Social Issues During the Victorian Era Lead to the Formation of Nice Girl Syndrome in Gaskell's *Ruth*

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Abstract—**This study aimed to elaborate on the relationship between social issues during the Victorian era and Nice Girl syndrome, as demonstrated in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*. A qualitative descriptive method was employed to achieve this objective, incorporating Alfred Adler's Individual Personality approach and Beverly Engel's Nice Girl syndrome as the grand theory. Data on female characters' behaviour and thoughts in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* were collected and analyzed using Adler's and Nice Girl syndrome theories, respectively. Furthermore, the dialogue and monologue of female characters were also considered. The results showed that social issues such as social class, Victorian family, Victorian ideal womanhood, and Victorian religion and morality related to Nice Girl syndrome during the Victorian era influenced and contributed to the formation of *Ruth's* female characters.**

Index Terms—***Ruth***, **Nice Girl Syndrome, psychoanalysis**

I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of women is highly engaging when discussing various aspects of society. According to Afiah et al. (2022), numerous themes are interconnected with women, such as discrimination, gender, freedom, inequality, independence, slavery, and women's rights and desires. Throughout history, women have frequently faced discrimination due to the perception of their vulnerability. However, in recent times, Beta (2020) reported that approximately 31 million women between the ages of 16 and 31 years in Indonesia are actively engaged as entrepreneurs or workers in the fashion industry, contributing US$ 8.2 billion to the country's economy. Mehrad and Zangeneh (2015) stated that women also significantly contribute to society's economy, especially in today's manufacturing and industrial sectors. Despite their contribution, they still encounter various obstacles related to societal roles.

Over the past three decades, social inequality has prevailed, leading to intense competition among groups striving for the highest societal position (Fadillah et al., 2022). Women's roles remain relatively low in various domains such as education, health, social culture, politics, law, and the economy (Purnawati & Utama, 2019). Purnawati and Utama further stated that power, agency, resources, and achievement explain and describe the global issues surrounding women's empowerment. These factors contribute to the limited participation, restricted access, and inadequate benefits experienced in fulfilling societal roles. This situation has violated women's social norms, but they cannot complain or fail to fulfil their needs and expectations (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). One of the primary challenges in this regard is that many communities still do not fully support the realization of gender equality and justice (Prantiasih, 2014). The community creates a perception and puts men as the dominant, leaving women in a lower position (Asri et al., 2023).

This lack of support perpetuates the undervaluation of women's roles, rooted in pervasive gender inequalities deeply embedded in societal systems worldwide. Consequently, their essential contributions often go unrecognized, a phenomenon that strongly connects to the emergence of Nice Girl syndrome.

Nice Girl syndrome is a condition where women consistently prioritize being kind and pleasing to others, often disregarding their feelings or rights (Engel, 2008). According to Kompasiana (2020), psychologists believe that childhood experiences play a significant role in the development of this syndrome. During childhood, individuals are often taught and expected to be friendly and obedient, catering to the desires and happiness of others. These behaviour patterns may persist into adulthood, where individuals constantly strive to maintain a friendly image to appease people.

During the Victorian era, science's development profoundly impacted art and literature, causing the emergence of various genres in literary works (Suhadi et al., 2022). The lives of men and women are captured and written in literature. Furthermore, literary works typically serve as mirrors, reflecting the realities of a specific era (Arafah et al., 2021). Literature can build its world through limitless imagination (Arafah et al., 2021), not only in fiction but also in the existing reality at a particular time (Arifin et al., 2022). It is also a form of art that expresses meaning and language beauty (Arafah, 2018). Literary works convey an author's thoughts, manners, behaviour, and attitudes, providing readers with insights into their distinct styles and enabling a deeper understanding of their work (Hasanah et al., 2021). Additionally, the literature study delves into personal, cultural, societal, and aesthetic values, understanding the human experience in life (Sunardi et al., 2018). Literature, functioning as a form of communication, can serve as a gateway to explore and introduce culture, social dynamics, and the intricacies of human existence (Mutmainnah et al., 2022).

