

**“MODELS TO THE UNIVERSE”
VICTORIAN HEGEMONY AND
THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININE IDENTITY**

Diana Pharaoh Francis, Ph.D.

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible through the support of many people, a few of whom I'd like to thank specifically here. First, I'd like to give my thanks to Ball State University and the English department who made my research possible through both emotional and financial support. I was awarded the Voss Scholarship and a dissertation grant, both of which I remain grateful for. More importantly, my committee members gave me the intellectual stimulus to dig deeply into my research; they threw down challenges which encouraged me to strive higher; they bounced me between nurturing guidance and incisive criticism. I cannot imagine accomplishing this task without the benefit of their assistance. So to you, Dr. Lauren Onkey, Dr. Patti White, Dr. Wade Jennings, and Dr. Deborah Balogh, I give you my deepest gratitude.

Equally important to this endeavor has been the support of my family. They have kept me humble and sane, and have been there throughout to encourage me to keep going. Another person I would like to mention is Dr. Gerald Dorros who has my everlasting gratitude. He gave me the gift of my life.

Finally, I want to say thank you to my husband Tony, without whom I'm not sure I would ever have embarked on this journey. In so many uncountable ways he made it possible for me to have written this. To him I dedicate this project because I believe it belongs to both of us.

Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation explores how women writers of popular novels in 1860s England characterized women, focusing in particular on the level of correspondence between fictional women to the prevailing ideology of the domestic angel. Unlike studies which posit this version of womanhood as merely as a function of patriarchal oppression, I see a more complicated relationship between it and the governing imperial hegemony of Victorian Britain. The imperial agenda relied on the preservation of the family structure which in turn depended on women adhering to the limits of her domestic sphere. Though my research reveals a universal dissatisfaction with the strictures of ‘true womanhood,’ the novels tend to reinforce and deploy this code of femininity as a means of conserving family, community and by implication, empire.

My analysis centers on the following novels which are representative of women’s popular fiction in the 1860s: Emily Eden’s *The Semi-attached Couple*, Charlotte Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Margaret Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks*, Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*.

Drawing on Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject, I explore the contradictions inherent in the Victorian cultural valuation of women based on the ideology of the domestic angel layered over the traditional perception of women as inherently flawed or monstrous. I postulate that the mid-Victorian hegemony took the shape of a panoptical power pyramid, which, integrated with Foucault’s theory of the panopticon and Bourdieu’s theory of delegated agency, provides a useful model with which to examine

the circulation of power in Victorian culture, particularly in reference to the control and containment of women.

These writers emphasize the artificiality of the domestic angel ideology, dramatizing the struggles of women to meet to its tenets, and providing few successful role models signifying eventual success. Ultimately however, the authors also universally punish transgressors and reward those women who conform to angelic parameters.

I see the domestic angel as a function of hegemonic exigency, the novels underscoring cultural priorities over individual feminine considerations. This accounts for the strength of the domestic angel ideology within Victorian culture, despite feminist challenges to its oppressive restrictions.

“MODELS TO THE UNIVERSE”
VICTORIAN HEGEMONY AND
THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININE IDENTITY

Table of Contents

I. Investigating Representations of Women in Women’s Novels.....	1
Imperial Hegemony	5
The Power of the Novel	9
The Novel as an Instrument of Discursive Reinforcement.....	13
The Domestic Angel and the Novel.....	19
Women’s Novels as Instruments of Hegemonic Subversion.....	22
The 1860s: When the Future Palled.....	28
Angels and Redundant Women	31
The ‘Woman’s Novel’: Domestic Realism and Sensationalism.....	37
II. A Woman’s True Mission.....	55
The Angel and the Monster	
<i>Feminine Antecedents</i>	55
<i>Between Patriarchy and Imperialism</i>	57
<i>Sensationalism and Domestic Realism</i>	61
<i>The Feminine Abject</i>	65
<i>The Angel in the House</i>	70
<i>Internal Battles</i>	75
Middle Class Subject Roles for Women	
<i>Angel and Nation</i>	77
<i>Redundant Women</i>	81
<i>Woman as Nurse</i>	84
<i>Wife and Mother</i>	90
III. To See and Be Seen: The “Many-Eyed World”	109
The Self-Reinforcing, Self-Regulating Power Structure	109
The Panoptical Power Pyramid.....	112
Crime and Punishment.....	118
The Circulatory Intelligence Network	120
The Value of a Good Reputation	128
Appearances Are Everything	135
Under Surveillance.....	139
Building a Reputation	145
Living Inside the Panopticon	156

IV. I Am Woman. What Am I?.....	172
Modeling Femininity	173
In the Tradition of Jane Austen.....	183
Didacticism and Realism	201
Moralizing Sensationalism.....	216
An Exciting Tale—No Moral Lessons Please!	239
V. Accounting for the Gaps	267
Elements of Resistance	267
Putting on a Costume	280
The Victorian Angel	292
VI. Afterword.....	300
VII. Bibliography	304

Chapter I:

Investigating Representations of Women in Women's Novels

. . . it is most certain, that in these days, where society is becoming every day more artificial and more complex, and marriage, as the gentlemen assure us, more and more expensive, hazardous, and inexpedient, women must find means to fill up the void in existence. Men, our natural protectors, our law-givers, our masters, throw us upon our own resources: the qualities which they pretend to admire in us—the overflowing, the clinging affections of a warm heart,—the household devotion,—the submissive wish to please, that feels ‘every vanity in fondness lost,’—the tender, shrinking sensitiveness which Adam . . . thought so charming in his Eve,—to cultivate these, to make them, by artificial means, the staple of the womanly character, is it not to cultivate a taste for sunshine and roses, in those we send to pass their lives in the arctic zone? (Margaret Mylne, “Woman, and Her Social Position” 19)

In a private note written in 1851, Florence Nightingale articulated her own personal anguish concerning her function within mid-Victorian society:

The thoughts & feelings that I have now I can remember since I was 6 years old. It was not I that made them. Oh God, how did they come?
A profession, a trade, a necessary occupation, something to fill & employ all my faculties, I have always felt essential to me, I have always longed for, consciously or not. . . . Why, oh my God, cannot I be satisfied with the life which satisfies so many people? (Selected Letters 47)

In her 1852 essay “Cassandra,” often cited as a feminist challenge to idle domesticity, Nightingale argues for more opportunities for women to serve. She challenges the cultural notion that women are naturally passionless, that they lack the intelligence or the mental capacity to learn traditionally masculine subjects such as math, science or law. She goes so far as to suggest that “the next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ” (53). Yet despite the challenges she makes to the domestic angel ideal, Elizabeth Langland and Anne Summers argue that Nightingale represents the ultimate fulfillment of the angel role.¹

According to Langland, Nightingale’s accomplishments in sanitary reform and nursing advanced the womanly paradigm of household management and the model of the domestic angel. Langland contends that Nightingale “had a viable managerial model to import to nursing: the bourgeois homemaker” (49). Mary Poovey, on the other hand, argues that though Nightingale seems to conform to the domestic angel ideal by repudiating the feminist movement of her day, in reality Nightingale’s writings “capitalized on the contradiction inherent in the domestic ideal in order to make even more radical claims for women than contemporary feminists did” (166).² Elaine Showalter also classes Nightingale among those women who broke “new ground and creat[ed] new possibilities” for Victorian women (Literature 19).

In fact, Florence Nightingale embodies the snarled difficulty in understanding how women functioned in Victorian society. She represents both the feminine ideal of the nurturing angel and the strong, independent woman who transgresses boundaries and undermines the governing hegemonic structure. In both capacities she serves as a signifier of empire and as an imperial agent. As such, she is an authorized representative

of the hegemonic structure, and is thus required to conform to her prescribed role. Like any other authorized representative of a governing social structure, she must “conduct [herself] in accordance with the social essence which is thereby assigned to [her]” in order to retain her position within the power structure (Bourdieu 106). She is inscribed by an imbricated collection of often contradictory ideals which culminate in the Victorian period in a single image of the Angel in the House. This image positions women as the bedrock of the nation by “legitimize[ing] both England’s sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote” (Poovey 9). Thus the Victorian woman as signifier of empire is implicated and promoted in the angelic ideal.

The Victorian woman is both Angel and Monster, Madonna and Eve, capable house manager and delicate child. Thus what might be characterized as subversive could also be commandeered for the purposes of patriarchy and for hegemonic objectives; what seems to be an advocacy of the domestic ideal could be turned to the feminist goals of transgression and subversion.

Langland’s study of the role of the domestic angel in Victorian Britain explores the function of women in the rise of the middle-class. She examines the way in which middle-class women, as domestic angels, solidified class barriers and imposed upon their culture middle-class values. According to Langland, during the mid-Victorian period there is a shift “from class defined in economic terms to class defined through cultural representations” where “women controlled representations of the middle class” (6). She posits that women, though subject to individual discourses and ideologies, held substantial power through their abilities to patrol and enforce discursive borders, giving them an “institutional” level of power (7).

Though Langland makes important and astute arguments, she fails to account for the imperial nature of the Victorian hegemony. She perceives the domestic angel as a product of the middle-class alone, rather than as, I will argue, a product of a variety of discourses. By the Victorian period, the angel ideal becomes essential to the British concept of themselves as a nation and as an empire. The proper woman becomes an authorized representative of the controlling hegemony, which I will argue is fundamentally imperialist and patriarchal in nature. As an authorized representative, she has been delegated power. So long as she performs her allotted duties, she will retain that power, perhaps climbing higher in the sovereign power pyramid. A failure would result in a slide down the pyramid and a loss of prestige, authority, and status; consequently her ability to maintain herself would diminish. This power structure coincides with the imperial power pyramid which Albert Memmi argues is “the basis of all colonial societies” (xiv) and the structure that I would argue dominated British culture during the mid-Victorian period.

The purpose of this study then, is to examine representations of women within five women’s novels. My focus shall be on women’s novels, not only because novels were perceived as a woman’s genre and forum, but because they were also perceived as having a dangerously potent influence on female minds and imaginations—an influence most often believed to be inevitably adverse. Through novels, women writers could challenge or reinforce ideological norms and thus undermine or affirm the cultural hegemony and the position of women within that hegemony. I wish to map the way in which these novels encouraged hegemonically complicit behavior through imperialistically coded language and motifs; how women participated in community

surveillance, the patrolling and maintenance of borders, and the suppression of turbulence; and I will finally seek to locate those places where ideological contradictions and discursive collisions created rupture and therefore opportunities to create change.

Imperial Hegemony

A discourse is an organized set of governing rules and strategies structuring signifying practices within any given community. Articulated through institutional formations such as law or education, accredited disciplines of knowledge such as history or medicine, and accepted social norms of behavior, the discourse regulates who can speak or act, and what it is that can be said or done. Through the manufacture and dispersion of authorized epistemological structures throughout its various levels, the discourse defines what is knowledge and how it can be constituted and classified. Through reinforcing ideologies which define truth as such, and which code discursive practices with the normalizing patina of ‘natural’ or ‘common sensical’ discourse justifies itself as intrinsic to “the established order of things” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 216). The Victorians might have said “God-given.” Thus discourse is necessary to life, and therefore it is indisputable. A discourse then, is a regulatory system which preempts challenges and contradictions by establishing itself as an inherent and elemental production of the natural world.

Every culture is comprised of multiple discourses, each of which is ruled by its own set of ideologies. Some discourses are nested within one another, sharing compatible ideologies; others merely overlap, their ideologies colliding and exposing contradictions. Those places of contradiction constitute ruptures or gaps where there is

room for modification and transformation, and where discursive suppression and containment of turbulence becomes necessary if the discourse cell is to protect itself from disintegration.

The multiple discourses which comprised Victorian Britain gave rise to an ideological superstructure—a hegemony. Antonio Gramsci argues that hegemony materializes spontaneously, arising out of the needs and desires of the “dominant fundamental group” (12). Furthermore, “the great masses of the population” consent to its rule because of “the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (12). Hegemony functions to bind multiple discourse cells together, promoting the dominant ideologies which are generated through trans-discursive coalition, and suppressing or defusing the natural frictions which arise when the competing ideologies of the individual discursive structures collide. Thus the larger discourse cells of Britain, through shared ideologies, needs and goals—which I discuss in more detail below—generated Victorian hegemony.³

In the case of Victorian Britain, hegemony coalesced beneath a single ascendant ideology of nationhood, one that centered on a sense of moral and cultural superiority and a consequent obligation to form a dominion under which to guide and protect the lesser peoples of the world. According to Maurice Quinlan, Victorian British “nationalism [was] based upon a belief in the moral superiority of the English over the lesser breed of men The conviction that the English were a chosen people, elected to enjoy the fruits of virtue at home and to rule over palm and pine abroad, was peculiar to the Victorians” (253). The successful building of empire confirmed this conception of a paternalistic and privileged nationhood. For instance, Shamsul Islam uses the Sepoy

Mutiny (1857) as an example of Britain's self-justification as an imperial power, saying "the suppression of the Mutiny had proved the triumph of the Christian God against the evil pagan deities; of Western culture over the Indian" (3).⁴ The Mutiny itself corroborated the English perception of Indians as barbaric. The subsequent defeat of the Sepoys reinforced British cultural superiority.⁵ Seamus Deane argues that a nationalist conception of England arose as a result of its imperial advancement. Deane writes that any given imperial nation "imagines itself to be the ideal model to which all others should conform They universalize themselves . . . regard[ing] any insurgency against them as necessarily provincial" (8-9). Indeed the British conceived themselves as the model and shepherd of global civilization, superior to not only their colonial subjects, but also their European competitors. Edward Said contends that the British commitment to imperialism took on an "almost metaphysical obligation" which resulted in "very little domestic resistance to these empires, although they were frequently established and maintained under adverse and even disadvantageous conditions" (10). Such scanty resistance indicates the influence of Britain's imperial hegemony. So deeply internalized was this national identity which believed itself to be divinely obligated to succor and govern other inferior peoples of the world, that the British people consented to support the process of empire in spite of domestic hardships.

This sense of national spirit was deployed through systems of "economics, religion, politics, biology, and literature, [all of which] served to spread the imperial gospel" (Shamshul 3). In her study of the British Empire and its systems of deployment, Anne McClintock says that "as domestic commodities were mass marketed through their appeal to imperial jingoism, commodity jingoism itself helped reinvent and maintain

British national unity,” portraying Britain as a humanizing force with moral obligations to bring civilization to its colonies (209). Each of the categories which Shamshul points to, as well as the popular culture advertising which McClintock explores, was domestically focused and essential to the production of an imperial-based national spirit within the domestic borders of Britain.

It is my contention that Victorian hegemony was fundamentally imperialist in nature, modeling the pyramid structure of colonization and utilizing the same discursive strategies which Britain implemented in the second stage of its empire, when it shifted from the violence of colonial rape, to the less overt violence of imperial indoctrination. Though as Patrick Brantlinger points out in his Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914, some critics argue that “early and mid-Victorians were perhaps . . . oblivious to India and [Britain’s imperial holdings],” it is more accurate to say that “colonial politics influenced all domestic issues and reform movements throughout the century” (4). Brantlinger goes on to say that “for the white imperialists from the [British] metropolis . . . that phase [Victorian empire building] was the chief glory and merit of modern history, the ever rising pinnacle of progress and civilization” (16). British national identity coalesced around a sense of superiority and the moral obligation of what Kipling infamously termed “the white man’s burden” in his poem of the same title. This self-concept deeply influenced the needs, desires and goals which gave rise to imperial hegemony in Victorian Britain. As Paul Knaplund explains in his history of the British empire, “the British empire came to represent not so much a political system as a way of life” or a hegemony (xvii).

I will also argue that the feminine ideal of the angel in the house came to serve as the signifier for England and her moral superiority, her sphere of influence as a caretaker and keeper of peace and harmony, and as a mother figure to her colonies. Evangelical morality had elevated women to the position of the domestic preserver of morality, but that subject role shifted so as to function as a foundation for nationhood and empire. Women as domestic angels became fundamental to the continuance and success of the imperial project through their influence on morality, male relatives, and domestic service. Novels became important to the construction and maintenance of hegemonic codes of femininity, and at the same time provided a means of protest and limited resistance.

The Power of the Novel

It is important to note here that hegemonic transformation or modification becomes possible when there are power shifts between or within discourse cells, when ideologies are revised, or when the needs and goals of the discourse communities are altered. Thus hegemony suppresses and diffuses turbulence from above, but is subject to alteration from below. This distinction becomes important when evaluating the impact of novels within the culture.

Throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century in Britain, most of the readership of novels came from the dominant majority—since only they could afford to purchase novels or memberships in circulating libraries. Novels consequently crossed the boundaries of the dominant discourse cells. In doing so, they were perceived as potentially subversive because they could not promote all the ideologies and codes of every discourse they transversed. Thus they exposed their readers to a range of

ideological possibilities. Even in Hannah More's intensely didactic novel Coelubs in Search of a Wife (1808), she acknowledges in her preface that "the religious [reader] may throw it aside as frivolous" (viii). In writing the novel, she intended to promote Evangelical morality, and "to show how religion may be brought to mix with the concerns of ordinary life" (x). However, she recognizes that she cannot please everyone, that in appealing to a wide audience, she must in the end challenge some competing discursive codes:

I must be content with the humble hope that no part of these volumes will be found injurious to the important interests which it was rather in my wish than in my ability to advance; that where I failed in effecting good, little evil has been done; that if my book has answered no valuable purpose, it has, at least, not added to the number of those publications which, by impairing the virtue, have diminished the happiness of mankind (x)

Novels had the power to reach across discursive boundaries and create turbulence by exposing ideological contradictions and challenging discursive codes, which could prompt discursive and hegemonic modification. At the same time, many novels overtly served the dominant hegemony. Novels then served as instruments of maintenance as well as rupture, often both contained within a single text. Even the most well intentioned and rigidly written novel, such as More's Coelubs, could not escape from criticisms of subversion or, to use More's term, "contamination" (x).

Early Evangelical movements had identified novels as harmful to their readers, a conception which permeated British culture through the first half of the nineteenth century. These middle-class Evangelicals feared that

novels would become an instrument of ideological penetration by what was seen as decadent aristocratic or gentry culture, depicted as either glamorous libertinism or its transmuted form of sensibility or sentimentalism, into the lives and consciousness of those lower down the social scale. Such penetration, it was thought, would help to ensure the continued ideological and social hegemony of the upper classes. (Engel and King 7)

This fear grew more powerful during the Regency period and on through George IV's reign. During this time, the "nobility abandoned themselves to hedonism," their dissipation reflected in the "shallow romanticism of the fashionable novel" (Engel and King 13). This change in perception is heralded by the changing critical tone within popular magazines. In one short diatribe in a 1790 Lady's Magazine, a writer claims that because of novel reading:

the moderate enjoyments of life are despised, and its duties neglected; the imagination, suffered to stray beyond the utmost verge of probability . . . soon shuts out reason, and the dormant faculties languish for want of cultivation The mischief does not stop here; the heart is depraved, when it is supposed to be only refined . . . and vague fabricated feelings supply the place of principles. ("Novels" 363)

The boundaries of the middle class discursive structure were marked by moderation, reason, duty and principle—the antithesis of the decadence perceived in the aristocracy, and the very values which popular novels were suddenly perceived as attacking. At the same time, the moral corruption of the aristocracy took on a more malignant aura viewed against the violent depredations of the French Revolution. Now the novels began to be perceived as spreading cultural pestilence which could result in a similar revolution, causing the complete collapse of the nation from moral decay. As John Taylor notes, “expressions of opinion about the dangers of novel reading pervade the ephemeral literature of the day . . . so repetitious and persistent did these comments become” (v). Coleridge, in addressing the subject of novel reading, said:

I will run the risk of asserting, that where the reading of novels prevails as a habit, it occasions in time the entire destruction of the powers of the mind It conveys no trustworthy information as to facts; it produces no improvement of the intellect, but fills the mind with mawkish and morbid sensibility, which is directly hostile to the cultivation, invigoration, and enlargement of the nobler powers of the understanding. (3)

While conservative groups had challenged the immorality of novels throughout the eighteenth century, their impact on the ruling hegemony had been slight, as the bulk of the population was not yet receptive to their admonitions and exhortations. It was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that their protests met with support during the rise of Evangelicalism and its enormous pool of middle class supporters. Thus their strict standards concerning novels—and leisure activities in general—permeated through many of the discourse cells comprising Britain at that time, leading to a modification of the

dominant hegemony and thus creating an ideological perception of novels as potentially dangerous, though having an equal and opposite potential of disseminating ideologically correct values and beliefs. However, by the middle of the century, the novel's popularity had grown enormously, while the Evangelical movements had subsided.

During the Victorian period, the novel came to be identified as a particularly middle-class form of literature. It served as a middle class representational replacement for the classical canon of literature, requiring no background in the traditional upper class education and written in a widely accessible style and language. Thus, despite the strong anti-novel sentiment of the earlier powerful middle-class Evangelical movements, the novel's popularity grew by leaps and bounds. At the same time, Evangelical groups sought to take advantage of the genre's popularity to promote their moral ideals.

The Novel as an Instrument of Discursive Reinforcement

The Evangelical push to establish Sunday schools for children, followed later by adult schools, led to an enormous expansion of the reading public. These schools were most particularly aimed at the poor. At the same time, the growth of the middle class led to the establishment of boarding schools for girls while there was an increased enrollment at boys' schools. Thus according to Frederick Karl, "by the end of the eighteenth century there were perhaps 100,000 habitual readers upon whom the booksellers and circulating libraries could count. In the nineteenth century itself, literacy outdistanced population growth by more than five to one" (14). For the first half of the century, the circulating libraries relied mostly on the patronage of the middle class, as the cost of membership was still too high for most of the working classes. The discovery of

new papers and publishing techniques made novels cheaper by the middle of the century, and thus more available to the working classes, but the middle class continued to provide the backbone to the book publishing market.

The Evangelical motive for teaching the poor to read was to promote their morality, reinforcing such virtues as cleanliness, obedience, and contentment with their station in life, and thus preserving the class system and alleviating the fear of revolt.⁶

The use of literature to inculcate the poor was effective. Terry Eagleton writes that literature “was in several ways a suitable candidate” for pacifying the masses (45).

Literature “could provide a potent antidote to political bigotry and ideological extremism” (Eagleton 45). In a deeply ironic tone, Eagleton comments that literature

could serve to place in cosmic perspective the petty demands of working people for decent living conditions or greater control over their own lives, and might even with luck come to render them oblivious of such issues in their high-minded contemplation of eternal truths and beauties. . . .

Literature would rehearse the masses in the habits of pluralistic thought and feeling, persuading them to acknowledge that more than one viewpoint than theirs existed—namely, that of their masters. It would communicate to them the moral riches of bourgeois civilization, impress upon them a reverence for middle-class achievements, and, since reading is an essentially solitary, contemplative activity, curb in them any disruptive tendency to collective political action” (45-6).

The Evangelical use of literature as a tool for ideological deployment is reminiscent of the development of English studies in India. According to Guari

Viswanathan, “British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education” (“Beginnings” 17). Teaching English literature to natives was to be particularly successful as a colonial control strategy because it converted the natives to a new ontological world order because, as Said notes, “even where colonies are not insistently or even perceptibly in evidence, the narrative sanctions a spatial moral order” where the colonizer is always superior to the colonized (79). In the case of English education in India, Viswanathan argues that this literature helped to codify an ontological conception of native Indians as inferior to the British, not only in need of instruction and discipline from their moral masters, but desirous of receiving them. In universalizing this concept and forcing the generation of a hegemonic structure based upon this moral order, English literature solved the largest problem facing the colonizers.

This problem was, as Viswanathan succinctly puts it, “how were Indian subjects to be imbued with a sense of public responsibility and honour,” where that honor and responsibility were defined under the heading of service to the British empire (“Beginnings” 10). It was vital to make the natives participate in their domination, for only a handful of British personnel were actually on site to maintain British dominion within the colony. The solution was to introduce the study of English literature to India. In this way, the natives could be indoctrinated with British ideologies—particularly those which reinforced British superiority—internalizing them and as a result, conforming to them, and disseminating and enforcing them as well.⁷ This was possible, because, as Elizabeth Langland argues, texts “formulate, transmit, and reproduce the ideologies of a

culture through the production of subjects. This is the process through which particular and local beliefs of a group become naturalized as truth” (3).

In the case of Evangelical groups, the discursive goal was to reinforce the subservient subject role for the lower class and to generate within them a sense of the divinely designated nature of that role. With the French Revolution and the consequent realization that the poor classes had not only the power to disrupt the economy but also to destroy the nation, came the Evangelical revelation that there needed to be a systematic program for solving the ‘problem of the poor.’ Maurice Quinlan contends that “seeing in France what they believed to be a collapse of civilization, they were impressed by the idea that the stability of a nation depended not only upon the maintenance of law and order, but upon the character of its manners” (69). Evangelicals focused particularly on the threat of the lower classes. Because these lower classes were characterized as degenerate and lazy, it was thought that only the infusion of middle class morality through education, surveillance and reward would defuse their threat. Economic inequity and hardship were believed to be only symptomatic of lack of morality amongst the poor, rather than as a cause for their discontent. Thus began systematic education centered on Evangelical treatises and tracts as means of inculcating the lower classes with hegemonically approved ideologies.

John Wesley, an early pioneer in Evangelicalism, did a great deal to further the effort of educating the poor, furthering the mission of indoctrination. His dictionary, created for the poor reader and aimed at assisting him in practical applications, served to widen the reading horizon for the vast numbers of the uneducated.⁸ Wesley also sought to provide suitable literature for the new reading public. Toward that end, he began to

edit classical works for both content and language.⁹ Though, unlike later Evangelicals, he did not condemn the novel as corrupting, he did not consider novels to be suitable reading material for readers of limited education because they did not provide a straightforward moral message. For instance, neither *Tom Jones* nor *Moll Flanders* are ever really punished for their sins which indicates the possibility of reward for immorality. Because most novels provided a variety of characters and often ameliorating circumstances for sinful behavior, readers might be confused into imitating that behavior.

This conception of the dangers of novels was taken up by Evangelicals and secular critics alike. Hannah More argues that novels “are continually shifting their ground, and enlarging their sphere, and are daily becoming vehicles of wider mischief” (27). Thomas Gisborne claims that they “are devoured with indiscriminate and indefatigable avidity. Hence the mind is secretly corrupted” (159). In 1840, while applauding two novels by the Reverend William Gresley, George Eliot still cautions that:

It appears to me that there is unfairness in arbitrarily selecting a train of circumstances, a set of characters as a development of a class of opinions. In this way we might make atheism appear wonderfully calculated to promote social happiness. I remember, as I dare say you do, a very amiable atheist depicted by Bulwer in *Devereaux* and for some time after the perusal of that book, which I read 7 or 8 years ago, I was considerably shaken by the impressions that religion was not a requisite to moral excellence. (Letters 45)

However, despite fears that even the best intended novels would corrupt the minds of their readers, the genre’s continued popularity made them impossible for Evangelicals to

ignore. The proliferation of unsuitable novels, novels that were “under the semblance of instruction, conveying the subtlest poison,” filled circulating libraries and juvenile libraries (“Evils” 783).

For some, the solution was to provide fiction which would be morally uplifting as an alternative to the poison available. Hannah More started the Cheap Repository, Sarah Trimmer began the Family Magazine, both of which published didactic fiction promoting proper behavior in both men and women. The novels of Mary Sherwood, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen received positive critical attention for their reinforcement of morality, duty, and class hierarchies, and their portrayals of traditionally feminine role models. As the century progressed, more and more novelists made contributions which would, in Horace’s classical terms, both teach and delight. Grace Aguilar, Elizabeth Sewall, Charlotte Yonge, Emily Eden, Margaret Oliphant and Dinah Mulock Craik are but a few names on the list of authors who sought to impose a moral message on their reader through their novels. As George Eliot states, the prevailing feeling had become that “we cannot . . . help being modified by the ideas that pass through our minds” in the course of reading, particularly novel reading (Letters 23). William Greg makes the same assertion in his “False Morality of Lady Novelists” (1859), saying “this literature is effective by reason of its very lightness: it spreads, penetrates, and permeates, where weightier matter would lie merely on the outside of the mind” (144). Thus Evangelicals, unable to stop the publication and sale of novels through censorship or public sentiment, began a campaign to develop novels and short fiction which would promote and support their ideologies.

Edward Said's relates the novel to imperialism. His discussion helps make sense of how Evangelicals sought to use the genre as means of inculcation. He says that the novel was "immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences" in Britain (xii). He argues that the British novel, designed for consumption by British subjects, reinforced the nationalist conception of Britain as superior to all other countries, divinely obligated to bring civilization to the lesser beings of the world. According to Said, "if we study the impulses giving rise to it [the novel], we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism" (69-70). Novels, by reinforcing and reproducing hegemony throughout British culture, act to refresh the needs, desires and goals which originated the imperial hegemony and which now assure its continued endurance. They also help to establish and confirm discursive and hegemonic subject roles which then serve to promote hegemony. According to Said, "British power was durable and continually reinforced . . . [and] that power was elaborated and articulated in the novel" (73).

The Domestic Angel and the Novel

To the "good woman" in mid-Victorian England falls the awesome responsibility for the perpetuation of the British civilization. According to the myth of the Angel in the House, she has "under her jurisdiction the [development of the] most basic qualities of human identity" (Armstrong 3). Her realm of influence is the home and hearth, and through her responsibilities there, she has as much a duty to her country as any man

serving in the military or government. A woman must engender moral and ethical values in her children, which include a moral sense of duty to the nation and consequently the imperial project. Rowbotham writes of the need for women to:

accept cheerfully the burden of sacrifice entailed by involvement in Empire. . . . However hard, the true woman was expected to accept and make the best of such events without adding to the sorrow of others by useless complaint or by inability to cope. More than that, it was necessary for women to take the lead in teaching men how to cope with their stresses. It has been seen that women were expected to teach men, from boyhood, the qualities necessary for moral and spiritual development: one aspect of this learning was the development of an imperial patriotism, ideally first imbued at a mother's knee. (190-1)

Thus from childhood women were inculcated in an ideology of femininity devoted to the development and perpetuation of empire through the maintenance of the domestic sphere.

Sarah Stickney Ellis makes the imperial duty of women plain when she writes in 1839 that women serve as “a kind of second conscience, for mental reference, and spiritual counsel . . . [making each of their husbands, sons and brothers] a wiser and better man” (1639). According to Ellis, women are fundamental to the maintenance and success of not only the imperial enterprise, but also English culture. The men who take up their duty to England in the colonies are only able to do so because “they have borne along with them a generosity, a disinterestedness, and a moral courage, derived in no small measure from the female influence of their native country” (1639). Should women default on their proper duties, English civilization and culture should fail at every level,

political and domestic.¹⁰ Consequently, women must be vigilantly selfless, moral, generous and sacrificing.

Containing women within the domestic angel role was accomplished through techniques of power which had already proved effective with the indigenous peoples of the colonies. The systematic imperial-styled power methodologies which these novels reflect include: panoptical surveillance, and containment and rehabilitation through modeling, self-discipline, punishment and reward. These techniques worked to motivate women to embrace the traditional role of the angel.

Just as English studies in India could be used to indoctrinate the natives into participating in the colonization process, and just as the Evangelicals used their didactic tracts and treatises to imbue the British lower classes with a sense of nationalism and duty which would make them conform to their assigned subject roles, so could novels, which had become so popular with women, be used to maintain control of them. Literature works “at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 3). Kate Flint argues that those who attempted to limit reading practices, were doing so as a “means of gaining control over subjectivity,” and to restrict the flow of knowledge available to women, and “through this, to [control] different social expectations and standards” (11). Further, according to Nancy Armstrong in her study of the development of the novel as a genre, novels would “have the desirable effect of inducing a specific form of political unconscious” (18). Armstrong claims that “fiction could accomplish much the same purpose as the various forms of recreation promoted by Sunday Schools,” which was to “occup[y] many of the idle hours when people gathered in their customary fashion and when political plans

might otherwise have been hatched” (17). The novel becomes a means of inculcating the population with hegemonic codes of propriety and self containment through its power to reach into a relaxed and unguarded setting, subtly re-aligning loyalties and belief systems.

Thus British white women and the indigenous people of the colonies were located in similar epistemological categories. Both were necessary to the wealth and stability of empire, while at the same time, both needed, for their own preservation and salvation, to be monitored and disciplined against the dangers of their inherent deficiencies. The novels then serve to disseminate hegemonic codes of behavior, mark taboos and transgressive behavior, model ideal role models, and to foster the deployment of the system of surveillance, discipline and punishment which formed the hegemonic auto-maintenance network.

Women's Novels as Instruments of Hegemonic Subversion

Despite the Victorian novel's potential as a tool of hegemony, it held, at the same time, the dangerous seeds of subversion. Let us return for a moment to George Eliot's assertion that novels had the power to create powerful impressions on readers, even to the point of undermining their religious integrity: “it appears to me that there is unfairness in arbitrarily selecting a train of circumstances, and a set of characters as a development of a class of opinions. In this way we might make atheism appear wonderfully calculated to promote social happiness” (*Letters* 45). In Eliot's words then, novels provide a means to influence readers' minds, and through them, I would suggest, discourse cells and eventually hegemony. For as Greg remarks:

there are peculiarities . . . in works of fiction which must always secure them a vast influence on all classes of societies and all sorts of minds. They are read without effort, and remembered without trouble. We have to chain down our attention to read other books with profit; these enchain our attention of themselves Other books are effective only when digested and assimilated; novels either need not digestion, or rather present their matter to us in an already digested form Novels are like soup or jelly; they may be drunk off at a draught or swallowed whole, certain of being easily and rapidly absorbed into the system. (146)

Novels have the ability to engage with the imagination without first passing through the hegemonically produced filters of reason and truth. Thus any parts of a narrative which undermine or challenge the currently hegemonically ratified ideologies are instantly advanced into the imagination where they at least come under consideration, if they are not assimilated. In this way, contradictions between the idealized norm of hegemonic subject roles and the actuality of women's lives created ruptures within the internalized systems of ideological truths which structured women's minds and guaranteed their cooperation within hegemony and discourse both. Discipline, imposed through reason and an awareness of the 'natural' order of culture based on internalized ideological conceptions, cannot defend against the threat of novels because it is completely bypassed in the course of reading.

On the side of hegemony, novels function, in the words of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, to produce "ethnocentric universalism" (199).¹¹ She argues that this kind of "discourse . . . sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i.e. the yardstick

by which to encode and represent cultural Others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse” (199). Because, as Simone de Beauvoir notes, the masculine is assumed to be the universal basis of epistemology, women are defined as Other, unable to function in the world without the benefit of the “masculine mediator” (755). In the mid-Victorian period, we can postulate the angel ideal as the “masculine mediator” to which Beauvoir refers. Produced as a means of making women compliant to hegemonic needs, the domestic angel ideology becomes the normative referent against which all women must be measured. Novels served hegemony by helping to institutionalize the angel ideal subject role for women.

Women’s novels often challenge the concept of an androcentric world by setting their novels within the feminine realm. Much as post-colonial writers seek “the right to represent” themselves as “part of a grander effort to discover the bases of an integral identity different from the formerly dependent, derivative one” (Said 212-3), women novel writers produced works which focused on the female domestic sphere, including marriage, motherhood, housekeeping, shopping, and moral caretaking. They not only portrayed the day to day life of women, but they celebrated feminine traits and traditions, those things which had come under derision by the larger culture. Visiting and gossip were shown to be communal opportunities for establishing and deepening relationships. Pregnancy was no longer taboo, but given a place of importance in the narrative. In emphasizing what had previously been perceived as feminine triviality, women writers asserted a separate identity from men, one that was whole and complete of its own, refuting the basic Victorian cultural mythologies that these trivialities signified women’s status as “weaker vessels” and “flawed men.”

In writing their own experiences, women claimed the right to relate their own histories—histories that hitherto had been ignored as insignificant and therefore unworthy of being recorded. Said emphasizes the primary importance of novels in the imperialist project. In particular, he examines how novels which take up the subject of imperialism, represent and codify the Other (the native) according to the needs and desires of the colonizer. However, when postcolonial writers coopt this method of power, redefining themselves through the imperialist mode, they create ruptures in imperialist ideologies, forcing the colonizer to recognize the contradictions and paradoxes within his concept of the world. In this way, the writers seek to reclaim their nation from the homogenizing forces of the colonizer. Similarly women, in writing their own experiences, seek to forge a separate identity from the universalizing androcentric hegemony which constitutes women within the angel ideal subject role, not because women are inherently angelic, but because to do so serves hegemony.

At the same time, because of the scope of a novel, women could skirt overt transgression by conforming to the letter of hegemonic codes while at the same time circumventing them through narrative skill. For instance, in some novels, transgressors, though subject to eventual punishment according to hegemonic dictates, may be portrayed in a sympathetic light for the bulk of the novel which cannot be dispelled by a token last page death or imprisonment. For instance, the Baroness Sampson, in Emily Eden's The Semi-detached House, is forced to flee from polite society when her husband's business dealings are revealed to be less than legitimate. Yet she retains her 'gentlewoman' status, her husband continues to accrue their fortune, she does not lose the family that she loves, and there is every chance that she will be able to return to polite

society eventually. At the same time, those female characters who are portrayed in a hegemonically correct fashion according to proper feminine subject roles, might come to the end of a novel in less than satisfactory circumstances. They might be unmarried, unhappy, or poor, and thus provide little incentive for their readers to imitate them. An example of such a woman would be Elizabeth Bennet's best friend Charlotte who marries the obsequious Mr. Collins in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. She accepts Mr. Collins because she has no other marital options and to refuse him would be to renege on her duties to her family and to her community. As a domestic angel, she must participate in any 'good' marriage which becomes available to her. Though Charlotte seems resigned and even content with her new life, her story does little to encourage marriage; readers are more inclined to sympathize with Elizabeth who adamantly refuses his proposal.¹²

Women writers also portrayed women who pretend to conform to proper subject roles, mimicking or passing as domestic angels in order to achieve their own ends. Lady Audley serves as an example of this. She pretends conformity to the angel ideal and then undercuts it by committing murder and arson, all the while appearing to be the epitome of innocent, moral womanhood. Similarly, Isabel Vane, though initially a perfect example of the feminine ideal, ends up seduced, pretending to model the proper role of wife and mother, while hiding her indiscretion. The readers are aware that these women are manipulating their appearances to mimic or impersonate the angel ideal. Through this awareness, readers begin to realize the constructed nature of feminine subject roles—that these roles may be circumvented. Controlling ideologies are thus exposed to inquisition and criticism, opening up opportunities for hegemonic modification.

Novels in Victorian England became a tool both of hegemony and of resistance, particularly regarding women. Much of the discussion concerning novels centered on their impact on the women who made up the bulk of the subscribers to Mudie's and other circulating libraries.¹³ Margaret Oliphant's scathing attack on the sensationalist novel focused particularly on the genre's corruption of women authors and women readers: "it is a shame to women so to write; and it is a shame to the women who read and accept as a true representation of themselves and their ways the equivocal talk and fleshly inclinations herein attributed to them" (275). Women's novels which focused on the domestic sphere—whether in the sensational or domestic realist style—simultaneously deployed and challenged the hegemonically codified ideologies surrounding the domestic angel ideal and the domestic sphere. The dynamic between the text and the reader's experience allowed for a complex interplay that could spark resistance or hegemonic compliance. Kate Flint addresses this point, saying "the same texts . . . may elicit complicity or resistance; the same reading subject, for that matter, cannot be relied upon to be a stable identity, responding in a predetermined way to each text that she encounters" (40). Any feminist exploration of woman-authored Victorian novels must therefore address both conformity and resistance, examining both the deployment of hegemonic codes of 'true womanhood' and the ways in which these writers challenged and undermined those ideological structures.

The 1860s: When the Future Palled

Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! For the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night
“Dover Beach” by Matthew Arnold

Arnold’s vision of the world in his 1867 “Dover Beach” was symptomatic of the unsettled Victorian mood. James Thomson echoes the cynical and despairing perception of the world in his “City of Dreadful Night” which stems from his experiences walking through London. His imagery is full of apocalyptic visions, ending with a stream of hopeless conclusions:

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
 Because Fate holds no prize to crown success;
 That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
 Because they have no secret to express;
 That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
 Because there is no light beyond the curtain;
 That is vanity and nothingness. (599)

For Thomson and Arnold, and for many other Victorians, by the 1860s, the world had become a dark place, with little hope for an afterlife of paradise. The 1859 publication of Darwin’s Origins of Species coincided with a strong upsurge in dissent from the

Anglican church, unsettling the faith of many. Questions about the nature of God abounded as people sought to account for not only the bloody losses of the Sepoy Rebellion (1857) and the Crimean War (1853-56), as well as those from the continuing skirmishes in China, but also the horrors of their own city streets, the wavering morals of the nation, and more than anything, the frightening chaotic changes attributed to progress. This was an unsettled, uncertain time, its glittering gilded surface hiding a rotten core.

During the decade of the 1850s, Britain glittered with success. It was a decade of great scientific and economic advancement. The 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition in Hyde Park showcased Britain's self-avowed superiority. It remained open for just six months and in that time there were over six million visitors to the exhibition. The iron and glass building, a miracle of architecture in and of itself, spread over more than twenty-one acres of the park. It housed a massed display of Britanalia: the best of its national products gathered together in a national narcissistic shrine celebrating industry and commerce.¹⁴ Robert Adams describes the exhibition, saying that "overstuffed furniture and gimcrack decoration, patent medicines, religious tracts, and Indian curries were jumbled in with ladies' corsets, brassbound steam engines, celluloid collars, and cast-iron whatnots for the genteel parlor" (386). A facsimile of the exhibition catalog shows that the wealth of displays ranged from tableware to furniture, guns to carriages, lampposts to statuary, jewelry to door knobs and hinges. Adams points out, however, that the aesthetics of the display were hardly important: "what the exhibition celebrated was the triumph of industry and commerce. And though the taste was uncertain or worse, there was something to celebrate in the sheer quantity of artifacts assembled" (386). And yet, according to James Adams in his book The British Empire 1784-1939, "the Exhibition,

indeed, although it seemed to those who visited it as the doorway to the future, was in reality the “Finis” to an age which was rapidly passing” (155). In fact, Adams writes that though the Victorian period “was to last for nearly a half century more, . . . it was entering on a new phase, in which the dreams of pacifism, of a world made peaceful and happy by free trade and inventive industry [sic] were to be rudely shattered” (154-5). Elisabeth Jay, in a literary biography of Margaret Oliphant, comments that “the New Exhibition of 1862 prompted comparison with the political climate in which its illustrious predecessor of 1851 had taken place. Peace had given way to war and the royal instigator of the nations’ euphoric self-congratulation, the Prince Consort, was dead” (192). This New Exhibition heralded a far more somber decade than its predecessor.

Along with the progress of industry and science, during the mid-Victorian period England vacillated between pinnacle achievements and abysmal lows. There were improvements in prisons and penal codes, transportation to Australia was abolished, the plight of workhouse children began to be addressed, new medicines were discovered, gas lamps lit the streets, and restrictions disallowing Jews to serve in Parliament were removed. At the same time, the Irish continued to suffer under cruel oppression. According to James Adams, “in spite of the wonders in the Crystal Palace and of many reforms, [conditions were] almost incredibly crude and cruel” (155). There was an enormous rise in prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases. The financial prosperity of the upper and middle classes did not translate into prosperity for the enormous lower classes, producing a situation of conspicuous consumption amongst the wealthy elite which contrasted sharply with the grim subsistence living or outright poverty of the lower classes. The later novels of Charles Dickens, novels such as Bleak House (1852-53),

Hard Times (1854) and Little Dorrit (1855-57), reflect a darker vision of Britain more akin to Arnold's and Thomson's than his earlier, more socially optimistic works such as The Pickwick Papers (1836-37) or Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44).¹⁵

According to G. M. Young in Portrait of an Age: Victorian England, “all through the [eighteen] fifties we are aware of the increasing tension” (89).¹⁶ Much of this had to do with the demands of empire and with domestic political developments concerning women and sexuality. England was not only concerned with the preservation of its current empire, but with its further exploitation as well—both of which carried high financial and human costs.

Even as England invested more of its resources in India and China, it became necessary to turn more of its attention to Africa. The discovery of financial opportunities in a previously unvalued Africa led to even greater domestic demands. McClintock writes that “until the 1860s, Britain had scant interest in its unpromising colony at the southern tip of Africa. Only upon the discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) were the Union Jack and the redcoats shipped out with any real sense of imperial mission” (368). During the 1850s, England also consolidated its control over the Australian continent and its resources of gold and wool. In India, after the Sepoy Rebellion, Britain revamped its governing structure, expending even more of its resources in retaining control over this lucrative colony.

Angels and Redundant Women

The social role for women that encompassed all other social roles and was fundamental to the progress of empire came to be known as the Angel in the House, or

the domestic angel. This role was characterized by selflessness, purity, high morality, self-effacement, and a strong sense of duty. Yet even while women as domestic angels had become central to Victorian hegemony, a new threat in the form of the so-called 'redundant' women loomed. The problem of redundant women was caused by the enormous exodus of men to the colonies—both in military service to the crown—to make their fortunes. Most did not return to England. Women were left behind in disproportionate numbers to remaining available men. At the same time, many middle class men claimed that the cost of marriage, of establishing and maintaining a household, was prohibitive. Joanna Trollope writes in Britannia's Daughter's: Women of the British Empire:

the Empire was only partly to blame for that [the exodus of eligible men from England]; certainly it demanded a huge manpower to forge new links around the world, and subsequently to maintain them, but men . . . were abandoning it [England] too for escape. What they sought to escape was marriage, not for any reasons of misogyny, but because of the demands made upon a married couple by middle-class Victorian society To get married it was necessary to set up an establishment and the rules for that were so exacting and expensive that ducking the issue altogether was understandably common. (23)

Joan Perkin argues that despite “the social ideal . . . that all women would marry and be kept by a husband . . . the 1851 Census showed there were half a million more women than men in Britain. It also revealed that a million women remained unmarried” (153).

Perkin goes on to say that this polarity of numbers resulted in a conception that “there had been a breakdown in the social system” (152), centering largely on how women fit into this rapidly changing culture. These extra, unmarried women were labeled redundant.

In 1862, William Greg writes in his well known article “Why Are Women Redundant?”:

there is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong. There are hundreds of thousands of women—not to speak more largely still—scattered through all ranks, but proportionally most numerous in the middle and upper classes,—who have to earn their own living, instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men; who, not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mothers, have to carve out artificial and painfully-sought occupations for themselves; who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own. (436)

This summation of the dangers of redundancy implies the debate surrounding the so-called ‘woman question’ which had become a great preoccupation for Victorian society. Indeed Greg states “the ‘condition of women,’ in one form or another—their wants, their woes, their difficulties—have taken possession of our thoughts, and seem

likely to occupy us busily and painfully enough for time to come” (436). In the article, however, Greg argues that women should maintain their traditional roles as wives and mothers, that unless women are encouraged to remain or return to the home and the domestic sphere, society will collapse. He terms the lives of single women, particularly those of the upper and middle classes, “unfulfilled destinies,” describing them as “wretched and deteriorating” because “they have nothing to do, and none to love, cherish, and obey” (437). According to Greg, the problem of redundant women, and by implication the woman question, is a problem that “society must solve or die” (437).¹⁷

A decade later, Josephine Butler’s introduction to Woman’s Work and Woman’s Culture: A Series of Essays articulates the continuing difficulties facing women, made worse by an economy about to dive into a severe depression¹⁸:

there remain both men and women who continue solemnly to inform the women who are striving for some work or calling which will save them from starvation, and who have no human being but themselves to depend on, that their proper sphere is *home*,—that their proper function is to be wives and mothers, and their happiness is to be dependent on men! Like Pharaoh, who commanded the Israelites to make bricks without the material to make them of, these moralizers command this multitude of inquiring women back to homes which are not, and which they have not the material to create. (xxviii-xxix)

The fortification of the traditional values surrounding women to which Butler refers came about largely in response to the feminist movements of the mid-Victorian period, particularly the agitation for women’s legal rights. The most obvious indicators

of the power of the feminist movement came in the form of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, and the Married Woman's Property Bill of 1857 and its eventual enactment in 1870, both of which enabled women to have more control over their bodies and their finances.¹⁹ Yet even as women were put in a better position to free themselves from bad marriages, hegemonically they were subjected to the increasingly compelling ideology of the domestic angel. In 1869, Frances Power Cobbe writes that "the domestic life and the passionate love of home are preached to a girl, even *ad nauseam*, as her special sphere and particular virtue" ("Final" 11).

This growing pressure to conform to the standards of the domestic angel coincided with a new understanding of middle-class girls as generally loose or promiscuous. This perception of girls had begun to circulate throughout Victorian society during the 1850s and increased dramatically during the 1860s, giving the impression of a kind of contagion within the heart of the family, reinforcing the need for hegemonic correction. Joan Perkin claims that "by the 1860s middle-class girls were becoming more flirtatious and sexually assertive. The journalist Eliza Lynn Lynton writing anonymously in the Saturday Review of 14 March 1868, trenchantly accused young women of behaving like courtesans" (55). While Michael Mason argues convincingly in his book The Making of Victorian Sexuality that this sort of perception of an escalation in feminine 'looseness' or 'forwardness' "can be traced back at least to the 1780s . . . and that it would be hard to make out a case for unmistakable change in frequency or character of reports of young women's behaviour over the successive decades of the nineteenth century," he goes on to remark on a single exception: the 1860s (119). Mason says that

the impression of girls' freedom and sexual adventurousness becomes so emphatic that the episode deserves isolating and considering on its own The evidence for 1860s emancipation comes from an encouragingly wide range of texts, including complaints of a new decline in standards, reminiscences about the period that are nostalgic for the good times it offered, and non-polemical writings (among them some fiction) which incidentally depict emancipated habits. (119-20)

This increasingly negative perception of girls stemmed largely from a sense of a decline in traditional morality and standards among women, a decline directly proportional to the growing feminist movement. A telling bit of legislation reveals an attempt early in the 1860s to recapture control over female bodies and feminine sexuality after the small liberties gained for women by the 1857 Matrimonial Causes (Divorce) Act. According to Perkin "an Act of 1803 made it illegal for anyone to assist a woman to procure an abortion, but the law was not broken if the woman sought her own miscarriage. The law was tightened in 1828 and again in 1837, and by an Act of 1861 self-abortion became an offence" (71).

The surge of agitation and turmoil surrounding women's roles which accompanied both the feminist push for independence from the domestic sphere and the impossibility for many women to attain the ideal for lack of marital opportunity, forms the context of this study. During the decade of the 1860s, women became the subject of intensifying hegemonic attention. Women best served hegemony as domestic angels, both at home and abroad; at the same time, many women were finding the traditional roles constrictive, if not all together impossible. The novels reveal evidence of the

struggle to define women, and on the basis of that definition, position them within particular roles within society.

My research is particularly concerned with the way in which women's novels functioned to foster the containment of women within hegemonically structured subject roles, and how the novels functioned to make them complicit with such control. At the same time, I wish to examine how women, through the medium of novels, were able to subvert those containment strategies.

The 'Woman's Novel': Domestic Realism and Sensationalism

Susan David Bernstein writes in her essay "Dirty Reading: Sensation Fiction, Women, and Primitivism," "the flood of sensation fiction on the Victorian literary marketplace of the 1860s posed a social catastrophe that threatened to erode literary standards and to undermine domestic tranquillity" (213). Keeping in mind that domestic tranquillity was none too tranquil, as we have seen above, what in fact the sensation fiction of this time focused on and interrogated were the traditional accepted roles for women in Victorian society. Bernstein argues that the sensation novel "transgress[es] conventional representations of middle-class gender roles, the sensation heroine is the bourgeois housewife turned villain: on the surface, the quintessential Victorian angel-in-the-house, but underneath an appealing demon of domestic crimes for which she is never convincingly punished" (216).

