Jovial Bigotry

Jovial Bigotry:
Max O'Rell and the Debate over Manners and Morals in 19th Century France, Britain and the United States

By

Jana Verhoeven

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

Jovial Bigotry:
Max O'Rell and the Debate over Manners and Morals
in 19th Century France, Britain and the United States,
by Jana Verhoeven

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-3758-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3758-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book developed from my doctoral thesis “Max O’Rell and the Cross-National Debate over Manners and Morals in France, Britain and the United States at the End of the Nineteenth Century”. I would like to thank the supervisors of my PhD project, Dr Jacqueline Dutton and Professor Colin Nettelbeck at the University of Melbourne, for the knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment they brought to this project.

Furthermore I would like to thank Jean-Luc Leservoisier, whose help with some of the biographical aspects of this thesis was invaluable. Drafts of chapters were also read by Charles Sowerwine, Susan Foley and Vladimir Kapor. I am also grateful to the advice received from my colleagues Dale Adams and Birgit Lang.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to Professor Ivan Barko, who read the thesis as well as the book manuscript and acted as a thorough proofreader. Finally loving thanks goes to my husband Tim Verhoeven, who has not only read every word at every stage of the project but whose suggestions concerning the research and argumentation of this project were vital.

INTRODUCTION

In March 1895, newspapers all over the United States and Britain, and even as far as Australia, were filled with reports of a literary duel. Mark Twain, the most famous American author of the period, and the Frenchman Max O'Rell, another celebrity of the world of letters and of lecturing, had engaged in a heated argument over remarks the American humourist had made in the *North American Review*.[1] In his article Mark Twain commented on the French novelist Paul Bourget's recent travelogue *Outre-Mer*. He had taken offence at Bourget's attempts to summarise the American national character and countered the French author's generalisation that every American's hobby is to find out who his grandfather was, with the remark: "But I reckon a Frenchman's got his little stand-in for a dull time, too; because when all other interests fail him he can turn and see if he can't find out who his father was!" (Twain 1895, 62).

This insinuation of latent adultery in French marriages caused the usual roar of laughter with Mark Twain's American readership and tapped into widely established cultural stereotypes of sexual licentiousness in French society. It is not clear if Paul Bourget ever read the article, but it enraged another French author—Paul Blouet alias Max O'Rell (1847-1903). Completely forgotten today, this prolific French writer and lecturer was a phenomenon of fin-de-siècle bourgeois mainstream culture. His 1883 debut work, *John Bull et son île* (*John Bull and his Island*), which depicted the 'foibles and follies' of the English, had sold more than 600 000 copies in France, England and the United States and had been translated into seventeen languages. Dubbed by the press the 'French Mark Twain', O'Rell had also become one of the most successful lecturers in America and Britain, taking audiences by storm with his witty depictions of national peculiarities. He made it his task to avenge the insult proffered by his famous American colleague.

In the following issue of the *North American Review*, O'Rell, who like Mark Twain belonged to the regular contributors to the prestigious magazine, published an angry retort. The French lecturer expressed his outrage over the American's joke about the doubtful paternity of many French, calling it "unkind, unfair, bitter, nasty […] a gratuitous charge of immorality hurled at the Frenchwomen" (O'Rell 1895, 304-5). He juxtaposed allegations of French sexual immorality with the typical

Anglo-Saxon vices of alcohol abuse and dubious business tactics. O'Rell here took a deliberate swipe at his American colleague whose present dire financial circumstances were well known to the public. In a thinly disguised personal attack, he insinuated that in France somebody who had "settled his fortune on his wife to avoid meeting his creditors would be refused admission into any decent society" (O'Rell 1895, 307).[2] Such was the seriousness of the tone of his article that the *Los Angeles Times* titled its front page "Max O'Rell and Mark Twain May Have a Duel".[3]

This duel never took place and their dispute, following another condescending reply by Mark Twain, eventually subsided over the following months. Yet the antagonism between the two men represents a revealing example of the 'debate over manners and morals'.

It is the aim of this book to analyse this debate over manners and morals in order to recapture late nineteenth-century attitudes to gender and sexuality. The issues Mark Twain and Max O'Rell argued about, the modes of communication they used for their exchange, and the means of disseminating their views are representative of a wider transnational discussion between social commentators in France, Britain and the United States, (although one could argue that the debate did not always take on such a hostile tone as that employed in the two author's feud in the *North American Review*). Bourgeois commentators, male and female, most of them with mainstream political, social and cultural views, engaged in it as active and well-informed participants and produced an array of utterances in books, journals, newspapers, on the stage and on lecture platforms which constitute a dense web of opinions across countries and even continents.

But firstly, what did the participants in the debate mean by *morals and manners*? The term might have suggested a range of concerns and preoccupations, from etiquette to business practices to culinary habits. However, a close reading of this debate reveals an overriding obsession with gender and sexuality. For O'Rell and other commentators, morals and manners signified above all women's role and position in the family and in society as wives, daughters, sisters, mistresses and prostitutes. The use of the expression morals and manners was thus in many ways misleading. Although theoretically applicable to a wide range of social behaviour, morals and manners had essentially become a much narrower and gender-focussed question.