In linguistic communication, users, including senders and recipients, communicate through various mediums, such as social media, either directly or indirectly (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023). In the context of literary work, where the author and reader serve as the sender and recipient, literature functions as a communication medium through which thoughts and emotions are expressed within a socio-cultural framework, utilizing language with cultural backgrounds (Takwa et al., 2022). As an artistic creation, literary work considers language the most crucial element in conveying aesthetic aspects (Manugeren et al., 2023). The language employed should be effectively aligned with the environmental characteristics of the story, as effective communication lies at the core of human interaction (Yudith et al., 2023; Yulianti et al., 2020). Ineffective or incomprehensible language can cause a shift in meaning, as observed in the Tolaki community of Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, where specific meanings of local languages have been altered due to modernization (Takwa et al., 2022). Literary work can be seen as social products encompassing cultural, political, and social issues (Irmawati et al., 2018). Based on these definitions, literary works serve as manifestations of each author's vision and record of cultural events in the past.

Literature can manifest in various forms, including written works and performances (Asriyanti et al., 2022). It encompasses several types, such as short stories, poems, novels, plays, and songs, offering valuable insights (Arafah, 2018). Among these, novels stand out for their complexity, as they often depict characters' lives in specific forms, times, and places, presenting conflicts and their resolution. Peck and Coyle (1984, p. 102) highlight that novels are prose narratives providing a significant amount of detail on every page and typically explore human values. Hence, the presented characters in novels can be used to teach character education values (Arafah et al., 2024). Despite their form, literary works contain valuable lessons and information about human existence (Purwaningsih et al., 2020). In the age of information and technology, literary works have evolved, enhancing their quality in expressing the diversity of human thought (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019a). Authors employ beautiful language and distinctive writing styles to address unique issues (Hasyim et al., 2020). To enhance the uniqueness of their narratives, they incorporate various characteristics and signs that emphasize the story's distinctiveness (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019b). In some regions, even an ordinary object, such as coffee, can be used as a symbol of a good deed or behaviour of their people (Hasyim et al., 2023). Additionally, local languages may be employed to introduce the cultural heritage of a specific region, including its traditions and rituals that symbolize meaningful values (Arafah et al., 2020).

Some signs are categorized as meaning relation, indicating that the words have additional meaning to be interpreted within their context (Hasjim et al., 2020). In other words, those signs need to be interpreted using an implicit method to achieve an understanding (Kuswanty et al., 2023). The multiplicity of meanings requires a deeper level of interpretation rather than taking them at face value (Baa et al., 2023). Signs and symbols, present in all branches of linguistics, including computational linguistics and emoji, are subject to interpretation, conveying different meanings or specific messages (Iksora et al., 2022). This stylistic approach extends to the language characters employ to communicate in their everyday interactions, as literature serves as a medium to introduce culture, social life, and the realities of human existence (Mutmainnah et al., 2022). Language, shaped profoundly by cultural influences, is integral in navigating the complexities of social interactions and daily life (Arafah et al., 2023). Through the novel, readers gain insights into various aspects of the characters' lives within the depicted world, including their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, traditions, and customs (Arafah, 2018).

The novel is a global phenomenon that exists in different languages. From time to time, literary work grows and develops in line with technology, resulting in it being taught in academic spaces (Arafah et al., 2023). In the advanced era, some popular novels are presented in English as an international language. Indonesian readers, specifically EFL students, can enhance their language skills through easily accessible literary resources offline and online, merely a click away from the internet (Anggrawan et al., 2019; Purwaningsih et al., 2020). Educators have tried providing online

material to adapt to the current situation (Arafah et al., 2023). In this digital era, people worldwide can connect through digital media and instantly access information (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a). A significant portion of internet usage emphasizes that our generation uses online media more often (Arafah et al., 2023). Digital literacy can function to improve students' skills through various kinds of information provided online (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023). Not only online media but advanced technology also expects the system to use electronic devices through artificial intelligence (AI) to improve students' writing skills (Kaharuddin et al., 2024). Despite being challenging for beginners, with high motivation for learning, students can overcome difficulties and achieve their goals (Arafah et al., 2020). As long as they are severe and pay much attention to it, any difficulty can be handled (Kaharuddin et al., 2023). The students' success in achieving their goals can be assessed by a test at the end of the session or term (Mardiana et al., 2023). Another area for the students to improve in second language acquisition is deepening their cultural knowledge of the language they are learning (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). It also helps students to shape their characters more positively (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022). As access to digital media is getting broader and easier, social issues might arise due to the rapid access to information-containing phenomena of the environment (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b). This phenomenon is becoming more dangerous as various values and customs slowly decline, especially those related to religious behaviour (Lebba et al., 2023). Furthermore, authors utilize literary work to convey their disappointment or disagreement with the environment, capturing the ever-changing phenomena that unfold over time (Siwi et al., 2022; Sunyoto et al., 2022). Elizabeth Gaskell is a female author specializing in women and their experiences.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865), born on September 29, 1810, in Lindsey Row, was a highly esteemed female Victorian author. Known for his beloved novels, Gaskell conveyed many messages regarding the importance of social reconciliation and better understanding between employers and workers, as well as among honourable and outcasts of society. The writing was carefully studied and accurately portrayed the northern dialect (Gaskell Society, 2018).