In her 1867 essay "Novels," Margaret Oliphant attacks the sensation novel for its portrayal of women. She writes that the sensation novel is "held up to us as the story of the feminine soul as it really exists underneath its conventional coverings" and yet this

hidden soul has “a very fleshly and unlovely record” (259). The heroines of these novels are portrayed in complete opposition to the socially valued characteristics of the domestic angel, while any representative domestic angel is dull by comparison: “the wickedness of the woman, her heartlessness and her self-indulgence, and utter blindness to everybody’s feelings but her own, render her profoundly interesting; and . . . good women are very dull shadows by her side” (271). Because novels are the “favourite reading of the young . . . one of the chief amusements of all secluded and most suffering people . . . [and] women and unoccupied persons,” which is to say, the most mentally vulnerable people of society, Oliphant argues that novels ought to uplift the reader and “to a great degree be pure from all noxious topics” (257). She decries the popular sensation novel for “unseemly references and exhibitions of forbidden knowledge . . . [and] stories of bigamy and seduction, those . . . revelations of things that lie below the surface of life” (258). Most particularly Oliphant complains of the representations of “young women, moved either by the will, foolhardiness of inexperience, or ignorance of everything that is natural and becoming to their condition” (258). She writes that sensation novels have no redeeming message, no underlying morality or reason for existence other than to excite the readers’ passions. Another reviewer shares a similar view in an 1865 review, complaining that in sensation novels, “on the whole, the wicked people have the happier fate” (Rae 198).

H.L. Mansel, writing in 1862, condemns sensation novels on much the same grounds. Like Oliphant, Mansel is concerned about the immense and vulnerable readership of these novels, and thus about their power to corrupt society as a whole. His suggestion that the sensation novel had appropriated the duties of religion reflects the

severity of the threat which sensation novels were believed to pose toward Victorian society:

A class of literature has grown up around us, usurping in many respects, intentionally or unintentionally, a portion of the preacher's office, playing no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation; and doing so principally, we had almost said exclusively, by 'preaching to the nerves'. . . . [These novels are] indications of a wide-spread corruption, of which they are in part both the effect and the cause; called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing themselves to foster the disease, and to stimulate the want which they supply. (482-3)

For Mansel, novels appropriate the preacher's task of molding and forming young female minds, engendering in them a diseased appetite for excitement, sensation, and vulgar knowledge. Mansel's criticism stems, like Oliphant's, from the way the authors offer characters which illustrate "repulsive virtue and attractive vice" (499). These illustrations are often attached to real contemporary events, lending them credibility and a veneer of the commonplace which Mansel argues creates a "morbid" interest in current events, where people become "thrilled with horror . . . by the thought that such things may be going on around us and among us" (489). It is the aura of truthfulness or reality which these novels engender which critics of the period feared created havoc amongst the reading public. In an often quoted sermon by the Archbishop of York concerning sensation novels, he says that

sensation stories were tales which aimed at this effect simply—of exciting in the mind some deep feeling of overwrought interest by the means of some terrible passion or crime. They want to persuade people that in almost every one of the well-ordered houses of their neighbours there was a skeleton shut up in some cupboard; that their comfortable and easy-looking neighbour had in his breast a secret story which he was always going about trying to conceal. (qtd. in Rae 203).²⁰

The effect of the novels then is to excite the readers into such a state that they cannot tell truth from fiction and begin to believe that everyone about them hides a desperate secret. This suspicion challenged the notions of middle class respectability and morality, the foundations of Victorian society.²¹ According to Thomas Boyle, “if the Victorian age in England represented the high point of modern civilization, its basic underpinning was the cosy [sic], bourgeois, God-fearing family life (93). Yet, as Elaine Showalter argues, in sensation novels, “we find a fantasy which runs counter to the official mythology of the Albert Memorial. In these novels, the death of a husband or wife comes as a welcome release, and spouses who lack the friendly agency of typhoid find desperate remedies in flight, divorce, and, ultimately, murder” (“Desperate Remedies” 1). Sensation novels challenge the ideologies of family and the domestic sphere, and most particularly, of the domestic angel. Boyle says “the benevolent dictator of a father was the head of the household [sic], but the centerpiece of the tableau was the demure, passionless wife and mother, ‘The Angel in the House’ as Coventry Patmore had it. The Sensation novel . . . implied that scratching one of these virtuous matrons might reveal a tigress” or a monster (93). Patrick Brantlinger expands, saying “The plots of sensation novels lead to the

unmasking of extreme evil behind fair appearances. In doing so, they threatened their first readers' cherished assumptions about women, marriage, and the fair appearances of the Victorian scene" ("Sensational" 11).

This credibility or sense of realism in the novels stemmed from two separate but equally authoritative sources. First, they were set in ordinary domestic situations. East Lynne (1861) takes place in an ordinary town involving ordinary households. Lady Audley's Secret (1861-2) is made real through prosaic details which would anchor the novel in the daily lives of its middle class readers. The details are mundane, about railways and food, clothing and weather, bad roads and dirty houses. This positioning of the sensation novel within a familiar domestic situation lends verisimilitude to characters who are generally middle class and with whom the largely middle class readers would find it easy to identify. Robert Audley in Lady Audley's Secret is described as an ordinary barrister with a penchant for stray dogs and a lazy manner. He reflects often on his housekeeper's mutton chops which though filling, are not particularly tasty, comparing them to the various meals he receives throughout his search for the missing George Talboys. Robert Audley's most significant characteristic lies in the negative—that he is not portrayed as particularly out of the ordinary; instead Braddon goes to great lengths to make him something of an everyman, or at least, a fairly typical middle-class man. As Peter Edwards asserts, "In the typical sensation novel . . . no matter how bizarre and complicated the stories, how deep-dyed the villainies, how doom-laden the atmosphere, the settings are always ordinary English households, [and] the characters are mostly harmless, unremarkable people" (7). It is just this lack of an extraordinary setting or uncommon characters which lends veracity and a sense of reality to the novels, and

which disturbed critics who said “into uncontaminated minds they will instill false views of human conduct A novel is a picture of life, and as such ought to be faithful. The fault of these [sensation] novels is that they contain pictures of daily life, wherein there are scenes so grossly untrue to nature” that they must be denounced (Rae 203).

Yet were these scenes of murder, bigamy, arson and mistaken identities really ‘grossly untrue’? The answer is no. Newspapers legitimized the fiction, making it more believable. Regular news accounts of murder and bigamy lent credibility to the sensation novels, combining with the aura of mundanity to further confirm these stories as truthful or real. Richard Altick argues in his account of various Victorian murder cases, “fiction . . . however sensationalized, could be regarded as a faithful transcript of contemporary life: there were the newspapers to prove it” (79).

Thomas Boyle discusses the relationship between newspaper headlines and sensation novels:

sensation novels appeared in the years immediately following the rise of the modern popular newspaper in Britain. News was cheaper, more immediate, more intrusive of privacy, and more plentiful. Much of this change took place most dramatically in the police reports and columns emerging from the newly-formed Divorce Court. (93-4)

Headlines about murder, bigamy and divorce could be read daily. Among them were the 1861 Yelverton bigamy-divorce trial, Madeleine Smith who poisoned her lover by putting poison in his cocoa in 1857, and sixteen year old Constance Kent who was accused of stabbing her four-year-old brother in 1860.²² Lyn Pykett claims that “the details of all these cases of bigamy, divorce and murder were communicated to the

ever-widening readership of a rapidly expanding newspaper press by the sensational reporting then enjoying a vogue” (Sensation Novel 2). And for the first time, these stories were not concealed from the delicate and vulnerable women at home, but “were carried across the domestic threshold to violate the sanctuary of home” (Pykett, Sensation Novel 2). In doing so, they became a source of corruption of the home, the family, and most particularly, of women.

Yet if such extravagant and often criminally-based plot devices as murder, bigamy, forgery, violence and disguised identity form the basis of sensation novels, what differentiates such novels as Charles Dickens’ Oliver Twist (1837-38), Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847), Elizabeth Gaskell’s Ruth (1853), and George Eliot’s Felix Holt (1866), all of which utilize such devices, from sensation novels?

Let us begin with Mansel’s 1862 definition of the sensation novel which remains valuable in separating the sensation novel from other types of novels of the period. According to Mansel,

a sensation novel, as a matter of course, abounds in incident. Indeed, as a general rule, it consists of nothing else. Deep knowledge of human nature, graphic delineations of individual character, vivid representations of the aspects of Nature or the workings of the soul—all the higher features of the creative art—would be a hindrance rather than a help to a work of this kind ‘Action, action, action!’ . . . is the first thing needful, and the second, and the third. The human actors in the piece are, for the most part, but so many lay-figures on which to exhibit a drapery of incident.

Allowing for the necessary division of all characters of a tale into male

and female, old and young, virtuous and vicious, there is hardly anything said or done by any one specimen of a class which might not with equal fitness be said or done by any other specimen of the same class. (486)

Mansel's contemporaries reiterate this definition. Oliphant contends that "their [sensation novels] construction shows, in some cases, a certain rude skill, in some a certain clever faculty of theft; but in none any real inventive genius; and as for good taste, or elegance, or perception of character, these are things that do not tell The events are the necessary things to consider, not the men" ("Novels" 261).

Lyn Pycket's definition echoes and expands Mansel's. From her twentieth-century perspective, she argues that sensation novels:

were mainly distinguished by their devious, dangerous and, in some cases, deranged heroes and (more especially) heroines. The sensation plot usually consisted of varying proportions and combinations of duplicity, deception, disguise, the persecution and/or seduction of a young woman, intrigue, jealousy, and adultery. The sensation novel drew on a range of crimes, from illegal incarceration (usually of a young woman), fraud, forgery (often of a will), blackmail and bigamy, to murder or attempted murder. . . . The sensation narrative is more than usually reliant on surprising events and extraordinary coincidences for its effects, and character is quite often subordinated to incident and plot. Mystery . . . is the dominant element. (Sensation 4)

While certainly many novels utilize such devices, from Richardson's Clarissa to Thackeray's Vanity Fair to Jane Eyre, Felix Holt, and Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles,

their main focus is on character development, on exploring their society, or on discovering a transcendental understanding of the world and the human relationship to it. Not so sensation novels. Sensation novels sought to entertain through emotional manipulation. Character development was scant, if present at all, while deeper exploration of anything else was negligible at best. Braddon proudly professed this conception of her own writing in her preface to Run to Earth (1868):

The author who provides his readers with a rapid narrative of stirring events will be more popular with the millions than the more profound writer whose greater depth of thought enables him to anatomize character and to depict the subtle emotions of mind. The author of Run to Earth believes in this dictum; and that, in short, novels are read, when read at all, for the amusement they afford, and not for the philosophical truths which they may contain. (qtd. in Edwards 21)

While there were those critics who felt that entertainment for the sake of entertainment was not particularly harmful to anyone, most agreed that these novels engaged in a “moral evasiveness” which, according to P.D. Edwards, gave the impression of advocating immorality and criminality (28). Perhaps this then, above all else, is what divided the sensation novel from other novels of the period. Edwards argues that “the failure to represent the motives for evil acts with anything approaching the realism, the particularity, and the emotional intensity that mark the dramatization of the acts themselves” was in direct contrast to the deeper explorations and purposes with which other novelists engaged these same plot devices (28). Brantlinger makes a similar point when he says that “most serious novels . . . involve a search for the self, the attempt of at

least one character to stake out a career or an identity in the social wilderness. In sensation and mystery novels, however, just as the intractable problem of evil is reduced to a neatly soluble puzzle on a personal level, so the search for self is short-circuited” (“Sensation” 22). Once the mystery is solved in a sensation novel, personal and social dilemmas are neatly wrapped up with little concern for deeper exploration of causes, larger implications, or moral messages. Brantlinger says “whereas serious literature imitates life partly by reducing and simplifying its scale and complexity, the mystery [sensation] novel imitates serious literature by carrying its reductive and simplifying tendencies to extremes” (“Sensation” 24). Such reductionism conceals the lack of realism in the world of the novel, a lack which suggests that the consequences for transgressive behavior will have little or no impact on the perpetrator’s family, community, or by implication, hegemony. This directly contradicts the ideology which insists that transgression will lead to disaster for the family, community and hegemony.

In the five novels I shall explore in the following pages, two are sensational novels. Braddon’s Lady Audley’s Secret (1861-2) and Ellen Wood’s East Lynne (1861) were two of the most popular sensation novels of the 1860s, and are often credited with having originated the genre.²³ Of the two, East Lynne is more moral, more supportive of traditional values of class, gender, and manners. Indeed the novel straddles the line between sensational and domestic realism, according to Margaret Oliphant’s understanding of domestic realism: “Their [the authors of domestic realism] stories were all family stories, their troubles domestic, their women womanly to the last degree” (“Novels” 265). Like sensation novels, domestic realist novels were set in small communities with ordinary middle-class characters. They were also generally written by

women for women, focusing on female characters, manners, local society, and the domestic situation. In each of the three domestic realist novels I have chosen, there are plot devices which would easily fit a sensation novel. The difference is that in none of these novels are these devices sensationalized. They are used to explore deeper issues of character, society, and particularly, the 'woman question.' Emily Eden's The Semi-attached Couple (1860) contains marital misunderstanding, misrepresented identity, and dramatic illness. Charlotte Yonge's The Clever Woman of the Family (1865) contains forgery, disguise, fraud, embezzlement, dramatic illness and several deaths, including a child and a woman in childbirth. Margaret Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks (1866) contains disguised identity, fraud, a love triangle, and financial ruin. Yet in spite of all these sensational devices, these three authors studiously avoid the sensationalizing of these topics. Rather they are presented matter of factly as a means of conveying moral messages, particularly concerning the roles of women.

I have chosen these novels for their popularity—all went through numerous printings and were in high demand in the circulating libraries, and were therefore read by many women. Thus the possibility of their influence was great. I have also chosen them because they are representative of their particular genres, though each offering richly varied perspectives on the 'woman question.' They are all written by women for women. Though men may have read them, critics couched their reviews in terms of their feminine creators and their expected feminine audience.

In contrast to sensation novels, domestic realist novels were perceived to present a more traditional view of woman and her sphere, reinforcing the domestic angel ideology, while the sensational novels challenged that ideology on many levels. Yet the

presentation of women and their roles in all of these novels is far more complex than the categories of domestic realism and sensationalism allow. Significantly, the novels are not published on a continuum—on a diachronic progression from traditional to radical—but instead overlap one another, offering both competing and complementary views of women and their roles within society and the domestic sphere. The proliferation of novels in the 1860s which are both written by women and which focus on women, of which these five are a tiny representative portion, indicates the pervasive cultural concern with the ‘woman question’ and the hegemonic struggles to suppress and defuse the growing turbulence and to recontain women within safe boundaries.

In the following pages, I will explore the various ideologies concerning women which these novels disseminated and reinforced, as well as the kinds of turbulence within hegemony which they generated by exposing the inconsistencies, contradictions, impossibilities and misconceptions of the domestic angel and the woman’s sphere.

Notes

¹ See Florence Nightingale: Saint, Reformer or Rebel? Ed. Raymond G. Hebert, Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1981. This collection offers a variety of essays on the subject of Nightingale's impact on women's roles.

² Interestingly, Poovey does not couch her argument in terms of Nightingale's "Cassandra" but instead she looks at Nightingale's nursing career and the narratives which surround it.

³ I would argue that the larger discourse cells which generated hegemony were comprised of the following populations: the aristocracy, middle class tradesmen, middle class industrialists, evangelicals, and the military. The working class had no representation, and little opportunity or power to affect hegemony. Though Gramsci argues that lower classes may create their own competing hegemony in resistance to the dominant hegemony, I believe that to be virtually impossible. The dominant hegemony will protect itself by suppressing turbulence. In England, the poor were rehabilitated and reeducated through Sunday school programs and visitations by their community superiors. Those who refused to conform to standards of behavior and dress were punished, while those who cooperated were rewarded. For the Victorian lower classes, conformity meant survival: jobs, food, housing. Given Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which postulates that a person whose basic needs are not fulfilled will be incapable of seeking beyond those needs, the mid-Victorian lower classes would be locked into a cycle of basic need fulfillment. Transgression would mean starvation and death. Thus it would be nearly impossible for the members of the mid-Victorian lower classes to organize and formulate a resistant hegemony, despite their numbers.

⁴ Resistance and revolt was not new to the British Empire. This rebellion, however, was reported in such bloody terms and involved the mass rape of women as well as the killing of children, that it shook the British people like nothing else had. For more on the Sepoy Rebellion, see chapter 4.

⁵ It should be noted that the British retaliation was equally, if not more, bloody and disturbing as the massacre by the Sepoys. See note 52 in chapter 4.

⁶ The French Revolution fostered increasing fears of a similar revolt amongst the English poor and lower classes. The increase in industrial technology put many people out of work, and Napoleon's Europe-wide ban on British goods worsened the crisis. Charlotte Bronte's Shirley (1849), set amongst the Luddite Riots of 1811-12, focuses on the rising discontent of the working class.

⁷ It is important to note that at this time, novels did not come under the designation of literature. Instead their defects were equated with those attributed to native literature which "lull[ed] the individual into a passive acceptance of the most fabulous incidents as actual occurrences; more alarming, the acceptance of mythological events as factual description stymied the mind's capacity to extrapolate a range of meanings for analysis and verification in the real world" (Viswanathan 20). Yet because of these very qualities, they were useful tools of inculcation.

⁸ Wesley's dictionary made no attempt to be comprehensive, but rather sought to provide a wide enough base of vocabulary to the poor so that they might read their Bibles, as well as the classical literature which he endeavored to edit and gloss for their use.

⁹ As Quinlan notes, Wesley's emendations focused on simplifying the texts for these basic readers, and removing those things which contradicted his teachings (31).

However, the Victorian anxiety over delicacy and refinement did not occur until the Evangelical movement hit its stride. Thus the works which Wesley edited do not reflect the prudishness for which the Victorian period would become known.

¹⁰ McClintock demonstrates that the trope of domesticity is fundamental to colonialism. By equating the natural relationship of woman and child to colonizer and colonized, the moral imperative of civilizing the barbaric spaces becomes inextricably linked with the metaphor of England as mother to a recalcitrant family (30-45).

¹¹ Mohanty's argument is aimed at the ways in which western feminist discourse conflates all third-world women's experiences, making presuppositions based on the experiences of western women. However, as she points out, her argument is valuable in the discussion of any implementation of discursive power structured in this fashion: "my argument holds for any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, e.g. the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse" (199).

¹² Mr. Collins is portrayed as obsequious and foolish and Elizabeth shuns marriage with him, though she may be left an old maid. Charlotte, on the other hand, agrees to marry him knowing his faults and accepting them because

without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of

giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (111)

¹³ In a letter to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Mary Elizabeth Braddon comments that she must not deviate too much from her popular sensationalist formula as “I have always to remember the interests of the Circulating Library, and the young lady readers who are its chief supporters” (Wolff 132).

¹⁴ This exhibition was predicated on the British nation as imperialist, the exhibition focusing on its colonial enterprises and economic strength in the world of trade.

¹⁵ While certainly Dickens is concerned with social issues in his earlier works, particularly Oliver Twist, his novels of the 1850s are far more focused on social problems and are, on the whole, far more grim.

¹⁶ Young discusses religious and political movements, as well as the impact of science and progress on mid-Victorian culture. Further, Young notes that economic speculation led to disaster in the form of panics in 1857 and 1866, and soon there was to be an economic depression. In 1857 the Neanderthal Man was discovered in Germany, further shaking institutional religion in Britain. At the same time, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, feminists were arguing loudly for women’s rights, threatening Britain’s most basic and fundamental institution: the family.

¹⁷ Susan Hamilton’s collection of Victorian women writers: ‘Criminals, Idiots, and Minors’: Victorian Writing by Women on Women, Broadview P, 1996, provides a more extensive contemporary discussion of women within Victorian culture.

¹⁸ England's economy had faced financial crises in 1857 and 1866. A panic occurred, caused by 'the cotton famine': the nearly complete deprivation of raw cotton imports from the United States as a result of the Civil War. According to James Adams, "in the winter of 1861-62 it is said that 500,000 people were being supported by public and private charity, and by 1863 it was necessary to start public works, the government making a loan of £1,500,000 and private subscribers helping to the extend of about £2,000,000" (184).

¹⁹ The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, also known as the Divorce Act, facilitated divorce by taking it out of the ecclesiastical courts and putting it instead in the civil courts. An amendment to the act in 1859 allowed the courts to review custody arrangements for the children and to place them with whichever parent was deemed best for the children, regardless of the original fault in the divorce suit. These changes in the law enabled women to not only escape bad marriages, but also to do so with their children. The Matrimonial Causes Act was further amended in 1878 to protect wives from the physical abuse of husbands. According to Mary Lyndon Shanley, "the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 helped lay to rest the notion that a husband's authority over his wife's body gave him the right to chastise her physically" (169).

²⁰ The sermon was reported in the Times on November 2, 1864.

²¹ Yet, as I argue in chapter 3, suspicion was an important element in the function of the panoptical power pyramid. The difference here is that reader suspicion is not hegemonically channeled safely and usefully.

²² Richard Altick's Victorian Studies in Scarlet (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970) explores the Victorian fascination with murder and crime. His study presents a variety of cases sensationalized in the newspapers.

²³ While Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White often makes a triumvirate of these foundational sensation novels, it has also often been separated out as more serious and realistic and has been categorized amongst the better realist novels of the period.

Chapter II

A Woman's 'True Mission'

"It is the role of ideology to construct people as subjects." As a result of ideological influence, people "adopt the subject-positions necessary to their participation in the social formation" (Catherine Belsey 356-8).

The Angel and the Monster

Feminine Antecedents

In his study, The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800, Lawrence Stone quotes the Homily on Marriage which, according to Stone, "was the eighteenth of the many from which all parsons were ordered by the Crown to read in church every Sunday from 1562 onwards" (138). The roots of the Victorian conception of woman as too frail and gentle for her own safety and health are reflected in the Homily: "the woman is a weak creature not endued [sic] with like [to a man's] strength and constancy of mind; therefore, they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind" (qtd. in Stone 138). Stone goes on to say that "the ideal woman of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was weak, submissive, charitable, virtuous and modest Her function was housekeeping, and the breeding and rearing of children" (138). This domestic conception of women was reflected in the Victorian

idealization of the angel in the house and the correlative women's sphere. However, that same Homily goes on to denounce the innate lack of morality in women. This appears to be a contradiction of its own logic, and marks a seemingly vast difference from the later Victorian perception of women which posited them as the moral core of the family and the nation. Françoise Basch explains this contradiction in part, saying that "until the seventeenth century, the Pauline conception of the tempting and sinful woman, a permanent threat to spirituality and mysticism, was more or less universal. [However] it was to be definitively abandoned in nineteenth-century England" (4).

I would disagree with Basch's assessment. Rather than abandoning the perception of women as a threat to England, I believe that the opposite occurred. As women were invested with more implicit and explicit forms of power, they gained more autonomy and authority within the domestic sphere. This expansion of influence only intensified the cultural anxiety raised by the risk inherent in enfranchising women with domestic power, the same anxiety underlying the ideology of woman-as-threat.¹ The same strengths which qualified a woman for the management of the domestic sphere, also, and paradoxically, disqualified her to hold so much power. Robin Gilmour argues that "women were felt to be at the mercy of their biology; menstruation, pregnancy, child-rearing, and the menopause were unsettling (and little understood) female phenomena, likely to make women unreliable. . . and there was no lack of prestigious, conservative doctors willing to say so in public" (191). Such heightened fears, corroborated as they were by science, served hegemonically as justification in circumscribing this feminine power, containing it within set limits, and consequently

precluding any possibility for hegemonic subversion or rupture. I discuss those systems of containment in detail in Chapter 3.

Between Patriarchy and Imperialism

Because the dominant discourse cells which constituted hegemony emerged out of the needs of the masculine constituency—women having little or no legal or political power—it can be argued that the imperial hegemony was also patriarchal in nature. Not only must the needs of imperialism be met, but also there must be preservation and support for the maintenance of patriarchal culture.

During the Victorian era, the family served as the bastion of patriarchy, one naturalized and protected by the patriarchal institutions of law and religion. As Joan Perkin argues in her study of Victorian women:

the traditional patriarchal family [was] dominated by the father and bolstered by law. . . . Marriage sanctified by religion was a sacrament The man was protector, chief breadwinner and head of the household. The wife and children were expected to be obedient and submissive to his rules. By marriage, husband and wife became one person in law—and that person was he. He had almost complete control over her body, and their children belonged to him. Unless a marriage settlement arranged things differently, the husband was entitled to all his wife's property, and he could claim any money she earned. (73)

Women's roles were constructed around the socially venerated characteristics of women which Victorians recognized as both ideal and paradigmatic, and which contributed to the perpetuation of the patriarchal family structure—self-effacement, self-sacrifice, moral purity, generosity, obedience, duty and service, particularly to male authority, be it brother, father, husband, or uncle. These characteristics of the 'true woman' or the domestic angel reinforced the patriarchal ideologies permeating the culture. Pat Jalland writes in Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914, "Victorian social thought emphasized the 'natural' separation of the spheres between the sexes It was widely accepted, even by many suffragists, that physiological and intellectual differences between the sexes fitted males for the public sphere and females for their domestic world" (7). The domestic sphere, while ostensibly given completely to woman's governance, was contained within the ruling province of the male family head. So long as the woman managed the household or performed her duties appropriately, he need not interfere in the day-to-day regimen. However, his role as "the head of the family, and the corresponding physical and mental inferiority of the woman" established a burden of responsibility on the man to care for the woman's needs, sometimes in spite of herself (Basch 16). A woman had few rights and could not gainsay her husband who it was believed behaved in accordance with her own good, and the good of his family, and by implication, the good of society and the nation.² She was subject to his approval at all times, as she was made completely dependent on his good will—no matter their specific relationship: mother to son, daughter to father, wife to husband, and so on.

We see an extraordinary case of masculine domestic power played out in East Lynne. Both Mrs. Hare and her daughter Barbara are subject to the autocratic and often arbitrary strictures of Mr. Hare.³ He has encroached on the feminine domestic sphere, which, though not considered his province, is his right as the owner of the household and patriarchal head of the family. His comprehensive dominance is revealed early in the novel, when Mrs. Hare complains of terrible thirst. She fears ordering tea even a moment early and thereby incurring her husband's wrath. In spite of the fact that he is not at home, and that he would not know if she took her tea some minutes earlier than his schedule dictates, her deeply ingrained obedience to him prevents her from even considering breaking such a minor rule without his permission:

It may occur to the reader that a lady in her own house, 'dying for her tea,' might surely order it brought in, although the customary hour had not struck. Not so Mrs. Hare. Since her husband had first brought her home to that house, four-and-twenty years ago, she had never dared to express a will in it; scarcely, on her own responsibility, to give an order. Justice Hare was stern, imperative, obstinate, and self-conceited; she, timid, gentle, and submissive. She had loved him with all her heart, and her life had been one long yielding of her will to his: in fact, she had no will; his, was all in all. (Wood 17)

On the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Douglas in Emily Eden's The Semi-attached Couple rarely interferes with his wife, despite her failure to properly discharge her domestic responsibilities, as revealed in her spitefulness and snobbery. However,

even he is moved to reprimand her when she fails to aid a young woman in need of her advice and influence. She responds with contrition, aware that she has neglected her culturally assigned feminine role: “Mr. Douglas was so seldom roused to anger that a lecture from him had a startling effect on his wife” (183). She apologizes to him and promises to alter her behavior. While she does not undergo a personality change—there is no expectation that she will suddenly lose her acerbic tongue—she does protect the younger, more helpless women from the unnatural and vindictive Lady Portmore.

These two opposing examples of the domestic sphere provide us a view into the hierarchy of patriarchy and the function of women within it. Women who either seek to traverse beyond the domestic sphere or who neglect the duties thereof challenge the patriarchy fundamental to the institutional foundation of Victorian Britain: from Parliament to education, from church to business. As we will see, the hegemonically approved feminine roles within mid-Victorian Britain served both imperialist and patriarchal ideologies. And though both were often compatible, they at times clashed. The site of such turbulence exposed to scrutiny the structure of hegemony and its component ideologies, offering the opportunity to challenge cultural habits and traditions which contained and disempowered women. This incompatibility is fundamental to understanding how women were able to step outside of controlling ideologies and undermine the mechanisms of containment, a point I take up in more depth later in this book. The limits then imposed on women in an effort to circumscribe the power of the domestic sphere not only furthered the imperialist agenda, but also supported and furthered the patriarchal regime.

Sensationalism and Domestic Realism

Those limits were demarcated by ideologies which defined the ideal woman in terms of selfless sacrifice, self-effacement, humility, morality, virtue and docility. Her realm of influence was the domestic sphere. According to Elaine Harnell in her essay “‘Nothing but Sweet and Womanly’: A Hagiography of Patmore’s Angel,” the ideal woman had “no existence outside the context of her home and . . . [her] whole window on the world [was] her husband” (460). This ideal became the object of Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House” (1854-1862). In this landmark poem, Patmore succeeded in codifying this ideal into a paradigm of the feminine domestic norm. For the proper Victorian woman, the domestic norm and the feminine ideal merged, the demands and limits of which left little room to subvert either hegemony or patriarchy.⁴

This construction of femininity which postulated formerly ideal characteristics as typical resulted in gaps between expectation and application. The domestic angel ideology demanded perfection from inherently flawed subjects.⁵ In Miss Marjoribanks, Margaret Oliphant pointedly calls attention to the discrepancies intrinsic to the domestic angel ideology. When Doctor Marjoribanks discusses marriage with his daughter Lucilla, the narrator says “he was a wordly man himself, and he thought his daughter a wordly woman; and yet, though he thoroughly approved of it, he still despised Lucilla a little for her prudence, which is a paradoxical state of mind not very unusual in the world” (397). The doctor both values and “despises” his daughter’s prudence—one of the most lauded characteristics of the domestic angel. Oliphant’s assertion that such a point of view was culturally common in 1866 when the novel was first published, gives a sense of the

conflicting expectations which women must attempt to meet, and how difficult it was to become a domestic angel when even a woman's father might disapprove of the very qualities which she works hardest to cultivate. Yet as Hartnell argues, the domestic angel "ultimately became an a priori assumption, embedded into the domestic discourses of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and beyond. The fictional woman behind the . . . angel rapidly became unremarkable as the discourses that constructed her were absorbed into the greater fabric of the dominant [i.e. hegemony]" (473). According to Frances Power Cobbe in her 1869 essay "The Final Cause of Woman,"

we are driven to conclude, both that a woman is a more mysterious creature than a man, and also that it is the general impression that she is made of some more plastic material, which can be advantageously manipulated to fit our theory about her nature and office, whenever we have come to a conclusion as to what that nature and office may be. 'Let us fix our own Ideal in the first place,' seems to be the popular notion, 'and then the real Woman in accordance thereto will appear in due course of time. We have nothing to do but to make round holes, and women will grow round to fill them; or square holes, and they will become square. Men grow like trees, and the most we can do is to lop or clip them. But women run in moulds, like candles, and we can make them long-threes or short-sixes, whichever we please.' (1-2)

In this satirical passage, Cobbe points to the fabricated nature of the domestic angel, likening women to commodities which can and have been manufactured for hegemonic

purposes. In her study on representations of fallen women in Victorian literature, Sally Mitchell argues that Victorian women

were . . . property. The father of an unmarried woman could sue her seducer for the loss of her services. A woman who married disappeared as a legal entity. Her husband owned all she possessed and everything she might earn. He could restrain and chastise her—lock her up, keep her from seeing her children, beat her at will. . . . She couldn't sue him or charge him with battery because, in the eyes of the courts, she had no separate existence. . . . For a woman to control her own body—to dispose of it or authorize its use as she saw fit—interfered with the property rights of her husband or father. (*Fallen* xi)

Like any other commodity, women had particular use-value in Victorian culture. For Cobbe, the feminine ideal emerged previous to the reality in the context of that use-value, and was then imposed on women, just as candle-molds are constructed and then filled with wax to formulate candles of predetermined specifications.

Both the domestic realist novel and the sensation novel address the difficulty and often impossibility of conforming to roles premised on the angelic ideal. Both these genres are anchored in the ordinary domestic situation. This setting of everyday, middle-class life and customs is what sets the sensation novel apart from the gothic novel. However, as Amy Kaplan argues, realism serves as means to impose order on a chaotic social situation; “it is a fictional conceit, or deceit, packaging and naturalizing an official version of the ordinary” (1).⁶ Kaplan maintains that realism failed its function for two

primary reasons. First, she argues that no dense social fabric could be captured linguistically. It is equally unfeasible that any one version of reality can account for the variant versions proffered by the competing discourse cells of mid-Victorian Britain, all of which sought to maintain themselves in the growing political, social, and technological disorder which had become particularly intense in the decade of the 1860s (1-2).⁷ For Kaplan, realist novels impose order on chaos, “actively constructing the coherent social world they represent” (9). She contends that realism is a “strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change” (10). For Kaplan, realist novels, and I would argue sensation novels, “do more than juggle competing visions of social reality; they encompass conflicting forms and narratives which shape that reality” (13). For example, East Lynne offers both the sensationalized scandal of Isabel Vane and the subplot of the murder mystery, while at the same dramatizing the ordinary domesticity of the middle class home and society. The novel challenges traditional perceptions of ‘proper’ womanhood, while at the same time proffering hegemonically approved conceptions of class and patriarchy. It is Mr. Carlyle’s failure in his role as the head of the family, allowing the encroachment of his domineering sister Miss Carlyle into his wife’s domain, that propels Isabel into running away. At the same time, Wood underscores the unsuitability of a marriage which crosses class lines. Even Mr. Carlyle acknowledges that until his spur-of-the-moment proposal after discovering the abuse Isabel had suffered from her aunt: “the idea of making her my wife had not previously occurred to me as practicable . . . [because] I deemed her rank incompatible wity [sic] my own” (117). Sally Mitchell writes that “the book exemplifies middle-class values yet subverts the

authoritarianism of a patriarchal father; it takes up issues of perfect ladyhood, feminine individuality, divorce, sexuality, repression and revenge” (Introduction vii).

I am interested in how the novels served hegemony in promoting particular roles for women based on the domestic angel norm/ideal, as well as what modes of resistance and subversion were reflected within the novels. As Edith Honig point out, “it is questionable how closely women adhered to this ideal picture, but it is certainly the standard by which middle- and upper-class women were judged.”⁸ True Womanhood was strenuously promoted in the women’s magazines of the period, as well as the religious literature and books devoted to self-improvement” (12). These novels, written nearly contemporaneously, offer competing and complementary versions of proper womanhood opposed against ‘unnatural’ women. In doing so, they expose the unstable and unsettled ontological and ideological constructions of Victorian femininity.

The Feminine Abject

Thomas Boyle argues that the sensation novel arose largely in response to the “deep confusion which existed . . . over the relationship between the real and the ideal” (93). In particular, “though women were lauded as men’s conscience and as repositories of virtue, they were also held to be easily corruptible. Eve, not Adam, had been tempted by the serpent, and this showed that women were innately sinful” (Perkin 229).

Women, seeking to conform to the societal domestic angel norm, continuously battled with that interior sinful nature. Specifically, they confronted the feminine abject: that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions,

rules” (Kristeva 4). In Anne McClintock’s useful discussion of the abject, she states that the “abject is everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social [An individual must] expunge certain elements that society deems impure” (71). For Victorian women, those elements of their nature—the feminine abject—which they sought to ‘expunge’ included sexuality, male-associated behavior and speech, vanity, artifice, passionate emotions and any appearance of discontent. Yet the abject cannot be removed, nor completely contained.⁹ McClintock draws on the work of Julia Kristeva, explaining that:

these expelled elements can never be fully obliterated; they haunt the edges of the subject’s identity with the threat of disruption or even dissolution Defying sacrosanct borders, abjection testifies to society’s precarious hold over the fluid and unkempt aspects of psyche and body. . . . [Abjection] imperils social order with the force of delirium and disintegration. (McClintock 71).

Thus the feminine abject cannot be destroyed or even far banished. It remains hidden, but readily available and eager to return. It is particularly dangerous in weaker willed women who are not able to resist their darker sides without constant discipline and the threat of punishment for transgression.

The abject is particularly menacing because it shrouds itself in the appearance of the acceptable:

He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious,

liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you (Kristeva 4)

This concept of abjection—the active concealment of culturally prohibited behavior and traits—highlights the foundation upon which Victorian culture was built, upon which all systems of power depended: appearances. Elaine Showalter argues that “secrecy . . . [was] a condition of middle-class life” and more than that, “secrecy was basic in the lives of *all* respectable women” (“Desperate” 2). What hegemony feared was feminine abjection and the consequent threat imposed by locating women in categories essential to the maintenance of empire and patriarchy, and assigning them the quality of superior morality over men.

For example, Lady Audley’s menace exists not in her machinations and murder plots, but in her plausible public veneer of normalcy, the outward appearance of the domestic angel hiding a rotten core of abjection: conniving (and murderous) machinations to promote her own survival at the expense of both her husband and family:

Wherever she went she seemed to take joy and brightness with her. In the cottages of the poor her fair face shone like a sunbeam. She would sit for a quarter of an hour talking to some old woman, and apparently as pleased with the admiration of a toothless crone as if she had been listening to the compliments of a marquis; and when she tripped away . . . the old woman would burst out into senile raptures with her grace, her beauty, and her

kindliness, such as she never bestowed upon the vicar's wife

Everyone loved, admired, and praised her. (6)

And yet this angelic appearance hides a monstrous interior. Later in the novel, while playing the shy, innocent wife to her husband Sir Michael Audley, Lady Audley smiles, thinking "I can twist him which way I like. I can put black before him, and if I say it is white, he will believe me" (282). In taking on the guise of innocence, Lady Audley clearly recognizes that she must not publicly reveal any abject or monstrous qualities; instead she accepts them, seeking to improve her situation through manipulation and subterfuge. What in the end is so detestable about her behavior (for the rest of the book's characters, and for the readers as well) is her deft ability to disguise her monstrous nature. In doing so, she not only appears to be a domestic angel, but she becomes representative, even stereotypical.¹⁰ Lady Audley's successful deception exposes the cultural anxiety attached to investing so much trust in women. The disguised demon in the midst is to be most feared because she is not subject to punishment or discipline so long as she maintains an acceptable facade. And so long as she remains hidden, the more damage she may do, particularly in her position of authority which lends her enormous influence over her community.

Yet even a paragon of virtue such as Margaret Oliphant's Lucilla Marjoribanks might be tempted to take advantage of misconception, flattery and deception.¹¹ Her lauded social success depends on her ability to quickly capitalize on any given situation, though for the good of the community rather than selfish reasons. For example, when she aids in the political campaign of Mr. Ashburton, she convinces Major Brown that he

influenced Mr. Ashburton into running for the local Member of Parliament position. She pretends that the Major, rather than she herself, said the fateful words which set Mr. Ashburton to run. By convincing him, she obligates the Major to serve on the candidate's committee and publicly support him. She says:

I am sure it was that as much as anything that influenced Mr. Ashburton.

He was turning it all over in his mind, you know, and was afraid the people he most esteemed in Carlingford would not agree with him, and did not know what to do; and then you said, What did it matter about opinions, if it was a good man?—that was what decided him . . . (379)

Major Brown replies that he is sure it was Lucilla who made the inspiring comment, which is in fact the case. Even so, the Major is willing to be convinced, flattered that he has had such an influence on someone. He thus gives his support to Mr. Ashburton, in spite of his original intent to back Mr. Cavendish. While Lucilla certainly believes that Mr. Ashburton is the better man for the job and thus for the Carlingford Community, she accomplishes her campaign on his behalf through manipulation and even outright lies.

Thus we can see that the monster continued to pose a threat, as nature cannot completely be conquered, but only tamed. As Gilbert and Gubar note, “every angel in the house . . . is really, perhaps, a monster” (29). Therefore, for both their own safety, and the security and preservation of the nation, women must not only be taught to suppress that terrible nature, but must also be subject to cultural surveillance and punishment in order to guarantee that they maintain their proper subject roles. That women continued to be identified as dangerous resulted in the pervasive perception of feminine cultural

menace. Victorian hegemony protected itself through a promotion of the status quo, weaving a web of ideologies which reinforced the cultural belief that feminine transgression was not only dangerous to the maintenance of the nation and the welfare of the culture, but it also violated the divinely constituted natural order of things.¹² The patriarchal family became the fundamental social mechanism in the management and legislation of women for the preservation of hegemony. According to Lyn Pykett, “the improper feminine could only be contained within the patriarchal family, an institution which it also constantly threatened to dissolve or destroy [through the abject]. This discourse of containment and threat . . . was used to reinforce masculine control of both women and the family” (*Improper Feminine* 56).

The Angel in the House

While women as monsters threatened hegemony, women as angels served it in an invaluable and irreplaceable way. In 1865 in *Sesame and Lilies*, John Ruskin offered this definition of the domestic angel:

She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service. (87-8)

Ruskin's description indicates a vision of womanhood which is incorruptible, gentle, self-effacing, pure, selfless, modest, and devoted to the service of her husband and family. He couches his description in terms of a woman's service to her husband, revealing the pervasive cultural association of true womanhood with the patriarchal family.

Victorian scholars have focused on this concept of womanhood in recent years, including such landmark scholarship as produced by Sally Mitchell, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, and Mary Poovey. Here the angel is traditionally discussed in relation to women's oppression by a patriarchal system, particularly in terms of diffusing her threat of feminine sexuality. But such explorations often suggest a generally linear progression of women's oppression and resistance over time. This does not adequately account for the richness and depth of the social fabric, the web of ideologies and competing discourses which comprised the Victorian world. Nor does this scholarship sufficiently problematize the concept of the angel, which is commonly perceived merely as a method of patriarchal control, rather than as an integral cog in the machinery of hegemony.¹³ The angel certainly served as a means of containment and control because women were trapped in a true paradox of unachievability and normalization. Women were constantly pushed to become the impossible, constantly forced to acknowledge their failures and flaws, thus they were contained within a cycle consisting of an endless quest for impossible perfection. At the same time, this concept of women also served specific hegemonic needs. In her discussion of how women functioned as "boundary markers of empire," Anne McClintock contends that "women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in

space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge” (24). Women as domestic angels epitomized England to its colonies, providing a signifier of the maternal nurturer, caretaker, and moral leader.¹⁴ McClintock writes that “the cult of domesticity . . . became central to British imperial identity. . . . colonialism took shape around the Victorian invention of domesticity and the idea of the home” (36), to which the angel in the house was a fundamental component. Domestically, the angel formed the nucleus of the Victorian family, the bedrock of Victorian culture and the imperial enterprise. Thus the domestic angel ideology not only contained women, but served a larger purpose within Victorian culture.

The continuing belief in woman’s innate weakness and her inclination toward evil is repeatedly referenced in the conduct books, fiction, poetry and prose of the period, but most significantly, and with probably the most culturally profound influence, in Patmore’s poem, “The Angel in the House.” In this poem, Patmore characterizes the Victorian feminine ideal in the persona of the pure and virtuous Honoria, acknowledging woman’s unseen monstrous nature, saying “To the sweet folly of the dove . . . she joins the cunning of the snake” (“Angel” 161).¹⁵ The narrator continues complain that

Her Mode of candour is deceit;

And what she thinks from what she’ll say

(Although I’ll never call her cheat)

Lies far as Scotland from Cathay. (“Angel” 161)

In their landmark feminist study of Victorian woman writers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write that Patmore “is here acknowledging his beloved’s . . . stubborn autonomy

and unknowable subjectivity, meaning the ineradicable selfishness that underlies even her angelic renunciation of self” (27). Patmore accepts as natural the monstrous abject within even the most idealized woman, for in this passage Honoria uses her “wiles” to “forg[e] chain and trap” so as to discharge her divine duties of keeping her fiancé “devout,” even “against his nature” (161). Patmore does not criticize his love here, but acknowledges the abject portion of her nature, revealing the underlying ontological truth of the Angel role: that even the best women, like their primeval mother Eve, are fundamentally tainted and therefore dangerous.

Among the characteristics Patmore considers unfeminine or abject are rationality, worldly knowledge, sexuality, and outspoken or “male” behaviors (Hartnell 464-66). This conception both reiterates and documents widely held conceptions of woman, codifying not only the positive ontological characteristics of the Victorian feminine which would later become the angel ideal and norm, but also the feminine abject, which would continue to circulate within cultural awareness, thus creating a ready knowledge base from which to recognize identifying signifiers. For neither Lady Audley’s nor Ruth’s nor Isabel Vane’s disguises defy all scrutiny. In the end, the surveillance structure of the Victorian system of power prevails. While the power structure encourages complicity amongst the populace, it makes allowances for possible failures of compliance, engaging a policing system of surveillance, discipline and punishment which permeates every level of society. The hegemonic gaze relentlessly pries even into the private sphere, carried by authorized representatives which include everyone from servants—think of Joyce

recognizing Isabel Vane, in spite of the other's disfigurements—to guests and trusted family members.

Patmore stresses that the monstrous potential inherent within women, a defect passed down from the primeval mother Eve, was manageable rather than inevitable. A woman, rather than existing in complete subjection to her monstrous nature, and therefore worthless except as a vessel of procreation, could choose to suppress her corrupt tendencies, and rise to the position of the domestic angel.¹⁶ The nature of that role is to serve the masculine head of her household.¹⁷ Patmore says:

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,

She leans and weeps against his breast,
 And seems to think the sin was hers . . .
 She loves with love that cannot tire;
 And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
 through passionate duty love springs higher ("Angel" 83)

The construction of the domestic angel around the imperative of service generates its own safeguards against the feminine abject and its potential dangerous effects. For the abject is immediately relegated to the realm of non-service, and thus becomes punishable.

Internal Battles

In the women's novels of the 1850-60s, female characters are often portrayed as tempted by their monstrous natures, with the option of succumbing or rising above them. For instance, in East Lynne, Isabel Vane yields to jealousy and, though married, participates in an affair with Francis Levinson, who turns out to be a murderer. Ellen Wood, the author, stresses the lack of intention on Isabel's part, pointing to the power of the monstrous side of woman's nature: "Oh, reader! Never doubt the principles of poor Lady Isabel, her rectitude of mind, her wish and endeavour to do right, her abhorrence of wrong; her spirit was earnest and true, her intentions were pure" (183). Yet Isabel cannot stave off the innate evil of woman's nature: "She was aware that a sensation all too warm, a feeling of attraction towards Francis Levinson, was working within her; not a voluntary one; she could no more repress it than she could repress her own sense of being" (177). Ultimately she endangers the reputation of her husband (who must sue for

divorce) and abandons her children (enjoining a mere servant to take over her motherly role) and later gives birth to an illegitimate child—the final proof of her monstrosity.

Similarly Ruth, of Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth, gives in to a seducer who appeals to her vanity and discontent. In the course of attempting to raise her illegitimate child and fill the role of the angel, her lies corrupt her benefactors, Mr. Benson and Faith, as well as one of her charges when she turns governess. Jemima, the eldest of the Bradshaw girls for whom Ruth becomes responsible as the governess, allows the charade to continue rather than reveal Ruth's background, and thus participates in the lie.

In fact, most of the female characters of woman-authored novels are seen to battle with this inherent evil component of their natures, many times failing as do Isabel Vane and Lady Audley, though not always so fatally. Barbara Hale, the nearest representative to an angel figure in East Lynne, confesses her love and resentment of Archibald Carlyle in a hysterical scene after she has worked herself "up to that state of nervous excitement when temper, tongue, and imagination fly off at a mad tangent" (137). Following his chastisement, she becomes kinder, more caring of her ailing mother. The memory of her hysterics serve to curb her emotions so that she may behave as a woman is supposed to, so that she may better serve her family, and later, better raise her children and function as a wife: "Barbara had grown more gentle and tender of late years, the bitterness of her pain had passed away, leaving all that had been good in her love to mellow and fertilize her nature. Her character had been greatly improved by sorrow" (192).

Middle-class Subject Roles for Women

Angel and Nation

Before embarking on any discussion of the specific roles considered appropriate for women in the Victorian period, it is essential to understand the function of the various female roles within the Victorian hegemony, specifically, their importance to the maintenance and deployment of empire and patriarchy.¹⁸ Mary Poovey stresses that the ability to perceive “that the national character was a domestic character” occurred only “because women made it so by making the home moral, [and] tidy” (*Uneven* 161). The British domestic family had come to serve as a microcosm of empire: “this patriarchal family was regarded by many people as the essential building block of a civilized society. The Victorian family—by which was meant the affluent middle-class family . . . won for itself a reputation as a noble institution upon whose continuance depended all that was fine and stable in Britain” (Perkin 74). Empire structured itself in a hierarchical configuration similar to that of the British middle class family, requiring of the colonized subject a that kind of loyalty, devotion, and unquestioning obedience that was expected within the family.¹⁹

If the family served as a microcosm of empire, the mother symbolized the British national conception of itself as the motherland—a nurturing, morally superior, civilizing entity which must administer to her children, the colonies. This image was cemented by the motherly Queen Victoria who represented publicly the domestic angel ideal: “Victoria achieves a domestic situation which she consciously opposes to the licentiousness of the court and which her era and our own have considered the ideal of

mid-century domesticity” (Helsing 66). According to James Adams in The British Empire 1784-1939, with Victoria came the end of Hanover line and

the British crown was freed from its last Continental possession and connection More than that, the despicable, dissolute, disliked and even hated line of monarchs had given place to a simple, virtuous and beautiful girl whom the nation could idolize and idealize. At that moment when reform was in the air at home and the Empire could be linked together only through the Crown, the wearer of that Crown had become an innocent but well-trained girl, who won all hearts and could portray all the qualities most revered by the middle class . . . and could also symbolize in the growing and increasingly self-governing Empire the glory of a common link and destiny. (116-117)

Representing the imperial project in terms of a loving mother defused the perception of Britain as a greedy conqueror, which might have resulted in domestic resistance by an increasingly moralistic population, as well as the unpalatable and inescapable comparison between Britain’s traditional enemies and competitors: the Spanish conquistadors of the Elizabethan period, and more recently and potentially more devastating to the imperial project, Napoleon. Instead, the conception of Britain as mother and the colonies as children created an iconography of the imperial mission as one of divine benevolence and dutiful responsibility.

The British nation as mother was advertised in the same terms as the domestic angel: self-effacing, self-sacrificing, pure, dutiful, submissive, and morally superior.

Much of this description might seem ludicrously contradictory to actual colonial tactics. However an imperial ideology based on the purest motives of moral necessity, divine duty, and respectful submission to the commands of God functioned domestically to generate a wellspring of public support and a national spirit which insisted on the imperative of persisting in the imperial project. Women as domestic angels were fundamental to the success of this project.