Max O'Rell emerges as a central figure in this debate. His literary fame may have proven to be ephemeral but his work and biography can be used as a framework for the analysis of the cross-national discussion over manners and morals. Both in his own writings and his interactions with

other social commentators, he illustrates the form and focal points of this cross-cultural exchange. Through his geo-biography and the specific focus of his work on transatlantic and cross-Channel comparisons of gender relations, he is ideally placed to frame the analysis of the debate. He personified the possibilities of cross-national and cross-cultural contact at the end of the nineteenth century. Born and educated in France, spending most of his adult life in England and married to an English wife, his biggest sales market was the United States. The success of his books (most of which were simultaneously published in Paris, London and New York, selling up to a million copies worldwide), his intensive media presence (particularly in the United States and Britain) and his constant contact with bourgeois audiences as a lecturer assured him an unprecedented exposure across countries and national cultures. His star status and profession as a lecturer enabled him to travel extensively and to meet with fellow participants in the debate. O'Rell contributed a truly transnational view to this debate, having a personal knowledge of the societies this study deals with: France, Britain and the United States. He explained each nation's mores not only to their transatlantic or trans-Channel neighbours, but also to themselves. Max O'Rell's lectures and texts were directed at a reasonably educated, predominantly urban bourgeois audience.[4] Although originally from a small town in Normandy, O'Rell regarded himself a cultural ambassador of metropolitan Paris and his cultural comparisons focus on the inhabitants of cities like Paris, London or New York.

O'Rell's falling into artistic oblivion is not completely undeserved: unlike Mark Twain he never managed to transcend his time, gender, and social class in his writings. A review called him "not deep, but witty" (*New York Times*, 17 November 1887, 4), which largely sums up his literary legacy. To the modern reader, his writings seem to lack a personal touch, although they are composed in an agreeable style, amusing and often well-informed. This study considers O'Rell not so much as an artist, but rather as a mediator, as a point of reference in the cross-national interaction between French, English and American cultures. The absence of artistic value of his work will be considered in conjunction with its mass appeal, and its dissemination through mass media. As distinct from their literary merit, his texts and biography remain extremely valuable as a case study to demonstrate how cultural codes were shared, transferred and exchanged in an international context.

A second reason for using Max O'Rell as a focal point of the debate is that in his books, articles and lectures he abundantly discussed the topic of women and gender relations. Among the group of commentators this study examines, he touched on the widest range of aspects in the debate over

gender. In his many texts, he commented on women's position in family and society, their partnership in the couple, their education, their sexual fulfilment, their right to paid work, aspects of social etiquette, feminism, domestic abuse, adultery and prostitution. Lacking artistic individuality and being intent on catering to the largest audience possible, O'Rell chose to present largely stereotyped and widely accepted notions of gender. In some aspects he could be regarded as a barometer of public opinion, acknowledging new social developments only when they had been accepted by the majority of his peers. This can be illustrated by his initial hostility towards the socio-cultural phenomenon of the New Woman, but also by his belated concession to some progressive and increasingly accepted ideas of gender towards the end of his life. It is particularly in his ideas of gender that the French observer reveals himself as an ideal illustration for the concept of mainstream, even though his inclination was often toward conservatism.

As the biographical research concerning Max O'Rell will be used as a starting point for the discussion of the transnational debate, it needs to be pointed out that although the author is quoted by several cultural historians, it seems that they were not aware of the full scope of his activities and sometimes based themselves on erroneous biographical information.[5]

Max O'Rell's work points to two significant gaps in the abundant existing historiography on the nineteenth-century debate over the role of women in western nations. Firstly, historians have concentrated on the debate within national frameworks,[6] whereas this book will concentrate on its transnational dimension.[7] Very little of this scholarship has addressed the issue of gender in its transnational context. In confining their ambitions in this way, scholars have offered a distorted picture of a problem which, as contemporaries were highly aware, transcended national borders. However, some texts exploring the transnational dimension of gender debates have shaped the focus of this study. The greatest inspiration for this study came from Peter Gay's five volumes of *The Bourgeois Experience*. The mosaic-like approach in his monumental work illustrates the complexity of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, particularly in its Pan-Western dimension. Gay's history of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture is based on the analysis of multiple sources and the recognition of their interactivity. Although *The Bourgeois Experience* is not meant to be a comparative history, it presents a transnational perspective by discussing aspects of bourgeois life in various Western nations from Sweden to Portugal. It also points to some cultural discrepancies between the

different Western societies which nourished the debate over manners and morals.

Peter Gay's principal argument in Volume I (*Education of the Senses*) is that although the public middle-class discourse about sexuality in the nineteenth century was repressive and elusive, many bourgeois men and women found multi-faceted ways to live out their sensuality. According to Gay, the discussion of sexual manners and morals in fact mirrored the social and spiritual conflicts the middle class was confronted with amidst a rapidly changing environment. The sheer mass and diversity of analysed primary documents from different European countries and the United States evokes a series of interlocking images of a culture with all its regional shades and sub-cultures. Gay manages to incorporate textual analysis of major literary works into an examination of their reception by individual readers (e.g. in letters and diaries), censorship and the public discourse. He defines this approach as history informed by psychoanalysis.

A work that has been important for this study in a very different way is Silvaine Marandon's *L'Image de la France dans la Conscience anglaise*, probably one of the most extensive studies of cross-cultural representations of morals and manners. Although Marandon's use of terminology as well as her theoretical approach is somewhat dated, this published doctoral thesis is an major point of reference for my study,[8] as she discusses cross-cultural presentations in abundant detail, based on a wide range of English sources of the period between 1848 and 1900, which incidentally coincide with the life dates of Max O'Rell. The French author, who has generally been neglected by cultural historians so far, is mentioned in her study. Marandon classifies Max O'Rell as an author who "good-naturedly denounced unjust and satirical representations which one nation has of the other" (Marandon 1967, 278). In this assessment she disregards the fact that despite his good-humoured tone, O'Rell heavily relied on stereotypes.[9] The present study not only has a different scope, but also goes further in its analysis, by not only listing the stereotyped themes and debating their veracity, but also by inquiring into their motivations and objectives, as well as by exploring their interactivity. In contrast to Marandon, who covers a wide range of socio-cultural aspects in the image one country has of another, I will focus on that of gender, but look at both sides of the debate, and widen the scope of investigation to a third country, the United States.

