

Hall Caine's novel *The Christian*, 1894, and Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*, 1999, tell the stories of young women whose careers lead them from humble beginnings, through the music hall where they find fame, to their eventual work in the women's movements which gained credibility and authority at the end of the 19th century. Throughout the 19th century, novels and theatre are intimately connected; authors write for both, adapt their novels to the stage, authors are often amateur – or professional – actors and stage managers, and their novels contain many actors, actresses, and theatrical performances, from Rochester's at-home gypsy impersonation to the professional performers Magdalen Vanstone and Margaret Jennings. Recent critical analysis of Hall Caine's writing is limited; only one biography exists, written by a descendent, Elsewhere, he is rarely mentioned for his own work but instead for his connections to Henry Irving, Bram Stoker and Alfred Hitchcock, or for working as secretary to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and his biography of the poet. Despite the claim made at his death that he had sold over ten million novels, including the first million-selling novel, it is significant that there is little critical agreement even on how many books he actually wrote. Mary Hammond cites fifteen, Vivien Allen's biography nineteen, David C. MacWilliams discusses thirteen. Caine was a celebrity at the turn of the century, with members of the public queuing outside his home for a glimpse of the author yet only two of his novels have been reprinted since 1931; on a digression, Caine may be a beneficiary of the print-on-demand format as all his books are currently listed on Waterstones, Amazon and Blackwells online sites, though not on their physical shelves. While this is of value to scholars interested in his work, it does not make Hall Caine particularly accessible to the public. His novels not only provide an insight to the social and cultural questions of their time, they tell stories and

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

2/13

involve characters that are intriguing in their own right and do not deserve to be so forgotten.

The little critical work that exists on Caine, rather than his connections, tends to fall into two camps; those who call for his rehabilitation into the canon and those who believe that Caine may have some relevance to scholars examining particular themes or social circumstances but will never be accessible to a wider public. An argument directly opposed to contemporaries who criticised Caine for being too mercenary, focused on selling books rather than on creating art, His didacticism can be offputting, as his obituary in the Times suggested:

This conscientious earnestness, which in personal matters made him an easy prey to the irresponsible American interviewer, often raised his work to a fine fervour; at its worst, it robbed him of his sense of proportion and fitness, and of his sense of humour¹

Mary Hammond places Caine in a debate at the end of the nineteenth century over whether novels debased literature simply by their popularity, in large part a result of decreasing costs meaning increasing accessibility to the newly-literate groups including women and the working class. She notes that Caine's ability to promote his work and produce different editions was "symptomatic of a market-driven alteration in publishing practices,"² and authors on the 'art' side of the debate disliked his sales

¹ The Times article

² {Hammond, 2004, Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film, 31 , 39-59}

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

3/13

tactics, as does MacWilliams who disapproves of what he calls Caine's "annoying habits of self-publicity".³

← Slide 2 →

Caine and Waters both explore their heroine's sexual awakenings alongside their careers. The music hall is positioned as a site of temptation and seduction; for Water's Nancy Astley it is in the audience that she discovers her attraction to the male impersonator Kitty. Joining her onstage, Nancy explores the eroticism of performance:

"making love to Kitty and posing at her side in a shaft of limelight before a thousand pairs of eyes...these thing were not so very different...beyond our songs, our steps, our bits of business with coins and canes and flowers, there was a private language in which we held an endless, delicate exchange of which the crowd knew nothing. This was a language not of the tongue but of the body" (129)

Waters historicises lesbian identity. Nancy's acceptance of her sexuality is very much a twentieth, rather than nineteenth, century sensibility – Nancy's sexual initiation as she discovers her lesbian identity is performative, and Waters uses Nancy's sexual exploration to provoke the same air of knowingness and titillation which was often associated with the music hall and actresses more generally. *The Christian's Glory* Quayle also experiences sexual initiation, but this is portrayed as merely a step on Glory's path towards her role in the social reform movement, rather than simply as a result of her theatrical career. For Caine and Waters, the music hall is primarily a place of transformation, a stage their heroines must pass through to gain the self-knowledge they need to become part of the social reform movement.

← Slide 3 →

³ { MacWilliams, 2004, *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 47 , 426-439 @428 }

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

4/13

The connections between actresses and the suffrage movement at the end of the nineteenth century has been well documented in, among others, Viv Gardner's assessment of the Actresses' Franchise League, Mary Corbett's critical examination of biographies written by actresses-turned-suffragette, and Christopher Kent's study of the uses to which actresses put their talents in agitating for the vote. Simultaneous to the suffragettes, a largely female-led moral reform movement gained credibility and authority. As male and female roles had become more polarised during the century, female roles moved into the domestic and the personal, taking responsibility for moral and religious education and the welfare of children. While higher class women tended to be involved in suffrage movements, the middle class took their domestic responsibilities out of the home to focus on the moral reform of society. While not strictly a religious movement, it involved improving the morality of society outside the home to protect the home itself from encroaching immorality. Prostitution in particular was seen as symbolic of a violation of the divide between the home and the domestic, and the pollution and corruption of the city. Helping fallen women was a priority; they were exploited by men taking advantage of their poverty and were a threat to other women, putting them at risk of sexually transmitted diseases.