Gaskell made a significant contribution to the literary world through several notable works. These include *Cranford* (1853), *Ruth* (1853), *North and South* (1855), *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), *Cousin Phillis* (1863), and *Wives and Daughters* (1866). In the early 20th century, these writings were considered ancient and provocative, but today, the writer ranks as one of England's most respected Victorian authors. In this new century, Elizabeth was recognized as an accomplished artist, capturing the attention of literary theorists, academics, and readers who appreciate engaging storytelling. These refined and evocative narratives are now being published for her growing readership. The writing style is bold and progressive, often presenting stories as critiques of Victorian attitudes. Gaskell fearlessly addressed topics such as traditional views on women's roles in society, prostitution, and prohibition, notably exemplified in her novel *Ruth*, which challenged the disapproval of the husband's Unitarian congregation (Gaskell Society, 2018).

Published in 1853 during the Victorian Era, *Ruth* tells the story of a young orphan girl who works as a seamstress after her parent's death. This novel employs a third-person narrator in the past tense about a series of unfortunate circumstances that lead to the girl being fired and expelled from work and home. Throughout *Ruth*'s journey, this novel addresses some social issues in the Victorian era, such as fallen women, the stigma of illegitimacy, gender inequality, and social class. This writing offers an interpretation of traditional views surrounding the role of women in society, which directly correlates to the topic of this study, Nice Girl syndrome. Social issues indicated in *Ruth* during the Victorian era contributed to the gradual development of female characters' experience of this syndrome.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Adler (1924, p. 2) introduced a psychoanalysis concept with a unity assumption of the individual and sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unified personality regarded as a variant of life manifestations and expression forms. The theory focuses on the fundamental motivations that drive other motivations within an individual. According to Hall and Lindzey's (1978, p. 118) explanation, Adler's theory emphasized that humans possess self-consciousness and the ability to plan and guide their actions with full awareness of the significance of realization.

Beverly Engel first brought attention to Nice Girl Syndrome in 2008 through a book known as *"Nice Girl Syndrome"*. This psychotherapist often observed clients describe painful, shocking, and bizarre experiences. Furthermore, Engel (2008, p. 5) focused on the beliefs and attitudes predisposing women to be used and abused. Nice Girl syndrome is when a woman consistently prioritizes being kind and pleasing to others without thinking about feelings or rights (Engel, 2008). Below are seven types of Nice Girl syndrome (Engel, 2008, p. 17):

A. *The Doormat.*

This individual, characterized as a stereotypical passive female, enables others to exploit their vulnerability. They endure the consequences of "terminal niceness" without gaining insight from past experiences. Regardless of repeated instances of being taken advantage of, manipulated, betrayed, or abused, this individual appears unable to learn from these encounters. Women suffering from Doormat syndrome often fall victim to unscrupulous salespeople and con artists. Moreover, many endure emotional, verbal, or physical abuse, leading to enduring this mistreatment for prolonged periods, ranging from months to years.

B. *The Pretender.*

This woman type has a robust investment in appearing friendly, cooperative, and charming despite potentially harbouring anger and resentment. Despite feeling bored, they pretend to agree with decisions and

often show interest in others' conversations or activities.

C. *The Innocent.*

This particular archetype of the Nice Girl exhibits high levels of naivety and gullibility. They readily accept others' words and can be easily manipulated or deceived. Moreover, their innocence often leads them to defend their partners or children who exhibit selfishness, deceitfulness, or outright abusive behaviour, even when those around them inform them of being taken advantage of or mistreated.

D. *The Victim.*

This type of woman feels hopeless and helpless when changing life circumstances. In attempts to be friendly, their power becomes repressed to the extent of losing touch completely. Those who suffer from this type of Nice Girl syndrome have been observed to remain in a relationship with a physically abusive partner, even after being hospitalized several times.