There is a lack of studies which fully explore the complexity of the cross-national exchange in terms of gender. One example of a thorough investigation of a specific aspect of the debate is Bertrand Taithe's article "Consuming Desires: Female Prostitutes and 'Customers' at the Margins

of Crime and Perversion in France and Britain, c. 1836-85". Using the example of the cross-Channel controversy over the regulation of prostitution, Taithe demonstrated how the differences in the way the fallen woman was represented in the French and British cultures nourished the debate over immorality. However, no study has yet presented these controversies as part of a wider discussion. Historians often use nineteenth-century social commentary with a transnational scope as quotes to illustrate social developments, but disregard its specific environment in its density and reciprocity. This study will analyse these texts as part of an intricate web of cultural references and underlying beliefs which transcended borders and will inquire into the influences and objectives which motivated late-nineteenth-century observers in their outlook in relation to another society.

Secondly, existing historiography on gender often emphasises the forces of change. When discussing personalities who shaped socio-cultural developments across borders, much of the scholarship on women concentrates on agents of progress—feminists, activists and historical figures who were ahead of their time.[10] This study seeks to reveal the unspoken normality of bourgeois attitudes and explore the underlying consensus of the exchange, by focussing on a group of socially, artistically and/or politically conventional or even conservative commentators like O'Rell who set out to defend established views of the gendered division of society. I will argue that the forces resisting change, as represented by the O'Rell phenomenon, need to be taken into account in any balanced evaluation. The notion of "mainstream" will therefore be central to this study as it will bring new insights to the historiography of fin-de-siècle gender. I will consider mainstream in its two important dimensions: firstly O'Rell's and his interlocutors' social convictions, which can be argued to represent the common current of thought of the middle class, but also the appreciation of his artistic work. Closely tied to the concept of mainstream culture is that of stereotyping.

Among the vast scholarship on stereotyping,[11] Ruth Amossy's discussion of stereotypes and socio-cultural interaction, *Les idées reçues : Sémiologie du stéréotype* has been crucial to my argument. Amossy regards the stereotype as an indispensable element of social interaction. She argues that stereotypes not only invariably exist, but often facilitate cultural exchange. Amossy's discussion helped structure the analysis of the texts of the debate in three essential domains: the conservative objectives of mainstream commentators, the transience of O'Rell's fame, and his role as a mediator between cultures. O'Rell's masculinist agenda can be analysed along the lines of Amossy's discussion of the way in

which stereotypes create cohesion and solidarity in a social group and denigrate an out-group. Her view of the stereotype "at the same time harmful and beneficial, dangerous and indispensable" (Amossy 1991, 36) is central to my argument. She demonstrates how in literature and cultural studies stereotypes are discussed in terms of literary value, qualified as banal and repetitive, whereas sociology and psychology regard them as indispensable for communication within and across societies.[12] Her analysis of the use of stereotypes in literature is valuable for the discussion of the reasons for the ephemeral nature of Max O'Rell's fame. One cannot disregard the implications of his lack of literary value. Amossy shows how a stereotyped style, artistic banality and repetitiveness often translated into popular success, and Max O'Rell is a prime example of this process. But her approach to the function of stereotypes is also helpful for the development of the notion of Max O'Rell's mediating role in the cultural and political rapprochement between Britain, the United States and France. She emphasises that the sociological function of stereotyping is not necessarily a negative one. Amossy speaks of the usefulness and constructiveness of certain ways of stereotyping, and Max O'Rell's efforts for a political and cultural rapprochement can be discussed in this context.

Much of recent cultural historiography of nineteenth-century sexuality and gender relations refers to Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la Sexualité* (Volume I) as a framework of discussion. It needs to be pointed out, however, that Foucault's work focused on the contemporary discussion of the deviation from the norm, of marginal sexuality, while I am particularly interested in the discussion of 'normal' social and cultural mores. His analysis of how the debate over sexuality was used as a tool to exercise (or resist) power nevertheless provides important clues for some of the interpretations in this study.

Through building on these seminal works, this study offers a new focus. In particular, it aims to consider these contemporary texts—in their diversity, their points of discord, but also their common undertones—as contributions to an international debate. Gay presents a mosaic of attitudes to sexuality, but without explicitly linking them together in the form of a transnational exchange, an exchange which this thesis terms the debate over manners and morals. For Foucault, as for so many subsequent cultural historians, a focus on the Other, on the deviant, functions as the key to understanding norms of sexuality. This study, however, focuses squarely on the mainstream. O'Rell was concerned far less with defining deviant forms of behaviour, and far more with articulating widely-accepted social and gender norms. In so doing, he placed himself at the centre of an international conversation, conducted by bourgeois

commentators in the three countries, who despite their particular national outlook shared fundamental values, objectives and modes of expression.

***

In order to better understand the focus and workings of the debate it is necessary to look at its historical context. Late nineteenth-century Western societies had more points of contact with each other than ever before: there was a lively cultural exchange through increased publication of translated foreign literary texts, improved travel and import of foreign consumer goods.[13] What had been a week-long sea voyage at the beginning of the century had become a comfortable and sociable journey of a few days after steamships revolutionised the transatlantic crossing. Equally, heading over to Paris from London for a short business trip had become normality thanks to the fast railway connections on each side of the Channel. The transatlantic cable installed in 1869 made newspaper coverage of events on the other shore more immediate and significant.

The 1880s and 1890s are also a particularly important period for the study of middle-class gender relations, as they represent the period in which the foundations of this society, such as the sanctity of marriage and the inferior status of women, were increasingly challenged. The emergence of feminist activism as a mass movement, the entry of the New Woman on the social scene, improved access of women to education and professional life, increasing divorce rates, changes to family legislation, changing codes of sexual behaviour as well anxieties over venereal disease and depopulation motivated commentators to offer their opinion.

It was also an era of political, cultural and economic rapprochement between the transatlantic powers, which foreshadowed their future alliance in the ensuing global conflict, despite the fact that national prejudice and intolerance still governed their relations. The middle classes of France, Britain and the United States had created a complex but often stereotyped idea of the other society, carefully shaping their self-image through the contrast with other cultures. Most of the participants of the debate were not only well informed about their transatlantic or cross-Channel neighbours; they also saw themselves as agents of a rapprochement between the three nations.

