

**FALLEN ANGELS:
FEMALE WRONGDOING IN VICTORIAN NOVELS**

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Al Barnhill, who continues to encourage me to turn my dreams into reality.

ABSTRACT

In the Victorian novel, gender-based social norms dictated appropriate behaviour. Female wrongdoing was not only judged according to the law, but also according to the idealized conception of womanhood. It was this implicit cultural measure, and how far the woman contravened the feminine norms of society, that defined her criminal act rather than the act itself or the injury her act inflicted.

When a woman deviated from the Victorian construction of the ideal woman, she was stigmatized and labelled. The fallen woman was viewed as a moral menace, a contagion. Foreign women who committed crimes were judged for their 'lack of Englishness.' Insanity evolved into not only a medical explanation for bizarre behaviour, but also a legal explanation for criminal behaviour. Finally, the habitual woman criminal and the infanticidal mother were seen as unnatural. Regardless of the crime committed, female criminals were ostracized and removed from 'respectable' English society.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

A	<i>Armadale</i> , by Wilkie Collins
AB	<i>Adam Bede</i> , by George Eliot
BH	<i>Bleak House</i> , by Charles Dickens
EL	<i>East Lynne</i> , by Ellen Wood
JE	<i>Jane Eyre</i> , by Charlotte Brontë
LAS	<i>Lady Audley's Secret</i> , by Mary Elizabeth Braddon
MW	<i>Man and Wife</i> , by Wilkie Collins
OT	<i>Oliver Twist</i> , by Charles Dickens
T	<i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> , by Thomas Hardy
US	<i>Uncle Silas</i> , by Sheridan LeFanu

INTRODUCTION

*"I like to hear of adventures, dangers, and misfortunes,
and above all, I love a mystery."*

LeFanu, Uncle Silas

The dark side of human nature, replete with intrigue, secrets and mysteries is compelling. Everyone loves a mystery. While our better natures may bristle at the thought of peeking through a keyhole or listening at a closed door, the reader's interest is piqued when he hears, "Do you want to know a secret?" A story filled with mystery, murder and passion provides a legitimate form of intimacy with the dangerous side of life as well as a vicarious participation in the secrets, passions and struggles of others.

The fascination with the dark side of life is not a recent phenomenon. For centuries mankind has been fascinated by crime. The eighteenth-century Gothic novel, with its

rape, sadism, incest, ghosts, vampirism, permanent imprisonment, natural and man-made cataclysms, and other such inducements to horror, deliciously stirred the sensibilities of readers who had fed too long on the bland diet of the domestic novel and polite essay. (Altick, *Studies in Scarlet* 67)

Together with the Gothic novel, during the eighteenth century, newspapers, broadsides and street ballads sensationalized crime for public consumption. Typically, broadsides were peddled at executions, detailing the crime as well as the confession of the criminal, embedding within their texts the moral that 'crime does not pay.'

The *Newgate Calendar*, first issued in 1773, was a series of books that reported the details of criminal cases heard at the Old Bailey in London. The popularity of the *Newgate Calendar* reflected "an unmistakable indication of the increasing and enduring taste for tales of fatal violence" (Altick, *Studies in Scarlet* 44).

Influenced by the success of the *Newgate Calendar*, and in response to the public's taste for crime, the Newgate novel, sometimes referred to as the 'penny dreadful,' gained in popularity during the 1830's. The Newgate novel was typically a narrative of murder or robbery, ending with the criminal's demise on the Newgate gallows (Altick 72). The Newgate novel focused on the depravity of crime, and like the eighteenth-century broadsides, the Newgate novel celebrated the moral lesson that honesty is rewarded and crime is punished.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the sensation novel gained popularity. Authors such as Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon exploited the public's fascination with violence. As Elaine Showalter notes, sensation novelists

made crime and violence domestic, modern, and suburban; but their secrets were not simply solutions to mysteries and crimes; they were the secrets of women's dislike of their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. These [...] novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction [...] by expressing a wide range of suppressed female emotions, and by tapping and satisfying the fantasies of protest and escape. (Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, 158-159)

Furthermore, the melodramatic style of nineteenth-century journalism encouraged sensationalism. Victorian newspapers echoed Disraeli in suggesting that there were two Englands. There was the ideal Victorian society that existed in English minds, and the reality of poverty, passion, and criminal sensation that existed in the streets (Boyle, 34). Undoubtedly, it was the 'sensational England' that mesmerized readers.

Women accused of wrongdoing held a special fascination for the Victorians. Their blend of passion, eroticism, and danger served to spark the Victorian imagination. Dickens, who witnessed the hanging of Maria Manning and her husband, Frederick, was much impressed by the spectacle that accompanied their execution. In fact, in 1852,

three years after the event, he stated in an article, "Lying Awake," that he was unable to forget

those two forms dangling on the top of the entrance gateway [...] the woman a fine shape; so elaborately corseted and artfully dressed, that it was quite unchanged in its trim appearance as it slowly swung from side to side. (Qtd. in Lindgren 9)

Dickens's description is a seamless merging of the horror of the execution with the attraction of the erotic woman. The mingling of death and erotic attraction is also evident in Thomas Hardy's account of the execution of Martha Browne on August 9, 1856:

I remember what a fine figure she showed against the sky as she hung in the misty rain [...] & how the tight black silk gown set off her shape as she wheeled half round & back. (Qtd. in Kalikoff, "The Execution of Tess d'Urberville at Wintoncester" 113)

Both of these descriptions conflate the mysterious and macabre with the erotic woman.

The fascination that the woman criminal held for the Victorians flowed in part from her deviation from the nineteenth-century notion of ideal womanhood. The ideal Victorian woman, or the 'angel of the house' was defined by her role within the home because the family served as a sanctuary for the "preservation of traditional moral and religious values" (Zedner 12). The qualities valued by Victorian society in the ideal female were submissiveness, innocence, purity, gentleness, self-sacrifice, patience, modesty, passivity, and altruism. The middle-class Victorian woman was to have no ambition other than to please others and care for her family (Zedner 15). According to the Victorian ideal, a woman was to be "a monument of selflessness, with no existence beyond the loving influence she exuded as daughter, wife, and mother" (Auerbach 185).

The woman of the nineteenth century occupied a position of duality within Victorian culture. She was either Madonna or Magdalene, pure or ruined, familiar or

foreign. Within this cultural construct, the criminal woman was defined largely by her departure from the ideal Victorian woman who was passionless, chaste, innocent, submissive and self-sacrificing. In contrast to the Victorian ideal, the woman who contravened the idealized conception of womanhood, whether by sexual misconduct or criminal act, was viewed as deviant and unnatural. She represented an unsettling anomaly that both repelled and fascinated the Victorians.

In this thesis I intend to argue that during the nineteenth century morality helped to define what constituted a 'criminal act.' As a result, gender-based social norms greatly influenced societal attitudes towards female wrongdoing. Criminality was often measured by a failure to live up to the feminine ideal of the 'angel in the house.' When a woman contravened societal expectations, she was judged far more harshly than her male counterpart. I will also touch on how the sex of the author impacted on the representation of female wrongdoing in the Victorian novel.

In addition, I will examine the role that class played in defining female wrongdoing in Victorian novels. Typically, women of the middle and upper classes who committed criminal acts in Victorian novels tended to be judged within the private sphere rather than in the public sphere of the criminal justice system.

I will also argue that the woman who committed wrongdoing represented a disease to the Victorian mind. Her wrongdoing was viewed as a poison in society, and she was viewed as the medium of contamination. The notion of the woman criminal as a contagion is reflected in the Victorian novel. She was stigmatized and ostracized because of her deviance from the Victorian notion of the ideal woman, and punished by removal from respectable society. Whether she died at the end of her story, was executed,

transported, or sent to the mad-house, the criminal woman was expunged, and the contagion was removed from society. The woman criminal was rarely, if ever, 'rehabilitated' and reintegrated into respectable society. She represented a rent in the social fabric of respectable society that could only be restored by her removal.

The chapters in this thesis are arranged according to the labels attached to women who committed wrongdoing. At the beginning of each chapter, I provide an historical framework of the social and/or legal culture of the day in order to supply a context within which the literary criticism is placed.

In my first chapter, I discuss the Fallen Woman in *Oliver Twist*, *East Lynne*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, arguing that female wrongdoing was defined largely by how far a woman deviated from the Victorian conception of idealized womanhood and less by the wrong committed. I will also argue that while society viewed these women as fallen and as morally and socially corrupt, they were, in fact, victims of male domination and seduction.

In my second chapter I examine the Foreign Woman in *Bleak House* and *Uncle Silas*. I argue that the women in these novels are judged for their 'lack of Englishness.' They are represented in the novels as being outside the parameters of respectable British society and accordingly, they are condemned more for their 'Frenchness' than for the acts they committed.

My third chapter focuses on the Mad Women in *Jane Eyre*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, and *Man and Wife*. My examination of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* centers on that text as supplying a prototype for the Victorian notion of the madwoman. In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Man and Wife*, however, I argue that both Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge

possess the necessary *mens rea* (guilty mind) and commit the *actus rea* (guilty act) to be held legally accountable for their actions. I argue that it was not mental instability, but rather the male-dominated law that created the explosive natures in these women. While Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge may have been the victims of the social system of the day, they were not the passive victims of their own physiology.

My final chapter examines the Unnatural Woman. I discuss Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* as a representation of the infanticidal woman and Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* as an example of the female 'career criminal.' I will argue that the women in these two novels are portrayed as 'unnatural.' They are both represented as passionate with a strong desire to transcend their class, regardless of social barriers and constraints. They are judged on the basis of their departure from the feminine ideal, rather than on the basis of their criminal acts.

In all of these novels, female wrongdoing is purged from respectable England by removal of the woman criminal. The woman who committed wrongdoing in the nineteenth-century novel was doubly condemned. While male criminals may have been denounced and expunged from society, their acts were not seen as an affront to manhood because it was culturally acceptable for a man to engage in aggressive behaviour. Female wrongdoing, on the other hand, was not only censured on the basis of the act itself, but, more importantly, it was condemned because it contravened the role of idealized womanhood.

CHAPTER I ~ THE FALLEN WOMAN:
OLIVER TWIST, EAST LYNNE, TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

The term fallen woman in Victorian culture applied “to a range of feminine identities: prostitutes, unmarried women who engage[d] in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as variously delinquent lower-class women” (Anderson 2). Furthermore, the fallen woman was often depicted in the iconography of the time as actually ‘falling.’ In 1858 Augustus Egg, the prominent Victorian artist, presented his trilogy of the fallen woman at the Royal Academy in London in paintings entitled: *Misfortune*, *Prayer*, and *Despair*. These three paintings depict the fallen woman, beginning with an illustration of the adulterous wife lying in a prone position at her husband’s feet in *Misfortune*. Next the children of the fallen woman are praying for their lost mother in the painting *Prayer*. Finally, Egg presents the fallen woman as gazing at the river in the painting *Despair*. Egg’s exhibition included the following explanatory narrative:

‘August the 4th. Have just heard that B—has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear *She* was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been!’¹

The Victorians regarded the fallen woman as a moral menace, a contagion. She was separated from society socially by stigmatization and was often physically removed from the gaze of respectable society, most frequently through her death. The Victorian view was that the fallen woman lacked shame and modesty; however, while society viewed these women as ‘fallen’ and as morally and socially repugnant, they were, in fact,

¹ During the exhibition, the narrative accompanied the group of paintings, providing additional explanation and impact to the visual representation. The narrative is quoted in Raymond Lister, *Victorian Narrative Paintings*. London: Museum Press, 1966, p. 54.

victims not only of male domination and seduction, but of a social system that stigmatized and ostracized them for their fall.

In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate that the novelistic depictions of the fallen woman show her being judged by society on the basis of her sexual behaviour, regardless of her character and values. The stigma she endured was based largely on how far her sexual behaviour deviated from the ideal woman who was the model of virtue, purity, innocence, submissiveness, and self-sacrifice. While a fallen woman's noble inner qualities of selflessness and innocence may have paralleled those same traits of the ideal woman, she was still condemned on the basis of her lack of sexual purity. I will argue that although Nancy in *Oliver Twist*; Lady Isabel in *East Lynne*; and Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* exhibit the inner qualities of the ideal woman, the novels depict them as being judged on the basis of their sexual lapses, and they are ultimately removed from British society through their deaths. In particular, Nancy and Tess, whose inner nobility of character is insisted upon by their authors, are not saved from the conventional literary death of the fallen woman.

Additionally, each of the fallen women in the novels *Oliver Twist*, *East Lynne* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* comes from a different social class, yet each is labeled as fallen as a result of sexual exploitation. It is noteworthy, however, that although each author depicts the fallen woman, the two male authors, Dickens and Hardy, are less critical of Nancy and Tess than Ellen Wood is of her character, Lady Isabel. This suggests that a gender bias is at play in the texts. In other words, based on these three novels, one might

conclude that women were harsher critics of other women who sexually transgressed than were men.

Clearly Dickens sympathizes with Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, and although she is depicted as a prostitute, Dickens paints her life as one of unending abuse. Nancy belongs to the lowest class of London's underworld. In his preface to the third edition, Dickens writes that he purposely placed her among "the most criminal and degraded of London's population" (Dickens 456), and for the sake of authenticity, he did not "abate one hole in the Dodger's coat, or one scrap of curl-paper in [Nancy's] dishevelled hair" (Dickens 458-9). Furthermore, Nancy is portrayed not only as a fallen woman and prostitute, but also as a thief, living amongst thieves. Nancy emphatically tells Fagin, "I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this (pointing to Oliver). I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since" (OT 133). Thievery, prostitution, abuse and misuse are all Nancy has known since she was a child.

In his novel, *Oliver Twist*, Dickens makes a departure from the Newgate novels that were popular in the first half of the century by explicitly depicting the conditions of the slums. Instead of romanticizing the criminal world, Dickens portrays the filthy squalor and sordid life of the criminal element of London (Meckier 3). It is not surprising, therefore, that Oliver's first impression of the streets haunted by Nancy, Fagin and Sikes is that of filth and poverty: "A dirtier or more wretched place [Oliver] had never seen" (OT 63).

Although Dickens admitted that he was presenting characters who may be "very coarse and shocking," (Dickens 456), making the lower-class or working-class female a criminal was a relatively safe strategy for the Victorian novelist. Defining the female

criminal “by class as well as gender” did not frighten or threaten middle-class readers (Morris 56). In a society ruled by class, social status often served as an implicit marker when identifying female wrongdoing. The fact that Nancy is a member of London’s underclass serves to reinforce the sympathy elicited for her, but as well, it implicitly “affirms [Dickens’s] adherence to the Victorian truism that deviant women were different in kind from normal (that is, middle-class) women” (Morris 56). In other words, it was not shocking to the Victorian mind that a woman of the lower classes should be characterized as a thief and prostitute. Victorians largely accepted that the environment of the slums fostered criminal activity given the filth, poverty, and disease so endemic to the poor and working-class districts.

Dickens’s placement of Nancy in the quagmire of poverty not only satisfies his purpose of presenting an accurate depiction of the London underworld, but also clearly reinforces the cultural stereotype of the female criminal. Victorian women were not judged solely by their behaviour. A woman’s mere appearance could damn her in the eyes of society and serve as a tool of judgment. An anonymous article published in the 1866 issue of *Cornhill Magazine* observed that slovenliness marked the woman criminal, encouraging the reader to:

take a walk through some of the by-streets of London, [you] will see slovenliness exemplified [...] in those awfully wretched-looking creatures that lounge about or squat down at the entrance of the courts with dirty faces, hair uncombed, a kerchief tied over the half-exposed bosom. Dozens of such [you] may see any day, their very countenances looking something less than human. When a woman gets to be utterly careless of her personal appearance—personal cleanliness—you may be sure that she is careful for nothing else that is good. (*Cornhill Magazine* 155)

Given this cultural view, it is not surprising that Dickens’s introduction of Nancy, together with her friend Bet, is an immediate indictment of character:

They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed, as there is no doubt they were. (OT 71)

The first comment the narrator makes about Nancy reflects a lack of grooming, and she is implicitly defined as deviant by her untidy dress. Nancy is described as being ‘nice,’ but certainly not ‘angelic.’ The social implications of Nancy’s appearance are especially pronounced when compared to the narrator’s introduction of Rose Maylie:

[Rose Maylie] was in the lovely bloom and spring-time of womanhood; at that age when, if ever angels be for God’s good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be without impiety supposed to abide in such as hers. She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould, so mild and gentle, so pure and beautiful, that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions. (OT 235)

The contrast between these two descriptions is glaring, especially if one takes into consideration the fact that both of these girls are seventeen.² These descriptions encapsulate the polarity of Victorian thinking of women as either angelic and pure, or fallen and ruined.

There was little room for middle ground regarding the Victorian cultural view of female indiscretion. Victorians commonly believed that if a woman fell into sexual transgression, the next logical step would be prostitution (Walkowitz 19). In the minds of many middle-class Victorians there was no difference between “sexual lapse and sexual sale” (Morgentaler 130). A woman who was morally tainted was not only stigmatized, she was considered a contagion and separated from respectable society. J. B. Talbot, a prominent Victorian Christian leader, asserted that every fallen woman “spreads with

² In his notes to the text of *Oliver Twist*, Philip Horne quotes critics Edward Guiliano and Philip Arthur William Collins: “If Nancy came under Fagin’s influence when she was half Oliver’s age, say five years old, and since she has been [with him] for twelve years, she is...seventeen years old” (504).

impurity the most frightful contagion and immorality” (quoted in Watt 14). Through the character of Nancy, Dickens challenges the common Victorian notion that the prostitute was “the source of disease, moral pollution and degradation” (Watt 13). By making Nancy “a pawn in the hands of Fagin and Sikes,” Dickens defies the notion that women were the source of corruption (Watt 13).

The essence of Dickens’s criticism of Victorian social values lies in the fact that Nancy is not responsible for her corruption. In fact, Nancy never had an opportunity to be innocent. She was an orphan of five years old when she came under Fagin’s influence: “I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as [Oliver]” (OT 133). Quite literally, “Nancy was ruined before she had a chance to understand the meaning of the word” (Watt 13). She fell into prostitution and a life of thievery, not so much from choice, or due to the fact that she was an amoral human being, but because, like many prostitutes of her day, she had no alternatives.

Contrary to popular Victorian belief, the prostitute of Victorian London had much in common with the “poor women who had to eke out a precarious living in the urban job market” (Walkowitz 15). Rather than being women without any ethical values whatsoever, many prostitutes “shared many of the cultural values of their class” (Walkowitz 15). Many had been servants or had worked as laundresses or as street sellers (Walkowitz 15). Many prostitutes were around the age of sixteen when they began to ‘walk the streets’ for a living. Many were orphans or had left home for economic reasons. They were left on their own without any safety net, either social or familial (Walkowitz 17). Many “poor working women often drifted into prostitution because they felt powerless to assert themselves and alter their lives in any other way” (Walkowitz 21).

The prostitute of the nineteenth century was not a totally debased, morally void and evil human being. She was, more often than not, a woman desperately trying to survive in a critical and judgmental world which offered her few opportunities.

Nancy fits perfectly the profile of the nineteenth-century London prostitute. Her loyalty to Sikes is born of fear of abandonment:

When such as me, who have no certain roof but the coffin-lid, and no friend in sickness or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any man, and let him fill the place that parents, home, and friends filled once, or that has been a blank through all our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us? (OT 338)

For Nancy, Fagin and Sikes have taken the place of parent, sibling and husband. Fagin and Sikes, as evil and abusive as they are, are preferable to the indifferent streets of London. Nancy is a “beaten-down prostitute, practicing one of the few trades available to Victorian females” (Auerbach 158). Nancy lives as a prostitute, not because of an innate depravity, but because Fagin’s control is too much to withstand (Watt 14). Fagin and Sikes control Nancy through manipulation, threats and violence. When Fagin wants Nancy to ‘recapture’ Oliver, it is only “by dint of alternate threats, promises and bribes, [Nancy] was ultimately prevailed upon to undertake the commission” (OT 101).

Despite his inherent sympathy for Nancy, Dickens does not hesitate to portray her as a crafty and shrewd thief with a degenerate lifestyle. For example, Nancy is presented in several places in the text as consuming alcohol. In one instance, she is even described as being “very far gone indeed” (OT 211). The portrayal of Nancy drinking is significant since the Victorians severely stigmatized women who were ‘moral offenders.’ A woman’s character could be indicted for alcoholism as well as for prostitution. The Victorians considered women who drank to be morally debased as “their most brutal and

repulsive penchants came to the surface” (Harris 243). In fact, “men who killed inebriated wives or mistresses were treated with extreme leniency” (Harris 243). Drinking came to be an explanation for both criminal and sexually transgressive behaviour. In 1889 L. Gordon Rylands stated in his book, *Crime: Its Causes and Remedy*, that “drink has been found to be the most effective cause of crime” (115). Women who became involved in either drinking or crime were viewed as betraying “the very ideal of womanhood as passive, respectable, and virtuous” (Zedner 2). In 1846, the journal *The Female’s Friend* warned that the female criminal “abandons herself to sensuality, drinks to drown her sense of shame, becomes unsexed in her manners, practices every vice for the sake of a living, and in her delirium of guilt and infamy spares neither men or women” (Qtd. in Zedner 31).

However, the fact that Nancy is a prostitute does not establish the essence of her character. Her prostitution is rather understated in the novel. Nancy is represented more as a “suffering wife than as an agonized prostitute” (Slater 340). She is portrayed in a variety of domestic situations: “The table was covered with tea-things [...and] Nancy was busily engaged in preparing breakfast” (OT 169). She also acts as nurse to Sikes, and as a result, he comments: ““If it hadn’t been for [Nancy], I might have died.”” (OT 322). Nancy nurtures and protects Oliver, and she places concern for Oliver and loyalty to Sikes above her own safety. By shifting the focus from degenerate prostitute to battered mistress, Dickens elicits the reader’s sympathy for Nancy, and through her domestication, she can be viewed as possessing (at least some of) the qualities of the ideal woman.

Slater asserts that “it is axiomatic with Dickens that every prostitute, however brazen and flaunting she may appear, is, sooner or later, tormented by shame and remorse

and secretly yearns for restoration to society as a good (i.e. domestic) woman” (Slater 340). It is precisely through Nancy’s domestication, and her instinctive nurturing of Oliver, that Dickens reveals the scope of Nancy’s personality. William Douglas Morrison, the nineteenth-century prison sociologist, noted that women are less disposed to crime than men because:

[women] are better morally. The care and nurture of children has been their lot in life for untold centuries; the duties of maternity have perpetually kept alive a certain number of unselfish instincts; these instincts have become part and parcel of woman’s natural inheritance, and, as a result of possessing them to a larger extent than man, she is less disposed to crime. (Morrison 152)

While, on the one hand, Nancy’s deviant qualities are revealed when the reader sees her in a drunken state, on the other, her ‘angelic’ qualities are manifested when she prepares meals, nurses Sikes, and protects Oliver.

Nancy is portrayed as a woman with multiple dimensions. Unlike Fagin and Sikes, who are painted with an evil brush, and likewise, unlike characters such as Oliver and Rose Maylie who are completely pure and innocent, Nancy is an ambiguous character. Dickens reminds the reader that Rose might have experienced Nancy’s fate had she not been rescued as an orphaned child and raised by Mrs. Maylie:

‘Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady,’ cried [Nancy], ‘that you [Rose] had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and—something worse than all—as I have been from my cradle; I may use the word, for the alley and the gutter were mine, as they will be my deathbed.’ (OT 334)

Dickens’s treatment of Nancy reflects an attempt to “demythicize the fallen woman by making her victim rather than agent” (Auerbach 158). Through the character of Nancy, Dickens challenges the Victorian polarity of thought that a woman can only be

“fallen or not” or “totally corrupt or pure” (Watt 12). While Nancy may on the one hand be brazen and outspoken, her feminine capacity for sympathy and self-sacrifice clearly coincides with the Victorian notion of feminine virtues (Morris 59). Nancy embodies the essence of goodness and loyalty, while at the same time manifesting the outward appearance of corruption.

The housemaids who judge Nancy when she first meets with Rose Maylie are representative of mainstream Victorian thinking that there could only exist two types of women: the virtuous and the fallen: “[...] Nancy’s doubtful character raised a vast quantity of chaste wrath in the bosoms of four housemaids, who remarked with great fervor that the creature was a disgrace to her sex, and strongly advocated her being thrown ruthlessly into the kennel” (OT 331). The allusions to animal imagery underscore the fact that the housemaids judge Nancy from her outward appearance alone, relegating her to a less than human status. In addition, the fact that the housemaids are physically separated from Rose and Nancy and positioned outside the room where they meet, further emphasizes the fact that the housemaids are unable to “see the truth of the matter [...] that] Nancy is both pure and corrupt at the same time” (Watt 16).

To the Victorian mind, the fallen woman and the prostitute were dangerous, mysterious, repulsive and yet, at the same time, compelling. The fallen woman’s image as outcast, coupled with her exciting blend of innocence and experience, “came to embody everything in womanhood that was dangerously, tragically, and triumphantly beyond social boundaries” (Auerbach 150). By virtue of Nancy’s role as a prostitute, she is associated in the Victorian mind with passion.

Dickens, however, does not link Nancy to sexual passion, but rather, at times to the passion of bravado, and at other times to intense emotion. She is described as “hysterical” (OT 122), bursting into a “loud laugh” (O.T. 158), and “indulging in [a] temporary display of violence” (OT 211). The notion of passion is also linked to animal imagery when Sikes refers to Nancy’s passionate nature, drawing on an image of strength: “I thought I had tamed her, but she’s as bad as ever...I think she’s got a touch of that fever in her blood yet [...]” (OT 373). It is precisely a woman’s capacity for energy and passion that the Victorian man found disturbing. The narrator reinforces this view: “There is something about a roused woman: especially if she adds to all her other strong passions, the fierce impulses of recklessness and despair: which few men like to provoke” (OT 131).