In Sesame and Lilies, John Ruskin argues for the separate sphere of women. Significantly, he posits women as domestic angels, protected from the external world by men:

By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued, often misled, and *always* hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division . . . it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth. (86-7)

Having divided the spheres, Ruskin then makes a claim for women—specifically wives—as having central importance as signifiers of civilization within the imperial mission:

wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her. The stars only may be over her head; the glow-worm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot: but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless. (87)

Women here are more than symbolic of civilization, they physically embody it. Ruskin goes so far as to say that women are not only the cornerstone of the home, of the family, but they *are* the home. Without a woman, a domestic angel specifically, there can be no home, no civilizing light. Anne McClintock correlates this embodiment of civilization within women with the imperial project. She argues that the imperial structure situates “women . . . as the visible markers of national homogeneity, [and thus] they become subjected to especially vigilant and violent discipline” (365). Homogeneity here can be defined as Britishness—homogenous in so much as it presents itself to its colonies as a unified hegemony: motherly, superior, and civilized. Because the ideal of the domestic angel was vertically integrated through every dimension of the hegemony’s discourse cells, the cultural metaphor of Britain as a mother to her colonies became possible. As Rowbotham states:

Without women, the middle-class ideal of family would collapse; without the family unit England could not continue to hold the position of moral pre-eminence on which her worldly success was founded If England was the Mother Country, the pivot on which the welfare of her offspring

colonies depended, then the professional mother . . . was the pivot on which England herself depended. (196)

Thus during the mid-Victorian period, empire and the patriarchal family, with the domestic angel as the keystone, mutually reinforced each other, each necessitating the other. Both institutions functioned together not only as the primary generative catalysts for the Victorian hegemony, but both also functioned to deploy and preserve hegemony.

Redundant Women

The fundamental importance to hegemony of the patriarchal family made the issue of the so-called redundant women in Britain worrisome. William Greg's famous essay "Why Are Women Redundant?" which appeared in 1862 in the National Review underscores how problematic the overabundance of women, particularly middle class women, had become. He says:

there is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong. (436)

Greg's rhetoric is inflammatory, indicative of the magnitude of the problem and the danger it presented to hegemony, particularly in terms of the patriarchal family. He posits these single women as contributing to "abnormal" and "unwholesome" social conditions, their mere presence inevitably leading to "wretchedness and wrong." Greg further

comments that these women, because they do not have “the natural duties and labours of wives and mothers . . . are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own” (436).²⁰ These redundant women were perceived as symptomatic of the failure of the middle class family, and thus of the eventual degeneration of the Empire and patriarchy. Such harsh realities as the surplus of marriageable women “brought up to regard marriage and the maintaining of an establishment as the highest female ambition” (Trollope 24) compounded circulating hegemonic fears about the destruction of the patriarchal family and the consequent danger to the Empire caused by the political and social agitation of feminists.²¹ Thus the domestic angel ideology must be reinforced to secure the safety of the nation.

During the 1860s then, hegemonic ideologies began to give extra emphasis to the importance of family and to the woman’s role at the center of the domestic sphere in the face of the rising feminist movements which were perceived as making women unfit for that same domestic sphere. Margaret Oliphant’s description of the reality of a single woman’s independence strips away the romantic glamour of such a state as idealized by feminists of the period, reinforcing traditional female roles.²² In Miss Marjoribanks, while Oliphant realistically presents marriage as often difficult and limiting for women, by comparison the single state is even more so, “unless they are awfully rich” of course (398). When Lucilla’s father dies and she believes herself to be a moderate heiress, she imagines her future, thinking she “could go wherever she liked, and had no limit, except what was right and proper and becoming, to what she might please to do” (406). However, upon discovering that shortly before his death her father had suffered enormous

financial losses, leaving her very limited means, the reality of the single woman's situation is revealed. She wonders whether, now "that she was . . . only a single woman," she should "sink into a private life" (404) which would involve a complete divestiture of her former lifestyle and interests, based solely upon her new status of having 'no ties'. In her new role, she may legitimately involve herself in working with the poor, as the Rector suggests, again based solely upon being a single woman without male relatives: "the Rector, who, though he did not purpose in so many words a House of Mercy, made no secret of his conviction that parish-work was the only thing that could be of any service to Lucilla; and that, in short, such was the inevitable and providential destination of a woman who had "no ties" (434).

The fact that Lucilla is not entirely without family ties makes no difference to her potential as a single woman. She does not have the protection of a father or uncle, nor does she have a husband. As a single woman, she may no longer socialize as she had previously as hostess under the borrowed sovereignty of her father's home:

it would be almost as bad for Miss Marjoribanks as if she were her father's widow instead of his daughter. To keep up a position of social importance in a single woman's house . . . would be next to impossible. All that gave importance to the centre of society—the hospitable table, the open house—had come to an end with the Doctor. (405)

In the end Lucilla does marry, giving the novel a happy ending. Despite her recognition of the plight of single women, Oliphant offer no real criticism of the social codes which marginalize them. Rather she presents Lucilla with multiple opportunities for matrimony,

even with her loss of wealth and community stature. In doing so, she avoids the social ramifications of feminine spinsterhood, going so far as to suggest that being single is a matter of choice.

Woman as Nurse

Poovey characterizes the perceived responsibilities of the British nation both domestically and in foreign lands in the iconography of the benevolent nurse: “the patient (read: India, the poor) is really a brute (a native, a working class man) who must be cured (colonized, civilized) by an efficient head nurse cum bourgeois mother (England, middle-class women)” (Uneven 196). The “housewifely . . . woman presides” (196) over both foreign and domestic missions of civilization and the discourses associated with them: morality, manners, duty and service. In the capacity of mother/nurse, the domestic angel becomes the moral guide of the nation, disseminating and reinforcing hegemonic structures and ideologies. “The change of emphasis is significant: we pass from religious and family restraints upon the freedom of a fundamentally dangerous nature to [the] framework for the accomplishment of a mission. Mary is superimposed on Eve” (Brasch 4). In his essay “The Social Position of Women,” Coventry Patmore argues that women are granted a more privileged status in “circumstances which render the services that she is best fitted to perform unusually necessary . . . that is to say, her rank has been raised, when its elevation has happened to recommend itself obviously to the selfishness of man” (518). In the case of the family and the imperial project, women were granted a great deal of power within a limited domestic sphere, so long as they provided the services which made women so valuable to hegemony and patriarchy.

The motif of the domestic angel as nurse is popularized in the woman authored fiction of the period. For instance, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth* redeems herself through her nursing service to the community, becoming something of a civilizing force in the sick

wards as a typhus epidemic sweeps the town. She arrives following the death of one of the physicians and after “the nurses belonging to the Infirmary had shrunk from being drafted into the pestilential fever-ward—when high wages had failed to tempt any to what, in their panic, they considered as certain death” (424). Once in the ward, she is described in terms of the domestic angel: “her face was ever calm and bright, except when clouded by sorrow as she gave the accounts of the deaths which occurred in spite of every care [Her face had never been] so fair and gentle as it was now, when she was living in the midst of disease and woe” (428). The real-life Florence Nightingale and her publicized self-sacrifice in service to her nation as a nurse and thus a kind of martyr and savior (very much the same kind of portrayal of Ruth) resonates with the novelized iconography of the domestic angel as nurse, lending the ideal a glamour of normality and attainability for the common middle class woman.

In Emily Eden’s the Semi-attached Couple, Helen’s marriage serves as the catalyst for her evolution into a domestic angel, realized only after she takes on the obligations of a nurse. Prior to this she had been merely a child, self-involved, with all the romantic ignorance and passion of a schoolgirl rather than a wife. She is represented as a dormant rose waiting for sun and water and careful tending to allow her to blossom into the woman she was meant to be. Teviot, though a bit blundering as a husband at first, provides her with all of the above. When he becomes ill, she has an epiphany. She believes Teviot’s illness to be punishment for failing in her marital responsibilities. As a result, Helen rushes to perform them with all the emotional dedication expected of a wife to her husband, repenting her previous monstrous selfishness and lack of feeling. Her

nursing actualizes her as an angel, as noted by her brother who says “my darling Helen! it kills me to look at that angel; she will wear herself out, and she looks so miserable, and yes is so calm and self-possessed” (251). Afterwards she is the epitome of the domestic angel, having flowered into true womanhood. This ascension to true womanhood is rewarded by expositions of romantic love with Teviot confessing his undying love in the flowery phrases of the best romance: “My treasure above all other treasures, whatever happens, I am not to be pitied. I have what I have longed for all my life—a real, true love to depend on” (266). Thus, much like Lucilla and Rachel, Helen achieves romantic true love by first proving herself as a domestic angel—quite an incentive for any woman, or any prospective husband as well.

The role of the nurse is delineated by characteristics of emotional control, self sacrifice, generosity, and feminine nurturing. Helen is only permitted to nurse Teviot following the doctor’s recognition that “she had power of herself” in spite of her husband’s horrifically diseased appearance (248). Thus, while women were expected to be given to emotional upheavals, evidenced by swift changes in facial color and expression, vocal outbursts and fainting, the duties of caretaking were expected to supersede such emotional weakness and women must rise to the challenge, as does Helen in her domestic sphere: “by the light of open day she saw the battle of life lying before her, and she roused herself for the encounter” (249). Similarly, Lucilla Marjoribanks in her larger, societal sphere, rises above feminine weaknesses and flaws to rescue her ailing community.

On a larger scale, Margaret Oliphant's Lucilla serves as a nurse to her sickly town. She provides social nurturing to a community which is fragmented and disintegrating. Her feminine influence draws first Grange Lane and then all of Carlingford together, creating a community fellowship where previously there had been merely a collection of houses and neighbors who were often bickering or criticizing one another. Lucilla is described as a "public-spirited young woman . . . doing so much for Carlingford" (104). She "puts her finger on the pulse of the community" (120) "accomplish[es] a great public duty" with no "selfish desire for personal pleasure, nor any scheme of worldly ambition" (124). Her social nursing is a product of being a domestic angel and involves personal sacrifice for the greater good of her overall project. In the second of her Thursday Evenings, she must—at least temporarily, though she has no way of knowing that—sacrifice the promising budding relationship with Mr. Cavendish, throwing him in the company of a very ambitious Barbara Lake who has turned out to be disruptive of the social gathering. In doing so, she "prove[s] herself capable of preferring her great work to her personal sentiments, which is generally considered next to impossible for a woman It was the Lamp of sacrifice which Lucilla had now to employ, and she proved herself capable of the exertion" (120-1).

Throughout the novel, the narrator remarks on Lucilla's emotional control. It is her ability to subsume her personal feelings to the greater good that allows her to succeed in her endeavors to heal the community. Even in those rare moments when she gives in to her emotions, as when her father dies, she maintains herself properly. At first, she is overcome with emotion: "the blood seemed to be running a race in her veins, and the

strangest noises hummed in her ears. She felt ashamed of her weakness, but she could not help it” (412). However, instead of wallowing in her grief, Lucilla puts it aside, deciding “it was best to go down to the drawing-room for tea. . . . On the whole she took tea very quietly with Aunt Jemima, who kept breaking into continual snatches of lamentation, but was always checked by Lucilla’s composed looks” (412). Lucilla permits herself a certain amount of grief, but typical of her behavior throughout the novel, she refuses to make a public display of her emotions. She serves as a model for her society, and for her readers, resisting the abject rather than indulging in passions. An even greater testimony to her emotional self-control comes when Lucilla learns that her Aunt Jemima nearly successfully plotted against an engagement between Tom and Lucilla. Rather than revealing his mother’s perfidy to Tom and exterminating his “esteem and confidence” in his mother, and thereby destroying their small family, Lucilla responds as the forgiving domestic angel, as the nurturing nurse, kissing her Aunt with “a kiss freely bestowed, and [with] a vow of protection and guidance from the strong to the weak, though the last was only uttered in the protectress’s liberal heart” (481). By suppressing her indignation and hurt, Lucilla preserves her family and serves as an example of self-sacrifice to her readers.

Lucilla’s commonsensical reasoning and dispassionate behavior in emotionally fraught situations not only serve her personally, but also help her to prevent the self-destruction of Carlingford society when it appears that the Archdeacon Beverley will publicly castigate Mr. Cavendish as an adventurer. That revelation would undermine the authority of all those who designated Mr. Cavendish as a worthy man, honorable and

well-bred, which would in turn lead to a shattering of the social foundation of Carlingford. Lucilla coolly formulates a plan and then proceeds with it, even while “conscious that in all this she might be preparing the most dread discomfiture and downfall for herself” (300). Her plan succeeds, but only through her careful management and controlled emotions: “Lucilla’s heart beat quicker, and she put down her tea, though she had so much need of it. She could not swallow the cordial at such a moment of excitement. But she never once turned her head, nor left off her conversation, nor betrayed the anxiety she felt” (314). At last the conflict is happily resolved without upsetting the delicate internal social balance of trust and credibility upon which the community is based.

Following her term as social nurse, Lucilla feels able to enter into marriage. It is important to note that Oliphant, while gently making fun of some of the cultural strictures and codes pertaining to women, still accords with the basic tenets of the domestic angel. Lucilla, upon marrying, must no longer serve as the public caretaker, but turns instead to her own family. Frances Power Cobbe explains that, “so immense are the claims of a mother, physical claims on her bodily and brainly vigor, and moral claims on her heart and thoughts, that she cannot, I believe, meet them all and find any large margin beyond for other cares and work” (qtd. in Honig 12). Thus while certainly Lucilla, as any domestic angel would, will continue to assist in the building of her community and its relationships, she will do so in the capacity of a participant wife and mother, and only after her domestic duties at her new home at Marchbank have been accomplished. Thus she has cured the town, and yielded over the maintenance of its health back to its

denizens, who, having now learned how, will have to depend on themselves to keep their community strong and healthy.

Wife and Mother

According to Hartnell, Patmore's "The Angel in the House" "heralded a change of direction in representation of the domestic sphere, especially in terms of creating a pivotal role for the wife/homemaker" (473). This shift, which can be traced to the rise of the imperial hegemony in Britain, had begun much earlier, and was institutionalized by the coronation of the young Queen Victoria.²³ Edith Honig, in Breaking the Angelic Image, argues that Victoria's role as mother was socially more valuable than that of queen. Honig says "so exalted was the role of the mother that when queen Victoria celebrated fifty years of her reign, the public saluted her with banners proclaiming: *Fifty Years, Mother, Wife and Queen*. "Mother" played the primary role, with "Queen" finishing a poor third (11).

Shirley Forster points out that "because so much importance was attached to the roles of wifehood and motherhood, marriage was deemed the apotheosis of womanly fulfillment, alternatives to which were regarded as pitiable or unnatural. Emotional and psychological pressures on women to marry were thus added to the social and economic ones of earlier periods" (6). Forster goes on to say that in spite of feminist challenges to marriage as the ultimate fulfillment of womanhood, "even the most thorough-going feminists felt that wifehood and motherhood were the most important aspect of female experience" (11).²⁴ Marriage was a vocation, the only truly respectable one for middle-class women. In each of these five novels, marriage is the central focus,

highlighting the cultural importance of not only becoming a wife and mother, but of doing so ‘properly’.

All five novels explore the social position of both married and single women. For instance, Yonge’s The Clever Woman of the Family offers a range of examples of women: the weak-willed Mrs. Curtis, who selfishly puts her desires and fears ahead of the real needs of her daughter Rachel, particularly during the latter’s illness; Fanny, who though at first appears an incompetent mother, turns out to be a model mother, though she refuses to remarry and again take up marital duties; Ermine, who, though an invalid, serves as a model domestic angel; Bessie, who is young and thoughtless, using her facade of goodness to manipulate others and who serves as the example of the remorseless unchecked monstrous, the revealed abject; and finally, Rachel, the eponymous ‘clever woman of the family’ who learns humility and who, after identifying the dangerous elements of her own abject, seeks to repress them and eventually evolves into a domestic angel.

From the first, Rachel is represented as a modern feminist who is unsatisfied within the limitations of her domestic sphere. She repeatedly complains of the limits of being a single woman, though she has no inclination to marry:

I have pottered about cottages and taught at schools in the *dilettante* way of the young lady who thinks it her duty to be charitable; and I am told that it is my duty, and that I may be satisfied. Satisfied, when I see children cramped in soul, destroyed in body, that fine ladies may wear lace trimmings! Satisfied with the blight of the most promising buds!

Satisfied, when I know that every alley and lane of town or country reeks with vice and corruption, and that there is one cry for workers with brains and with purses [sic]! And here am I, able and willing, only longing to task myself to the uttermost, yet tethered down to the merest mockery of usefulness by conventionalities. I am a young lady forsooth!—I must not be out late; I must not put forth my views; I must not choose my acquaintance; I must be a mere helpless, useless being, growing old in a ridiculous fiction of prolonged childhood, affecting those graces of so-called sweet
seventeen . . . (3)

Rachel's diatribe against the constrictions on single women is, significantly, couched in the language of the domestic angel. Though the abject is revealed in her forcefulness, her strong opinions and her dissatisfaction with the social role of women, she still seeks to be useful, to aid and uplift society, particularly the women and children who work locally in the lace manufacturing sweatshops. Unlike Bessie, who appears angelic but lies and manipulates to achieve her ends, Rachel speaks "real truth" and even when she is conned by Mauleverer/Maddox with the resulting tragedy of Lovedy's death, she "never shift[s] the blame from herself" (273). Yet in her zeal to do good, Rachel 'un-womans' herself. She becomes something of a zealot, manly in her insistence on the rightness of her opinions and in her judgment of others.²⁵ Alick Keith, whom she eventually marries, recalls his first meeting with her: "I liked her that first evening, when she was manfully chasing us off for frivolous dangles round her cousin" (273).

Rather than offering the quiet unobtrusive service expected of the domestic angel, she is domineering, controlling and headstrong, all of which is attributed to the lack of a male influence in her life. According to the Major, Rachel “battle[s] every suggestion with principles picked up from every catch-penny periodical, things she does not half understand, and enunciates as if no one had even heard of them before” (95). A subsequent comparison to the admirable and angelic Ermine reveals the detrimental effects of the lack of a masculine influence in Rachel’s upbringing. In fact, Ermine serves as a foil to Rachel. Her opinions have been tempered by superior male intellect, and now she serves both as a model to society through her anonymously published writings, and as a model of the domestic angel: grateful, forgiving, compliant, moral and eager to serve. The following scene between the Major and Ermine foreshadows the enlightenment which Rachel will receive at the hands of the Major and Alick. The Major says:

One reason why she is so intolerable to me is that she is a grotesque caricature of what you used to be.

Ermine replies:

You have hit it! . . . she is just what I should have been without papa and Edward to keep me down, and without the civilizing atmosphere at the park (95).

Without losing her urge to be “useful,” Rachel becomes more feminine, first, in conversation with Major Keith, who exposes the narrow bias of her opinions, and then later under the care of her husband and his minister uncle, Mr. Clare, who similarly

expose and correct the errors in her thinking which stem from her unfeminine ways.

According to Ermine:

I believe that all that is unpleasing in her arises from her being considered as the clever woman of the family; having no man nearly connected enough to keep her in check, and living in society that does not fairly meet her. I want you to talk to her, and take her in hand. (96).

And indeed later Rachel comes to understand that “a woman’s tone of thought is commonly moulded by the masculine intellect, which, under one form or another, becomes the master of her soul” (337).

Rachel’s conversion comes shortly after Alick proposes. She believes that she will destroy his life and career: “So happy, so bright and free, and capable, his life seems now

. . . . I can’t understand his joining it to mine; and if people shunned and disliked him for my sake!” (283). She goes on to retract her earlier views on marriage: “I used to think it so poor and weak to be in love, or want any one to take care of one. I thought marriage such ordinary drudgery, and ordinary opinions so contemptible, and had such schemes for myself” (283). But now she recognizes that in her forays into independence, departing from the true duties of women, she has caused irreparable harm, not only to the children of her small school, but also to her family and friends. Ermine comforts her, saying that Rachel will be “much more really useful and effective than ever [she] could have been alone,” for women need that masculine hand of guidance in their lives: “we are not the strongest creatures in the world, so we must resign ourselves to our fate, and make the

best of it. They must judge how many imperfections they choose to endure, and we can only make the said drawbacks as little troublesome as may be” (283).

But while her conversion begins with the contemplation of her marriage, she must still learn to control herself, to take her feminine place. When she attempts to demonstrate her scholarly prowess by reading St. Augustine from the original Latin to the blind Mr. Clare, she discovers her inadequacies.

On her offer of her services, she was thanked, and directed with great precision to the right volume of the Library of the Father; but spying a real St. Augustine, she could not be satisfied without a flight at the original. It was not, however, easy to find the place; she was then forced to account for her delay by confessing her attempt, and then to profit by Mr. Clare’s directions; and, after all, her false quantities, though most tenderly and apologetically corrected, must have been dreadful to the scholarly ear, for she was obliged to get Alick to read the passage over to him before he arrived at the sense, and Rachel felt her flight of clever womanhood had fallen short. It was quite new to her to be living with people who knew more of, and went deeper into, everything than she did, and her husband’s powers especially amazed her. (293)

This incident is but the first lesson in her education on the proper feminine, particularly in terms of her relationship to her masculine superiors. She becomes aware of her own natural dependence, saying to Bessie “I have learnt not to despise advice” (297). In the company of Alick and Mr. Clare, she “was constantly feeling how shallow were her

acquirements, how inaccurate her knowledge, how devoid of force and solidity her reasonings compared” to the masculine depth of their knowledge (300), though on occasion, “here and there a spark of the old conceit . . . lighted itself, and lured her into pretensions where she thought herself proficient” (301). At last however, Rachel achieves a sense of peace with herself as a woman and willingly takes on the role of the domestic angel. She says to Mr. Clare, “[I] feel as I used when I was a young girl, with only an ugly dream between. I don’t like to look at it, and yet that dream was my real life that I made for myself” (322). She recognizes here that the difficulties of her previous life as ‘the clever woman of the family’ were caused by her own faults, her unsuppressed abject. In marrying, in submitting to the tutelage of her husband and his uncle, she has returned to a state of innocence, a state of femininity—she has become Eve prior to biting into the apple. She has become of “far more positive use in the world at the present moment than ever she had been in her most assuming maiden days” (345).

In each of these novels the various women encounter the prospect of marriage in one form or another, demonstrating the central importance marriage held for women within Victorian culture. Women were defined in the world according to their relationships with men, particularly according to how they married, or their prospects for attaining a good husband.²⁶ The woman’s sphere was predicated on marriage, on the patriarchal family construct, where the man was the “the protector, chief breadwinner and head of the household” (Perkin 73).

As wives and mothers, these women were also housekeepers, keepers of morals, and hostesses—roles associated with marriage and the domestic sphere. Daughters were

wives and mothers in training. The remaining available roles, not nearly as acceptable as marriage, were for spinsters and childless widows. These women could serve as companions, governesses, teachers, chaperones, hostesses, but without the endorsement of marriage, these women could never achieve the status that married women could. In East Lynne for instance, though Cornelia Carlyle is given a great deal of respect by the town, she nevertheless is dependent on her brother for much of her social power. The usurpation of her place as the woman in his life—the woman who arranges and maintains his domestic space—leaves her without recourse. Certainly she could marry, but she prefers her independence. However, the price of that independence is a loss of social stature and the ability to connect socially in the manner she had become accustomed to while attached to her brother's household. When he informs her of his prospective second marriage, her reaction is telling, for she has a great deal to lose in his remarriage: “Miss Corny gathered her knitting together; he had picked up her box. Her hands trembled, and the lines of her face were working. It was a blow to her as keen as the other [his first marriage] had been” (312). And Miss Carlyle is not wrong, for immediately upon the heels of his announcement her losses begin. Mr. Carlyle tells her, “You will go back, I presume, to your own home.” Miss Carlyle is stunned. “Go back to mine own home! . . . I shall do nothing of the sort. I shall stop at East Lynne. What's to hinder me?” (313). But Mr. Carlyle adamantly refuses to allow her to stay. He will have a wife and therefore there will be no room for his sister. He says “You have been mistress of a house for many years, and you naturally look to be so; it is right you should.

But two mistresses in a house do not answer, Cornelia: they never did and they never will” (313-14).

Within Victorian hegemony, the only truly legitimate position for women was marriage. In the following chapters, I will explore the hegemonically legitimized feminine roles and behaviors promoted and discouraged by these five novels, and the systems of power and reprisal which encouraged complicity and cooperation with the domestic angel ideology. Containing both competing and complementary versions of ‘proper’ or ‘true’ womanhood, these novels provide a rich tapestry of Victorian ideologies concerning women, revealing turbulence and ruptures in the logic and consistency of those ideologies—particularly those surrounding the angel ideal/norm—as well as dramatizing those which continued to be maintained and promoted with few challenges.

Notes

¹ A great many Victorian critics have discussed the cultural fears inherent in authorizing women to hold power. The following is a limited list of important texts for further reading on the subject. Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988; Elizabeth Langland, Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995; Joan Perkin, Victorian Woman, Washington Square, NY: New York UP, 1993; Judith Rowbotham, Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989; Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes, New York: Homes & Meier, 1976; Martha Vicinus, ed. A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977; Nancy Fix Anderson, Woman Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987; Josephine Butler, ed. Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays. London: 1869; Susan Hamilton, 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Victorian Writing by Women on Women. Ontario: Broadview P, 1996; Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 4 (Winter 1978): 219-236; Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.

² Though, as Basch notes, the powerlessness and subjugation of married women began to undergo legal challenges in the 1850s, it was not until later in the century that women

achieved any real freedoms (16-17). By the 1860s, the rights of married women had become a hotly debated subject of contention.

³ In this case, Mr. Hare's actions are not typical, but rather reveal the extent to which he may dominate over the domestic sphere, though ostensibly that physical and moral space has been culturally assigned to the feminine.

⁴ There is some difficulty in defining the norm versus the ideal in this instance. The ideal would generally be a standard for which all should strive, rarely achievable. The norm would be what the bulk of women would ordinarily be. However, in this case, hegemony assigned a norm separate from empirical evidence. That norm coincided with the qualities associated with the domestic angel ideal. Thus the standard for which women should strive, was also the median by which they were judged. Hence my understanding of Victorian femininity as formulating the ideal as the norm.

⁵ Women, as emotional beings, incapable of intellectual pursuits and rational thought, were at the mercy of their emotions, and therefore liable to act inappropriately.

⁶ While Kaplan's book is focused on the emergence of the American realist novel, her theory on the realist novel is useful in discussing the British realist novel as well.

⁷ Progress, originally a positive term, becomes something to be feared. It was happening too fast, and with a great deal of chaotic change. Robert Browning, Mathew Arnold, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and many others explored the adverse ramifications of turbulent change in their overtly political works. The novels dealt with here do not, as a rule, explore social ills, but deal more with domesticity and issues of middle-class women.

⁸ Joan Perkin argues that there were two “very different middle-class ideals of ‘the perfect wife’ or ‘true womanhood’”. One was held by men, the other by women, and they were incompatible. Yet both ideals continued side by side down the century, with most women pretending to be as men wished them to be” (86). Perkin argues, as does Anne McClintock in Imperial Leather, that while middle-class men desired a “decoratively idle, sexually passive woman, pure of heart, religious and self-sacrificing,” the reality was that the family finances usually precluded such idleness and leisure. Thus women worked to erase evidence of work, creating an illusion of idleness. The ideological construction of the domestic angel was continuously shifting, making it an even more impossible ‘mold’ to fill.

⁹ See also Julia Kristeva’s Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, Trans. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

¹⁰ One critic compared Lady Audley to the “half unsexed” Lady Macbeth, saying that it would be impossible for the “timid, gentle, innocent creature Lady Audley is represented as being” to “meet unmoved the friend of the man she had murdered” (Rae 186). The critic goes on to complain that “whenever she [Lady Audley] is meditating the commission of something inexpressibly horrible, she is described as being unusually charming. Her manner and her appearance are always in contrast with her conduct . . . [which] is . . . very unnatural” (Rae 186-7). Such a portrayal of womankind makes this novel “one of the most noxious books of modern times” (Rae 187).

¹¹ Though again, even in this example of positive influence, the question arises whether Lucilla, as a woman, is qualified to make the decisions she does. The lack of male

influence on her planning and social manipulations gives her something of a *carte blanche*. Without that masculine guidance, she becomes a loose cannon. At any moment elements of the inherent feminine abject could overcome her, resulting in enormous community destruction. No woman is ever completely innocent or inculpable; the abject remains part of her character, and thus she remains always a lurking menace.

¹² Feminists such as Josephine Butler, Barbara Smith Bodichon, Caroline Norton, Maria Rye, Bessie Parkes and Emily Faithfull, who pushed for expanded economic, marital, and political rights for women had garnered some support from such influential men as John Stuart Mill and Lord Brougham, head of the Law Amendment Society, among others. A very loud and public debate developed. Following the passing of the Divorce Act in 1857 which made divorce both more obtainable and which granted divorced and separated women far more rights than previously allowed under the law, feminists began agitating for the Married Woman's Property Act which, after long debate, passed in 1870, followed in the next decades by more reforms. These two political reforms for women, combined with the agitation for suffrage, establish the context within which these women novelists wrote their books. At the same time, the empire had suffered an enormous setback in prestige and complacency with the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion, causing a hegemonic push to shore up the British sense of nationalism and superiority. McClintock argues that after the 1850s "The cult of domesticity became indispensable to the consolidation of British national identity" which was facing "deepening imperial competition and colonial resistance" (209). Fundamental to this shoring up was an

emphasis on women as the moral center of the nation, as the bedrock upon which the fortunes of England rose or fell. Feminist agitation therefore could be construed as undermining the bedrock of the nation, creating weakness in a time of crisis.

Adherence to the Angel norm was perceived as sustaining the nation, even as patriotic, though as stated earlier, impossible to manage. For further discussion of Victorian women and the law, see Lee Holcombe's essay "Victorian Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law, 1857-1882," in A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. Ed. by Martha Vicinus, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977.

¹³ Though Elizabeth Langland acknowledges the importance of women's roles in class politics, she limits her discussion to class and patriarchal distributions of power rather than exploring larger hegemonic influences. See Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

Likewise, though Deborah Gorham examines the function of the domestic angel within the middle class household, her argument is limited to women's specific roles within the household, rather than how that function served the larger hegemonic structure. See The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982. Elaine Showalter, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also formulate their theories of femininity in relation to patriarchal limitations and masculine literary traditions. See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, New Haven: Yale UP, 1979; and Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

- ¹⁴ McClintock goes on to argue that advertisements “figure[d] imperialism as coming into being through *domesticity*” (32). That England in the guise of the global domestic angel spread civilization through domesticity. Further, McClintock argues that “the colonies . . . became a theater for exhibiting the Victorian cult of domesticity” (34).
- ¹⁵ While the poem was very popular in its day, becoming, according to Jerome Buckley and George Woods “a conspicuous bestseller” (994), the term coined by Patmore came to represent the subjection of women to not only feminist critics of the Victorian period, but to later feminists as well. Virginia Woolf, in her landmark essay “Professions for Women,” uses the angel in the house metaphor to dramatize her own oppression.
- ¹⁶ A perspective typified particularly in the early 18th century when upper class women had more freedoms: those freedoms that come with wealth. Indeed, these women were in hindsight viewed through the lens of middle class morality which conceived of the upper class as having loose morals at best.
- ¹⁷ Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s lengthy collection of sonnets entitled “The House of Life” reflects how ingrained within hegemony the ideology of the domestic angel continued to be into the 1880s. He offers an enraptured vision of the domestic angel under the stanza heading “True Woman—I. Herself.” He says “Heaven’s own screen/ Hides her soul’s purest depth and loveliest glow” (537). The next sonnet “True Woman—2. Her Love” continues on, saying “her infinite soul is Love,’ And he her lodestar Lo! They are one. With wifely breast to breast/ and circling arms, she welcomes all command” (537). From Poetry of the Victorian Period. 3rd Ed. Ed. Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods. Harper Collins, 1965.

- ¹⁸ Woman—Nation—State, Ed. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, presents a significant collection of essays which discuss the magnitude of the family unit and women's reproductive function in the promotion and preservation of empire and race. See also The Incorporated Wife, edited by Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener, London: Croom Helm, 1984.
- ¹⁹ Anne McClintock discusses Frantz Fanon's rejection of the "Western metaphor of the nation as family," saying that Fanon challenges the conception of the "naturalness of nationalism as a domestic genealogy" (360). For both Fanon and McClintock, the metaphor of the patriarchal family was the foundation for empire: "military violence and the authority of a centralized state borrow and enlarge the domestication of gender power within the family" (McClintock 360).
- ²⁰ Greg's solution to the problem is to transport these women to the colonies to become wives to British colonists who need women to build civilized British homes in the frontiers.
- ²¹ Nancy Fix Anderson writes in Woman Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton,

The only work for middle-class "redundant women" . . . was as governesses. To provide better training for governesses and to improve the standards of teaching, Queen's College was founded in 1848 and Bedford College in 1849. A Society for the Employment of Women was established in 1857 to open new avenues of work for women. In the same year, the English Woman's Journal, edited by Bessie Parkes and . . .

Matilda Hays, was founded as a forum to discuss the changing role of women, and to campaign for improvements in women's status and opportunities. (96)

The efforts to solve the problem of redundant women only exacerbated the subversion of the domestic angel ideal by creating schools and increasing employment opportunities to further take them out of the home and the domestic sphere.

²² Eliza Lynn Linton satirizes the inherent selfishness of the girls who admire romanticized independence in her essay "The Girl of the Period." Linton criticizes the trend of selfish independence in young girls. She says "the girl of the period does not please men. She pleases them as little as she elevates them; and how little she does that, the class of women she has taken as her models of itself testifies" (173). Frances Power Cobbe, while acknowledging the prevailing sentiment that "marriage is, indeed, the happiest and best condition for mankind," immediately argues that since unhappy marriages are deleterious to society, that women should not be expected to enter into loveless marriages. Instead she suggests female independence as a means to create marriages and decrease the number of redundant women in English society:

let the employments of women be raised and multiplied as much as possible, let their labour be as fairly remunerated, let their education be pushed as high, let their whole position be made as healthy and happy as possible, and there will come out once more, here as in every other department of life, the triumph of the Divine laws of our nature. (87)

Or in other words, an increase in happy marriages, solving the problem of redundant women. “What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?” 1862. ‘Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors’: Victorian Writing by Women on Women. Ed. Susan Hamilton. Ontario: Broadview P, 1996. 85-107.

²³ While the metamorphosis of this perception of women probably began in the eighteenth century as the usefulness of women in the angelic subject role began to become apparent, once Victoria ascended the throne, it was no longer hegemonically prudent to discredit the female sex.

²⁴ Joan Perkin makes a similar assertion, saying

Many women who left a record of their feelings actually welcomed marriage as an emotionally satisfying and indeed emancipating experience. Even those we would call feminists were often ambivalent in their attitudes. Freedom is a relative concept, and for many women marriage meant release from a childlike and humiliating dependence on parents. It offered the possibility, on however unequal terms, to create a home and family of one’s own and, surprisingly, the chance to go about and make separate friends, even ones of the opposite sex. (75)

²⁵ The characteristics most often associated with Victorian manliness include the ability to argue and reason, forceful opinions, independent thinking, and dispassionate logic.

²⁶ At the same time, there was growing political agitation to make wives less financially dependent on their husbands, and to allow them separate property under the law. At that time, if a woman’s purse was stolen, her husband was considered the victim as the

owner of the stolen property. Women were not entitled to their own earnings. If her husband deserted her, he was still entitled to all her money. For further discussion of women and their legal position within society, see Joan Perkin, Victorian Women, New York: New York UP, 1993; Mary Lyndon Shanley, Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1989; and Maeve E. Doggett, Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England, Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1993.

Chapter III

To See and Be Seen: The “Many-Eyed World”

“... it became understood that it was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place people under surveillance [rather] than to subject them to some exemplary penalty” (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 38)

“But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (Foucault, Power/Knowledge 39)

“Should she ever be allowed to hide her head, or should she be forced again to brave that many-eyed world?” (Yonge, The Clever Woman of the Family 268)

The Self-Reinforcing, Self-Regulating Power Structure

The power pyramid which formed the infrastructure of hegemony in mid-Victorian England asserted control over its constituent population through an ecology of culturally integrated power. This power was animated through a program of omniscient surveillance combined with percussive reinforcement in the form of both reprisal and reward. Within this structure, women were measured and codified against the domestic angel norm on the basis of reputation and appearances. The ideal of the domestic angel had been culturally normalized, requiring that women strive to cohere with a way of

being which, in Robert Browning's terms, exceeded their grasp. As a result, women routinely failed to meet this norm, reinforcing the concept of the lurking monster, the barely-leashed abject hidden within every woman. The failure of women to actualize themselves as domestic angels was blamed on the inherent monstrous portion of the feminine nature, not the ideology's impossible mandates and contradictory requirements. Sanctions for failure to meet the established norm included loss of power and agency within the power pyramid, and often meant the inability of a woman to marry or to find suitable work, leaving her with few options for survival.¹ Joanna Trollope remarks on the failure to meet the most important quality of the domestic angel—marriage:

to be a woman, to be middle-class, perhaps educated, and to be without either a husband or money was to be in a position for which society had no pity. . . . Such a woman not only carried a social stigma, she carried the immensely arduous burden of providing for herself in an age when legally it was extraordinarily difficult for a woman to make or retain any money of her own. It must be remembered that divorce was not possible until 1857, that any money a woman possessed could, with the law's full consent, be used or abused by her husband until 1882, and that, for a further nine years after that, a husband could by right imprison his wife in her own house if he so chose [even if separated or divorced]. . . . Single women might have escaped such tyranny, but they did not escape the very real threat of destitution. For most of them, the only means of warding it off was to teach in the schoolrooms of middle- and upper-class households, an outcast from life both below and above the stairs (61-62)

As Trollope indicates, the life of a single woman, or perhaps more accurately, the failed woman, was hardly desirable. She became a social pariah. For such a woman, legitimate (socially acceptable) survival became almost impossible, leaving her little choice but to join the growing ranks of British prostitutes, or die for lack of food, shelter and clothing. George Gissing's The Odd Women (1893) gives us shocking insight into the lives of such women: Virginia Madden quietly starving to death as she takes refuge from her loneliness and social position in alcohol, while her sister Alice loses herself in prayer, "her refuge from the barrenness and bitterness of life" (305). Thus a very real threat underlies the ideology articulating the domestic angel as the pinnacle of female achievement. Women who deviate from their designated feminine roles face terrible hardship and even death.

The following chapter will explore the structuring of power within the panoptical pyramid and examine how women were encouraged and coerced into becoming domestic angels. In particular, I focus on the surveillance system, investigating what I call the circulatory intelligence network for the ways in which information was gathered, archived, and circulated. The novels of this study reveal a sharp feminine awareness of this system. They dramatize the social application of perpetual surveillance and the consequent need to cultivate proper appearances and guard reputations. At the same time, they demonstrate the authors' cognizance of the rewards for qualifying as domestic angels.

The Panoptical Power Pyramid

Albert Memmi, in his biographical account of French colonization in Tunisia, cites the power pyramid as “the basis for all colonial societies” (xiv). According to Memmi, this pyramid places the colonizer at the peak and the least powerful of the colonized at the bottom, establishing a hierarchy in between. Anyone one privileged enough not to be on the base would seek to maintain his position or to move up the pyramid by cooperating with and participating in the colonizers’ imposed hegemony (xiv). One of the fundamental principles of this pyramid structure is that those who command power at the top never permit those lower down to move so high as to dislodge them, thus creating a situation of constant competition for the limited positions of prestige which may become available. Availability is predicated on a subject relinquishing the position, usually through failure to maintain the role, death or debilitation, or less frequently, disqualification.² There would thus be a natural—though limited—rotation of subjects filling the top agency positions, and by ripple effect, down the pyramid. The possibility of ascension would encourage close adherence to hegemonic regulations amongst hopeful candidates.

Because agent positions are defined in terms of exclusion, increasingly fewer subjects are qualified to occupy them as we progress up the pyramid’s hierarchy. The selection for any given position is determined by whether the candidate may be trusted (in terms of proven credentials) as the proxy of hegemonic power. That subject rises from the limited pool of available candidates on the immediately lower level of the pyramid. These subjects have already met a substantial number of the criteria of the position, if not all, and are prepared to move up when the opportunity allows. Those

criteria might be predicated on gender, religion, class, wealth, and education, as well as precedents of conforming behavior.³ The competition thus encourages hegemonic service as means of further credentialling a subject and thereby increasing the likelihood of upward mobility.

At the same time, each subject who has a place above the pyramid's base seeks to protect that position through compliance and by suppressing the upward movements of those below. This doubled strategy of self-advancement reinforces participation with and adherence to hegemonically dictated social regulations. A subject's participation helps her to accrue what Pierre Bourdieu has termed "symbolic capital" which is measured by "the recognition [she] receive[s] from a group" (106). The sum of symbolic capital assigned to any given position on the pyramid is proportional to the power and influence of that position. From that position, an individual acts as a delegated representative of the group, "giving a biological body to a constituted body" (106-7). The individual thus becomes a physical representation of hegemony, her investiture of power a "*guarantee of delegation*" granted by the group consensus (107). However, there is a certain measure of danger to hegemony in delegating power to agents. Because authority is mediated through hegemony, which at its most basic level is a kind of ontological and ideological group consensus, the individual subject "creates the group which creates him" (106). This means that the more symbolic capital a person acquires, or more specifically for my argument, the higher up on the pyramid a person advances, the greater possible impact he or she might have on the total hegemonic structure. However, the system anticipates the danger of subversion by proportionally increasing both incentives and punishments with pyramidal ascension, decreasing the likelihood of transgressive behavior.

Foucault argues that structuring power in the form of a pyramid “increases its possible effects” (Discipline 174). He writes that:

the pyramid was able to fulfil, more efficiently than the circle, two requirements: to be complete enough to form an uninterrupted network—consequently the possibility of multiplying its levels, and of distributing them over the entire surface to be supervised; and yet to be discreet enough not to weigh down with an inert mass on the activity to be disciplined, and not to act as a brake or an obstacle to it. . . . (Discipline 174)

Through the combination of delegation of authority and preemption of subversion, this system integretated itself with every element of mid-Victorian life, encouraging self-surveillance and willing participation amongst its constituent population. It transmitted itself in such a way as to appear transparent and natural, even ontological. It effaced itself under the disguise of normalcy, of common sense, to ensure hegemony’s continuing existence..

Integrating Memmi’s power pyramid with Foucault’s concept of the Panopticon provides a useful model with which to examine the circulation of power in Victorian culture.⁴ The desire to maintain position on the pyramid inherent to Memmi’s construct, combined with the pervasive sense of constant scrutiny and suspicion inherent to the Panopticon, produces an environment of complicity and self-discipline within the culture. Within the Panopticon, power is distributed to the inmates; “they are themselves the bearers” of their own containment (Discipline 201). The inmates become responsible for patrolling themselves. They are compartmentalized, separated into individual units, and

therefore unable to plan “an attempt at collective escape . . . new crimes for the future, [or spread] bad reciprocal influences” (Discipline 200). Fundamental to the structure of Memmi’s pyramid is each member’s desire to retain his position and seek ascension, strengthened by the constant fear of sliding down. If we introduce into that pyramid the element of disciplinary surveillance, where power is “everywhere and always alert . . . [and which] constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising,” then we have the architecture of mid-Victorian hegemony (Discipline 177). In this system participation and compliance are induced through the possibility of personal advantage and the coercive nature of panoptical surveillance.

The middle class women who are the focus of this study both cooperated in and were subject to this system of panoptical surveillance and reprisal. In participating, they maintained their place within the cultural power pyramid, while at the same time their cooperation helped to patrol and preserve the borders of their various discourse cells, guaranteeing the continued endurance of the pyramid, and by implication, patriarchy and hegemony. Like the panoptical penal structure, also designed to generate self-surveillance and internal or peer deterrence, this structure “frame[d] the everyday lives of individuals; [was] an adaptation and a refinement of the machinery that assumes responsibility for and places under surveillance their everyday behaviour, their identity, their activity, their apparently unimportant gestures” (Foucault, Discipline 77). This surveillance decreases the danger of hegemonic subversion as a result of commonplace transgressions. Foucault goes on to say that in a traditional system of punishment “there is a scarcity of great crimes; on the other hand, there is the danger that everyday offences may multiply” (Discipline 93). Heinous crimes such as murder and theft would without a

doubt result in public castigation; however lesser offenses which are not criminal, may be allowed because they seem less dangerous, and the consequence of this is the proliferation of small but disruptive offenses.⁵ Further, Foucault argues that the “influence of a crime is not necessarily in direct proportion to its horror; a crime that horrifies the conscience is often of less effect than an offence that everyone tolerates and feels quite ready to imitate” (Discipline 93). Thus the emphasis in Victorian hegemony on the minute surveillance of daily activities, mannerisms, words and gestures. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s Ruth (1853), the revelation of Ruth’s deception and dissimulation comes through such surveillance, and would have remained hidden without it. It is through careful observation of Jemima that Mrs. Pearson confirms her suspicions about Ruth: “[Jemima] felt that Mrs. Pearson’s eyes were upon her, watching her; not with curiosity, but with a newly-awakened intelligence” (Gaskell 321).

The imbricated systems of redundancy, of reward and punishment, and of surveillance and discipline, protected Victorian hegemony by promoting a threatening ideology of public omniscience: even the smallest act of transgression, whether premeditated or merely accidental, would be noted and circulated, and would eventually lead to some consequence, depending on the severity of the transgressive act. The determination of severity is computed against the degree of danger to both the immediate discourse cell and the larger hegemony. Punishments and/or disciplines are therefore assigned through the systemic machinery of the locally available, best informed senior agents of the hegemonic panoptical power pyramid. The possibility of a recurrence or resurfacing of corruption, or that others might perceive a discursive or hegemonic sanctioning of the transgression, is too hazardous to be allowed.

The Panoptical pyramid model helps us to understand how the domestic angel role functioned in service to hegemony and why women would cooperate and seek to conform to such an impossible role. The traditional suspicion surrounding women intensifies in the panoptical pyramid system, emphasizing the submerged monstrous nature of women—the abject. In circular logic, this evidence of the feminine abject justifies the perception that the ontological composition of women is inherently corrupt and that therefore women require increased surveillance and disciplinary controls. This construction of women as figures of menace functions as a strategy of containment. Women, codified in a doubled classification of morality and menace, must consistently strive to appear harmless and inoffensive, incapable of transgression. Thus they are coerced into ‘willing’ participation in the discursive structures which limit their involvement in the realm of public discourse. They do so partly because of the power, safety and security which the domestic sphere offers, partly to avoid a punishment which would exile them from the domestic realm, and partly because, without an attachment to a domestic situation, women have no roles, no legitimate discourse in which they might participate.⁶ They become circumscribed by the domestic sphere and its related subject roles. The seat of woman’s power lay within the family and home, giving her enormous power over the nation through her influence on her children and husband, the vulnerability of hegemony and nation being directly proportional to how well she adhered to the strictures of true femininity. Ultimately she must be made to conform to the domestic angel role in order to serve hegemony and to defuse the feminine menace.

Crime and Punishment

According to Foucault, “The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (Discipline 170-1). Observation coerces; fear of deficiency engenders scrupulous conformity. Foucault’s statement indicates that the correlative of surveillance occurs in the form of publicly administered reinforcement, whether that be reward or punishment. This is because the efficacy of a power structure which relies on individual complicity depends on the general public’s awareness of certain repercussion, that “everyone . . . see[s] punishment not only as natural, but in his own interest; everyone must be able to read in it his own advantage” (Foucault, Discipline 109). Thus, as a whole, the public willingly endorses punishment for personal benefit. This is an effect of the pyramid system. Individuals who perform the duties inherent to their positions on the power pyramid protect that position and gain reward. At the same time, transgressors are categorized as subversives and dangerous to society. Their punishment preserves ‘good’ society, which benefits all ‘good’ citizens. Thus, supporting hegemonically sanctioned punishment allows individuals to prove their loyalty and adherence to social regulations and also protects them from danger. An added benefit is the resulting pyramidal shift upwards to fill the agency position opening as a transgressor descends the pyramid.

Similarly, the dispensation of rewards encourages individual participation, again, for personal benefit. Rules and punishments are defined through transdiscursive negotiation within set parameters, whether within a town, county, country, or other

grouping of people, but contained within the overall hegemonic regulatory apparatus.⁷

Because there is a majority consensus, these rules and punishments are therefore viewed as natural or organic, giving rise to an ideology of axiomatic essentiality, or for the mid-Victorians, divine prescription. In this way each member of society perceives a personal stake in his or her participation in the panoptical power pyramid, in surveillance, and in the process of rendering punishment, engendering increased complicity and cooperation.

The punishment for a woman's transgression of discursive or hegemonic codes in the mid-Victorian period often took the form of social ostracism, leading to the impossibility of engaging in marriage, of achieving a living wage, or of gaining access to community services. Under these conditions, a woman must do one of two things: she must die, which effectively suppresses the turbulence caused by her actions, thereby removing the danger to the discursive or hegemonic formation. Examples include Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, who eventually dies as a punishment for her illegitimate child and subsequent conspiracy to hide her sin. Yonge's *Bessie Keith*, Braddon's *Lady Audley*, and Wood's *Isabel Vane* come to similar ends as a result of their transgressions. The second possibility for a woman who transgress is that she must live in a constant state of recurring punishment which would act as a cautionary signifier in the public milieu. Such a recurring punishment would be intended "to supervise the individual, to neutralize [her] dangerous state of mind . . . and to continue even when this change has been achieved" (Foucault, *Discipline* 18). Though Foucault is referring to penal rehabilitation, the application of a penalty to the social transgressor functions in the same manner. The punishment extends beyond mere penalization into the realm of the public

semiotic with the intention of deterring other transgressors. Without a visible indication of punishment, the woman would become a negative example, a public invitation to follow in her footsteps, the penalty appearing easy enough to bear. Punishment, therefore, can never end. Safety for the community is guaranteed by the continuing affirmation of the paramount danger involved in transgressive behavior, and the visible price which accompanies it. Foucault says that “one must calculate a penalty in terms not of the crime, but of its possible repetition. One must take into account not the past offence but the future disorder. Things must be so arranged that the malefactor can have neither any desire to repeat his offence, nor any possibility of having imitators” (Discipline 93). Once a violation has occurred, there can be no rehabilitation in which the violator is permitted to be socially identified as ‘normal’. The possibility of a recurrence of corruption, or that others might perceive a discursive or hegemonic sanctioning of the transgression, is too hazardous to be allowed.

The Circulatory Intelligence Network

The viability of the surveillance and repercussion system depended on the existence of a network which accumulated, distributed and archived all of the miscellaneous information gathered through surveillance. Without such a network, not only would an assigned punishment carry less signficatory impact, but the crucial component of immediate omniscient surveillance would be lost. The Victorian hegemony’s pyramidal infrastructure efficiently enveloped and permeated every level of society, coercing compliance through both fear of punishment and desire for reward. The consistent rendering of such punishments and rewards, so necessary to the preservation of

the power pyramid, was made possible through both a system of surveillance and the networked circulation of the information gathered. These combined systems allowed for minute, detailed control of individuals on a moment-to-moment basis. Foucault likens this control to “a microscope of conduct” (Discipline 173).

The power pyramid not only functioned as a system of continuous surveillance, but also made information useful by keeping it in continuous circulation through both formal and informal channels and relays. Formal channels included systems of reporting within institutional settings, newspapers, business connections and professional relationships; informal channels consisted largely of gossip and rumor, overheard conversations, or the revelation of personal writings. The difference between the two types of communication lies in the nature of the information. Formal communication implies fact: the contributing agents possess a certain amount of social endorsement or delegated authority, and have either authenticated the information, or have the means to do so. On the other hand, informal communication is more likely to be false, though often the report is based in truth. Both the source and the informant may be unreliable, if they are known at all. Yet more people may participate in informal channels than formal, and thus the amount of information generated through informal channels is far more prolific, though less reliable.

