



# Victorian Scandals: Repressions Of Gender And Class

*Kristine Ottesen Garrigan*

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In the popular mind, the word “Victorian” still evokes associations of repression, hypocrisy, and prudery. We persist in thinking that the Victorians were perpetually shocked by everything from minor breaches of domestic decorum to ministry-toppling causes célèbres. In examining various Victorian scandals, some familiar, some more obscure, these essays provide lively discussion and diverse points of view on the context, nature, and function of “scandal” in Victorian society, particularly in terms of gender and class.

Topics covered include:

- women as both victims and beneficiaries of the Victorian legal establishment, demonstrated through divorce petitions, cases of wrongful confinement, and a highly publicized breach of promise suit
- the actress in contemporary pornography
- the effects on male hegemony of programs of higher education for women
- ambivalent reactions to biographies of Thomas Carlyle and George Eliot and to Julia Margaret Cameron’s “ennobled” photographic portraits
- the surprising toleration of gambling and infanticide.

The afterword examines the diverse responses to scandalous behavior from the perspectives of recent critical theory.

Taken as a whole, *Victorian Scandals* illustrates the pervasive role of the contemporary press in rendering private conduct a subject of public fascination and suggests the need to expand the definitions, functions, and interpretations of “scandal” in Victorian society.

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