It is noteworthy, however, that when describing Nancy’s emotive states, Dickens employs the word “passion” only when characterizing Nancy in the role of protecting Oliver. When Nancy recaptures Oliver and returns him to Fagin’s control, Nancy “passionately” intervenes when Fagin “inflict[s] a smart blow on Oliver’s shoulders with the club” (OT 131). The word “passion” is linked to Nancy’s response to Fagin a total of four times during this scene. She is described in “the passion of rage;” with “strong passions;” and finally, she cries “passionately” to Sikes and Fagin to keep the dog away from Oliver, with a “passion [that] was frightful to see” (OT 131, 2). Later, when Nancy meets Rose to reveal her knowledge concerning Oliver’s parentage, Nancy exclaims: ““Oh, lady, lady!’ she said, clasping her hands passionately before her face, ‘if there was more like you, there would be fewer like me.’” (OT 333).

Clearly Nancy displays a passionate nature; however, it is interesting to note that when she is pleading for her own life, the use of the word “passion” does not enter into the text. In fact, while struggling with “the strength of mortal fear,” Nancy does not become passionately violent, but rather tries to invoke calm, insisting: “—I—I won’t scream, or cry—not once, hear me—speak to me—tell me what I have done!” (OT 396). While Nancy uses her passion to assist Oliver, she is paralyzed when it comes to extricating herself from Sikes’s influence (Morris 57), or even in defending herself against the brutal attack that results in her death. Nancy’s passion is associated with her sacrificial actions. Her passion is portrayed as an intense, emotional response borne from her ‘motherly’ and ‘angelic’ instinct to protect Oliver.

Coupled with the fact that Nancy is associated with notions of domesticity, Nancy evolves in the text from thief and prostitute to angelic redeemer. Nancy appears to Oliver as an answer to prayer:

Falling upon his knees, [Oliver] prayed Heaven to spare him [...] if any aid were to be raised up for a poor outcast boy, who had never known the love of friends or kindred, it might come to him now, when desolate and deserted, he stood alone in the midst of wickedness and guilt. He had concluded his prayer, but still remained with his head buried in his hands, when a rustling noise aroused him [...] Oliver raised the candle above his head, and looked towards the door. It was Nancy. (OT 164-5)

Nancy comes to Oliver as his redeemer. Oliver comes to realize “that Nancy is the only caring force in the criminal world” (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature* 38). Not only is Nancy being transformed figuratively from demon to angel, but also her physical appearance is altered from strong and robust to “very pale” (OT 165).

It is significant that Nancy does not appear in a weakened condition until she has undergone the mental and emotional struggle that will result in Oliver's salvation. It is not until Nancy has redeemed herself through her self-sacrifice that she is represented as physically weak: "[Nancy was] so pale and reduced with watching and privation that there would have been considerable difficulty in recognizing her as the same Nancy who has already figured in this tale [...]" (OT 318). Nancy's representation as a deviant female is subsumed by her sanctifying role as Oliver's salvation. Her strength and vitality dissipate as she is transformed in the text from harlot to saint, reinforcing her association with the physically weak ideal woman and distancing her from the strong, passionate, dangerous woman.

Notwithstanding the fact that Nancy evolves in the text from the harlot to saint, she is associated with water imagery, which, in turn, represents the end, or the death, of the fallen woman. It is significant that when Nancy meets with Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow, she coaxes them out of the public view and down toward the river: "'Not here,' said Nancy hurriedly. 'I am afraid to speak to you here. Come away—out of the public road—down the steps yonder.' [...] The steps to which the girl had pointed were those which [...] form a landing-stairs from the river" (OT 381). Nancy's association with the water as well as with dark, secluded places serves to define her. Again Rose and Nancy are implicitly contrasted: "'This is far enough,' said [Mr. Brownlow...] 'I will not suffer [Rose] to go any further.'" (OT382). Mr. Brownlow makes it clear that he hesitates to go down to the river in an effort to protect Rose from the potential danger of the dark river. Mr. Brownlow instinctively resists allowing the chaste Rose to be contaminated by Nancy's dark, threatening world. He declares to Nancy: "'Why not [...] let me speak to

you above there, where it is light, and there is something stirring, instead of bringing us to this dark and dismal hole?"(OT 382). He further stereotypes Nancy when he continues: "Many people would have distrusted you too much to have come even so far, but you see I am willing to humor you." (OT 382). Mr. Brownlow speaks to Nancy with condescension, automatically judging her, as does everyone else, by her appearance alone.

It is only after Nancy has provided Mr. Brownlow and Rose with "most valuable assistance" (OT 387) that Mr. Brownlow offers her sanctuary. It is significant, however, that while he offers Nancy "quiet asylum [...] in England," he quickly adds, "or, if you fear to remain here, in some foreign country [...] and leave as utter an absence of all traces behind you, as if you were to disappear from the earth this moment." (OT 387). While on the surface, it appears that Mr. Brownlow's offer of refuge is in Nancy's best interest, implicit within the altruistic offer is the removal from respectable society of the contaminated fallen woman. With Nancy's removal from the public gaze, respectable society would be purged of the taint of the morally corrupt woman.

As well, it is significant that although Mr. Brownlow offers Nancy asylum, "he confidently assures Rose that Nancy could not be persuaded to accept the offer" (Tromp 45). Before Nancy even has a chance to respond to Mr. Brownlow's offer he states to Rose: "I fear [Nancy can]not." (OT 388). It is only after this preemptive remark by Mr. Brownlow that Nancy replies: "No, sir [...] I am chained to my old life." (OT 388). Nancy then goes on to acknowledge what must be the end to the fallen woman's life:

'Look before you, lady. Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as me who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing to care for or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last.' (OT 389)

While the water imagery is suggestive of the dark, dangerous and tainted side of Nancy, water is also suggestive of life and nurturing. Dickens draws on this ambiguous imagery with the character of Nancy. On the one hand Nancy is associated with the dark world of evil and crime, and on the other she is linked to the noble virtues of loyalty, sacrifice and goodness: “Nancy’s shame and honesty make her more noble, and the errand of mercy she undertakes makes her virtuous” (Watt 16).

Drawing on Christian ideology, it appears to be that through the sacrifice of death Nancy is sanctified. While Dickens adheres to the Victorian doctrine that demands the final sacrifice of death for the woman who has sexually transgressed, he shifts the reader’s focus from the sin that corrupts to the act of virtue that redeems. Nancy is a representation of a woman of the lower class of nineteenth-century London who is *more sinned against than sinning*. She exhibits some of the noblest virtues of all of Dickens’s characters in *Oliver Twist*. Nancy refuses to take money from Rose Maylie in return for the information she has provided which will benefit Oliver, and at great personal risk she determines to do what she can to help him. Nancy, without a doubt, exemplifies many of the attributes of the ‘angel of the house,’ while bearing the stain and stigma of sin. Nancy represents a character who is both pure and corrupt. Tragically, however, because Nancy’s purity is a purity of heart, not a purity of body, she endures the conventional end of the fallen woman. Through her death, the sexually contaminated woman is removed.

Lady Isabel, of *East Lynne* by Ellen Wood, has the distinction of being the only female character I will be discussing in this thesis who is born and raised in the aristocratic class. This fact makes her flaws, which are of a moral and not of a criminal

nature, all the more interesting. It is noteworthy that none of the authors whose works I examine in this thesis saw fit to portray a woman born into the upper class as a criminal. Clearly a reluctance existed among Victorian writers to place a 'bona fide' aristocrat with blood on her hands at the center of a novel.

While the existence of the lower-class woman criminal was, if not expected, at least accepted, the existence of the woman criminal in the middle and upper classes presented a dilemma. Victorians largely accepted that the environment of the slums fostered criminal activity because of the filth, poverty, and disease so endemic to the poor and working-class districts; however, no such excuse existed for the criminal woman of the upper and middle classes. As well, while it may be conceded that a criminal woman of the lower class *might* have some angelic qualities, the reverse idea was not so heartily embraced. There existed a reticence to admit that an angelic woman of the upper class could possess criminal qualities.

So, while Lady Isabel may be sexually tainted, she is not a 'criminal' per se. Unlike Nancy, Lady Isabel's wrongdoing will not lead her to the gallows. That said, however, although Lady Isabel's 'crime' does not contravene any legal statute, her crime clearly contravenes social and moral values. Her adultery and desertion of her husband and children are judged by society, and she endures the stigma of the fallen woman. Moreover, she is ostracized from respectable British society and finally removed from it completely through her death.

Although Lady Isabel is portrayed as a fallen woman, she is the victim of all those around her. Lady Isabel, the daughter of the bankrupt Lord Mount Severn, becomes motherless at the age of twelve and is orphaned by her father's death shortly after the

novel begins. Prior to Lord Mount Severn's death, Archibald Carlyle, a young, successful lawyer, negotiates to purchase the family estate, East Lynne. Bewitched by Lady Isabel, he proposes, but Lady Isabel hesitates because she is attracted to her dangerous, distant cousin, Francis Levison. Lady Isabel reflects to herself: "It is not only that I do not love Mr. Carlyle, but I fear I do love, or very nearly love, Francis Levison" (EL166). Lady Isabel finally consents to Carlyle's proposal after "a feeling shot across her mind, for the first time that [Francis Levison] was false and heartless" (EL167).

Before the newly married Carlyles return from their honeymoon, Mr. Carlyle's critical, penny-pinching, spinster sister, Cornelia ('Corny'), takes up residence in East Lynne. She declares emphatically to her brother:

'I have let [my house...] You cannot turn me out of East Lynne [...] Your wife will be mistress [...] but I shall save her a world of trouble in management [...] I dare say she never gave a domestic order in her life.'
(EL191)

Miss Carlyle's influence over the household grows until Lady Isabel is mistress in name only. Haunted by the suspicion that Carlyle is engaged in a romantic affair with her rival, Barbara Hare, frustrated by her lack of authority in her own home and over her own children, and encouraged by the visiting Francis Levison, Lady Isabel abandons her home and children and flees with Levison for France. There she bears his illegitimate child. After Levison abandons her, Lady Isabel is involved in a train accident leaving her baby dead and her face severely disfigured. While Lady Isabel is residing in France, Archibald Carlyle initiates divorce proceedings and subsequently marries Barbara Hare. Through a chain of events Lady Isabel finds herself back at East Lynne disguised as Madam Vine and in the role of governess to the children of the newly married Archibald and Barbara (Hare) Carlyle.

While Nancy evolves in *Oliver Twist* from harlot to angel, Lady Isabel, who is initially portrayed as the ideal ‘angel of the house,’ falls into sin from which she is never able to completely extricate or exonerate herself. When Lady Isabel is first introduced to Carlyle he is:

[...] not quite sure whether it was a human being: he almost thought it more like an angel. A light, graceful, girlish form, a face of surpassing beauty, beauty that is rarely seen, save from the imagination of a painter, dark shining curls falling on her neck and shoulders smooth as a child’s, fair delicate arms decorated with pearls, and a flowing dress of costly white lace. Altogether the vision did indeed look to the lawyer as one from a fairer world than this. (EL 49)

The “girlish form,” the “face of surpassing beauty,” and the “dress of costly white lace” combine to portray a virginal angel, not a woman. The fact that she is referred to as “it” and “a vision” underscores the fact that she is not viewed as human. Not once in this passage is Lady Isabel referred to by her name, or even by the pronoun ‘she.’ The fact that she is a nameless object of beauty underscores her role in society as a powerless paragon. As an ‘angel,’ Lady Isabel embodies the qualities of the ideal woman: “submissive, innocent, pure, gentle, self-sacrificing, patient, sensible [...] modest, quiet, and altruistic” (Zedner 15). The narrator intrudes into the text, demonstrating Lady Isabel’s patience as she submits to Miss Carlyle’s tyrannical rule:

[Lady Isabel] has not been allowed to indulge a will of her own [...] in her own house she has been less free than any one of her servants. You have curbed her, [Miss Carlyle], and snapped at her, and made her feel that she was but a slave to your caprices and temper [...] she has borne it all in silence, like a patient angel [...] never [...] complaining to [her husband]. (Wood 331-2)

Ironically, it is through fulfilling the role of the nineteenth-century ideal woman that Lady Isabel becomes the “villainess” who deserts her husband and children. It is because of her patience and child-like submission that she succumbs to the frustrations that finally

drive her from her home. If Lady Isabel had been able to effect change in her life, or, if she had been free to articulate her fears, frustrations and anxieties, she might have been saved from the fall that forever separates her from her home and family. The cultural imperative that women submit silently to their husbands created an atmosphere that required women “to endure a passivity that verge[d] on paralysis” (Barickman 10). In short, the choice for Lady Isabel, as well as for all nineteenth-century women, appears to be between submission in silence or banishment from society.

Lady Isabel is restrained in a society that “perceived women as childlike, irrational, sexually unstable [...and] rendered them legally powerless” (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 73). Ann Cvetkovich asserts that “repression rather than oppression is the focus of the novel’s drama; women whose feelings are generated by their structural position bear the additional burden of being forced to hide those feelings, stay silent, and put up with their lot in life” (105).

Lady Isabel is not only the victim of Miss Carlyle, but of her late father and her husband as well. Lord Mount Severn, Lady Isabel’s father, neglects to provide a settlement for Lady Isabel, leaving her penniless at his death. He confesses his error to Mr. Carlyle: “My wife had possessed no fortune; I was already deep in my career of extravagance; and neither of us thought of making provisions for [Lady Isabel].” (EL 47). Lady Isabel’s complete dependence on Mr. Carlyle arises out of her father’s selfish neglect and “dramatizes for the reader the emotional cost of women’s economic dependence, which forces them to accept hardships without complaint” (Cvetkovich 101). Miss Carlyle, whose move into the Carlyle home is a function of thrift rather than

necessity, continually reminds Lady Isabel of her impoverished state and the expense Lady Isabel represents to her brother's financial security:

Not a day passed but Miss Carlyle, by dint of hints and innuendoes, contrived to impress upon Lady Isabel the unfortunate blow to his own interests that Mr. Carlyle's marriage had been, the ruinous expense she had entailed upon the family. (EL 216)

Lady Isabel's economic dependence upon her husband is not only a reminder, but also a reinforcement of her powerlessness.

Lady Isabel's abandonment of her husband and children is more specifically the result of her jealousy of her husband's relationship with Barbara Hare than her seduction by Levison: "Lady Isabel [...] saw Barbara's touch upon her husband's arm, marked her agitation, and heard her words [...] Never, since her marriage, had Lady Isabel's jealousy been excited as it was excited that evening" (EL 293). It is because Lady Isabel is convinced of Mr. Carlyle's infidelity that she allows Levison to persuade her to leave: "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" (EL 322).

Although Carlyle is portrayed as "true and faithful [...] upright and good [...] one of nature's gentlemen: one that England may be proud of, as having grown upon her soil" (EL 360), he is responsible for Lady Isabel's misgivings, frustration and anxiety. Because he does not trust and confide in his wife, but rather in his sister, he bears an element of culpability for her fall. It is Lady Isabel's misunderstanding of Miss Carlyle's reference to the 'old affair' that leads to Lady Isabel's fall: "Now, Miss Carlyle's 'old affair' referred to one sole and sore point—Richard Hare [Barbara's brother]: and so Mr. Carlyle understood it. Lady Isabel unhappily believed that any 'old affair' could only

have reference to the bygone loves of her husband and Barbara” (EL 308-9). Miss Carlyle rightly understands the ‘old affair’ to refer to a matter involving Barbara’s brother, Richard; however, Lady Isabel misinterprets the message. Although Lady Isabel pleads with her husband to confide in her: ““Must the business be kept from me?”” (EL 309), Carlyle further exacerbates the misunderstanding by his refusal to allow Lady Isabel into his confidence:

He was silent for a moment, considering whether he might tell [his wife]. But it was impossible [...] to no one would he betray [the information]: unless Miss Corny, with her questioning, drew [more information] out of him: and she was safe and true. (EL 309)

By treating Lady Isabel like the childlike ‘angel of the house’ and refusing to address her concerns, Carlyle effectively cuts off the necessary information that Lady Isabel requires in order to believe in his marital fidelity.

By seducing Lady Isabel, Francis Levison further victimizes her by inciting and encouraging her jealousy of her husband:

Captain Levison would be strolling down like a serpent behind the hedge, watching all [of Mr. Carlyle’s] movements, watching his interviews with Barbara, if any took place, watching Mr. Carlyle turn into the Grove...and perhaps watching Barbara run out of the house to meet him. It was all retailed, with miserable exaggeration, to Lady Isabel, whose jealousy, as a natural sequence, grew feverish in its extent. (EL 296-7)

Once Levison convinces Lady Isabel to escape with him, he victimizes her once again by deserting her after she gives birth to their baby in France. He heartlessly tells her: ““Well Isabel—you must be aware that it is an awful sacrifice for a man in my position to marry a divorced woman.”” (EL 344). As a fallen woman, Lady Isabel is beyond the reaches of society:

The facts of her hideous case stood before her, naked and bare. She had willfully abandoned her husband, her children, her home; she had cast

away her good name and her position; and she had deliberately offended God. What had she gained in return? What was she? A poor outcast; one of those whom men pity, and whom women shrink from; a miserable, friendless creature [...] (EL 349)

Wood symbolically removes Lady Isabel from English society by physically placing her in France. She is outcast and rejected, not only by her family and society, but by Levison as well. Zedner suggests that “the ferocity with which the fallen woman was condemned seems to suggest that, having repudiated every aspect of her assigned role, she was no longer considered to merit male respect” (Zedner 42). This is apparently the case with Lady Isabel as she does not even merit the respect of her depraved lover who is later revealed to be not only a seducer, but a murderer as well. Given the moral parameters of the day, it was necessary for Wood to displace Lady Isabel because “the Victorian imagination isolated the fallen woman pitilessly from a social context, preferring to imagine her as [a] destitute and drowned prostitute or errant wife cast beyond the human community, because of her uneasy implications for wives who stayed at home” (Auerbach 159). The moral sin of the Victorian woman who sexually transgressed “is equivalent to death, since she dies socially when she falls into disgrace” (Cvetkovich 102).

Even before Lady Isabel has an opportunity to experience the social stigma and isolation of the fallen woman, she repents of her rash mistake: “Never had she experienced a moment’s calm, or peace, or happiness, since that fatal night of quitting her home [...] The very hour of her departure she awoke to what she had done: the guilt [...] a never-dying anguish, took possession of her soul forever” (EL 334). In adhering to the Victorian convention that death is preferable to sexual transgression, the narrator warns the reader:

Lady—wife—mother! Should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you waken! Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though 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 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! (EL 334-5)

The fact that the narrator exhorts women to “pray for patience, pray for strength” to endure the hardships of marriage and to resist sexual temptation underscores the powerlessness of the Victorian woman. The narrator “preaches submission and acceptance rather than challenging the underlying economic structures that force women to marry in the first place” (Cvetkovich 108). The novel reinforces the Victorian notion that a woman’s happiness is secure only within the confinement of marriage. Additionally, the low probability of successfully escaping an unhappy marriage is underscored (Cvetkovich 103).

Marriage, as an economic necessity, becomes a prison for women, and because of a lack of choices, the Victorian woman was presumed to be better off dead than transgressing her marriage vows. The narrator interjects an insightful comment on the Victorian cultural view of fidelity: “Could the fate that was to overtake [Lady Isabel] have been foreseen by [her father], he would have struck her down to death, in his love, as she stood before him, rather than suffer her to enter upon it” (EL 51). It appears strange to the modern reader that striking down a daughter in death can be considered an act of love and is preferable to her disgrace. The very juxtaposition of ‘striking her down to death’ and ‘in his love’ appears to be paradoxical.

The Victorian demand that the fallen woman die at the end of her story not only symbolized her punishment, but also the ritualistic construction of honour: "Death does not simply punish or obliterate the fallen woman: its ritual appearance alone does her justice" (Auerbach 161). Rather than dying, however, Lady Isabel exists in "an emotional purgatory plagued by remorse and guilt that can never be expressed" (Cvetkovich 102). Where Lady Isabel silently bore her frustrations before she abandoned Carlyle, when she returns in the guise of governess, her silence is that of suffering, and it "now becomes her earned punishment" (Cvetkovich 102). Lady Isabel returns to East Lynne disguised as the governess, Madam Vine. She is not only excluded from the love of her family, but she is also forced to observe and silently endure the death of her child, William, as a stranger would. On her deathbed, she declares to Carlyle: "Think what it was to watch William's decaying strength; to be alone with [Archibald Carlyle] in [William's] dying hour, and not be able to say, He is my child as well as yours!" (EL 682).

Disfigured by a train accident in France, Lady Isabel is veiled and unrecognizable. Lady Isabel's "physical disfigurement reflects her moral deformity" (Reed 295). As the veiled Madame Vine, Lady Isabel is reunited with her family, but her sin has forever changed her and separated her from the family she loves: "And what was she? Not even the welcomed guest of an hour [...] but an interloper; a criminal woman who had thrust herself into the house [...]" (EL 490). She has ceased to be Lady Isabel, but instead she has taken on a disguise, and as Reed asserts, "she has truly become the pinched and veiled Madame Vine" (Reed 295). Lady Isabel's sin has altered her identity. Moreover, it is significant that although Lady Isabel's wrongdoing is of a moral and not a criminal nature, she, nevertheless, views herself as a "criminal." Clearly, this supports the

suggestion that the Victorians viewed the sexual slippage of a woman as a crime. It is for her 'crime' that Lady Isabel endures a self-imposed punishment.

While it may be argued that in the end Lady Isabel's death is her punishment for her sexual transgression, in fact it is when she returns to her former home as Madame Vine that silent endurance becomes her punishment for her former lack of love for her husband:

When Lady Isabel was Mr. Carlyle's wife, she had never wholly loved him. The very utmost homage that esteem, admiration, affection, could give, was his; but that mysterious passion called by the name of love...had not been given to him [...] From the very night she had come back to East Lynne, her love for Mr. Carlyle had burst forth with an intensity never before felt. (EL 655)

Her self-inflicted punishment is manifested in her silence as she resolves to "take up her cross daily and bear it" (EL 455). Punishment for a lack of love appears to be the result of not heeding the narrator's earlier advice:

Do we not all, men and women, become indifferent to our toys when we hold them securely in possession? Young lady, when he, who is soon to be your lord and master, protests to you that he shall always be as ardent a lover as he is now [...] don't reproach him when disappointment comes [...] if [it] look[s] like indifference or coldness [...] you will do well to put up with it, for it will never now be otherwise. Never: the heyday of early love [...] is past. (EL 247)

It is interesting to note that the narrator's warning narrows its focus from applying to men and women equally to targeting only women who must "adjust to the nature of men's affections" (Cvetkovich 108). Implicit within the text is the warning to the Victorian reader that, while the wife may not expect the "heyday of early love" to last, she must still 'love' her husband, for if she only 'appreciates' him, she may be subject to the same temptations, or better stated, frustrations, experienced by Lady Isabel. Cvetkovich asserts that Lady Isabel provided a role-model for the Victorian reader. Through Lady Isabel's

example of suffering, the Victorian woman could “receive confirmation” that silent, “heroic suffering” is the appropriate wifely response in marriage rather than to “question the social [...] conditions that render her helpless” in the first place (103).

Lady Isabel’s abandonment of her children is central to the criticism of her motherhood. While the narrator might give Lady Isabel the benefit of the doubt in other areas, the fact that she deserts her children is scorned as unnatural: “Lady angels go wrong sometimes, you see; they are not universally immaculate. She must have been a queer angel, rather, to leave her children” (EL 387). Lady Isabel is, to all intents and purposes, dead to her children.

Lady Isabel does not defend her actions as the product of jealousy, frustration, and powerlessness, but rather, she attributes her act to madness: ““Oh Archibald, I was mad, I was mad! I could not have done it in anything but madness. Surely you will forget and forgive!”” (EL 681). This serves to underscore the view that a woman’s passions were interpreted as a product of instability and madness. The suppression of emotion was linked to womanhood and was “attributed to the pressures of a social propriety that demands that a woman disguise unrequited desire” (Cvetkovich 106). This view was reinforced by the accepted theories that “female insanity [was] specifically and confidently linked to the biological crises of the female life-cycle [...] during which the mind would be weakened and the symptoms of insanity might emerge” (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 55).

While madness may have prompted Lady Isabel to abandon her home, it is her shame for this action that finally kills her: ““My own sin I have surely expiated: I cannot expiate the shame I entailed upon you and upon our children.”” (EL 682). Her death is

“clearly the only proper response for someone in her situation, remorseful but socially irretrievable” (Hughes 115). Lady Isabel pays for her transgression through silent suffering, and ultimately it is through her death that she is restored to her dead son and redeemed in the sight of God. It is interesting to note that although she expects to receive forgiveness from God for her sin, “I am going on to [heaven to be with] William.” (EL 682), she does not expect the forgiveness and restoration of society. Lady Isabel’s eternal redemption is easier to obtain than her social restoration (Hughes 115). She is forever condemned by society for her rash and impetuous moral transgression. Imbedded within this conclusion is the unsettling implication that God is willing to forgive what man is not.

Like Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, Tess, in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, is characterized as being noble and pure of heart. Hardy, however, takes Dickens’s important assumption about Nancy’s character one step further. Hardy makes Tess’s character absolutely clear to the reader when he identifies Tess in the subtitle on the frontpiece of his novel as “A Pure Woman” (T 25). It is noteworthy that Hardy employs the word ‘pure,’ thereby reinforcing the fact that although Tess is a fallen woman, she is still virtuous. Moreover, it is significant that although Tess is ‘pure,’ she is the only character in all the novels I will be discussing in this thesis who actually suffers execution for her crime. By using the word ‘pure,’ Hardy seems to be asking the question: What makes a woman pure? As well, by opening the novel with the discovery of Tess’s connection to nobility, Hardy links the notions of purity and nobility, implicitly

asking the question: Does Tess's nobility make her pure? Is it her heredity, or is there an element of Tess's nature, aside from her bloodline, that serves to make Tess honorable?

Noble or not, Tess is victimized, not only in her death, but in her life as well. Born into an agrarian working-class family with aristocratic ancestral roots, Tess is encouraged by her mother to cement ties with the Stoke-d'Urberville family. Because of Tess's assumption of familial responsibility for her drunken father and overbearing mother, Tess moves from her home to work for the d'Urberville family. While in their employ, the unscrupulous Alec d'Urberville affects her sexual ruin. It is unclear whether Tess is raped or seduced. What is clear, however, is the fact that the sexual encounter results in the birth of an illegitimate child who later dies.

