of the monstrance, the symbol of victory over fear and death.

Male readers in *Farewell Love!* are devitalised by their reading. Caracciolo is a puppet, reading at Anna's direction and his voice is suddenly silenced by her act of suicide. He is emasculated by being turned into what Catherine Golden calls an 'interrupted reader', that is, one obliged to halt an activity to attend to others' needs –

⁷⁰ Walter Butterworth, 'Matilde Serao,' *Manchester Quarterly*, 12 (1893), 96-107, (p. 102).

⁷¹ 'Five New Novels,' *The Standard*, 19 April 1894, p. 2.

⁷² Charles Baudelaire, 'Harmonie du Soir' *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 81-2. In 1857, the collection was partially censored and Baudelaire, his publisher, and his printer were prosecuted for indecency.

⁷³ Serao, *Farewell Love!*, trans. by Aline Harland (London: Heinemann, 1894), p. 280.

traditionally the female role.⁷⁴ Dias lacks originality: his character is mirrored in the figure of Constant's Adolphe. Ironically, the texts associated with these reading males direct the focus back to the woman: Constant evokes Ellénore's tragedy, which prefigures Anna's fate, while Baudelaire's meditation on the heart highlights the irony of Carracciolo's failure to win Anna's metaphorical heart or to protect her literal one. The allusions to French texts provide commentaries on, and insights into, male and female behaviour. They also exhibit the arbitrary and constructed nature of ascribed gender differences by creating reading-men who are passive and feminised.

The shift of gender from male to female authorship signals an entirely new conception of the woman-reader's authority and agency. Having pushed the limits of public tolerance with Serao's novels, Heinemann then published Gemma Ferruggia's *Follie Muliebri* (1893) as *Woman's Folly* (HIL 1895), which exposed the double standard in sexual relationships. 'The New Woman has not', Gosse writes in the introduction, 'in any country, expressed herself with more daring, and I think she never will'.⁷⁵ Gosse's admiration for such 'daring' is suggested also by his comments in *Questions at Issue* (1893), in which he urges British novelists to 'contrive to enlarge their borders' and not shy away from controversy.⁷⁶ He claims that since the public has now 'eaten of the apple of knowledge' in the form of the New Woman novel, it will no longer countenance 'the Madonna heroine and the god-like hero'.⁷⁷ Madonna heroines, created to satisfy the Young Woman benchmark, had no place in the world of the New Woman.

The backlash was not slow in coming: *Woman's Folly* was condemned as reflecting 'the spread of morbid hysteria through the female fiction of Europe'.⁷⁸ Ferruggia's protagonist, Caterina Soave, differs from her counterparts discussed above in that she is emphatically not a woman-reader until she shoots her philandering husband ('in the back of his neck, where traitors are shot') and is tried for murder.⁷⁹ Writing to her legal counsellor and psychiatrist, Caterina explains:

⁷⁴ Golden, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Edmund Gosse, 'Introduction,' in Gemma Ferruggia, *Women's Folly*, trans. by Helen Zimmern (London: Heinemann, 1895), pp. v-ix (p. v).

⁷⁶ Gosse, 'The Tyranny of the Novel', in *Questions at Issue* (London: Heinemann, 1893), pp. 3-31 (p. 31).

⁷⁷ Gosse, 'The Limits of Realism in Fiction', in *Questions at Issue*, pp. 137-54 (p. 153).

⁷⁸ 'Novels', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 August 1896, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Ferruggia, p. 88.

I set myself to overcome my dislike to reading [...] and have eagerly read everything that has been produced in that new species of literature which may be called the apotheosis of crime [...] I read Lombroso; I read *La Fille Elisa* by Goncourt, and Giovanni Episcopo and *L'Innocente* by Gabriele D'Annunzio; also many Russian books, great and impressive as the steppes, the dull romances of English literature, and the coarse French romances.⁸⁰

Although Caterina Soave, like Serao's Lucia, crosses national boundaries in her reading, she denies any male authority the right to explain her behaviour. Resistant not only to French writing (she affords Goncourt's novel her particular scorn), but to all of these male-authored books, Caterina insists that her homicide was a deliberate act of 'justice' not a passionate act of 'sensual jealousy'.⁸¹

This is not Caterina's first rejection of French literature. In an analeptic scene that occurred before her arranged marriage, she is courted by a young artist, Wilfred Heyse, who reads to her from Victor Hugo's *Les Chants du Crépuscule* (*Twilight Songs*, 1835).⁸² Reaching the verse, 'Oh! n'insulter pas jamais une femme qui tombe! | Qui sait sous quell fardeau le pauvre âme succombe [Oh! Never insult a woman who falls! | Who knows under what burden the poor soul succumbs!]', the disdainful Caterina 'closed the book indignantly,' and by the same gesture dismissed her suitor.⁸³ Caterina, with her unequivocal vision of the world, rejects Hugo's 'crépuscule' or half-light of nebulous uncertainty and liminality. Like Serao's Caracciolo in *Farewell Love!*, Heyse reads verbatim, unable to anticipate his listener's response. Also, like Caracciolo, Heyse's recitation is interrupted, and he is prevented from ever resuming his reading. Passive male reading is subjected to female audit. Serao and Ferruggia have inverted the Young Woman benchmark. Women are now the active and analytical readers, empowered not only to fragment and fracture male authorship at will, but also to impose limits on what and when men are permitted to read.