In particular, gossip served an important means of data transmission within the mid-Victorian surveillance structure. It was particularly important to the success of the circulatory intelligence network because it exposed those secrets which might otherwise remain hidden.⁸ Though Patricia Meyer Spacks contends that gossip is more a means of

subversion, of secrecy, of “giving voice to the dominated as well as the dominant” (263), she admits that gossip may be

an instrument not of subversion but of control. Intimate talk about other people can . . . challenge assumptions of the powerful; on the other hand, such talk also serves interests of governing classes. . . . Both friendly and malicious anecdote can purvey information useful in preserving dominance. (172)

In the case of the Victorian panoptical power pyramid, an extensive complex of intersecting gossip capillaries functioned as part of the circulatory intelligence network, gathering and contributing information to the flow of accumulated knowledge for regulatory purposes.

Gossip tends to be rooted in reality, incorporating elements of truth, according to Meyer Spacks. It “attaches the names of real people to its characters; therefore, it has potential effects in the real world” (51). Unlike stories couched in fictional terms with fictional characters, gossip focuses on the real, attributing events and behavior to real people. Because this information inevitably enters into the circulatory intelligence network, it becomes a “powerful weapon in the politics of large groups and small” and “can effect incalculable harm” (4). Meyer Spacks suggests that gossip’s power lies in its potential to damage, and the “social mythology” which “evokes the terror of the self as agent or as victim of such power” (51). The threat of being singled out, of being subjected to heightened social scrutiny, encourages scrupulous conformity to hegemonically legislated codes of behavior. The combination of a “primitive terror of reprisal” and the seductive promise of reward for conformity engenders cooperation and

participation because social subjects “dread an all too readily imagined danger” (Meyer Spacks 51). Given the social emphasis on reputation in the mid-Victorian period, gossip could have quite harmful consequences for the subject(s), and therefore must be avoided at all costs. One way to avoid becoming the subject of gossip would be to scrupulously conform to social regulations, both privately and publicly.

While gossip is not always factual, the speakers believe that their information is truthful, based on the “social realities” of their lives and culture (Meyer Spacks 52). In voicing the gossip, they align themselves with the power pyramid by contributing to its knowledge base, and not only reap the rewards of their complicity through social and economic opportunities, but also demonstrate their willing participation in the power pyramid. Often gossip revolves around the speakers’ immediate peers and thus those who report to the circulatory intelligence network—even through informal channels—may also gain ascension in the power pyramid by sabotaging the reputations of their competitors. This occurs because the exposed secrets are often those which would subvert hegemony and therefore require sanctions, thus the subject’s authority and power within the pyramid decreases while the speakers accrue more authority, more capital, by way of reward. Further, gossip “incorporates the possibility that people utterly lacking in public power may affect the views of figures who make things happen in the public sphere” (Meyer Spacks 7), thus presenting opportunities to accumulate power through influence.

All increments of information, from the most innocuous scraps of kitchen gossip to the number of handkerchiefs in a woman’s trousseau, were passed into this intelligence network to be distributed, evaluated, and aligned with other contributions to make new

information. This new information was then resubmitted to the process, remaining in circulation until aligning with other information, and thus continuing to cycle through the process until needed: i.e., requiring action by a hegemonic agent within the appropriate level of the power pyramid. Once made available to the power pyramid, however, no information is ever lost to its use, but remains accessible and readily available indefinitely within the circulatory process. This lends a certain omniscience to the structure, reinforcing the public conception of continuous surveillance and thus helping to create a condition of coerced compliance, of cooperation based on immediate fear of discovery, as well as on the less concrete, often less attainable, reward of ascending through the hierarchy of the pyramid. An example of this omniscience may be found in Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth. Though her affair with Mr. Bellingham occurred years before, and across the country, it remains current within the circulatory intelligence network. Thus the dressmaker recognizes her by her description, and reports that information through gossip relays, leading to Ruth's social ostracization and eventual death. Similar revelations occur in each of the five novels in this study, as we shall shortly see.

To increase the efficacy of the surveillance system, each member of the panoptical power pyramid must be made to participate in the circulatory intelligence network. Deputization of each individual member increases the possibility of total surveillance, even into the private realm. Not only could anybody be watching, but everyone was *required* to watch and report. Toward that end, each member is inculcated into hegemonic codes of duty and responsibility to report information, and encouraged to do so with the lure of reward, of ascending the power pyramid and thereby increasing economic and social opportunity and power.

The function of the circulatory intelligence network is to maintain the currency and availability of information, and to relay it to the proper agents of the panoptical pyramid. The system is informal, decentered and homogeneous, with no central collection nexus, no central point of distribution. However, despite the lack of a central organizational nucleus, it succeeds because it coerces participation and cooperation on a micro level. Individual members of the pyramid understand that they are continuously subject to scrutiny, even in their most private moments. This panopticality combines with the perpetual circulation of information across discursive borders to produce individual accountability: each person must answer for his or her behavior, both in terms of standards of social behavior, as well as in terms of participation in the surveillance system. Further, complicity in the name of preserving and protecting hegemony results in rewards. Individuals who supply information to the intelligence network also serve themselves by maintaining and promoting their own positions within the power pyramid.

Qualified agents of the power pyramid utilize the information generated through the circulatory intelligence network to suppress resistance and turbulence which might endanger hegemony. They occupy the superior hierarchized subject positions on the pyramid, if we define superior in relation to the response required by the reported information. Foucault's discussion of the hierarchy of discourse applies equally to that of the power pyramid: each position is filled by an individual who has "satisfied certain conditions . . . if he is not, from the outset, qualified" by virtue of his class, education, economic standing, or political associations. (Foucault, Archaeology 225). In Language and Symbolic Power, Pierre Bourdieu expands on this notion of authorized agents, saying that these subject positions are invested with power "in proportion to their symbolic

capital, i.e., in proportion to the recognition they receive from the group” (106). This recognition is structured through the specific agenda of a given hegemony, an agenda which arises from the needs and desires of the group—in this case the Victorian imperialist nation. Bourdieu further contends that “the representative [agent] creates the group which creates him” by imposing a reality “which allows the consensus concerning the meaning of the social world which [in turn] grounds common sense to be imposed officially, i.e., in front of everyone and in the name of everyone” (106). Specifically, in a given region defined by the population’s social identity,

Even when he [the agent] merely states with authority what is already the case, even when he contents himself with asserting what is, the *auctor* produces a change in what is: by virtue of the fact that he states things with authority, that is, in front of and in the name of everyone, publicly and officially, he saves them from their arbitrary nature, he sanctions them, sanctifies them, consecrates them, making them worthy of existing, in conformity with the nature of things, and thus ‘natural’. (Bourdieu 222).

In this statement, Bourdieu points to the stabilizing function of the qualified agent within a community.⁹ By sanctioning a particular version of ‘natural’ social reality, one which grows from grassroots discursive consensus (i.e. hegemony), a qualified agent helps to prevent chaotic disruption and turbulence within the social economy.¹⁰ Bourdieu’s theory of representation and identity helps us understand the essential function of qualified agency within the panoptical power pyramid: “what is at stake here is the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision [sic] which, when

they are imposed on a whole group, establish meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and the identity of the group” (221). The authorized agent has the power to “*make and unmake groups*” (Bourdieu 221), or to literally disperse and destroy those foundational discourse cells which create hegemony. Thus the person who fills a given position of authorized agency on the panoptical pyramid must be fully committed to hegemony. He must have demonstrated his allegiance to hegemonic codes and values without critical deviation. Any transgression undercuts an individual’s eligibility for authorized agency, though as Foucault argues in his discussion of institutional discipline and punishment, the “micro-economy of a perpetual penalty operates a differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value” (Discipline 181).¹¹ Foucault also argues that “disciplinary apparatuses” position individuals in “hierarchized . . . relation to one another” (Discipline 181). For Victorians, the matrix of individuals is predicated on their value: on their usefulness to the deployment, maintenance, and preservation of hegemony. Therefore the qualifying standards for holding a position of authorized agency within the panoptical power pyramid are relative to the specific needs of a given hegemony, and the local requirements of a particular discourse cell.¹²

In the panoptical power pyramid, no disguise is impenetrable; nothing can remain hidden under the panoptical gaze. This gaze is imbricated, redundant, and omni-directional, which is why Lady Audley cannot succeed, why Isabel Vine must be revealed, why Mauleverer must be convicted, why Mr. Cavendish must be exposed, and why Mary Forrester must be exonerated. A multiplicity of intersecting gazes guarantees

that eventually the evidence of duplicity (or in the case of Mary Forrester, innocence) will make its way into the circulatory intelligence network. This pyramidal structure of what Foucault identifies as “hierarchized, continuous and functional surveillance. . . . rests on individuals . . . [but functions as] a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network ‘holds’ the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors perpetually supervised” (*Discipline* 177). The effects of power in this structure can be collectively defined as pervasive coercive obedience. The induced paranoia—a sense that anyone could be looking at, recording, and interpreting the appearance and behavior of someone at any given time—is a powerful incentive to conform.

The Value of a Good Reputation

Because of the duality of female nature—the angel and the monster dichotomy—and women’s integral role within the family and the stability of hegemony, in the mid-Victorian period women were subject to more intense scrutiny than men. At any moment the abject might reveal itself in a woman, if only momentarily, and for some women, fatally. Therefore, a sharply observant gaze becomes necessary in ferreting out the first indications of an escaping abject nature. Caught in time, correctional disciplines and punishments might be brought to bear to ‘salvage’ the woman, though the revelation of such innate inadequacies would forever disqualify her from many pyramidal privileges.¹³ Even rehabilitated, she would be singled out for heightened surveillance, a

calculated program of observation specifically aimed at detecting a relapse or reversion to the abject.

In her introduction to A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women, Martha Vicinius argues that the ideology of a dual feminine nature served as a form of social containment: “Nineteenth-century women were not always the passive, submissive and pure creatures of popular idealizations [i.e., the angel in the house], but neither were they ever completely free from this stereotype. Its most pervasive and effective form of control was through the social and individual demand for respectability” (xix). During the Victorian period, respectability was the quality which made everything else possible. It was a necessary element in marriage, business, social intercourse, politics and public interaction. It allowed individuals to function within their discourse communities, and served as a means of calibrating the amount of symbolic capital or power which could be invested in any given person within the panoptical power pyramid. Respectability is a slippery and fluid term that must be discursively negotiated. What constitutes respectability for some may not serve others.¹⁴ It is formulated according to specific hegemonic or discursive needs. At the same time, the slippery nature of the concept and the difficulty in articulating its specific requirements contributed to the cultural anxiety engendered by the panoptical surveillance system. It did so by imposing cautious conservatism on Victorian behavior—it was better to be too careful rather than to blunder into costly mistakes.¹⁵ Thus, though respectability often remained a fuzzy concept, anchored as it was in the particular mores of a given community or discourse cell, fears of transgression and consequent repercussions lent it a veneer of rigidity and implacability.

Respectability served as a dividing line between and within classes. It was a means of establishing and maintaining hierarchy, particularly within the new middle class. As the middle class formed itself, its members needed to distinguish and separate themselves from what they had been previously—the working class—and to create an internal hierarchy. Methods of credentialization, of forming systems of restrictions to keep interlopers out and allow only those who qualified for membership to pass through, developed. In her study The Best Circles: Society in the Nineteenth Century, Lenore Davidoff points to the increase of privacy and selectivity amongst the upper and middle classes during the nineteenth century which allowed them segregate and exclude undesirable elements of society, while giving them a means to prove their own social qualifications. This exclusivity culminated in the strict codes of respectability of the Victorian period. She says that there were “developments towards greater exclusiveness, privacy and controlled social interaction” (24). These restrictions revolved around codes of respectability: proper behavior, speech, dress, social associations and alliances, and manners. The rising middle class strove to distance itself from its former ‘working class’ associations and align itself with the traditions of nobility. Amongst those things which became markers of middle class status and middle class respectability were cleanliness, servants, proper language skills, education, etiquette and manners, dress devoted to leisure and travel. Though the middle class did not deny its professional connections, it negotiated a middle ground of more genteel occupations—more intellectual and less manual—and adhered to more of the traditional conceptions of gentility. The explosion of etiquette books during the mid-Victorian period gives testimony to the middle class desire to become gentle, to establish codes of respectability which would articulate

measurable differences between themselves and the working and lower classes.¹⁶ Thus, according to Davidoff, the divisions between and within classes, particularly the newly formed middle class, became quite formalized and rigid during the Victorian period:

The formation of a formal social life confined to private locations and rigidly defined by convention which was embraced by aristocratic and middle classes in both town and country made it possible for upwardly mobile individuals and parts of families to gain access to new groups if they had the necessary qualifications. Before this period, the problem of maintaining barriers against newcomers [the *nouveau riche*] was never so important. The whole basis of social relations was family (or pseudo-family) ties between equals in the elite, or patronage across well-defined hierarchical lines. (27)

The surge in the publication of books regarding manners and conduct during this period suggests the extent of the desire of the untutored middle classes to learn refinement, to become respectable, and to thus earn symbolic capital and a higher place within the power pyramid.¹⁷

Manners, appropriate dress, appropriate language and gentility—all of these insubstantial qualities make up the core of respectability. According to Michael Curtin in Propriety and Position: A Study of Victorian Manners,

certain habits were identified with the aristocracy and others with the middle class; a person observed with certain manners was recognized by others as of a particular class; individuals tried to make their own habits conform to the usages of the class they preferred. . . . A skillful observer

might be able to recognize another's class of origin despite the latter's attempt to adopt the manners of his preferred class. (53)

Categories of respectability serve as a kind of language, hegemonically negotiated and approved, and correspond to Bourdieu's theory of symbolic expression, which "through a system of social differences . . . expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups. These . . . systems of differences which are both classified and classifying, ranked and ranking, mark those who appropriate them" (54). A system of symbolic power predicated on values of respectability depends on the panopticality of the power pyramid, as well as on its rigid hierarchization. The mid-Victorian middle class eagerly claimed codes of respectability as a means of self-promotion as they jockeyed for higher positions on the pyramid. Those who achieved greater status within the pyramid had proportionally stronger reputations than those below. Their reputations essentially pre-certified a certain level of respectability required to qualify for their position within the power pyramid, and therefore they did not suffer as great a level of scrutiny.

The danger of exempting anyone from strict surveillance is highlighted in the fictional characters of Lady Audley, Isabel Vane, and Bessie Keith. All four of these characters pretend propriety and are lent a margin of protection by their level of authorized power on the pyramid. Though eventually all are punished for their transgressions, they succeed in causing a great deal of social damage. Bessie Keith hides her transgressions behind the facade of the domestic angel, while in reality she has run herself into debt, neglected her husband's ill health, and put Rachel in the hands of Mauleverer. Her death comes as a result of her dalliance with the unfortunate Mr. Carleton when she tries to hide her indiscretion from her brother. Though Alick Keith

warned his friends of his sister's duplicity, their observations told them otherwise.

Yonge draws a significant comparison between Bessie and Rachel: Alick made a stronger effort to curb Rachel's abject, and she succeeded in becoming a domestic angel.

The question remains, had he been more strict with Bessie, would she also have become a domestic angel rather than dying as a result of her transgressions? Lady Audley sabotages the Audley family, dividing them and exposing them to gossip and ridicule.

Her success in deceiving Michael Audley discredits his ability as a leader within his discourse community; it weakens public trust in his judgment and his ability to influence, and thus destroys his usefulness as an authorized agent at that level. Isabel Vane's sordid affair and consequent divorce exposes Mr. Carlyle to public embarrassment, and thus he suffers a similar challenge to his reputation. Further, because the circulatory intelligence network continuously refreshes its data, reviewing and renewing it, and because of the relational stigma of transgression, Isabel's children will always suffer suspicion and a heightened scrutiny as a result of their mother's monstrosity.

With marriage advocated as the most important goal in a Victorian woman's life, it was imperative that a woman establish and maintain a good reputation in order to be considered eligible by prospective husbands.¹⁸ Because of the exorbitant cost of establishing a household, and given the surplus of marriageable women in England, men could and did demand high standards of respectability from prospective wives, particularly if the size of the girl's dowry or her family's connections could not overcome her deficiencies. A man might turn a blind eye to certain flaws in a woman's personality or behavior if it were economically sound to do so.¹⁹ However, such a woman could prove a liability if she transgresses the lines of respectability too far and too publicly.

Her corruption then becomes socially contagious, the stigma of her transgression tainting both family and friends. Those people in contact with her might be shunned or ‘cut’ — excluded from important social contacts. As Davidoff notes, much of a man’s business life grew directly out of his social connections. Private social gatherings and the private clubs gave a man associations which led to business transactions in the public arena: “It was in the course of calling that wives made the contacts which led to dinner invitations which in turn might mean entry into important houses” and lead to opportunities, both social and economic (44). To be excluded from this social network would mean not only the embarrassment of social isolation, but economic disaster. It would lead to disqualification of authorized agency as well as loss of privileges within the panoptical power pyramid, resulting in a lowering of status within the pyramid and consequently a loss of power.²⁰ Thus a woman’s concern for the endangerment of family and friends through relational stigmatization serves as a deterrent to possible transgression, just as the possibility of furthering the ambitions and careers of family and friends through the positives of reputation encourages adherence and conformity to hegemonic codes of feminine behavior.

Perhaps one of the most memorable examples of this relational stigma in all of nineteenth century British literature occurs in Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice when Jane’s and Elizabeth’s marital opportunities suffer from the undignified conduct of their sisters and mother.²¹ As amusing as that situation continues to be for readers, without intervention both girls face a bleak lifelong spinsterhood without a home or income. At the end of the century George Gissing in The Odd Women (1893) offers a dark portrait of just what might have happened to Jane and Elizabeth. His novel follows two genteel

sisters who have not married and must attempt to make a living for themselves. Virginia and Alice live pitifully, constantly verging on starvation. They take work as companions and governesses, but such jobs not only pay very little, they are ephemeral; children grow up, those in need of companionship die or take in spinster relatives. But these are the only respectable jobs available to middle class spinster women (those who are independently wealthy are an exception), and thus they are locked into a cycle of poverty, insecurity, and hopelessness. If we apply Gissing's eventualities to Jane and Elizabeth, we gain dreadful insight into the real danger of relational stigmatization.

The system of respectability and surveillance functions microcosmically, applying restrictions, coercion and rewards individually. Individuals respond by conforming to hegemonic requirements and thus fortify hegemony. They also participate in the system of panoptical surveillance, denying their own and others' rights to privacy in an effort to garner more symbolic capital and thus advance up the power pyramid. This competitive system of surveillance assures that all information will be yielded up to the circulatory intelligence system. Those who refuse or neglect to report their observations are subject to punishment in the form of loss of stature within the power pyramid, and with that demotion, a loss of power.

Appearances Are Everything

It is not only a misconception but naïve to believe that all women could and would achieve the status of the domestic angel. Rather, the ideology served to encourage adherence to hegemonic codes of femininity by formulating an ecology of desire and fear

within which women who more closely conformed to the ideology of the domestic angel achieved greater status and reward, while those who failed suffered and even died.

The ideal was normalized into routine hegemonic expectation, with the understanding that the abject continued to exist beneath the surface, that the monster could escape without warning, that constant discipline and self-patrol would be necessary. Though the domestic angel was hegemonically accredited to be a natural condition for a good woman, at the same time, it was culturally understood that girls must be trained to control themselves, to become the domestic angel and suppress the abject. Thus the ideology of the woman as domestic angel served hegemony by insisting on the need for outside control of women and by generating internal complicity and desire to achieve. With such success came recognition and power within the panoptical pyramid, and often financial security, prosperity, and social success. This two-pronged method of control and containment guaranteed the general cooperation of women, and defused possible turbulence (and a consequent loss of hegemonic stability) by undermining the validity of any protests by attributing them to the monstrous side of female nature.

Ascension to domestic angel status was demonstrated through a woman's outward appearance—through empirical evidence—for as the cases of Lady Audley and Isabel Vane make very clear, knowing the mind of a woman was not practicable. However, according to Foucault, the panoptical system of surveillance provides the means of collecting “a whole corpus of individualizing knowledge” (Discipline 126). This knowledge separates, defines and categorizes any given individual within a community. As we have seen, hegemonic power was applied at an individualized, or microcellular, level, justifying the pyramid's system of stratification and hierarchy for the delegation of

authority and power. Perhaps more importantly, it also generated a discipline of complicity and obedience requiring that each member of the pyramid live in a constant state of self-awareness and self-patrol.²² Because even the slightest perception of misbehavior would be circulated through the intelligence network and could have a profound effect on a woman's reputation, and therefore on her accrued authority, every woman must therefore scrupulously maintain appearances. Every woman must guard her reputation with fanatical—or perhaps more appropriately for the Victorian era, puritanical—zeal. The fear of contagious corruption only added extra impetus to a woman's obedience to and compliance with hegemonic social mores.

Though personal reputation was also important to Victorian men, in the case of women (whose lives and livelihoods depended on their reputations) maintaining appearances was even more important than for men.²³ As Michael Curtin says, “breaches of either morality or propriety redounded most heavily against women. This was one reason why late Victorian feminism was so strongly puritanical and why it attacked the double standard by urging greater purity of men rather than by lowering the moral demands on women” (214).²⁴ This paradoxical double standard of morality, where women were at once both the moral heart of the nation and the site of corruption, led to severe punishments for women who crossed the bounds of respectability. Foucault's investigation of penal theory becomes important here. He argues that such a transgressor—one in which so much social trust has been invested—“has broken the pact [with society], [she] is therefore the enemy of society as a whole. . . . The least crime attacks the whole of society” (*Discipline* 90). Because women were considered the center of morality in Victorian Britain while men were considered morally weaker, a

fallen woman was punished more harshly because of her greater responsibility.²⁵ Judith Rowbotham argues that “throughout the nineteenth century . . . feminine influence was [believed to be] more essential to the daily moral health and strength of the family unit and of the nation than that of a man” (21). Thus feminine transgression was all the more heinous, even treasonous, and necessitated a severe punishment for the overall “defence of society” (Foucault, Discipline 90).²⁶ At the same time, such a punishment was advertised as being for her own benefit, since it squelched the emergence of her abject nature, essentially saving her from herself.

Empirical evidence concerning any given individual was screened through a particular kind of filtering consciousness which, according to Foucault, sorts the masses of information on the basis of “the potentiality of danger that lies hidden in an individual and which is manifested in his observed everyday conduct” (Discipline 126). David Spurr’s analysis of the gaze of the Western journalist in a colonized territory is useful here in understanding how information is chosen, gathered and sorted when the gaze is situated within a particular hegemony. He explains that:

the eye remains mobile and selective, constantly filtering the visible for the *sign*, for those gestures and objects that, when transformed into the verbal or photographic image, can alone have meaning for a Western audience by entering a familiar web of signification. The journalist is literally on the lookout for scenes that carry an already established interest for a Western audience, thus investing perception itself with the mediating power of cultural difference. (21)

Spurr's journalist is an authorized agent of imperialism, of western control. And though this journalist is not necessarily "clearly or consciously the instrument of colonial authority," he continues to assert "a commanding, controlling gaze" (Spurr 20). This is because "the sympathetic humanitarian eye is no less a product of deeply held colonialist values, and no less authoritative in the mastery of its object, than the surveying and policing eye" (20). Thus the western journalist is very much akin to the Victorian observer—an authorized agent of a particular hegemony, applying a "commanding and controlling gaze" which grows naturally from his basic ideological structure. By likening an observer within the Victorian panoptical power pyramid to Spurr's journalist, we get a clearer understanding of the hegemonic filter through which information is gathered and its relevance assessed. Like Spurr's journalist, the observer collects and sorts information of interest to the members of the panoptical power pyramid whose 'web of signification' is the imperialist Victorian hegemony which gives rise to all rules, codes, taboos, and criteria of culture. For women, the hegemonically ordained criteria of respectability were evoked transdiscursively from the parameters of the domestic angel: selflessness, meekness, prudence, obedience, morality, kindness, generosity, purity, modesty, and above all, self-sacrifice. Throughout the five novels of this study, the writers evince an awareness of the importance of respectability and the importance of maintaining proper appearances..

Under Surveillance

Throughout the five novels of this study the writers evince an awareness of both the existence of the surveillance system and its coercive power. Whether offering a

sympathetic villain—like Isabel Vane and Lady Audley—or whether offering a more correct version of womanhood—like Lucilla Marjoribanks, Ermine Williams, and Helen Teviot—these authors write with a consciousness of the effects of surveillance. They each devote extensive attention to the importance of appearances and reputations. In fact, much of the action in all five novels occurs in reaction to gossip or as an effort to preempt the production and circulation of incorrect information. As specifically pertaining to women, the system is devoted to the production of domestic angels; to encourage women to actively conform to the code of the domestic angel. A closer examination of the novels reveals specific techniques of control and containment involved in the hegemonic promotion of the domestic angel ideology; techniques made possible by the foundation of surveillance within Victorian society.

When Mr. Carlyle learns of the his sister's sabotage of his wife's housekeeping, not from his own observation living in his home, but through gossip, he tells Mrs. Hare:

Cornelia will quit East Lynne. . . . I have not spoken to her yet, but shall do so now. I have long made up my mind to that; that if ever I married again, I and my wife would live alone. It is said she interfered too much with my former wife: had I suspected it, Cornelia should not have remained in the house a day. Rest assured that Barbara shall not be subjected to the chance. (Wood 309)

Carlyle here acknowledges his own failure to maintain surveillance of his wife and sister. As a result, Isabel elopes with Frances Levison, deserting her husband and children. Yet the blame lies not only on Isabel herself, but on Carlyle's failure to observe and take appropriate preventative action.²⁷ As the narrator notes, "Lady Isabel was endowed with

sensitively refined delicacy, with an innate, lively consciousness of right and wrong; a nature, such as hers, is one of the last that may be expected to err; and, but for that most fatal misapprehension regarding her husband . . . she would never have forgotten herself” (Wood 238). Had Mr. Carlyle been more observant of his wife, he might have noticed hints of jealousy, small revelations of her hidden abject, and taken steps to protect her from herself.

There is danger in Carlyle’s laxity, in his failure to vigilantly observe. He fills one of the highest positions of qualified agency in his discourse cell. By the end of the novel, when he is elected Member of Parliament, it could be said he holds *the* highest position of qualified agency. Yet when he fails to maintain the integrity of his own household, when his wife and sister transgress the boundaries of proper femininity right beneath his nose, he reveals himself to be flawed, perhaps even incompetent. In that incompetence lies the threat to the stability of his community.²⁸ If he cannot safeguard his own household, how can he protect the community? Wood finally excuses him, laying the blame on Levison, Isabel and Miss Corny. Carlyle missed the clues because they also held superior positions of agency on the power pyramid. He assumes that because they have proven their qualifications and been delegated such high positions of authority on the power pyramid, that they do not require such strict surveillance. He is wrong.

Carlyle’s incompetence also places his children in social danger. Isabel’s corruption is contagious, damaging the reputations of her still small children, particularly her daughter. Barbara Hale (Carlyle), in an ironic scene, details the damage to Madame

Vine (who is Isabel in disguise) following the train accident which left her supposedly dead. Barbara says:

‘Of course the disgrace is reflected on the children, and always will be; the shame of having a divorced mother—’

‘Is she not dead?’ interrupted Lady Isabel.

‘She is dead. Oh yes. But they will not be the less pointed at, the girl especially, as I say.’ (340)

Because of the folly of their mother and the lack of appropriate surveillance on the part of their father, the children will forever carry the taint of Isabel’s transgression. Just as Lucy Audley feared that she had inherited madness from her mother, these children must fear the genetic taint of their mother by virtue of the relational stigma attached to transgressive behavior. Her transgression suggests the probability of a sinister abject within them, and therefore they will arouse constant suspicion and intent scrutiny almost as if they wore a scarlet letter. Indeed Barbara impresses on Madame Vine that Lucy in particular, more than her brothers, must be carefully watched and disciplined so as to “keep her from a like fate” as that of her mother (340).

Like Carlyle, Michael Audley also assumes the authenticity of Lady Audley’s credentials and qualifications, only to discover that despite her outward angelic appearance, she is a murderer, an arsonist, a bigamist, and a madwoman.²⁹ Worse, she committed most of her criminal acts while in his home, as his wife. Small clues reveal her personality to Robert Audley but are missed by her husband, step-daughter, father, and friends. The difference lies in the lackadaisical nature of their surveillance and the insistent calculation of Robert’s. The consequent harm of negligent observation

emphasizes the importance of vigilant monitoring of all women, and by implication, the necessity of maintaining a mode of perpetual doubt and suspicion, particularly toward those women whose past lives, or elements of them, are hidden.³⁰ When Lady Audley at last confesses her abusive childhood and her insane mother to her husband, he is more than stunned:

He sat silent and immovable. What was this story that he was listening to? Whose was it, and to what was it to lead? It could not be his wife's; he had heard her simple account of her youth, and had believed it as he had believed in the Gospel. She had told him a very brief story of an early orphanage, and a long quiet, colourless youth spent in the conventual seclusion of an English boarding-school. (Braddon 349)

Michael Audley believes what his wife has told him about her past without question, despite clues which indicate a different reality. These clues are revealed in her appearance and behavior, and are equally available to any observer, yet only Robert collects and assembles the information into a coherent chain of evidence which exposes her crimes and monstrous nature. By the time she reveals herself, he has already discovered most of her past. In fact, there can be no doubt that he would have ferreted out the rest of her secrets in a short period of time, had not he forced Lady Audley's confession. As a means of forcing her to confess, he informs her in a short message of his further investigation:

Should Mrs. George Talboys [Lady Audley] really have survived the date of her supposed death, as recorded in the public prints, and upon the tomb-stone in Ventnor churchyard, and should she exist in the person of

the lady suspected and accused by the writer of this, there can be no great difficulty in finding some one able and willing to identify her. Mrs. Barkamb, the owner of North Cottages, Wildernsea, would no doubt consent to throw some light upon this matter, either to dispel a delusion or to confirm a suspicion. (Braddon 305-6)

Because he is correct that witnesses to Lady Audley's past are available, she realizes the futility of carrying on her masquerade and makes a complete confession. Yet the availability of such witnesses only serves to emphasize Michael Audley's incompetence and culpable gullibility. In the course of hearing his wife's confession, Michael Audley comes at last to understand his own negligence to his assigned agency responsibilities: "he began to understand it all now. A crowd of unheeded words and forgotten circumstances that had seemed too insignificant for remark or recollection, flashed back upon him" (Braddon 351). Yet despite the fact that he clearly defaulted on his obligations as an authorized agent of hegemony, the narrator offers to mitigate his culpability, saying:

I do not believe that Sir Michael Audley had ever really believed in his wife. He had loved her and admired her; he had been bewitched by her beauty and bewildered by her charms; but that sense of something wanting, that vague feeling of loss and disappointment which had come upon him on the summer's night of his betrothal, had been with him more or less distinctly ever since. I cannot believe that an honest man, however pure and single may be his mind, however simply trustful his nature, is ever really deceived by falsehood. There is beneath the voluntary

confidence an involuntary distrust; not to be conquered by any effort of the will. (Braddon 352)

Yet rather than mitigating Michael Audley's fault, the narrator confirms it. In recognizing his underlying awareness of Lucy Audley's monstrous nature, the narrator acknowledges Michael Audley's intentional disregard for his assigned duty within the power pyramid. He fails to maintain proper surveillance; he fails to record and distribute information which would have prevented much of the harm that Lady Audley accomplishes. He has not only failed, but willfully refuses to acknowledge the evidence he himself gathered, thus withholding pertinent data from the circulatory intelligence network, and thus essentially creating a temporary blind spot within the structure. At the same time, he allows Lady Audley to move up in the power pyramid, lending her power—specifically a spotless reputation, an authentic and irrefutable name, influential connections, and wealth—all by virtue of the privileges accorded to her as his wife. In permitting her ascension, he threatens the viability of the structure, authorizing and allowing an unqualified agent into a position of power which she in turn abuses and subverts in an effort to preserve her secrets.

Building a Reputation

When Mary Forrester jilts Colonel Stuart in Emily Eden's The Semi-detached Couple, she does so having discovered that "he was extravagant, that he played, and that he was totally without religious principle" (Eden 116). His true nature exposed to Mary by his jealous mistress, Mary calls off their engagement. Several weeks later she becomes the heiress of a small fortune. Colonel Stuart, unwilling to reveal his fault in the

situation, allows it to be publically understood that she jilted him once she came into her fortune because she did not wish to tie herself to such a poor man. As a result of his emotional distress, he claims that he then turned to excessive gambling and liaisons with married women. The public accepts this story as truth, assigning Mary a reputation as “cold-hearted and capricious” as well as vain and selfish (116). Not only did she jilt a fine man, but drove him to immoral acts.³¹ Such a reputation undercuts her eligibility for marriage. And though she is publicly exonerated, the incorrect information will continue to circulate through the intelligence network. She will be forever marked as having revealed monstrous qualities, and therefore requiring a higher level of critical surveillance, and limiting her ability to qualify for symbolic capital. An axiomatic understanding within Victorian culture was that once a reputation was damaged, no matter how deserving or undeserving, it could never be repaired. Women then strove all the harder to maintain appearances and never give any observer a reason to question their respectability.

In each of these five novels, the reputations of the central female characters come into question. Each author explores the importance of maintaining a good reputation, as well as pointing to its vulnerability. For instance, in East Lynne, when Barbara first goes to Mr. Carlyle’s offices to discuss her brother, her immediate concern is that she not be seen, for “it was *not* the custom for ladies, young and single, to come there after Mr. Carlyle” (33). Barbara knows that she will be observed and that that information will be reported to the circulatory intelligence network. She also knows that it could be misconstrued and misinterpreted, and that like Mary Forrester, her reputation will probably be mistakenly damaged, never to be fully restored. And she is correct. When

Miss Carlyle sees Barbara leaving, she grills the other woman suspiciously, not believing Barbara's explanation, but rather inferring that Barbara was chasing Mr. Carlyle romantically, exhibiting wanton (monstrous) behavior.

Rachel Curtis, in Charlotte Yonge's The Clever Woman of the Family, exemplifies the unrecoverable reputation. Despite her marriage and rehabilitation, Rachel continues to suffer the suspicions of her family and friends. When Bessie dies following childbirth, having been in the care of Rachel, the letters between Rachel's family and friends indicate their continued distrust. Ermine writes to Colonel Keith saying "pray, if you can say anything to exonerate poor Rachel from mismanagement, say it strongly; her friends are so engaged in wishing themselves there, and pitying poor Bessie for being in her charge, that I long to confute them, for I fully believe in her sense and spirit in any real emergency that she had not ridden out to encounter" (Yonge 326). Ermine's last words of support for Rachel are qualified in terms of Rachel's ability to maintain her new status of domestic angel—Ermine believes in Rachel so long as the younger woman does not relapse into monstrous independence or "cleverness." However, her family cannot trust her ability to care for Bessie and become suspicious of Rachel's care when Bessie dies. Thus Rachel's reputation remains irreparable, no matter how she has evolved.

Lucilla, in Margaret Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks, demonstrates her awareness of proprieties and the need to maintain her reputation, not only for her sake, but because any stains on her reputation extend automatically to her father and even her friends. When her father naively challenges her invitation to Mrs. Chiley for a dinner party, Lucilla responds correctly, saying: "I must have a chaperone, you know. . . . I don't say

it is not quite absurd; but then, at first, I always make it a point to give in to the prejudices of society. That is how I have always been so successful . . .” (72). Without a chaperone, even in her father’s house, Lucilla would have crossed the boundaries of impropriety and thereby reduced her standing within the power pyramid, undermined her eligibility for marriage, and clouded her father’s reputation as a man of morals and propriety. Mrs. Bury underscores the need for constant self-awareness and self-patrol when she tells Lucilla, “I could only hope that I had impressed upon your mind that an account must be given of every careless word” (79). This last advice comes hard upon the heels of Tom Marjoribanks’ denouncement of religion, a conversation which Lucilla attempts to pass off as the result of his weaker male morality, though she fears “the possibility of her religious principles being impugned, which [is] dreadful in itself (‘for people can stand a man being sceptical [sic], you know . . . but everybody knows how unbecoming it is in a woman . . .” (83). Because she realizes that Mrs. Bury will report the occurrence and that the incident will be contributed to the circulatory intelligence network, she seeks to preempt any damage to her own reputation by distancing herself from Tom’s opinions. Yet Tom’s lack of propriety in this instance and others lowers his position within the power pyramid and invalidates his eligibility for marriage with Lucilla, something he deeply wants. But neither she nor her father consider him eligible. Though Dr. Marjoribanks admits a fondness for Tom as a nephew, his opinion of Tom as a son-in-law is less than positive:

the last person in the world that he would choose to see dancing attendance on his daughter was Tom Marjoribanks. . . .He took a great deal too much interest in Tom Marjoribanks to let him do anything so

foolish; and as for Lucilla, the idea that, after all her accomplishments, and her expensive education, and her year on the Continent, she should marry a man who had nothing, disgusted the Doctor. (69)

In spite of his jeer at marriage as “foolish” and the expression of his affection for Tom, the doctor is firmly opposed to any marriage between Tom and Lucilla.³² It is not until the end of the book when he returns (having succeeded in his business in India) that Tom can ascend high enough socially to propose. At the same time, by the end of the book Lucilla has lost a great deal of her social capital with the death of her father and the loss of his wealth, thus lowering her status within the pyramid. Thus the two equalize onto a level which makes marriage between them possible.

As I stated earlier, the definition of the respectable—or proper, or decorous, or fitting—whichever Victorian term you choose to assign to the concept, was fluid at best, and difficult to maintain. Robert Audley voices his antipathy for its ideological constrictions, describing day-to-day expectations of propriety monolithically as “this unflinching regularity in the smaller wheels and meaner mechanism of the human machine, which knows no stoppage or cessation, though the mainspring be for ever broken, and the hands pointing to purposeless figures upon a shattered dial” (Braddon 205). His description underscores the proliferation of rules, traditions, and taboos which allows for the individualized regulatory system of the panoptical power pyramid. He goes on to lament the growing mass of madhouses which he argues “are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within”

(Braddon 205). The ‘storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within’ grow out of the slippery nature of the rules of propriety, the shifting values assigned to behavior and appearances. What may be done now without impunity may generate painful reprisal later. What is respectable for some may not be respectable for others. For instance, when Mr. G., an influential politician, visits the Teviots in Emily Eden’s The Semi-attached Couple, he immediately develops an overt and public flirtation with Helen. He says to her husband, “I never saw such perfection. I cannot take my eyes from her” (157). Rather than responding jealously as has been his practice, Teviot is “delighted” (157). The narrator exonerates Mr. G, explaining that he

had established a right to make a little solemn political love to all the distinguished beauties of the day, and it was by no means a mere measure of custom and courtesy. He was as busy about his little flirtations, and as absorbed in his little sentiments, as if he had been . . . doing his first London season, and nobody thought it odd. Half the women in London unblushingly paid court to him, and nobody said it was scandalous. (157)

The diminutive language of this passage suggests the minor nature of his offenses: “little solemn political love,” “little flirtations,” and “little sentiments.” Combining a benignly innocent tone, a frankly open approach, and a public venue, Mr. G. manages to disarm the rules of flirtation, if only for himself. Thus despite the fact that he flirts openly, particularly with married women, and that they respond enthusiastically, none of the participants suffer censure from angry husbands or the public. This seems to challenge accepted Victorian social codes of behavior, particularly viewed through the ideological construction of the domestic angel. Yet what this passage really reveals is both the

slippery nature of social codes of behavior, and the real danger of misinterpretation.

Anyone unfamiliar with Mr. G. or his flirtations could easily believe in their reality and contribute that misinterpretation to the circulatory intelligence network. In doing so, not only would Mr. G's reputation be damaged, but those women with whom he flirted would come under suspicion. And though, like Mary Forrester, none of the parties would have actually committed any offenses, the taint of suspicion would nevertheless cling to them, undermining their authority and agency within the power pyramid.

Misinterpretation of information is an important theme in these five novels.

When Robert Audley first meets Clara Talboys, she appears to him to be "cold, hard and unwomanly. . . . a stately and heartless automaton" (Braddon 204). Her apparent disbelief and indifference to the evidence Robert provides of her brother's murder disgusts and repulses Robert. Yet when she runs outside to speak with him privately away from the oppressive eye of her father, her feminine flush, emotional entreaty, and her love for George convince Robert that she is the epitome of the domestic angel.

Robert originally concludes that Clara's stoicism during his meeting with her father is a consequence of her lack of emotion and thus he determines that she is an unnatural woman—the worst kind of woman. He also describes Lady Audley as unnatural, a correlation which cannot be lost on the readers. In the general mistaken conception of Lady Audley as the domestic angel, and Robert's original impression of Clara Talboys, we can see the inherent danger of basing 'facts' the interpretation of appearances.³³ Because these 'facts' are often incorrect and invariably are also deemed to be factual until proven otherwise, a woman must not only seek to appear respectable,

but she must also anticipate how her appearance might be misinterpreted and her reputation damaged by the circulation of inaccurate and erroneous information.

Oliphant repeatedly dramatizes the misinterpretation of Lucilla's appearances and behavior by society. Because she can eat in a socially difficult situation, she cannot be emotionally invested in it: "Mrs. Chiley, who watched her [Lucilla] with grandmotherly interest, was comforted to perceive that Lucilla, as on the former occasion, had strength of mind to eat her dinner" despite her supposed nerves (118). When observation fails to elicit information, the community relies on hindsight to make sense of a situation. Thus because she unexpectedly accepts Tom's proposal in the end of the book, Lucilla was always secretly emotionally attached to him:

And by degrees the Grange Lane people came to see that they knew a great deal about Tom, and to remind each other of the abrupt end of his last visit, and of his going to India immediately after, and of many little circumstance in Lucilla's looks and general demeanour which this *dénouement* seemed to make plain. . . . Going back upon their recollections, most people were able to verify the fact that Miss Marjoribanks had borne her little disappointments very well, and there was sometimes a preoccupation in her eye. (494-5)

In both instances, the social interpretation is incorrect, and is based on what is known personally about Lucilla and what is expected of a middle-class domestic angel.

Oliphant's dramatization of this social misconception exposes the ironies of social 'facts' which are dependent on observation and interpretation. Yet at the same time, Miss Marjoribanks demonstrates that in spite of individual personalities and the day-to-day

transgressions which occur in any given community, the system of the panoptical power pyramid serves to protect the community from real damage caused by transgressors. The unworthy Mr. Cavendish is prevented from taking a position of power; Barbara Lake is forced into exile through community ostracization; the Archdeacon is prevented from exposing misinformation concerning Mr. Cavendish and thereby ruining the reputations and credibility of many senior citizens of the town.

Yonge also focuses on the dangers of misinformation in The Clever Woman of the Family. For instance, upon hearing of Colonel Keith's and Ermine's relationship, Rachel wishes to withdraw from the company and ponder the situation. However, "consciousness and fear of the construction that might be put on her change of purpose [forced] her on" (Yonge 170). Rachel fears that her sudden change in plans will elicit a misinterpretation of her behavior and thus harm her reputation. Grace is equally conscious of the danger of misinformation when, following the revelation of the abusive conditions at Rachel's charity school, Grace "could not see three people talking together without blushing with indignation at the construction they were certainly putting on her sister's scarlet cheeks and absence from the drawing-room" (228). The scarlet is easily explained by Rachel's humiliation, the absence by her concern for the sick child upstairs. Nevertheless, the public interpretation is that she has been complicit in the fraud and abuse, and gossip that neither Rachel nor Grace anticipate, that Rachel is involved in a romantic relationship with Mauleverer.

Both Rachel and Grace prove wiser than their cousin Fanny in the matter of appearances. Both are aware of the possibility of false interpretations and both attempt to forestall them before the misinformation is circulated. Yet while Rachel is certainly the

character Yonge uses to denounce feminism and the 'new woman', Yonge finds her an insufficient illustration in stressing the importance of appearances. In the character of Rachel, Yonge has created a caricature of the outspoken, aggressive and controlling woman with whom readers would not wish to be identified. Rachel is expected to make blunders of appearances and so when punishment befalls her, the readers are encouraged to feel she has received her just desserts. Rachel serves as a negative example. However, in order for Yonge to impress on her readers the need to examine their own appearances and behavior, she must show that even domestic angels must be ever on guard.

In the following lesson, Yonge's main concern is to stress the importance of maintaining appearances, the importance of anticipating the interpretation someone might place on behavior and appearances, and the consequences to a woman too lax in this area. Even the best of women. Yonge's target for this lesson is unusual—Fanny (Lady Temple). Hitherto Yonge has represented Fanny as a domestic angel, second only to Ermine Williams. She demonstrates most characteristics of the domestic angel, although she does not exhibit as much prudence as she should. However, her faults are attributed to her innocence and her emotional state at the loss of her husband. Both of these characteristics are associated with the domestic angel, and thus Yonge is also in a sense criticizing a paradoxical ideology when she demonstrates that those characteristics have led Fanny into transgression.

Yonge's lesson begins when Lord Keith proposes marriage to Fanny. Oblivious of his interest until his proposal, Fanny examines her own behavior for what might have given him the impression that she might wish to again marry—a course of action she is adamantly opposed to. She says "it must have been my fault! I was so childish; and

when I've got my boys with me, I can't help being happy. . . . I know I have not been as sad and serious as my aunt thought I ought to be, and now this comes of it" (Yonge 154). Fanny quickly locates the fault in her own demeanor and behavior, crediting Lord Keith with making a reasonable interpretation. She believes that she has acted inappropriately and consequently curbs her behavior toward stricter propriety and self-restraint. Thus later, upon being invited to a party, she refuses. She "never for one moment thought of going, or even supposed that any one could imagine she could. Indeed, if she had accepted it, it would have been a decisive encouragement to her ancient suitor [Lord Keith]" (Yonge 176). Her refusal has the desired effect on Lord Keith: "Colin saw that he [Lord Keith] regarded her refusal, in its broad black edges, as a further clenching of the reply to his addresses" (Yonge 176). As a result, Lord Keith turns his attentions to Bessie.

However, Fanny's romantic troubles are not yet over. The bumbling Mr. Touchett has also fallen in love with her and soon makes his proposal. Fanny of course refuses, but again takes the blame: "I am afraid I can't be what I ought to be or people would never think of such nonsense" (Yonge 163). She then turns to Colonel Keith and begs, "please will you tell me how I could have been more guarded" (Yonge 163). The doubled proposals suggest that indeed Fanny should have been more aware, that the blame does rest on her for not anticipating how these men would read her appearance and behavior. That two men came to the same conclusion about her only serves to confirm her fault in the matter—her lack of propriety. Indeed Colonel Keith admonishes that she ought to have been more thoughtful about her invitations, and that she should not have allowed so much social interaction with Mr. Touchett. Fanny willingly accepts his

criticism, saying “If I had only thought in time” she might have modified her behavior and prevented the proposals (164).

The result of the two proposals, in spite of her attempt to suppress any public knowledge of them, is a welter of gossip and public speculation. The public continues to interpret the behavior of the principle characters in the matter and arrives at the correct conclusion. While Fanny’s reputation does not noticeably suffer, she has still lost credibility and now it becomes necessary that she be more closely monitored. At the same time, or perhaps more accurately as a consequence, she is required to develop stricter measures of self-patrol and self-restraint. She and her friends agree that these two unwanted proposals grew out of her own selfish desire to participate in various social activities. Rather than sacrificing her personal pleasure and refusing to participate, she had ignored the admonitions of her aunt and cousin to be more modest and less frivolous. Therefore, as a result of her transgression of the social codes, she must suffer through a difficult social predicament and public embarrassment.

Living Inside the Panopticon

When Rachel attends court to testify against Mauleverer in The Clever Woman of the Family, she does so not only as a legal obligation, but also to refute the prevailing gossip which identifies her as an accomplice to fraud, the schoolmaster’s lover, and, perhaps most disturbing, an unnatural woman who starves and beats children. While she explains her part as a victim of fraud, the real refutation of her guilt is conveyed in physical terms, rather than verbal. The crowd gathers its information not from what she says, but rather from her outward appearance:

All the world indeed was curious to see the encounter between Rachel Curtis and her impostor, and every one who had contributed so much as a dozen stamps to the F. U. E. E. felt as under a personal wrong and grievance, while many hoped to detect other elements of excitement, so that though all did not overtly stare at the witness, not even the most considerate could resist the impulse to glance at her reception of the bow with which he greeted her entrance. (Yonge 251)

Under the microscopic scrutiny of the audience, Rachel's demeanor is self-possessed and she maintains her outward composure: "there [is] no change of colour on her cheek" and she appears "impassive" throughout her testimony (Yonge 251). The Victorian ideological assumption behind such an examination argues that had she been guilty, there would have been a tell-tale color fluctuation in her face. Nor could she have maintained composure, but would have revealed to those dissecting gazes some outward evidence of her guilt. Innocence, guilt, evil, goodness—the Victorians believed that a person's character and mind could be read on her outward appearance, given sufficiently incisive scrutiny.

Positioning Rachel within the legal milieu as a witness emphasizes the importance of appearances within Victorian culture. She is being observed for the veracity of her answers, she is recounting her observations of Mauleverer, a confidence man who has maintained all appearances of respectability while manipulating Rachel into public activities which suggest her guilt. She recounts her observations of him even as the court observes her as means of discovering signs of her guilt or innocence. Because she reveals herself only to be negligent, her own appearance and answers showing naïveté

rather than criminal culpability, her observations of Mauleverer are perceived as accurate, if not discerning. Even so, the court requires corroborating testimony, emphasizing Rachel's loss of credibility. Because there are no other witnesses, Mauleverer is acquitted; his appearance of respectability and her loss of agency contribute to his credibility. Eventually, however, further investigation produces evidence and witnesses which convict Mauleverer of more crimes than the one for which Rachel testifies against him, demonstrating the effectiveness of the pervasive surveillance of the panoptical power pyramid.

Rachel's public exposure serves as punishment for her guilt, though not of fraud and child abuse. Rather she is guilty of unwomanly or monstrous behavior. Specifically, she acts too independently of male instruction and guidance. Her punishment helps discipline her, serving as a corrective and facilitating her metamorphosis into a domestic angel by the end of the novel. As Colonel Keith notes at the end of the trial, "the absurdity of her whole conduct was palpable. I hope she has had a lesson" (Yonge 262).

Following Rachel's testimony against Mauleverer, she wishes only to isolate herself. This is impossible. Isolation would give credence to the gossip surrounding her relationship with Mauleverer. Mrs. Curtis, her mother, tells her: "After all, my love, one can't so much wonder! You have always been very peculiar, you know, and so clever, and you took up this [charity school for girls] so eagerly. And then the Greys saw you so unwilling to prosecute" (Yonge 264). Rachel responds by attending the dinner party that evening, saying "I will give as much ocular demonstration as I can, that I am not pining" for Mauleverer (Yonge 264). Rachel becomes aware of the constant surveillance of society, of her friends, family, and husband. She responds to that surveillance by

conforming more and more to the role of the domestic angel. In a final soliloquy of confession, she articulates the changes which she has undergone, offering the reader a moral lesson in proper femininity:

I had a few intellectual tastes, and liked to think and read, which was supposed to be cleverness; and my wilfulness made me fancy myself superior in force of character, in a way I could never have imagined if I had lived more in the world. Contact with really clever people has shown me that I am slow and unready. . . . I should have been much better if I had had either father or brother to keep me in order. (Yonge 367).