When Tess moves to an isolated farm as a milkmaid, she meets and falls in love with Angel Clare, the son of a middle-class parson. He subsequently woos and weds her. On their wedding night, Tess reveals her past to him. Although he tells her he can forgive her, he can no longer love her: "I do forgive you, but forgiveness is not all." "And [do you] love me?" [Tess asks in return] To this question he did not answer" (T 260). Angel abandons her, without making adequate provision for her. Heartlessly, he tells her: "If I can bring myself to bear [the shame of your fall]—if it is desirable, possible—I will come to you. But until I come to you it will be better that you should not try to come to me." (T 281). Like Lady Isabel, Tess is the victim of the anti-female bias prevalent in Victorian society. She is stigmatized and ostracized by her husband as well as by society.

The law, coupled with the construction of cultural values, places Tess in an impossible situation. Alec reappears, convincing her that if she will live with him he will provide for her now widowed mother and her siblings. After more than a year's silence

from Angel (who has gone to South America), and because of her sense of responsibility to her family, Tess reluctantly agrees to become Alec's mistress. When Angel appears to reclaim her, having decided that he can love her after all, Tess, in a passion, murders Alec in order to be reunited with Angel. It is for this crime that she ultimately pays with her life.

Tess shares none of the negative traits evident in other women criminals in Victorian literature. In fact, Tess "surpasses the conventional woman in looks, intelligence and charm. But because she is working-class and can be labeled as promiscuous, she pays with her life for breaking the law" (Morris 128). While this may be true in a general sense, the fact of the matter is that Tess is executed for her crime of murder, not for her crime of sexual lapse. The story of Tess "typifies the plight of physically and psychologically battered women who turn to violence as a last resort" (Morris 128). Furthermore, Hardy makes it clear that he does not view Tess as a criminal, but instead "portrays her death as a travesty of justice" (Morris 129). Tess's purity and nobility of heart flow from the fact that she spends her entire, short life fighting "her way through conventional comforts, hopes and dogmas" (Watt 164). However, despite her purity of intention, Tess is innocently victimized over and over again.

Unlike Nancy, who never had an opportunity to experience innocence, Hardy invokes the notion of innocence repeatedly when referring to Tess in both her appearance and her mannerisms: "[Tess] innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom" (T 69), she is described as having "large innocent eyes" (T 41), and her "beautiful feminine [form is...] practically blank as snow" (T 103). When Angel first sees Tess, he declares: "'What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature [Tess] is!'" (T 151). Even after Tess

divulges her past to Angel, she appears pure: “[Tess] looked absolutely pure. Nature, in her fantastic trickery, had set such a seal of maidenhood upon Tess’s countenance that [Angel] gazed at her with a stupefied air” (T 265). Unlike Nancy, whose appearance defines her as sexually loose, Tess embodies the appearance of the Victorian angel of the house. Throughout the novel, Hardy underscores Tess’s innocence. Ironically, however, it is precisely Tess’s innocence, so prized by Victorian culture, which leads to her downfall. After Tess returns from her employment at the d’Urbervilles, she confronts her mother for not making her aware of the dangers that unscrupulous men represent:

‘Oh mother, my mother!’ cried [Tess...] ‘I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o’learning in that way, and you did not help me!’ (T 112)

In her book, *The Mothers of England*, Sarah Ellis charges mothers with the responsibility of protecting the purity of their daughters from unprincipled men:

If ever, in the course of female experience, a mother’s protection and advice are necessary, it is at such times; for to witness the foolish practicing of ungenerous men upon the credulity of young girls, is as painful as it is humiliating—humiliating to think that the nature of woman should be such as to allow her to believe what is [...] so grossly insincere; and painful that the weak should thus be taken advantage of by the strong [...] but unfortunately an ungenerous man cares little about the mischief he is doing. (Ellis 349-50)

It is Tess’s innocence, coupled with her lack of experience, largely the result of an imprudent mother, which sets the stage for Tess’s sexual exploitation.

Virginia Morris asserts that Tess’s purity refers to her sexuality “despite her illegitimate child” (Morris 127). Furthermore, Tess is pure “because she is completely and totally womanly” (Morris 127). Before her unforgivable act of murder, there is little Tess can be blamed for. She is innocent, honest, patient, gentle, and submissive (Morris

127). She is the embodiment, in every way, of the ideal woman. In fact, “Hardy flings his heroine’s purity as a gauntlet at hypocritical social taboos” (Auerbach 168).

It is her beauty, delicately combined with her innocence, however, that both Alec and Angel find so utterly irresistible. Alec blames Tess’s beauty for his inability to resist the temptation of lusting after her: “[...] you have been the means—the innocent means—of my backsliding [...] You temptress, Tess; you dear damned witch of Babylon—I could not resist you as soon as I met you again!” (T 349). It is interesting that on the one hand Alec acknowledges that Tess is “innocent,” yet on the other, he invokes the image of a sorceress, blaming her for his lack of self-restraint. Alec further labels Tess as evil when he tells her: “[...] it is better that I should not look too often on you. It might be dangerous.” (T 336). He even goes so far as to invoke a Christian relic as a form of protection against Tess’s tempting beauty:

‘This was once a Holy Cross. Relics are not in my creed; but I fear you at moments—far more than you need fear me at present; and to lessen my fear, put your hand upon that stone [relic...], and swear that you will never tempt me—by your charms or ways.’ (T 337)

The irony in this passage lies in the fact that the stone cross is not a holy relic at all, but rather the grave-site of a criminal. Tess is later told: “‘Cross—no; ‘twere not a cross! ‘Tis a thing of ill-omen [...] The bones lie underneath. They say [the criminal buried beneath the stone] sold his soul to the devil, and that he walks at times.’” (T 338). This passage further serves to link Tess with the world of witchcraft, reinforcing the fact that her beauty is somehow linked to sorcery.

Alec further blames Tess for being the object of male victimization solely because she is beautiful: “‘Of course you have done nothing except retain your pretty face and shapely figure [...] that tight pinafore-thing sets it off, and that wing-bonnet—you field-

girls should never wear those bonnets if you wish to keep out of danger.” (Tess 355). It is noteworthy that he refers to her body as ‘it,’ which both objectifies Tess and abrogates his own responsibility for his sexual arousal, at the same time defining her body as a sexual threat (Mills 28).

Moreover, there is little difference between Angel and Alec in how they view Tess. Both describe her in sensual, physical terms (Pearce 33). As noted earlier (see p. 35) when Angel first sees Tess he thinks: ““What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!”” (T 151). Later in the text, when his sexual desire for her has been fully aroused, his thoughts of Tess are blended with animal imagery:

[Angel] saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake’s. She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up cable of hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn; her face was flushed with sleep, and her eyelids hung heavy over their pupils. The brim-fulness [sic] of her nature breathed from her. (T 198)

This description is important for two reasons. Not only does it underscore Tess’s association with animal imagery, evoking the notion of the dangerous woman, but also the description of her mouth is juxtaposed with the colour red, which serves as an implicit link to sexuality.

Associating the fallen woman with red is not uncommon in Victorian literature, and Hardy invokes this technique at various times throughout the text. In each instance, however, the red object serves as an implicit signal that Tess is about to encounter an erotic or sexual experience rather than the red object serving as a symbolic representation of Tess’s fallen state. For example, when Angel first sees Tess at the May-dance, the narrator describes her amongst a company of women who are dressed entirely in white: “[Tess] wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who

could boast of such a pronounced adornment” (T 41). Immediately following this account of Tess, the reader is introduced to Angel, who has been watching her from afar and later meets her for the first time while dancing with her at the May-dance.

When Tess first views the d’Urberville mansion, which serves as the scene of her sexual ruination by Alec, she describes her view:

The crimson brick lodge came first in sight [...] Tess thought this was the mansion itself till, passing [...] onward to a point at which the drive took a turn, the house proper stood in full view. It was of recent erection [...] and of the same rich red colour [...] Far behind the corner of the house—which rose like a geranium bloom [...] stretched the soft azure landscape of The Chase. (T 65)

A total of three times the colour red is invoked to describe the scene. Moreover, when Alec conducts Tess around the grounds he offers her strawberries: “He stood up and held [the strawberry] by the stem to her mouth” (T 69). It is significant that Tess is reluctant to taste it: “‘No—no!’ [Tess] said quickly, putting her fingers between his hand and her lips” (T 69). Alec, however, will not take no for an answer, and in a symbolic representation of her rape he insists: “‘Nonsense!’ [Alec] insisted; and in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in” (T 69). The erotic imagery contained in this scene underscores the physical threat to Tess’s innocence that Alec represents.

Later, when Alec reappears after Angel has deserted her, the colour red is once again employed to signal Tess’s sexual exploitation. While at Flintcomb-Ash farm, Tess is employed at the physically exhausting work of threshing. The narrator refers to the threshing machine as “the red tyrant that the women had come to serve” (T 351). While the significance of the machine underscores Tess’s helpless victimization at the hand of her employer, it also serves to signal Alec’s final reappearance: “a person had come silently into the field by the gate, and had been standing under a second rick watching the

scene, and Tess in particular” (T 353). It is after this meeting that Alec convinces Tess to become his mistress.

Clearly, the most erotic application of the colour red is in Tess’s encounter with

Angel:

Tess’s excitable heart beat against [Angel’s] by way of reply; and there they stood upon the red-brick floor of the entry, the sun slanting in by the window upon his back, as he held her tightly to his breast; upon her inclining face, upon the blue veins of her temple, upon her naked arm, and her neck, and into the depths of her hair. Having been lying down in her clothes she was warm as a sunned cat [...] she regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam. (T 199)

Here again, the narrator juxtaposes animal imagery with the colour of red. Hardy also invokes Biblical imagery as Tess is depicted as ‘Eve’ suggesting a sense of nature, womanliness, and fertility. However, making Tess a representation of Eve also implicitly links her to the fall of mankind, and, more specifically, suggests her sexual ruination. This is especially apparent when viewed in conjunction with the narrative of the early-morning walks that Angel and Tess take together: “The mixed, singular, luminous gloom in which they walked along together [...] often made [Angel] think of the Resurrection hour. He little thought that the Magdalen might be at his side” (T 161). By drawing on the three elements of colour, Biblical symbolism, and animal imagery, Hardy constructs Tess as a representation of the dangerous woman.

It is not only Tess’s sexuality, however, that is linked to animal imagery. While both Angel Clare and Alec d’Urberville treat Tess as a sexual object, even the narrator demeans her by grouping “Tess with the lower animals” (Pearce 42): “To fling elaborate sarcasms at Tess [...] was much like flinging them at a dog or cat” (T 258). This

comment underscores not only Tess's inferior moral position to Angel, but her social position as well.

Tess is repeatedly reminded that she is a social inferior. Although Angel treats Tess with "what he considers to be respectful restraint in his behaviour" (Pearce 37), he takes license with Tess that he would not with a social equal. For instance, when he carries Tess across the flooded road, he presumes that, as a milkmaid, "Tess has literally 'no right' to be offended" (Pearce 37). Alec also demeans Tess by suggesting that she cannot think for herself: "Your mind is enslaved to [Angel's]" (T 347).

Tess's position of social inferiority is reinforced by her economic dependence on the men who abuse and take advantage of her. Alec takes advantage of both Tess's innocence and his position of power over her when she is a servant in his household (Morris 134). Later, Angel rejects and deserts her, not making adequate provision for her. As well, Angel, "through his moral rigidity," not only refuses to protect her, but also stigmatizes her through his cowardly act (Morris 130). This places Tess in a desperate financial situation that results in her accepting Alec's offer to take care of Tess's mother and siblings in return for which she must consent to becoming his mistress. Alec reminds Tess, not only of her inferior social position, but of her subservient position in a male-dominated society: "I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine!" (T 358).

The fact that Alec manipulates Tess into becoming his mistress not only underscores her powerlessness, but also reinforces her noble character. While Alec does offer her marriage, even if Tess desired to be free to accept his proposal, she is legally married to Angel. The likelihood of her being able to obtain a divorce, even if she had

wanted one, was next to nil. Divorce was rare and extremely costly (Thompson 91). By virtue of Angel's abandonment of her, Tess is cast off without any financial assistance or legal recourse. In Tess's impoverished state, the expense of a divorce would have made it impossible. This fact, however, is a moot point because Tess refuses Alec on the grounds that she "love[s] somebody else" (T 342). Tess remains true in her heart to Angel despite his rather superficial love for her. It is only when Tess realizes that Alec will protect and provide for her mother and siblings that she consents to live with him. It is ironic that it is precisely her noble character, so valued by the Victorians, that prompts her to enter into a relationship that serves to further condemn her in the eyes of Victorian society.

Tess is victimized because she is isolated, has nowhere to turn, and has no protector. Her drunken father fails her, and her mother consistently gives her bad advice. It is her mother who blames Tess, not only for her fall, but also for spoiling the family's hopes for financial security:

'Why didn't ye think of doing some good for your family instead o' thinking only of yourself? See how I've got to [toil] and slave, and your poor weak father with his heart clogged like a dripping-pan [...] You ought to have been more careful if you didn't mean to get him to make you his wife!' (T 111)

Likewise, it is her mother who advises Tess to keep her past a secret from Angel: "[...] on no account [should] you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to [Angel....] Many a woman—some of the Highest in the Land—have had a Trouble in their time; and why should you Trumpet yours when others don't Trumpet theirs?" (T 220). It is precisely this erring advice that creates Tess's dilemma as she struggles and fails to tell Angel the truth before they wed. As well, it is because of the fact that Tess does not

reveal her past before the wedding that Angel is able to rationalize his callous rejection of her: “O Tess! If you had only told me sooner, I would have forgiven you!” (T 295).

While it is questionable whether or not Angel would have really forgiven Tess if she had revealed her secret past sooner, the fact that her mother cautioned her against revealing all is not surprising. Victorian women were encouraged from childhood to “conceal their opinions, their emotions and—especially—their desires” (Ruddick 173). Concealing the truth from Angel could be viewed as merely compliance with the prevailing Victorian norms.

Whether or not Tess made the right decision to tell Angel the truth, the critical views of Tess’s victimization provide an interesting insight into the complexity of her situation. On the one hand, Lynne Pearce asserts that Tess views herself as a “victim from the very beginning of the novel” (Pearce 41), quoting Tess’s comment to her brother that they live on “a blighted [star]” (Tess 58). On the other, Johan Aitken states that Tess does not view herself as a victim, and “instead she experiences the alienation of the ages, of simply being female, desired and therefore guilty” (Aitken 69). The truth seems to be somewhere in the middle. Initially, Tess does not appear to feel herself overly victimized, but rather educated in a rather harsh lesson of life. When she returns home from The Chase, after Alec has seduced her, “[Tess] had learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing, and her views of life had been totally changed for her by the lesson” (T 104-5). Later in the novel, however, Tess takes on the voice of victimization when, weary with resisting Alec’s proposition, she says to him:

‘Now, punish me!’ she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow’s gaze before its captor twists its neck. ‘Whip me, crush me [...] I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim—that’s the law!’ (T 358)

The sense of victimization is also present in Tess's agony as she struggles with whether or not to write her final appeal to Angel:

Her husband, Angel Clare himself, had, like others, dealt out hard measure to her, surely he had! [...] Never in her life—she could swear it from the bottom of her soul—had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgments had come. Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently? (T 382)

Whether Tess's sins are sins of omission or commission, neither society nor Angel offer her absolution. After her fall Tess is stigmatized in church: “[...] observing [Tess] they whispered to each other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to church no more” (T 114). Moreover, the taint which stains Tess's life bleeds into the lives of her family as well:

Ever since the occurrence of the event which had cast such a shadow over Tess's life, the Durbeyfield family [...] had been tacitly looked on as one which would have to [move] when their lease ended, if only in the interests of morality. (T 379)

Tess appears to accept that, because of her fall, she will never be truly forgiven: “Bygones would never be complete bygones till [Tess] was a bygone herself” (T 333).

Tess comes to embody the essence of the fallen woman. In her plea to Angel, after she has revealed her secret, she assumes the classic prone position of the fallen woman: “she slid down upon her knees beside [Angel's] foot, and from this position she crouched in a heap” (T 256). Like the woman in Augustus Egg's painting, *Misfortune*, not only is this a visual presentation of the fallen woman, but, unlike the painting, there is also superimposed within this description an allusion to animal imagery in the word “crouched” portraying a bestial, subservient position.

Tess is not surprised at Angel's rejection of her because she regards herself as unworthy of him—both intellectually as well as morally. Tess combines the feminine “natural humility” with “the debasement she feels as a fallen woman” (Pearce 41). The result is her immediate acceptance of Angel's rejection of her as her “just punishment” (Pearce 41). Further, Angel's rejection of Tess represents the “death of [Angel's] romantic dreams” (Watt 151). Tess's confession effectively removes her from the moral pedestal upon which Angel had placed her. She has become human in his eyes. She is no longer the perfect, innocent, and chaste ‘angel of the house.’ Angel cannot accept Tess's humanness because, for him, “there is no such thing as a moral shade of grey” (Watt 151).

Like Nancy, Tess views a watery grave as the end of the fallen woman's story: “‘The river is down there. I can put an end to myself in it. I am not afraid.’” (T 261). While Angel prevents Tess from taking her own life, his retort seethes with self-interest: “‘I don't wish to add murder to my other follies.’” (T 261). Clearly, Angel visualizes himself as the victim, and although he gives lip service to preventing Tess's death, his subconscious reveals something quite different. In a state of sleep-walking, Angel comes to Tess, and picking her up, he carries her to a deserted Abbey-church, laying her in an empty stone coffin: “‘Dead, dead, dead! [...] My poor, poor Tess—my dearest, darling Tess! So sweet, so good, so true! [...] My wife—dead, dead!’” (T 275). It is evident that Angel considers Tess already dead merely by virtue of her fall.

Shortly after this incident, Angel once again attempts to exonerate himself from the blame of abandoning his wife when he declares: “‘How can we live together while [Alec d'Urberville] lives?’” (T 271). It is interesting that while this statement may well

have been responsible for Tess's rash and passionate act of murder, it is not because of this argument that she gives up her attempts at convincing Angel to remain. Tess finally relents when Angel insists that they can no longer live as man and wife because of their progeny: "[...] think of wretches of our flesh and blood growing up under a taunt which they will gradually get to feel the full force of with their expanding years." (T 271). It is after this statement that Tess replies:

‘I cannot say *Remain*’ [...] She had truly never thought so far as that, and [Angel's] lucid picture of possible offspring who would scorn her was one that brought deadly conviction to an honest heart which was humanitarian to its center. (T 271)

Tess's thoughts turn to her unborn children and the moral taint that would shadow their lives, and for this reason Tess accepts Angel's abandonment of her. Tess releases Angel because of her inherent nobility. This selfless act of denial and sacrifice is one among many that serves to reinforce the purity of heart and noble essence that characterizes Tess.

It is unfortunate that Angel cannot bring himself to acknowledge Tess's virtuous nobility before he deserts her, putting in motion the chain of events that end in her act of murder. Sadly, it is Tess's lack of chastity that consumes Angel, causing him to miss the obvious. Even during a visit with his parents, before he leaves for South America, when Angel's vicar father reads Psalm 31, "the chapter in Proverbs in praise of a virtuous wife" (T 291) Angel is blind to Tess's noble qualities, linking only her sexuality to her virtue:

‘Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. [sic] She riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household. She girdeth her loins with strength and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good; her candle goeth not out by night. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and

he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.' (T 291)

It is noteworthy that this description of the 'virtuous woman' does not relate in any way to a woman's sexual purity. This Biblical passage defines the virtuous woman as having strength, "made strong by wisdom and grace and the fear of God, [...] who has the command of her own spirit [...and who possesses] resolution, who, having espoused good principles, is firm and steady to them" (Henry 788). The passage underscores the principles of hard work and sacrifice, not of sexual purity. This Biblical text further serves to underscore the fact that "Tess's moral purity is not identified with her physical virginity" (Aitken 68). True morality, nobility and virtue stem from purity of the heart, a kind of spiritual purity rather than merely a physical purity. Once again, as with Lady Isabel, the fact emerges that God is much more forgiving of a woman's sexual ruin than society appears to be.

It is interesting to note that Tess's "sense of herself as unforgiven and unforgiveable [...] changes after she kills Alec" (Morris 136). Furthermore, it is odd that that "Angel can forgive murder, although he could not forgive Tess's sexual experience" (Morris 141). It is, however, her final act of murder that "consummates her identity as an outcast" (Auerbach 172). Tess becomes associated with the pagan world of Stonehenge when Angel places her on the stone altar. Tess is symbolically linked with the pagan world as she declares to Angel: "And you used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen. So now I am at home." (T 420). It is on the empty altar at Stonehenge that "Tess finds her ultimate home" (Auerbach 172).

It is while Tess lies on the stone altar, awaiting her capture and certain execution, that she wills her sister to Angel in her place: "[Liza-Lu] is so good and simple and pure

[...] I wish you would marry her if you lose me, as you will do shortly [...] She had all the best of me without the bad of me” (T 420). It is by substituting Tess’s sister as Angel’s wife that Hardy appears to be “admitting not only that Tess’s own fate was unavoidable, but that the only way to avoid similar tragedies was somehow to rid the world of [the fallen woman]” (Pearce 45). Replacing Tess with her unspoiled sister effectively removes the contagion of the fallen woman from a righteous Victorian society.

Tess’s story is tragic, not only because she is victimized by the society that judges her both in the moral and the legal sense, but also because she pays with her life for responding to that victimization with violence (Morris 139). Furthermore, “Tess [...] must die on the scaffold because she has no remorse for her crime. She is not sorry Alec is dead and she does not regret killing him” (Morris 141). In an attempt to regain control over her life, Tess commits murder, thereby effectively sealing her fate.

Even aside from her act of murder, however, Tess’s moral taint all but obliterates her inner morality and virtue in the eyes of respectable Victorian society. Morris asserts “Hardy made the execution a part of his novel in order to lodge an outraged protest against the treatment of women—especially poor, fallen women” (Morris 140). Tess succumbs to the fate of the fallen woman. Although Tess displays many of the attributes of the ideal woman in her selflessness, her sacrificial love, and in her submission, she is removed from the English gaze. In the mind of the Victorians, the nobility of her character is blighted, and therefore she cannot be restored to respectable society. Like Nancy, however, Tess embodies the essence of the ideal woman, and regardless of the moral stain that scars her life, she remains a representation of ‘a pure woman.’

CHAPTER II ~ THE FOREIGN WOMAN: *BLEAK HOUSE, UNCLE SILAS*

During the Victorian era, the view of women as being either fallen or pure, good or bad became mingled with other notions of duality such as foreign or familiar, and beastly or civilized (Davidoff 21). This widened polarity of thinking was, in part, responsible for the portrayal of the French women in *Bleak House* and *Uncle Silas* as representing 'the other.' These women are depicted as being outside the parameters of English respectability and consequently are judged for their lack of Englishness. They are condemned, not so much for their acts, but because they are French, and accordingly, they are viewed as dark sorceresses who are evil and dangerous.

The negative portrayal of the French in Victorian novels is not surprising as hostility has characterized British-French relations since the Norman Conquest when "French language, law and customs first became influential [...] in England" (Richardson 44). Tensions between the French and the English were evident in the political, economic, philosophical and religious spheres. Understandably, these tensions were exacerbated during periods of military conflict between the two countries. The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) between England and France was followed by a second major conflict when William III declared war on Louis XIV of France in 1689, with both periods serving to entrench anti-French sentiment in England. The third major conflict with France occurred during the Napoleonic War, between 1792 and 1815 (Richardson 44). In fact, "the roots of conflict were so many and so convoluted that the period between William of Orange's accession and the final defeat of Napoleon has sometimes been called the Second Hundred Years War" (Gibson 81).

Competition between France and England over trade and territories served to further inflame the hostility. The decline of the English woolen industry was blamed on the high tariffs and duties imposed by the French in 1659 (Duffy 32). The War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713) further heightened commercial and territorial friction. Moreover, during the eighteenth century, the assistance the French provided to the American revolutionaries further inflamed an anti-French bias (Richardson 44).

Added to the political and economic tension was the British suspicion of French philosophy. Many Victorians considered Voltaire to be the “chief of infidel philosophy” (Newman 390). The distrust of French philosophy was evident in the late eighteenth century when Abbé Augusti Barruel, an immigrant priest, asserted that

Voltaire, out of ‘hatred to Christ,’ had hatched a gigantic plot to overthrow every altar in Christendom, a plot which co-conspirators extended and generalized to include the overthrow also of every government, every species of property, every social restraint in Europe. (Newman 390)

In 1817, the British periodical, *The Quarterly Review* asserted that “French philosophy ...[is] a compound of the most disgusting profaneness, the grossest obscenity, the shallowest sophisms, and the most superficial knowledge” (Qtd. in Newman 392). Schilling, in his book *Conservative England and the Case against Voltaire*, asserted that “Voltaireism [...] lurked everywhere, secretly boring philosophical notions into the minds of the unwary” (Qtd. in Newman 390).

Coupled with the suspicion of Voltaire’s philosophy was a British distrust of Catholics and, in particular, the Pope. In his book, *Studies in Scarlet*, Richard Altick states:

Between the French nation and the Roman church [...] there was not much to choose; the British nation as a whole was never more confident of its own righteousness, and consequently never more convinced of the malign

cunning of Roman Catholics and the sheer immorality of Frenchmen.
(179)

Many Victorians viewed the 'idolatrous' Catholics with suspicion and distrust, thereby exacerbating the anti-French sentiment already prevalent in Britain.

Two anti-French stereotypes emerged from the hostility that Britain felt against France. The first (as early as 1470) depicted the French as "poor, starving and pathetic creatures" (Richardson 45). The second characterization was that of the "over-refined, effeminate fop...whose fashions betrayed intellectual and moral bankruptcy" (Richardson 45). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the French were often portrayed "as skeletal imbeciles, at once grotesque, pathetic and malevolent" (Richardson 45).

A 1793 British political cartoon entitled *The Contrast* pictures "*British Liberty* seated calmly with Religion and Morality, while *French Liberty*, identified with Atheism, Rebellion, and Madness, runs amok through a scene of corpses" (Newman 388). Embedded within the British consciousness were the notions that France embodied the essence of "destruction, license, abstract political thought, atheism, and impious mockery" (Newman 389). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the central images that were used to characterize the French were the "wizened and triumphantly grimacing countenance of Voltaire [...] or the face of an ape," each displaying a "horrible grin" (Newman 389). Added to this were images of "Pope-devil symbolism" (Newman 393). Voltaire's 'anti-Christian' philosophy, coupled with the notion of 'French Liberty' served to reinforce the already-existing bias against Roman Catholicism that the British had long nurtured.

