

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 object. Or in this case, the danger rises from a very controlled object, 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.

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).