Rachel learns humility, dependence, and meekness. As a result, the surveillance becomes rewarding rather than punishing as the looks turn approving by the end of the novel.

Ermine Williams, who is Yonge's representative domestic angel in the novel, says "it is beautiful to see her [Rachel] holding herself back, and most forbearing where she feels most positive" (365). Rachel no longer has a need to fear surveillance, because she has reformed into a domestic angel. As such, her actions and appearance are always above reproach, always conforming to the hegemonic codes of proper femininity. In this way the panoptical power pyramid coerces women into willing compliance with hegemony.

Perhaps it is amusing in East Lynne when Judge Hare attempts to force Barbara into marriage because the gossips have come to the conclusion that "the unhappy crime attaching to her brother was the sole cause" of her remaining single (Wood 261).

Hearing the gossip, fearing that it will be believed, Judge Hare insists that she refute the gossip by marrying Major Thorn whom she has just refused. The coercive power of gossip and the importance of reputation are revealed in the Judge's complaint to Mr.

Carlyle: “One would think, rather than lie under the stigma and afford the parish room to talk, she’d marry the first man that came, if it was the parish beadle—anybody else would” (Wood 262). How long Barbara would have been able to resist her father’s demands remains unknown, for shortly thereafter Mr. Carlyle finally proposes and she accepts, but out of her long-unrequited love for him rather than the pressure from her father. The reader’s amusement at Judge Hare’s reaction is tempered by the reality of his fears: he cannot afford damage to his reputation, or he risks losing his livelihood as a judge and his position of power within the community.

The system of interpretive surveillance inherent to the panoptical power pyramid works to hegemonic advantage by creating an atmosphere of constant menace, of a Damocletian sword hanging over every woman’s head. The ability to micro-focus power on an individual is much the same as the individualized inspection allowed by the segmentation of space in Bentham’s Panopticon. Though in Victorian society an individual might move about freely, her person is under constant surveillance as though she were in a fixed space: “the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded . . . [and] each individual is constantly located, examined” (Foucault, Discipline 197). The dynamics remain the same because of the diffusion of surveillance. The gaze of the panoptical power pyramid is as “omnipresent and omniscient” as the prison (Foucault, Discipline 197). The necessary anonymity of the observer and the continued threat of surveillance and discovery are preserved in the profusion of possible watchers. Indeed, in the panoptical power pyramid, there is more likelihood of consistent observation by the multiplicity of observers which make up society than there is a possibility of going unobserved. This creates the effect of “conscious and permanent

visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, Discipline 201).

Because, as Foucault points out, observation is “unverifiable . . . the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (Discipline 201). This sense of imminent danger encourages a kind of manic state of constant dread of discovery—of real or imagined offenses. As a result, there is more strict adherence to the social codes of respectability, increasing the likelihood of complicity and participation within the power pyramid. As David Spurr argues, “sight confers power; for the observed, visibility is a trap” (16). Further, there is a fear, not only of what truth shall be observed, but what will be construed by watchers.

Notes

- ¹ The only real options for middle class women's work included becoming a companion or governess, both of which depended on references which required respectability and propriety. Lucy Graham (later Lady Audley) attempts to circumvent the requirement by changing her name and arranging for forged references, enabling her to find work as a governess. However, she is eventually discovered and dies in madhouse. Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth becomes a governess on the basis of the local dissenting vicar's recommendation, though he knows she has committed adultery and has borne an illegitimate child as a result. She also eventually dies following the revelation of her improprieties. Both women are punished severely for transgressing against the domestic angel ideal, for being unnatural women, and then for subverting hegemony by undermining public faith in the competency of the system. See also Joan Perkin, Victorian Women, Washington Square: New York UP, 1993, and Judith Rowbotham, Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989.
- ² Those people who hold top agency positions would be intent on protecting their positions, taking few risks which would lead to disqualification.
- ³ Queen Victoria is of course a striking anomaly in this architecture of power. However, she was perceived as largely ornamental, allowing her husband to perform the political duties of the monarchy, while she acted as the domestic angel. As Adrienne Munich states "Many traditional powers of the monarchy were transferred to Parliament during Victoria's reign, although the publication of her letters after her death challenged the public perception of the powerless queen" (2). However, appearances in the Victorian

period, those cultural elements subject to scrutiny and gossip, created cultural reality.

As Munich goes on to point out, unlike Elizabeth I, Victoria is “not regard[ed] . . . as central to her [political] era, though no one denies her function as a cultural icon” (2).

⁴ Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) formulated the idea of the panoptical prison. The cells would be built in a circular building surrounding a tower ‘axis.’ Prisoners would be placed in the cells which would be backlit to make the prisoners always available to the gaze of the central tower. The watcher within the tower would always be hidden, the gaze discontinuous. Because the prisoners would never know when or if they were being watched, their uncertainty would encourage constant adherence to the rules for fear of being discovered. Foucault examines the circulation of power within Bentham’s design of the Panopticon, arguing that:

the Panopticon . . . takes account of the chief inspector’s surveillance of his staff and the constant watch kept over everyone through the windows of the tower, an unbroken succession of observations recalling the motto: each comrade becomes an overseer. . . . In the Panopticon each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others. You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust. (Power/Knowledge 157-8)

⁵ Adultery or bigamy would fall into the ‘heinous’ category, while refusing to marry, or failing to meet the requirements of a social role would be considered more moderate transgressions. Because my argument does not revolve around real crime, but social

transgression, it is important to emphasize the danger of ignoring ‘minor’ appearing transgressions.

⁶ Women excluded from what I have termed legitimate discourse might turn to illegitimate forms of discourse to survive: begging, criminal activities such as prostitution or theft, or they might drop from their middle class status and become laborers of some sort (though such work might be difficult to find; employers would be suspicious of women who had slid from their class). In any case, she becomes ‘unsexed’ in the terminology of the period. She loses her cultural value.

It might be argued that women could participate in missionary work, and had begun to attend schools which allowed them professional careers. However, the missionary woman was very much the domestic angel and thus retained her class status and cultural value. Indeed, postcolonial writers have argued that the white woman in the colonies, particularly the missionary woman, conformed more rigidly to the codes of the domestic sphere than their counterparts in Britain. These women served as symbols of England to the colonized natives, representing purity, divine righteousness and racial supremacy. According to Deirdre David, Victorian women acted “as emblems of correct colonial governance” (5).

Professional careers were not really a viable option because so few were publicly accepted and profitable during the mid-Victorian period. The largest exception would be the traditional role of the governess and companion. However, these roles marginalized those women on the edges of a foreign domestic space, one that belonged to women who better exemplified society’s expectations of womanhood.

As George Gissing masterfully portrayed in his novel The Odd Women (1893), to be a governess was not particularly desirable, since those women had little contact with eligible bachelors and so did not have access to the authorized feminine domestic sphere; they lacked financial security—and often physical security when forced to suffer the attentions of male family members and guests; and they often became, particularly as they grew older or ill, incapable of supporting themselves. See also note 56 in Chapter 4.

⁷ The rules created within any given discourse cell could not contradict or challenge hegemony without endangering the cell's own integrity, which is governed by and contained within the larger hegemonic structure.

⁸ Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that some gossips may be making an attempt (whether consciously or unconsciously) to play “with reputations, circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods about the activities, sometimes about the motives and feelings, of others” in order to “further political or social ambitions by damaging competitors or enemies, gratify envy and rage” (4). Thus while gossip may contain truth, it is often biased by the motives of the gossips. The information retrieved in this way must be reprocessed through formal channels for corroboration, or to separate the fact from rumor.

⁹ Bourdieu is specifically concerned here with ethnic and/or national identity (depending on how the boundaries of a social collective (country or nation) are drawn.

¹⁰ Hegemony depends on such discursive consensus—it is, always, transdiscursive.

- ¹¹ Foucault's discussion here revolves around elementary education, specifically focusing on the methods of teaching and correction involved in training students to behave appropriately.
- ¹² In Chapter Five, I discuss further the concept of hegemonic service value. Specifically, in that chapter I examine those female characters within the novels who do not suffer reprisal for transgression, as reprisal would do more damage than good. Thus these characters have greater value unpunished than punished.
- ¹³ Ironically, though all women were believed to harbor monstrous qualities inherent to feminine nature (contradicting the ideology of the domestic angel), only those women who revealed those qualities in some way were subject to reprisal, though of course all women were subject to particular scrutiny.
- ¹⁴ Specifically, there were divisions of respectability according to such considerations as political association, religious affiliations (broad church, low church, dissenting church, etc.), class, economic status, urban or rural communities, gender, and education. For a detailed discussion of the concept of respectability in Victorian England, see F. M. L. Thompson, The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988.
- ¹⁵ In the case of women, however, respectability was more clearly defined, based as it was on the tenets of the domestic angel and fear of the feminine abject.
- ¹⁶ For more information concerning etiquette books and the evolution of Victorian manners amongst the middle class, see Michael Curtin's Propriety and Position: A Study of Victorian Manners.

¹⁷ Michael Curtin's extensive study on Victorian manners shows that there were a great variety of these books available, and many went through multiple printings. For example, he says that in "1848 the New Monthly Magazine reviewed three etiquette books, the first in its twenty-ninth edition, the second in its thirty-fifth, and the last in its seven-thousandth copy" (40).

¹⁸ A major consideration of a prospective wife was her usefulness in terms of social contact. A woman could establish social contacts which would further a husband's career in business, and establish connections within the power pyramid which would allow him to increase his delegated authority and ascend higher within the power structure. For further reading on women's social roles, see Joan Perkin's Victorian Woman, Washington Square, NY: New York UP, 1993; Judith Rowbotham's Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989; Pat Jalland's Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914, Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986; and Françoise Basch's Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

¹⁹ There was a conception that a husband could train his wife properly, so those behaviors which could be curbed as Alick does with Rachel in Yonge's Clever Woman might be overlooked. However in Miss Marjoribanks, Mr. Cavendish considers marriage to Barbara Lake a ludicrous idea because her flaws involve her class standing, her family, and her uncontrollable passions. He does eventually decide to marry her, but only under the condition that they leave English society altogether, since such a wife could only undercut his precarious social position. He thinks that Barbara, "if she were well

dressed, would still be a fine woman . . . and that about Naples, perhaps, or the baths of Lucca, or in Germany, or the south of France, a man might be able to get on well enough with such a companion, where society was not so exacting or stiff-starched as in England” (464).

²⁰ For instance in Pride and Prejudice when Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham and proceeds to live ‘in sin’ with him in London, her sisters suddenly lose all chance at marriage. Mr. Collins sums up the situation in his letter to Mr. Bennet: “this false step in one daughter, [sic] will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others, for who, as lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family[?]” (262).

²¹ It is important that Jane and Elizabeth are the only real candidates for marriage amongst the sisters. They aspire to the qualities of true womanhood, and present an appearance of the domestic angel. Once married, Elizabeth attempts to rescue her younger sister, training her in the attributes of the domestic angel, and thereby making her marriageable.

²² Self-patrol includes self-surveillance and self-discipline.

²³ James Eli Adams explores Victorian codes of masculine identity in Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

²⁴ Feminists and non-feminists alike reacted strongly against the Contagious Diseases Acts which allowed military men to continue in sinful vice while persecuting the women (prostitutes in particular) with whom they engaged in sex. The Acts are credited with uniting women in a common protest as they had never been previously.

²⁵ In this context, the fallen woman refers less to the traditional corpus of prostitutes which Amanda Anderson (Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) and Judith Walkowitz (City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) each explore in their studies of fallen women. Rather here it indicates the woman who fails to adequately meet the requirements of the domestic angel. Therefore in the context of this study, ‘fallen’ refers less to sexual misconduct, than to transgressions of hegemonic standards of true femininity as discussed in chapter two.

²⁶ Foucault discusses the shift in punishment strategy from the “vengeance of the sovereign” to one which focuses on social protection.

²⁷ Carlyle invites Levison into his home and serves the other man in a legal capacity. Had he become aware of Levison’s Iago-like manipulations of Isabel, Carlyle could have thrown the other man out and declined his business. He also, as he acknowledges, never saw the depth of Isabel’s uncertainty and fears, and so never gave her the reassurance that she needed.

²⁸ And depending on the amount of damage, this could become a threat to the larger hegemonic structure. Hegemony is structured on a relational hierarchy, like a spider web. When one side of the web is twitched, the entire web feels it; if enough collateral damage occurs, the entire spider web can collapse. With hegemony, if not quickly subdued or contained, corruption could spread transdiscursively and threaten the stability of the larger structure.

²⁹ Lady Audley explains that her insanity is hereditary, that her mother had been suffered the same illness. In describing a visit to her mother, she says

Before my father sent me to school in Torquay, he took me to see my mother. This visit served at least to dispel the idea which had so often terrified me. I saw no raving, strait-waistcoated maniac, guarded by zealous gaolers; but a golden-haired, blue-eyed, girlish creature, who seemed as frivolous as a butterfly, and who skipped towards us with her yellow curls decorated with natural flowers, and saluted us with radiant smiles, and gay, ceaseless chatter. (Braddon 349-350).

Like herself, Lady Audley's mother has the physical appearance of an angel hiding a monstrous nature. Braddon represents Lady Audley not as a singular, anomalous case, but instead suggests a certain regularity of occurrence within society of such monstrosity.

³⁰ As a requisite of becoming a governess, Lady Audley fabricates a past for herself which falls apart when Robert Audley investigates. Thus, in spite of physical evidence of the authenticity of a person's past and character such as letters of reference or a family name, vigilant observation must not be relaxed, as that evidence may prove to be false. For instance, Mr. Cavendish pretends to be related to a socially revered family, and as a result gains the social trust of Carlingford, only to betray it. In a panoptical system, there is no sufficient proof of character except the daily actions which support a good reputation.

- ³¹ The public perception of the danger involved in delegating women power is revealed in this story. Mary is condemned more for corrupting Stuart than for jilting him.
- ³² Dr. Marjoribanks' own marriage to Lucilla's mother, whose death initiates the novel, was an irritant to him. It is not long before "the faint and daily lessening shadow of poor Mrs [sic] Marjoribanks was removed altogether from the house" (28). He feels "a painful heaviness," not from grief, but because "he [becomes] aware how little real sorrow [is] in his mind, and how small an actual loss [is] this loss of his wife" (28). His marriage to Mrs. Marjoribanks had "wearied his life out" (31).
- ³³ The growing cultural authority of the empirical scientific method lends credence to the truth of facts drawn from observation during this period.

Chapter IV

I am Woman. What am I?

*“Lady angels go wrong sometimes, you see;
they are not universally immaculate” (Wood, East Lynne 279)*

We have already observed that the domestic angel standard was not universally accepted within mid-Victorian culture, in spite of hegemonic pressures for conformity. Thus it should come as no surprise that these five novels, taking their stories from ‘daily life,’ reflect that reality. And yet, given the hegemonic systems of control encouraging and enforcing compliance with the norm of the domestic angel ideal, it is astonishing to find a scarcity of domestic angel characters in these novels. Instead we find the bulk of the woman characters fall into the categories of angels-in-training, flawed and weak women, and monsters. Given this discrepancy between the domestic reality which these novels claim to reflect and the reality promoted by hegemony, we must ask: do these novels challenge the domestic angel standard? Do they reflect an alternative and more accurate feminine reality which is not predominately comprised of domestic angels?

Before engaging these novels more fully to answer these questions, I would like to address the rationale behind the order of their discussion. As I noted in the introduction, these novels were published nearly synchronically—over the course of only six years: 1860-1866. Rather than developing on a continuum bookended by extremes of domestic realism and sensationalism, these novels were published nearly

contemporaneously. And though Charlotte Yonge's 1866 domestic realist novel The Clever Woman of the Family is the most recently published of the five, the writing of sensational fiction neither ceased nor became less popular, as we can see in the wildly popular novels of Rhoda Broughton, Ouida, and Florence Marryat who are only three of the many authors who published sensation fiction through the next three decades. The same can be said for domestic realism. Both Yonge and Oliphant continued to produce novels well into 1870 and 1880, as did Rosa Carey, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, and Evelyn Everett Green.¹ Ellen Wood also turned to a more domestic realist vein with her Johnny Ludlow stories.² This synchronicity in publication reveals a preoccupation with and confusion about the domestic sphere and women's roles within it. In my discussion of these novels, I shall examine themes and style—from conservative domestic realism through to full-blown sensationalism—exploring the various representations of women and the domestic situation. What we shall see may be surprising. All five of these novels share a similar level of conformity to the domestic angel ideology, as well as similar dissatisfaction with the parameters of the roles permitted to women within the domestic sphere.

Modeling Femininity

In his 1869 polemic "The Subjection of Women," John Stuart Mill contends that "All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men" (26). Mill is describing the pervasive and systematic deployment of hegemonic power via the panoptical pyramid, calling attention to the nexus of cultural components aimed at the subjection of women. In particular, he

argues that any possibility for women to organize resistance to the domestic angel ideology was preempted through imbricated mechanisms of containment devoted to imposing a participatory form of feminine governance which would involve both self-policing, as well as participation in the surveillance pyramid.

Recalling that hegemony derives from the needs of its constitutional discourse cells, and that these needs reflect a majority consensus transdiscursively rather than individually, we can see that women were positioned as domestic angels in fulfillment of general cultural needs, which translated into a dearth of public support for those few women who voiced discontent. As I have argued in chapter one, the cultural needs which shaped hegemony largely derived from the expansion of empire, particularly in relation to the desire to increase commerce and expand England's sphere of influence. Also influencing hegemony were fears of both lower class and colonial revolt. Thus hegemony was structured around an imperial agenda and formulated through a patriarchal ontology, encompassing all individuals and molding them in particular ways as a means of preserving and deploying itself, but dependent upon the continuing endorsement of its constituent discourse cells. Women were allowed no sanctioned public voice with which to make changes in their individual discourse cells. Further, because of the control mechanisms of the power pyramid, they did not unite in their discontent and thus could not create a power base (or perhaps more accurately a discourse cell) which would have in turn allowed them to influence hegemony. They were merely minority members of discourse cells within which dominating majorities insisted on women adhering to traditional feminine roles.

Mill's advocacy of the expansion of women's rights points to elements of indoctrination benefiting men which "enslave" the minds of women, and make them complicit in their own domination. He explains the mechanisms of power which produce angelic subjectivity in women:

The masters of all other slaves rely, for maintaining obedience, on fear; either fear of themselves, or religious fears. The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose. All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. (27)

Mill calls feminine cooperation and willing participation the cornerstone to the successful subjection of women in the mid-Victorian period. Comprehensive control of women hinges on feminine complicity; women relinquish any claims to "self-will" or self governance, depending instead on the culturally acknowledged superior intelligence and greater qualifications of men. Like Foucault's prisoner subjected to 'the gentle way in punishment,' the Victorian woman becomes "the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around [her] and upon [her], and which [she] must allow to function automatically in [her]" (Foucault,

Discipline 128-9). For mid-Victorian women, that authority was deployed on a double axis of patriarchy and imperialism.

Mill goes on to examine the construction of ideal femininity based on a program of mental enslavement:

this great means of influence over the minds of women having been acquired, an instinct of selfishness made men avail themselves of it to the utmost as a means of holding women in subjection, by representing to them meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness. (28)

Mill might equally effectively have used the term ‘domestic angel’ to describe the ideal feminine characteristics for which women were programmed. His argument against the suppression of women sums up both the hegemonically mandated credentials of the domestic angel and the way in which women were made to agree to and participate in their own subjection. It is a form of control strikingly similar to that of colonization.

In her essay “Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?” Nancy Harstock suggests that the system of colonization—the colonial-styled power pyramid—which Albert Memmi describes in The Colonizer and the Colonized is a useful metaphor in describing the ways in which women are controlled, contained, marginalized and oppressed through the construction of feminine identity:

I want to stress once again that I am not claiming that women are a unitary group or that Western white women have the same experiences as women or men of color or as colonized peoples. Rather, I am pointing to a way of looking at the world characteristic of the dominant white, male,

Eurocentric ruling class, a way of dividing up the world that puts an omnipotent subject at the center and constructs marginal Others as sets of negative qualities. (161)

Harstock's theory of power dovetails with Mill's assessment of the treatment of women.

If men, as Mill contends, or more specifically to my argument, if the needs of the mid-Victorian patriarchal imperialist hegemony function as Harstock's omnipotent subject at the center, then women are categorized as Others, as sets of negative qualities.

These negative qualities, as Mill notes, are those attributed to the Victorian feminine: a

lack of self-control, obedience, meekness, resignation, submission, and all of the related qualities of the domestic angel. The Victorian classification of women as Other

continues the patriarchal tradition of woman as the flawed man, the weaker vessel in spite of, or more accurately in contradiction to, the ideological construction of woman's superior morality, and thus her sovereignty over the woman's sphere.³

In the course of establishing the importance of the family trope to the advancement of the British empire in the Victorian period, Anne McClintock remarks that "the subordination of woman to man and child to adult were deemed natural facts" and ontological truths, thus "social hierarchy . . . could be portrayed as natural and inevitable, rather than as historically constructed and therefore subject to change" (45).

Woman as Other became the ontological explanation and justification for maintaining the cultural inferiority of women. This was necessary for the continuance of the imperial project, for "the bounds of empire could be secured and upheld only by proper domestic discipline and decorum, sexual probity and moral sanitation" (McClintock 47).

McClintock's argument underscores that of Mary Poovey who claims that "this image of

woman [the domestic angel ideal] was also critical to the image of the English national character, which helped legitimize both England's sense of moral superiority and the imperial ambitions this superiority underwrote" (9). The domestic angel, that form of enslavement which Mill describes in "On the Subjection of Women," was fundamental to the imperial project, to England's conception of itself as a nation.

If women did not conform to the domestic angel ideology then the British Empire would collapse. Put in its simplest terms, this was the ideology surrounding the normalization of the domestic angel ideal. The ideology of the domestic angel became a means to more successfully control and contain women, to make them cooperate and even eagerly participate in their own subjection, all in service to imperial hegemonic needs. Judith Butler identifies this process as a system of productive power. Women as domestic angels are both produced and regulated through subjectification, a power which "not only unilaterally acts on a given individual as a form of domination, but also activates or forms the subject" (Power 84). The panoptical power pyramid served to regulate women through both negative techniques of enforcement such as surveillance and punishment, and the positive techniques of producing the domestic angel through subjectification and reward.⁴ It was a closed system of production, training, reinforcement, regulation and correction. Recall Frances Power Cobbe's ironic criticism from "The Final Cause of Woman": "We have nothing to do but to make round holes, and women will grow round to fill them; or square holes, and they will become square. . . . women run in moulds, like candles, and we can make them long-threes or short-sixes, whichever we please' (1-2). Cobbe's candle-mold metaphor for the

production of female subjects is an apt description of the systematized matrix of control exercised over women's minds and bodies.

Given the monolithic and thus unassailable appearance of this structure of power with its failsafe redundancies of surveillance and techniques of subjection, it would seem impossible that any woman would behave any differently from the hegemonically approved domestic angel, or more extraordinary, that there would be any possibility for resistance or challenge to the ideology.⁵ And yet in exploring the domestic angel ideology in mid-Victorian England, Mary Poovey claims that:

Despite repeated invocations of the domestic ideal, despite the extensive ideological work this image performed, and despite the epistemological centrality of woman's self-consistency to the oppositional structure of Victorian ideas, the representation of woman was also a site of cultural contestation during the middle of the nineteenth century. (9)

In fact, Mill confronts the cultural axiom that "the rule of men over women . . . is accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it" (24). He contends that:

Ever since there have been women able to make their sentiments known by their writings (the only mode of publicity which society permits to them), an increasing number of them have recorded protests against their present social condition: and recently many thousands of them, headed by the most eminent women known to the public, have petitioned Parliament for their admission to the Parliamentary Suffrage. The claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge, as men, is

urged with growing intensity . . . while the demand for their admission into professions and occupations hitherto closed against them, becomes every year more urgent. . . . How many more women there are who silently cherish similar aspirations, no one can possibly know; but there are abundant tokens how many *would* cherish them, were they not so strenuously taught to repress them as contrary to the proprieties of their sex. (24-25)

Once again Mill reveals the workings of the panoptical power pyramid in mid-Victorian England. Despite the surge in individual female voices, he questions how many women remain silent because of those systems of indoctrination which idealize self-abnegation and valorize male domination. Yet at the same time he suggests a burgeoning unification of female resistance. Women have begun to claim public forums, breaking the hallowed silence of the domestic angel: a code of silence with which they have been programmed, a code of silence which functions most effectively to prevent a unified challenge to oppression.

Caroline Norton, Harriet Taylor, Frances Power Cobbe, Josephine Butler, Barbara Bodichon Smith—these are only a few of the mid-Victorian women who made public challenges to the domestic angel ideology in their efforts to improve the rights of women. What is here revealed is that there was a dichotomous split between the reality of women within mid-Victorian culture, and the ideological construction of the domestic angel; a dichotomy which Emily Eden, Charlotte Yonge, Margaret Oliphant, Ellen Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon address in varying ways in the five novels examined here.

For my purposes, resistance can be defined as the purposeful exposure of governing hegemonic structures—discourses and ideologies. As Foucault notes in “Discourse on Knowledge,” chance events may also expose hegemonic structures (Archaeology 231), but in examining how these women writers represented women, intent becomes important to understanding how hegemony was served and deployed, as well as what kinds of challenges were made to the domestic angel ideology. It is important to note that hegemonically, intent made no difference to the transgressions committed by subjects of the power pyramid. If the end result was the endangerment of hegemony, then reprisals would follow.

In exploring Foucault’s theory of power, Judith Butler asks “how and why is resistance denied to bodies produced through disciplinary regimes? What is this notion of disciplinary production, and does it work as efficaciously as Foucault appears to imply?” (Power 89). Certainly the answer to the last question is no, if the power regime in question is the panoptical power pyramid of the mid-Victorian culture, otherwise the domestic angel ideal/norm would have been universally accepted and there would be no further need of discussion. In seeking to establish a means of resistance within a disciplinary power regime, Butler locates resistance internally within the individual unconscious, while Foucault locates resistance externally in the exposure of gaps and ruptures of governing ideologies through the collision of discourses.⁶ Both make very cogent arguments and had I room here, I would argue for a combination of both external and internal sources of resistance, particularly focusing on Butler’s assessment of Foucault’s position which informs my understanding of resistance in this study:

For Foucault, the subject who is produced through subjection is not produced at an instant in its totality. Instead, it is in the process of being produced, it is repeatedly produced (which is not the same as being produced anew again and again). It is precisely the possibility of repetition which does not consolidate that dissociated unity, the subject, but which proliferates effects which undermine the force of normalization. The term which not only names, but forms and frames the subject . . . mobilizes a reverse discourse against the very regime of normalization by which it is spawned. (Power 93)

Because the subject—the woman as domestic angel—is not introduced into the power pyramid in a totalized state, there is a need for complex structures of containment, discipline and inculcation. The existence of such structures serves as inferential evidence of recurrent transgression, of the need to protect against its damaging effects. Contrary to the social myth that the qualities of the domestic angel were fundamental to women, part of the feminine ontology, women had to be trained and enculturated into the role.⁷ Women whose training was incomplete or faulty, or whose self-discipline and repression of their abject natures failed, became monsters and were subject to the system of punishment inherent in the structure of the panoptical power pyramid. Yet according to Butler's assessment of this structure, the mere fact of the existence of these structures to contain, control and discipline women into the proper domestic role indicate the constructed nature of the domestic angel—of *normal*. What is generated as a result is a reverse discourse which posits a different reality of womanhood, or perhaps an actuality.

In this reverse discourse, the domestic angel ideology is recognized as artificial and debilitating to women.⁸

However, developing an argument concerning the origination of resistance within a disciplinary power regime would be far beyond the scope of this dissertation and would stray greatly from the point. The question I seek to answer here is not whether or not or how resistance originated. But acknowledging that it did indeed manifest itself, particularly in regards to the domestic angel of the mid-Victorian period, the pertinent double-edged question becomes: how did these five women authors present the domestic reality of women in their novels, and did in the end these novels serve hegemonic goals or function as resistance?

In the Tradition of Jane Austen

Emily Eden initially began to draft The Semi-attached Couple in the early 1830s, completing and revising it for publication in 1860.⁹ Reviewers of Semi have favorably compared it to Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, congratulating Eden on her witty dialogue and humor, her careful realistic characterizations of both men and women, and her accurate depiction of class distinctions.¹⁰ In fact, Semi is very reminiscent of Jane Austen's or Fanny Burney's novels of manners earlier in the century. Like them, Eden is concerned with the roles for women within the domestic sphere, particularly focusing on how a woman's marital and domestic choices impact family, friends and her surrounding social discursive structure.

The plot of Semi revolves around the marriage of Helen Eskdale to Lord Teviot. The novel opens shortly after the announcement of their engagement. Significantly the

first two chapters are devoted to the community response to the impending nuptials with no introduction to the main characters of the novel until chapter three. This prolonged account spotlighting the community's reaction emphasizes the centrality of the marriage to the social economy of the discourse cell. By utilizing the communal perspective as the initial medium through which the reader becomes acquainted with the plot, Eden indicates the depth of the mutual reciprocity fundamental to the relationship between the local community and its leaders—the Eskdales.¹¹ When the Eskdale family elects to return to their country home where they serve the community as the highest local agents of the panoptical power pyramid, their London neighbors feel “defrauded of a view of the wedding” (26). The legal overtones of the language in which Eden describes the reaction of the London neighbors indicates that the relationship between the Eskdales and the community is perceived as a binding social contract, one that obligates the Eskdales to certain responsibilities consequent to their rank on the power pyramid. And certainly returning to their country home and local discourse community for the wedding is coherent with those obligations, as it is to their home community that they owe the greatest obligation.

Following the public observation and evaluation of the bride and groom, Eden presents Helen in a state of nervous indecision. It is soon revealed that the bride has many doubts about her feelings for her prospective husband and considers dissolving the engagement. When Helen asks her sister Amelia what she would have done under similar circumstances, a horrified Amelia reminds her sister of the social obligations inherent in this marriage. Amelia emphatically declares that she would have gone through with her marriage no matter her misgivings: “think of the sin of breaking one’s

promise, and of the poor man's mortification, and of what papa and mamma would have said; and of the explanations and the disgrace of the whole business" (36). Her argument is couched in terms of the selflessness of the domestic angel. Her concerns are for the well being of her parents, her fiancé, and her family. The notion of the "sin of breaking one's promise" evokes a comparison between Helen and the monstrous Eve. Amelia insinuates that in contemplating breaking her socially sanctioned engagement, Helen is allowing abject feminine frivolity to control her. As Amelia makes clear, Helen's marriage is not an insular romantic union confined to two people. This marriage is a nexus of social cohesion. It creates stability within the discourse cell by fulfilling community expectations and responsibilities. From the beginning of the novel the reader is made aware of the investment that the community has in the union between Teviot and Helen. It is communally concluded that theirs will be a "model marriage" (45). As leaders within their discourse community, their marital example contains enormous signifying capacity to influence others to aspire to similar happiness. Put in simple terms, with her marriage, Helen not only encourages other couples to marry in accordance with the needs of hegemony, but also serves as an illustration of the domestic angel; the domestic bliss she exhibits in reward for participating in a socially sanctioned marriage encourages other women to comply with the strictures of the domestic angel and thus qualify themselves for a similar marriage and similar rewards. In entering into this marriage, she becomes an agent of hegemonic reinforcement, a public model of the ideal woman, of the value of conformity.

Amelia increases coercive pressure on Helen by reminding her of the damage to their parents should she renege on her engagement. They have encouraged and

sanctioned this marriage, and Helen's refusal to cooperate in their plans for her would subject them to public condemnation and ridicule for their inability to perform as parents and as leaders of their community. Their authority within the community would be critically undermined. This would result in a loss of faith in their qualifications as agents of hegemony, and thus lead to a decrease in status within the power pyramid. At the same time, to withdraw from her engagement would be interpreted as an attack on marriage as the pinnacle of feminine existence. Her refusal would suggest romantic (and socially inappropriate) notions of choice rather than duty. For Victorians, marriage was not a romantic partnering of lovers, but a unification of suitable people whose compatibility would lead to love, and more importantly, children and the fulfillment of social duties. Suitability was measured by class, income, adherence to proper social roles, and reputation. Eden's description of the Douglas marriage underscores the insignificance of romantic attachment in arranging the typical mid-Victorian marriage: "Mrs. Douglas had been an heiress, which perhaps accounted for Mr. Douglas having married her; but though no one could suppose that he married for love, he had been to her what is called a good husband . . . he [also] had a great reliance on her judgment, and a high opinion of her talents" (21). The Douglasses share an affection which has grown as a result of their 'proper' or authorized marriage. Romantic love was welcomed and certainly in this novel encouraged and celebrated, but it was not a requisite factor for entering marriage.¹²

Amelia ends her lesson by dismissing Helen's personal qualms as insignificant: "you have had your fit of dignity, and the pleasure of putting yourself rather in the wrong; and now make it up" (36). Amelia implies that Helen's uncertainty is childish

and unwomanly—monstrous. She confirms this when she labels Helen an “ungracious little thing” for putting Teviot in the wrong (37). Her use of the diminutive to refer to her sister suggests that Helen is not behaving appropriately for a responsible woman. That she is “ungracious” also challenges her status as a domestic angel.

As Amelia has pointed out, there was never any real opportunity for Helen to refuse the proposal if she behaved appropriately as a domestic angel. Her parents had traditionally arranged marriages for their daughters on the basis of social and economic suitability, and these marriages had ripened into romantic love. The domestic angel Helen must accept the strictures of her parents and obey. However, even if her parents had demonstrated a poor record in arranging marriages for their daughters, Helen still has no choice but to commit to the marriage or else reveal such monstrous qualities as selfishness, vanity, disobedience and independence. Such evidence of the abject would not only undermine her own position on the power pyramid and contagiously endanger the position of those she cares about, but would also undermine her eligibility for marriage, which Eden maintains in this novel as the pinnacle of feminine actualization.

Helen does marry Teviot and their relationship does not improve. Though they are matched economically and socially, neither Teviot nor Helen have been adequately prepared for the realities of marriage. Specifically, neither understands the other’s given role, nor do they sufficiently perform in their own roles. The narrator explains the situation:

He was always quarreling with her—at least, so she thought; but the real truth was, that he was desperately in love, and she was not; that he was a man of strong feelings and exacting habits, and with considerable

knowledge of the world; and that she was timid and gentle, unused to any violence of manner or language, and unequal to cope with it. He alarmed her, first by the eagerness with which he poured out his affection, and then by the bitterness of his reproaches because, as he averred, it was not returned. (40-1)

Helen exhibits many of the qualities of the domestic angel. She is selfless, gentle, and obedient, and yet she evinces little evidence of the domestic angel's core of moral strength which would enable her to fulfill her duties as the mistress of her home and marriage. Unlike Teviot, she has been protected from the vagaries of the larger world. She has no frame of reference except for that which has been imposed on her as an angel-in-training; a training which has infantilized her, leaving her unprepared for the demands of marriage and the realities of a flesh and bone husband.

The violence of Teviot's emotional outbursts frighten Helen because she "had been accustomed to the gentle love of her mother and the playful tenderness of her brother and sisters" (77). As a domestic angel, she has been protected from exposure to pain and adversity. Eric Trudgill sums up the Victorian cultural ideology which infantilizes women: "notions of feminine delicacy regularly meant an insulation from all sully contact with the sins and cruelties of the world, and a conditioning in bashful modesty, graceful passivity and dutiful self-negation" (66). Helen has not been exposed to any experiences which might be perceived as potentially harmful, and thus she has no experience with which to deal with her new husband. At the same time, Helen has been inculcated in the ideology of passionlessness, both of which leave her ill-prepared for the depth of his passion. The demands of the domestic angel prohibit the emotional response

which Teviot seeks. Instead she attempts to distract her husband from his moods, avoiding confrontation of any sort, and thus aggravating him all the more:

The waywardness of his temper had so often displayed itself, that between him and Helen many of the commonest topics of conversation were attended with awkwardness; and he had discovered that she not only abstained from contradicting him on any point that had once inflamed his temper, but that she never alluded to the disputed point again. (76)

Teviot desires from Helen a level of emotion precluded by and contrary to the ideology of the domestic angel. For a woman to demonstrate passion, even toward a legitimate subject such as a husband or child, would be to reveal the abject, indicating feminine instability. The crux of the problem for Helen lies in the fact that her role as domestic angel thus far in life has been limited to the carefully regimented sphere of an obedient selfless daughter. Because she her childhood has been devoted to fulfilling her obligations as the domestic angel daughter, she enters into marriage without the proper skills or preparation for its demands. She responds childishly—in the only way she knows how—which is not what Teviot wants.

While Teviot originally valued Helen because she appeared to fulfill the desired qualities of the domestic angel ideal/norm, he does not get the wife he bargained for. He expects for her angelic qualities to manifest themselves differently than is possible for Helen the child, Helen the daughter. While he still wishes for her to be forgiving, obedient, accommodating and selfless, he requires that she do so in the capacity of a wife. He wants her to assume her position of authority in her newly acquired domestic sphere. Rather than taking up her responsibilities, he believes that she willfully neglects them.

When she specifically avoids subjects which might cause friction between them, or which have previously resulted in an eruption of his anger, he perceives her to be harboring hurt feelings and resentment, when she “ought to make allowance for his manner” and she “ought to be above such trifles” (76). In Teviot’s view, Helen should forgive and accommodate his anger, for his passion is but a ‘trifle’, and as a domestic angel her responsibility is not to avoid difficulty but to provide succor and support. His repeated use of the word ‘ought’ reflects his belief that her response to his passion would only be correspondent with the hegemonically advertised qualities of the domestic angel. Yet because such outbursts are alien to Helen, beyond her experience or understanding, she can only approach the problem as she knows how—as the domestic angel child. Her tools are avoidance and distraction. In Helen, Teviot does not have a partner who takes up her equal share of the burden of their relationship; instead he has a child who requires a kind of care and protection he is unwilling to engage in.

Prior to her marriage Helen is the epitome of the domestic angel ideal/norm as a daughter. However once married, the expectations designating her feminine obligations shift radically. As a result, she instantly loses competence, unable to perform adequately the role of wife. Teviot has fallen passionately in love with her and wishes for her to return that passion. Yet nothing in her training to this point has prepared her to experience that passion nor to demonstrate it: “Helen was still almost a child, and the obliquities and injustices of strong passions were incomprehensible to her” (Eden 167). In fact the ideology of the domestic angel refuses proper women the capacity for strong emotion, attributing the emergence of such passion to the influence of the object. Thus

Teviot's desire clashes with the hegemonically coded role of the domestic angel into which Helen has been inculcated.

Eventually Eden comes to a compromise between the two. Following the escalation of friction between the newlyweds, friction compounded by a houseparty of family and friends, Helen at last loses her control and emotionally breaks down. The scene is triggered by Teviot's impending trip abroad. He feels rejected by her because she does not immediately wish to travel with him, but instead desires to visit her deathly sick sister. In spite of Helen's natural (and ideologically consistent) desire to help nurture Sophia through her illness, Teviot responds jealously, assuming that she in reality prefers to be away from him, that once again she is practicing avoidance. He immediately distances himself from her emotionally, and his travel arrangements suggest a more permanent ending to their marriage. When Helen, feeling persecuted, tells him that her home is wherever he is, he responds: "I fear it has not been a happy one, but all that is over now; discussions can do no good. I have no doubt that you will be very happy when you are with those you love, and as for me, allow me to take care of myself. Any life that I make out for myself will be better than that I have led lately" (187). The tenor of his reaction is one of finality, as though he is severing all marital ties. He will make a life without her; he will withdraw from the marriage and return to a solitary bachelor's life.¹³ It is at this point that Helen evinces the emotional capacity that Teviot has desired. However she does so within the legitimized borders of proper femininity.

After Teviot assists Helen to her room, she erupts into tears, verging on hysteria. Such passion is completely alien to her, cathartic: "the relief of tears she had never before in her short, sunny life experienced to this extreme degree. She absolutely reveled in

them” (188). Such a breakdown confirms her femininity through a seeming contradiction of ideology: by affirming her abject nature. Such tearful release precipitated by such a catastrophic event as the perceived ending of her marriage is in accordance with woman’s weaker nature, but is welcomed by Teviot because the outburst proves Helen’s femininity. This is because, as Trudgill remarks in his study of the domestic angel, a “kind of intellectual and psychological debility [in women] was not only tolerated by men but often actively encouraged” (66). Helen’s even disposition and lack of overt response to Teviot’s lovemaking and anger has marked her as an unnatural woman with too much control, too little feminine ‘feeling’. Despite the mid-Victorian ideology of passionlessness, women were expected to be naturally emotional, naturally weak willed.¹⁴ In fact Trudgill argues that the mid-Victorian culture relied on that underlying weakness: he claims that “woman’s fragility and dependence were held the means of a general moral influence through the engagement of man’s affections” (74). Trudgill argues that Victorian rhetoric encouraged feminine weakness as a means of eliciting desirable qualities in men, particularly moral qualities. Thus feminine weakness helped women to accomplish their domestic tasks. Yet at the same time, passionlessness was fundamental to the fulfillment of the domestic angel role. Thus Helen is caught in a bind of contradictory ideologies. Teviot desires those negative qualities of the female abject which would verify Helen’s femininity while invalidating her as a domestic angel, and paradoxically, at the same time he desires Helen to fulfill the role of the mature domestic angel. Helen’s revelation of her feminine weakness in her explosive torrent of tears at Teviot’s unexpected retraction of his marital commitment convinces him of her femininity, which he has come to doubt. Her unexpected enjoyment of the outburst

reveals to herself a capacity for emotion which has previously been “alien” to her—she has broken through a barrier which has deprived her of her full femininity and therefore hindered her from becoming the mature domestic angel.

As a result of Helen’s outburst, Teviot apologizes for the attacks he has made on her, quickly reassuring Helen that he will not dissolve the marriage. In doing so, he rewards her feminine and un-angelic passion, teaching Helen that while this sort of outburst was improper for the a daughter, such emotion may be appropriate for a wife. Her outburst, while contradictory to the ideology of the domestic angel, accords with the mid-Victorian social perception of inherent feminine emotional fragility and thus deflects such sanctions required by more dangerous revelations of her abject such as an adulterous affair, or the breaking of an ‘advantageous’ and socially approved engagement.¹⁵

This incident marks the first of three major evolutionary steps which Helen takes in becoming a mature domestic angel. The second occurs as Helen visits to her childhood home, now in a primary role of wife rather than daughter. Upon her return, Helen discovers that in making the transition to wife she has passed a threshold into womanhood from which there is no return. She discovers her inadequacies as a wife and her incompetence in creating the home which Teviot desires and which is the fundamental duty of a wife.¹⁶

Until this point in her married life, Helen has refused to embrace Teviot’s home as her own. She makes this evident in a moment of resentment when she publicly refers to her parents’ house as her home, essentially renouncing both her obligations as a wife, and by implication, Teviot himself. Perhaps more disturbing to Teviot is Helen’s inability to recognize the legitimacy of his anger at her apparent rejection of himself and

their marriage. He views her uncertainty and childish longings for the refuge of her parents' home as a conscious refusal to root herself in his life: "she does not even look kindly at me, and she evidently thinks of nothing but her own family . . . she called Eskdale Castle her home. My house is clearly not her home" (74). Ordinarily a wife might depend on her husband's female relations to serve as mentors for her new role, helping her to overcome the fears and uncertainties which Helen exhibits. As Pat Jalland writes, it was generally "the custom for the female members of the groom's family to welcome the prospective bride into the family" (30), easing the transition between child and wife and lending the newly-minted, mature domestic angel guidance. Yet this mentorship was by no means necessary or required in terms of the bride fulfilling the obligations of her new role. Teviot's lack of a family cannot give Helen a legitimate excuse for failing in her wifely obligations. Deborah Gorham argues that "girls were to be reared for domesticity, and prepared, in adolescence" for the role of wife and mother (102). That she has been raised with these goals in mind and that she is aware of her new duties cannot be doubted. As Teviot says in the end: "all you Beauforts [Helen and her sisters] have been brought up in a domestic atmosphere. Lord and Lady Eskdale are a model couple, and you have all been so accustomed to happy homes that when you are taken from one, you immediately set about making another" (287). Except that at first, Helen flees the obligations of her domestic sphere, returning to her childhood home, only to discover that for better or worse, she no longer belongs there.

Once back in her parents' house, Helen becomes embarrassed with her behavior and domestic deficiencies. She fears her brother Beaufort's report on her marriage, wondering how much of her marital misbehavior he has revealed to their parents. Her

self-consciousness and embarrassment reveals her growing sense of guilt. This escalating discomfort results in self-scrutiny aimed at reforming herself. Put in the context of her old home and contrasted against the successful marriages of her sisters, Helen begins to acknowledge her deficiencies; she begins to understand the responsibilities of being a wife:

Again she was with those dear ones who had never looked at her but with admiration, and never spoken to her but with tenderness—again with those who had encircled her youthful days with blessings and love, and whom she had yearned to see with the deep longing of young affection. But she was not so happy when restored to them . . . there was a doubt whether she had done what was right; there was a slight feeling of mortification when she compared her sisters with herself, and saw their husbands treated as sons of the house, while she had returned unaccompanied by hers. She felt discontented. . . . Sometimes the recollections of them [Teviot's words of love] stirred her very soul, and she pondered over them till she wondered at her own coldness, till she hated herself for not having prized them more, and began to pine for that from which she had voluntarily fled.

(202)

In contrasting her newly-wed separation with her sisters' conjugal devotion, she becomes aware that the only status remaining available to her within her childhood home requires Teviot's presence at her side. Certainly her family continues to love her and accepts her explanation for not accompanying Teviot on his journey. Yet this acceptance is premised on her fulfillment of her marital obligations. Her guilt over her deception leads to

mortification at her own behavior, waking her from her narcissistic preoccupation with self-pity and regret. As a result, it occurs to Helen for the first time that she might not “[have] done what was right” in allowing Teviot to go without her while indulging herself by returning ‘home’. She acknowledges that her sister Sophia’s illness was not at the heart of her decision to return to her childhood home, but that she was selfishly fleeing, running away from an obligation that she had taken a sacred oath to undertake, behaving as an unnatural woman, a monster. That her family trusts in the genuineness of her wifely mimicry exacerbates her guilt. The discrepancy between what they believe she has become and what in reality she has not done spurs her toward a realization of her ‘true feminine’ role. Their affectionate surveillance serves as a goad to become the angelic wife she has pretended to be. As a result, she soon becomes eager to return to Teviot and begin fulfilling her marital responsibilities.

Rather than wait for her husband’s return to England, Helen begins immediately to adopt the duties she has so long neglected. She writes to him, “grow[ing] better acquainted with him by writing than she had by words” (203). In her letters she grows more intimate, revealing herself to him as she had not done previously; a fact which had caused him to question her femininity and his choice for a wife. For the first time she takes an interest in knowing him as her husband rather than merely as a quick-tempered man who frightens her with his moods. By the time he is due to return to England, she has developed a proper wifely “tenderness” for her husband, protectively defending him against the rumors of Colonel Stuart who has taken an unhealthy romantic interest in Helen.¹⁷ I think that it is important to note that Stuart’s interest is a direct result of the marital discord which Teviot and Helen exhibit in front of their friends and family earlier

in the book. Eden reminds the reader of the importance of maintaining appearances. Stuart has arrived at Eskdale Castle believing that Teviot and Helen are separated. His interpretation of the situation, though incorrect, reminds the reader of the surveillance of the larger world—and the danger to not only Helen's and Teviot's reputations, but those of their family and friends. Eden blames Helen for the danger, indicating that her role as wife is to maintain appearances, no matter what kind of foibles or indiscretions her husband commits: "the first moment in which a woman lets it appear that she and her husband are at variance is the last in which she is safe from the impertinent admiration of others" (177). Thus even as Helen is about to embrace her proper position, Eden cautions her readers against the dangers of surveillance: of being socially condemned for impropriety, whether real or unfounded.

The third step toward achieving true womanhood occurs during the final trials of the book; Teviot's illness and the challenge to his title allow Helen to prove to both Teviot and herself the extent of the changes to which she has undergone. She reveals both enormous strength in the domestic service she renders to her husband (or more importantly, to her hearth and home), as well as her now instinctive willingness to sacrifice herself on his behalf—to fulfill the role of the domestic angel. Indeed that she succeeds in actualizing herself in this role is reflected in her self-assessment: "I was a foolish spoiled child then [when first married], and now I am a happy woman" (274). For Victorians, 'woman' signified the concept of the domestic angel, the ideology serving as a benchmark of normalcy. Deviants were unnatural, monstrous women, flawed women, abnormal women.

In Helen, Eden portrays a young woman from a good family, with a good upbringing (specifically her angelic mother has trained her in strict adherence to the domestic angel role), and a perfect husband.¹⁸ Her initial behavior is therefore inexplicable, highlighting the social disapproval of the trend in young women to search for romantic love rather than more prosaic and also more secure grounds for marriage. The real emotional bond that Helen develops for Teviot as a result of their compatible social status and background challenges the prevailing romanticism among young girls that passionate love is required prior to marriage. Instead Eden posits marriage as a joining of suitable partners based on class, economics, and reputation, the combination of which will lead to love. The choice of a prospective husband, according to Eden, should be left to the discretion of the girl's parents whose selection will serve the best interests of their daughter, even if she cannot at first understand their choice.¹⁹ Eden's depiction of Helen's training recalls Judith Butler's words quoted earlier in this chapter: "the subject who is produced through subjection is not produced at an instant in its totality. Instead, it is in the process of being produced, it is repeatedly produced" (*Power* 93). In spite of the Victorian ideology of an ontological domestic angel, one born and not constructed through rigid structures of discipline and punishment, threat and reward, Eden pokes holes in the ideological veneer, exposing to public view Helen's struggle to become what is not natural, not normal. Eden's portrayal of Helen invokes Foucault's assessment of what constitutes a crime in society: "the injury that a crime inflicts upon the social body is the disorder that it introduces into it: the scandal that it gives rise to, the example that it gives, the incitement to repeat it if it is not punished, the possibility of becoming widespread that it bears within it" (*Discipline* 92). Ironically, in exposing the

constructed nature of the domestic angel, Eden herself damages mid-Victorian society. Her saving grace lies in her valorization of Helen's achievement of true womanhood, providing a positive role model for feminine readers, in a sense the very opposite of Foucault's definition of crime.

In this novel Eden shows Helen establishing order, suppressing scandal, and encouraging others to repeat her example, all as a result of accepting the demands of true womanhood. Novels in the mid-Victorian period were perceived as having enormous influential power, as moralist William Greg writes in his 1859 polemic "False Morality of Lady Novelists." According to Greg,

this literature . . . spreads, penetrates, and permeates We are by no means sure that, with reference to the sphere and nature of the impressions they produce, prose works of fiction do not constitute precisely that branch of the intellectual activity of a nation which a far-seeing moralist would watch with the most vigilant concern, and supervise with the most anxious and unceasing care. (144-45)

In particular, Greg complains that as a result of reading novels, "we are constantly gazing on inaccurate pictures, constantly sympathising with artificial or reprehensible emotions, constantly admiring culpable conduct, constantly imbibing false morality" (149).