As the nineteenth-century progressed, so did the anti-French sentiment, and the French "remained irritating, arrogant, and scheming in many British eyes" (Richardson

46). This 'British righteousness' extended beyond philosophy and religion to moral values and codes. The British viewed French traits as contrary to their own. An article in the nineteenth-century periodical, *The British Critic* observed that:

A woman who swerves from her sex's point of honour in England, is aware that she has committed an unpardonable offense [...] But it is very different in France. A female there [...] experiences little, if any alteration, in consequence of the violation of her person [...] The French act from feeling, and the British from principle. (Qtd. in Newman 393)

The bestial imagery that was evident in the political cartoons of the day began to target French women. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* declared that:

Most English gentlemen, who are above being taken by superficial pretension, are aware of the almost universal ugliness of Frenchwomen; the hard, sharp, and wrinkled face, the greenish dark complexion, the hair on the upper lip; the hoarse voice, the almost bestial expansion of the lower ribs to contain enormous viscera. (Qtd. in Newman 393)

Not surprisingly, the anti-French bias found its way into the contemporary literature, and in addition to the negative portrayal of French characters, there existed numerous slurs against the French. Mr. Poyser, for example, in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, states: "[...] them French are a wicked sort o'folks" (AB 522), and Jane Eyre describes her French teacher as "harsh and grotesque" (JE 39). Jane Eyre also deprecates Rochester's ward, Adèle, when she says: "[...] there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne's earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress" (JE 145). Moreover, Rochester's houseguest, Blanche in *Jane Eyre*, recalled her French governess's "raging passions" (JE 151).

In *Bleak House*, Mr. Snagsby states that "I never had an idea of a foreign female, except as being formerly connected with a bunch of brooms [...], or at the present time with a tambourine and ear-rings" (BH 663). This statement not only distances the

foreign woman as ‘the other,’ but also associates the foreign woman with gypsies and witchcraft, invoking the notion of sorcery and the mystical. The French characters in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens and *Uncle Silas* by Sheridan LeFanu are stereotypical representations of the passionate and dangerous French woman whose ‘Frenchness’ seems in many ways an inherent part of her criminal nature.

Hortense in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* is a relatively minor character who plays an important role. Hortense is the French-born maid of Lady Dedlock. Hortense is removed from her position as Lady Dedlock’s maid because she is, as Tulkinghorn states: “the most implacable and unmanageable of women” (BH 668). Angry at Lady Dedlock and desiring revenge for her dismissal, Hortense aligns herself with the lawyer Tulkinghorn, who is obsessed with uncovering Lady Dedlock’s illicit past (BH 668). Hortense assists Tulkinghorn in amassing evidence of the identity of Lady Dedlock’s former lover as well as of her illegitimate child, Esther Summerson.

Hortense is characterized by the French propensity for passion which is displayed by her intense hatred of Lady Dedlock: “I hate my Lady, [with] all my heart [...] I detest her.” (BH 666). Her passion turns on Tulkinghorn when he treats Hortense with condescension. She accuses him of using her: “Sir, you have not use me well [...] You have attrapped me—caught me—to give you information [sic]” (BH 665). For this slight, Tulkinghorn pays with his life. Hortense revenges herself on Tulkinghorn by murdering him, and on Lady Dedlock by implicating her as the murderer.

It is generally agreed that Dickens used Maria Manning as his prototype for Hortense.¹ The Swiss-French Maria de Roux was a lady's maid before her marriage to Frederick Manning. The husband and wife were both convicted of the murder of Maria's lover, Patrick O'Connor, and sentenced to be hanged. The public soon became fascinated with Maria, who "made good copy for the newspapers, who likened her to Lady Macbeth and the foreign temptress Jezebel" (Lindgren 7). During the trial Maria exhibited a stalwart nature. *The Times* reported that she "looked about her with a fearless and unembarrassed expression" (Qtd. in Borowitz 144). However, after she was sentenced to death she lost her composure and "unleashed her fury against the jury, her legal advisors, and England. 'Damnation seize you all,' she cried again and again" (Borowitz 207). Percy Fitzgerald, an early biographer of Charles Dickens, observed that "Maria Manning's broken English, her impatient gestures, and her volubility are [...] imitated in the novel *Bleak House* with marvelous exactness" (Qtd. in Borowitz 305).

Hortense clearly embodies the notion of passion and danger associated with French ethnicity. This is underscored by the fact that "the dominant trait of her character is a general quickness of speech and temper" (Briard 26). Esther shows an instinctive fear of Hortense when she first meets her: "I drew back, almost afraid of [Hortense]." (BH 368). Hortense attributes her own passion to her French birth: "I come from the South country, where we are quick, and where we like and dislike very strong." (BH 368). Hortense's nature is depicted as different from the English, who are characteristically reserved. Her emotions are strong, and her moods are volatile.

¹ See Albert Borowitz, *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satan: The Bermondsey Horror*; Phillip Collins, *Dickens and Crime*; and Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*.

Hortense is dangerous in part because she is unpredictable. Hortense is described by the narrator as “almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language” (BH 187); however, her speech is characterized by a polarity of emotion, ranging in a moment from placid to passionate. In her exchange with Tulkinghorn, the narrator describes Hortense in one breath as speaking with “energ[y...] by clenching both her hands, and setting all her teeth,” and in the next as “ironically polite and tender” (BH 666). The pendulum of her emotion again swings back, however, as Hortense “suddenly dashed into the bitterest and most defiant scorn, with her black eyes in one and the same moment very nearly shut, and staringly wide open” (BH 666). This dichotomy of mood and emotion is represented as being characteristically French. There seems to be no middle ground with Hortense. She is portrayed as either perfectly calm or passionately volatile. She is depicted as having explosive moods that can erupt without provocation.

Additionally, the extremes of her passion are manifested in the extremes of her language. Hortense’s Frenchness is characterized by her use of superlatives. She describes herself as “en-r-r-r-aged,” and insists that she “det-est(s) [Lady Dedlock]” (BH 666). When Tulkinghorn attempts to rid himself of her by paying her off, Hortense refuses the money. The excessiveness of her emotion is evident when she declares: “*I am rich [...] I am very rich in hate. I hate my Lady of all my heart*” (BH 666). She violently rejects his money, “flinging [the coins] with such violence on the floor, that they jerk up again into the light before they roll away into corners, and slowly settle down there after spinning vehemently” (BH 666). Hortense’s passion is displayed not only in her actions, but it is manifested in her language as well.

It is not surprising that Hortense's volatility is associated with animal imagery. She possesses a "feline mouth [...] and] she seems to go about like a very neat She-Wolf imperfectly tamed" (BH 187). Feline imagery is repeatedly invoked when describing Hortense that serves to further distance her from the respectable English woman. Hortense is "tigress-like [...] snap[ping] her teeth together, as if her mouth closed with a spring" (BH 837). She is portrayed as a hunter, a dangerous and passionate woman waiting to spring upon her prey. The link between the passionate woman and the bestial, savage hunter is further underscored when Hortense throws off her shoes and "walk[s] deliberately [...] through the wettest of the wet grass" (BH 299). She is described by the groundskeeper as "powerful high and passionate" (BH 300). And, the keeper's wife adds that rather than "cool[ing] her down [...] she fancies [the wet grass is] blood" (BH 300). This passage is significant because it links both passion and danger. Hortense is represented as a feverish, agitated, and deadly foreigner.

Aside from her passionate and treacherous temperament, Hortense is dangerous because she possesses Lady Dedlock's secret. Servants were sometimes feared because they possessed intimate knowledge of their employer's habits; and clearly, knowledge is power. As early as 1725, Daniel Defoe articulated this fear in his book, *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business*. He asserted that the unscrupulous servant poses a threat to the middle and upper-class employer: "there have always been thieves and whores, who get into people's houses, under the characters of honest servants, even with design to rob the families [...]" (Qtd. in Masicola 63). Hortense intends to rob Lady Dedlock, not of her material wealth, but of her social position. Hortense's actions are not motivated by her own personal gain, but stem from a vicious desire for revenge. The knowledge

Hortense possesses of Lady Dedlock's nocturnal movements as well as her past represent a very real threat to Lady Dedlock's security and well-being. Hortense is dangerous because she is privy to the dark secrets of the aristocracy. She has the knowledge of Lady Dedlock's illicit past that, if revealed, will certainly blight the name of Sir Leicester and cause the social ruination of Lady Dedlock.

Additionally, Hortense is especially dangerous because she is constantly spying (Borowitz 304). She is depicted as having the capacity to see everything: "[Hortense] has a watchful way of looking out of the corners of her eyes without turning her head" (BH 187). The narrator goes on to later add that even when "her eyes [are] almost shut up [...she is] still looking out sideways" (BH 665). The fact that Hortense sees the secrets that are hidden from the public underscores the danger that she poses to respectable society. This reinforces the threat of exposure presented by the sinister, foreign woman who sees into the dark recesses of Victorian society, possessing knowledge of dark secrets of sexual misconduct that respectable Victorians wished to deny. Hortense's gaze seems to penetrate to the very soul, unlocking the secrets that lie hidden in the hearts of those around her. Hortense embodies the dangerous foreigner in whom "passion has overmastered the reasoning faculty altogether, leaving only a furious cunning at work" (Slater 260). Furthermore, Hortense does not hesitate to use her knowledge to damage and destroy those whom she hates.

It is ironic, however, that although Hortense implicates Lady Dedlock in the murder of Tulkinghorn, the removal of Tulkinghorn is exactly what Lady Dedlock and the reader wish for. It is by eliminating Tulkinghorn that the immediate threat to Lady Dedlock is removed. As the events of Tulkinghorn's final night unfold, Dickens elicits

sympathy for Lady Dedlock when she appears to be the murderer because the reader “can sympathize with the wretchedness that compelled her to do it” (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature* 113). When it is revealed that Hortense is the murderer, it is almost a relief. The reader has much less sympathy for a passionate, proud, erratic and violent foreigner than for an English lady.

Making Hortense the murderer clearly smacks of an anti-French bias due to the fact that Hortense has no compelling motive for killing Tulkinghorn. Her motive appears to be merely the fact that Tulkinghorn ‘misused’ her and she ‘detests’ Lady Dedlock, hoping to implicate her as the murderer. The weakness of Hortense’s motive serves to underscore the strength of her passion, and the strength of her passion can be directly linked to her ethnicity. It is because of Hortense’s ‘Frenchness’ that she is the murderer. She embodies spontaneous volatility and unchecked passion, a deadly combination.

Moreover, Mademoiselle Hortense “is a much more credible killer than Lady Dedlock” (Morris 65) because Hortense is a female member of the lower class. By making Hortense the murderer rather than Lady Dedlock, Dickens shifts the focus from the highly sympathetic lady to the less sympathetic foreigner of low birth. Clearly, it was more palatable to his readership to portray a murderess of a class and ethnicity that would not offend the English middle class.

Part of the reason that the reader is much less sympathetic toward Hortense is due to the fact that we are not privy to her inner thoughts, and as a result, this distancing reinforces the lack of sympathy for her. The reader is not allowed into her mind, cannot know her thoughts, and cannot relate to her inner struggles. Not only does Hortense’s

violent and erratic behaviour fail to elicit sympathy for her, but the reader is by no means disappointed to see Hortense brought to justice.

It is not a mistake, however, that Lady Dedlock is implicated in the murder that Hortense commits. In fact, Hortense is “put forward as a substitute character to enact the murder that Lady Dedlock [desires]” (Steig 290). Hortense is portrayed as the mirror image of Lady Dedlock. Hortense represents the dark side of Lady Dedlock and embodies the side of womanhood that the Victorians wished to deny: the dark, potentially violent nature that lurks beneath the surface of the otherwise ideal woman. Hortense, as the quintessence of evil womanhood, is free to commit the murder that Lady Dedlock can only wish for. The narrator reinforces this fact by stating that, “[Lady Dedlock’s] enemy [was Tulkinghorn...] and she has often, often, often, wished him dead” (BH 854). Hortense becomes the physical embodiment of Lady Dedlock’s psychological desire. Hortense may be viewed as the ‘body’ that commits the crime desired by the psychological ‘will’ of Lady Dedlock.

Lady Dedlock evokes the sympathy of the reader partly because she is portrayed as the embodiment of English stoicism. Lady Dedlock is a true representation of her name. While married to the noble Sir Leicester, she is ‘dead’ to her emotions and ‘locked’ into the life and image of the aristocratic lady. She exhibits the cold emotion demanded of the ideal woman, and falls into the hypocrisy imposed by a society that condemns passion in women (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 64). Lady Dedlock is continually referred to as being in an inert position. She is repeatedly represented gazing absently outside, unconcerned with those around her: “My Lady Dedlock [was...] looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir...My Lady Dedlock says she has been

'bored to death.'" (BH 21). Her emotions are dead, and her movements are paralyzed: "My Lady Dedlock, having conquered her world, fell, not into the melting, but rather into the freezing mood" (BH 22). She is depicted repeatedly as bored and detached. The narrator describes Lady Dedlock as "always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine" (BH 196). Conversely, Hortense is characterized as the embodiment of fiery passion. Hortense is a representation of destructive, evil, feminine energy. Steig and Wilson assert that

Hortense is a deeply disturbing image to Dickens. She represents a destructive female energy so dismaying to the novelist that (although she is Lady Dedlock's surrogate and her violence is really the obverse of Lady Dedlock's imperturbable *sang-froid*), he cannot bring himself to admit that an English lady could be possessed of it and transfers it to an alien Frenchwoman. (291-2)

Lady Dedlock and Hortense represent opposite sides of the same coin; however, Hortense says that she left Lady Dedlock's employ because "'We could not agree. My Lady is so high; so very high'" (BH 367). This serves to underscore the fact that "one is mistress, the other maid, and society approves the one and condemns the other" (Briard 27). Society condemns the passion outwardly displayed by Hortense. The same passion exists within Lady Dedlock; however, it is suppressed and hidden from societal censure.

The fact that Hortense's name is similar to Lady Dedlock's first name (Honoraria) is clearly not coincidental. Both are female Latin names: Honoraria meaning honour, hope, and humility, and Hortense, meaning a garden (*A Concise Dictionary of First Names* 113-114). Both Hortense and Lady Dedlock are, to varying degrees, inversions of what their names imply. While outwardly, Lady Dedlock represents the cardinal virtue of honour and the ideal Victorian image of female propriety, the stain of her past represents

a potential taint to the patriarchal name of Sir Leicester. Likewise, while the name Hortense is associated with a garden, in reality, thorns and thistles may more rightly represent her nature. Hortense represents the passionate side of Lady Dedlock—the thorns and the thistles that are concealed from public view.

Hortense and Lady Dedlock are also linked by virtue of disguise. The fact that Lady Dedlock wears Hortense's dress is symbolic of Lady Dedlock's dual nature. It is only when Lady Dedlock clothes herself in Hortense's dress that she is free to move about in the nether regions of society in an attempt to find her lover's final resting place. Lady Dedlock assumes the disguise of a servant; however, she is only thinly veiled, and the lady cannot be utterly concealed by the camouflage: "[Lady Dedlock] should be an upper servant by her attire, yet, in her air and step [...] as far as she can assume in the muddy streets, which she treads with an unaccustomed foot—she is a lady" (BH 260).

While Dickens touches on the dual nature of Lady Dedlock, he reinforces the fact that the same duality exists within Hortense, only in a much more dangerous form, because Hortense's civility is only a gloss for her cunning. It is when Inspector Bucket reveals Mademoiselle Hortense's guilt that she quickly turns from sweet to savage, in one breath cooing like a dove and in the next raging like a tigress. When she first enters the room, she speaks to Inspector Bucket sweetly, civilly calling him "my angel" (BH 830). Almost immediately, however, the tigress pounces, and she begins to rage, calling him "an unhappy idiot," a "great pig," and "a Devil" (BH 831). In much the same way that Maria Manning exploded with vehemence in the courtroom after her conviction, Hortense erupts in vociferous anger at Inspector Bucket and Sir Leicester Dedlock: "I

spit upon [Sir Leicester's] house, upon his name, upon his imbecility” (BH 832). Over and over Hortense asserts “Lie[s]! [...] All lie[s]!” (BH 832).

When Inspector Bucket finally confronts Hortense with her guilt, she is quickly removed, not only from the scene where her guilt is exposed, but also from the entire novel. In fact, Dickens eradicates the contagion of the dangerous foreign woman without any grandstanding whatsoever: “It is impossible to describe how Mr. Bucket gets [Mademoiselle Hortense] out, but he accomplishes that feat in a manner peculiar to himself; enfolding and pervading her like a cloud, and hovering away with her as if he were a homely Jupiter” (BH 837). It is significant that Hortense vanishes from the novel so quickly and so completely. We do not view her trial or her execution. She merely disappears from sight. This serves to reinforce the Victorian desire to hide the criminal woman from sight—to remove her from the public gaze, thereby re-establishing social order.

The fact that the reader does not witness Hortense's execution may be the result of the effect that the spectacle of the Mannings' execution produced on Dickens. He was appalled, not by the execution itself, but by the reaction of the crowd. On November 13, 1849, Dickens sent a letter to *The Times* reiterating the horror of witnessing the hanging:

When the two miserable creatures who attracted all this ghastly sight about them were turned quivering in the air, there was no more emotion, no more pity, no more thought that two immortal souls had gone to judgment [...] than if the name of Christ had never been heard in this world, and there were no belief among men but that they perished like the beasts. (*Times*, printed November 14, 1849)

Rather than attacking the hanging itself, Dickens seemed to be more concerned with the public harm done through public executions. Dickens argued “for a more limited change in the law,” rather than proposing the abolishment of capital punishment (Collins 236).

In a further letter to *The Times* on November 19, 1849, Dickens suggested how he would conduct an execution: “From the moment of a murderer’s being sentenced to death, I would dismiss him to [...] obscurity” (Qtd. in Collins 238). Dickens’s treatment of Hortense illustrates his belief that executions should be held in private. Her execution is hidden from public scrutiny and held in private. Hortense is merely dismissed to obscurity. Again, this may be viewed as an implicit wish to deny the existence of the potentially violent female.

Hortense is a representation of the dangerous French woman who threatens the peace and security of English society. Her passion and emotional volatility are portrayed in contrast to English conservatism. She is dark, dangerous unpredictable, and cunning, all qualities linked to her French ethnicity, and all qualities that are diametrically opposed to English stoicism. The fact that she is removed so quickly and completely from the end of the novel may be interpreted as Dickens’s implicit social desire to expunge not only the contaminated woman criminal from English society, but the presence of the foreign ‘other’ as well, reinstating the safety and security of homogeneous England.

Sheridan Le Fanu’s novel, *Uncle Silas*, like Dickens’s *Bleak House*, portrays a French woman at the center of mystery and intrigue. Like Hortense, Madam de la Rougierre “is French, itself a kind of shorthand for immoral, overly passionate, and mercurial” behaviour (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay* 115). Madame de la Rougierre is condemned more for her unnaturalness (which is linked to her Frenchness) than for her crime. In the character of Madam de la Rougierre, Le Fanu combines the distrust of the French with the Victorian suspicion of the governess. Le Fanu plays on the Victorian

“paranoia about infiltrators, a fear sometimes linked to that of independent, ruthless women” (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay* 97).

Uncle Silas is a Gothic novel about the young Maud Ruthyn, whose father hires the grotesque French governess, Madame de la Rougierre, to instruct his daughter. Madame de la Rougierre uses threats and terror to manipulate her young charge. When, late at night, Maud discovers Madame de la Rougierre in her father’s study shuffling through his papers, she secures Madame de la Rougierre’s dismissal; however, Madame de la Rougierre does not leave until she has uttered a subtle threat to Maud: “I will remember you—ah ha! Yes; *most* certainly, I will remember you.” (US 108).

Shortly afterward, Maud’s father, Austin Ruthyn, dies, and she is orphaned. She is sent to Bartram-Haugh, the home of her Uncle Silas, who is appointed as her guardian. Making Maud her uncle’s ward is her father’s way of exonerating Silas, who has tarnished the family name through an ill-advised marriage and dissipated living. Her uncle’s scandalous and murderous past haunts Maud. She endeavours to give Silas the benefit of the doubt, but when Madame de la Rougierre appears at Bartram-Haugh, Maud becomes convinced of her uncle’s evil intentions.

The scene grows dark and sinister and shifts from the civilized home of Maud’s father to the uncivilized mansion of Bartram-Haugh. The atmosphere is rife with images of the mysterious, the threatening, and the supernatural. Bartram-Haugh is a gothic mansion whose grounds are populated with gypsies and savage, troll-like people. The orphaned Maud lingers in a woman-child state, subject to omens and nightmares and a slave to fate. In an attempt to isolate and murder Maud for her inheritance, Silas engages the help of his son Dudley and Madame de la Rougierre; however, it is the sleeping

Madame de la Rougierre who is mistaken for Maud and murdered in Maud's place. While Madame de la Rougierre is characterized at best as a representation of an 'evil' governess, and at worst, a predator, in reality, her crimes are minor, and ultimately, she becomes merely a pawn of the murderous Silas.

Governessing was a position occupied in Victorian times by educated women without financial means. It was one of the few occupations that was available to women who were "immediately above the laboring poor" (Leder 73). Governessing was often a difficult occupation. Christina Rossetti is quoted as saying: "I am rejoiced to feel that my health does really unfit me for miscellaneous governessing *en permanence*" (Qtd. in Damrosch 1611). Charlotte Brontë, while employed as governess to Mr. and Mrs. Sidgwick, wrote to her sister complaining that "Mrs. Sidgwick expects me to do things that I cannot do—to love her children and be entirely devoted to them" (Brontë 433). In 1850, *Punch* magazine published an anonymous article entitled "The Governess-Grinders" which satirized what was expected of the governess:

She was to sleep in a room with three beds, containing herself, four children and servant; to rise at ¼ to 6; give the children their baths, dress them, and be ready for breakfast at ¼ to 8. School, 9 to 12; ¼ past 2 to 4; and besides this, to give two hours' lessons in music. To teach drawing, rudiments of French [...] To be proficient in plain and fancy work, which she was to spend her evenings in doing, not for herself, but for her mistress. She was to have the baby on her knee while teaching, and to put all the children to bed. (151)

The article concludes by recommending that advertisements for governesses be entitled: "Wanted: a Domestic Drudge!" (151).

Occupying a position beneath the master of the house, yet above the servants, the Victorian governess' place was ambiguous. Having the power to exercise a certain amount of control over the children in her charge, and sometimes possessing an intimate

knowledge of family affairs, the governess could sometimes exert influence over her employer. Advice columns in the nineteenth century often “warned employers to beware of [the governess’s] powers over the household” (Mangum 214).

The governess was sometimes stereotyped as a threat to the safety and sanctity of the English home. In her article, “The Governess: Her Health,” Harriet Martineau declares that it is difficult to

exaggerate the misery of the household in which there is a [...] bad governess [...] Bad governesses are very numerous—adventuresses who hope to catch a husband [...] fawning liars [...] ignorant pretenders who [...] furnish [...] domestic tragedy. (269)

Coupled with this view of the governess, and taking into account the anti-French bias of the English, the French governess was doubly condemned. This fact is reinforced by the comment that Maud’s maid makes when learning of the new governess: “I hate them Frenchwomen; they’re not natural [...] I wonder why honest English girls won’t answer the gentry for governesses, instead of them gaping, scheming, wicked furriners? [sic]” (US 26-27).

The English did not have to look far to find a representation of the evil and mysterious French governess who infiltrates and desecrates the sanctity of the English home. In 1855 the French governess Mademoiselle Flore-Marguerite-Celestine Doudet was charged with the death of her employer’s ten-year-old daughter, Mary Ann Marsden. At the trial, the maid revealed the extent of Doudet’s abusive behaviour toward the children:

[The maid] had seen the governess beating the children’s heads against the wall, stamping on their bare feet until blood came, pulling out their hair, striking their arms with a ruler, forcing them to remain with arms crossed for entire days, and abandoning them for hours in the locked cellar or the toilet. (Hartman 92)

While Madame de la Rougierre's abuse of Maud does not result in Maud's death, it certainly results in psychological trauma. By dint of overt and covert threats, Madame de la Rougierre successfully terrorizes Maud. In *Uncle Silas*, "the familiar [is] terrible, and the terrible [is] inescapable" (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay* 99).

Madame de la Rougierre manipulates Maud through both physical and psychological intimidation. When Maud refuses to divulge the location of her father's will, Madame de la Rougierre responds: "'You do know, and you must tell, petite dur-tête, or I will break a your leetle finger' [...Maud] screamed; [and Madame de la Rougierre] continued to laugh" (US 37). Madame de la Rougierre employs her position to control and intimidate Maud, using her power of cunning and duplicitous manipulation to terrorize her.

Madame de la Rougierre embodies all of the elements of the dangerous unnatural foreigner. She is "duplicitous, grotesque, alcoholic, foreign, and gender-ambivalent" (Mangum 214). The duplicity inherent in the dangerous woman is revealed repeatedly in Madame de la Rougierre. She "feigns crying," and her tears come on "short notice" (US 74, 374). She is "cunning" while appearing "dejected and timid" (US 76). While "in public," Madame de la Rougierre displays "affection" for Maud; however, her dark, sinister side is revealed when Maud is alone with her: "'La!' [Madame de la Rougierre] cried with a smile of rage and a laugh, letting [Maud] go and shoving [her] backward at the same time, so far that [Maud] had a rather dangerous tumble" (US 31, 84). The housekeeper, Mrs. Rusk, describes Madame de la Rougierre as "'grinning here, and crying there, and her nose everywhere. The old French hypocrite!'" (US 98). Madame de la Rougierre's "deceptions [...] often puzzled, though they seldom convinced [Maud]"

(US 422). In his 1895 book, *The Female Offender*, Cesare Lombroso, the nineteenth-century sociologist, noted that “mobility of mood” is a “salient characteristic” of the female offender (221). The woman criminal “passes with extraordinary rapidity from laughter to tears” (Lombroso 221). Madame de la Rougierre, with her volatility of moods, is analogous to the characterization of the woman criminal.