Max O'Rell again serves as prime illustration of how the debate unfolded against this specific background. New modes of transport and communication afforded him the opportunity to travel extensively and to see remote parts of the United States and the British colonial empire with his own eyes, crossing the American continent from east to west, and

visiting places such as Canada, Australia and even South Africa. As a journalist and foreign correspondent, he took advantage of the cable system to provide American newspapers with the latest news from Europe. His travels to the United States also confronted him with new social and cultural opportunities for women, for instance when visiting the fully co-educational University of Michigan or when being interviewed by female journalists. His marriage to, and subsequent divorce from, a well-educated former teacher and fellow writer, as well as his relationship with an American actress, show that his personal life was equally informed by the complexities of fin-de-siècle gender relations.

O'Rell can also be analysed as a symbol of the efforts towards a political and cultural rapprochement between France, Britain and the United States.[14] He not only spoke out for a cross-national rapprochement and condemned the perpetuation of national prejudices and animosities in all of his texts; he also acted as a member of the *Committee of the Entente Cordiale for the Better Relations between England and France.* On the other hand, he illustrated the limits of an unprejudiced view of the neighbouring society. Despite having lived in England and the United States and claiming to be an impartial observer, he never managed to apply the same amount of sarcasm to the texts dealing with his own nation, becoming an ardent defender of French morals.

But which texts, among the multitude of nineteenth-century writings could adequately represent this transnational exchange? Should it be avantgarde manifestations of social progressives, as they often indicate the distance between the actual state of things and the desired state? Should it be canonical texts as many of them were able to transgress their time and place? Should it be diaries or letters, personal expressions of ordinary people? All these approaches have been attempted and have resulted in very diverse cultural histories with diverse foci.

As it is my aim to present attitudes to gender and sexuality in their interconnectedness, I have taken Max O'Rell's work and biography as a starting point and a framework to delineate the debate over manners and morals. Extensive archival research has identified a large body of texts by the French writer and lecturer. Max O'Rell has authored more than thirteen books, most of them simultaneously published in France, England and the United States.[15] Moreover, he contributed at least ten long articles to leading French, American and British magazines such as the *North American Review*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Cosmopolitan* or *La Revue de Paris.* The historical research conducted to trace O'Rell's career and personal life is based on Max O'Rell's published texts, on the contemporary press articles in the United States, Britain and France, and on archival material

such as his personal correspondence. Shorter articles in the form of regular columns which O'Rell wrote for American and French dailies such as *Le Figaro* and the *New York Journal*, as well as transcriptions of his lectures in British and American newspapers, have also been analysed. Furthermore, in order to reveal the cross-cultural dimension of O'Rell's activities, an extensive search of newspapers in Britain, the United States, Australasia and France was undertaken, focussing on reviews of his lecture performances, reports of social events and references to his texts.

The analysis of these texts framed my further research in two ways: it helped identify the key themes of this debate and it also established the links to other commentators, ultimately leading to an understanding of this discussion as a web of cross-referencing and reciprocity. Through his many and frequently repeated comments on national differences in courtship, marriage, adultery, divorce and prostitution, O'Rell had created a network of interconnected and causally linked stereotyped themes. In many instances, he tapped into well-established national and gender stereotypes and in some instances he refuted them, offering a different generalised presentation. Most of the issues and stereotypes Max O'Rell discussed and promoted were also debated by other commentators.

Once a theme was identified, I searched for comments of other participants of the debate pertaining to the same phenomenon. Through their agreement with or refusal of the stereotyped portrayal as presented by O'Rell, or their proposal of another representation, the debate could be recreated in its complexity. The study then examines how the representations in the debate were mediated. Rather than seeking to prove or disprove the historical accuracy of these depictions, they are put into a wider cultural and socio-historical perspective. I assessed the historical context in which Max O'Rell's stereotyped representations were created, and examined whether they reflected widespread and easily discernible socio-cultural phenomena, or whether they were pure propaganda. Starting with the question of what it was that shaped the opinions and perceptions of Max O'Rell and the other participants of the debate, I regarded these presentations as the manifestations of the different social, cultural and political developments to which the commentators were exposed.

All of the primary sources are analysed as reactions to political and socio-cultural developments at home and abroad. The debate was generated by phenomena like the *demi-mondaine*, or the New Woman, the fight for or against changes in legislation like the reintroduction of divorce in France or the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in Britain, or by mass movements like that of militant suffragism. It is by regarding these comments as responses to a changing social, cultural and political

environment that their purpose and strategic make-up are revealed. I will demonstrate how Max O'Rell and many of his colleagues reacted to gender conflict by ridiculing dissent, by focussing on trivialities or simply by ignoring burning social matters.

But apart from the characterisation of the debate over manners and morals through an analysis of how key themes were discussed in their specific environment, I was also interested in the exchange itself. The debate can be defined by its two constituting elements: the issues discussed and the people engaged in this discussion. Apart from the references found in the texts, I also conducted archival research to position Max O'Rell in this debate and to find out who his interlocutors were and how they interacted with each other. To achieve this, I examined O'Rell's personal correspondence with publishers, agents, friends and colleagues, dispersed over dozens of archives in Britain and the United States. This enabled me to establish his importance as a focal point in the debate.

Although O'Rell was at the centre of the transnational debate, he was not, of course, the only participant. It is in his points of contact with others that the full dimension of this exchange is revealed. Max O'Rell, when engaging in this international discussion, found well-informed interlocutors with whom he shared a common set of cultural references. These interlocutors could be travel writers, novelists, journalists, social activists and even medical scientists. The texts they produced were very different in format and circulation; often they appeared in influential magazines such as the *North American Review* or *La Revue des Deux Mondes*; sometimes they were published as monographic travelogues, literary criticism, scientific treatises or political pamphlets.