E. *The Martyr.*

This woman makes sacrifices for others, including her parents, partner, and children. These activities encompass time, financial security, and health to help or rescue people around. The entire life of the martyr is often dedicated to helping others, with the feeling of these people being indebted due to the sacrifices.

F. *The Prude.*

The prude demonstrates a strong inclination towards perfectionism and moral standards. They adhere to rigid standards, such as abstaining from premarital sex and avoiding alcohol, often being actively involved in a conservative religious community. The prude strongly disapproves of specific behaviours and tends to be highly judgmental of individuals who partake in those activities. However, they hide their disapproval behind niceness.

G. *The Enlightened One.*

This kind of woman firmly upholds the values of tolerance, compassion, and forgiveness to such an extent that she suppresses her anger and refrains from expressing typical emotions such as sadness, envy, anger, or resentment.

Engel (2008, p. 27) mentioned that the four primary origins for the formation of Nice Girl behaviour over time are:

A. *Biological Predisposition*

Women are naturally inclined to exhibit patience and compassion, prioritizing connection over confrontation. The term "female passivity" often means seeking solutions that are most inclusive of everyone's needs, emphasizing care and restraining aggression. Women have a broader range of behavioural options compared to the seemingly limited "fight or flight" responses. When the oxytocin hormone is released during a woman's stress response, it mitigates the "fight or flight" instinct. Instead, it encourages nurturing behaviour towards children and fosters social bonds with other women.

B. *Societal Beliefs*

Societal beliefs are transmitted to children through the culture or society in which they are raised. Girls are typically socialized to embody qualities: politeness, appropriateness, pleasantness, and agreeableness, all characteristics of a Nice Girl. For centuries, being nice has often been intertwined with feminity, with girls expected to epitomize the phrase "sugar and spice and everything nice". Regrettably, even in contemporary times, the feminine ideal revolves around pleasing others, being selfless, maintaining a pleasant appearance, and assuming a role as an object in other individuals' lives.

In pursuit of this culturally prescribed ideal, teenage girls often suppress various aspects of their identity. They learn to be silent and stifle their voices and emotions, redirecting their energy towards appeasing others, particularly individuals of the opposite sex.

C. *Familial Beliefs*

Children inherit familial beliefs either directly through explicit teachings or indirectly by observing the behaviours of their parents or other members. Families often impart specific messages and values that encompass a wide topic range, from interpersonal relationships to the role of women within the family unit. These messages and beliefs significantly influence individuals' thoughts and behaviours, playing a vital role in shaping their personalities.

Several everyday family situations can contribute to developing Nice Girl syndrome in women. These factors encompass various aspects, such as having a passive mother, an abusive or oppressive father or older brother, being brought up in an ultra-conservative or deeply religious household that perceives women as inferior, growing up in a misogynistic family, and having parents who prioritize women embodying fairness, compassion, and pleasant.

The first false belief that prioritizes others' feelings and needs over another stems from early teachings within the home. It can be modelled by a passive or codependent mother who sacrifices for the family or husband, neglecting personal needs. Girls raised in such an environment may internalize the message that being a "good" woman, wife, or mother entails disregarding personal needs and exclusively devoting themselves to the wants of others.

Another way is when women have a selfish or narcissistic parent who considers their needs all-important

compared to their children's. Those raised in this environment often believe personal happiness lies in fulfilling others' needs.

D.   Experiential Beliefs

   A child shapes experiential beliefs through personal experiences, including childhood trauma. It is typical for individuals with the Nice Girl syndrome to have faced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse during their childhood or adulthood. Such abuse and neglect can lead to unhealthy attitudes and beliefs, making women more susceptible to adopting the Nice Girl syndrome and frequently becoming victims. For instance, those who fall into the category of Nice Girls or adopt a victim mentality tend to display the following inclinations:

1.   They hold themselves responsible when something goes awry.
2.   They perceive their own needs as less significant compared to others.
3.   They harbour self-doubt, questioning their perceptions, knowledge, and beliefs.
4.   They tend to place excessive trust in others, even after experiencing betrayal.
5.   They demonstrate naivety regarding the intentions and motives of others.
6.   They believe they should fulfil the needs of others, particularly their partner or children, regardless of the consequences or personal hardships they may face. They tend to devalue their needs, considering them less important than others.