Women are especially susceptible to the insidious influences of the novel. Greg argues that:

novels constitute a principal part of the reading of women, who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily

aroused and whose estimates are more easily influenced than ours, while at the same time the correctness of their feelings and the justice of their estimates are matters of the most special and preeminent concern. (145-46)

In the close of this passage Greg recalls the ideology true womanhood, reminding his readers of the vulnerability of women, and their importance to the nation. In 1839, Sarah Lewis penned her treatise “Woman’s Mission,” in which she argued that “women may be the prime agents of God in the regeneration of mankind” (qtd. in Helsinger 6). Further, she claims “the moral world is ours [women’s],—ours by position; ours by qualification; ours by the very indications of God himself” (qtd. in Helsinger 7). She articulates a position consonant with hegemony and the ideology of the domestic angel. However her statement concerning women’s power of influence coincides with Greg’s statement concerning the influence of novels: “Principles have their chief source in influences, early influences, above all; and early influences have more power in forming character than institutions or mental cultivation; it is therefore to the arbiters of these that we must look for the regenerating principle” (qtd. in Helsinger 6). Pairing Lewis’ sentiments with Greg’s concerns, we discover that women are in a precarious position; they are vulnerable to the influences of novels, and at the same time wield enormous power over the nation through their individual families and communities. Should women be corrupted by novel reading, as Greg fears, the potential for terrible social damage is nearly limitless.

Kate Flint links Victorian fears of the novel with the mystery of the feminine mind. Surviving within the panoptical power pyramid depended on maintaining proper

appearances. Yet as Flint argues, the "self-absorption of the readers . . . implies some of the reasons why the private activity tended so persistently to come under scrutiny. It hints at the subject's vulnerability to textual influence, deaf and blind to all other stimuli in her immediate environment. It suggests the potential autonomy of her mind" (4). Flint goes on to say that "the activity of reading was often the vehicle through which an individual's sense of identity was achieved or confirmed" (14). Thus by showing Helen's transformation into the domestic angel, Eden establishes a rapport with her readers by recognizing an ideologically suppressed truth: that domestic angels evolve with practice and self-patrol. Young women readers identify with Helen, finding in her a role model. Through her novel, Eden encourages her female readers to measure themselves against the domestic angel Helen. By doing so, she reinforces the ideology of true womanhood and engenders in her readers a desire to imitate Helen.

Didacticism and Realism

Helen becomes a domestic angel as though the role is a final attainment which requires no further struggle. In presenting Helen in this way, foiled against Amelia and Lady Eskdale who similarly represent a totalized domestic angel, Eden obliterates and effaces the hegemonic structures of containment—both social and institutional—which guarantee the continuing production of appropriate femininity through prohibition, restriction, reward and punishment. In spite of the 'monstrous' or unreformable women characters of this novel—Lady Portmore and Lady Douglas—whose presence in the book corroborates Eden's revelation of the constructed nature of true womanhood, Eden creates an enticing sense of final success, of a goal surmounted, of final reward involving

personal satisfaction, community and familial admiration, as well as domestic wealth and happiness.²⁰ Yet Butler argues that in any culture gender is a socially negotiated construct, and that any ideology of ultimate womanhood—of a totalized femininity—is false:

woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. [It is] . . . an ongoing discursive practice Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the “congealing” is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. (Gender 33).

Victorian conceptions of womanhood are productions of “ongoing discursive practice,” subject to continual reinforcement and modification, perpetually cycled through a process of constitution and reconstitution. Rather than attaining a finalized goal, these women remain embedded within the panoptical power pyramid where all subject positions are fluid, dependent upon continuous affirmation of potency, of service to hegemony. Therefore women cannot escape or circumvent those “mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals; . . . a machinery that assumes responsibility for and places under surveillance their everyday behavior, their identity, their activity, their apparently unimportant gestures” (Foucault, Discipline 77). Their complicity and cooperation gain them rewards, but only so long as they conform to the narrow confines of the domestic angel ideology, only so long as they serve hegemony. What Eden attempts to disguise, then, is the fact that no woman ever can ‘rest on her laurels,’ for she must always prove herself, verify her qualifications for her position within the panoptical power pyramid. True womanhood requires constant and active evidence of cooperation

and complicity with hegemonically coded femininity, a fact which Charlotte Yonge draws attention to in The Clever Woman of the Family (1865).

In The Clever Woman of the Family, Yonge challenges Eden's beatific perception of womanhood, suggesting a sterner reality comprised of the continuing struggle against the feminine abject. In her novel, Yonge emphasizes the need for strong male guidance, dramatizing the dangerous repercussions of 'monstrous' behavior, both to the woman herself and to her family and community. Like Eden, she reveals the workings of the panoptical power pyramid; she exposes the constructed nature of femininity. Unlike Eden, who unquestioningly valorizes the domestic angel role, Yonge criticizes the lack of opportunities for women in society, articulating the need for intellectual stimulation among women, as well as the need to contribute to the community in a significant and material way.²¹ Yet Yonge strongly advocates the domestic angel role and its feminine values, showing that intellectual and social pursuits should neither interfere with a woman's higher calling—her domestic sphere—nor should it undermine, challenge or otherwise invade the masculine public sphere. Rather, her mind should be instructed so as to provide regulation and direction, helping her to formulate appropriate methods of contribution to her community, *within the hegemonically coded bounds of feminine domesticity*. That instruction, Yonge maintains, must come from a trusted masculine source. Women, even socially sanctified mothers, are not qualified to regulate the proper education for girls or other women without the proper supervision of a man:

a woman's tone of thought is commonly moulded by the masculine intellect, which, under one form or another, becomes the master of her soul. Those opinions, once made her own, may be acted and improved

upon, often carried to lengths never thought of by their inspirer, or held with noble constancy and perseverance even when he himself may have fallen from them (337)

For Yonge, a woman educated under a superior male intelligence will become more feminine, more aware and desirous of fulfilling her role in her domestic situation as well as in her community. A ‘clever woman,’ one with intellectual ambitions who is properly guided, will develop the feminine state of mind which will bring “only blessings helping the spirits in infirmity and trouble, serving as a real engine for independence and usefulness, winning love and influence for good” (367). Thus female education promotes the domestic angel ideology, encouraging girls to perform greater feats of service and self-sacrifice, all within the bounds of marriage and domesticity.

Like The Semi-attached Couple, the plot of The Clever Woman of the Family revolves around the development of a young woman as she evolves into a domestic angel. Unlike Eden’s restrained style of narration where the reader discovers for herself the message of heavenly domesticity, Yonge’s novel is heavily didactic and steeped in mid-Victorian middle-class values, overtly expounding her theme of proper womanhood, preaching warnings about the terrible damage which will result from the influence of a monstrous woman. Interestingly, she further distances herself from the tradition of the novel of manners by incorporating the sensational elements of crime, disguise, adultery and death, but only in the service of her moralizing themes, rather than for the purpose of titillation. Her use of such sordid elements suggests a desire for verisimilitude, a kind of gritty realism missing in the fairy tale realm of Helen Eskdale. June Sturrock comments that “unlike The Daisy Chain, where the energetic young woman is honoured by all who

know her, this novel offers none of the consolations of fantasy: Rachel is firmly established as an embarrassing, charmless, and rather ridiculous young woman, and she is heavily punished for her offences against femininity” (62). Yonge does not wish her female readers to escape reality; rather, she wishes to confront them with a moral allegory in which they will see themselves reflected, and thus lead them to enlightenment and reform.

The novel begins with a flurry of activity in honor of the imminent arrival of the Curtis’ widowed cousin Lady Fanny Temple and her brood of seven children. She is returning from India following the death of her husband, a general in the army. Rachel Curtis, a proudly self-declared spinster at the age of twenty-five, has been looking for a “mission”—some purpose for her life beyond the limitations of femininity. She has been unable to act, “hat[ing] herself for the enforced submission to a state of things that she despised” (6). All around her she sees “a world of sin and woe” with no opportunity to render assistance. However, on this birthday she believes that she will finally have put girlhood behind her, and as a spinster without matrimonial prospects, she will be permitted to take up her causes: “This twenty-fifth birthday had long been anticipated as the turning-point when this submissive girlhood ought to close, and the privileges of acting as well as thinking for herself ought to be assumed” (6-7).²² Rachel sees Fanny’s care and the proper education of her children as that mission.

It fails. Dismally.

Raised in a home without a father, her mother a weak woman who “had never been a visible power in her house” (6), Rachel has been forced to educate herself from whatever means available, including religious tracts, periodicals, an odd assortment of

books, and whatever people she meets. While she has a strong sense of moral boundaries and social obligations, she also believes herself to be far superior to her family, her local community, and most of her friends, with the exception of Ermine Williams whom she acknowledges as something of an equal. She believes she has become enlightened through her patchwork quilt education, and has a vast confidence in her own abilities. She believes this enlightenment privileges her, granting her a higher level of agency on the power pyramid, of delegated power, than she has actually been allotted as an unmarried spinster from an upper-middle class background. Thus she takes on the education and discipline of Fanny's boys with all the conceit of that sense of superiority; she fails utterly, revealing that her lack of *feminine* education has disqualified her from interacting with the boys as a motherly authority figure, and her attempts at *masculine* authority are ludicrous. Her so-called enlightenment has not resulted in a greater accrual of authority, but in fact Rachel has begun to slip down the power pyramid and will continue to so, so long as she refuses feminine nature.

In contrast to Rachel, Yonge portrays Fanny as something of a madonna. She is youthful in appearance, with "imploring" eyes, an air of "earnest sweetness" (8). Rather than making her look tired and worn, her family of "great boys enhanc[ed] her soft youthfulness" (8). She is submissive and gentle, self-sacrificing and humble. She exhibits all the maternal devotion expected of a Victorian mother, of a domestic angel. Rachel, on the other hand, is overbearing, arrogant, and even insulting. Immediately she ascertains that Fanny's children are spoiled and in need of discipline—discipline that she intends to provide. In addition, she believes that Fanny is an ineffective mother, incapable of administering to her children properly. According to Rachel, "Fanny's a

perfect slave” to the whims of her children (13). Rachel, with all the conviction of her superior common sense and intellect, believes that she will teach Fanny to be a better mother. She remains fixed in her intentions, despite the boys’ lack of interest and Fanny’s lack of cooperation. She says with complacent arrogance:

there is always an ordeal at the beginning of one’s mission. I am mastering them [Fanny’s boys] by degrees, and should do so sooner if I had them in my own hands, and no more worthy task can be done than training human beings for their work in this world; so I must be willing to go through a little while I bring them into order, and fit their mother for managing them. (27)

Even with only her limited experiences with volunteer teaching and the visitation of poor children, Rachel judges herself to be a far better mother for Fanny’s children than Fanny herself. She objectifies the children, seeing them merely as a “worthy task,” in desperate need of “training” and “order” which only she herself is competent to provide. Fanny must be made “fit” to mother her children—though ironically Rachel’s dispassionate and distinctly militant assessment of Fanny and her children reveals her own lack of qualifications, her own lack of suitability for motherhood. She lacks the emotional component natural to a proper woman, to a good mother.

Rachel’s willingness to continue on a course which will only humiliate her stems from her need to be useful in a world which provides no opportunities for a single woman. She believes herself to be past the possibility of matrimony, and yet there is no future for her beyond continuing in the role of daughter and occasionally school mistress. She has exhausted all her intellectual resources and hungers for some sort of fulfillment.

But there simply is nothing available and so she attempts to usurp Fanny's maternal role. Rachel expects to have innate and superior mothering abilities—abilities not grounded in her femininity, but in a logic which posits women's tasks as simple, requiring little or no skill, particularly for a woman with transcendent intelligence and education. She assumes mastery of the feminine domain because she believes in her own vaunted aptitude for the more difficult skills of the masculine domain. Later she realizes that: "I had a few intellectual tastes, and like to think and read, which was supposed to be cleverness; and my willfulness made me fancy myself superior" (367). Yet she not only does not know how to care properly for the boys, but her inability turns criminal when she cannot recognize the abuse of the girls in her girls' school. Rescue comes only when maternal Fanny realizes the danger and sounds the alarm. The damage is done, however, and both Lovedy and Alice die, all the blame going to Rachel for "neglect and cruelty—and she the cause" (231).

Though Yonge initially portrays Rachel in a rather negative light, making her difficult to like, she nevertheless demonstrates a certain amount of sympathy for Rachel's plight. Rachel's life is frustrating and boring, she needs *something*, and in her quest to answer that indefinable need, has become unfeminine: independent, forward, arrogant and outspoken. She seeks to fulfill herself, and in doing so, makes poor choices, and must pay the price for those choices. The urge to help, to minister to others is fundamental to the ideology of the domestic angel, of true womanhood, and Yonge celebrates that trait in Rachel while showing the dangers of misguided women, and the need for male supervision within the domestic space.

The end of Rachel's 'mission' with Fanny comes when she accuses Conrade, Fanny's eldest son, of disobeying and then lying to cover it up. Fanny refuses to accept that Conrade has been guilty of either crime and prevents Rachel from disciplining the boy. Rachel then attempts to coerce her cousin's cooperation by self-importantly withholding her guidance, telling Fanny that "while you are so weak as to let that boy go on in his deceit, unrepentant and unpunished, I can have no more to do with his education" (30). Much to Rachel's surprise, Fanny agrees quickly and gratefully. Later, when Alison Williams becomes their governess, her gentle femininity wins the boys over and they cooperate and obey as a result, not of a masculine styled discipline, but of gentle influence—a feminine method of education. Thus Yonge reveals Rachel to be wanting in those feminine qualities which would have allowed her to succeed in her 'mission.' At the same time, she has encroached into the masculine sphere with her manly urge to take charge of Fanny, her attempts at discipline and her vociferous opinions on religion, women, and social ills. In doing so, she appears ridiculous and becomes the butt of local ridicule and disapproval. She also endangers the discourse cell and the larger hegemony. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray explores the cultural construction of femininity. She writes that culturally, mothers have no assigned value connected to reproduction, but have the "responsibility . . . to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it" (185). In transgressing into the masculine sphere, Rachel subverts it through her antithetical example, but also through her influence over others.²³ Her only saving grace is her desire to be useful, to care for others.

In this exploration of femininity, Yonge rejects the version of the domestic angel who is idle, a signifier of economic superiority within the hierarchical stratification of the

middle class discourse structure. Because leisure served as a symbol of wealth and thus higher social status, a wife must never appear to labor. The idle angel was a product of indolent upper class values and contrasted sharply with the conservative middle class conception of the useful woman. For Yonge, brought up under strict middle class values, and a version of the domestic angel devoted to service and utility, the idle woman was as monstrous as the masculine woman.²⁴ Yet the urge to service “required women to lay aside any desire for the power to achieve, especially outside the domestic sphere” (Newton 5). A woman must, like Alison Williams over the boys, exert influence, which meant, in the words of Judith Lowder Newton, “doing without self-definition, achievement, and control, meant relinquishing power for effacement of the self in love and sacrifice” (5). Yonge criticizes Rachel’s ambitions, her desire for recognition and her obvious gratification whenever undertaking a service. Rachel should perform services for the sake of others in humility and true altruism, and should not only show no interest in personal reward, but should actively strive to evade it. The service itself should be its own reward. Yonge also faults Rachel for ignoring the needs of her home and family in order to accomplish some greater (to Rachel) purpose. At first Rachel complains about her inability to do nothing while “the world around [is] one mass of misery and evil” (3). Despite the pivotal cultural value assigned to the domestic angel, Rachel disdains “only a domestic mission” (3). Later, after her devastating and fatal attempt at organizing a poor girls’ school, the subsequent trial and her marriage, she discovers the value of the domestic sphere. Her “self-conceit” disappears (316). She discovers that “she was certainly of far more positive use in the world at the present moment than ever she had been in her most assuming maiden days” (345). In the present

moment, she humbly provides care and assistance to her husband, his uncle, and her orphaned nephew. She willingly allows herself to be guided, asking her husband, “have I been self-willed and overbearing?” (344). All her energies are devoted to domestic life and motherhood. She has become a true woman, though as Yonge points out, ever needing masculine guidance—as do all women, no matter how closely they may *currently* measure up to the ideology of the domestic angel.

Unlike Eden’s Helen, whose failures as a mature domestic angel arise out of her own inability to accept or understand her new role, Yonge wishes her readers to see Rachel as a product of a faulty—and probably more typical—upbringing.²⁵ Yonge sympathizes with Rachel’s plight, with her desire to exercise her mental capacities and assist her fellow humanity, yet condemns her rejection of the feminine sphere. Rather the solution for Rachel’s discontent lies in becoming more selflessly useful as a domestic angel, becoming marriageable and ascending to the realm of the maternal. For Yonge, the limitations of femininity have not created in Rachel such dissatisfaction, rather it is the result of masculinization, of her misunderstanding of her proper sphere—which is a direct result of her poor upbringing, specifically a lack of masculine guidance.

Yet, though Rachel admits that she “should have been much better if [she] had either father or brother to keep [her] in order,” Yonge acknowledges that masculine influences may not be enough. Bessie Keith has had all the benefit of Mr. Clare’s and Alick’s care and guidance—the same care and guidance which have re-feminized Rachel. Bessie is witty, generous, friendly—appearing to most to be a model domestic angel. Yet as her brother Alick confesses, his attempts at molding her character have failed: “I always feel as though I were more unkind and unjust to her than any one else, and yet we

are never together without my feeling as if she was deceiving herself and me; and yet it is all so fair and well reasoned that one is always left in the wrong” (303). And indeed he is correct. Bessie refuses to get her husband the care he needs during his illness, claiming that he won’t listen to her. Alick challenges her excuse of helplessness:

‘I cannot help thinking, Bessie, that Lord Keith is more ill than you suppose. I am sure he is in constant pain.’

‘So I fear,’ said Bessie, gravely; ‘but what can be done? He will see no one but his old surgeon in Edinburgh.’

‘Then take him there.’

‘Take him? You must know what it is to be in the hands of a clever woman before you make such a proposal.’

‘You are a cleverer woman than my wife in bringing about what you really wish.’

‘Just consider, Alick, our own house is uninhabitable, and this one on our hands—my aunt coming to me in a month’s time. You don’t ask me to do what is reasonable.’ (302)

Bessie has little interest in her husband’s welfare. Rather she married him for his position and money, and ignores his health to pursue her own social desires. She also runs up a great deal of secret debt buying “expensive trinkets and small luxuries” for herself (339). She encourages the crush of a young man with whom she’d flirted with prior to her marriage; and she encourages Rachel’s involvement with Mauleverer.²⁶ All of this she rationalizes in terms of duty, claiming that her behavior grows from a desire to help others, to sacrifice herself in the care of her friends and family. While Bessie claims

that her intentions are consonant with the qualities of the domestic angel, her real agenda aims at personal pleasure and self-aggrandizement.

The narrator calls her “double-minded,” saying she has a “double nature” (304, 312). She performs outwardly as a domestic angel, but covertly allows her abject nature free rein. In this way, Bessie manages to lead a “self-indulgent, [yet] plausible life” (339). Because of this plausibility—because she maintains appearances—the circulatory intelligence network fails to recognize or discipline Bessie’s transgressions, as it will with Lady Audley. Despite evidence to the contrary, because of Bessie’s “perfect sincerity of manner,” she deceived nearly everyone into believing that she was a domestic angel (341). Alick’s warnings to others not to indulge her and his remonstrances to his sister fall on deaf ears. His friends assume that his long illness following his wounds in battle have colored his impressions:

[Colonel Keith] was aware of the miserably sensitive condition of shattered nerve in which Alick had been sent home, and of the depression of spirits that had ensued on the news of his father’s death; and he thought it extremely probably that his weary hours and solicitude for his gay young sister might have made molehills into mountains. . . . At least this seemed the only way of accounting for an impression so contrary to that which Bessie Keith made on every one else, and, by his own avowal, on the uncle whom he so much revered. Every other voice proclaimed her winning, amiable, obliging, considerate, and devoted to the service of her friends, with much drollery and shrewdness of perception, tempered by kindness of heart and unwillingness to give pain. (190).

Bessie's façade of true femininity is so well constructed that no one, not even saintly Mr. Clare, can believe she is not what she seems to be.²⁷

Until her death provides proof to the contrary, Bessie is publicly admired as the epitome of the domestic angel. Yet her dangerous influence on both her community (as the influential wife of the local lord) and her family and friends is arrested with her death: a death stemming entirely from her own monstrous nature. Attending a garden party with Rachel, Bessie meets clandestinely with Mr. Carleton, the man whose crush she encouraged before and after her marriage. Rachel and Alick observe the meeting and Bessie, seeing herself under surveillance and recognizing the danger to her carefully maintained reputation, immediately begins to run from Mr. Carleton as though he has somehow dragged her to the lonely spot. In the course of her escape, she trips and falls, provoking her premature labor and subsequent death. In this way, her dangerous influence as an authorized agent within the panoptical power pyramid is removed, and she becomes beneficial as an object lesson about the eternal duplicity inherent in woman's monstrous nature.

Yonge's novel then both exposes and valorizes the mechanisms of the panoptical power pyramid which contain and control women, helping them to overcome their abject and embrace their femininity in the service of society, and by implication, hegemony. Putting into practice Dinah Mullock Craik's assertion that novels, more than any other medium, have the ability to disseminate ideas to the world, Yonge set about creating a novel of overt didacticism, encouraging women to embrace the domestic angel ideology.²⁸ The narrative, incorporating the 'sensational' headlines of the day with all the distasteful details of modern day criminals, workhouses, and war, seeks to establish a

sense of transparency, of true reality, effacing itself as a text, and instead seeming to “transcribe a series of events, to report on a palpable world” (Belsey 361). In this way, the ideology of the woman’s sphere is reinforced as “the reader is invited to perceive and judge the “truth” of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation” (Belsey 361). Yonge’s view of the world underscores not only the necessity, but also the ontology of separate spheres, positioning women in the traditional role of domestic angels with cautionary illustrations of tragedy and fatality for those women who fail or evade their true femininity. The popular Victorian novel, so potent in its capacity to reach so many women readers, as Craik contends, carried with it heavy, almost godlike responsibilities:

What is it to “write a novel?” Something which the multitude of young contributors to magazines, or young people who happen to have nothing to do but weave stories, little dream of. If they did, how they would shrink from the awfulness of what they have taken into their innocent, foolish hands; even a piece out of the tremendous web of human life, so wonderful in its pattern, so mysterious in its convolutions, and of which—most solemn thought of all—warp, woof and loom, are in the hands of the Maker of the universe alone. (442)

Yonge, in taking her ‘piece out of the tremendous web of human life,’ rejects Eden’s complacency about Helen’s ‘final’ achievement of true womanhood. Instead she cautions women against such smugness and contentment. True womanhood requires constant attention to the feminine abject, constant self-patrol. To assume that any woman

is beyond danger, beyond the need for surveillance and masculine guidance, is to court disaster, as Mr. Carlyle discovers in Ellen Wood's East Lynne.

Moralizing Sensationalism

Like The Clever Woman of the Family, Ellen Wood's East Lynne (1861) carries an overtly moralistic message, though in contrast to Yonge's effort, the novel clearly utilizes the sensational devices for effect, rather than verisimilitude. Nor does East Lynne exhibit the same kind of focused didacticism as The Clever Woman of the Family. Rather the intertwining of the sensationalized murder plot with the melodrama of the Barbara-Carlyle-Isabel triangle divides reader attention, undermining to some extent the cautionary vision of the disfigured Isabel, monstrous in appearance as well as in actions, returning to her former home disguised as a nurse to care for her own children.²⁹ In her introduction, Sally Mitchell addresses this in her study of women in popular literature, saying "popular fiction provides emotional indulgence; it avoids analysis and lets readers escape from the tensions that grow out of social conditions or their own nature" (Fallen xviii). Wood's characters do evade the kind of extended soul searching and painful rehabilitation which Rachel Curtis endures, though clearly Isabel feels terrible remorse and regret for allowing herself to be seduced away from her family. This lack of internal struggle might be explained by the severity of Isabel's crime versus Rachel's, rather than by the sensationalist nature of the work.³⁰ Isabel not only commits adultery, deserting her husband and children, but she also delivers an illegitimate child. Unlike Rachel, her actions place her beyond redemption as even she acknowledges: "My own sin I have surely expiated: I cannot expiate the shame I entailed upon you and upon our children"

(517). In particular Wood suggests that Isabel's actions have caused her son William's death by an 'inherited' weakness, though Isabel worries about Lucy's marital prospects, about the damage done to her reputation through "disgrace reflected on her through the conduct of her mother" (502). And rightfully so. With the overabundance of 'redundant' women in England at that time, men could and did require the highest standards from prospective wives. Thus the innocent Lucy will suffer from the contamination of her mother's actions. Indeed Isabel is right. She cannot expiate the damage done to her family. Winifred Hughes says in The Maniac in the Cellar, "From the moment of her elopement with the villain, she [Isabel] has put herself beyond the pale For the adulteress . . . there is only one permissible cure, morally as well as dramatically: an early and contrite death" (112-13). And so for Wood to offer an investigation of Isabel's attempts to learn from her mistakes seems not only pointless, but might also be construed as excusing the inexcusable.

Foucault's asserts that "the injury that a crime inflicts upon the social body is the disorder that it introduces into it: the scandal that it gives rise to, the example that it gives, the incitement to repeat it if it is not punished, the possibility of becoming widespread that it bears within it" (Discipline 92). If it was taken for ontological fact, as I argue, that women maintaining their roles as domestic angels was fundamental to the stability and preservation of hegemony, then it follows that a feminized Rachel, who is offered up as an example of successful rehabilitation, serves hegemony as both a cautionary model of the dangers of "clever" or "strong-minded" women, and more importantly, as an enticing example of what women may become. If she, who seems at first to be so monstrous, can aspire to a domestic angel, becoming a wife and mother,

obedient and submissive to her husband, then so can women readers who share similar flaws, similar frustrations.

On the other hand, Isabel can only be useful to hegemony in her suffering and eventual death. Her violations preclude any suggestion of hegemonic forgiveness, for to allow her to live would be to undermine the ideology which made the family—and women within the family—the cornerstone of the nation, of English society and culture. Whereas Rachel can be made to serve that ideology, Isabel has gone beyond any possibility for redemption and can only serve as an illustration of the consequent horrors intrinsic to such transgression. As a model of punishment, Isabel discourages similar behavior.

Foucault writes that “one must punish exactly enough to prevent repetition” (Discipline 93). The only sufficient punishment for Isabel’s desertion of her husband and children, an adulterous affair, and illegitimate child, is death. As Lady Mount Severn says in her relief upon hearing of Isabel’s death: “It is a blight removed from the family” (272). Thus Wood constructs Isabel as a negative example, a model of monstrosity, who, like Rachel, is led astray by her own uncontrolled abject nature combined with a lack of proper masculine (and feminine) guidance. Unlike Rachel’s enticement, Isabel serves as a cautionary figure. Therefore she must be seen to suffer the agonies of her choices, convincing her readers to avoid following her example. Explorations of her thoughts are limited to her regrets, and these are quite profoundly tormented: “It has been one long scene of mortal agony . . . it has been to me as the bitterness of death” (516-17). To expose readers to any internal moral struggle which Isabel might be making would be to speculate on the possibility that she was right, that she might have been justified. Such a

notion would be wholly contrary to the feminine ontology which takes for an *a priori* truth that any idea of leaving her husband should be inconceivable—literally impossible to conceive—for any good woman. This might encourage readers to accept her behavior based on such mitigating circumstances, and thus subvert the ideology of the domestic angel by asserting occasions when passion, selfishness and un-maternal feelings are justified.

Unlike The Semi-attached Couple or The Clever Woman of the Family, East Lynne does not concentrate on those mechanisms of the panoptical power pyramid which contain or control women, nor does Wood call specific attention to the limitations or contradictions of the domestic angel ideology. Wood's main female characters, Isabel and Barbara, have no further ambitions than marriage and children. Neither seeks further personal affirmation or purpose, nor does either feel inadequate to the job of domestic angel. Where Helen must learn to accept and adopt her new role, where Rachel must embrace her femininity, Barbara and Isabel, both confident of and comfortable with their hegemonically assigned femininity, must fear the lurking dark passion of the feminine abject—also hegemonically coded as feminine.

East Lynne begins with the death of Isabel's dissipated father, Lord Mount Severn, William Vane. Realizing his imminent demise, he sells his eponymous estate East Lynne to Archibald Carlyle so as to gain enough money to see him through to the end. He leaves his daughter destitute, and she eventually comes under the care of his brother and his abusive and vain wife Emma, now Lord and Lady Severn. Lady Severn abuses Isabel, even striking her physically. Mr. Carlyle becomes aware of the situation and proposes marriage as a means to rescue her. He has loved her for a long time, but

realizing his class is below hers, never had aspired to marry her.³¹ But he cannot leave her in an abusive home, and so when he proposes, she accepts though she does not love him, and in fact has already formed an emotional attachment to Francis Levison.³²

Their marriage is a blissfully happy one for Mr. Carlyle, and a generally miserable one for Isabel. Miss Corny, Carlyle's overbearing sister, moves into their home and proceeds to usurp Isabel's place in the household.³³ Isabel, too much the selfless, self-effacing domestic angel, offers little protest, feeling guilty about causing Miss Corny pain. At the same time, Isabel becomes jealous of Barbara Hare who often meets clandestinely with the oblivious Carlyle.

Barbara has been in love with Carlyle for many years and is herself jealous of Isabel. However her meetings with Carlyle are not romantic, but instead relate to the plight of her brother Richard. Some time before the onset of the novel, he has been involved in a murder where he stands as the only suspect. Rather than staying for a trial, he ran away and was convicted *in absentia* by his own father, Justice Hare, who has vowed to see his own son hang. As the novel commences, Richard visits Barbara claiming his innocence. At her mother's behest, she engages Carlyle's professional services to look into the murder and attempt to clear her brother's name. This all must be kept secret against Justice Hare's infamous rage (though Miss Corny worms her way into the confidence). Thus Isabel is not given the particulars of her husband's and her rival's relationship, and constructs her own romantic interpretation of their meetings.³⁴ All appearances, all circulating gossip, indicate that Barbara and Carlyle have long shared an intimate relationship, and given their clandestine meetings and Levison's corroborating interpretations of those meetings, Isabel is easily convinced of her husband's infidelity.

Isabel's mistrust escalates with the aid of Levison's none-too-subtle suggestions of an adulterous affair. Finally, in a paroxysm of jealous anger, she succumbs to Levison's campaign of seduction and runs away with him, much to the shock of her husband, family, and community. She becomes pregnant and the notoriously debauched Levison deserts her, leaving her with an illegitimate child. In the meantime Carlyle has divorced her, though he refuses to marry again as he feels that he remains married to her in the eyes of God.³⁵ Later Isabel travels to France to find work and, following a train wreck, is horribly disfigured, her child by Levison killed. She is identified as dead, however, and allows that fiction to continue though, against all odds, she survives her injuries. Her supposed death frees Carlyle and he eventually marries Barbara.

Having taken up work as a governess, Isabel hears that her former husband and his new wife are seeking someone to care for their children (children from both marriages). Disguising herself with bulky clothing, and counting on the extraordinary changes in her appearance from the train wreck and premature aging, she changes her name to Madame Vine (pronounced Veen) and applies for the job. She is accepted and returns to the household of her marriage. Meanwhile Levison has inherited a title and married for money, and Carlyle continues to pursue the truth in the Hallijohn murder case. It soon comes to light that Levison is the real murderer and has framed Richard Hare. A trial is held and Levison is sentenced to death and Richard freed. Meanwhile William, Isabel's and Carlyle's middle child, has grown steadily more consumptive, and finally dies. Isabel soon does the same, following a deathbed revelation of her masquerade.

The plot is clearly sensational, as a great many of the elements indicate. Mrs. Hare's dreams of the murderer all prove prophetic. Bats swarm East Lynne just as Isabel's father dies. His dead body is "arrested" by moneylenders and held hostage to his bills. There are murder and bigamy, disguise and subterfuges, seduction and fallen women: all stock elements of the sensational tale. Much like Yonge, Wood utilizes the sensational plot devices toward implementing her message of morality, though with a far lighter hand and far more interest in entertainment rather than character development or didacticism. Her extensive use of such devices, however, firmly establishes East Lynne as a sensational novel rather than domestic realist, though P.D. Edwards remarks that "reviewers in religious journals seem . . . to have felt that Mrs. Wood was the safest and least unwholesome of the sensationalists" (15). In fact Wood articulates a moral message stressing the importance of marriage and maternity within the culture, reinforcing the cultural ideology that a woman's highest priority and goal in life should be establishing a family, and that women who do not strive toward this end will eventually prove socially destructive.

And East Lynne teems with such destructive women.

Whereas in the previous two novels there were offered up several domestic angel role models, *none of the women in this book can be termed angelic*. Mrs. Hare, who comes closest, is criticized for her weakness and helplessness. Though determined to maintain the role of wife and mother to the best of her ability, she is ineffectual and requires so much care that it might be said that she is something of a burden to both her husband and children, and she cannot manage her own household. Miss Corny is overbearing and destructive. In spite of her quick mind and sometimes good nature, she

exemplifies but one of the attributes of the domestic angel: a lack of vanity. In fact she is opinionated, outspoken, demanding, forceful, nosy, and independent. She admits to no masculine higher wisdom, and not only shuns marriage for herself, but preaches against it for others. She invades Isabel's household and makes her a virtual prisoner: "in her own house she has been less free than any one of the servants" (234). She interferes with Carlyle's private and official business. Lynn Pykett calls her the "masculinized old maid" (*Improper* 126). Both categories—masculine and unmarried—identifying her as 'unfeminine,' a.k.a., not a domestic angel. The rest of the novel's women appear as minor characters—Afy, Lady Mount Severn, and Alice Levison—and all reveal a gamut of monstrous qualities.³⁶ We are left then with Isabel and Barbara—both of whom enter the novel as seeming angels, both of whom prove flawed, though Barbara, like Rachel and Helen, eventually actualizes herself as a domestic angel (while Isabel becomes a monster).

Sally Mitchell writes that "one striking feature of the sensation novels of the 1860s, as a group, is the centrality of female characters" (*Fallen* 73-74). And these women characters are sexualized, whether they commit adultery, bigamy, or are seduced away from their families as young girls; or whether their passions lead them to murder, arson, theft, or other illegal activities. In each case, the woman gives into her abject nature, in particular the passions of original sin, the sin of her great grandmother Eve. Neither Isabel nor Barbara are exceptions.

Isabel is introduced to the reader in terms of the madonna: "Lady Isabel was wondrously gifted by nature, not only in mind and person, but in heart. . . . Generous and benevolent she was; timid and sensitive to a degree; gentle and considerate to all" (9).

She is also dutiful, innocent, pure and “as good as she is beautiful” (9). Though her beauty is enough to take “away his [Carlyle’s] senses and his self-possession” when he first sees her, she has no vanity (8). Rather, she wears simple clothing and simple jewelry against her fears that “it might be thought I had put them on to *look* fine” (12). She is also softhearted and generous. When she discovers Mr. Kane’s plight, she feels horrified that she did not offer him a meal or in some way assuage his predicament. Instantly contrite and repentant, she immediately sets out to assist the poor man.³⁷ After her marriage, when she discovers that Miss Corny has taken control of her household, she is so “refined and sensitive, almost painfully considerate of the feelings of others, [that] she raise[s] no word of objection” (124). To this point, Isabel typifies the perfect domestic angel. Despite her father’s excesses, she exemplifies every aspect of true femininity.

By contrast, Barbara is immediately portrayed as flawed. She is strong minded. She bullies her mother, challenges her father’s wishes, and pines passionately after Carlyle. She reveals impatience in the care of her invalid mother and is even “petulant” at times (17). Nor does she lack vanity. When Isabel and Lord Vane attend church early in the novel, Barbara—in strong contrast to Isabel’s simple appearance—dresses in her best clothing: clothing which proves to be overdone and gaudy. She comes “looming up the street, flashing and gleaming in the sun. A pink parasol came first, a pink bonnet and feather came behind it, a grey brocaded dress, and white gloves” (52). The language of the description suggests garish vulgarity and conspicuous consumption, a display contrary to the quiet taste expected of a true woman. Miss Corny calls her a “vain idiot” for attempting to show herself off to Lord Mount Severn and Lady Isabel. And indeed

Isabel's appearance is "plain," something which might be worn "on a week day, and not found . . . too smart" (53).

Yet it is Barbara's passion, her uncontrolled emotions, which speak to her deepest flaws. From the first her passion for Carlyle makes her "listless" until he comes to visit. Then she becomes animated, the mere sound of his footsteps making her blush, "her veins tingl[ing] with an excess of rapture" (18). She imagines that he is courting her, constructing loving explanations for friendly behavior. A kiss on the cheek arouses in her a storm of feeling: "all her veins were tingling, all her pulses beating; her heart was throbbing with its sense of bliss" (24). When Miss Corny maliciously informs Barbara of her brother's marriage to Isabel, Barbara cannot suppress her response. She turns white and runs from the room, flinging herself to her bedroom floor "in utter anguish" and "despair" (112). The melodrama of the scene notwithstanding, Barbara reveals a level of passion beyond the limits of acceptability in the domestic angel, particularly given that its focus is a man who is not only not related, but married. As we saw in Helen, such emotion for one's husband might be excused, given provocation. Yet despite all of these elements disqualifying her as a domestic angel, Barbara, though flawed, cannot yet be deemed monstrous. Her passion kindled, her love unrequited, she takes a more fateful step, succumbing to her abject nature.

Carlyle and Isabel return to East Lynne. Barbara and her parents make a visit to welcome and congratulate the couple. Yet at the sight of Isabel, Barbara feels "sickening jealousy" (133). She can hardly contain herself when she sees their loving interactions. At the end of the evening, Carlyle walks Barbara home and she imagines that "all [was] just as it used to be—only that he was now the husband of another" (136). The

combination of her jealousy and her frustrated desires lead her to step across the boundary between the proper and the monstrous:

Her love, her jealousy, the never-dying pain always preying on her heart-strings since the marriage took place, her keen sense of the humiliation which had come home to her, were all rising fiercely, bubbling up with fiery heat. The evening she had just passed in their company, their evident happiness, the endearments she had seen him lavish upon his wife, were working her up to that state of nervous excitement when temper, tongue, and imagination fly off at a mad tangent.
(137)

She becomes incapacitated with hysterics, unable even to stand with the force of her emotions. She accuses Carlyle of leading her on, much to his shock. He had not previously known of her infatuation. When Wood identifies her love as “idolatrous passion” (112), the comparison to the barbaric worship of idols, of ‘graven images’ before God, confirms the nature of Barbara’s feelings as evil, as monstrous. Her complete loss of control and reason, her “temper, tongue, and imagination fly[ing] off at a mad tangent,” are indicative of the dark passions of Eve hidden within every woman, emphasizing Wood’s implication that there is no such thing as a ‘safe’ woman, a complete and perfectly consummated domestic angel. All of Wood’s female characters in East Lynne exhibit elements of the abject, therefore none are above suspicion and all benefit from continuous surveillance. In this way Eden endorses the necessity of the panoptical power pyramid.

Barbara's confession at this moment, after Carlyle's marriage, suggests an intent to subvert and destroy that marriage which, if successful, would endanger their respective families and community. Both families hold positions of authorized agency within the discourse cell of West Lynne: Justice Hare as the head of the local board of justices, Carlyle at first as the leading citizen of West Lynne, later as the Member of Parliament (chosen because of his uncompromising fairness, superior morality and good sense). Had he eloped with or otherwise engaged in an illicit alliance with Barbara, both his and Justice Hare's reputations would have been destroyed. West Lynne would have been left without its two community preceptors, the two cohering forces of morality, leadership and hegemonic conformity. Without them, there would be moral decay and loss of communal stability, thereby endangering first the discourse community, and second the encompassing hegemony. Thus in confessing her love to Carlyle, Barbara commits an act of transgression against hegemony, her passionate outburst both selfish and socially destructive.

Isabel and Barbara switch positions by the end of the novel. Barbara learns to overcome her passionate abject, suppressing it in obedience to her husband, while Isabel, beginning the novel as unselfish, self-effacing, moral, obedient, and passionless as any domestic angel ought to be, eventually allows the dark passions of her abject to overcome her morality.³⁸

During the same evening when Barbara makes her hysterical confession to Carlyle, Isabel discovers through the gossip of her servants that Barbara had long been in love with Carlyle. Despite Isabel's own lack of love for her husband, and despite his passionate proclamations of love for her, she becomes immediately jealous: "a hot flush

passed over the brow of Lady Isabel; a sensation very like jealousy flew to her heart. No woman likes to hear that another woman either is or has been attached to her husband: a doubt always arises whether the feeling may not have been reciprocated” (133). Later in the evening, after Carlyle has walked Barbara home, and after Barbara’s tempestuous scene, Isabel hears Wilson (the nurse) describing what she saw to Joyce (Isabel’s maid). Though Wilson has not been privileged to witness the entire scene, she understands that something improper has passed between them. She suggests, with knowing innuendo, that if “Mr. Carlyle should ever get tired of my lady [Isabel],” then “Miss Barbara, as sure as fate, would step into her shoes” (150-1). As a result of this intelligence, Isabel “hastily [takes] up the idea that Archibald Carlyle had never loved her, that he had admired her and made her his wife in his ambition, but that his heart had been given to Barbara Hare” (151). Obviously Isabel makes unfounded assumptions concerning Carlyle’s feelings which the narrator attributes to illness: this gossip “might not, and indeed would not, have made so great an impression upon her had she been in strong health, but she was weak, feverish, in a state of partial delirium” (151). Nevertheless, she believes that he has been unfaithful, and thereby nullified their marriage vows. In this she is incorrect, not only in her suspicion that he has committed adultery, but that such an act would in any way nullify their marriage.³⁹ Nor does that justify her own subsequent adultery with Levison.

Her jealousy is only temporarily alleviated when she follows up her discovery by interrogating Carlyle about his former and current relationship with Barbara. He answers unequivocally, “I never loved Barbara Hare; I never entertained the faintest shadow of love for her; either before my marriage or since . . . Believe me, you have as much cause

to be jealous of Cornelia, as you have of Barbara Hare” (152). Despite his blunt and absolute reassurances of his feelings for Isabel and his lack of previous or present feelings for Barbara, Isabel’s darker passions, now aroused, cannot be fully assuaged:

There never was a passion in this world, there never will be one, so fantastic, so delusive, so powerful as jealousy. . . . Implicitly relying upon her husband’s words at the moment, feeling quite ashamed at her own suspicion, Lady Isabel afterwards suffered the unhappy fear to regain its influence; the ill-starred revelations of Wilson reasserted their power, over-mastering the denial of Mr. Carlyle. . . . Isabel said not another word to her husband . . . but certain it is that Barbara Hare dwelt on her heart like an incubus. (153)

Displaying a distinctly unfeminine or ‘unnatural’ lack of faith in her husband, a kind of disobedience to him as her divinely appointed ruling authority, Isabel chooses instead to believe the gossip of the nurse Wilson. In this, we as readers are given to understand not only a woman’s inherent lack of competency (as an authorized agent of the panoptical power pyramid) in sifting through gossip for elements of truth, but we also perceive the pervasive frailty involved in the mental stability of a domestic angel—of any woman. That monstrous abject, ever-present in even the best of women, may emerge without warning or real cause. Thus Isabel, in a matter of few hours, devolves from a domestic angel to a monster as her jealousy overrides all other concerns. She becomes self-centered and self-interested, providing fertile ground for Levison’s innuendo and seduction. Except for the jealousy and consequent subjection of her domestic angel tendencies, she would not have succumbed to Levison.⁴⁰ Thus while certainly Levison

plays a part in her ‘fall,’ i.e. her adultery and desertion of her family, the source of Isabel’s monstrous actions (and thus all responsibility) rests with her.

Isabel grows increasingly jealous as she sees Barbara and Carlyle together. Her husband explains the private meetings as relating to business, but Isabel doesn’t believe him. Instead she concludes that they are having an affair, an idea made more plausible by the confirming observations of Levison who, much to Isabel’s initial dismay, has been invited to visit at East Lynne by Carlyle. At this point Levison has confessed that he loves her, and though she rejects him instantly, Isabel feels “sinful happiness throbbing at her heart” (181). Not wishing to encourage him or her own improper feelings, Isabel returns from vacation, believing that she has removed herself from temptation and danger. However when Carlyle tells her that he has invited Levison to visit for business reasons, she tells him that she would prefer that he rescind the invitation, that she does not like him. Carlyle, unsuspecting and confident of his wife’s integrity as a proven domestic angel, responds that he it would be rude to revoke a “voluntary invitation” (188). Because women were supposed to lack any intellectual capacity for non-domestic subjects, he assumes that she has developed a feminine “prejudice” against Levison, and therefore by implication, her objection is without merit (188). Isabel cannot convince him of Levison’s iniquity because she refuses to offer him any proof, unwilling to tell him even “a portion of the truth” (188). In this she fails in her responsibility to report important information to the circulatory intelligence network, thereby allowing Levison to continue to subvert hegemony through his immoral activities. Had she made this information available to Carlyle—one of the two authorized agents within the discourse cell—Levison’s position within the panoptical power pyramid would have deteriorated,

he would have been made the object of minute surveillance, and thus his ability to cause harm would have been preempted. At the very least, he would have been unable to cultivate the jealousy which leads to Isabel's ruin.

As the frequency of the meetings between Barbara and Carlyle increase, so does Isabel's jealousy and discontent: "Discontented with herself and with everybody about her, Isabel was living now in a state of excitement; a dangerous resentment against her husband working in her heart" (211). Her monstrous passions, the anathema of the domestic angel, are in constant state of arousal, further inflamed by "Levison's comments and false insinuations regarding" Barbara and Carlyle (211). Her resentment of Carlyle's perceived wrongs only accentuates how self-involved she's become. She's quickly growing dismissive of those domestic concerns which previously had been the source of her identity and life's purpose—morality, motherhood, and wifedom—in favor of her sense of having been wronged, of a need for personal retribution and justice.

Events and emotions come to a head the night of the Jeafferson's dinner party. Richard returns to identify the mysterious Thorn and as a result, Carlyle must cancel his evening with his wife who believes that he was "making this excuse to spend the hours of her absence with Barbara" (221). Her suspicions are confirmed when later Levison reports that he saw them "coupled lovingly together, enjoying a *tête-à-tête* by moonlight" (227). Isabel physically transforms into the inner monster which has taken her over, "almost gnash[ing] her teeth" (227). Desiring to confirm Levison's surveillance, she drives by the garden where Barbara and Carlyle are walking, innocently keeping watch for Justice Hare while Richard meets inside the house with his mother. At that moment, the narrator suggests that Isabel goes mad: "a jealous woman is mad; an outraged woman

is doubly mad; and the ill-fated Lady Isabel truly believed that every sacred feeling which ought to exist between man and wife, was betrayed by Mr. Carlyle” (227). Yet madness can be defined as hysteria—an emotional excess—the revelation of a woman’s abject nature. Beyond reason, caught up in her own sense of betrayal and need, Isabel succumbs to Levison’s seduction: he “whisper[ed] that his love was left her, if another’s was withdrawn” (227). She flees her home and husband, rejecting her morals, and most monstrous of all, leaving her children. As Afy tells Madame Vine later, “a brute animal deaf and dumb clings to its offspring: but *she* abandoned hers” (332). Isabel evinces less maternal instinct than an animal when she deserts her children, revealing herself to be less than womanly, less than animal: monstrous.

Isabel quickly regrets her actions, allowing Wood to sermonize to her readers about the dangers of the feminine abject. Isabel gives into her darker side, and as a result, destroys herself and damages her family. The following encapsulates Wood’s moral message:

The very hour of her departure she [Isabel] woke to what she had done: the guilt, whose aspect had been shunned in the prospective, assumed at once its true, frightful colour, the blackness of darkness; and a lively remorse, a never dying anguish, took possession of her soul for ever. Oh, reader, believe me! Lady—wife—mother! Should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake! Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, thought they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them: pray for

patience; pray for strength to resist the demon that would urge you so to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death! (237)

Wood holds up Isabel as a negative example of womanhood. Promising a “fate worse than death,” she preaches the importance of maintaining a marriage, no matter what grounds—mistaken or otherwise—might be found for “escape.” By Isabel’s own example, those reasons are likely without merit, instigated by “the demon” of the woman’s abject. This passage introduces the rest of Isabel’s life which Wood will paint in colors of torment and regret, underscoring her warning to her readers against abandoning marriage and children.

Yet in spite of her repeated expressions of regret and remorse, Isabel nevertheless continues to give way to the passions of her abject nature. The narrator claims that “but for that most fatal misapprehension regarding her husband, the jealous belief, fanned by Captain Levison, that his love was given to Barbara Hare, and that the two were uniting to deceive her, she would never have forgotten herself” and committed such an immoral and destructive act (238). Despite the narrator’s attempt to shift blame onto Levison, however, he did not generate those passions in Isabel, nor did he kidnap her. She chose to abandon her family. Nor was that eruption of emotion a single aberration. Isabel continues her destructive path, repeatedly giving way to her emotions.

Following her abandonment and the onset of regret, Isabel begins to value what she has lost. Specifically, she falls in love with her former husband, he becoming “far dearer to her heart than he had ever been” (347). Such love is now illicit, not only

because they are now divorced, but also because he has remarried. Knowing her feelings for Carlyle, she still returns to his home disguised as Madame Vine, ironically echoing the temptation created by Levison's stay at East Lynne. Then, as now, her passions are unpredictable, and she cannot say with surety that she will resist the temptations of her former life. More than once her passions for Carlyle and the children nearly make her reveal herself. Nor is she unaware that in returning she commits an act of transgression: "[she returned as] an interloper, a criminal woman who had thrust herself into the house; her act, in doing so, not justifiable, her position a most false one" (362). She identifies herself as "criminal," not in the sense that she has violated any laws, but that by returning she threatens Carlyle's marriage, his morality, and the children. Aside from the possibility of her tainting the children and covertly undermining the marriage as Levinson did with hers, Carlyle believes that she is dead. If that were not the case, he would not have remarried. For Carlyle, marriage lasts until death, no matter the legalities of divorce. Thus if he discovered that she were still alive, he would perceive himself a bigamist. His career would be ruined. His child with Barbara would be deemed illegitimate, and their larger families and friends would also suffer as a result of the cultural belief in infectious corruption. The dangers to Carlyle and his wife duplicate those created by Barbara in her earlier hysterical outburst shortly after Carlyle married Isabel.

The comparison between Isabel as Madame Vine and Levison as a friend of Carlyle is an interesting one. Both enter East Lynne under false pretenses, and both set out to fulfill a hidden agenda based on selfishness and greed. To accomplish this agenda, both maintain a false appearance of propriety and service while undermining and

corrupting the family unit. For instance, Isabel's unfounded concern for her children leads her to interfere with Barbara as a mother. She feels that Barbara tries to separate Carlyle from his children, and she purposefully circumvents Barbara's domestic rules by going instead to Carlyle: "her jealous heart would not recognize the right of Mrs. Carlyle over her children" (369). Though she does not try to supplant Barbara in the affection of her children, she takes pride in the fact that after six months "she had endeared herself greatly to them, and they loved her: perhaps nature was asserting her own hidden claims" (368). She seeks justification in nature for renewing her relationship with her children, though she knows it can only harm them. For Isabel, nature's claim of motherhood supersedes those of mere stepmothers. In thus rationalizing away her selfishness and deceit, Isabel affirms the morality of subverting Barbara's relationship with the children.

However Madame Vine is not Isabel's only disguise, not even the most pernicious. As Madame Vine, Isabel takes on the guise of the domestic angel, of the pure woman. She outwardly mimics the aspect of a domestic angel, consciously hiding the reality of her monstrous nature. In this she disguise she has the opportunity to wreak a great deal of damage. The authority inherent in the agency position of a governess gives her a great deal of influential power. She influences by example, by her teaching and behavior. She has power over the minds of vulnerable people, whether children, or innocent (in the sense of pure and trusting) members of the community—particularly other women. Thus the gravity of her menace to hegemony lies largely in her assumption of a guise which has such great communal influence: the domestic angel.