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The music halls' heyday of 1880-1900 took place during an intense period of change in women's opportunities and campaigning, yet theatre in London continued to experience a similar class distinction to that of the suffragettes and moral reformers. Outside the capital, single women worked more frequently and had gained a measure of independence; seeing them in theatre audiences in groups or on their own was accepted. In London though, this was not the case as fewer women were employed – Martha Vicinus notes that as a result the only women alone at a theatre or music hall

Charlotte Unsworth
07709587692
5/13

in London were assumed to be prostitutes. There also remained different licensing laws in place in the capital, stopping the majority of theatres producing straight drama. As music hall gained in popularity, with their burlesque, pantomime and variety performances, theatres showing so-called 'legitimate' drama became less acceptable for the working class to be involved in, either in the audience or onstage.

← Slide 5 →

Earlier in the century a career in theatre had provided potential for social-climbing; actresses married aristocracy and increased contact with the upper class through their work, fame, wealth and theatre's new fashionability improved their social opportunities. Increased respectability of the straight drama theatres meant these actresses enjoyed higher social status. For working class women though there were fewer similar opportunities as they were considered unsuitable for the upper-class audiences to associate with, even across the fourth wall between stage and audience. Working class women had generally more employment opportunities open to them, and so the music hall, with theatre's old associations of prostitution and immorality, remained a dubious career choice.

← Slide 6 →

Glory Quayle is one of the increasing number of single women in the 1880s whose family could afford to educate them but not to support them if they did not marry. Single, middle class women's options for employment were limited with many occupations deemed unsuitable for their status and taking work was itself an admission that they had failed to find a husband and had given up hope of marriage. Single women could occupy themselves in their family – if their family could afford it – but were secondary to mothers and married sisters, expected to remain silent and grateful that they had been provided for. To obtain some autonomy and privacy

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

6/13

(virtually impossible to find within the home) the increasing numbers of single women either took employment or became involved in good works, often in social reform, caring or welfare.

Employment options reflected these priorities; women were encouraged to become teachers or nurses, playing to their assumed feminine strengths and, until the middle of the century, requiring little additional training. By the time Glory takes a training post in the late 1880s, nursing had also become a profession for the more ambitious single woman. Martha Vicinus suggests that 'the most important model for single women was Florence Nightingale'. Nursing it provided a progression along a career path and an opportunity to make a visible difference in a male-dominated environment. In addition to catering to Glory's ambition, hospitals also provided accommodation for trainee nurses which gives her an opportunity to leave the Isle of Man and experience independence.

← Slide 7 →

While Caine later acknowledges the potential for moral corruption in the theatre he suggests that there is a similar possibility in all professions. Glory's dismissal from the hospital is largely the result of her anger when a fellow nurse, Polly Love, becomes pregnant during an affair with Lord Robert Ure. Polly is dismissed and named a prostitute yet barred from naming the man as the hospital board fear shaming a gentleman. Glory stands up to the board:

"I have been taught to think of a man as strong and brave, and tender and merciful to every living creature, but most of all to a woman if she is erring and fallen. But you are not brave and tender; you are cruel and cowardly, and I despise you and hate you...you have discharged my friend...and you may discharge me too if you like – if you dare! But I will tell everybody that it was because I would not let you insult a poor girl with a cruel and shameful name and trample upon her when she was down."

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

7/13

Glory's insubordination is unexpected, even shocking – despite her tendency towards enjoyment and pleasure she has a respect for authority but only when it is deserved, rather than conferred as a result of a title. Her stand here is portrayed as a moral one, repeated in her absence by the vicar John Storm, whom Glory has loved since she was a child. It is the first instance of Caine's criticism throughout the novel of a society which shames and torments fallen women while protecting the men who seduce them. His criticism extends to those who, like the board, fail to chastise these men and so are complicit in their behaviour. The theatre can be corrupting; Caine does not attempt to portray the music hall as a force for good or bad, and as Glory begins her career onstage she comes into contact with those who could potentially bring her to moral ruin – the ballet chorus girls who seem more sexually knowing than they should be, a stage manager who demands a kiss in exchange for a role though she is outraged and leaves immediately, and a programme seller who takes Glory to a seedy club frequented by prostitutes – but Glory remains innocent throughout her theatrical experiences.