III.   METHODOLOGY

This study applies the procedure and principle of the qualitative method. Data were collected by close reading and deep understanding of the literary work while taking notes of certain words and sentences. They were analyzed using a psychoanalysis approach to identify dialogues and thoughts of female characters, with the overarching framework of Nice Girl syndrome theory serving as the central theoretical perspective. The aim was to identify and interpret the dialogues and thoughts of female characters in the novel who exhibit signs of this syndrome and establish a connection between social conditions prevalent during the Victorian era and the manifestation of Nice Girl syndrome in these characters.

IV.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to Engel (2008, p. 27), the primary origins of Nice Girl Syndrome include biological predisposition, societal influences, familial factors, and experiential beliefs. These four significant origins concluded that concepts and beliefs of social conditions contribute to forming a girl who exhibits this syndrome. This study aims to explore social situations related to the manifestation of Nice Girl syndrome during the Victorian era.

The Victorian era, commonly known as the Victorian Age, is a specific period that coincides with the reign of Queen Victoria in 1837. According to Fletcher (2010, p. 157), Victoria's reign was characterized by changes that made it the most progressive in British history. During the Industrial Revolution, England became a top nation because trade and industry created a new world for Victorians and the texture of their daily life (Williams, 2004, p. 53).

According to Fatima (2013, p. 1), the Victorian era was a significant trade period in English literature. There was an argument about it dealing with the contemporary issues and problems of the day, such as social, economic, religious, and intellectual subjects, troubles associated with the Industrial Revolution, as well as changes in the role of women who were not expected to have interest in literature or any other field and had limited status in Victorian Society.

During the Victorian era, women encounter numerous challenges due to the vision of the ideal woman. This period was characterized by lacking rights, leading to mistreatment and oppression under discriminatory laws. Women were deprived of property ownership and were limited to certain professions, such as teachers, domestic servants, factory workers, or agricultural labourers (Mitchell, 2009).

The following are social issues related to Nice Girl syndrome during the Victorian era.

A.   Social Class

Maciver and Page (1950, p. 348) defined social classes as spontaneous formations expressive of social attitudes. According to Landis (1974, p. 118), the several factors used to distinguish social classes in society included years of education, income level, type of possessions, and types of furniture quality.

Mckay et al. (1983, p. 847) categorized Victorian society into three class structures: aristocratic, middle, and working. The aristocratic class, consisting of the royal family, held a hereditary landownership and derived their income from property rentals (Mitchell, 2009, p. 21).

The middle class was further divided into three categories, namely (1) the upper-middle-class, composed mainly of the most successful business families involved in banking, industry, and large-scale commerce; (2) the middle-middle class, who lived quite comfortably but lacked great wealth, and (3) the lower middle class which consisted of independent shopkeepers, small traders, tiny manufacturers, and a significant numbers of white-collar employees.

According to Mckay et al. (1983, p. 848), white-collar workers had less property and earned lower income than skilled or semi-skilled workers. Despite this, they were fiercely committed to the middle class and striving to move upward in society. Elementary school teachers largely succeeded in this effort for being miserably paid part-time

workers in the early 19th century; they rode on the wave of mass education to respectable middle-class status and income.

Mckay et al. (1983, p. 850) stated that the middle class adhered to a strict, demanding code of expected behaviour and morality. They placed great value on hard work and personal achievement. Society showed no mercy towards those in poverty or engaged in criminal activities. This norm reinforced traditional Christian morality and was vigorously preached by middle-class individuals who took pride in their good deeds. The middle classes needed much more than the aristocracy did to look respectable, even when they inherited wealth or held lucrative occupations, as they faced competition and the need to defend their reputations.

Additionally, Clark (1971, p. 445) stated that the middle class tended to follow social conventions and share standards of education and behaviour. It was noted in history that the middle class played a big role in industrial development. They created many inventions and established the applications of science and technology. Finally, this social class dominated England economically, politically, and socially.

The previous description focused on the working class. According to Mckay et al. (1983, p. 851), approximately 4 out of 5 individuals belonged to the working classes during the 19th century. The classes were divided into three subclasses, namely (1) labour aristocracy class consisting of construction bosses and factory forepersons, who had advanced in their rank and were fiercely proud of their achievements, (2) semi-skilled manual workers who were factory workers who earned highly vulnerable but relatively good wages, and (3) unskilled manual workers, including wagon-driving teamsters, teenagers, and many kinds of helper.