Isabel, on her deathbed, confesses to Carlyle her selfish reasons for returning to East Lynne, saying "I could not stay away from you and from my children. The longing

for you was killing me” (516). When Carlyle tells her that she was wrong to return, she concurs, saying it was “wickedly wrong. You cannot think worse of it than I have done. But the consequences and the punishment would be mine alone, so long as I guarded against discovery” (517-18). And yet she has been discovered—by Joyce, Miss Corny, and Carlyle. Her uncle Lord Severn will also be informed and thus she once again her passions lead her to endanger Carlyle’s livelihood, his marriage, and their children: all out of her selfish desire to return to the home she had forsaken. In the end, her identity and masquerade are kept secret—as the revelation of that secret would only serve to undermine the stability of their community, their discourse cell.

Barbara, as might be guessed, becomes a domestic angel. Lyn Pykett notes that as “the ‘successful’ heroine . . . she is represented as suitably adoring, but also as a woman whose maternal feelings are constrained and contained by her sense of what is due her husband” (*Improper* 128). Barbara’s control over those maternal passions are sharply contrasted against Isabel’s, whose maternal emotions are “either dangerously excessive or dangerously absent” (Cvetkovich 112). Anne Cvetkovich argues in her study of *East Lynne* that the polarity between Isabel’s excesses and Barbara’s careful moderation show us that “like sexual desire, maternal desire must be put into play but also regulated, and it is dangerous when it is not balanced correctly, or when it becomes too narcissistic. A woman’s desire is thus placed in the service of the social order” (112). Yet, despite the fact that Barbara becomes a domestic angel, in the last pages of the novel, Wood reminds her readers that women bear watching, that the dark passions of the abject cannot be permanently suppressed. Madame Vine has recently died and Carlyle now informs Barbara of her real identity, knowing that too many others (Joyce, Miss

Corny and Lord Mount Severn) already know, and that sooner or later she will find out. Her response is an emotional outburst of tears. She asks him—in a repetition of Isabel’s jealous lack of faith in his marital commitment—“has this taken your love from me?” (524). He reprimands her, saying “I had thought my wife possessed entire trust in me,” as indeed Isabel did not when it came to his relationship with Barbara (524). Now Barbara confesses that she has long been jealous of his children by Isabel, that she has “tried earnestly to subdue it,” but it is not yet gone (524). Her confession is important because she, unlike Isabel, acknowledges her jealousy to her husband in an effort to correct and suppress it. She asks for his help rather than arrogantly trusting her own feminine, and by definition weak, will. In these last pages Barbara evinces something of that passion which so overwhelmed her following Carlyle’s marriage to Isabel. Yet clearly she not only has achieved a level of control—there are no hysterics here—but she also has put herself into the superior care and tutelage of her husband, allowing herself, like Yonge’s Rachel, to be molded by masculine guidance into a true woman.

In both Barbara and Isabel, Wood decries women’s ability to interpret information gathered through surveillance. Their sphere is the home; they are not qualified to function in the public sphere as men are. Mary Poovey writes that the public sphere by definition excluded feminine participation, based as it was on “competition, self-interest, and economic aggression,” the very opposite of woman’s special nature (10). The women’s sphere was predicated on her value as the moral core of the family and Victorian culture. Yet as Sally Mitchell notes, the Victorians had come to believe that “a woman’s soul is so refined that it has, ironically, grown too thin and fragile to protect her:

woman is in greater danger than a man,” who is more equipped to face the corruption and dangers of the public sphere (Fallen x). Mitchell goes on to say that:

purity . . . was also so valuable that extreme precautions were needed to preserve it. Prudery kept girls pure by concealing the basic facts of human existence; they therefore did not have the knowledge necessary to make rational choices. . . . The spiritual was woman’s provenance and the material was man’s—at a time when control of the material world (through commerce, science, and social reform) was becoming the most important object of human life. Women’s moral superiority would be endangered, said society, if they were brought into contact with money or political power or a knowledge of human anatomy or almost anything else that might help them master the physical circumstances of their own lives. (Fallen xii)

Neither Barbara nor Isabel have sufficient experience in the public sphere to adequately interpret the information they receive through surveillance. As a result, their obligation is to report that information to a qualified authority (masculine authority). In Isabel’s case, Levison complicates the situation, posing as an authorized agent of the power pyramid. Yet in the end, it is her own monstrous nature which impels her to abandon her family for an adulterous affair. Her selfishness, jealousy, and vanity work together to destroy her trust in Carlyle and overwhelm her maternal instincts. Those same monstrous emotions bring her back to East Lynne, and cause her to subvert Barbara’s position in the household. East Lynne is a cautionary tale, reminding readers that marriage after divorce is still bigamy, and that any suffering a woman endures in a marriage (whether from real

or imagined causes) cannot justify abandonment or adultery. In dramatizing Isabel's self-recriminations and torment, Wood provides a horrifying alternative to the domestic angel, encouraging her readers to conform to the sometimes painful limitation of true womanhood rather than suffer the agonies which Isabel suffers as a consequence of her transgressions.

An Exciting Tale—No Moral Lessons Please!

W. F. Rae, in an 1865 attack on Braddon, sums up the typical response of Braddon's reviewers to her novels:

They [Braddon's reviewers] tell us that the plots will hardly bear criticism, that the tone is unhealthy, that the views of life are false and mischievous; but they recommend them to us notwithstanding, merely on the ground that each can be read from the first to the last page without our attention ever flagging, or our interest being abated. (202)

Lady Audley's Secret (1862) was unabashed light reading aimed at the popular appetite for entertainment—aimed with great success. She makes no claim to any lessons of morality as Wood gives us in East Lynne, rather she writes merely for entertainment, believing that her readers prefer the excitement and titillation of 'pure' sensation.

Braddon has no misconception concerning the kind of writing she does; she writes to entertain, not to enlighten. In a 1863 letter to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Braddon writes: "I shall attempt no high flight [of artistic accomplishment]—since . . . I have always to remember the interests of the Circulating Library, and the young lady readers who are its chief supporters" (Wolff 132). She makes the rationale behind her choice clear, saying:

“I have learnt to look at everything in a mercantile sense, & to write solely for the circulating library reader, whose palette [sic] requires strong meat, & is not very particular as to the quality thereof” (Wolff 14). While Braddon would like to “be artistic” with more originality and more depth of character, and to write on more thematically important topics, she acknowledges that sensationalism “please[s] Mudie’s subscribers” and sensational fiction is her chief means of supporting herself (Wolff 14).

Besides bearing no kind of overt messages of morality like those which pervade East Lynne, Lady Audley’s Secret presents us with a different kind of narrative. Rather than focusing on the personal experiences of her female characters, Braddon reveals the events of the story most often through the eyes of Robert Audley, and occasionally from other characters such as Phoebe and Alicia. Thus, unlike any of our previous female protagonists, we rarely see anything of Lady Audley’s inner life, such as her emotional responses to the return of her husband George, her attempts at murder and arson, or her fears of Robert’s investigation. As readers, we have no real sense of tortured regret for her actions (as we do with all of our other female protagonists). Braddon proffers no mitigating maternal motivation which drives Lucy to monstrous behavior, nor is she presented as dominated by jealousy or feminine ambition.⁴¹ Rather Lady Audley is something of an anomaly in this collection of women, in whom we see revealed, more than with Isabel, more than with Bessie Keith, the strong cultural anxiety surrounding the domestic angel and her hidden abject. Elaine Showalter argues this point, saying:

The brilliance of Lady Audley’s Secret is that the would-be murderess is the fragile blond angel of Victorian sentiment. Braddon means to show that the dangerous woman is not the rebel or the intellectual, but the pretty

little girl whose indoctrination in the feminine role has taught her
deceitfulness almost as a secondary sex characteristic. (“Desperate” 3)

Showalter suggests that women learn deceitfulness as a consequence of or, perhaps more accurately, as an integral component of Victorian inculcation into the cult of true womanhood. Thus a woman, by virtue of becoming a domestic angel, no longer suppresses her abject nature. Or she no longer regards those elements of her being which have traditionally been designated as ‘evil’ or taboo, as such. Thus the domestic angel becomes a particularly suspicious figure.

The Sepoy Revolt, also called the Indian Mutiny, occurred in 1857. The Sepoy, “those decent, orderly, quiet sepoys in whom everyone had such absolute confidence,” were Indian soldiers in service to the British (Trollope 123). That day they turned on their masters and massacred hundreds of British people—including women and children—in what Joanna Trollope describes as “an orgy of slaughter and burning” (123).⁴² Amongst the atrocities committed during the revolt was the slaughter at the well of the Bibighur. When the British Highland troops arrived in Cawnpore, they “found the well of the Bibighur choked with the hacked-up bodies of English women and children” (123).⁴³ This event is often described as one which shocked the British out of complacency with their own imperial superiority. They became not only more cautious with their colonies, but with one another. This distrust was compounded by rising accounts of crime and murder, often committed by women and other culturally reliable people. Richard Altick in his Victorian Studies in Scarlet describes three prominent murder cases committed between the years of 1856 and 1865; all three of the culprits were doctors (146-74). Madeleine Smith, “the daughter of a prosperous Glasgow

architect” and respectable in every appearance, not only took a lower class lover, but murdered him when he became inconvenient to her in 1857 (Altick 175-90). In 1862, Jess M’Pherson, a servant of the respectable upper-middle class Fleming household, was beaten to death with a meat cleaver. Public sentiment and some evidence (though inconclusive) suggested that Mr. Fleming, the family patriarch and well-known philanderer, had murdered her to prevent her from speaking of his iniquitous activities (Altick 191-98). Though the Archbishop of York spoke facetiously when he said that sensation novels “want to persuade people that in almost every one of the well-ordered houses of their neighbours there was a skeleton shut up in some cupboard; that their comfortable and easy-looking neighbour had in his breast a secret story which he was always going about trying to conceal,” clearly a certain level of suspicion and trepidation, a willingness to conceive that evil lurked in previously safe, innocuous places, had taken root in the Victorian imagination (qtd. in Rae 203). Showalter argues that this continuous suspicion indicates that “secrecy . . . [was] a condition of middle-class life” and that this suspicion of one’s neighbors “was unpleasantly close to the truth” (“Desperate” 2).⁴⁴ David Skilton echoes this observation in his introduction to the novel, saying that “sensation fiction is not just a matter of taking crime and sin as subjects, but of showing them threatening the apparently ‘respectable’ world” (xxi). That Braddon responded to this pervasive suspicion cannot be doubted: “even in these civilized days all kinds of unsuspected horrors are constantly committed” (*Lady Audley* 97). Braddon expands on her dictum, saying “foul deeds have been done under the most hospitable roofs, terrible crimes have been committed amid the fairest scenes, and have left no trace upon the spot where they were done” (140). Nor does Braddon leave it there. Rejecting the notion that

violent acts occur only in cities, performed by strangers, Braddon argues that even the most peaceful appearance can hide dreadful violence enacted within the most intimate relationships:

We hear every day of murders committed in the country. Brutal and treacherous murders; slow, protracted agonies from poisons administered by some kindred hand; sudden and violent deaths by cruel blows, inflicted with a stake cut from some spreading oak, whose very shadow promised—peace. In the country of which I write, I have been shown a meadow in which, on a quiet summer Sunday evening, a young farmer murdered the girl who had loved and trusted him; and yet even now, with the stain of that foul deed upon it, the aspect of the spot is—peace. No crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven Dials that has not been also done in the face of that sweet rustic calm which still, in spite of all, we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning and associate with—peace. (54).

Clearly, for Braddon, there is no safety anywhere, with anyone. Even the most innocent people, the most innocently ‘peaceful’ places, can conceal hideous acts of violence.

Of all the possible crimes or evils portrayed in sensation novels, none could be worse than the monster disguised as a domestic angel. Given the importance of the domestic angel to family and nation and the position of influence and power she held within the culture, such a creature could destroy the nation from within.⁴⁵ Braddon, in the character of Lady Audley, captures the Victorian cultural fears of locating too much power in the hands of women—whose flawed or dual nature was a cultural axiom—leaving the very

heart of all England vulnerable to corruption and destruction. In Lady Audley we have the epitome of just that monster, to all appearances angelic, hiding within an unimaginable core of monstrosity. Early in the novel she is described as having childlike innocence, generosity, and lack of vanity. She has an “amiable and gentle nature” and is “always . . . light-hearted, happy, and contented under any circumstances” (5). She visited the sick and the poor, “tak[ing] joy and brightness with her,” her “fair face [shining] like a sunbeam” (5). So angelic was she, that “everybody, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl that ever lived” (6).⁴⁶ Yet for all her childlike innocence, for all her sweetness and generosity, for all her grace and beauty, despite all of these outward indications of purity and superior femininity, she proves to be “a beautiful fiend” (Braddon, *Audley* 71).

Pykett argues that fundamental to most sensational heroines, particularly Braddon’s heroines, is a “hidden mission which drives their lives;” a mission which is not the same as that of the domestic angel (and by extension, England) (*Improper* 84). Lady Audley is no exception. She is driven by a desire to survive in a world which has left her with no legitimate options to sustain herself. To achieve survival, she disregards English law and codes of femininity. She commits bigamy, arson, attempted murder and murder.⁴⁷

As a young mother, she is deserted by her husband George Talboys who leaves to make a fortune in order to support his new family. George leaves his wife and baby to the mercy of her profligate father, saying in his note that he “was going to try my fortune in a new world; and that if I succeeded I should come back to bring her plenty and happiness, and but that if I failed I should never look upon her face again” (21). Helen

Talboys (Lucy Audley) has no means of supporting herself or her child, and no idea when or if her husband will return.

Leaving her son in the care of her father, she takes the name Lucy Graham and becomes a governess in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Dawson. It is there that Michael Audley encounters and falls passionately in love with her. Shortly thereafter he proposes to her. She confesses that she does not love him, but desires the security of his wealth and name. Her honesty is compelling because at this point the reader is unaware of her larger deceit. Rather Lucy garners sympathy by being willing to sacrifice a good marriage rather than lie.⁴⁸ He agrees to marry her, though her confession disappoints him. Interestingly, Lady Audley makes no attempt to seduce Michael Audley or encourage his attentions once she's made aware of his interest. In fact she becomes agitated at the prospect of his proposal when Mrs. Dawson informs her of Michael's interest: "Pray, pray don't talk to me, Mrs. Dawson. I had no idea of this. It is the last thing that would have occurred to me" (8). She had been content as a governess, having achieved a level of security. Though she changed her name, she did not plot to remarry but merely escape any taint associated with having been deserted by her husband. In fact, she assumed that if and when George "returned to England, he would have succeeded in finding [her] under any name and in any place" (353). Knowing the risk, the possibility of another marriage does not occur to her. But the prospect of an aristocratic marriage with its inherent wealth and social position works in concert with her own "demons of Vanity, Selfishness, and Ambition" (297) and the risk no longer seems as large.

Still, Lucy does not lie to Michael and claim to love him, but rather she tells him that her past life has been such that she must value him for his wealth: "I cannot be

disinterested; I cannot be blind to the advantages of such an alliance” (11). Given her later lies and the ease with which she makes them, it seems oddly out of character that she should not tell her future husband what he wishes to hear, so as to assure his future generosity at the very least. Yet despite this appearance of honesty, she later explains that becoming Lady Audley was a fulfillment of her deepest ambitions, that she had been “selfish, cold, and cruel, eager for her own advancement, and greedy of opulence and elegance, angry with the lot that had been cast her, and weary of dull dependence” (299). This description is in complete opposition to the domestic angel, and is the antithesis of how she outwardly appears: “the innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley’s fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes Her fragile figure . . . was as girlish as if she had but just left the nursery” (52). The description of Lucy is one of childlike innocence, fragility and delicacy. Yet shortly she will attempt to murder George Talboys. Indeed Robert’s words prove prophetic when he tells Lucy, “I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty” (141).

Lucy is aware that her safety and preservation depend upon how well she maintains the facade she has created. There are “fatal necessities for concealment,” for to be revealed would send her to the gibbet, the madhouse, or perhaps less deadly, on the run (298). She dreads discovery, less because she would be exposed to punishment than because she would have nothing; she would return to a life of poverty, dependence and struggle:

What would become of me? I have no money: my jewels are not worth a couple of hundred pounds What could I do? I must go back to the

old life, the old, hard, cruel, wretched life—the life of poverty, and humiliation, and vexation, and discontent. I should have to go back and wear myself out in that long struggle, and die. (316)

Given this constant fear of returning to her past, her “sick terror. . . [of] a life so affected” (351), she must always be vigilant, always “alive to the importance of outward effect” (298). She dresses carefully, always well-groomed and ordered, for “all mental distress is, with some show of reason, associated in our minds with loose, disordered garments, and disheveled hair, and an appearance in every way the reverse of my lady’s” (338). In manifesting the part of the innocent, child-like, angelic woman, she became that, for what the public sees, the public believes, particularly given the endorsement of the Audley name, and of the Dawson family who held her in such high regard as a governess. She manages to deceive the apparatus of surveillance with her masquerade. In Lady Audley, Braddon exposes a great weakness in the surveillance system. It can be fooled.

Yet despite all her machinations, Robert roots out her secret. Her confession lacks remorse or any signs of regret. She justifies her actions based on a life of “poverty and misery” (352). She explains that her husband had “left me with no protector but a weak, tipsy father, and with a child to support” (353). She describes herself following George’s desertion as “a slave allied for ever to beggary and obscurity” (353). She lacks any maternal attachment to her child, perceiving him as “a burden upon [her] hands” (353). Eventually, despite her revelations, Robert attributes her transgressions to hereditary insanity; insanity that reveals itself only in moments of passion. Showalter claims that this plea of insanity is necessary to a socially acceptable resolution of the plot. Such a device “spare[s] Braddon the unpleasant necessity of having to execute an

attractive heroine with whom she identifies in many ways . . . [But] Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane*, and moreover, representative" ("Desperate" 4).

Showalter argues that Lucy is representative of mid-Victorian women, referring to their dissatisfaction with the limitations of their allotted roles, their resourcefulness, and their desire for revenge on a system which enculturates women into a structure of systematic disempowerment. I agree with Showalter's assessment that Lucy is sane and that she is representative of women. But what she represents is the proliferation of monstrous women which society feared lurked within their individual households, hidden within the breast of a mother, sister, wife or daughter. Lucy's insanity is tied to the feminine abject, her aroused passions inciting her to unspeakable acts—much as Isabel is provoked by the dark passions of her own abject nature. Unlike Bessie Keith, who parallels Lucy in her carefully constructed public facade, Lucy's passions overwhelm her. She becomes goaded by "desperate purpose" (353). She is driven by a sane and understandable desire to leave behind poverty and want forever, to become solvent and live without fear of the degradation and helplessness that grows out of such poverty. And once accomplished, she will do whatever necessary to preserve that accomplishment.

Robert Audley deeply wishes to absolve her through a declaration of insanity. It is his "secret desire" (376). If her actions can be explained by madness, then his trust in true womanhood can be retained. Yet because her actions seem rational and calculated, the possibility of insanity seems farfetched. Her actions suggest a monstrous nature purposely cloaked in the guise of the domestic angel, strategically invading and corrupting the Audley family for diabolic—but not insane—purposes. The doctor's initial diagnosis is therefore disheartening:

there is no evidence of madness in anything that she has done. She ran away from her home, because her home was not a pleasant one, and she left it in the hope of finding a better. There is no madness in that. She committed the crime of bigamy, because by that crime she obtained fortune and position. There is no madness there. When she found herself in a desperate position, she did not grow desperate. She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that.

(377)

The rationality, strategy and coolness which Lucy exhibits are typically associated with masculinity, making her unfeminine, unwomanly—monstrous. Robert desires to locate her flaws in feminine monstrosity, in the insanity of woman's hidden passions, thereby preserving hegemony's construction of a dichotomous femininity.⁴⁹ Cvetkovich writes that for mid-Victorians, "psychic discipline becomes the prerequisite to moral and social stability, and women in particular bear the burden of representing virtue as the control of vice" (47). Yet in the above passage, the doctor's account of Lucy's actions indicate discipline and control, not in the service of the suppression of vice, but to further a 'fiendish' agenda. In this way Lucy threatens accepted notions of femininity, revealing the horrifying possibility that women were capable of strategic duplicity—that indeed any and every woman could be a monster in disguise. This is why Robert wishes to categorize her as insane. It is simply, as Pykett writes, that "his notions of the feminine cannot reconcile sane femininity with the criminally duplicitous behaviour of which he intuitively knows Lady Audley to be guilty" (*Improper* 94). Far better that she be judged

insane, than that she, in complete control, planned and executed her schemes of murder and arson. For her to have done so would make even the most virtuous woman suspect. What might Alicia or Clara be hiding beneath a facade of the domestic angel? If Lucy proves to be insane, he need not confront such an overwhelming and horrific possibility, but may comfort himself with the knowledge that she is an aberration, her madness inherited from her mother. Because he *knows* Alicia's and Clara's pedigrees, he can be reassured that their outward appearance does not hide a monster.⁵⁰

Underlying his inability to accept the possibility that Lucy may have acted entirely intentionally is Robert's attempt to avoid scandal for his family. He wishes to "save our stainless name from degradation and shame" (378). Locked up, Lucy is essentially effaced, unable to achieve a public voice of any kind. As the doctor tells Robert, she will be "finished. Whatever secrets she may have will be secrets for ever! If you were to dig a grave for her in the nearest churchyard and bury her alive in it, you could not more safely shut her from the world and all worldly associations" (381). Once again Lucy will be trapped, powerless and dependent. Her worst fears will be realized. Yet Robert's worst fear, the "exposure" and "disgrace" of Lucy's story, will have been averted.

The doctor tells Robert that in locking away Lucy he "could do no better service to society" (381). Though he means that Robert removes a dangerous criminal from the world, in reality the quiet removal of Lady Audley helps to preserve the stability of the local community. Revealing her would create doubt and exacerbate the burgeoning cultural suspicion discussed above. People would lose faith in the abilities of authorized agents to adequately perform their duties, for Michael Audley and Mr. Dawson lent

credence to Lucy's constructed identity and reputation. Without them, she could not have reached such a platform of power from which to exercise her influence. To expose that fallibility would be to undermine the community balance and endanger hegemony. His decision to conceal the secret of Lady Audley from common society is similar to Carlyle's decision to conceal Madame Vine's true identity in Wood's East Lynne: social and cultural damage would result, in the process undermining hegemony.

Cvetkovich writes that "the sensational paradox of the beautiful but evil woman can be used both to reinforce and to challenge ideologies of gender" (50). Lucy Audley reinforces the need for surveillance, for the need to place limitations upon women for fear of the uncontrolled feminine abject. Or in this case, the danger rises from a very controlled abject, aimed at a purpose not coherent with that of the domestic angel. Her impersonation challenges the cultural trust placed in women whose superior ontological morality qualifies them to hold the most sensitive and vital agency positions within hegemony: mothers and wives. In her impersonation and infiltration, Lucy Audley reminds readers of the importance of those roles. In the end, Braddon supports hegemonically constructed codes of femininity, allowing Lucy to be diagnosed insane, relieving fears of a 'feminine fiend.' Lucy Audley is defused, safely categorized and contained, and then erased from public awareness. Alicia and Clara, both trustworthy and proven, become authorized agents within their communities—Alicia as the wife of an aristocrat, Clara as Robert's wife, he having become, like Carlyle, a well-known, well-respected attorney.

Notes

¹ Male writers also produced fiction in these two genres, including Charles Reade, George Gissing, Anthony Trollope, Thomas Hardy and Henry James. It should also be noted that though many of the writings of these prolific women have disappeared from modern literary memory, their novels would have been considered best-sellers.

² These were first published in her own magazine Argosy and then collected into volumes in 1874-89

³ According to Antonia Frasier, “it was a fact generally acknowledged by all but the most contumacious spirits at the beginning of the seventeenth century that woman was the weaker vessel; weaker than men, that is” (1). She goes on to argue that this conception of women came from an older Biblical tradition which was underscored in the 1611 King James version of the Bible: “St. Peter, having advised wives in some detail to ‘be in subjection to your own husbands’, urged these same husbands to give ‘honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life’ ” (1). (The Weaker Vessel. New York: Vintage Books, 1985.)

Tennyson echoes this concept of women in “Locksley Hall”:

Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions,

matched with mine,

Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water

unto wine—

(“Locksley Hall.” Poetry of the Victorian Period. 3rd Ed. Ed. Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods. nc: Harper Collins Publishers, 1965. 585-599.)

However Nancy Armstrong in Desire and Domestic Fiction makes the argument that the Othering of women stemmed from a “presupposed . . . existence of a gendered self, a self based on the existence of positive female features rather than on the lack or even the inversion of certain qualities of the male” in conduct books in particular(88). Her argument is important, but does not address the continued references to women as ‘weaker vessels’ nor does it address the relationship of this new view of women to the more traditional view.

See also Mary Poovey’s valuable study Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England.

⁴ Judith Rowbotham discusses the ways in which young girls were trained in the requirements of the domestic angel in Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989. See also Nancy Armstrong’s. Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel. 1987. New York: Oxford UP, 1989; and Elizabeth Langland’s Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

⁵ Though Foucault has been criticized for not admitting the possibility of any resistance in his geneological approach to power, in reality he argues that resistance is integral to any power system. He says “there are no relations of power without resistances” (Power/Knowledge 142). Furthermore, Foucault defends his theories from the accusation of a totalizing system of absolute power saying “to say that one can never be ‘outside’ power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter

what” (Power/Knowledge 141-42). In his essay “Discourse on Language” which articulates his theoretical method, he describes the structuring of discourse as a means to circumvent, preempt and defuse turbulence, into which category resistance certainly falls (Archaeology 216).

⁶ For a more extensive discussion of these authors’ theories of discourse and subjection, see Butler’s The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997; and Foucault’s The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language. (1969). Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993. While many of Foucault’s writings take up these issues, in Archaeology he discusses in greater depth what he calls “discontinuities” and I have called ruptures.

⁷ Judith Rowbotham addresses the training of girls as domestic angels in Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction. The abundance of books on etiquette and housekeeping also indicate the need for training.

⁸ Had I more room here, I would argue that this reverse discourse forms the foundation for the growing feminist movement, serving as a kind of enlightenment.

⁹ In the preface to the novel, Eden comments on the changes that have occurred in the world since she began work on the novel:

[The Semi-Attached Couple] was partly written nearly thirty years ago, before railroads were established, and travelling carriages-and-four superseded; before postage-stamps had extinguished the privilege of franking, and before the Reform Bill had limited the duration of the polling at borough elections to a single day. . . . When I wrote it, I thought

it a tolerably faithful representation of modern society; but some young friends who are still living in the world, from which I have long retired . . . condescendingly assure me that it is amusing, inasmuch as it is a curious picture of old-fashioned society.” (np)

¹⁰ Though contemporary reviews of Eden’s The Semi-attached Couple are almost nonexistent, the republication of the novel in the 1920s generated a number of reviews. See John Gore, “A Rival to Jane Austen,” The London Mercury (March 1924, 495-501); “Miss Eden’s Novels,” The Times Literary Supplement (December 15, 1927, 955); and “In Jane Austen’s England,” The New York Times Book Review (April 29, 1928, 8).

¹¹ A related family name is Beaufort. Lord Eskdale is also referred to as Lord Beaufort, and the Eskdale family as the Beauforts.

¹² This is not to suggest that girls were forced to marry without any opportunity to refuse or voice disagreement. However the domestic angel ideology into which girls were inculcated made them strive to be obedient to the wishes of their parents and later their husbands, deterring them, as in the case of Helen, from refusing a suitable and parentally approved marriage.

¹³ The recent Divorce Act is key to the tension of the plot here. Thirty years before when Eden had begun drafting the novel, Teviot would likely have been suggesting a separation, but for audiences of 1860 there could be no doubt that his implication was divorce, which would have been far worse for Helen than separation. She would have lost the protection of a husband’s name, she would have been gossiped about and held

up for ridicule. It would have been assumed that she had failed in her marital duties and thus revealed herself as unredeemably monstrous. The taint of her fall would have spread to her family and acquaintances.

¹⁴ Such a natural weak will and emotional instability resulted in the need for constant surveillance. Thus a woman's very nature dictated the social controls surrounding her—for her safety and that of her family, friends and culture.

¹⁵ Because emotional outbursts gave proof of the feminine abject without creating discursive or hegemonic turbulence, they were designated hegemonically as a necessary evil, one which affirmed the need to control and contain women. On the other hand, to refuse a socially advantageous engagement or to commit adultery would be to undermine important governing ideologies concerning marriage, family, and social responsibility. They would create turbulence and therefore transgressors would be subject to punishment.

¹⁶ Judith Rowbotham's discussion of a woman's role in the household reveals the Victorian cultural conception of a woman within the home: "Throughout the century, a home with no female old enough or good enough or of the right rank to conduct its domestic affairs was seen to be a cheerless place" (18). In bringing home Helen as a wife, Teviot was transforming his house into a home, forming a family which Rowbotham claims was "the most important element . . . for social stability and success" in the Victorian period (18).

¹⁷ The rumor that Colonel Stuart brings to Helen is that there is a challenger to Teviot's title. As it turns out, a man has come forward claiming to be the true heir but eventually it is proven that Teviot is the true heir.

¹⁸ Teviot's perfection lies in his aristocratic title, money and reputation. For Victorians, these were the criteria for a good spouse.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note here the 1857 sensational murder case of Madeleine Smith. She had become lovers with Emile L'Angelier, a shipping clerk and social inferior. When the time came for her to make a socially appropriate marriage approved by her parents, he threatened to reveal their relationship. After his death by arsenic poisoning, Madeleine stood trial for his murder. Though it was likely she was indeed responsible, she was acquitted. Publicly she was touted as being innocent or justified against a "depraved fortune hunter and seducer" (Perkin 59). This story underscores the pervasive Victorian ideology of appropriate or compatible marriage, excusing murder rather than suffering an inequitable marriage.

²⁰ Deborah Gorham argues that despite the permeation of the domestic angel ideology throughout Victorian culture, "much Victorian rhetoric about the failings of middle-class family life assumes that most Victorian girls failed to achieve it. The negative counterpart of the dutiful girl, the lazy, disobliging girl, was a favorite target of hostile critics" (50).

²¹ June Sturrock explores Yonge's advocacy of feminine productivity in her study "Heaven and Home": Charlotte M. Yonge's Domestic Fiction and the Victorian Debate Over Women.

²² A woman of twenty-five years was believed to be ‘on the shelf’ or past the opportunity for marriage. The fact that she has not married suggests a defect in her. Yonge does not choose to acknowledge here that as something of an heiress, Rachel’s prospects would continue to be good, as an older woman with money was far more desirable than a younger woman without.

²³ Unlike Bessie Keith, discussed later in this chapter, Rachel’s public punishment and discipline allow her to serve as a model of rehabilitation, and thus she is permitted to maintain her position and salvage her life.

²⁴ Yonge’s father only granted his approbation of her writing after eliciting from her the promise that she would write didactic fiction and donate the profits, thereby preserving her own femininity—to write in an effort to seek public admiration or financial gain would have been both vain and greedy, and therefore monstrous (Showalter, Literature 56-7).

²⁵ Helen’s early family life is very much fairytale-like, with a doting mother and father, admirable siblings, and no evidence of strife or dissatisfaction. Yonge posits a more accurate reality, where families have real flaws and daily difficulties.

²⁶ The contrast between Bessie’s uninterested care of her husband and Helen’s insistent nursing of Teviot is compelling. Helen, in becoming the domestic angel, refuses to obey Teviot during his recovery, at least in terms of his health: “he was told that he was on no account to interfere with the arrangements of the sick-room, but to do what he was told, and get well as fast as he could” (262). On the other hand, Bessie allows

Lord Keith's injuries to become worse, all because he neither wishes to travel, nor will he see any other doctor but the one in Edinburgh.

²⁷ Bessie is also likeable and does care for other people, and Alick obviously loves his sister deeply, much as he despairs over her selfishness.

²⁸ Craik says "the amount of new thoughts scattered broadcast over society within one month of the appearance of a really popular novel, the innumerable discussions it creates, and the general influence which it exercises in the public mind, form one of the most remarkable facts of our day." Dinah Mullock Craik, "To Novelists—and a Novelist." Macmillan Magazine. 3 (1861): 441-48.

²⁹ Isabel's disguise as Madame Vine depends on the damage done to her in the train wreck as well as on costuming. In evaluating how she had managed to accomplish her deception, Miss Corny says:

She was young, gay, active, when she left here, upright as a dart, her dark hair drawn from her open brow and flowing on her neck, her cheeks like crimson paint, her face altogether beautiful. Madame Vine arrived here a pale, stooping woman, lame of one leg, *shorter* than Lady Isabel—and her figure stuffed out under those sacks of jackets. Not a bit, scarcely, of her forehead to be seen, for grey velvet, and grey bands of her hair; her head smothered under a close cap, large blue double spectacles hiding the eyes and their sides, and the throat tied up; the chin partially. The mouth was entirely altered in its character, and that upward scar, always so

conspicuous, made it almost ugly. Then she had lost some of her front teeth, you know, and she lisped when she spoke. (521)

³⁰ Ann Cvetkovich comments that “East Lynne transforms a narrative of female transgression into a lavish story about female suffering, a suffering that seems to exceed any moral or didactic requirement that the heroine be punished for her sins” (99). Yet that suffering communicates a warning to women readers, one that cannot be ignored. Cvetkovich goes on to write that “For the Victorian middle-class woman, sexual transgression is equivalent to death, since she dies socially when she falls into disgrace” (102). Once Isabel abandons her husband and children for Levison, she has essentially committed herself to a kind of death, a state for which true death can only be a kindness.

³¹ Isabel is of course destitute, but both her father and uncle believe that with her beauty and angelic qualities, “many a man will be too ready to forget her want of fortune” (93). In fact Carlyle confesses to Lord Severn that, but for the immediacy of Isabel’s need, “I could have carried my love silently within me to the end of my life, and never betrayed it” as “the idea of making her my wife had not previously occurred to me as practicable . . . [because] I deemed her rank incompatible wity [sic] my own” (117). Thus despite Carlyle’s wealth and status, he nevertheless is marked as middle class, and therefore unequal in station to a *lady*.

³² She has previously encountered Levison socially, since he is the heir presumptive to a title of his own, and therefore a member of her social circle. He has indicated a desire for her, and begun to pursue her, though without any intent to marry as he very

pointedly tells her. She, in her innocence, does not recognize his malicious intent, and responds with blushing appreciation to his flirtation. A friend to Lady Mount Severn (previously an ardent admirer), Levison has continued to pursue Isabel at Castle Waring, in spite of Lady Mount Severn's obvious jealousy. Just after Lady Mount Severn hits her, and just before Carlyle's proposal, Isabel acknowledges that her feelings for Levison "had come to love, or something very near it, in [her] heart" (98).

³³ Joyce, the maid, will accuse Miss Corny of driving Isabel to this horrific act: "You have curbed her, ma'am, and snapped at her, and made her feel that she was but a slave to your caprices and temper. All these years she has been crossed and put upon; everything, in short, but beaten" (234).

³⁴ Carlyle tells Isabel that his private discussions with Barbara concern business with Mrs. Hare and "a dark secret . . . touching the Hare family," but Isabel is too jealous to believe: "She did not put faith in a word of the reply. She believed he could not tell her because her feelings, as his wife, would be outraged by the confession: and it goaded her anger into recklessness" (216).

³⁵ This is an important plot point because it suggests bigamy when he marries Barbara, believing Isabel to be dead. Technically he is not a bigamist, but Victorian readers identified the marriage as such, even as he himself did.

³⁶ I have not included Joyce or Wilson in this list as both are of a working class and therefore are subject to different criteria. Afy, though Joyce's sister, is presented as having achieved a higher status. Richard Hare's troubles stem from his involvement with her, and his desire to marry her.

³⁷ Mr. Kane is the local music master who comes to tune her piano. He has seven children and a wife and is nearly broke, his debts about to force his family out of their home and into the streets. He is putting together a concert to raise money for himself. By letting it be known that she will attend, Lady Isabel guarantees that the people of West Lynne will also attend, thereby saving Mr. Kane and his family.

³⁸ It is interesting to note that in Isabel's actions we see something of the repercussions of Barbara's confessions played out as though she and Carlyle had acted upon illicit passions.

³⁹ Typically in mid-Victorian England, men could and did commit adultery with impunity. For a woman to receive a divorce, she would have to prove not only adultery, but also a level of physical abuse beyond the standard 'corrections' (essentially beatings) which husbands were justified in according to errant wives. Women were held to a much stricter standard and could be cast off and divorced for even the suspicion of adultery. In part this stemmed from racial fears of broken bloodlines, of illegitimate children becoming heirs. If a man could not be sure of his wife's fidelity, he could not be sure his children were his. In 1857 in the House of Lords, Lord Chancellor Cranforth argued:

A wife might, without any loss of caste, and possibly with reference to the interests of her children, or even of her husband, condone an act of adultery on the part of the husband but a husband could not condone a similar act on the part of a wife. No one would venture to suggest that a husband could possibly do so, and for this, among other reasons . . . that

the adultery of the wife might be the means of palming spurious offspring upon the husband, while the adultery of the husband could have no such effect with regard to the wife. (qtd. in Perkin 123)

⁴⁰ Isabel acknowledges her continuing passions for Levison during their casual meeting at a sea-coast retreat. Yet in spite of her feelings, the narrator more than once makes it clear that Isabel would not renounce her marriage nor her morals in order to pursue her feelings:

She did not fear for herself; none could be more securely conscious of their own rectitude of principle and conduct: and she would have believed it as impossible for her ever to forsake her duty as a wife, a gentlewoman, and a Christian, as for the sun to turn round from the west to the east. That was not the fear which possessed her [in her feelings for Levison]; it had never presented itself to her mind: what she did fear was, that further companionship . . . with Francis Levison might augment the sentiments she entertained for him to a height, that her life, for perhaps years to come, would be one of unhappiness and concealment: more than all, she shrank from the consciousness of the bitter wrong that these sentiments cast upon her husband. (177)

Thus Isabel's love or lust for Levison does not impact her choice to abandon her husband. Levison merely provides an avenue of escape.

⁴¹ Much of the current criticism concerning East Lynne focuses on the audience sympathy evoked by Isabel. Because of her great suffering and torment, critics suggest

that female readers were willing to excuse her horrific behavior because they could identify with both her powerlessness within her marriage, and the overpowering maternal drives which return her to East Lynne. These same critics suggest that presenting Isabel in such a sympathetic light undermines the accepted cultural codes of femininity by acknowledging the common reality of women's frustrations and desires. For further exploration of this, see Ann Cvetkovich, Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992. Lyn Pykett, The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing. London: Routledge, 1992. Lyn Pykett, The Sensation Novel: From The Woman in White to the Moonstone." Plymouth, UK: Northcote House Publishers, 1994. Elaine Showalter, "Desperate Remedies: Sensation Novels of the 1860s." The Victorian Newsletter 49 (1976): 1-5.

⁴² Jenny Sharpe, in her essay "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape," comments that the revolt was more protracted than many accounts claim, and that despite multiple accounts of massacres, the massacre at Cawnpore was the only one. However that event lent credence to many wild tales of rape and torture which proliferated during and after the Revolt. Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, New York: Columbia UP, 1994, 221-243. Regardless of the truth of the accounts, the resulting effect was that Britain felt it's first major challenge to its imperial authority.

⁴³ The retaliation against the Indians was equally horrific: "all captured sepoys before their execution were kicked into the Bibighur and forced to kneel in the room where the

atrocities had been committed and lick part of the floor or walls clean of blood”

(Trollope 123).

⁴⁴ Showalter cites “Gladstone, Kingsley, Ruskin, Meredith, Munby, Dickens, [and] Wilkie Collins” who all revealed a less than pure private side (“Desperate” 2).

Showalter goes on to point out that “at the time Lady Audley’s Secret was published, [Braddon] gave birth to the first of her five illegitimate children” (“Desperate” 2).

⁴⁵ In her study of the production of femininity in Victorian England, Judith Rowbotham argues:

Without women, the middle-class ideal of family would collapse; without the family unit England could not continue to hold the position of moral pre-eminence on which her worldly success was founded If England was the Mother Country, the pivot on which the welfare of her offspring colonies depended, then the professional mother, or her substitute was the pivot on which England herself depended. (196)

Anne McClintock also takes up the importance of the family circle with the central female figure in Imperial leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York: Routledge, 1995.

⁴⁶ This description occurs in the novel prior to her marriage to Michael Audley. She is also known as Helen Talboys.

⁴⁷ Lady Audley believes she has killed her husband George, and later attempts the murder of Robert. As a consequence of that arson, her blackmailer Luke dies.

⁴⁸ Providing a context for the readers' sympathy is the knowledge that governesses held unenviable roles in Victorian society. Mary Poovey writes that though "not a mother, the governess nevertheless performed the mother's tasks; not a prostitute, she was nevertheless suspiciously close to other sexualized women; not a lunatic, she was nevertheless deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle-class status and her "natural" morality" (14).

⁴⁹ The masculine traits here suggest a barely veiled criticism of those early feminists who sought to encroach into the 'masculine' or public sphere.

⁵⁰ Pykett points out that Lady Audley in her duality as an angel/monster "represents and explores fears that (actual, historical) women cannot be contained within dominant definitions of 'woman', or of normal femininity" (Improper 95).

Chapter V

Accounting for the Gaps

*I read a score of books on womanhood
To prove, if women do not think at all,
They may teach thinking, (to a maiden aunt
Or else the author)—books demonstrating
Their right of comprehending husband's talk
When not too deep, and even of answering
With pretty 'may it please you,' or 'so it is,'—
Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,
Particular worth and general missionariness,
As long as they keep quiet by the fire
And never say 'no' when the world says 'ay,'
For that is fatal—their angelic reach
Of virtue, Chiefly used to sit and darn,
And fatten household sinners,—their, in brief,
Potential faculty in everything
Of abdicating power in it: she [Aurora's aunt] owned
She liked a woman to be womanly,
And English women, She thanked God and sighed,
(Some people always sigh in thanking God)
Were models to the universe.
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh 14-15)*

Elements of Resistance

In the previous chapter, I posed the question: did these five novels tend to serve hegemonic goals of feminine construction or did they function as resistance? I have shown that these novels did in fact encourage cooperation and compliance with hegemonic codes of womanhood. All three of the women characters who were revealed

to be unredeemably monstrous, whose transgressions threaten their various discourse cells, are permanently removed. The deaths of Isabel Vane Carlyle, Bessie Keith and Lady Audley serve not only as cautionary signifiers of absolute retribution, but also their removal from their individual situations results in discursive stability and tranquillity. Meanwhile, the women represented as angelic are richly rewarded in domestic specie: Rachel, Helen, Barbara, Clara, and Alicia are all happily married, their families and communities prospering as a result of their adherence to hegemonic standards of true femininity. Thus monsters and angels are presented in oppositional terms; female readers are encouraged to emulate and identify with the angelic characters, while the monstrous women function as deterrents to abject behavior. In an overall reading, these novels support and deploy hegemonic standards of femininity.

Yet as Lyn Pycket notes, “nineteenth-century discourses on woman were deeply contradictory,” a point corroborated by all five of the novels which comprise this study (*Improper* 19). To categorize these novels in such black and white terms—hegemonically supportive or resistant—denies both the rich texture of the novels, and the nature of the novel, a genre which infiltrates culture transdiscursively, and therefore cannot support all available ideological constructions. Each of these novels acknowledges mounting cultural concerns surrounding women and the contradictions inherent in the domestic angel ideology. In the characters of Lady Portmore and Mrs. Douglas, Eden reveals that monstrous women may prosper within the panoptical power pyramid structure, accruing power and extending influence despite exhibitions of unfeminine behavior. Nor is she alone in acknowledging the existence of such women. Certainly Woods’ Miss Corny

falls into a similar category, as does Mrs. Hare and Yonge's Mrs. Curtis. Though Lady Portmore is by far the most egregious and unsympathetic offender, each of the other women characters reveal in themselves shades of monstrosity, ranging from Miss Corny's overbearing interference with Isabel's home to gentle Mrs. Curtis' unmotherly pleasure in Rachel's 'come-uppance': "since her daughter was to have the shock, [Mrs. Curtis was] rather glad to have a witness to the surprise it caused her" (264). Mrs. Douglas spends much of her time in sarcastic contemplation of "almost all her acquaintance," her "mortified vanity curdl[ing] into malevolence" (Eden 21). Lady Mount Severn physically attacks Isabel, forcing her into marriage in order to escape. She is also "vain to her fingers' ends" (Wood 10). She flirts with men, despite being married; Levison's attentions to Isabel "driving her wild" with jealousy (Wood 94). Similarly, Braddon's Alicia has bouts of uncontrollable anger and jealousy, her passions driving her to unfeminine behavior: "She set her face with a sulky determination against any intimacy between herself and the baronet's [her father] young wife; and amiable as that lady was, she found it quite impossible to overcome Miss Alicia's prejudices and dislike; or to convince the spoilt girl that she had not done her a cruel injury in marrying Sir Michael Audley" (5). Alicia gives vent to her passions, ranting about Robert's dilettante approach to life, and finally succumbing to a fit of hysterical tears over her unrequited love for Robert.

Yet despite their monstrous qualities, these women suffer no real punishment. Lady Portmore continues her social escapades, though she is no longer allowed entrance into the Teviot/Eskdale domain. Mrs. Douglas becomes more docile under the influence

of her son-in-law, but is merely “tamed,” her sharp-nature curbed but not cured (284). Miss Corny remains as stubborn, independent, overbearing and forceful at the end as at the beginning of the novel; her only punishment lies in losing her hold over Carlyle, though she continues to have great influence on the community of West Lynne. Lady Mount Severn, though scolded by her husband now and again, nevertheless maintains her life of vanity and flirtation. She continues to engage in the aristocratic social rounds with no apparent loss of stature or reputation for her ties to Levison or her behavior toward Isabel. Mrs. Curtis becomes a happy grandmother, continuing in her reclusive lifestyle with her daughter Grace for company. Alicia becomes engaged to Sir Henry Towers and will soon become influential in his community and household.

These women, who in some cases transgress hegemony in equal measure to those women who are subjected to punitive social measures, continue their habits unmolested and undamaged. The fact of the matter is that these authors recognize a reality which the panoptical power structure seeks to efface. Put simply, in a world where the durability of the social fabric depends on people fulfilling the obligations of their various positions, punishment is a luxury that society cannot really afford. For punishment to be useful, there must be more hegemonic benefit than loss in acknowledging transgression. Excessive punishment undermines the public’s belief in its total domination. Hegemony maintains itself by encouraging the willing participation of its constituent populace and by promoting itself as ontological, which in turn creates a population of “docile bodies” which can “be subjected, used, transformed and improved” to increase each individual’s use-value (136).¹ The prudent application of punishment allows hegemony to reinforce a

public consciousness of panoptical surveillance which in turn generates a pervasive program of self-patrol amongst its constituent population.² Ideally, because members participate in self-patrol, there would therefore be no need for punishment “because it is possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed” (Foucault, Discipline 206).

However the mid-Victorian hegemony was not a closed system and was thus subject to outside influences (i.e., intrusive ideologies from other hegemonic structures) as well as chance.³ Some punishment, judiciously administered, was therefore necessary.

Foucault articulates the importance of assigning punishments in relation to their consequences to society, saying “what has to be arranged and calculated are the return effects of punishment on the punishing authority” (Discipline 91). He goes on to expand this statement, saying that “the injury that a crime inflicts upon the social body is the disorder that it introduces into it: the scandal that it gives rise to, the example that it gives, the incitement to repeat it if it is not punished, the possibility of becoming widespread that it bears within it” (Discipline 92). If, for instance, Lady Portmore were punished, perhaps ostracized, her family, friends and the rest of her community would certainly suffer. The taint of scandal and gossip makes women ineligible to marry, and destroys economic and social relationships fundamental to the stability of local and larger discourse cells. In small communities, no one can afford to even associate with the families and friends of the offenders. At the same time, maintaining that sort of ostracism would cause schism and the ecology of the community would be forever crippled, if not destroyed completely. Thus the consequent damage in punishing her would far outweigh

the possible benefits. It is enough that the other characters in the novel recognize and disapprove of her vain self-importance. Because no one seems inclined to follow her example, Lady Portmore's improprieties can be overlooked. This is only possible because her transgressions against hegemony have not resulted in imitation by other women, and because she maintains a general appearance of conformity to the bounds of acceptable behavior.

The same could be said for the rest of the listed women. The quality and influence of their monstrous behavior has not proved to have 'infected' other women, and the stability of their communities depends on continuing social trust in them, in the believed integrity of the network of authorized agency. It is no coincidence that Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. Douglas, Lady Portmore and Miss Corny are older and have established themselves as authorized agents of their various communities. Any punishment inflicted on them would ripple out into the community causing social upheaval. Unlike Isabel or Lady Audley, the nature of whose transgressions already threaten to destroy their families and communities, and therefore disqualify them from holding agency positions, these other women continue to serve hegemony in important ways. Thus they are to a certain extent protected by their social standing and assigned pyramidal agency. This protection reveals the critical and effaced element of class which underlies hegemonic systems of containment and control. Most authorized agents are members of the wealthy and/or social elite of their communities. Their wealth and status corroborate their power and authority in the public consciousness, lending them credibility. Certainly if they were poor, and by implication with negligible status on the power pyramid, their punishment

would not undermine hegemony and they would be subject to exemplary punishment.⁴

Their rank, both social and pyramidal, insulates them from punishment and allows them a certain range of transgression.

Yonge's and Braddon's emphasis on the lack of opportunities available to single women also challenges the domestic angel ideology. Both Yonge's Rachel and Braddon's Lucy Audley begin their novels complaining about the limitations placed upon single middle class women.⁵ Neither have husbands to support them, and Lucy has a son and profligate father for whom she must provide. Marriage is an unlikely prospect for both of them; therefore, given the domestic angel ideology establishing marriage as fundamental to femininity, both find themselves marginalized with negligible cultural worth. Rachel, unmarried at twenty-five years old, considers herself an old maid: redundant. She tells her sister that they are "the maiden sisters of Avonmouth, husband and wife to one another" (1). Believing that her twenty-fifth birthday will mark a "turning-point when this submissive girlhood ought to close, and the privileges of acting as well as thinking for herself ought to be assumed," Rachel is soon disappointed (7). What she discovers is that a proper single woman has no real opportunities for work, and her attempts at social reform prove both ridiculous and disastrous, from her essays on curatolaty to her children's school.⁶ But for local "prejudice" against her as a single woman (15), she claims she might have done more good for her community with her homeopathy, her superior leadership skills, and teaching abilities. She finds herself impeded and mocked, with no delegated authority to take charge, to lead or to care for others.