The points of contact between the participants in the debate were varied: they could be personally acquainted or known to each other only by reputation. Sometimes, it was only their common interest in a specific aspect of the debate that connected them. What links them all together is their focus on the themes of the debate and their transnational outlook. It is a unique contribution of this study to analyse these primary texts, not only in their focus on gender relations but in their transnational dimension.

In order to illustrate the debate over manners and morals this study proposes a selection of textual utterances by people who can be connected in several ways. This list of primary sources, however, is not exhaustive and could be extended much further. The first category of text is that by authors whom O'Rell regarded as his predecessors and whose footsteps he claimed to follow. O'Rell clearly modelled many of his arguments on the historian Jules Michelet (1798-1874), particularly his books *L'Amour* and *La Femme*, when presenting French gender relations to an Anglo-

American[16] public. Similarly, O'Rell tried to emulate Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) as a social observer. Taine's *Notes sur l'Angleterre* (1874) were clearly on his mind when he wrote *John Bull et son île* some years later. O'Rell also made frequent references to authors such as Honoré de Balzac or Alexis de Tocqueville whose texts *Physiologie du mariage* and *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, although predating the period analysed in this study, foreshadowed many of the themes of the debate.

The second category is composed of texts by commentators O'Rell had contact with, either personally, through references or through a shared thematic outlook. The most illustrative example is Mark Twain (1839-1913), whose tumultuous professional relationship with O'Rell has been commented on earlier. An instance of a more harmonious connection within the debate is that of O'Rell and Miss Matilda Betham-Edwards (1836-1919), a prolific English author whose 1905 title *Home Life in France* is especially rich in representations of French women. She referred to Max O'Rell as a personal friend and in many of her assessments echoed his comments.[17] The English journalist and art critic Gilbert Hamerton (1834-1894) lived as an expatriate in France: his book *French and English* (1889) was often regarded as a counterbalance to O'Rell's depictions, who himself had a high regard for Hamerton's work.[18] Albert Rhodes (born 1840)[19] is linked to Max O'Rell in an interesting way. The American diplomat and author of *The French at Home* once accused the French author of plagiarism.[20] Another American, the travel writer Thomas Wallace Knox, met O'Rell at a literary club in New York.[21] Oscar Commettant (1819-1898), like O'Rell also travelled to the United States and Australia, and echoed many of O'Rell's views. French authors C. de Varigny (1829-1899) and Auguste Carlier (1803-1890) published studies of marriage and the situation of women in the United States in influential French magazines. The Swiss pioneer of sexology Auguste Forel (1848-1931), although he was not of French, British or American nationality, will be included as one example of how scientific discourse weighed into the debate over manners and morals. In his work Forel touched on many of the issues discussed in this study. Trained in Paris with the eminent alienist Charcot, he published popular medical treatises which became standard works in France, England and the United States. Forel did not shrink from using literary texts to illustrate his points and referred to developments in all of the major Western countries. He is one of the foremost psychologists who described fin-de-siècle sexuality from a scientific perspective.

O'Rell was in contact not only with like-minded colleagues, but also with writers disagreeing with some of his views. His high public exposure in the United States and Britain sparked a series of comments relating to

him and the topics he covered. Willa Cather (1873-1947), an eminent American novelist, who, as a young student went to several of O'Rell's lectures in Lincoln, Nebraska, also weighed into the transnational debate over manners and morals. Juliette Adam (1836-1936), former pioneer of French feminism and influential publisher at fin de siècle, published a series of articles in the *North American Review* between 1890 and 1892, side by side with O'Rell who was also a prolific contributor to this magazine. They not only shared space in the same publication, but also a particular situation as French writers explaining their specific culture to an American public. Marie Dugard (born 1862),[22] an influential French pioneer of girls' education, left with *La Société américaine* an account of her trip to the United States in which she analysed some of the major themes of the debate. The English journalist Albert Vandam's (1843-1903) acrimonious denunciation of *French Men and French Manners* (1895) gave rise to criticism by many fellow commentators such as Miss Betham-Edwards.[23] The French author Félix Remo also contributed several books on English morals and manners.

This study will also analyse the comments of a third group of authors who are known primarily as novelists, but who, through non- or semi-fictional texts, contributed to the debate over manners and morals. Furthermore, in their fictional texts they created types which entered the debate as cognitive models such as Nana or Daisy Miller and had therefore become points of reference for the participants in the exchange. Emile Zola (1840-1902) played an important role in this debate, not only because his novels provoked huge controversy in each of the three societies, but also because some of his literary characters (such as Nana) had become types which served as vehicles for the cross-national debate. O'Rell and many authors of the texts selected for this study engaged in a heated discussion about whether or not the naturalist novelist's representations of adultery, prostitution and moral decay did convey a truthful image of fin-de-siècle France. Zola in a way epitomised the argument over French immorality, particularly through his claim to a realistic portrayal of French society. Similarly, Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) will serve not only as a point of reference for the debate, but also as a commentator participating in it. Like Zola, he contributed pseudo-sociological studies to Parisian newspapers which will be considered as a contribution to the debate over manners and morals. With some of the characters of his novel *Bel-Ami*, such as Madeleine Forestier and Clotilde de Marelle, he had furthermore created types which were identified by participants from all three countries, and the question over the veracity of his representations elicited a lively discussion. With Marguerite, the virtuous courtesan in *La Dame*

aux Camélias, Alexandre Dumas fils (1824-1895) had also created a type which occupied the debate for a long period of time. His opinions on adultery, divorce, women's suffrage and feminism, as expressed in *L'Homme-femme* and *Les Femmes qui tuent et les Femmes qui votent* will be examined in their cross-cultural dimension. Henry James (1843-1916) is another author who is examined as a commentator rather than as a creator of fiction. James' travelogue *A Little Tour of France* (1882), as well as several of his literary reviews, will be examined as texts contributing to the cross-national discussion. Marcel Prévost, who incited a new wave of cross-national discussion with his novel *Les Demi-vierges*, not only commented on social mores but also for a while shared a first-page column of the *Figaro* with O'Rell.