The phenomena of social class during the Victorian era relate to the formation of Nice Girl syndrome, as reflected in Gaskell's *Ruth*. Clark (1971, p. 445) further mentioned that lower-class women faced more hardship than their middle-class counterparts when employed in low-paying jobs. Furthermore, they endured unjust treatment from society. In the novel, hailing from a lower class suppresses personal feeling, fully aware of the stack difference in social standing, as presented by Gaskell:

Data 1

Jemima → "As she threw her head back for this purpose, the eye of the gentleman standing by was caught, and it was so expressive of amusement at the airs and graces of his pretty partner. Infected by the feeling, Ruth had to conceal the smile that mantled by bending down her face" (Gaskell, 1853, 1, p. 31).

According to the given extract, Miss Jemima Bradshaw was forbidden by her parent to eat any cake in Mr Benson's house. This directive was motivated by the desire to assess Mr Benson's economic circumstances, and Jemima, being from the upper class, was expected to exhibit refined behaviour. Despite being hungry, Jemima had to suppress her appetite and maintain an appearance of cultured behaviour, as Gaskell portrayed:

Data 2

Jemima→ "Take no sugar in your tea, Jemima. I am sure the Bensons should not be able to afford sugar due to their limited means. Also, do not eat much, as you can have plenty at home on your return, and remember that the cost of Mrs Denbigh's keep should be a great deal." Therefore, Jemima returned considerably sobered and was afraid of the hunger leading her to forget Mr Benson's poverty" (Gaskell, 1853, 2, p. 74).

As Gaskell displays in *Ruth*, social class plays a significant role in developing Nice Girl syndrome in the female character. Regardless of whether the female character belongs to the lower or upper class, they must behave by suppressing their feelings and needs according to current circumstances and finally displaying the image of a Nice Girl.

B. Victorian Family

According to Arnstein (1989, p. 78), the Victorian family was patriarchal, where a wife's role was not an equal partner to the husband but a household manager. There was recognition of the woman being the mother to the children. Furthermore, Arnstein asserts that the home was regarded as the epitome of moral virtue and a sanctuary against the perceived savagery of the outside world. Victorian families emphasized the duty of women to care for domestic matters and raise children. Concerning Nice Girl syndrome, this patriarchal family strongly influences the female characters in *Ruth*. Gaskell skillfully portrays this phenomenon within the context of the Bradshaw family.

Data 3

Mrs Bradshaw→" Mrs Bradshaw murmured faintly at her husband when his back was turned, but the moment his voice or footsteps sounded from a distance, she would be mute and quickly guide the children into the attitude or action that is most pleasing to their father" (Gaskell, 1853, 2, p. 135).

This information above showed that Mr Bradshaw's wife changed in attitude, pretending to be excellent in front of the husband and teaching the children to behave in ways that would be most pleasing to their father.

C. Victorian Ideal Womanhood

According to Abaker (2019, p. 50), the ideal Victorian woman's life revolved around her family's domestic sphere and home. Mitchell (2009, p. 266) described the criteria of a perfect woman as preserving higher moral values, guarding the husband's conscience, guiding the children's training, and contributing to the regeneration of society through a daily display of Christianity in action. When the wife successfully made the home a perfect place, the husband and sons would not want to leave it for an evening's (morally suspected) entertainment elsewhere.

The concept of an ideal woman within the domestic sphere involved instilling moral values in everyone. This figure,

often referred to as "The Angel in the House," was expected to uphold the moral purity of the household. McDonnell (2018, p. 11) explains that husbands regarded these women with religious reverence. The term "The Angel in the House" originated from Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name, published in 1854. Patmore's poem portrays women as angelic beings within the home, characterized by their heavenly, dignified, noble, sweet, and sincere personalities.

According to Peterson (1984, p. 677), the notion of ideal women in the Victorian era symbolized oppressed women trapped in the gilded cage of male domination. The expectations placed upon wives during this time greatly influenced how women perceived their roles in marriage and shaped the qualities men sought. This concept of ideal women led to a type of Nice Girl's type known as the martyr. These women tend to sacrifice their needs and dedicate their lives solely to others.

Gaskell demonstrates this phenomenon through the character of Jemima, who is ready to change to become the ideal woman Mr Farquhar wants. Jemima stated, "*For an instant, she planned to become all he could wish by changing her very nature for him*" (Gaskell, 1853, 2, p. 151).