Yet despite Yonge's criticisms of Rachel, she sympathizes not only with her objects of social reform, but also with a single woman's limitations. Ermine earns her living through writing essays for the same *Traveller* magazine to which Rachel submits her essays, revealing Yonge's sympathy for and awareness of the plight of women who have neither traditional means of support, nor any real hope of marriage. At the same time, though Rachel and Ermine in the end find love, marriage and motherhood, neither Grace nor Alison ever do. They fade into the background, Grace remaining a companion to her mother, while Alison serves out her days as a governess, a profession which Rachel decries as abusive. She says "Is it not flagrant abuse . . . that whether she have a vocation or not, every woman of a certain rank [middle-class or above], who wishes to gain her own livelihood, must needs become a governess? A nursery-maid must have a vocation, but an educated or half-educated woman has no choice; and [sic] educator she must become, to her own detriment, and that of her victims" (16).⁷ Even as she promotes the traditional roles of femininity in her portrayal of Rachel and Ermine, Yonge recognizes the harm which befalls both women and society when women are forced into roles for which they may not be suited or desire, but which they must take up as the only available means of self-support. Indeed Alison "had to turn governess" to support Ermine, herself, and their niece Rose (38). And though she demonstrates a 'natural talent' for the job, Rachel's inept attempt to manage Fanny's children only emphasizes Yonge's assertion that not all women are qualified to fill such a role.

Braddon condemns the governess profession with equal vehemence. Though Lucy Graham is introduced to the reader as appearing "as if she had not higher aspiration

in the world than” to act as a governess “all the rest of her life” (5), it is soon made clear that she despises the job. Yet she has no other legitimate work options available to her; her survival depends on becoming a governess. Her life has consisted of nothing but “poverty, poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations, deprivations” (10-11). Leaving her “heir to her father’s poverty,” George Talboys abandons his wife to an impossible situation (19). Lucy’s desperate solution was “to run away from this wretched home which [her] slavery supported” (353). She then turns to governess work. That she finds the work intolerable becomes evident when she triumphantly says to herself after accepting Michael Audley’s proposal, “no more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations” (12). Her attempts at murder and arson stem more from a desire to escape the constrictive life of a single woman than from the wealth and position she has achieved.⁸

Braddon’s portrayal of Lady Audley is largely sympathetic. Her legitimate options are destroyed, leaving only criminal options. She is driven by social circumstances to commit bigamy, murder, and arson. Lyn Pycket writes that “the irony is that all of Lucy’s actions are aimed at those ends which were recommended to all middle-class girls: achieving and maintaining a socially acceptable and financially secure marriage, and keeping up appearances” (*Sensation Novel* 53-4). Braddon challenges the feminine ideal, creating in Lady Audley both a “charitable, childlike, genteel” angel, and a “cold, calculating, resourceful” monster (*Sensation Novel* 53). Lucy Audley is a woman devoted to fulfilling the hegemonic obligations of marriage, no matter what obstacles are put in her way, acting in “rational self-interest to protect her livelihood” (Cvetkovich 48).

Elaine Showalter states that Lady Audley's "career and the careers of other sensation heroines of the 1860s make a strong statement about the way women confined to the home would take out their frustrations upon the family itself" ("Desperate 5). I would argue that it was not the frustrations of the home which created these heroines, but rather the oppressive limitations of the domestic angel ideology which led to their marginalization, like that of many women who did not fit the narrow definition of true womanhood. Lady Audley's lack of remorse or repentance for her actions seem horrific to Robert Audley, but perfectly understandable to a woman reader who knows how easy it would be to lose her position and family and to become Helen Talboys: a woman burdened with a child, abandoned by her husband, enslaved by her father, without money nor means to make any. Lady Audley's attraction for women readers lies in the control she takes of her life, control denied to respectable or proper women. Domestic angels are completely dependent creatures by definition, and so, like Clara Talboys, they must wait for others to act on their behalf. But as Lady Audley's predicament shows, there is precious little recourse available to the domestic angel who has no one else to act for her, whose father and husband renege on their duties to her.

Cvetkovich argues that East Lynne's challenge to the domestic angel ideology comes in Wood's underlying assertion that "patriarchal culture does violence to women by forcing them to hide their feelings, and that the expression of those feelings will alleviate their suffering" (98). Because hegemony equates passions and feelings with the monstrous abject, constructing true femininity around a fundamental essence of passionlessness, Wood's portrayal of the feminine repression of natural feminine feeling

reveals “a world of psychic pain” inherent in women’s daily lives (Cvetkovich 98). As with Braddon’s Lady’s Audley’s Secret, women readers identify with Wood’s characters, seeing their own emotional experiences reflected back from the novel’s pages. In Isabel, Wood articulates female dependence as the source of emotional disturbance and all of its consequences: “Isabel is depicted as a woman who can only respond emotionally to the conditions of her life because she is prevented from overt action. . . . Isabel’s powerlessness stems from her economic dependence first on her father [then on Lord Mount Severn and his wife] and then on her husband” (Cvetkovich 101). Uniting with the cultural conspiracy of feminine passionlessness is the hegemonic legislation against female selfishness. Thus Isabel’s emotions are doubly monstrous: that she has them at all, and that they are self-centered. For instance, when Miss Corny takes control of her household, her complaint to Carlyle rings of selfish personal concern and emotional trespass: “Isabel had then hinted to her husband that they might be happier if they lived alone, hinted it with a changing cheek and beating heart, as if she were committing a wrong upon Miss Carlyle” (141). Her “changing cheek and beating heart” indicate a loss of emotional control as a result of a selfish desire to rid her home of her husband’s sister. Though justified in her desire to get rid of Miss Corny and the “galling subjection” (141) imposed on her by the other woman, her request that Miss Corny leave reveals a monstrous self-concern transcending what should be her first priority: the welfare and happiness of her husband. She makes her complaint believing that the departure of Miss Corny will result in economic injury to her husband. Isabel believes herself to be an “incubus” to Carlyle, a “ruinous expense . . . entailed upon the family,” an expense which

Miss Cornelia's presence offsets since "that lady contributed a liberal share to the maintenance of the household" (141). By seeking Miss Corny's removal, Isabel knowingly puts her husband at further economic risk rather than tolerate a difficult situation.

Because a woman's emotions are categorized as abnormal, they do not qualify for examination or consideration, thus reinforcing the ideology of normative feminine passionlessness. Yet by focusing on Isabel's emotional motivation for abandoning her husband and children and then returning to their home in disguise, Wood suggests that emotions merit consideration, refusing to dismiss them as unimportant or nonexistent. The drama and detail devoted to exploring her emotional state indicates its relevance to Wood in her portrayal of Isabel's fall. Cvetkovich explains that "the reader is presented with the spectacle of her interior life, gaining access to the private and invisible drama that goes unnoticed by those around her" (101). In fact that drama not only goes unnoticed, but is culturally effaced as nonexistent, or when finally revealed, is deemed monstrous and aberrant. Cvetkovich goes on to argue that "her position dramatizes for the reader the emotional costs of women's economic dependence, which forces them to accept hardships without complaint" (101). Such a dramatization allows women readers to recognize themselves, to identify in Isabel's circumstances aspects of their own lives and sufferings. In doing so, they learn to acknowledge the reality and validity of their suppressed emotional lives: "by identifying with Isabel, the reader can express the pain she might feel about the necessity of her own silent endurance" (Cvetkovich 103).

Though eventually Cvetkovich argues that East Lynne and Isabel's story reinforce true femininity by shifting the blame for her actions onto "a series of unfortunate 'circumstances,' . . . [and thus] avoid the extent to which her problems are caused by her social position as a woman" (104), the novel's acceptance and validation of feminine feelings and passions undermine the domestic angel ideology, suggesting to its readers that such emotions are, if not normal, then at least widely shared, rather than anomalous (and monstrous).

In these novels then, we have elements of resistance and challenge to the domestic angel ideology, even as the authors support and deploy that ideology. These writers manifest a critical awareness of the gaps between the domestic angel ideology and reality, yet ultimately work to preserve this narrow, constrictive definition of true femininity. To understand better the contradiction inherent in this, we turn finally to Margaret Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks. This novel exhibits an unique meta-awareness of the function of women within the power pyramid while similarly criticizing and supporting the domestic angel ideology. Such a meta-awareness highlights the rationale behind her endorsement. Though she acknowledges the artificiality and limitations of the hegemonically constructed female role, at the same time she dismisses them as inconsequential against the greater needs of society. More overtly than the other novelists of this study, Oliphant locates the domestic angel ideology as a function of hegemonic exigency, establishing society's priority over individual feminine considerations, and accounting for the continued strength of the domestic angel ideology within Victorian culture despite multiple challenges to its oppressive restrictions.

Putting on a Costume

Margaret Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks (1866) ostensibly falls into the realm of domestic realism, as might be expected from her harsh condemnations of sensational fiction. Oliphant castigates sensation novels as "worthless" ("Novels" 260). She says they require only a "very small amount of literary skill" to write and show hardly "any real inventive genius . . . good taste, or elegance, or perception of character" ("Novels" 261). However, though a domestic realist writer, like Yonge, Oliphant introduces elements associated with sensationalism such as fraud, disguise and revelation, and romantic intrigue, though always with the aim of character development and her moral message. That message might be best summed up as follows: every person in a community, but most particularly women, must devote themselves to fulfilling their socially mandated roles; to do otherwise not only invites, but ensures social decay and eventual destruction.

Miss Marjoribanks begins with the death of Lucilla Marjoribanks' mother, whom her husband Dr. Marjoribanks termed "an incapable bride" (67). An invalid for many years, she finally succumbs to illness. Thus, at the age of fifteen, Lucilla returns home from school to attend her mother's funeral, fully intending to take over the care of her father's home and see to his comfort and well being: she "was going home to be a comfort to her widowed father, and meant to sacrifice herself to his happiness" (27). In a tearful declaration of purpose, she tells him:

I was only a silly girl the other day, but *this* has made me a women.

Though I can never, never hope to take dear mamma's place, and be—

all—that she was to you, still I feel I can be a comfort to you if you will let me. You shall not see me cry anymore I will never give way to my feelings. I will ask for no companions—nor—nor anything. As for pleasure, that is all over. Oh, papa, you shall never see me regret anything, or wish for anything. I will give up everything in the world to be a comfort to you. (30-1)

Despite the melodramatic sentiment and childish affectation of her self-abnegation, Lucilla reveals here the foundation for the domestic angel role she will adopt in her future life. She wishes to remain in her father's household and 'be a comfort' to him, and is willing to forget her own pleasures, feelings and social life toward that service. That willingness to sacrifice herself personally for the good of others becomes the hallmark of her social influence as the novel develops. Lucilla chooses personal sacrifice in service to the greater good. Of particular importance here is that Oliphant emphasizes the element of choice over ontological impetus. Lucilla, as we will see, *chooses* to adopt the role of the domestic angel. She does not become one by virtue of inherent feminine traits, or because she is driven by social constraints. Rather, she recognizes not only the importance of the domestic angel's social function, but also the desperate need within her own community for someone to fill that position. Thus she claims duty as her motivational impetus in taking on the "reorganisation" of Carlingford, as its "affairs [are] in an utterly chaotic state" (41).

After her dramatically poignant declaration, Lucilla's father packs her back to school, saying "I am not prepared to say that the responsibility of having you here without

a mother to take care of you, and all your lessons interrupted, would not neutralise any comfort you might be” (32). Nor is he willing to sacrifice his own newfound freedom to his daughter who, in her emotional application to stay, reveals:

the same qualities which had wearied his life out [in his wife], and brought his youthful affections to an untimely end. Lucilla, was, it is true, as different from her mother as summer from winter; but Dr. Marjoribanks had no means of knowing that his daughter was only doing her duty by him in his widowhood, according to a programme of filial devotion resolved upon, in accordance with the best models, some days before.
(31).

Even at fifteen years old, Lucilla resolves upon a strategic plan of action which coheres with the ideology of the domestic angel. Elizabeth Jay comments in a literary biography of Oliphant that “the ‘principles’ by which Lucilla guides her life are in fact pragmatic strategies rather than ethical convictions” (Oliphant 70). That Oliphant couches Lucilla’s decision in terms of strategic planning and not feminine instinct or hegemonic coercion reveals her position on the ‘woman question.’ For Oliphant, it does not matter whether women are by nature domestic angels, or whether they adopt the role self-consciously. What is important is that women adhere to the hegemonically constructed model of true femininity in service to her community and by implication, nation.⁹ In her 1858 essay, “The Condition of Women” in which she rejects the feminist assertion that “one-half of the English women of the present time” will not be able to marry, but must find a means of supporting themselves (212), Oliphant argues that there is “one sphere and kind of

work for a man and another for a woman. He [God] has given them different constitutions, different organisations,” each suited to his or her own sphere (217). She goes on to say that “every human creature is bound to do his or her duty . . . whether it has the solace of love to sweeten it or no. It may seem a frightful doctrine, yet it is the merest dictate of ordinary sense and wisdom” (220). For Oliphant, separate spheres not only exist, but are the proper way of the world. At the same time, there are particular duties attached to each sphere, specific roles for each person to fill within society, which she argues must be filled, even if the role proves difficult. Her portrayal of Lucilla and her assumption of her domestic duties reflects this conviction.

Four years after her mother’s death, Lucilla returns from school and a subsequent grand tour of Europe. She has devoted her education to preparing to assume the domestic angel role in her father’s household and her community, taking a course in political economy which provides her with domestic management skills. Aside from providing a comfort to her father, her goal is to “revolutionise society in Carlingford” (36), which was in an “entirely disorganised condition” (41). To Lucilla, once she accepts the role of the domestic angel and the duties attached to that role, “even her own prospects . . . [are] as nothing to her in comparison with the good of society” (175). She explains to Rose Lake that there is “perfect reasonableness, and indeed necessity, of sacrificing herself to the public interests of the community” though “enjoying it . . . is quite a different matter” (179). And her community needs her talents for social organization. As the narrator explains, “affairs [in Carlingford] were in an utterly chaotic state at the period when this record commences. There was nothing which could be properly called a centre in the

entire town. To be sure, Grange Lane was inhabited, as at present, by the best families in Carlingford; but then, without organisation, what good does it do to have a number of people together?" (41-2). The reader is given to understand that the society of Carlingford is aimless, lacking cohesion and direction.¹⁰ Lucilla intends to correct that.

Immediately upon her return, Lucilla begins upon her "great mission" (45), setting about uniting the disparate peoples of her community into a harmonious whole. She first takes control of her father's household, though without any indication of avarice or selfishness which might be categorized as monstrous. On her first morning back home, she usurps his position at the breakfast table in order to serve him, as is appropriate for to do as the new mistress of the house. Her father, though "stricken dumb by this unparalleled audacity," allows her to do so, becoming "aware all the same that he had abdicated, without knowing it, and that the reins of state had been smilingly withdrawn from his unconscious hands" (50). Moments later she commandeers the rest of the household tasks, asserting her feminine duty, preempting her father's objections by declaring that "he is not to be troubled about anything" in their home (51). She quickly learns to entertain her father, pointedly seeking his physical and emotional comfort. She tells the cook that "he must have been very desolate, with no one to talk to, though he has been so good and kind and self-sacrificing in leaving me to get every advantage [during the previous four years of her schooling]; but I mean to make it up to him, now I've come home" (52). Though Lucilla understands that Dr. Marjoribanks might be inclined to refuse her help, it does not matter. She says "it is the worse for him if he does not understand; but that does not make any difference to my duty" to him (93). She has

chosen to accept the role of the domestic angel in all its facets as a means of serving her father and community, and she will cohere to that role, no matter what resistance her father might make. Yet as a result of her desire to create a pleasant home and relieve him of domestic care, he soon begins to participate in the traditional domestic life which he had avoided since his wife died. In fact, by the third night of her return, Dr. Marjoribanks has for the third time joined Lucilla upstairs for tea following their evening meal, rather than remaining downstairs to smoke cigars and drink his liquor in bachelor fashion (89). Thus Lucilla begins to domesticate her father's household even as she sets her sights on Carlingford.

Her campaign begins by instigating a regular social gathering for the people of Grange Lane. Her Thursday evening festivities are designed to encourage social relationships, with Lucilla carefully managing the situation. Though these evenings might be viewed by a larger world as trivial, in terms of stabilizing and integrating the community of Carlingford they are essential. There are no other avenues for social interaction on this scale, and thus through Lucilla's Thursday evening gatherings, "the limits of society . . . [are] extended miraculously beyond the magic circle of Grange lane" (124). She strengthens individual and communal relationships, invigorating community participation and interest in one another and eventually in politics. Before long, her "Thursday evening" become "an institution in Carlingford" (125). Her home and careful social management become the "centre of society" (405). She brings "light and progress" to the "chaos" of Carlingford society, engendering vitality and stability in the stagnant and decaying community (498-9).

One fact that indicates the level of decay which had permeated through the community comes in the revelation of Mr. Cavendish's deception (and though little is made of it, of Mrs. Woodburn, his sister). Mr. Cavendish and Mrs. Woodburn have long claimed kinship to the Cavendishes, an influential family in British society. As a result, they are considered people "of great consideration in Grange Lane," enough so that it is assumed that he will shortly become the local Member of Parliament once the current Member retires. Yet as attendance of important local figures increases at Lucilla's Thursday evening gatherings, it is revealed that Mr. Cavendish has rather a sordid skeleton in his closet: he has very low social connections and is not related to the Cavendishes at all.

Mr. Beverley, an Archdeacon, delivers a story which implicates Mr. Cavendish in fraud, robbery and murder. Though he does not reveal the particulars, and no one besides Lucilla suspects that he refers to Mr. Cavendish, the possibility that it might be the town's favorite son generates the menace of terrible repercussions to the social economy. Quickly Lucilla drives to the heart of the issue: "if it could by any possibility turn out that the man of whom Mr. Beverley was speaking had ever been received in society in Carlingford, then it would be a dreadful blow to the community, and destroy public confidence forever in the social leaders" (171). And indeed, while much of the story proves untrue, in reality Mr. Cavendish has perpetrated a fraud of his name and social standing on the community, a fraud for which he cannot be forgiven. or ever again be allowed to achieve any measure of authorized agency within the community. Lucilla sums up the situation in terms of community stability and hegemonic preservation: "if it

should come to pass that an adventurer had been received into the best society of Carlingford, and that the best judges had not been able to discriminate between the false and true, how could any one expect that Grange Lane would continue to confide its most important arrangements to such incompetent hands?" (172). The Carlingford discourse cell depends upon the integrity and competence of their authorized agents, those who comprise "the best society of Carlingford." They have been designated authorized agents because they have proven themselves, earning the trust of their constituency. But with the revelation of Mr. Cavendish's deception, the question arises: if these elite, these authorized agents of hegemony, these "best judges," could not discern that Mr. Cavendish was lying; if they accepted his word (as obviously they did) when "describing himself, no doubt, very truthfully, as one of the Cavendishes" (44), then could their judgment of *anything* be trusted?

Thus, like Michael Audley with Lucy Graham, like Rachel with Mr. Mauleverer, like Mr. Carlyle with his wife Isabel, the ruling agents of Carlingford reveal themselves to be inadequate and incompetent to perform their basic duties. In fact, Cavendish acknowledges that he used their gullibility as a means of foisting himself on a better class of society, of accruing social capital: "when Carlingford signed his patent of gentility, and acknowledged and prized him, it did an infinite deal more than it had any intention of doing" (285). It elevated him in the power pyramid, crediting him with more social capital than he had earned, and thus authorized him to a level of authority which he was qualified neither to hold nor wield. His incompetence is revealed in his obsessive fascination for Barbara Lake, a lower class woman who, had his agency been authentic,

he would never have considered worthy of his attention. He exposes his true self in his attentions to her, and in his consequent snubs to Lucilla who is a far more appropriate and socially acceptable match for him.

It is a confirmation of his true self, his actual place on the power pyramid, when Lucilla acknowledges that, having been discovered, he can now aspire no higher than Barbara Lake, the daughter of the local drawing-master: “Lucilla became regretfully conscious that now no fate higher than Barbara was possible for the unfortunate man who might once, and with hope, have aspired to herself” (296). At the same time, Lucilla will work to protect her community from his romantic scheming: “Miss Marjoribanks was too well aware of her duty to her friends, and to her position in society, to have given her consent to his marriage with anybody’s daughter in Grange Lane” (297). Yet in her effort to preserve the stability of the community and limit the damage Mr. Beverley seeks to do in denouncing Mr. Cavendish, Lucilla, knowing that “she might possibly be going to harm herself in benefiting others” (298), insinuates a romantic attachment between herself and Mr. Cavendish to Mr. Beverley, who “could not publicly expose the man who had just received this mark of confidence from his young hostess” (309). Using her authority as a domestic angel, Lucilla prevents Mr. Beverley’s “Berserker madness” from destroying what she has built (312). He “dared not follow his natural impulses, nor even do what he felt to be his duty, for fear of Miss Marjoribanks, which was about the highest testimony to the value of social influence that could be given” (312). Lucilla is aware that the information concerning Mr. Cavendish’s background must be revealed; however

she manipulates the situation in order to defuse as much of the danger as she can, all in service to the preservation of the discourse cell.

Throughout the novel, Lucilla performs her duties according to the ideological code of the domestic angel. Yet Oliphant makes it clear in the language she uses to describe Lucilla that her heroine makes a conscious choice to adhere to the proper feminine. After Mr. Cavendish's secret is revealed (without damage to the local ecology of power and authority), the narrator sums up Lucilla's actions in the matter:

She had made a sacrifice, and nobody appreciated it. Instead of choosing a position which pleased her imagination, and suited her energies, and did not go against her heart, Lucilla, moved by the wisest discretion, had decided, not without regret, to give it up. She had sacrificed her own inclination, and a sphere in which her abilities would have had the fullest scope, to what she believed to be the general good. (332).

The language of the description reveals a woman driven not by instinctive self-sacrifice, humility, morality and passionlessness, but a woman who chooses to perform according to those standards for the "general good," adopting a pattern of behavior and appearance for a purpose. In the earlier course of her Thursday evening gatherings, when she had originally considered Mr. Cavendish a possible match, he began his obsession with Barbara Lake, much to the indignation of Lucilla's friends who found him to be "flirting in an inexcusable manner with Miss Lake" (121). Yet Lucilla, aware that fostering that burgeoning relationship could very well lead to her own loss of a suitor, chose to "prefer . . . her great work to her personal sentiments . . . [and] sent away the gentleman

who was paying attention to her, in company with the girl who was paying attention to him,” for the greater good (120).

At the same time, Lucilla adjusts her behavior according to “the prejudices of society” (76). She tells her father that she “must have a chaperone” because society requires one, and she “always make[s] it a point to give in to the prejudices of society” (72). According to Lucilla, this conformity to social expectations is at the root of her domestic successes. Yet once again, this adherence to hegemonically mandated codes of behavior is not a result of ontological femininity, but of Lucilla’s conscious adoption of the domestic angel role. Likewise, she makes conscious efforts to “make an example” (62), and thus when she first meets Mrs. Woodburn, a woman who mocks her friends through mimicry, Lucilla refuses to allow the other woman to attack the gentle and elderly Mrs. Chiley. Later, during a visit to Mrs. Woodburn, when the other woman repeats the offense, this time mimicking Lucilla’s neighbor Miss Brown, Lucilla responds similarly: “she felt in her heart that, representing public interest as she did, it was her duty to avoid all complicity in any attack upon an individual; and consequently, to a certain extent, it was her duty also to put Mrs. Woodburn down” (111).

In the end, Lucilla’s awareness of not only the power, but more importantly, the responsibility of the domestic angel within a community drives her to consciously adopt the role as though she were putting on a costume. As she says, “they might be ungrateful, or even unaware of all she was doing for them, but they had the supreme claim of Need upon Strength; and Miss Marjoribanks. . . was loyal to that appeal” (266). The domestic angel then, is fundamental to the stability and preservation of family, community and

hegemony. Despite Merryn Williams' claim that "what [Lucilla] really wants . . . is a power base in her father's house from which she can dominate her neighbours,"

Oliphant's consistent repetition of the importance of duty, sacrifice, and service belie any assertion of selfishness for Lucilla (161). Rather Oliphant sees the domestic angel in terms of her responsibilities, Lucilla "doing what they [the matrons of Carlingford] ought to have done" (118). Her strength is a reflection of her willingness to perform her duties appropriately. She accepts that "the wives and mothers . . . [have] charge of Their [male relatives] morality" and should "[strive] hard to keep them in the right way" (158).

Oliphant applauds Lucilla's initiative in serving her family and community, the combination of her strength and boldness in taking up her chosen "career," and her dedication to giving the community the "ruling spirit" which will energize and heal its tattered fabric. As she points out in her "Novels" essay, "there can be no possible doubt that the wickedness of man is less ruinous, less disastrous to the world in general, than the wickedness of woman. That is the climax of all misfortunes to the race" (275). A woman's failure to take up her hegemonically assigned duties can only lead to racial destruction. Thus for Oliphant, Lucilla's energy and drive to actively pursue her duties and obligations serves society—hegemony—best.

Yet despite Oliphant's obvious support for the domestic angel—even though she resists the ideology which postulates a woman's ontological angelic characteristics, choosing instead to make the role a choice of public duty, a rational choice for any 'good' woman—she articulates a concern for the single woman in society, particularly the single woman without money.

After her father's death, Lucilla discovers that she has been left destitute, a financial crash ruining her father just prior to his death. As a result, she finds herself without the means to perform the duties of her chosen role. Without an attachment to a masculine authorized agent, without the personal authorization which comes with marriage, Lucilla suddenly becomes a redundant woman. Indeed the Rector recommends to her "parish work . . . as the only thing that could be of any service to Lucilla; and that, in short, such was the inevitable and providential destination of a woman who had 'no ties' " (434). Her aunt recommends that she take in boarders, while Rose encourages her to turn her home into a "House of Mercy" (433). After all, in social terms, she "was now *only* [my italics] a single woman" (404). Moving from social savior to something of very little social worth in the matter of a single night, Lucilla loses all authorized agency. She has not changed; her sense of duty and obligations remain as strong as ever. Thus Oliphant comments ironically on a society which would dismiss one of its best and brightest over her lack of a masculine appendage.

The Victorian Angel

Joan Perkin writes in her study Victorian Women, that

the ideal of most middle-class wives was to organize their households as efficiently as their husbands organized their businesses, thus making a substantial contribution to the family's well-being . . . and also to become the morally superior partner in the marriage. . . . [Women] needed to guard the citadel of respectability. . . . they had also to establish peace,

love and unselfishness, not only for themselves and their children, but also for [society]. . . . In short, women (particularly middle-class women) were to regenerate society. (87)

Oliphant's characterization of Lucilla coincides with Perkin's description of the feminine role, particularly in its sense of a woman's active assertion of herself within her hegemonically allotted domestic domain: she must "guard," "establish," "regenerate," and "organize." On the other hand, the distinctly masculine initiative and leadership qualities exhibited by Lucilla which Oliphant promotes as feminine, are described as monstrous in the characters of Lady Audley, Rachel Curtis, and Miss Corny. Those qualities are relegated to the feminine abject because women do not have the intellectual capacity use them safely and appropriately, and because women are susceptible to their emotions. Mary Poovey writes that Victorian ideology suggested that this susceptibility to the feminine abject resulted in the need for "the control that was the other face of [masculine] protection [and which was] integral to the separation of spheres and everything that followed from it. . . . [since] women were governed not by reason (like men), but by something else, then they could hardly be expected (or allowed)" to be trusted with unregulated power (11). Thus ironically, Lucilla Marjoribanks, for all her conformity to the tenets of the domestic angel ideology, symbolizes the kind of independent woman which feminists hailed as antithetical to the hegemonically coded feminine ideal. Rather, in her independence, rationality, leadership, and superiority, she becomes the adverse of the submissive, self-effacing, dependent woman promoted by conservative traditionalists.¹¹

Oliphant portrays Lucilla with gentle satire. Her tone is slightly mocking, narrating Lucilla's social nurturing in the language of a mock epic. Lucilla's social plans become a "campaign" (99). She is a "revolutionary," challenging the stagnation and decay of her community (100). She is a "conqueror" (109). Her two spinster neighbors become "dangerous" as Lucilla worries about them taking pictures of her newly redecorated drawing-room (99). Barbara, Lucilla's 'enemy,' is described in equally lavish terms: "Barbara was the soldier of fortune who had to open the oyster with her sword" (103). When Barbara tempts Mr. Cavendish from Lucilla's side, the narrator describes the scene in the heroic language of political intrigue:

Just then, when she [Lucilla] could not put on a new ribbon, or do her hair in a different style, without all Carlingford knowing of it—at that epoch of intoxication and triumph the danger came, sudden, appalling, and unlooked for. If Lucilla was staggered by the encounter, she never showed it, but met the difficulty like a woman of mettle, and scorned to flinch. It had come to be summer weather when the final day arrived upon which Mr Cavendish forgot himself altogether, and went over to the insidious enemy [Barbara] whom Miss Marjoribanks had been nourishing in her bosom. Fifty eyes were upon Lucilla watching her conduct at that critical moment. . . . (134)

The heroically sentimental language of this kind of description permeates through the novel and contrasts sharply with Lucilla's own emotional equilibrium.¹² The irony emphasizes Lucilla's pragmatism in adopting her feminine role. Elisabeth Jay writes that

“Lucilla consciously embraces the ideal of womanhood and determines to embody that ‘picture of angelic sweetness and goodness’ ” (Oliphant 69). Further, Jay writes that Oliphant believed “many girls derived their expectations of life and their role models from fiction. Working on this assumption Mrs Oliphant decided that it would be the business of her fiction to provide role models that did not glamorize a woman’s lot” (Oliphant 55). Lucilla’s pragmatism, despite the heroic language of the novel, provides a model of femininity which represents Oliphant’s ideal of true womanhood. Further, Jay explains that the irony of Oliphant’s narrative tone highlights “the discrepancy between the idealized vision of life, which occupies a portion of most people’s thinking, and the compromises, accommodations, and failures that characterize awkward reality” (220). Deploring sentimental novels which leads girls astray, Oliphant creates her own version of the sentimental novel in which the heroine remains pragmatic and practical in the midst of dramatically romanticized plot twists.¹³

Merryn Williams argues that Oliphant “makes the serious point that no talented young woman can go on amusing herself with dinner parties forever” (“Feminist” 170). Indeed, after ten years in her role as Carlingford’s social leader, Lucilla discovers that “she had outlived the occupations that were sufficient for her youth,” and has “become conscious that her capabilities [are] greater than her work” (395). Having accomplished her goals and nursed the community back to health, Lucilla is left without sufficient challenge for her abilities. Yet rather than agitating for greater opportunities for women in the public sphere as William’s contends, Oliphant locates Lucilla’s limitations in her yet-unfulfilled femininity. Shortly after this passage, Lucilla begins to contemplate

marriage, a step she has been unwilling to take for ten years. Once engaged, she realizes a new horizon of opportunities, “carry[ing] light and progress” to her new home at Marchbank and the surrounding county (499). These new opportunities involve similar domestic services to those she has long provided to Carlingford, and become available only with marriage, indicating that Oliphant continues to promote and encourage the ideology of the domestic angel. Q.D. Leavis writes that “we have reason to conclude that Mrs Oliphant’s purpose in writing this novel was to campaign against false Victorian values where women are concerned” (150). Leavis goes on to say that even though Oliphant did not support the “kind of emancipation of women that John Stuart Mill stood for” (150), she, like Yonge, supported a version of the domestic angel ideology which promoted usefulness and practicality for women—*within the domestic sphere*. Jay confirms this when she writes “ [Oliphant] remained of the opinion that women were most fulfilled in marriage, family responsibilities, or, when needs must, in the types of employment which most nearly replicated these condition” (49). In other words, for Oliphant, women were most happy (and most useful) when fulfilling the role of the domestic angel.

Taken together, these five novels strongly support the domestic angel ideology, reinforcing the connection between the safety and preservation of the community and nation, and with the stability and perpetuation of the domestic sphere. Despite elements of resistance, despite clear concerns about the limitations of the role and the lack of options available for unmarried women or so-called redundant women, these novels

privilege the needs of the larger society over “special instances” (Oliphant “Condition” 211).

Notes

¹ In Discipline and Punish, Foucault discusses how methods of discipline created docile bodies in both 18th century French military and political settings. He articulates four methods of approach to discipline: distribution, control of activity, organization of geneses, and composition of forces (135-169). Foucault stresses that these methods of discipline were forms of domination, differentiated from other forms of discipline (vassalage, monastic, service) because they increase “the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (138). The “exercise of discipline” and the creation of docile bodies depends on “a mechanism that coerces by means of observation” (170).

² “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, Discipline 202-3).

³ In the appendix to Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault discusses “chance as a category in the production of events” (231).

⁴ Terry Eagleton argues that “the function of ideology, also, is to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society; . . . the dominant ideas of a society are the ideas of its ruling class” (5). In the case of Victorian hegemony, the ruling class held the highest agency position on the power pyramid.

⁵ Though Lucy (as Helen Talboys) is certainly already married, as Lucy she masquerades as a single woman. Because, until Michael Audley proposes marriage, she clearly has

no intent to commit bigamy, her situation at the beginning of the novel is very much akin to Rachel's. She faces a future of spinsterhood..

⁶ Rachel defines curatolatry rather sententiously and vaguely as "that sickly mixture of flirtation and hero worship, with a religious daub as a salve to the conscience" (50). She reveals a suspicion of religion (a suspicion which keeps her from accepting Alick's proposal since she knows his beliefs are firm).

⁷ Rachel's sentiments echo those of Florence Nightingale in "Cassandra."

⁸ This is not to suggest that Lucy does not enjoy or desire her newfound wealth and position. Indeed she does, spending liberal amounts of money on clothing, jewelry, perfumes, household decorations and other things she could not previously afford.

⁹ In "The Condition of Women," Oliphant argues that the what affects women in Britain, "affect[s] generally the whole race," specifically both men and women—all of society (218).

¹⁰ In terms of middle class values which promote social usefulness and active service, Carlingford is an example of indolence and lethargy, and rather than maintaining hegemony, it will provide grounds for social disease to take root, as will be discussed further in this chapter.

¹¹ Critics of Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks, like Merryyn Williams cited in this text, adamantly argue that Oliphant was an ardent feminist whose novels promoted an enlightened femininity. Williams says that thought it "would be a mistake to typecast her as a forerunner of present-day Women's Liberationists" (166), in Oliphant's writings, there "is a strong undertow of deep personal feeling" which challenged

patriarchal oppression of women (“Feminist” 171). Williams points to Oliphant’s Kirsteen (1890), a novel in which the heroine “remains a spinster” and “makes the family’s fortune, fulfilling the pattern of success normally reserved for men” (“Feminist” 176-7).

¹² As Q.D Leavis remarks, Lucilla is not without feeling, but her emotions are well-contained (141-43).

¹³ For instance, Tom’s initial proposal, Lucilla’s first party, Mrs. Mortimer’s fainting attack, the public revelation of Mr. Cavendish’s deception, and Tom’s return to Carlingford in the nick of time (despite his mother’s attempt to prevent it)

Afterword

*. . . Women as you are,
Mere Women, personal and passionate,
You give us doating mothers, and chaste wives,¹
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!*
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh 44)

Judith Lowder Newton writes that in the Victorian period, the “valorization of women’s influence . . . was aimed at devaluing actions and capacities which we can only call other forms of power, and in this way, the peddling of women’s influence, in a sort of ideological marketplace, functioned to sustain unequal power relations between middle-class women and middle-class men” (4). There can be no doubt that the ideology of the domestic angel reinforces patriarchy. Women, though morally superior, must always look to men for ‘protection’ from their abject natures. In this way, women are doubly contained within the restrictive limitations of the ideology and again within a masculine curriculum of desire and need. The laws of England reinforced patriarchal control; Myra Stark explains that

husbands had total economic power over their wives. Unless protected by private agreements, a wife’s assets—her money, her property, even her children and her own body—were legally her husband’s to dispose of. Thus the law completed what social and cultural tradition prescribed. (4)

In this study I have attempted to contextualize the domestic angel within a third field of containment: imperialism. Though these five novels rarely refer to the events of empire, the fundamental importance of the domestic angel to the imperial project intensified the mechanisms of hegemonic control which deployed the domestic angel ideal. The prevalent nationalist doctrine articulating England as the angel ministering to ‘her’ colonies had its basis in the middle class family with the domestic angel at its nucleus. The imperial agenda relied on the preservation of the family structure which in turn depended on women adhering to the limits of her domestic sphere. These novels, though in some respects resistant to the restrictions entailed on women, reinforce the domestic angel ideology to their readers. The women characters held up for admiration and whom readers are encouraged to emulate conform to the tenets of true femininity. By reinforcing this code of femininity, these novels assist in the hegemonic project of conserving family and community and, by implication, empire.

I began this study with Florence Nightingale and so let us return to her once more. In a strangely contradictory situation, both feminists and advocates of true womanhood² viewed Florence Nightingale as representative of their particular causes. In her introduction to “Cassandra,” Myra Stark says that Nightingale “was worshiped as the ideal image of the tender, nurturing female—an image which still clings to her, as well as to the profession which she created” (1). Yet Stark goes on to say that

One cannot exactly say that Nightingale was, in modern terms, a feminist. She refused to give wholehearted support to the main feminist causes of her day—suffrage and equal educational rights for women—and was

critical of those who did. Indeed, she frequently expressed contempt for the lives and characters of most women. (15)

Nightingale embodies the contradictions of the domestic angel ideology. Like Lucilla Marjoribanks, her masculine qualities of organization, leadership and sense of purpose allow her to fulfill her domestic angel role. The irony of this paradox ruptures the Victorian culture's ontological acceptance of the domestic angel ideology. In many respects, these novels in fact shore up the ideology, recontaining women within a larger set of ideological boundaries which acknowledge the futility of obtaining the status of 'true domestic angel,' but which depend on the unbending middle-class sense of duty and morality in convincing women to cooperate, along the same heading as 'lay back, close your eyes and think of England.' Culturally, there was a hegemonically certified ontological presumption the empire would collapse without the domestic angel foundation. Thus the outward appearance of the compliance to the domestic angel becomes paramount, as well as the performance of those social duties associated with true womanhood, no matter how they come to be accomplished. Indeed Florence Nightengale, celebrated as a both domestic angel and feminist, was correct when she wrote:

Verily the world is full of the strangest & saddest contradictions
(Selected Letters 424)

Notes

¹ A variation of this line reads, “You give us doating mothers, and perfect wives.”

² Though women who supported the ideal of the domestic angel perceived themselves to be feminist in so much that they felt their position to be superior and necessary. To abandon their position as domestic angels would result not only in cultural chaos and moral decay, but also in a loss of personal power—particularly the power of influence, as Sarah Stickney Ellis argues in her books.

Bibliography

Adams, James Truslow. The British Empire 1784-1939. 1940. New York: Dorset P, 1991.

Adams, Robert, M. The Land and Literature of England: A Historical Account. New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1983.

Altick, Richard. Victorian Studies in Scarlet. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970.

Anderson, Nancy Fix. Woman Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Armstrong, Nancy. Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel. 1987. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures. New Accents. London: Routledge, 1989.

Austen, Jane. Pride and Prejudice. (1813). Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.

Ballhatchet, Kenneth. Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905. New York: St. Martin's P, 1980.

Basch, Françoise. Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

- Belsey, Catherine. "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text." Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Robert ConDavis and Ronald Schleifer. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 1994. 355-370.
- Bernstein, Susan David. "Dirty Reading: Sensation Fiction, Women, and Primitivism." Criticism 36 (1994): 213-241.
- Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." 1987. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Boucherett, Jessie. "How to Provide for Superfluous Women." Butler 27-48.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. Language and Symbolic Power. Ed. John B. Thompson. Trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994.
- Boyle, Thomas, F. "'Fishy Extremities': Subversion of Orthodoxy in the Victorian Sensation Novel." Literature and History 9.1 (1983): 92-96.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. Lady Audley's Secret. 1861-2. Ed. David Skilton. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
- . "What is 'Sensational' About the 'Sensation Novel'?" Nineteenth-Century Fiction 37.1 (1982): 1-28.
- Brown, Julia Prewitt. A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth-Century English Novel. New York: Macmillan, 1985.
- Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Aurora Leigh: A Poem. 1857. Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1989.

[Buckley, Theodore.] "The Babbington Book Club." Household Words. 23 October 1852: 129-33.

Butler, Josephine, ed. Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays. London: 1869.

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.

---. The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.

Callan, Hilary, and Shirley Ardener, eds. The Incorporated Wife. London: Croom Helm, 1984.

[Capper, John, and W. H. Wills.] "A Pull at the Pagoda Tree." Household Words. 9 July 1853: 433-436.

Chapman, Raymond. The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society 1832-1901. Literature and Society. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968.

Cobbe, Frances Power. "The Final Cause of Woman." Butler 1-26.

---. "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" 1862. 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Victorian Writing by Women on Women. Ed. Susan Hamilton. Ontario: Broadview P, 1996. 85-107.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton. 1856. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968.

Cott, Nancy. "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 4 (Winter 1978): 219-236.

- Craik, Dinah Mullock. "To Novelists—and a Novelist." Macmillan Magazine. 3 (1861): 441-48.
- Curtin, Michael. Propriety and Position: A Study of Victorian Manners. Modern European History. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1992.
- David, Dierdre. Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
- Davidoff, Leonore. The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season. London: Croom Helm, 1973.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. 1952. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1974.
- Deane, Seamus. Introduction. Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature. By Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said. Minneapolis: Field Day—U of Minnesota P, 1990.
- Dutt, Rajani Palme. "The Exploitation of India: A Marxist View." *From India Today*. 1940. The British in India: Imperialism or Trusteeship?. Ed. Martin Deming Lewis. Problems in European Civilization. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1965. 41-52.
- Dutt, Romesh Chunder. The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule: From the Rise of the British Power in 1757 to the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837. 1902. Vol. 1. New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969.

- Eden, Emily. Miss Eden's Letters. Ed. Violet Dickinson. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1919.
- . The Semi-attached Couple. (1860). The Semi-detached House. (1859). In 1 vol. Separately paginated. Virago Modern Classics. London: Virago, 1988.
- Edwards, P. D. Some Mid-Victorian Thrillers: The Sensation Novel, Its Friends and its Foes. St. Lucia, Queensland: U of Queensland P, 1971.
- Eliot, George. The George Eliot Letters. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. New Haven: Yale UP, 1954.
- . "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." 1856. Essays of George Eliot. Ed. Thomas Pinney. New York: Columbia UP, 1963. 300-324.
- Ellis, Sarah, Stickney. *From "The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits."* 1839. The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Ed. M.H. Abrams, et al. 5th edition. Vol. 2. New York: Norton & Co., 1986. (1638-40).
- Engel, Elliot and Margaret King. The Victorian Novel Before Victoria: British Fiction During the Reign of William IV, 1830-37. New York: St. Martin's P, 1984.
- "Evils of Circulating and Juvenile Libraries." Letter. Gentleman's Magazine 78 (Sept. 1808): 782-3.
- Fahnestock, Jeanne. "Bigamy: The Rise and Fall of a Convention." Nineteenth-Century Fiction 36.1 (1981): 47-71.
- Flint, Kate. The Woman Reader 1837-1914. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993.
- Forster, Shirley. Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1985.

- Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language. (1969). Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993.
- . Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. (1975). Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1979.
- . Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon et. al. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
- Gilmour, Robin. The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890. Longman Literature in English Series. London: Longman, 1993.
- Gisborne, Thomas. An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex. London, 1798.
- Gissing, George. The Odd Women. (1893). New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977.
- Gramsci, Antonio. Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. Trans. and Ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1995.
- [Greg, William R.] "False Morality of Lady Novelists." National Review. 8 (1859): 144-67.
- . "Why Are Women Redundant?" National Review. 14 (1862): 434-60.
- Gorham, Deborah. The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.
- Hartnell, Elaine. " "Nothing But Sweet and Womanly": A Hagiography of Patmore's Angel." Victorian Poetry 34 (Winter 1996): 457-476.

- Helsing, Elizabeth K., Robin Lauterbach Sheets, and William Veeder. The Woman Question: Defining Voices, 1837-1883. New York: Galand Publishing, 1983.
- Honig, Edith Lazaros. Breaking the Angelic Image: Woman Power in Victorian Children's Fantasy. Contributions in Women's Studies 97. New York: Greenwood P, 1988.
- Hughes, Winifred. The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Irigaray, Luce. This Sex Which is Not One. 1977. Trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Islam, Shamsul. Chronicles of the Raj: A Study of Literary Reaction to the Imperial Idea Towards the End of the Raj. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979.
- Jalland, Pat. Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986.
- Jay, Elizabeth. Mrs Oliphant: 'A Fiction to Herself': A Literary Life. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1995.
- . The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel. Oxford. Clarendon P, 1979.
- Karl, Frederick. A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth Century British Novel. New York: The Noonday P, 1967. Rpt. of An Age of Fiction: the Nineteenth Century British Novel, 1964.
- Kaplan, Amy. The Social Construction of American Realism. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.
- Kelly, Gary. English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830. Longman Literature in English Series. London: Longmann, 1989.

Knaplund, Paul. The British Empire 1815-1939. New York: Harper & Bros. Publishers, 1941.

Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. European Perspectives. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

Langland, Elizabeth. Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.

Leavis, Queenie D. Collected Essays. Vol. 3. Coll. and Ed. G. Singh. Cambridge, Cambridge UP. 1989.

Linton, Eliza Lynn. "The Girl of the Period." 1868. 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Victorian Writing by Women on Women. Ed. Susan Hamilton. Ontario: Broadview P, 1996. 172-176.

---. "The Modern Revolt." 1891. 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Victorian Writing by Women on Women. Ed. Susan Hamilton. Ontario: Broadview P, 1996. 177-197.

Lohrli, Anne. Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850-1859: Conducted by Charles Dickens: Table of Contents, List of Contributors and Their Contributions. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973.

[Mansel, H.L.] "Sensation Novels." Quarterly Review. 113 (1862): 481-514.

Marshall, P.J. The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Mason, Michael. The Making of Victorian Sexuality. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.

McClintock, Anne. Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Memmi, Albert. The Colonizer and the Colonized. (1957). Trans. Howard Greenfeld.

Boston: Beacon P, 1967.

Mill, John Stuart. The Subjection of Women. 2nd edition. London: Longmans, Green,

Reader, and Dyer, 1869.

Mitchell, Sally. The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880.

Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1981.

---. Introduction. East Lynne. By Mrs. Henry [Ellen] Wood. 1861. New Brunswick:

Rugers UP, 1984.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes." Colonial Discourse and

Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader. Ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman.

New York: Columbia UP, 1994. 196-220.

More, Hannah. Coelebs in Search of a Wife. 1808. New York, 1857.

---. Strictures on the Modern Sysem of Female Education. 2 Vols. Boston, 1800.

Munich, Adrienne. Queen Victoria's Secrets. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.

[Mylne, Margaret.] "Woman, and her Social Position." Westminster Review. 35

(January 1841): 13-27.

Nehru, Jawaharlal. "British Rule in India." *From* The Discovery of India. 1946. The

British in India: Imperialism or Trusteeship?. Ed. Martin Deming Lewis.

Problems in European Civilization. Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1965. 12-25.

Newton, Judith Lowder. Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British

Fiction, 1778-1860. 1981. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Nightingale, Florence. Cassandra: An Essay by Florence Nightingale. 1852. Intro.

Myra Stark. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.

---. Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters. Ed. Martha Vicinus and Bea Nergaard. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990.

“Novels.” Lady’s Magazine. July 1790: 363.

Oliphant, Margaret. Miss Marjoribanks. 1866. New York: Penguin Books-Virago Classics, 1989.

---. “The Condition of Women.” (1858). ‘Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors’: Victorian Writing By Women on Women. Ed. Susan Hamilton. Ontario: Broadview P, 1995.

[Oliphant, Margaret.] “Novels.” Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine. 102 (September 1867): 257-280.

“On Female Authorship.” Lady’s Magazine. June 1789: 297-298.

Patmore, Coventry. The Angel in the House Together With The Victories of Love. Intro. Alice Meynell. London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., nd.

[Patmore, Coventry.] “The Social Position of Woman.” North British Review 14 (Feb. 1851): 515-40.

Perkin, Joan. Victorian Woman. Washington Square, NY: New York UP, 1993.

Poovey, Mary. Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.

Pykett, Lyn. The ‘Improper’ Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing. London: Routledge, 1992.

---. The Sensation Novel: From The Woman in White to the Moonstone. Plymouth, UK: Northcote House Publishers, 1994.

Quinlan, Maurice. Victorian Prelude: A History of English Manners 1700-1830. 1941.

Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1965.

[Rae, W. F.] "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon." North British Review. 4 (September 1865): 180-204.

Roberts, Paul Ernest. History of British India Under the Company and the Crown. 3rd

Ed. London: Oxford UP, 1952.

Rowbotham, Judith. Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989.

Ruskin, John. Sesame and Lilies. (1865). The Seven Lamps of Architecture; Also Lectures on Architecture and Painting; The Study of Architecture; Sesame and Lilies—Unto This Last; The Queen of the Air; The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century. 1 vol. Separately paginated. Boston: Aldine Book Publishing Co., n.d.

Said, Edward. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Knopf, 1993.

Shanley, Mary Lyndon. Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1989.

Showalter, Elaine. "Desperate Remedies: Sensation Novels of the 1860s." The Victorian Newsletter 49 (1976): 1-5.

---. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

Skilton, David. Introduction. Lady Audley's Secret. By Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. vii-xxiii.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. Gossip. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

- Spurr, David. The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration. Durham & London: Duke UP, 1993.
- Stark, Myra. Introduction. "Cassandra." By Florence Nightingale. 1852. Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1979.
- Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800. Abr. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Sturrock, June. "Heaven and Home": Charlotte M. Yonge's Domestic Fiction and the Victorian Debate Over Women. *English Literary Studies*. 65. Victoria, B.C.: U of Victoria P., 1995.
- Summers, Anne. Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses, 1854-1914. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.
- Taylor, Gordon Rattray. The Angel Makers: A Study in the Psychological Origins of Historical Change 1750-1850. 1958. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974.
- Taylor, John Tinnon. Early Opposition to the English Novel: The Popular Reaction from 1760-1830. 1943. Folcroft: Folcroft P, 1970.
- Thompson, Francis Michael Longstreth. The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988.
- Thomson, James. "The City of Dreadful Night." 1870-74. Poetry of the Victorian Period. 3rd Ed. Ed. Jerome Hamilton Buckley and George Benjamin Woods. nc: Harper Collins Publishers, 1965. 585-599.
- Tillotson, Kathleen. "Introduction: The Lighter Reading of the Eighteen-Sixties." The Woman in White. By Wilkie Collins. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969. ix-xxvi.

- Trollope, Joanna. Britannia's Daughters: Women of the British Empire. London: Hutchinson, 1983.
- Trudgill, Eric. Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes. New York: Homes & Meier, 1976.
- Vicinus, Martha. "Introduction: New Trends in the Study of the Victorian Woman." A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. Ed. Martha Vicinus. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977. ix-xix.
- Viswanathan, Guari. "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India." The Oxford Literary Review. 9.1-2 (1987): 2-26.
- . Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.
- Walbank, Felix Alan. Queens of the Circulating Library: Selections From Victorian Lady Novelists 1850-1900. London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1950.
- Williams, Merryn. "Feminist or Antifeminist? Oliphant and the Woman Question." Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive. Ed. D. J. Trela. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1995. 165-180.
- . Women in the English Novel, 1800-1900. New York: St. Martin's P, 1984.
- Wolff, Robert Lee ed. "Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sire Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873." Harvard Library Bulletin. 22.1 & 2 (January and April 1974): 5-35, 129-161.
- Woman: As She Is, and As She Should Be. 2 vols. London, 1835.
- Wood, Mrs. Henry [Ellen]. East Lynne. 1861. Ed. Sally Mitchell. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1984.

Yonge, Charlotte. The Clever Woman of the Family. 1865. London: Virago P., 1985.