The last group of commentators is composed of political and social activists of the time who published texts pertaining to issues discussed in the transnational debate over manners and morals. However, this study uses their representations mainly as counterpoints to the exchange, as they questioned some common points of agreement in the debate such as the double moral standard and the inferiority of women. Feminist activists often referred to the themes of the debate, sometimes unmasking the stereotyped representations and sometimes accepting them uncritically. Maria Deraismes (1828-1894), for instance, deconstructed many of the myths surrounding the discussion of women and presented a link to Anglo-American feminism in a published collection of speeches, *Eve dans l'Humanité*. A letter by the suffrage activist Frances Willard (1838-1898) whom O'Rell met at a private dinner party suggests that he was regarded by some as a veritable symbol of anti-feminism.[24] Josephine Butler (1828-1906) brought a truly transnational dimension to the debate when she took the fight against state-regulated prostitution from England to continental Europe. Texts authored by some of her French allies such as Yves Guyot (1843-1928) and Louis Fiaux (1847-1936) will equally be analysed as contributions to the debate.

This list of commentators is not exhaustive but it will be sufficient to demonstrate the spirit of the debate and of its participants. A trait common to all of these authors is their self-identification as representatives of the middle-class. Apart from the activists, the commentators referred to in this study, in their diversity and uniformity, are good examples of the use of the term "middle-class mainstream" in this thesis. They adhered to widely shared beliefs in the fundamentals of bourgeois society, namely those of family, capitalism and colonialism. Neither revolutionaries nor reactionaries they represent what Peter Gay has called "the bourgeois mind". The "bourgeois mind", Gay admits, is a generalisation, but a "necessary

metaphor" (Gay 1984, 15). He also underlines the surprising reciprocal awareness of the different transatlantic cultures: "And, as we shall see, culture high and low, too, was impressively cosmopolitan." (Gay 1984, 22-3). Although sensitive to national difference, all of the participants in the debate believed this bourgeois identity transcended national borders.

In his transnational comparison of gender relations, Max O'Rell relied mostly on observations made within his own social class. In *John Bull's Womankind*, he even gave a precise range of annual income of 200–500 pounds for the class of people he was describing.[25] His humoristic observations disregarded women of the working class, the subject being to him "as repulsive as it is stale." (O'Rell 1884a, 18). However, in his later career he often referred to mores of the upper class, bourgeois or aristocratic, as this was a popular topic in the gossip columns of the yellow press.

***

This book will be divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of the biographical chapter, relies strongly on original archival research. By sketching out a biography of Max O'Rell, situating him in a cross-national context and by presenting a case study of a cross-cultural controversy, this part will map the parameters of the debate over manners and morals of the late nineteenth-century. The second part, consisting of Chapters Two to Four is more interpretative. Through the analysis of texts identified as part of the cross-national exchange, the chapters will reveal the key themes of this debate, as well as its motivations and objectives.

Chapter One, in tracing his biography, will demonstrate why Max O'Rell is not only representative of the debate but also serves as a thread for the discussion of the group of commentators contributing to the debate. Max O'Rell, although in some ways a typical example of the bourgeois male of his time, provides through his extraordinary life story an illustration of the points of contact between members of the middle class in France, the United States and Britain. This biographical chapter will also explore the sources which shaped his observations as well as his personal influence and that of his comments on the debate over manners and morals in the three countries. The analysis of O'Rell's success as a phenomenon of middle-class culture will explain the notion of the bourgeois mainstream which is central to this book. His self-appointed role as a mediator between cultures and expert on gender relations will be examined in the context of his relations with colleagues and the media.

The biographical chapter will take up one professional relationship in detail—that between Max O'Rell and Mark Twain. Their confrontation and collaboration exemplify how the cross-cultural debate was conducted and where the main points of contention were situated. Furthermore, a comparative discussion of particular aspects of the careers of both writers, particularly their contributions to the debate, will answer the question as to why Max O'Rell has fallen into oblivion whereas Mark Twain has left a treasured literary legacy.

Once Max O'Rell's role and significance for the debate have been established, the second part of the book will proceed to analyse it in its thematic and ideological focus. The examination of O'Rell's texts reveals three main groups of women which the debate centered on: the girl (meaning here a young unmarried woman)—under the control of her parents, the wife—under the control of her husband, and the fallen woman (meaning adulteresses, mistresses and prostitutes)—rejected but nonetheless regulated by society. Each of these groups is linked to specific themes of discussion. Max O'Rell also talked about unmarried women, spinsters or widows. But as he and his fellow commentators generally paid much less attention to them, I have chosen to discuss these groups of women in the chapter devoted to the wife.

Chapter Two will analyse representations of the girl who was often discussed in terms of her sexual trustworthiness and her access to education. Max O'Rell, when comparing the independent and bold but trustworthy Anglo-American girl favourably to the strictly supervised and yet distrusted French girl, tapped into a widely accepted stereotyped paradigm. This study will investigate the extent of the consensus of commentators over the positive effects of education, personal liberty and choice of spouse of unmarried women, particularly in Britain and the United States. The extent of this consensus will demonstrate the expectations and fears of a fin-de-siècle society faced with a new generation of more assertive young women.

Chapter Three will examine how, although marked by less consensus, the transnational debate over the wife again revealed the common objectives and strategies of its participants from each of the three nations. Max O'Rell serves as an illustration of this lack of agreement, when he fervently defended French womanhood against allegations of frivolity. He also exemplified the shift of the debate from the focus on the independent Anglo-American girl to that on the French wife, liberated through marriage. This chapter will identify the national variants of stereotyped themes, from that of the elegant French *maîtresse de la maison*[26] via that of the English wife as the neglected housekeeper to that of the American

wife as a spoiled social queen. This study will demonstrate that these images were employed not only by Max O'Rell, but also by many of his contemporaries to mask apprehensions over challenges to the status quo of gender relations and to discredit feminism.