← Slide 8 →

Two men, Drake and Storm, constitute the greatest threat to Glory's innocence; she is never tempted by anything or anybody she comes into contact with in the theatre but these two men she knew as a child, a politician and vicar respectively, lead her out of innocence. Drake assumes that because Glory is involved in the theatre she must be more sexually knowing and willing than she appears to be; he may treat her better than his friend Lord Robert treats his girlfriends, but Drake's attitude towards Glory is that of a lengthy seduction.

Though she interprets it as friendship she is aware – because of his connection to Lord Robert – that he may intend more later and tries to keep at a distance, yet he finally

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

8/13

insists on taking her to a club which, she realises on arrival is for gentlemen and their lower-class lovers, and Drake tells Glory he will come to her house even if he has to break the door down. Caine is highly critical of Drake – Drake is aware that Robert treats women shamefully yet Drake remains close friends with him without questioning his behaviour. Even after Drake has realised his error in his inability to distinguish between Glory and her profession's reputation he cannot make full recompense for it to redeem his relationship with Glory, and so he does not see her again.

← Slide 9 →

The vicar John Storm proves the final cause of Glory's seduction, and also the final stage of her transformation from music hall star to social reformer. Storm is constantly jealous of the attention Glory attracts from other men – though she does nothing to encourage it – and the audience's possession of her when she is onstage. He is driven to a campaign of rescuing fallen women, all of whom he associates with Glory, believing that if he can save them he can alleviate her fate. Caine portrays his jealousy as maddening; Storm sees Glory onstage as more knowing, her sincerity and artlessness as an act to encourage men to watch her and lust after her – yet Storm describes her behaviour as being 'the same' as it always was, unable to recognise that it is his way of watching her that has changed. Storm may condemn Robert for objectifying women as expendable, meaningless entertainment, but in this scene Storm sees Glory as being one of these women, in effect blaming the women and Glory for provoking men like Robert into their actions.

Storm's jealousy provokes him to attempt to murder Glory in a terrifying scene in which he justifies himself as destroying her body to save her soul but, when confronted with her and realising she is the same as he has always known her, they

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

9/13

make love. Storm's jealousy and anger is just one indication of Caine's criticism of hypocrisy and complicity, here of religious men and religion itself; Storm's bishops are more concerned with their social standing and politics than ministering to those most in need. Storm's attempts to live up to his religion's requirements leads him to deny his feelings for Glory, causing his jealous rage. Glory's eventual seduction comes, not through her association with music hall, but through the uncontrollable jealousy of a man of religion.

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It is the final stage of Glory's transformation. During her time in the music hall, first as programme seller, then dresser, and finally as a star herself, she has come to understand the difficulties women can face. While this knowledge could be positioned as a loss of innocence Caine places it as a maturation. On arrival in London, Glory was unprepared for her caring role at the hospital – she wept for child patients who died, but she was selfish in her desire for recognition and independence. Her stage experience, and the experiences that go with it including spending time with Drake and Lord Robert, and travelling among society, makes her more aware of the difficulties and suffering women like Polly Love undergo and the problems they have in maintaining their integrity in a society which privileges both the masculine and the wealthy. Her interlude with Storm opens the prospect of her joining a movement which helps alleviate this suffering, though it is the imprisonment of Storm to finally persuade her – once there is nobody else to take on his role, she understands that not only will she give up the recognition of a stage career for a life of anonymity, and become known only as 'Sister' in her nurse's uniform tending the Whitehall slums, she will be happy to do so.

← Slide 11→

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

10/13

Nancy Astley's career path is very similar to Glory's, with her initial theatre work as a dresser, progressing to the stage before finally becoming involved in the social reform movement through her connections to her lover Florence Banner. There are significant differences; Nancy has a job in her family's café before moving to London, rather than searching for a middle class profession, though she experiences the same thrill and ambition on visiting the theatre as Glory does. Both protagonists go to London as a result of ambition, desire for independence and to some extent love, Glory for Storm and Nancy for Kitty, a cross-dressing actress who met Nancy while on tour. Glory chooses acting because she wants to be known; Nancy does not have the same ambition for fame but she does desire Kitty's attention and praise, and finds that joining her onstage provides it. Waters's novel places Nancy as the stereotypical actress, sexually knowing – as seen when she describes her relationship with Kitty as being a stage performance, she brings her sexual exploration into her music hall performances, using her body to draw attention and money. Following her departure from the halls Nancy continues to perform, bringing performance and prostitution even closer. Nancy does not leave the halls to immediately take up social work but as the result of discovering her lover Kitty is having an affair. Nancy has more employment options open to her than Glory but chooses not to pursue them –she does not return to her family's business, and would have been able to take up a job in many areas – domestic, factory, farming, etc – without her family's disapproval but chooses not to. Destitute, she uses her theatrical skills to gain a sense of independence. Dressing as a boy enables her to walk the streets alone but her theatrical impersonation pushes her into prostitution – dressed as a man, she is mistaken for a rent boy and uses the opportunity to make some money. Her prostitution itself becomes a performance; she continues cross-dressing to attract clients unaware of her