Madame de la Rougierre’s criminality, however, is a sticking point in the novel. While LeFanu paints her as treacherous we do not see her committing any specific acts of treachery. She is addicted to alcohol, but according to Martineau, this was a vice shared by some governesses: “The propensity to drink is occasionally seen among [governesses]” (“The Governess” 269). We also see Madame de la Rougierre shuffling through Austin Ruthyn’s papers, but it is not clear if she actually steals anything. Maud is convinced that Madame de la Rougierre steals her ‘gipsy pin,’ a favourite charm, but this is not confirmed, and, of course, Madame de la Rougierre denies the theft: ““Oh! the little pin with the red top? Maybe it’as fall on the ground; we weel [sic] find when you get up”” (US 417). Maud’s Cousin Monica implicates Madame de la Rougierre in the theft of a pearl cross belonging to Maud, but she admits to Maud that ““The worst I *know* of [Madame de la Rougierre] is her treatment of you, and her robbing the desk.”” (US 183). While Cousin Monica states that she ““think(s) that’s enough to hang her”” (US 183), Madame de la Rougierre’s guilt is clearly not established beyond the shadow of a doubt.

LeFanu’s treatment of Madame de la Rougierre is unmistakably ambiguous. While we do not actually *see* Madame de la Rougierre committing a crime, we *assume* she is a criminal because she is characterized in extremely negative terms. She is depicted as suspicious, dangerous and evil.

Part of why Madame de la Rougierre seems so malevolent is because, like Hortense, she is portrayed as seeing everything: “[Madame de la Rougierre] rolled her eyes stealthily from corner to corner of the room” (US 101). Her threats are couched in expressions of kindness, which serve to further underscore her evil disposition. After Maud’s father dismisses Madame de la Rougierre, she issues a warning to Maud:

‘Although I shall not be always near, yet I shall know everything about my charming little Maud; you will not know how, but I shall indeed, *everything*. And be sure, my dearest child, I will some time be able to give you the sensible proofs of my gratitude and affection—you understand.’ (US 108)

Madame de la Rougierre is associated with the cunning predator, stealthily waiting and watching. Maud invokes predatory bird imagery when Madame de la Rougierre steps out of a carriage: “[Madame de la Rougierre’s] cloak flitting and flapping this way and that, like the wings of a raven disturbed over its prey” (US 413). Madame de la Rougierre is described as wolfish and an “angry beast” (US 26, 85). She is implicitly linked to the snake in the Garden of Eden when Maud sees Madame de la Rougierre in her father’s house:

[Madame de la Rougierre’s] great mouth was open, and her eyes absolutely goggled with eagerness. She was devouring all that was passing there. I drew back into the shadow with a kind of disgust and horror. She was transformed into a great gaping reptile. (US 32)

Within this description is embedded the notion that Madame de la Rougierre represents an evil threat to the respectable English home and is, in effect, the spoiler of paradise.

The notion of the dangerous woman is not only reinforced in Madame de la Rougierre through her animalistic nature, but in her physical appearance as well. She is the manifestation of the evil, criminally inclined foreigner. In much the same way as Esther is initially repulsed when meeting Hortense, when Maud first sees Madame de la

Rougierre, she is immediately frightened of her: “I already disliked, distrusted, and feared her.” (US 26). Madame de la Rougierre is described as

Tall, masculine, a little ghastly perhaps, and draped in purple silk, with a lace cap, and great bands of black hair, too thick and black perhaps to correspond quite naturally with her bleached and sallow skin, her hollow jaws, and the fine but grim wrinkles traced about her brows and eye-lids.
(US 27)

This description further parallels the description that Lombroso offers of the woman criminal. Lombroso asserted that “female offenders have invariably strong jaws and cheek-bones, and a masculine aspect” (Lombroso 102). He goes on to claim that the hair of female criminals is “darker than among normals” (Lombroso 70), and moreover, that facial “wrinkles are more frequent and deeply marked in criminal women of mature age,” comparing them to witches (Lombroso 72).

Not only is Madame de la Rougierre linked to criminality through her description, she is also associated with sorcery, witchcraft and unnatural power. Madame de la Rougierre is repeatedly portrayed as laughing or grinning: “[Madame de la Rougierre] laughed, and it would not have been a bad laugh for a ghoul” (US 86). She has a “sly, grinning face” (US 371). The caricature of the grinning and ghoulish French is echoed in Madame de la Rougierre’s grin, and the ‘Pope-devil’ symbolism is evident when Madame de la Rougierre is referred to as “devilish,” and “fit to teach nothing but devilment” (US 60, 52). She is represented more as a gargoyle than a woman. She is referred to as “Medusa,” a “sorceress,” and appears like an apparition (US 99, 101, 332).

Furthermore, Madame de la Rougierre is associated with death and a love of morbidity. She tells Maud: “I love very much to be near to the dead people” (US 35). She calls herself “‘Madame la Morgue—Mrs. Deadhouse!’” and says she will present

Maud to her friends “‘Monsieur Cadavre [Mr. Corpse] and Monsieur Squelette [Mr. Skeleton]’”(US 41). The underlying irony is, that despite all of this, it is Madame de la Rougierre who turns into the victim.

Madame de la Rougierre is portrayed as unnatural—she embodies the opposite of what the English embraced as the ideal woman. She has “a malevolent shrewdness in her eyes, and [a] hollow smile,” and exhibits “waggish, frolicsome moods” (US 73, 87). When Maud discovers Madame de la Rougierre in Silas’s home, Madame de la Rougierre responds in an unnatural, very *un*English way. She is portrayed, like the passionate Hortense, as “danc[ing] some fantastic steps in her bare wet feet, tracking the floor with water” (US 368). She is the embodiment of the frenzied Frenchwoman.

The reader is convinced of Madame de la Rougierre’s criminality, not so much because she *is* a criminal, but because she *acts* and *looks* like a criminal, and moreover because she is French. Maud asks the question: “‘Has [Madame de la Rougierre] ever committed any great crime?’” (US 81). The answer, upon close inspection, is simply no. It is evident that the extent of Madame de la Rougierre’s wickedness does not encompass crimes of a deadly nature, but merely cruelty to Maud, a tendency to theft, and alcoholism.

The purpose of frightening Maud appears to be merely cruelty for the sake of being cruel (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay* 106). However, Madame de la Rougierre’s cruelty, coupled with her association with the unnatural, serves to reinforce her culpability in the mind of the reader. The reader *wants* to see Madame de la Rougierre punished merely because she is *so* unnatural and is *so* cruel to Maud.

Part of the reason the reader feels such animosity toward Madame de la Rougierre may be the result of the point of view. The story is told from Maud's perspective, in the first person. The bias that the reader adopts flows from the bias that Maud feels against Madame de la Rougierre. As with Hortense in *Bleak House*, the reader is never allowed into the mind of Madame de la Rougierre, which effectively negates any sympathy the reader might develop for her. The reader becomes so convinced of Madame de la Rougierre's guilt that it is easy to identify with Maud's explication of Madame de la Rougierre's personality:

I never could quite understand why these Jezebels like to insinuate the dreadful truth against themselves; but they do. Is it the spirit of feminine triumph overcoming feminine shame, and making them vaunt their fall as an evidence of bygone fascination and existing power? [...] Have not women preferred hatred to indifference, and the reputation of witchcraft, with all its penalties, to absolute insignificance? Thus as they enjoyed the fear inspired among simple neighbours by their imagined traffic with the father of ill, did Madame, I think, relish with a cynical vainglory the suspicion of her Satanic superiority. (US 392)

Couched within this analysis of feminine enigma, is the assertion that those women who deviate from the norm (in this case respectable, idealized *English* womanhood) are somehow crazed, attention seekers. This trivial desire for attention is manifested in their desire for power at any cost.

Ultimately, Madame de la Rougierre is punished for "her betrayal of her sex and the Victorian womanly ideal" (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay* 104). Moreover, she "is the only character [...] who is punished in such a violent way" (Kalikoff, *Murder and Moral Decay* 104). Madame de la Rougierre implicitly causes her own death by drinking the drugged claret that is intended for Maud. Moreover, the narrator implicitly blames Madame de la Rougierre for her own death, effectively 'blaming the victim' by implying

that her indulgence in wine is “characteristically French” (Kalikoff 104). Madame de la Rougierre becomes the scapegoat because she is the *other*, not because she is complicit in murder. She is not privy to Silas’s intention to murder Maud. The narrator makes this fact clear by stating that “[Madame de la Rougierre] was not to be trusted [...] with the truth,” which, paradoxically, may also be interpreted as a slur against her French ethnicity (US 432). It is ironic that Madame de la Rougierre becomes the victim of the murder plot to kill Maud. When Maud inadvertently discovers her at Bertram-Haugh, Madame de la Rougierre declares that she will be Maud’s “gardien tuteur [guardian angel]” (US 370). In the final scene this is exactly what she becomes. It is Madame de la Rougierre who is murdered in Maud’s place. With the death of Madame de la Rougierre, the foreign contagion is removed, re-establishing social peace and harmony.

CHAPTER III ~ THE MAD WOMAN: *JANE EYRE, LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET, MAN AND WIFE*

It was not only the fallen or foreign woman who was outside the boundaries of respectable society. The woman labeled as mad was excluded as well, despite the fact that in some cases she may have elicited more sympathy than her fallen or foreign sisters. During the eighteenth century, the insane were viewed as “unfeeling brutes, ferocious animals that needed to be kept in check” (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 8). In the nineteenth century a shift occurred, and the mad were looked upon with pity as “sick human beings” in need of help (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 8).

As the Victorians embraced the emerging discipline of psychology, the diagnosis of insanity evolved into not only a medical explanation for bizarre behaviour, but also a suitable legal explanation for criminal behaviour. The woman criminal did not have to be judged only as either ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ She could now be judged as mad.

During the first half of the century, female criminal insanity was largely attributed to a lack of moral will. In his 1835 book, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*, J.C. Pritchard, an English physician, defined two types of insanity: “one corresponding to the intellect and the other to the will, using for the latter the term *moral insanity*.” He asserted that when a person is afflicted with moral insanity, “the moral and active principles of the mind are strangely perverted and depraved; the power of self-government is lost or greatly impaired” (Pritchard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* 4).

Pritchard admitted that moral insanity was difficult to detect because there were no “discoverable illusion or hallucinations” (Pritchard, *On the Different Forms of Insanity, in Relation to Jurisprudence* 31). Although considered mad, the sufferer from

moral insanity could still reason, and accordingly “the problem of insanity was redefined as one of loss of self-control, not loss of reason or intellect [...]” (Wiener 166). By defining insanity from a ‘moral’ standpoint, madness was redefined, “not as a loss of reason, but as deviance from socially accepted behaviour” (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 29). Pritchard underscored this ambiguity by stating that the appearances, which may indicate the presence of moral insanity, may also be merely an “eccentricity of conduct [...] and absurd habits” and not insanity at all (Qtd. in Berrios 125). Because the term ‘moral insanity’ was vague, it could be used to explain any behaviour that was either abnormal or disruptive.

Early in the century, Victorian doctors also commonly believed that insanity could be prevented through the sheer use of will power (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 30). This view serves to underscore the influence of religion on how mental illness was interpreted during the first part of the nineteenth century. Where moral fortitude was needed to resist temptation, the same self-will was needed to resist behaving in a way that was contrary to social norms. The strength of a person’s will was seen as ‘insurance’ against mental disorders. Sanity depended on the force of the will to behave in a manner that was socially acceptable.

As the century progressed, female “criminal offenders [...] came increasingly to be described in terms of the external forces acting upon their will—their social environment, their physical and psychic constitution, or a mixture of the two” (Wiener 216). As a result, criminal behaviour became less frequently attributed to a woman’s agency. Instead, female offenders were labeled “as [having] problem personalities that manifested pathologies” (Wiener 228). Female criminality could now be associated with

a psychological disorder which could be directly linked to either a woman's physiology or, alternatively, to her heredity. Pritchard reinforced this view by asserting that a link existed between heredity and insanity. He stated that "in many instances it has been found that an hereditary tendency to madness has existed in the family" (Qtd. in Berrios 117).

During the middle of the nineteenth century, this shift in the view of female criminality was explained as being in "the offender's nature [rather] than in the moral consciousness or the rational intellect" (Wiener 229). Doctors displayed a growing tendency to favour a medical analysis and "interpret criminality as indicative of [a] biological or psychological disorder" (Zedner 3). What had once been viewed as being "the result of [...] sin [...] was increasingly seen as being tied to constitutional defects in the offender" (Wiener 229). Society began to look to science rather than religion as an explanation of behaviour. The spiritual explanation that centered on a person's lack of will power was gradually being superseded by "the advance of medical [science which] went hand in hand with the rapid development of the study of psychology, based on a growing preoccupation with the biological conditions shaping character" (Wiener 165). Because women were viewed as physically and emotionally weak creatures, the female criminal came to be viewed as 'medically' abnormal as well as 'morally' abnormal.

This view of women was rooted in the Victorian notion that women were biologically inferior to men. Because women were viewed as weak and childlike, 'prisoners' of their own female biology, they were easily integrated into the psychological model of mental instability (Zedner 90). Moreover, "puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause were seen as so debilitating that woman was

left barely fit for ‘normal life’” (Zedner 77). Lombroso, a prominent Victorian sociologist, asserted that “one peculiarity of the female lunatic, which is, however, only an exaggeration of her normal state, is that her madness becomes more acute at particular periods, such as menstruation, menopause, and pregnancy” (294).

This view served to reinforce the fact that any departure from the Victorian notion of appropriate female behaviour was labeled as deviant and psychologically abnormal. “Deviant behaviour” was explained “as the product of delicate nerves, emotional disorder, or mental defect—all directly related to [a] woman’s biology” (Zedner 87). Moreover, the willingness to view females as mad is reinforced by the statistics of asylum confinement. In 1845, males outnumbered females in asylum confinement by thirty percent. By the 1850’s, however, women outnumbered men (Showalter, *The Female Malady* 52).

Within the scope of a criminal charge, “the degree to which a woman could be seen as prisoner of her biology directly lessened her culpability” (Zedner 87). Moreover, coupled with the fact that the Victorians identified all women as inherently weak, both emotionally and physically, there was also a class bias embedded within the Victorian criminal justice system. Even if the accused woman was not facing a capital charge, her social class influenced the degree of punishment. On January 19, 1869, an article published in *The Echo* “compared the light sentence of one month in jail meted out to a ‘lady’ shoplifter with the six-months of hard labour customary for working-class women convicted of the same offence” (Qtd. in Morris 31). Charles Bucknill, a prominent psychologist, implicitly criticized the extent to which women of the middle and upper classes were given preferential treatment in the criminal justice system: “Kleptomania is

never urged as a defense for the delinquencies of the poor; but when ladies of respectable connection are detected in habits of shoplifting, the theory of kleptomania has been found exceedingly convenient” (Bucknill 324-5).

A woman’s emotional fluctuations associated with her life-cycles came to be linked to mental instability and provided a satisfactory explanation for wrongdoing, especially for the middle and upper class female criminal. If she shoplifted, she was labeled a kleptomaniac rather than a common thief. If she was guilty of murder, she could be viewed as the victim of her body’s natural cycles and therefore she was labeled ‘mad,’ not ‘bad.’ This labeling effectively removed her agency and made her a helpless victim of her own biology.

The insanity plea provided a means by which Victorian juries could exculpate a woman whose conviction might send her to the gallows. Psychiatric discourse provided the explanation for behaviour that contravened the acceptable norms of propriety, and so enabled juries to view the woman as ‘diseased’ or ‘abnormal’ rather than criminal.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the view of womanhood as biologically inferior paved the way for women to invoke the insanity plea as a defense in criminal cases. In fact, “the courts themselves took the lead in demanding that medical evidence be used; there was therefore an established institutional framework into which medical evidence linking [murder] and lunacy could be placed” which became available to both men and women (Smith 148).

The landmark case of *Regina v. M’Naghten* in 1843, and the resulting M’Naghten Rule, provided the standard measure for criminal culpability with respect to criminal

insanity. The case centered around Daniel M’Naghten¹ who, while attempting to assassinate British Prime Minister Robert Peel, murdered Peel’s private secretary, Mr. Drummond. M’Naghten was not convicted on the grounds that he was deemed to be the “victim of irresistible impulses” (Wiener 87). The public outcry against this verdict was overwhelming. Queen Victoria herself was alarmed, and she complained to Peel:

The law may be perfect, but how is it that whenever a case for its application arises it proves to be of no avail? We have seen the trial [...] of [...] M’Naghten conducted by the ablest lawyers of the day—and they *allow* and *advise* the Jury to pronounce the verdict of not guilty on account of insanity, whilst *everybody* is morally convinced that [...]the] malefactor [...]was] perfectly conscious and aware of what [...]he] did. (Qtd. in Wiener 87)

To ease Queen Victoria’s discomfiture with the verdict in the M’Naghten case, the Lord Chancellor convened a panel of judges who appeared before the House of Lords to answer a set of questions in order to restate “the knowledge of right and wrong test” as it applied to criminal insanity (Wiener 87). This resulted in the famous M’Naghten Rule, which, to the present day, provides the framework for determining criminal lunacy. Reduced to its essence, the M’Naghten Rule states that in order to be held culpable, the accused must understand the nature and consequences of the action undertaken *or* understand the action to be morally wrong and contrary to accepted social behaviour² (Martin’s CC 53).³ The M’Naghten Rule established a consistent standard for

¹ A dispute arose between Justice Frankfurter and *The Times* of London surrounding the spelling of M’Naghten. *The Times* maintained that they “preferred M’Naghten as it was based on a letter actually signed by the accused.” Justice Frankfurter responded by writing to the Editor: “To what extent is a lunatic’s spelling, even of his own name, to be deemed an authority!” (Stuart, 349). For the sake of consistency, the accused’s own spelling of M’Naghten will be maintained in this thesis.

² The term ‘morally wrong’ is interpreted in law to mean socially wrong and contrary to the accepted law of the land. For a thorough discussion of the M’Naghten Rule, see *Mewett & Manning on Criminal Law*, by Alan W. Mewett and Morris Manning, and *Canadian Criminal Law: A Treatise*, by Don Stuart.

³ See Section 16, *Martin’s Criminal Code, 2001*, specifically the subsections dealing with “Meaning of appreciating and knowing,” “Meaning of wrong,” and “Mental illness short of insanity.” For a complete report of the House of Lords’ decision on the M’Naghten Case, see *All England Reports* [1843-60], pages 229-235.

determining criminal insanity at a time when medical standards of determining insanity were quickly evolving and changing. Furthermore, the M'Naghten Rule still provides the framework for determining criminal responsibility today.

It is interesting to note that between 1832-1901 far more women than men were acquitted on the grounds of insanity, "even when women and men were charged with similar crimes" (Ainsley 39). Of the women who pleaded insanity, eighty-seven percent were successful, compared to only fifty-nine percent of men who were successful when pleading insanity. This fact serves to underscore not only the notion that any departure from the feminine ideal must be 'madness,' but that men and women were held to "different standards of responsibility" (Ainsley 42). This view denied the agency of women, particularly "when confronted with physical proof of their capacity for anger, power, and violence" (Ainsley 40). The verdict of insanity allowed Victorians to excuse the violence of women and attribute it to their inherent weakness and 'femaleness.'

Mad women are at the center of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë; *Lady Audley's Secret* by Mary Elizabeth Braddon; and *Man and Wife* by Wilkie Collins. It is interesting to note that all of the women (Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Hester in *Man and Wife*), are at one time associated with the middle or upper classes. This fact reinforces the view that a class bias existed when determining criminal insanity. Apparently, it was much less distasteful for the respectable Victorian to view middle- and upper-class women criminals as mad rather than bad. Labeling deviant behaviour as insanity implicitly reinforced the Victorian stereotype of the woman as essentially good, but psychologically weak and troubled. Violence belonged to the lower and working

classes, not to the respectable classes, and certainly did not exist in the heart of the ideal woman of the middle and upper classes.

It is also noteworthy that the punishment for the crimes of Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge was relegated to the private sphere, not the public arena of the criminal justice system. This fact underscores the class as well as the gender bias that existed when determining criminality. As Ruth Harris notes in her book, *Murders and Madness*:

Although [...] women [often] demonstrated a keen awareness of their circumstances, generally admitting their offence and even describing their sometimes elaborate preparations, investigating magistrates, nonetheless, tended to treat them as irresponsible agents. (209)

The law often turned a blind eye to the violence perpetrated by women. A woman's capacity for violence was often disturbing to the male-dominated legal and judicial system, and it was much more comforting to view middle- and upper-class women criminals as mentally unbalanced than violently inclined.

I intend to argue that in Victorian novels, madness was used as an attempt to explain female violence. The most famous representation of madness in Victorian literature is Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. While Bertha in *Jane Eyre* is depicted as mad before she is portrayed as an arsonist, she represents a prototype against which the depiction of mad women in Victorian novels may be measured. Furthermore, while she is not initially depicted as criminal, the issues of foreignness, miscegenation, class, and hereditary taint come into play in her characterization.

In *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Man and Wife*, I intend to argue that although Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge are labeled as mad in the novels in which they appear, it is clear that their crimes are not the result of biological or psychological fluctuations. They both possess the necessary *mens rea* (guilty mind) and committed the *actus rea* (guilty

act) to be held responsible for their actions. While Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge may be the victims of the social system of the day, they are not the passive victims of either heredity or their own physiology.

Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is the embodiment of the Victorian mad woman whose unleashed passion represents a deadly threat to respectable British society. While Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge are only judged to be mad after the commission of their crimes, Bertha's crimes are portrayed as a manifestation of her madness. Her crimes of arson, like her personality, are associated with heat and passion. The fact that Bertha sets fire to Rochester's bed, and later to Thornfield, reinforces her depiction as a mad woman whose presence represents a danger to everyone with whom she comes into contact. She is portrayed as dangerous, not so much because she is a 'criminal,' but because she is mad. Jane states to Rochester: "[Bertha] cannot help being mad" (JE 257). Bertha's crimes are depicted as resulting from her madness, and likewise, her madness is a result of her heredity. She is portrayed as having no control over either.

The Creole Bertha Mason personifies the passionate foreigner to Rochester. He at first found her "a fine woman [...] tall, dark, and majestic" (JE 260). Rochester "was dazzled, stimulated: [his] senses were excited" (JE 260). On the one hand Rochester was aroused and fascinated by Bertha, while on the other, he was horrified by her passion. Bertha's exotic beauty, coupled with her alien mystery, was at the same time both threatening and alluring. Rochester admits to Jane that he was rash and impetuous: "[Bertha's] relatives encouraged me; competitors piqued me; she allured me" (JE 260). Bertha represents the uncivilized and passionate creature who is secreted away in the

Victorian consciousness. She is the manifestation of the dangerous criminal who potentially exists within every woman and who threatens to split the stable fabric of English respectability.

Rochester's explanation of his marriage, and his subsequent imprisonment of his wife, is centered in the fact that he was "cheated into espousing" Bertha Mason (JE 249). Bertha's father was "silent on family secrets before [the marriage]" (JE 249). And what were the 'family secrets?' The secrets, so effectively hidden from Rochester (according to his own account), were that Bertha Mason "came of a mad family;—idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard!" (JE 249). Bertha is the representation of the foreign woman whose heritage is madness. She embodies the threat that female passion and hereditary taint represented to the respectable Victorian.

It is noteworthy that what appears to have disgusted Rochester the most is not Bertha's madness, but the blemish on his name that her madness represents. It is evident that even Rochester's father, who initially promoted the marriage, became anxious to conceal the union. Rochester tells Jane that:

'My father and brother had not made my marriage known to their acquaintance; because, in the very first letter I wrote to apprise them of the union—having already begun to experience extreme disgust of its consequences; and from the family character and constitution seeing a hideous future opening to me—I added an urgent charge to keep it secret; and very soon the infamous conduct of the wife my father had selected for me was such as to make him blush to own her as his daughter-in-law.' (JE 263)

Madness was linked to heredity and served to fuel the fear of a tainted progeny. George Man Burrows asserted in his *Commentaries on Insanity* in 1828 that a link existed between madness and heredity:

But no fact is more incontrovertibly established than that insanity is [...] susceptible of being propagated; or, in other words, that a specific morbid condition sometimes exists in the human condition which, by intermarriage [...] may be perpetuated *ad infinitum*. (Qtd. in Taylor 65)

The fact that Bertha's madness is linked to her heredity serves to underscore the fear of blight on the patriarchal name. However, Rochester appears to loathe not only her 'inherited' madness, but also the fact that she is a Creole, reinforcing the fear of blight through miscegenation. His repulsion to Bertha was not only due to a manifestation of her heredity, but also to her lack of Englishness. Bertha embodies the opposite of what the Victorians conceived of as the ideal woman. Rochester claims that shortly after the marriage, Bertha's "vices sprang up fast and rank [...] What a pigmy intellect she had—and what giant propensities!" (JE 261). Rochester describes Bertha's nature as "most gross, impure, [and] depraved" (JE 261).

Rochester's description of Bertha parallels that of the Victorian madwoman who is characterized as uncivilized. J.C. Pritchard, a nineteenth-century physician and ethnologist, compared the insane to savage tribes and asserted that in both instances "the passions were under no restraint, and the will was surrendered impetuously to the emotions" (Qtd. in Wiener 26). Later in the century, in 1868, the scientists John Bucknill and Daniel Tuke asserted that "religious and moral principles alone give strength to the female mind; and that, when these are weakened or removed by disease, the subterranean fires become active, and the crater gives forth smoke and flame" (273). It is evident that, at least in Rochester's mind, Bertha had no "religious and moral principles," was lacking in Victorian "femininity," was more "savage" than "sane," and furthermore, he was disgusted by the fact that "by the law and by society [Bertha was] a part of [Rochester]" (JE 261).