Heroines of the European New Woman novel are often readers who, like Serao and Ferruggia's protagonists, interpret, analyse, and dissect books rather than passively accepting them. Sarah Grand exemplifies this in *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), when the

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

⁸² Victor Hugo, 'Verse XIV', *Les Chants du Crépuscule* (Paris: Hetzel, 1835), p. 105.

⁸³ Ferruggia, p. 33.

philandering Colonel Colquhoun gives his wife, Evadne, books by Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and George Sand in the hope that they will trigger in her, erotic feelings for him. It is a measure of Colquhoun's belief in the influence of French novels that he thinks them sufficiently powerful to manipulate his wife. Evadne, however, reading from a feminist perspective, sees only '*the awful, needless suffering!*' that they describe.⁸⁴ As Kate Flint points out, New Women novels encouraged readers to develop 'an interrogative manner of reading, not just developing one's rational powers in relation to the printed word, but in relation to society more widely'.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

Benedict Anderson presents the nineteenth century as the time when the nation-state became thinkable and identifies the novel as one of the forms that allowed people to imagine their country with finite borders. The HIL represents a counter-culture to that nationalist impulse by acts of translation which enabled the 'penetration to the secrets of a nation'.⁸⁶ By translation, one 'imagined community' is made legible to a different 'imagined community'. The separate linguistic and visual identities of the books that comprise the HIL are dissolved by its creation as a uniform set of yellow-covered texts. The disparate texts, brought together onto one bookshelf, are coerced into new relationships with each other. Readers make connections between books, between authors, and between nation-states that would not have been visible before the creation of the HIL.

Nationalism promotes the desire to protect a country's cultural identity from being, as Jay refers to it, 'watered down or erased'.⁸⁷ This defensive impulse is recognisable in the conception of the woman-reader of French texts by HIL male authors. Fear of French military power, resentment of the French nation's innovative literature and cultural influence, and disapproval of French moral laxity fostered the emergence of the French novel as an emblem of corruption. Nationalist fervour and patriotism encouraged Bjørnson, Goncharov, Kraszewski, Valdés, Valera, and Jacobsen to construct the woman-reader of French texts as a negative paradigm of engagement

⁸⁴ Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell, 1893), pp. 176, 220. Emphasis original.

⁸⁵ Flint, p. 296.

⁸⁶ Gosse, 'Editor's Note'.

⁸⁷ Jay, p. 3.

with the Other. Women, already figured as vulnerable by separate spheres ideology, provided these writers with a ready vehicle to symbolise the susceptibility of the nation-state to external threat. However, as Jay contends, 'every culture is always shaped by other cultures, and agency has more to do with the intelligent and imaginative negotiation of cross-cultural contact than with avoiding such contact'.⁸⁸ This is what is recognized and demonstrated by the Italian New Woman writers, Serao and Ferruggia, who show that by reading with intelligence, energy, and determination, and by interrogating and not simply absorbing the Other, a text's ideas can be creatively reemployed or reinterpreted. Empowerment and agency can be achieved by transnational interaction.

Since HIL subscribers accessed different cultures by the literary imagination, the figure of the woman-reader functions as *mise en abyme*, alerting them to the perils and possibilities, the costs and gains of literary engagement. She offered alternative ways of approaching the French novel: it could either be defensively closed down or creatively opened up to produce new narratives. As the century approached its end, HIL readers could look back to the passive Young Woman benchmark or forward to the active and empowered New Woman, and decide for themselves which model was appropriate for the new century. Between 1890 and 1897, Heinemann and Gosse offered the public a taste of 'the apple of knowledge' and extended the debate not only about attitudes to the French novel, but also about the status and agency of women across many cultures.⁸⁹



BIOGRAPHY: Kathy Rees is an independent researcher. She has written on various aspects of Edmund Gosse's work since completing her PhD in 2014. Her book, *Victorian Non-Fiction Prose: A Companion*, will be published by McFarland (USA) in 2022.

CONTACT: kathyjrees@yahoo.com

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁹ Gosse, *Questions*, p. 153.