D. Victorian Religion and Morality

According to Sanders (1994, p. 398), religion remained a powerful force in Victorian life and literature. Derry (1963, p. 202) stated that Victorian religious values revolved around family prayers centred on the Bible. Religious experiences were communicated through conventional phrases, usually derived from scripture passages. Edberg (2021, p. 3) mentioned that during the 18th and 19th centuries, Christianity had a firm hold on society, influencing the everyday life of its people. Christian values played a pivotal role in shaping Victorian morality and social values. Mitchell (2009, p. 261) noted that "Victorian Morality" was often used with contempt, implying prudery, hypocrisy, sexual repression, and rigid social control. Furthermore, Derry (1963, p. 201) explained that Victorians are usually remembered for their solid and functional virtues, including thrift, hard work, self-help, temperance, and respectability.

According to McDonnell (2018, p. 20), Christians in the Victorian age espoused the belief that marriage was holy, virtuous, and essential while simultaneously condemning lust and sexuality as immoral, especially for women. Arnstein (1989, p. 79) stated that discussions and depictions of sex were typically considered improper in polite conversation and public discourse. Questions related to sex were rarely addressed, and premarital sexual experimentation was considered illegitimate. McKay (1983, p. 850) noted that middle-class Victorians valued sexual purity and fidelity as virtues. Arnstein (1989, p. 78) argued that purity was indeed the standard for a lady, and continence became at least the professed ideal of a gentleman's sexual freedom as men often experienced intense frustration with sexual desires.

Furthermore, McDonnell (2018, p. 23) noted that Christianity and Victorian moral values portrayed women as innocent and asexual beings not driven by lust. Sexual intercourse was considered a duty for wives, as it was believed necessary for procreation and the ideal of domestic tranquillity. This belief leads to the portrayal of women in *Ruth*, exhibiting the trait of Nice Girl syndrome. For instance, despite desiring marriage, Sally rejects a man's proposal.

Data 4

Sally → "I never considered accepting the fellow and getting married, although I won't deny that I had entertained the idea of being asked. However, I found myself unable to tolerate the man. 'Sir,' I said, attempting to appear bashful as the situation required, though inwardly feeling a suppressed laughter bubbling up inside me, 'Mr. Dixon, I appreciate the compliment and thank you nonetheless, but I believe I would prefer to remain single" (Gaskell, 1853, 2, p. 46).

In the line above, Gaskell portrayed Victorian beliefs surrounding marriage through Sally's decision to reject the proposal. Sally's behaviour aligns with the characteristics of Nice Girl syndrome, particularly the pretender type. This lady tried to hide her sexual desire by appealing to be a nice girl.

According to Sanders (1994, p. 399), Victorian society adhered to a monogamous system. The prevailing moral teachings of Christianity and the influence of Puritan sexual norms played a significant role in maintaining this structure. The emphasis was placed on the virtues of monogamy and family life, but there was also a widespread awareness of moral anomalies within the social system. The supposed blessings of ordered family life were generally announced to be dominant, and many individual Victorians perceived the family as a source of oppression and a means of enforcing conformity.

Gaskell also portrayed this using Mr Bradshaw's family in *Ruth*. Mr Bradshaw forced the daughter Jemima to conform to the expectation of being a nice girl to appear suitable as a potential wife for Mr Farquhar.

Data 5

Jemima → "Her action was so submissive and spiritless; she did all her father desired with a nervous quickness and haste, having the thought that any deviation may lead to Mr Farquhar's interference" (Gaskell, 1853, 2, p. 162).

The line above shows that Jemima became obedient and restrained her emotions from behaving as her father wanted. This belief in the dominance of family life in shaping individuals led to Jemima being portrayed as having the "Nice Girl" syndrome, precisely the pretender type.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, Nice Girl syndrome is a pervasive phenomenon that often goes unrecognized, as societal pressures compel women to conform to specific values and norms. This is clearly demonstrated in *Ruth*, where the social issues

prevalent during the Victorian era are closely intertwined with the presence of the syndrome. Factors such as social class, Victorian family dynamics, the idealized concept of womanhood, and the influence of Victorian religion and morality all shape the novel's female characters. Exploring these social issues and their impact on the manifestation of Nice Girl syndrome sheds light on the complex interplay between societal expectations and individual identity during that historical period.

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