The 'smoke and flame' of Bertha's soul terrifies Rochester. The mad woman, and in particular the *foreign* mad woman, serves as the manifestation of the uncivilized and barbaric. Rochester's description of the West Indies is of a wild, uncivilized country. He evokes the imagery of heated passion when describing Bertha's home. The air was "like sulphur-streams," and "the sea...rumbled dull like an earthquake—black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball" (JE 262). This imagery taps into both the physical and the spiritual dangers of the dangerous foreign landscape. Images of hell resonate within the phrases "sulphur streams," and "earthquake," while "black clouds" and "hot cannon-ball" allude to the physical danger that the foreigner, particularly the mad foreigner, represents. Conversely, England is represented by "a wind fresh from Europe" (JE 263). Rochester insists that in the patriarchal homeland of England, "all is real, sweet, and pure" (JE 184). It is ironic that Rochester removes Bertha from the 'uncivilized' West Indies only to imprison her in 'civilized' England.

It is not surprising that Bertha's crime is arson. Fire connotes heat, passion and destruction, all of which may be associated with Bertha. She sets fire to Rochester's bed curtains and later sets fire to Thornfield. The reader is clearly led to believe that Bertha is mad, and it is because of her madness that she commits her crimes. The question must be asked, however, are her crimes the result of her madness, or are they the logical consequences of being imprisoned like a savage beast? Furthermore, is it truly her heredity that is responsible for her madness, or is her madness, like her crimes, the logical result of the psychological trauma that results from her abusive incarceration? It is impossible to know the answer to these questions because Bertha's past history of

madness is related to the reader through Rochester and filtered through Jane—both of whom have a vested interest in Bertha's unsound mind. Ironically, Jane and Rochester ultimately profit from Bertha's madness and her final crime of arson. If Bertha had been 'sane,' and not caged like a wild animal, Jane and Rochester's future together would have been forever nullified. Bertha would have been the mistress of Thornfield and, presumably, Jane would have remained merely the governess—not Rochester's lover. The reader must therefore consider the possibility that it is not, in fact, heredity that causes Bertha's madness, but rather her marriage and the subsequent abusive confinement she endures at the hands of her husband. Rochester's treatment of Bertha erases her humanity and serves as an example of Rochester's attempt to obliterate Bertha and deny her existence as a human being.

In an attempt to dismiss the savage and barbaric Bertha, Rochester distances her from himself by imprisoning her in a "wild beast's den" (JE 264). By removing the evil, untamed, and mad foreigner from the public gaze, Rochester attempts to disown his wife. He asserts to Jane that "[Bertha,] who [...] so sullied my name; so outraged my honour; so blighted my youth—is not my wife" (JE 263). Rochester's denial and subsequent imprisonment of Bertha dehumanizes her. Rochester swears that he will "let [Bertha's] identity, her connection with [himself], be buried in oblivion" (JE 263). Rochester's intent to obliterate Bertha's identity is encapsulated in his comment to her brother: "You may think of her as dead and buried" (JE 181). Barbara Rigney suggests in *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* that Bertha "has ceased to exist in both human and sexual terms" (17).

Bertha becomes more beast than human, and it is not surprising that she is repeatedly associated with animal imagery. Bertha is described as a “wild beast,” and a “fiend in yonder side den” (JE 179). She does not speak, but rather issues “snarling, canine noise[s]” (JE 179). She is not depicted as human, but rather as a “creature [...] masked in an ordinary woman’s face and shape [whose] voice, [is] now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey” (JE 179). She is described as a “clothed hyena [...] stand[ing] tall on its hind feet” (JE 250). She is portrayed as “grovel[ing...] on all fours; [...] growl[ing] like some strange wild animal [...] with [...] a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane” (JE 250). Vampire imagery is also evoked when, after Bertha bites her brother, he says: ““She sucked the blood: she said she’d drain my heart”” (JE 181). Rigney asserts that Bertha’s “madness has caused this metamorphosis from human to animal” (15). Again, however, the reader must ask: Has madness caused this transformation, or is Rochester’s treatment of Bertha responsible?

It is not only Bertha who is dehumanized, however, as Rochester also evokes animal imagery when he describes Jane:

‘Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me, with more than courage—with a stern triumph. Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it—the savage, beautiful creature! If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose [...] And it is you, spirit—with will and energy, and virtue and purity—that I want.’ (JE 271)

This passage reveals both the duplicity of women as well as the fascination that the “savage, beautiful creature” holds for men. On the one hand, the fact that Rochester places Jane in a symbolic cage reveals his desire to contain and control the passionate woman, the “wild, free thing [...] the savage, beautiful creature!” (JE 271). He identifies Jane’s ‘cage’ as the virtuous repository of the passionate woman who lurks beneath the

surface. On the other hand, however, Rochester wants the virtuous Jane, the ideal woman. It is interesting that fundamentally the same attributes that attracted Rochester to Bertha attract him to Jane. He desires both the passionate and the pliant woman. He tells Jane that he loves a woman who possesses “‘the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break—at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent’” (JE 222). It is ironic that he can only possess the ‘ideal’ Jane by effecting her sexual ruin.

Bertha is a representation of Jane’s double and serves as the representation of “Jane’s own dangerous propensities toward passion” (Rigney 16). In other words, Bertha is the embodiment of Jane’s dark side. Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, agree with Rigney that Bertha symbolizes Jane’s unconscious rebellion against male dominance (361). Bertha is a manifestation of the passion that Jane keeps in check.

Jane and Bertha are linked most obviously when Bertha steals into Jane’s room before Jane’s wedding day, placing the veil meant for Jane on herself. Bertha becomes the embodiment of “Jane’s anxieties about her marriage” (Gilbert and Gubar 360). Bertha appears in a gown that is “‘white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, [Jane] cannot tell’” (JE 242). The confluence of marriage with death is evident in Jane’s description of Bertha. Jane fears the loss of self through submission in marriage. Through marriage to Rochester, Jane Eyre will cease to exist and will become Jane Rochester. Jane admits to Rochester that her “‘new name—Jane Rochester...seems so strange’” (JE 220). It is significant that through marriage, even Jane’s first name will be symbolically obliterated as Rochester makes clear when he counters: “‘Yes, Mrs. Rochester...young Mrs. Rochester—Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride’” (JE 220). The veil

suggests the symbolic death of Jane Eyre, just as the imprisonment of marriage has affected the symbolic death of Bertha Mason.

Rigney suggests that Bertha may be associated with the symbolic scapegoat: “With the depiction of the ebony crucifix on the cabinet door, which hides the entrance to Bertha’s den, an identification with the scapegoat aspect of the dying Christ” might be drawn. Rigney immediately undermines this suggestion, however, when she asserts that this view is tenuous at best (Rigney 27). However, this link is clearly strengthened and the association becomes significant when the scapegoat symbolism is combined with the veil imagery. The fact that Bertha tears Jane’s wedding veil “from top to bottom” (JE 243) parallels the Biblical account of the renting of the veil in the temple at the time of Christ’s death: “The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split” (Matthew 27:51). The tearing of the veil, precipitated by the sacrificial death of Christ, symbolically represented free access to God for everyone (Henry 1356). Furthermore, the temple veil was “a piece of tapestry” (Unger 1146), which further links it to the tapestry that hangs over the door leading to Bertha’s den, hiding the madwoman from the public gaze. Bertha becomes the scapegoat who must be sacrificed. Like Christ, Bertha is despised, rejected, and sacrificed. Bertha becomes the facilitator of Jane’s bid to assert her independence from male domination. It is when Jane learns of Bertha’s existence as Rochester’s wife that she determines to extricate herself from her involvement with Rochester. It is through the revelation of Bertha as Rochester’s wife that Jane is freed.

Bertha, as the embodiment of the scapegoat, facilitates Jane’s freedom. It is ironic, however, that Jane’s freedom is secured at the hands of a madwoman whose death

opens the way for Jane to legally marry Rochester. It is also ironic that Jane's struggle for self-fulfillment and independence ends with the Victorian convention of marriage (Kennard 91). It is noteworthy, however, that when Jane finally marries Rochester, it is not as a dependent, powerless woman. The locus of control has shifted, and Rochester becomes reliant on Jane. She is financially independent, and it is the blind and disabled Rochester who is needy. Jane's freedom to marry Rochester is purchased with the death and the final removal of the tainted and contaminated madwoman.

It is significant that Bertha's crime becomes merged with her death, and both are manifested in fire, underlining her propensity to passion. Bertha is associated with the savage, uncontrolled elements of fire in its most destructive state. The fundamental element of civilization becomes a source of destruction and death when unleashed and allowed unchecked expression. Bertha is the manifestation of unrestrained passion and potency—the deadly energy of fire that is both dangerous and destructive.

It is during Bertha's nocturnal walks that she sets Rochester's bed on fire, and it is at night that she finally dies amidst the flames that engulf Thornfield. The fact that Bertha's crimes are associated with fire and with darkness also underscores the difference between Jane and Bertha. It is the tension between the rational Jane and the passionate Bertha that serves to reinforce the Victorian conception of ideal womanhood and isolate the deviant madwoman. Bertha embodies the deadly and dangerous fire that rages in the dark, nocturnal recesses of Victorian consciousness.

Like *Jane Eyre*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*, is a novel "obsessed with the dangers of excessive passion and sexual madness" (Cvetkovich

52). *Lady Audley's Secret* challenges the existing perception of social structure, safety, and stability in England by “develop[ing] a subversive social theme about the reality of life in [...] 1861” (Boyle 149). Braddon assaults the “conventions of Romanticism, [and...] the English faith in domestic and rural tranquility” (Boyle 151). The narrator underscores this with the warning: “We hear every day of murders committed in the country” (LAS 54). *Lady Audley's Secret* brings the possibility of murder and bigamy close to home: “What do we know of the mysteries that may hang about the houses we enter?” (LAS 140).

Deserted by her husband, George, Helen Talboys leaves her young son with her aging father and assumes the name of Lucy Graham. Shortly after accepting the position of governess, she is proposed to by Sir Michael Audley, a man many years her senior. She accepts his proposal and becomes Lady Audley. In the meantime, George Talboys returns to England to find that his wife is allegedly dead. Grief-stricken, George accepts an invitation from Robert Audley to visit his uncle and his uncle's new bride at Audley Court. Shortly after their arrival, George Talboys disappears. Convinced that Lady Audley is somehow responsible, Robert embarks on a crusade to expose her guilt: “He felt that there was some mystery involved in the disappearance of his friend—some treachery towards himself, or towards George” (LAS 97). Through a chain of circumstances, Robert is able to uncover Lady Audley's past as a bigamist as well as her crime of attempted murder.

When Robert confronts Lady Audley with his suspicions, she realizes the threat that he poses to her position and attempts to murder him by setting fire to the Castle Inn where he is residing. The murder attempt fails, and Robert Audley appears at the mansion

of Sir Michael and Lady Audley and there reveals the sordid details of Lady Audley's past to Sir Michael.

It is interesting to note, however, that it is not Robert who ultimately reveals Lady Audley's 'secret.' Lady Audley's 'secret' is not her former identity, nor is it her bigamy and her attempts to murder her former husband and Robert Audley. Lady Audley's 'secret,' like the secret so carefully guarded by Bertha Mason's family, is her mother's madness and her fear that she has inherited the same condition (Boyle 154). This revelation appears somewhat anti-climactic to the contemporary reader; however, it serves to underscore the importance of appearances, inheritance and blood-lines to the Victorians. Murder, bigamy and child-abandonment *appear* to have been less distasteful to them than insanity. In reality, however, madness becomes an excuse for murder and facilitates the removal of Lady Audley from the family circle, eliminating the blight that a criminal would bring on the family name. Lady Audley is not mad, but, rather, she is the embodiment of the Victorian woman who is constrained by Victorian laws and culture that limited a woman's choices and responses within the prison-like confinement of marriage.

Unlike Bertha, who is depicted by Brontë as savage and uncivilized, Braddon's Lady Audley is "the frail, fair-haired child-woman with murder and bigamy in her heart" (Hughes 124). Lady Audley embodies the Victorian feminine ideal: "The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness" (LAS 52). Lady Audley is represented as being 'angelic,' and the ideal child-bride: "she was

something too beautiful for earth, or earthly uses, and [...] to approach her was to walk on a higher atmosphere and to breathe a purer air” (LAS 57).

Not only is Lady Audley portrayed as a child-like, sexless angel, but she also embodies middle-class domesticity and respectability:

Lady Audley flitted from room to room in the bright September sunshine—now sitting down to the piano to trill out a ballad, or the first page of an Italian bravura, or running with rapid fingers through a brilliant waltz—now hovering about a stand of hothouse flowers, doing amateur gardening with a pair of fairy-like silver-mounted embroidery scissors. (LAS 77)

Coming from an impoverished background, Lady Audley presents to the Victorian reader a disturbing portrait of the fairy-princess fantasy. Lady Audley rises from governess to lady and, outwardly, is the ideal representation of the refined Englishwoman; however, “she has achieved [her status] by abandoning her child, misrepresenting her identity, and committing bigamy. Then she twice attempts murder to preserve the status she has so perfidiously attained” (Boyle 152). Lady Audley represents an “internal threat to the respectable classes because she identifies with them; she wants what they value and brilliantly parodies their ideal” (Hughes 127). She adopts the mannerisms, dress and attitudes of the upper class, and her disguise is flawless: “She had appeared at several public balls at Chelmsford and Colchester, and was immediately established as the belle of the county. [She was] pleased with her high position and her handsome house; with every caprice gratified, every whim indulged” (LAS 53). Lady Audley represents the ideal woman with her modesty, deference and defenselessness because these qualities appealed to the Victorian male’s sense of mastery over the female (Maly-Schlatter 97). Through Lady Audley’s attempt to manipulate her own fate, she

contravenes her role as ideal woman, and as a result, she poses a threat to the male desire to control her.

The fact that Lady Audley appears to be the embodiment of the English ideal presented a threat to the Victorian social fabric. Like the unnatural clock at Audley Court “which had only one hand [...] and was therefore always in extremes” (LAS 1), Lady Audley is, on the one hand, a “waxen beauty,” and on the other, a “demonic incarnation” (LAS 345). The extremes of her nature are evident as, in the same breath, she is described as a “beautiful devil” (LAS 391) and “beautiful fiend” (LAS 71). It is the fact that Lady Audley embodies both the angel and the demon that made her such a disturbing figure to the Victorian reader. Her existence reinforces the fact that evil can exist under the gloss of beauty. Because evil may be unseen, it may be anywhere and the threat is undetected. Robert emphasizes this point to Lady Audley when he says: “I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty” (LAS 141).

The double nature of Lady Audley is further exploited in her portrait. Her portrait is fascinating because it reveals the ambiguous nature of her beauty. It focuses on the contradiction of her identity:

No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait [...] for my lady, in [the] portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend. Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace. (LAS 70-1)

The doubleness in Lady Audley's portrait reflects the contradiction that existed, but was suppressed in Victorian society. While all appears well within the domestic sphere, there are "rents in the fabric" of what society considers normative (Boyle 136). At the same time Lady Audley's beauty and beastliness are revealed. Lady Audley's portrait is a sensual representation of a woman. The erotic imagery of "crimson," "flames" and "raging furnace" are juxtaposed with her "blonde complexion" and "pretty pouting mouth." Braddon exploits the fascination with a woman's "beastly sexuality that is hidden in the recesses of the Victorian consciousness" (Boyle, 157). Cvetkovich asserts that "the image of the beautiful and transgressive woman becomes sensational when we know that she is evil and we both see and do not see her criminality in her appearance" (50). The distortion of Lady Audley's beauty not only makes her frightening, but fascinating as well (Cvetkovich 49). Lady Audley would be far less sensational if she looked as evil as she supposedly is (Cvetkovich 50).

Lady Audley's beauty effectively mystifies the evil element of her personality. In 1864, *The North British Review* described Lady Audley as:

At once the heroine and the monstrosity [...] whenever she is meditating the commission of something inexpressibly horrible, she is described as being unusually charming. Her manner and appearance are always in contrast with her conduct. All this is very exciting, but it is also very unnatural. (Qtd. in Boyle, 135)

It is the dichotomy of Lady Audley's character that reinforces this 'unnatural' element with her "golden haired beauty and her capacity to commit murder [...it is] the impossibility of recognizing her wickedness from her appearance [that] adds to her power to both fascinate and threaten others" (Cvetkovich 50).

The 'unnaturalness' of Lady Audley's nature is underscored by the mermaid imagery evoked by Braddon:

Her hair had been blown away from her face, and, being of a light, feathery quality, had spread itself into a tangled mass that surrounded her forehead like a yellow flame. There was another flame in her eyes—a greenish light, such as might flash from the changing hued orbs of an angry mermaid. (LAS 320-1)

Nina Auerbach, in her book *Woman and the Demon*, suggests that mermaid imagery “exemplif[ied] the secrecy and spiritual ambiguity of woman’s ascribed powers. Fathomless and changing, she was an awesome threat to her credulous culture” (8). The mermaid represents the woman’s “hybrid nature, her ambiguous status as creature, typifying the mysterious, broadly and evocatively demonic powers of womanhood in general” (Auerbach 94). Water imagery may be associated with danger, darkness, mystery, passion, and an erotic power beyond the control of society. These allusions are embedded in Robert Audley’s dream sequence:

In those troublesome dreams he saw Audley Court, rooted up from amidst the green pastures and the shady hedgerows of Essex, standing bare and unprotected upon that desolate northern shore, threatened by the rapid rising of a boisterous sea, whose waves seemed gathering upward to descend and crush the house he loved. As the hurrying waves rolled nearer and nearer to the stately mansion, the sleeper saw a pale, starry face looking out of the silvery foam, and knew that it was my lady, transformed into a mermaid, beckoning his uncle to destruction. (LAS 246)

The “green pastures” and “shady hedgerows” stand in stark contrast to the “boisterous sea” and “waves descending and crushing.” The menacing and dangerous woman destroys the representation of the idyllic, paternal home. Lady Audley, in this depiction of an unnatural creature of the sea, is the looming threat to the stability, security and honour of the patriarchal home. She is a contaminant embodying danger and death. Robert views Lady Audley as the embodiment of evil as he contemplates her character

and desires to remove her from the family circle: “I look upon you [...] as the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle [...] you shall no longer pollute this place by your presence” (LAS 345).

Even when Lady Audley is portrayed as the picture of domestic bliss, the aura of the sorceress surrounds her:

Surely a pretty woman never looks prettier than when making tea. The most feminine and most domestic of all occupations imparts a magic harmony to her very movement, a witchery to her every glance. The floating mists from the boiling liquid in which she infuses the soothing herbs, whose secrets are known to her alone, envelop her in a cloud of scented vapour, through which she seems a social fairy. (LAS 222)

Like the duality of Lady Audley’s portrait, it is difficult to separate the woman (or the fairy) from the witch in this description.

Clearly, Lady Audley is portrayed as a cunning predator; however, one of the unsettling aspects of the novel is the fact that Lady Audley is depicted with a lack of sympathy. Although George Talboys ultimately becomes the victim of Lady Audley’s murder attempt, initially, it is Lady Audley (Helen Talboys)⁴ who is victimized by Talboys, and it is Talboys’s desertion of her that sets in motion the circumstances that trigger the commission of her crimes. Because of Talboys’s inability to support his new wife, he abandons her: “I flew into a rage with her [...] then ran out of the house, declaring that I would never enter it again” (LAS 19). He takes the coward’s way out, leaving her a note as she sleeps:

‘My wife was upstairs, sleeping peacefully with the baby on her breast. I sat down and wrote a few brief lines, which told her that I never had loved her better than now when I seemed to desert her; that I was going to try my fortune in a new world; and that if I succeeded I should come back to

⁴ Lady Audley’s legal name is Helen Talboys. After her husband, George Talboys, deserts her, she assumes the alias of Lucy Graham.

bring her plenty and happiness, but that if I failed I should never look upon her face again.’ (LAS 20-21)

Helen Talboys is left with nothing more than “a few blotted words” to explain her husband’s disappearance. She has no way to contact him, and furthermore, she does not know when, or even if he will ever return. Clearly, Helen Talboys is victimized by her husband’s abandonment. As if this were not enough, Helen Talboys’s abandonment arises out of the stigma she has inherited by her low social class. George Talboys abandons his wife because she is poor, as he states:

‘No sooner [...] did my father hear that I had married a penniless little girl, the daughter of a tipsy old half-pay lieutenant, than he wrote me a furious letter, telling me he would never again hold any communication with me, and that my yearly allowance would stop from my wedding day.’ (LAS 18)

Helen Talboys’s life is one of “poverty, trials, vexations, humiliations [and] deprivations” (LAS 10), and although her poverty may explain why she changes her name in order to rise in social station, it clearly does not justify the abandonment of her son. Cvetkovich asserts that “one of the subversive dimensions of the sensation novel is its challenge to the links between femininity and maternity” (119). Both Lady Audley and Lady Isabel in *East Lynne* appear willing to abandon their children out of self-interest; however, where Lady Isabel goes to great lengths to be reunited with her children, Helen Talboys goes to great lengths to be separated from her child. As she says:

‘I looked upon this as a desertion, and I resented it bitterly—I resented it by hating the man who had left me with no protector but a weak, tipsy father, and with a child to support [...] I recognized a separate wrong done me by George Talboys. His father was rich; his sister was living in luxury and respectability; and I, his wife, and the mother of his son, was a slave allied for ever to beggary and obscurity [...] I did not love the child; for he had been left a burden upon my hands.’ (LAS 353)

Unlike Tess d'Urberville who becomes the victim of her circumstances, Lady Audley effectively *uses* her circumstances to her own advantage. As a class-climber, her self-interest becomes evident. Clearly, the impetus for marriage is not love for Lady Audley, but rather the attainment of social position and material comfort. In her confession to Sir Audley, Lady Audley states that, "I knew how far poverty can affect a life, and I looked forward with a sick terror to a life so affected. At last the rich suitor [George Talboys...] came" (LAS 351). Likewise, it is evident that her love for Sir Michael is dependent on what he can provide for her when she goes on to tell him: "I have loved you, Sir Michael [...] for when you married me you elevated me to a position that [George Talboys] could never have given me" (LAS 351). Lady Audley does not love the man, she loves the means that he represents. The person himself is secondary. It is the position he can confer and the resulting self-gratification that Lady Audley loves.

It is significant that before Lady Audley is revealed to be a bigamist and a woman who has attempted murder, she is portrayed in the conventional prone position of the fallen woman. Lady Audley is twice portrayed in this position, and both times she is at the feet of Sir Audley. The reader is first introduced to Lady Audley in the fallen position when she accepts Sir Michael's proposal of marriage: "She was still on the ground at his feet, crouching rather than kneeling, her thin white dress clinging about her, her pale hair streaming over her shoulders [...] her hands clutching at the black ribbon about her throat, as if it had been strangling her" (LAS 11). Embedded within the position of "crouching" is the implicit allusion to animal imagery. The allusion to Lady Audley as "beast" is further reinforced by her "thin white dress" that carries with it the implicit suggestion that her virtue is merely a thin veneer. It is only a 'thin covering' for her

beastly nature. Furthermore, her “thin white dress” is contrasted with the “black ribbon about her throat,” effectively portraying the extremes of Lady Audley’s nature as ‘angel’ and ‘demon.’ The black ribbon serves as a symbol of the noose around the lovely neck of the cunning criminal.

The second time we see Lady Audley in the prone, fallen position occurs when she divulges the truth to Sir Michael. Once again she is at his feet: “When first my lady had fallen on her knees, Sir Michael had attempted to raise her” (LAS 347). It is significant that Sir Michael attempts to raise Lady Audley *before* he is told of her past. It is also significant that Lady Audley reveals her bigamy to Sir Michael, but *not* the fact that she has attempted murder twice. It is after Sir Michael learns of the stain on his family’s name that, although Lady Audley “was still on her knees [...] Sir Michael made no effort to raise her” (LAS 349). It is in the prone position of the fallen woman that Sir Michael leaves Lady Audley, who has been transformed from “my darling” (LAS 285) to “the *creature* whom he had cherished” (LAS 358) (my italics). Once again, animal imagery is evoked to characterize Lady Audley. It is this dangerous creature whom Sir Michael must now abandon in order to protect his name and family from the stain, stigma, and contagion of the fallen woman. Sir Michael does not turn from Lady Audley because she has attempted murder twice, but because she has dishonoured the sacred, patriarchal name.

As with Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, the taint of hereditary insanity resonates within the text of *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Lady Audley’s greatest fear is that of inherited insanity; however, Lady Audley is not mad. Lady Audley very conveniently invokes madness firstly as way of diverting suspicion from herself to Robert Audley, and secondly as a

defense of her criminal actions. When it becomes clear to Lady Audley that Robert is on the verge of revealing her past to Sir Michael, she suggests to her husband that Robert is mad: “My dear [...] have you ever thought Mr. Audley—a little [...] out of his mind?” (LAS 285). The fact that Lady Audley has the calculation to attempt to shift suspicion from herself to Robert suggests that she recognizes the nature and consequences of her actions. Furthermore, when Lady Audley later realizes that she can no longer maintain the lies about her past, she invokes madness once again, but uses it this time as an excuse for her actions and for her own defense. She declares to Robert Audley when he threatens to confront Sir Michael with her past: “Bring Sir Michael! [...] I will confess anything—everything! [...] You have conquered a MADWOMAN!” (LAS 345). Lady Audley’s crimes are not a manifestation of madness, but rather they are motivated by a keen desire to maintain the social position she has achieved. She is considered mad because the label of insanity was preferable to that of criminal. Her madness is merely an excuse for her violent actions.

Lady Audley is removed to the madhouse, not because she is mad, but because she represents a threat to the stability of patriarchal tranquillity as well as a taint on the patriarchal name. This fact is reinforced when Robert Audley engages the physician, Dr. Mosgrave, to assess Lady Audley’s sanity. His motives are clear when he asks the doctor “to save our stainless name from degradation and shame” (LAS 378). Robert desperately clings to the belief in Lady Audley’s madness in order to provide the necessary justification for removing her from the family circle. The doctor, however, does not confirm Lady Audley’s madness when he tells Robert:

‘[...] there is no evidence of madness in anything that [Lady Audley] 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.' (LAS 377)

Through Lady Audley's actions, "the threat of crime and insanity has penetrated not only into respectable society, but into the family circle itself, and into the heart of that circle, the wifely paragon" (Hughes, 127). Lady Audley is removed from respectable society and hidden in a madhouse because of the blight she represents to the family. As the doctor concludes: "'The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood [...] I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!'" (LAS 379). Robert Audley achieves the goal he articulates earlier in the novel: "'I will go straight to [Lady Audley], and will tear away the beautiful veil under which she hides her wickedness [...] and banish her for ever from the house which her presence has polluted'" (LAS 253). Lady Audley, representing a contagion, is separated and isolated from the patriarchal family, thereby purging the poison that she represents to the respectable English family.