Chapter Four will illustrate the suggestion that the debate over the fallen woman drew even more controversy than that over the wife. Although it centred on the accusation of French immorality, it was clearly motivated by deeper anxieties over the stability of the bourgeois family, the spread of venereal disease and depopulation (or, in the case of the United States, immigration) in each of the three nations. Starting with an analysis of representations of female adultery, proceeding to images of *demi-mondaines* and mistresses and concluding with the debate over the regulation of prostitution, this chapter will show that the debate over the fallen woman was used by conservative commentators to confine women to narrowly prescribed roles.

The conclusion will bring the different strings of the main argument together. It will show how the analysis of mainstream discourse over gender in its various national and topical shadings leads to a deeper understanding of the motivations and anxieties of fin-de-siècle Western bourgeoisie.

Notes

[1] See (*Critic*, 2 March 1895, 163; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 March 1895, 2; *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1895, 1*; Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 March 1895, 6; *Washington Post*, 12 March 1895, 6; *Daily Inter Ocean*, 6 March 1895, 2; *Denver Evening Post*, 13 March 1895, 8; *Salt Lake Herald*, 14 March 1895, 1; *Morning Oregionian*, 20 March 1895, 4; *Atchison Daily Globe*, 3 April 1895; *Manchester Weekly Times* supplement, 12 April 1895, 6).

[2] When Samuel Clemens was faced with bankruptcy, he took the advice from Henry H. Rogers to name his wife Olivia Clemens principal creditor, so that income from his book sales could be channelled back to the family (Camfield 2003, 223).

[3] See (*Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1895, 1).

[4] However, there are indications that particularly towards the end of his life, O'Rell increasingly catered to lower middle-class audiences and focussed more clearly on a female readership, particularly with his advice columns in American yellow press publications.

[5] Philippe Roger quotes from O'Rell's *Jonathan et son continent* (using a 1900 edition) in his work on anti-Americanism in France, *L'Ennemi américain* (2002). In *Victorian Murderesses: A True History of Thirteen Respectable French and English Women Accused of Unspeakable Crimes* Mary S. Hartman quotes from O'Rell's *Les Filles de John Bull* (1884), but is wrong when attributing a French

wife to Max O'Rell. His wife Mary Blouet was English. Sylvaine Marandon quotes repeatedly from O'Rell's book *The dear neighbours* (1885) in *L'Image de la France dans la conscience anglaise* (1967). Jean Guiffan mentions O'Rell in *L'Histoire de l'Anglophobie en France: De Jeanne d'Arc à la Vache folle* (2004).

[6] There has been a vast expansion of scholarship on nineteenth-century gender and sexuality over the last four decades. Its range is enormous, from the legal status of wives to marriage customs to the regulation of prostitution, and the fictional representations of women. Just to name few, James McMillan's *France and Women* (2000) as well as Susan Foley's *Women in France since 1789* (2004) have informed this study through their analyses of the strategies employed to confine women to their subordinate roles.

[7] Some studies focussing on nineteenth-century gender and feminism have a trans-national perspective. *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States* (1981), edited by Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen M. Offen, provides not only a broad range of primary texts from all three nations but also situates these in their social, cultural and national contexts. Bess Beatty's book chapter "Outside the Narrow Circle: American Women in France in the 19th Century", in *Stereotypes in Perspective: Americans in France, Frenchmen in America*, edited by William Chew and Dominique Laurent (2001), explores the representations of French women by female American travellers to France.

[8] Already in her title, Marandon uses the term *image* which could be translated by the English word "image". She offers the following definition for *image nationale*: "Une représentation au moins reconnaissable, sinon fidèle, et plus ou moins nuancée, à la portée même des mentalités les plus simples." She argues that the image often occurs in a simplified form and that it describes mostly characteristic traits (Marandon 1967, 124). Rather than defining the term *conscience* as a socio-psychological construct, Marandon inquires into how to apprehend it or how truthful it is. The equivalent of what is referred to as cross-cultural exchange in this study is Marandon's term *interpénétration* which she quantifies as what is studied about the other country, what is said, what is looked at, what is bought and what is being told about the other culture (Marandon 1967, 120). She describes in great detail by which means the Victorians obtained knowledge of France. She looks at cultural exchange not only in terms of published texts such as travel accounts, social commentary and novels, but also in terms of tourism, commerce, political relations, theatre productions and art exhibitions which provided the setting for contact between the societies concerned. Some of the theories she has recourse to contain some interesting elements, for instance the German *Volksgeist*-theory (Marandon 1967, 122), the theory of the residue developed by Halwachs and Pareto. She also explores Kardiner's theory of the *personnalité de base* of the community under consideration. For a group of individuals Kardiner substituted an average individual, who lives out the group's common cultural experiences. This individual incarnates and represents this group, and it is possible to explore an individual experience of a representative person (Marandon 1967, 123). This particular theory is quite relevant to the analysis of Max O'Rell as a representative

of average middle-class beliefs. However, this study will also be interested in the occasional instances in which his opinions deviated from those of other mainstream commentators.

[9] Marandon herself admitted to the limits of her approach, often having recourse to the reverse "image"—the image the French had formed of the English—which implies an awareness of the perception the opposite party has formed. With the inclusion of the United States I will argue that their emergence as a significant cultural entity was a key shaping factor in the debate itself. The digitisation of a great variety of nineteenth-century print matter has also enabled me to include a larger selection of primary sources and go beyond Marandon's focus on books and magazine articles.