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

11/13

true gender and imagines being watched by somebody who is. She is in fact being watched by Diana who sees through her disguise. Even after Diana takes her in, Nancy continues to perform, prostituting herself in a series of acts and tableaux for Diana and her friends - who behave similarly to her as Robert does to his girls - to ensure Nancy keeps her position in Diana's household where she is clothed, fed and given money.

Initially, Nancy appears more sexually aware than Glory. When she moves to London she is aware of her attraction to Kitty and it is she who initiates their sexual relationship. She continues to use her boy's costume after her time onstage in an attempt to continue the same kind of independence she has been used to in working and supporting herself; in fact, she has more independence as she is not watched over by Kitty and their manager. Yet she retains a measure of naivete regarding others and the way they may treat her. Diana exploits this in their relationship, taking control of Nancy and removing her independence by refusing her a way to earn a living – she is provided with some money but only as Diana sees necessary. When she finally exerts her independence, rebelling into another sexual relationship, she is thrown out without any money and in no position to be earning any. Glory's performing gives her confidence, independence and the ability to stand firm on what she wants for herself

← Slide 12 →

Nancy's performances, in music hall and for Diana, destroy rather than promote her sense of self and by the time she meets Florence Banner she has become anonymous, virtually unable to tell the truth about who she is and constantly performing the self she believes others expect. Unlike Glory, though, her anonymity comes with a loss of self-esteem. She can only regain this through acceptance of her music hall experiences when she meets women who were in her audience, and

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

12/13

recognise the advantages of her training in helping women improve their lives.

Nancy's final transition from performer to social reformer comes as she too develops from an initial selfish nature to caring for others; her move to London is a selfish desire to follow Kitty and discover independence rather than remain with her family, and even her relationship with Diana is characterised by selfish hedonism – the pleasure she experiences in being well kept in a sexually exciting relationship.

Following this she becomes able to care for Florence and to use her talents not for selfish objectives, but for the movement which means so much to her partner.

Waters's novel follows a similar trajectory for its protagonist as Caine's, but does not fully explore the dangers which exist outside the theatrical. Nancy's lesbianism is used through the majority of the book as a theatrical measure – her relationship with Kitty is explicitly described as being played out onstage and her relationship with Diana is theatricalised even when there is nobody else present as their sexual relations take place through elaborate schemes, props and costumes. This association of the sexual with the theatrical is that which the Victorians recognised, and which Caine is so critical of Drake for assuming it exists in *Glory*. Nancy's final stage of transformation into social work comes when her relationship with Florence is not based on theatrical sex, or Nancy's performances. It occurs when Nancy is able to leave behind her selfish desires to be watched, known and in control, independent regardless of others. Much like those in the Actresses' Franchise League Nancy is able to use her acting talents to help others in Florence's social improvement campaign, at a Worker's Rally where she speaks herself, using her talents for public speaking, and coaches other nervous speakers to enable them to perform persuasively and win others to their cause.

Charlotte Unsworth

07709587692

13/13

Glory and Nancy find independence and selfhood – living alone, financially

independent if not entirely secure, emotionally unattached – while in the music hall phase of their career. Through their performance experiences they are transformed into less selfish women able to use their talents for the good of others; Waters portrays Nancy as a selfish hedonist bent on pleasure until her moral decline through performance forces her to change. Caine's instead acknowledges that moral dangers come from avenues other than theatre and that the theatre can provide a valuable learning ground for girls like Glory to experience, even second hand, a darker side of existence and become determined to prevent it. Glory's career path, from nursing to music hall to the social work she does at the end of the novel, is not an indication of the moral dangers of the theatre, but of its transforming nature. Like Collins' Magdalen Vanstone, Glory comes to a full understanding of her moral responsibilities to society through her theatrical associations. Prior to her acting, she is a naïve, frivolous child. By the time she leaves the theatre she is taking on the role of a social reformer aiming to protect vulnerable women and improve their lives. Caine's attitude to women's work and the scope of their experience as well as its critical attitude towards exploiters of women and those who implicitly condone it places his novel as an important text which offers a far more radical, and forgiving, story.