The fact that Lady Audley's crimes are resolved by removing her to the madhouse and without legal intervention underscores the length to which the aristocracy would go to save the patriarchal name from the shame, stigma, and public exposure of criminal activity within the family circle. None of Lady Audley's acts is the result of madness, but, rather, they are keenly rational and highly self-serving. She deserts her child and enters into a bigamous marriage in an effort to escape poverty and degradation. She attempts to murder George Talboys to maintain her secret past, and she further attempts to murder Robert Audley in an effort to silence him and eliminate the threat of exposure

that he represents. What is unsettling is the fact that Lady Audley's actions are not only rational, but, given the legal constraints faced by women, they are logical as well. Because the male-dominated law regarding marriage and divorce allowed few options for a woman in her position, coupled with the fact that Victorian society offered few opportunities to poor, lower-class women, Lady Audley maximizes her one source of capital—her beauty. Her actions, however misguided, are not motivated by madness, but by a keen desire for self-preservation.

Lady Audley is not insane, but rather “acts out of rational self-interest to protect her livelihood” (Cvetkovich 48). Lady Audley manipulates her circumstances to meet her needs within the confines of society and the limited power granted to women. Lady Audley “take[s] control of events and [...] murder stands in for divorce” (Cvetkovich 48). Because divorce was not an option, Lady Audley turns to murder. As Elaine Showalter argues, “as every woman reader must have sensed, Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative [of women in general]” (Qtd. in Cvetkovich 48).

Hester Dethridge, of Collins's *Man and Wife*, is a representation of a Victorian woman who, unlike the abandoned Lady Audley, is shackled to a marriage partner from whom she cannot escape. Rather than being the abandoned wife, Hester is the portrait of a wife unable to extricate herself from a damaging and abusive marriage. Although Hester is banished to the madhouse as a result of her crimes, she is, in fact, not mad. She calculates and plans the murder of her husband, Joel Dethridge. It is not madness that prompts this homicide, but rather the constraints of the marriage laws, together with the societal restraints placed upon Victorian women. These create the environment in which

Hester commits her crime. Later, when she murders Geoffrey Delamayn, it is again not the result of madness, but rather an attempt to extricate herself from the control he is exercising over her and to save the life of Anne Silvester.

While Hester is a relatively minor character in the novel, she plays an important role. The plot of the novel revolves around the governess Anne Silvester, who, after the rich Geoffrey Delamayn seduces her, begs him to marry her. Since he is a member of the upper class and she is a lowly governess, Delamayn refuses, telling Anne: ““Here it is in a nutshell:—If I marry you now, I’m a ruined man”” (MW79). By marrying Anne, Delamayn would abdicate any hope of marrying the wealthy widow, Mrs. Glenarm. Anne replies to Delamayn: ““You villain! If you *don’t* marry me, I am a ruined woman”” (MW79). As the narrator interjects, “Discovery, which meant moral-ruin to the woman, meant money-ruin to the man” (MW 83). Delamayn suggests that he will meet Anne at a nearby inn at Craig Fernie, Scotland, and there he will marry her privately.

Through manipulation and deceit, Delamayn convinces his good friend, Arnold, to go in his place to deliver a letter to Anne explaining his delay in coming to her at the inn where she awaits him. At the inn, Arnold pretends to be Anne’s husband in an effort to protect her honour. Delamayn uses this masquerade, in combination with the Scotch Marriage Law,⁵ to wriggle out of his promise to marry Anne, claiming that she is already married to Arnold. His plot fails, however, and the irregular marriage laws of Scotland come back to haunt him when he finds himself married to Anne on the basis of the promise of marriage he had made in a letter to her.

⁵ During the nineteenth-century in Scotland a couple could be considered married without any official service if they merely presented themselves as wed. These marriages were sometimes referred to as ‘Irregular Marriages,’ and Sir Patrick Lundie alludes to this on page 199 when he states: ““It is extremely difficult for a man to pretend to marry in Scotland—and not really to do it.””

Reluctantly, Delamayn accepts Anne as his wife, virtually imprisoning her in the fortress-like cottage of Hester Dethridge: “The cottage suggested [...] the idea of an asylum or a prison” (MW 536). Like Bertha, Anne is confined and isolated. She is the captive of her husband, who not only imprisons her, but also plots her death. Delamayn blackmails Hester into conspiring with him to murder Anne because he has obtained possession of Hester’s written confession of the murder of Joel Dethridge. However, just moments before Delamayn can carry out his plan to suffocate Anne, Hester murders him. The removal of Delamayn not only releases Anne from her impossible situation, but also frees her to marry the honourable Sir Patrick Lundie.

Hester is as a suitable character to commit the murder of Delamayn because she has not only already committed homicide before, but when she committed her first homicide—that of her husband, Joel Dethridge—Hester was a member of the working class. While Joel Dethridge is alive, Hester “epitomizes working-class abuse.” She is the victim of her husband’s “physical violence, drunkenness, exploitation, and emotional torture” (Morris 119). As the victim of physical, financial and emotional abuse, and despite numerous attempts to leave her husband, Hester finally turns to the solution of murder as a way of ridding herself of a husband who torments her life.

Part of Hester’s dilemma, however, is rooted in her isolation, which is a direct result of her union with her working-class husband. In her manuscript, Hester explains that “[Joel Dethridge] was a good ten years younger than I was; and, being only a journeyman, his worldly station was below mine” (MW 582). The Victorian middle-class notion of marriage embraced a “union between social equals” (Thompson 95). Furthermore, while the middle class scorned any marriage to a social inferior, this was

especially true for daughters who married beneath their social station (Thompson 95). By marrying beneath her station, Hester pays the social price of isolation, as she writes: “My relations all turned their backs on me. Not one of them was present at my marriage; [...] saying that they had done with me from that time forth” (MW 583). Hester’s isolation makes her even more vulnerable to the abuse of her husband. She is rejected by her family, isolated from friends, and constrained by the law. As she explains in her manuscript: “Magistrates and lawyers; relations and friends; endurance of injuries, patience, hope and honest work—I had tried all these, and tried them vainly [...] The prospect [of help] was closed on all sides” (MW 593).

Virginia Morris asserts in her book, *Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction*, that Hester Dethridge’s story was inspired by the 1869 trial of Susannah Palmer who was charged with assault by her husband. Palmer’s husband maintained that Susannah had “struck him in the hand with a kitchen knife, threatening his life” (Morris 119). Susannah was subsequently charged, tried, and convicted; however, it is clear that Susannah was the victim rather than the perpetrator:

Testimony dominated [during the trial] that throughout her marriage, her husband had savagely beaten her, turned her out of the house at night, openly lived with a mistress, and frequently disappeared for months at a time, leaving her to support herself and her children by working as a charwoman...[Palmer returned periodically to] help [...] himself to her wages [and sell] her furniture to raise more cash [...] Under the law, he had every right to her property and she had no right to a divorce. Nor were there any legal provisions that could effectively protect her from a beating. (Morris 119)

The parallels between the story of Susannah Palmer and Hester Dethridge are striking. Although Hester repeatedly tries to free herself from her abusive husband, her efforts are useless. Furthermore, the framework of the marriage law created the

environment that makes possible Hester's abuse. Victorian laws and customs served to reinforce the power of the husband. Hester's husband exercises his legal right in taking Hester's money and selling her furniture. As his wife, she has no legal claim to anything she might have brought into the marriage or earned while in the marriage. She and her possessions are viewed "as commodities to be exchanged, bought and sold, and thought of in terms of profit and loss" (O'Neill 126). This fact is reinforced when the magistrate tells Hester:

'My good creature [...] you are a married woman. The law doesn't allow a married woman to call anything her own [...] Your husband has a right to sell your furniture if he likes. I am sorry for you; I can't hinder him.' (MW 586)

In short, as Hester observes, "there is no limit, in England, to what a bad husband may do—as long as he sticks to his wife" (MW 590). Furthermore, Hester finds that she cannot even obtain protection against her husband's physical abuse. When she seeks help from a barrister, she is told:

The law of England declines to consider an incurable drunkard as a fit object for restraint; the law of England leaves the husbands and wives of such people, in a perfectly helpless situation, to deal with their own misery as they best can. (MW 591)

Because the law was heavily weighted in favour of husbands, Victorian women had an "obligation to tolerate any abuse they received from their husbands, and to comply with close family efforts to conceal it" (Ruddick 162). It was not until 1853 that spousal abuse was made illegal, and during the first half of the century, "husbands were legally entitled to use violence and physical restraint to keep their wives obedient" (Morris 36).

Spousal abuse "encompass[ed] not only violence but also legal manipulation and social persecution" (Morris 118). For Hester, as well as for any other abused Victorian

woman, divorce was rarely an option. In fact, prior to the Divorce Act of 1857, divorce was granted only on the basis of a *wife's* adultery (Tromp 72). Even after the Act was legislated, divorce was rare and extremely costly (Thompson 91). In a society very much concerned with appearances, divorce was often out of the question because the stigma it carried affected both the immediate as well as the extended families. If a woman suffered abuse at the hands of her husband, she was obliged to endure it or, as a few women did, consider the radical and permanent solution of homicide.

Hester plans the murder of her husband because she sees it as her only means of escape. This fact is reinforced when she notes in her manuscript: “‘There’s no deliverance from this [marriage], but in death—his death or mine.’” (MW 590). Once Hester has decided to murder her husband, she is not swayed from her course by his promises to reform, as she writes: “‘He said as usual that he was going to turn over a new leaf. Too late! The time had gone by. He was doomed [...]’” (MW 597). Moreover, when Hester plans the murder of her husband, she does not view herself as insane. She observes in her manuscript that “‘Another woman would have gone mad under [the abuse from her husband]. I fancy it just missed, by a hair’s breadth, maddening Me [sic].’” (MW 591). The murder of Joel Dethridge is the result of a calculated plot, not the result of insane impulses. Hester not only plans the murder; she also intends to kill Dethridge.⁶

Morris asserts that “Collins’s message is clear: women, if they are to survive, must save themselves” (Morris 118). The implicit message is that Victorian women were

⁶ The finding of first-degree murder in a court of law necessitates two criteria: (1) the homicide must be ‘planned and deliberate,’ (deliberate meaning there must be deliberation or scheming); and (2) there must also be the intent to kill. Given this test of guilt, Hester would have been culpable of first-degree murder for the death of Joel Dethridge. Furthermore, there is no statute of limitations with respect to the criminal offence of murder. See Martin’s Criminal Code, Section 235 (the Statute concerning first- and second-degree murder) for a complete explication of the legal criteria.

forced to rely on their own resources to extricate themselves from an abusive relationship, and when all else failed, they were forced either to endure the abuse, or to turn to murder as an alternative.

The fact that Hester feigns muteness further suggests that when she murders her husband she is not a mad woman who does not know the difference between right and wrong. Hester utilizes the only power she has in an effort to save herself after she has committed homicide: she refuses to speak. In her confession, she explains that she feigns being mute as a way of avoiding prosecution: “I let them dispute [my guilt] as they liked. All human talk was nothing now to me. I had set myself apart [...] I had begun my separate and silent life” (MW 604). Hester’s self-imposed dumbness serves as her source of protection and power against the human institution of justice.

Hester does not fear retribution at the hands of the law; however, she does fear providential justice, as she writes: “There was no fear of human justice finding me out: my one unutterable dread was dread of an Avenging Providence” (MW 603). It is only when Hester makes her supplication to God in prayer that she speaks audibly: “In the sanctuary of her own room [...] the dumb woman threw off the mysterious and terrible disguise under which she deliberately isolated herself among her fellow creatures [...] Hester Dethridge spoke” (MW 570). It is noteworthy that when Hester *does* speak, she calls upon “the mercy of God” (MW 570). The fact that Hester realizes that she must face some form of retribution, whether at the hands of the criminal justice system or at the hand of God, reinforces the fact that Hester does, indeed, know that her violent actions are of a criminal nature and subject to sanction.

While Hester's culpability is evident with respect to the homicide of Joel Dethridge, Collins nevertheless leads the reader to question her sanity. From the beginning of the novel Hester's behaviour is bizarre. She is repeatedly depicted as a witch and a sorceress and is associated with death and malevolence. Moreover, the fact that Hester sees apparitions is clearly intended to suggest insanity. The apparitions appear repeatedly to Hester, who sees them appear once behind a little boy and three times behind Delamayn. The appearances of the apparition serve to define Hester as mad, especially in the mind of the reader. Hester explains the sensation she experiences as "a creeping chill" that appears as the embodiment of a woman, urging her to kill:

The Thing stole out, dark and shadowy in the pleasant sunlight [...] Set before me was the vision of MY OWN SELF [...] the double of myself, looking at me with my own eyes [...] I saw it stop behind the beautiful little boy. I saw it stand and listen [...] it pointed down to the boy, with my own hand. And it said to me, with my own voice:—"Kill him." (MW 605)

Clearly, these are not the reflections of a mentally balanced person; however, it is important to note that Hester does not see the spectre before she murders her husband. It is only after she murders him that the vision repeatedly appears before her. While Hester's actions may be defined as peculiar, which tends to reinforce the notion of madness, the fact that Hester premeditates her husband's murder speaks to her ability to form intent. Hester does not murder her husband as the result of the spontaneous urging of a spiritual apparition. Moreover, while Hester *does* see the apparition appear behind the young boy, she *resists* the urge to kill him. Likewise, Hester sees the spectre behind Delamayn a total of three times and twice she resists the urge to kill Delamayn. This serves to reinforce the fact that her urgings are not *irresistible* impulses.

It is likely that if Hester had been prosecuted for the homicide of Delamayn, she would have been found criminally responsible in a court of law, despite the hallucinations she experiences prior to and during the act. The fact that Hester sees a vision may speak to a mental instability, but the reality is that she has resisted the ‘urging’ to kill in the past, reinforcing the fact that this urging is not ‘irresistible.’ As Mewett and Manning state, “from the earliest application of the [M’Naghten Rule...] the commission of an act under an ‘uncontrollable impulse’ does not constitute a defence” (474). This same standard of measure for determining criminal insanity has been in effect since the M’Naghten Rule was established in 1843. Justice Riddell reinforced this fact in the 1908 case of *R. v. Creighton*:

Under our law, if a man when he commits an act is not [...] incapable of appreciating the nature and quality of the act and of knowing that it is wrong, he is responsible. The law says to men who say they are afflicted with irresistible impulses: “If you cannot resist an impulse in any other way, we will hang a rope in front of your eyes, and perhaps that will help.” (Qtd. in Mewett and Manning 474)

According to the M’Naghten Rule, criminal insanity cannot be invoked as a defense as long as the accused recognizes the nature and consequences of the action or understands the act to be morally wrong. Hester clearly realizes the consequences should her confession fall into the hands of the authorities. She also recognizes that her actions will result in some sort of punishment, either by God or by man. Additionally, she has the capacity to understand that the taking of a life is morally wrong.

Collins again suggests the notion of madness to the reader when Hester sets fire to the curtains in Anne’s room. Anne immediately reinforces the idea that Hester is mad when the narrator states that

Anne had hitherto not shared the conviction felt by most other persons who were brought into contact with Hester Dethridge, that the woman's mind was deranged. After what she had just seen, however, the general impression became her impression too. (MW 619-620)

Collins taps into the same fire imagery that is depicted in *Jane Eyre* and presents a portrait of the dangerous madwoman who commits arson. This tends to further establish Hester as insane in the mind of the reader. Upon close inspection, however, it is evident that it is not madness that prompts Hester to set fire to Anne's bedroom. Hester destroys Anne's bedroom to facilitate Anne's move to the adjacent room without arousing her suspicions. Hester has prepared the secret passageway between the room where Anne is to be moved and Delamayn's bedroom. It is through this passageway that Delamayn intends to obtain access to Anne's room where he intends to murder her.

At the last minute Hester refuses to be Delamayn's accomplice. The narrator tells the reader that "[Hester] sternly made the sign of refusal; she resolutely opened the door to leave [Delamayn]. 'Do you want your Confession back?' he asked. She closed the door, stolidly submissive in an instant" (MW 634). At this juncture, it is evident that Hester does not want to be complicit in the murder of Anne. Presumably, it is because she understands the nature and consequences of the act of murder and realizes that homicide is morally wrong. Hester is forced to acquiesce, however, because she realizes the importance of obtaining her confession from Delamayn.

Once in the room with Delamayn and the sleeping Anne, Hester sees the 'Thing' that appears behind Delamayn, urging her to murder him. The narrator tells us that "[Delamayn poised [the pillow] over Anne's sleeping face. At the same moment, he felt Hester Dethridge's hand laid on him from behind" (MW 636). Collins clearly is leading the reader to believe that it is because of the irresistible urging of the apparition that

Hester murders Delamayn; however, Delamayn's murder results more from Hester's desire to save Anne from the immediate threat of death than from the hallucination that she is experiencing. At the moment when Hester murders Delamayn, she perceives the *reality* that Anne is in mortal danger. Her perception of reality at this point is accurate. While on the one hand, she may be experiencing a vision, she is at the same time grounded in the reality that Anne's life is in mortal danger. Had Hester not intervened, Delamayn would have suffocated Anne. In all likelihood, in a court of law, Hester's defence for Delamayn's homicide would not be based on criminal insanity, but, rather, her defence would have relied on the fact that her act saves the life of Anne Silvester.

The fact that Hester experiences delusions may speak to a form of mental instability; however, it does not meet the test of criminal mental illness. C.J. Tindal, one of the justices who assisted in the framing of the M'Naghten Rule, reinforces this fact when he states:

Persons who labour under [...] delusions only, and are not in other respects insane [...] notwithstanding the party accused did the act complained of with a view, under the influence of insane delusion, of redressing or revenging some supposed grievance or injury, or of producing some public benefit, he is nevertheless punishable according to the nature of the crime committed, if he knew at the time of committing such crime that he was acting contrary to law. (*All England Law Reports Reprints* 233)

The vision that Hester sees may speak to a disconnect with reality; however, the fact that she knows she is taking a life speaks to culpability, and the fact that she saves Anne's life speaks to intent and mitigating circumstances. Whether or not Hester would have been found guilty for murdering Delamayn had she been brought to justice, she would certainly not have been acquitted by reason of criminal insanity.

Collins uses Hester to reinforce the fact that women were paralyzed both by the marriage laws as well as by the restraints placed upon them by society. The fact remains, however, that labeling a violent woman mad removes her agency, and by labeling Hester in this way, Collins reinforces the fact that Victorians looked for an excuse for a woman's capacity for violence. Labeling the vicious female criminal as insane "empt[ies] her act of meaning; she, and not society, [has the] problem" (Smith 140).

Additionally, the fact that Hester is dealt with in the private sphere and circumvents the criminal justice system also underscores the powerlessness of women. Hester is not given the opportunity to defend herself and obtain an acquittal in a court of law on the grounds that her actions saved Anne's life. Hester is arbitrarily institutionalized. Hester's voice is silenced: she is rendered truly mute.

It is significant that all of the 'mad' women in this chapter are removed from the public gaze, either by death, or by life-long incarceration in a mental asylum. While Collins does not 'sentence' Hester to a physical death as punishment for her crime, like Lady Audley, she is removed from respectable society and imprisoned in an asylum. Whether this is the result of the pity he takes on her, or whether it stems from a reluctance to punish the female criminal with death, is unclear. The fact remains, however, that by confining Hester for life to a mental asylum, Collins effects her symbolic death and the removal of the contagion of the woman criminal from respectable English society.

CHAPTER IV ~ THE UNNATURAL WOMAN: *ADAM BEDE, ARMADALE*

When faced with female violence, Victorian society tended to offer excuses for a woman's brutal and aggressive behaviour in an attempt to explain it away. Lady Audley and Hester Dethridge are perfect examples of the desire to attribute some reason, other than a woman's vicious capacity, to a violent act. This reluctance to assign blame may partly flow from the fact that women were viewed as nurturers, givers of life—not takers of life. However, when it was clearly evident that there were no 'excuses,' such as madness, for a woman's violent behaviour, she was viewed as unnatural—a monster. The 'born criminal' and the infanticidal mother both fall into the category of the unnatural woman. These women appear to be devoid of excuses and explanations, and Victorian society labeled them as unnatural because their behaviour contravened the very essence of ideal womanhood and motherhood. While an isolated offense might be explained away, a woman who offended over and over again, as is the case with Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale*, was viewed as aberrant, deviant, and *unnatural*. Likewise, the mother who took the life of her child, as Hetty Sorrel does in *Adam Bede*, was viewed as an unnatural aberration of motherhood.

I will argue that the women in these two novels are portrayed as 'unnatural.' They are both beautiful and passionate with a strong desire to transcend their class, regardless of social barriers and constraints. They are judged on the basis of their departure from the feminine ideal rather than on their criminal acts. Likewise, while these women may have been viewed as unnatural, the course each chose to solve her dilemma was the

consequence of the restrictions placed upon her by Victorian society in limiting her choices and options.

The Victorians viewed the infanticidal woman as an unnatural anomaly of womanhood. At the same time, there was a polarization of response to her crime. On one hand the woman who killed her child was seen as “an object of peculiar compassion and sympathy,” and on the other, she was seen as the representation of everything that was reprehensible in womanhood (Zedner 29). Those who sympathized with the infanticidal woman viewed her as being motivated by shame and the maternal desire to save her child from a life of poverty and destitution. Those who were less sympathetic viewed the killing of an infant as the act of a callous and shameless woman whose only interest was to free herself from “an encumbrance” (Zedner 29).

Many Victorians struggled with the notion that a woman could be capable of taking the life of her own child. A. Herbert Safford wrote in a paper presented to the annual meeting of the Social Science Association in 1866:

That a mother should be capable of killing her infant is a fact that even the strong intellect of man cannot compass, and we consequently rarely find a jury that returns a verdict of willful murder against a woman so accused. (Qtd. in Zedner 29)

On one hand, it is evident that in a society that sanctified motherhood and idealized femininity, men found it difficult to conceive of women as criminal, much less as child-murderers (Zedner 29). On the other hand, those who were critical of infanticidal mothers asserted that “unscrupulous unmarried mothers took advantage of the courts to commit murder, callously secure in the knowledge that they would not be punished” (Higginbotham 262).

Throughout the eighteenth century it had become evident that the legal statute concerning infanticide did not accurately reflect society's view of the crime. While the English House of Commons Act of 1624 demanded execution for those found guilty of infanticide, both judges and juries resisted condemning women to death. It appears that the overwhelming majority of not guilty verdicts were the result of jury nullification. In other words, juries did not concern themselves with the legal statute, but with the circumstances surrounding the offence. Verdicts were rendered in direct contradiction to the legal interpretation of the evidence. At a time when poverty was rampant, no social safety net existed, and birth control and abortion were unreliable, expensive and risky, judges and juries tended to exercise sympathy and lenience toward the mother charged with killing her infant. Time and time again verdicts were rendered in direct opposition to the letter of the law, reinforcing the fact that cases were decided on the basis of the sympathy engendered by the accused's circumstances rather than on the existing statute. Of those cases where a guilty verdict was rendered, the Home Secretary of England often intervened with a judicial reversal and pardoned the offender, which reinforces the assumption that sympathy for the infanticidal mother existed at even the highest levels.

The law of 1624 demanded that any woman who concealed her pregnancy and delivered a child who died be charged with infanticide. If the woman was convicted, the sentence was execution by hanging, even if there was no evidence of murder. The law was intended to discourage infanticide by "identifying as a potential murderess any woman who sought to deny her pregnancy" (Higginbotham 257-288). The 1624 Act placed the onus on the mother to prove that murder *had not* occurred (Smith 143). However, because of the deficiency of medical forensic science and the conditions of

gross poverty, malnourishment, disease and unsanitary conditions, it was often nearly impossible to distinguish willful murder from natural causes (Smith 146).

By the nineteenth century, “it was conceded that the benefit of doubt must go the accused and that a conviction should follow only after clear evidence of an intention to murder” (Smith 146). In response to this situation, the law was amended in 1803 to provide for a finding of concealment that carried with it a maximum of two years’ incarceration. The 1803 Act was passed as a measure to obtain convictions (Smith 143); however, juries still resisted rendering guilty verdicts.

This fact illustrates the complexity of the problem from both the legal and the societal perspective. Juries appear to have recognized the plight of the unmarried mother, who was often isolated and economically destitute. They also appear to have recognized the injustice of condemning a woman to death when the male seducer was not held legally culpable. Poverty, isolation, the lack of alternatives, as well as the Victorian culture that exalted traditional motherhood, attaching shame and stigma to illegitimacy, were issues that juries could not change; however, judges and juries could implicitly address these issues in their findings of not guilty. The class or status of the mother was far more important than the crime she had committed. Her marital status, together with her victimization, both by seduction and/or poverty, tended to elicit sympathy from juries (Zedner 30).

An explanation may be found in the religious beliefs embedded in Victorian culture. Many, if not most, of the jurors would have subscribed to the Christian notions of forgiveness and mercy. The generous impulse of forgiveness may have been a result of viewing the infanticidal mother in light of Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned [...]” As a

'fellow sinner,' the strict evangelical Victorian may have been prompted to exercise mercy. This view, however, presents an interesting paradox. The Victorian period was a time when female sexual indiscretion was considered sinful, and there existed explicit constraints within which women were expected to live. Moreover, the growing Evangelical movement of the day focused on the universality of sin. The home remained the place where godliness might prevail. Wives and mothers were the guardians of morality, occupying an "elevated position of moral authority" (Zedner 14). The restraints imposed by Victorian culture resulted in a "narrowness of outlook" (Maly-Schlatter 93). As a rule, Victorians "were strongly prejudiced against women who would not fit themselves [...] into the accepted standard of feminine behaviour" (Maly-Schlatter, 56). This paradox is clearly evident in *Adam Bede*: while on the one hand the Home Secretary commutes Hetty's death sentence at the last minute, on the other, she is clearly not forgiven by her family, nor by society as a whole.