[10] See for instance Patrick Bidelman's *Pariahs Stand Up!: The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889* (1982), Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (1995), Richard Evans' *Comrades and Sisters: Feminism, Socialism and Pacifism in Europe 1870-1945* (1987), Christine Fauré's *Democracy without Women: Feminism and the Rise of Liberal Individualism in France* (1991), *A "Belle Epoque"?: Women in French Society and Culture, 1890-1914* (2006), edited by Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr, Mary Louise Roberts' *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-De-Siècle France* (2002) or Claude Maignien and Charles Sowerwine's *Madeleine Pelletier, Une Féministe dans l'arène politique, ou, La Vie originale et tragique d'une femme qui, ayant tenté de s'imposer comme médecin, anthropologue, aliéniste, libertaire, franc-maçonne, socialiste, communiste, antifasciste et néo-malthusienne, finit ses jours, solitaire et oubliée, á l'asile de Perray-Vaucluse* (1992); Barbara Caine's *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (1997) and Catherine Clinton's *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1999). Steven Hause's *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic* (1984) investigated the claim of nineteenth-century commentators that French feminism failed to develop as a mass movement.

[11] Mireille Rosello's *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* provided valuable guidance for my analysis of stereotyped representations of gender. Wolfgang Stroebe and Chester A. Insko also offer an approach to stereotyping as a fundamental function of socialisation and avoid the uniformity of the postcolonial judgments of the strategies and tactics of stereotyping: "Stereotype, Prejudice and Discrimination: Changing Conceptions in Theory and Research" in Bar-Tal, Daniel et als (eds): *Stereotyping and Prejudice: Changing Conceptions* (1989). See also Robert Stewart's *Person Perception and Stereotyping* (1979) and Jacques Philippe Leyens' *Stereotypes and Social Cognition* (1994).

[12] Amossy prefers the term "stereotyped image," "stereotyped idea" or "stereotyped notion" to "stereotype" and believes that it is impossible to establish a strict dichotomy between the terms "image" and "stereotype". Marandon sees the terms "image" and "opinion," as being on one level, contrary to "stereotype" and neighbouring "prejudice," which she qualifies as founded on poor knowledge, based on rumours, anecdotes and insufficient accounts. The term "image" therefore

has explicitly positive connotations for her, while the word "stereotype" has exclusively negative connotations attached to it (Marandon 1967, 12-127). Amossy however argues that a stereotype is not necessarily based on insufficient knowledge; it is a generalisation which oversimplifies and possibly distorts cross-cultural ideas and concepts. An image, on the other hand, necessarily also based on simplifications, is in many cases conveyed or constructed through stereotypes.

[13] See (Marandon 1967, 105-20).

[14] O'Rell's attitude towards Germany was much more ambiguous. As an eyewitness to the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, he symbolised not only the lingering resentment against the 'Teutons' but also voiced concerns over that demographically exploding Western power with yet unsatisfied colonial ambitions. On the other hand, for O'Rell there seemed to be a general agreement on the principles of their society: capitalism, colonisation, whiteness and male hegemony. He wrote: "In feeling, in behaviour, in culture, and in refinement of manners there is no difference—none whatever—between an American gentleman and a gentleman from France, or any European country including Germany. Good society is good society everywhere." (O'Rell 1890, 589).

[15] This number does not include the several didactic books O'Rell published during his earlier career as a teacher of French (grammar books, selected reading texts and edited versions of French canonical texts). I have also not included titles which were different versions of the same book. See Appendix B.

[16] When referring to British and American people or groups of people, this study uses the term "Anglo-American". When the term "Anglo-Saxon" is employed, it follows the way in which it was used by Max O'Rell and his contemporaries. In order to establish a cultural dichotomy, the Anglo-Saxon as a stereotype encompassing several nations was contrasted to that of the Latin, which included the French. This dichotomy, however, did not necessarily reflect hostility to foreigners, but often served to affirm a newly-found sense of partnership and rapprochement. To the participants of the debate, Anglo-Saxon was a cultural rather than an ethnic concept and included white, Protestant inhabitants of the British Isles and colonies. The United States was regarded as an Anglo-Saxon country in that it was dominated by an English-speaking, Protestant elite with strong cultural ties to their English 'mother country'.

When talking about the inhabitants of England, Scotland, Wales and as well as about the white inhabitants of the British colonies, this study uses the term British, except when directly referring to contemporary texts which often referred to all white inhabitants of the British Empire as English. However, Max O'Rell often distinguished particular traits in ethnic groups within the Anglo-Saxon cultural concept, such as Americans and English, as well as Scots and Irish. For the purposes of the present study, Germans are excluded from the term Anglo-Saxon.

[17] See (Betham-Edwards 1905, 296). After a series of stays in France, she wrote several books on the country and its customs. For her work, she was appointed *Officier de l'Instruction Publique de France* in 1891.

[18] See for instance (*Literary World*, 26 November 1889, 368) and (O'Rell 1888a, 122).

[19] Year of death is unknown.
[20] In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Rhodes presented passages from his 1885 book which were almost identical to the text from Max O'Rell's article *The Land of Mounseer* published in *Harper's Weekly* of 10 September 1887 (*New York Times*, 10 October 1887, 4).
[21] Knox and O'Rell had met at the New York Lotos Club at the end of October 1891 (*New York Times*, 1 November 1891, 1).
[22] Year of death is unknown.
[23] See (Betham-Edwards 1905, 293).
[24] See Frances Willard's letter to Mrs Spofford of 5 August 1896 congratulating her on a published reply to one of O'Rell's anti-feminist tirades in the *North American Review*, held by University of Wisconsin, Madison Libraries, Dept of Rare Books and Special Collections. [Cairns Collection. Part B. Willard]
[25] See (O'Rell 1884a, 18).
[26] By using the term *maîtresse de **la** maison* instead of *maîtresse de maison*, O'Rell wanted to point out that French wives reigned over the domestic sphere and were not mere housekeepers.