Part of society's response to infanticide may be attributed to the way in which children, especially babies, were viewed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sir James Fitzjames Stephen explained to the Capital Punishment Commission in 1866 that "the crime [of infanticide] was popularly seen as less serious than other kinds of murder because the baby has no self-awareness, and the public at large did not feel a threat to themselves" (Qtd. in Rose 73). Over the course of history, society has vacillated in the value it has placed on infant life. In the nineteenth century, ignorance about hygiene and the means to prevent sickness and death served to threaten the success of the infant's life (Rose 5). This fact was reflected in Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of*

Population; or A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness published in 1798, which asserted that high infant mortality was a regrettable biological necessity:

The infant is comparatively speaking of little value to society, as others will immediately supply its place. Its principal value is on account of its being the object of one of the most delightful passions in human nature—parental affection. But if this value be disregarded by those who are alone in a capacity to feel it, then society cannot be called upon to put itself in their place; and has no further business in its protection. (Malthus 431)

Malthus argued that if financial support were denied to the mother of an illegitimate child, bastardy would fall. He further argued that “abortion and infanticide would be less frequent” (Qtd. in Rose 25). This view prompted the creation of the Bastardy Clause in the New Poor Law of 1834 which provided that “all illegitimate children (after the act of 1834) were to be the sole responsibility of their mothers until they were 16 years old” (Heller 1). Not only were unwed mothers expected to support themselves and their children without parish assistance, but they could also no longer depend on sanctions to be taken against the father for non-support of their illegitimate children. With the implementation of the Bastardy Clause, “the putative father for the first time was absolved of any responsibility for his illegitimate offspring” (Heller 2). Furthermore, if a mother could not support herself and her children, her only solution would be to enter the workhouse, because homes for the destitute and deserted unwed mother took in only “deserving girls” (Rose 46).

Coupled with the social taint endured by the mother of an illegitimate child was the economic hardship of supporting the child. To many women of the lower classes there seemed to be only two options available: “either to kill her child or support it by sin” (Higginbotham 260). In many instances, infanticide was not an act of cold-blooded malice, but rather the act of a woman who became “convinced that death was the best

solution [...] and only way to protect [her] children” from a life of misery, poverty and destitution (Oberman 17).

Although in practice society did not make economic provision for the illegitimate child and, in fact, stigmatized the child as much as the mother, much of the rhetoric surrounding the issue of illegitimacy identified both mother and child as victims. Society defined the act of infanticide as deplorable; however, the crime was “blamed not just on her poverty but on the child’s father who had betrayed her” (Higginbotham 261). In the nineteenth century, the desertion of a woman by her lover was not uncommon, even when a child had not been conceived. The end result, whether she was pregnant or not, was that the woman was usually left destitute and isolated with no social structure to rely on.

The woman who had an illegitimate child had little hope of obtaining support from the father, as the law was framed in such a way as to “make maintenance proceedings against the putative father so awkward that actions would wither away” (Rose 26). The reasoning embraced the notion that “as girls came to realize the harsh consequences of sexual delinquency, they would guard their chastity and bastardy would decline” (Rose 26).

The rhetoric surrounding the social problem of illegitimacy seems to have been concerned more with the morality of the mother than the reality of survival. The criminalization of infanticide, to a large degree, was a product of the church’s interest in the sexual morality of society (Geyer-Kordesch 99). The sexual act became “an act defining the boundary between the chaste and morally good, and the wicked and fallen woman” (Geyer-Kordesch 99). Once charged with infanticide, women tended to be judged, not as much on the basis of harm done, but “as a moral menace” (Zedner 30). A

woman's past conduct, her class, marital status, her lack of shame or outward repentance, and even her physical appearance had a bearing on how she was viewed by the judicial system of the day (Zedner 30).

The nineteenth-century adjudicator Justice Keating denounced infanticide trials as a mockery of justice as long as infanticide was a capital offense:

Juries will not convict whilst infanticide is punished capitally and even where judges do review the evidence and law objectively, juries wholly disregard them and eagerly adopt the wildest suggestions which the ingenuity of counsel can furnish. (Qtd. in Rose 76).

In his article, "The Punishment of Infanticide," published in *The Nineteenth Century* in June, 1877, C. A. Fyffe criticized the legislation of infanticide and the resulting sentences as "a fiction which serves no purpose but the infliction of horror and despair." He maintained that

the existence of the old law has only been tolerated by the public because they have known that it is inoperative: carry it out in one single instance, and the indignation of the country would probably sweep away our entire system of capital punishment.

The fact that the last execution of a woman for infanticide took place in 1849, thirty years prior to Fyffe's declaration, served to reinforce the notion that neither judges and juries nor society at large wished to inflict the punishment of death on the infanticidal mother. As Smith concludes in his book, *Trial by Medicine: Insanity and Responsibility in Victorian Trials*:

A blind eye was turned in the first place, a charge of concealment of birth was brought in the second, the criminal law gave women benefit of doubt about the moment of birth in the third, and the Home Secretary ensured finally that women were not hanged. (147)

Furthermore, Fyffe maintained that the law as it stood inflicted needless cruelty on those women who were charged, convicted and sentenced to death:

To terrify a prisoner with the anticipation of a punishment absolutely certain not to be carried out—a punishment which no variety of circumstances has in one single instance been held to warrant during the space of thirty years, and from which the powerful and growing humanity of the country daily separates us more and more—approaches too nearly to a form of torture. (Fyffe, June 1877)

While the overwhelming majority of infanticidal mothers in the nineteenth century were typically of the lower class, they were not vicious killers who were devoid of morality. They were women who were isolated and driven to infanticide through the economic destitution imposed by society upon the unwed mother.

In keeping with the polarized view of the infanticidal woman George Eliot, in *Adam Bede*, treats Hetty with a certain amount of ambivalence. At times Eliot characterizes Hetty as innocent and childlike, thereby eliciting sympathy for her, and at other times Eliot is critical of Hetty's vain, heartless behaviour. On the one hand, Hetty is portrayed as an 'unnatural' woman who, regardless of human consequences, places her own welfare above the welfare of others, and especially of her newborn child. Hetty is an infanticidal woman with a strong desire to transcend her class, regardless of social barriers and constraints. She is punished, not so much for the act of infanticide, but for her departure from the feminine ideal. On the other hand, Hetty is portrayed as a victim. She is seduced by Arthur Donnithorne and believes that his love for her will overcome their class disparity. Furthermore, Hetty elicits sympathy from the reader when, after having given birth, she wanders aimlessly through the countryside, alone and afraid. This ambiguous treatment of Hetty serves to reinforce the polarity of thought and shifting views surrounding the infanticidal woman that were so pervasive in the nineteenth century.

Hetty Sorrel is an orphan who, with her orphaned cousin Dinah, is raised by her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Poyser, on their dairy farm. Both Hetty and Dinah represent a departure from the strict representation of the ideal woman, although while Hetty represents the fallen woman, Dinah represents the saintly, pure woman who refuses to be passive. Dinah chooses the life of sacrifice and becomes a Methodist minister. While she is portrayed as the embodiment of goodness, by virtue of her vocation she does not strictly submit to the male-dominated society in which she lives. In contrast, Hetty is a vain and shallow young woman who covets the life of a lady and is seduced by the wealthy Arthur Donnithorne, who represents the lifestyle that Hetty craves: "Perhaps some day she should be a grand lady, and ride in her coach, and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk, with feathers in her hair and her dress sweeping the ground" (AB 150).

When Adam Bede, who is in love with Hetty and desires to marry her, discovers that Arthur is trifling with Hetty's emotions, he confronts Arthur and forces him to write to Hetty, ending their relationship. Before Arthur departs for military service he sends Hetty a letter explaining that it is impossible for him to make her his wife: "I know you can never be happy except by marrying a man in your own station and if I were to marry you now, I should only be adding to any wrong I have done besides offending against my duty in the other relations of my life" (AB 333). Hurt and angered, Hetty accepts the hard-working Adam Bede's offer of marriage. Shortly after she becomes engaged to Adam Bede, however, she realizes she is pregnant, and she leaves her home in search of Arthur, believing that Arthur will assist her and hoping that he will marry her.

Unable to find Arthur, Hetty gives birth alone. Afraid, confused and isolated, she wanders for several days in the countryside, eventually leaving her newborn child under a

bush in a nest of leaves, where it dies. Hetty's dead baby is subsequently found, and she is convicted of infanticide and sentenced to death. It is only at the eleventh hour that Arthur returns with a pardon from the Home Secretary, transmuting the death sentence to transportation. Hetty, representing the infanticidal contagion, is removed from England, which paves the way for Adam to marry Dinah.

The reader is first introduced to Hetty at her home, the Hall Farm. While Dinah is "mending" linen for her aunt, Hetty is in the dairy "making up the butter" (AB 74-75). Immediately a contrast is drawn between the two young women: Dinah is inside, Hetty is outside. Dinah is occupied in a task of restoration, while Hetty is creating something new. Hetty is immediately associated with nature, rich and sensuous, while Dinah is coupled with the utilitarian, with what is necessary and useful.

This contrast continues throughout the novel. Dinah is presented as the "spiritual paragon" in comparison to Hetty, who is childlike and vain (Auerbach 175). The two are repeatedly juxtaposed to symbolically represent the pure and the fallen:

What a strange contrast the two figures made! Visible enough in that mingled twilight and moonlight. Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love. (AB 158)

In this passage the contrast of the fallen woman with the saintly woman is evident. The pure, angelic qualities of Dinah in her 'long white dress' are presented in stark contrast to Hetty, who is the embodiment of the passionate woman: her flushed cheeks, her bare neck and arms, and her hair cascading down her back. Dinah is a representation of the spiritual in contrast to Hetty, who is erotic and sensual.

While Dinah is associated with the ethereal realm of sainthood, Hetty is linked to the earthy realm of nature. Hetty is associated with the dairy work, linking her to life and procreation, which is reinforced by Arthur's reference to her as a "little buttermaker" (AB 130). Clearly there exists a link with the erotic within this symbolic phrase. Additionally, Hetty is pictured picking apples in the orchard: "Hetty [was] bending over the red bunches, the level rays piercing the screen of apple-tree boughs" (AB 221). The fact that she is gathering apples implicitly links Hetty with the Garden of Eden, original sin, the fallen state of mankind, and ultimately the death of innocence. When combined, these symbols reveal the image of life (the making of something new) and death (the fall of man). This imagery serves to further underscore the tension between the feelings of sympathy and loathing that the infanticidal woman elicited.

Furthermore, Hetty is repeatedly associated with lower forms of life. Auerbach points out that

At various times Hetty is associated with a pound of butter, kittens, small downy ducks, babies, rose petals, a young calf, a butterfly, a blossom, a bird, a peach, a brooklet, a spaniel, a bird, a pet, a 'thing,' a canary, a water nixie [...] 'a round, soft-coated pet animal,' a brute, a 'medusa-face,' a stone, and death. (174)

Hetty is at some times linked with the innocent and vulnerable, and at others with the dangerous and deadly. This fact serves to underscore the polarity of views associated with the infanticidal woman. While her act of infanticide may be viewed as vicious, at the same time she may be seen as victimized. Eliot further reinforces this dual perspective when the narrator addresses the reader:

Pray ask yourself if you were ever predisposed to believe evil of any pretty woman—if you ever *could*, without hard head-breaking demonstration, believe evil of the *one* supremely pretty woman who has

bewitched you. No: people who love downy peaches are apt not to think of the stone, and sometimes jar their teeth terribly against it. (AB 152)

This duality of view is further evident when Hetty, who is portrayed as the fallen woman, is also depicted as child-like. Adam reinforces this fact when he confronts Arthur after Arthur seduces Hetty: “She’s all but a child—as any man with a conscience in him ought to feel bound to take care on” (AB 309). Gould states in her article “The History of An Unnatural Act: Infanticide and *Adam Bede*” that Eliot argues that “childishness ought not to be an ideal quality in adult women, that the idealization of women as children causes great harm” (264). While the quality of childlikeness and innocence might have been an admired quality in the Victorian woman, it was a double-edged sword. While, on the one hand, innocence served to protect a woman from the vulgar taint of immorality, on the other hand, it undermined her ability to cope with a sexual threat. It served to make a woman extremely vulnerable, but also served to elicit sympathy for her. Hetty’s first private encounter with Arthur is a mingling of passion with childish excitement:

They were alone together for the first time [...] As for Hetty, her feet rested on a cloud, and she was borne along by warm zephyrs; she had forgotten her rose coloured ribbons; she was no more conscious of her limbs than if her childish soul had passed into a water-lily, resting on a liquid bed, and warmed by the midsummer sunbeams. (AB 130)

While Hetty may be dreaming of a future with Arthur, Arthur’s attitude toward his relationship with Hetty is that of a dalliance. Like Hetty, he is selfish and self-centered, but unlike Hetty, he is not vulnerable. He does not think, in fact he cannot even conceive of her vulnerability. Arthur casually dismisses the notion that his overtures to Hetty will result in her ultimate destruction. He attributes less feeling to women “such as Hetty” than to himself: “Perhaps he had better not take any more notice of [Hetty]; it

might put notions into her head [...] though Arthur [...] thought girls were not by any means so soft and easily bruised; indeed, he had generally found them twice as cool and cunning as he was himself' (AB 127).

Merryn Williams asserts that Hetty's fall is not prompted by her love of Arthur, but rather by her love of luxuries (141). Like Lady Audley, it is not so much the man whom Hetty loves; it is the class and status that he represents. It is not Hetty's vulnerability that results in her fall, but her desire to transcend her class. Hetty's interests are focused on her own advancement. She does not concern herself with the feelings of those around her, but rather with her own beauty and with what she might obtain with her beauty. Morris asserts that, "Hetty is interested in Arthur Donnithorne because she thinks he will provide an escape from the unexciting existence of the family's dairy and the prospect of a dull marriage and its inevitable children" (Morris 77). It is this first intimation of Hetty's hardness that reveals her "lack of conventional womanliness," and this suggestion is later reinforced by her lack of remorse for her dead child (Morris 78).

Just as Hetty is merely a plaything to Arthur, so Adam is merely a plaything to Hetty: "Hetty was quite used to the thought that people liked to look at her [...] she knew that [...] Adam who was often rather stern to other people, and not much given to run after the lasses, could be made to turn pale or red any day by a word or a look from her" (AB 97-98). The base of Hetty's power is her beauty, regardless of the feelings, if any, that she has for others (Kennard 113). Hetty delights in her own beauty and in the power over men that her beauty affords: "She liked to feel that [Adam] was in her power, and would have been indignant if he had shown the least sign of slipping from under the yoke of her coquettish tyranny [...] But as to marrying Adam, that was a very different affair!"

(AB 99). Hetty desires to be the focal point of all male attention. When class and status is not an issue, Hetty is more interested in the game than the prize.

Eliot presents Hetty as a woman driven to violence through “self-absorption: her self-devoted rather than her self-devoting love” (Morris 79). As Virginia Morris points out, “while these traits are not admirable, they are neither immoral nor unnatural” (79).

While Hetty’s vanity may not be immoral or unnatural, Eliot clearly depicts her aversion to children as unnatural. Hetty is contrasted to Dinah, who is depicted as the saintly woman, and to Mrs. Poyser, who is represented as the ideal mother. Throughout the novel Mrs. Poyser dotes on her small daughter, in contrast to Hetty, who clearly displays a dislike for the child:

‘O dear aunt, I wish you’d speak to Totty, she keeps putting her legs up so, and messing my frock.’ ‘What’s the matter wi’ the child? She can niver please you,’ said the mother. ‘Let her come by the side o’ me, then: *I* can put up wi’ her.’ (AB 262-263)

Totty is an annoyance to Hetty, who is more concerned with her own vanity than with her young cousin. Embedded within Hetty’s unnaturalness is her lack of connection to others, even those who depend upon her. To Hetty, Totty is “a day-long plague” and “Hetty would have been glad to hear that she should never see a child again; they were worse than the nasty little lambs [...] for the lambs *were* gotten rid of sooner or later” (AB 154). Even when Totty falls into a pit, Hetty is unconcerned. Mrs. Poyser observes about Hetty:

‘She’s no better than a peacock, as ‘ud strut about on the wall and spread its tail when the sun shone if all the folks i’ the parish was dying: there’s nothing seems to give her a turn i’ th’ inside, not even when we thought Totty had tumbled into the pit [...] But Hetty niver minded it [...] though she’s been at the nussin’ o’ the child iver since it was a babby. It’s my belief her heart’s as hard as a pibble.’ (AB 154-155)

Hetty's aversion for Totty, however, appears to be reciprocated. Not only does Hetty dislike Totty, Totty does not particularly care for Hetty. Totty makes her dislike for Hetty clear when Mrs. Poyser asks Totty to allow Hetty to put her to bed:

Before her mother had done speaking, Totty had given her answer in an unmistakable manner, by knitting her brow, setting her tiny teeth against her underlip, and leaning forward to slap Hetty on the arm with her utmost force. Then, without speaking, she nestled to her mother again [...]

'It's no use tryin' to persuade her,' said Mrs. Poyser. 'She allays takes against Hetty when she isn't well. Happen she'll go to Dinah.'

[...] Totty turned her face towards Dinah, and looked at her an instant, then lifted herself up, put out her little arms, and let Dinah lift her from her mother's lap. Hetty turned away without any sign of ill-humour, and [...] stood waiting with an air of indifference [...] (AB 146)

Clearly, Totty prefers her mother and Dinah to Hetty. Once again, Hetty is implicitly compared to the two paragons of virtue, Mrs. Poyser and Dinah. The child scorns Hetty in favour of the ideal woman and mother.

Coupled with this aversion for Totty, Hetty neglects to display a natural affection for her own child. In her book, *The Mothers of England*, Sarah Ellis asserts that a mother's love for her children is instinctive, inducing her to sacrifice herself in protecting her child:

A mother's love [...] which is strong enough to overcome the universal impulse of self-preservation [...] can never have been given by the Author of our existence, for any mean or trifling purpose [...] As there is an existence beyond this, for which she has to prepare, so the love of the human mother, by its continuance to the end of life, is beautifully adapted to those higher responsibilities which devolve upon her as the parent of an immortal being, whose lot, it is her privilege to hope, will be cast amongst the happy, the holy, and the pure, for ever. (2-3)

The sanctifying of motherhood, with its self-sacrificing and undying love, is evident in this passage. Clearly, Hetty's love (if any) for her child is not instinctive, undying, nor is

it self-sacrificing. When Hetty sheds tears of remorse, they are for her own unfortunate situation. Her thoughts are not of the misery she has caused others, nor of the misery she will inflict upon her own illegitimate child, but for herself only: “Hetty’s tears were not for Adam [or for her unborn child...] they were for the misery of her own lot” (AB 367).

After the birth of her child, Hetty wanders aimlessly, consumed by her own despair and desolation. Isolated and impoverished, Hetty’s options are bleak:

It was impossible for [Hetty] to enter into any service, even if she could obtain it; there was nothing but immediate beggary before her [...] and to ask anything of strangers—to beg—lay in the same far-off hideous region of intolerable shame, that Hetty had all her life thought it impossible she could ever come near [...] The dread of bodily hardship mingled with the dread of shame; for Hetty had the luxurious nature of a round, soft-coated pet animal. (AB 380-381)

Hetty’s isolation is exacerbated by the shame and stigma she bears as the fallen woman:

“All the force of [Hetty’s] nature had been concentrated on the one effort of concealment, and she had shrunk with irresistible dread from every course that could tend towards a betrayal of her miserable secret” (AB 365). Hetty is confounded by her dilemma. She feels abandoned and helpless. In her misery, she even gives up the hope of Arthur coming to her rescue: “[Arthur] could do nothing for her that would shelter her from discovery and scorn among the relatives and neighbors [...] now her airy dream had vanished. Her imagination no longer saw happiness with Arthur, for he could do nothing that would satisfy or soothe her pride” (AB 365).

In her despair, Hetty’s thoughts turn to suicide, and in keeping with the conventional end of the fallen woman, Hetty contemplates drowning herself:

Hetty felt that no one could deliver her from the evils that would make life hateful to her; and no one, she said to herself, should ever know her misery and humiliation [...] she would wander out of sight, and drown

herself where her body would never be found, and no one should know what had become of her. (AB 385)

Again, Hetty's thoughts are self-centered. She contemplates drowning in order to save herself from humiliation and a life of destitution. Unlike some infanticidal women who took their baby's lives in an effort to save their children from a life of poverty, Hetty's child is not even mentioned in her musings. The mental questions that Hetty asks herself are concerned with her own pride, her own misery, and her own lot in life. Never do we hear her ask herself how she will provide for the helpless babe. The life of the child is second to the security and happiness of the mother.

In defense of Hetty's pride, however, it must be pointed out that her fears of shame and stigma were altogether justified and were not merely the imaginings of a vain and shallow woman. Hetty receives a modicum of mercy from her aunt, but virtually no sympathy from her uncle, Martin Poyser. When news of Hetty's crime reaches her home, "the Hall Farm was a house of mourning for a misfortune felt to be worse than death" (AB 415). The mourning, however, is neither for Hetty nor for the lost life of the illegitimate child. In fact, the life of the child appears to be expendable when compared to the stigma it has brought to the extended family. The "misfortune felt to be worse than death" is the shame brought upon the family by Hetty's actions: "Hetty had brought disgrace on them all—disgrace that could never be wiped out [...a] scorching sense of disgrace, which neutralized all other sensibility" (AB 415). Mr. Poyser views relocation as his family's only escape from the shame and stigma brought upon them by Hetty's act. Even when Hetty's death sentence is transmuted to transportation, Martin Poyser agonizes over his own misfortune: "But I doubt we shall ne'er go far enough for folks not to find out as we've got them belonging to us as are transported o'er the seas, and war

[sic] like to be hanged. We shall have that flyin' up in our faces, and our children's after us'" (AB 464).

Hetty is convicted, not only because her act was considered unnatural, but also because she refused to act like the ideal woman. During her trial, Hetty "stood like a statue of dull despair" (AB 437). She "stood [...] motionless" (AB 435). Her lack of response is interpreted as an unnatural hardness. Onlookers "thought she looked as if some demon had cast a blighting glance upon her, [and] withered up the woman's soul in her, and left only a hard despairing obstinacy" (AB 433). Hetty stands mute, she does not break down, and she does not cry. Unlike Hester Dethridge of *Man and Wife*, whose muteness saves her from criminal prosecution, Hetty's silence only results in reinforcing her unnaturalness and serves to compound her guilt in the mind of the jury.

Interestingly, it is the two ideal women, Mrs. Poyser and Dinah, who exhibit some understanding of Hetty's actions. This fact is particularly noteworthy when juxtaposed with the historical accounts of male sympathy directed toward the infanticidal woman. It was male juries and judges who often refused to condemn infanticidal women during the nineteenth century, and conversely, it was typically women who showed less sympathy towards those of their own sex who committed sexual indiscretions. This fact may account for the astonished reaction of the parson, Mr. Irwine, who "was struck with surprise to observe that Mrs. Poyser was less severe than her husband" (AB 415). Additionally, it is Dinah who goes to Hetty in an effort to comfort her and offer her a sense of absolution. The "harsh judgment" of the "male-dominated" judicial system stands in stark contrast to the "forgiveness her cousin Dinah offers in the prison cell" (Morris, 78). This serves as a curious inversion of historical reality at a time when the

large majority of women charged with infanticide were exculpated by the male-dominated judicial system.

While the jury may have condemned Hetty on the grounds that “the unnaturalness of her crime stood more harshly by the side of her hard immovability and obstinate silence [during her trial],” Morris asserts that Eliot’s point is different: “the crime is not unnatural; rather, it is the all too natural consequence of Hetty’s personality in the context of her environment” (79). Hetty, like many infanticidal women of the era, was faced with an impossible situation: the father of her illegitimate child would not marry her, she was impoverished and had no prospects of supporting herself or her child, and her family (specifically her Uncle Poyser) offered no sanctuary or safety, but rather criticism and condemnation.

Hetty’s death sentence is transmuted to transportation and she is removed from England. While she is spared immediate execution, in reality, a sentence of transportation was just a slower death sentence. Eliot’s treatment of Hetty acts as a vindication of English law and moral values. England is purged of the infanticidal woman. Eliot “casts England as a country in which child murderers like Hetty Sorrel will not be tolerated” (McDonagh 250). Furthermore, the restoration of social order is established in the final scenes with the harvest supper. There is a sense of community with everyone eating the traditional English roast beef, drinking beer, and singing (McDonagh 257).

In *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720-1900*, Josephine McDonagh asserts that “Hetty’s crime paradoxically facilitates the constitution of the new society at the end of the novel, symbolized by the marriage of Adam and Dinah.” She further asserts that because of this fact, Hetty’s crime “takes on the role of a sacrifice that will enable the

eventual reconstitution of the social order” (248). This fact is underscored by the absence of Hetty at the end of the novel. Moreover, the only mention of Hetty after her transportation is as Adam’s inferior love: “[Adam’s] love for Dinah was better and more precious to him [than his love for Hetty]” (AB 530).

The notion of the angel in the house is so embedded within the text of *Adam Bede* that in the end both Dinah and Hetty are manipulated by Eliot to adhere to the cultural norms of the day. Hetty is punished for her departure from the feminine ideal, and Dinah is transformed from saint to angel of the house. Hetty is removed from English society, while the pure and saintly Dinah gives up her preaching and her role as a Methodist minister and becomes the Victorian ideal woman when she marries Adam:

The love that had brought hope and comfort in the hour of despair, the love that had found its way to the dark prison cell and to poor Hetty’s darker soul—this strong, gentle love was to be Adam’s companion and helper till death. (AB 534)

Both Hetty and Dinah are held to the strict standards of the Victorian morality, and moreover Hetty is defined as unnatural by her departure from ideal womanhood. Conformity rules the day, as Eliot appears to be stressing not only idealized womanhood, but also an England free from the taint of the fallen woman.

The infanticidal woman was not the only woman whom the Victorians considered unnatural. The woman who persisted in criminal activities, or the “born criminal,” as Cesare Lombroso labeled her, was also considered unnatural. According to Lombroso, she “is more cynical, more depraved, and more terrible than the [...] male [criminal]” (Lombroso 147). During the nineteenth century, when a woman was convicted, especially

for a particularly vicious crime, she was viewed as far worse than her male counterpart.

In her departure from the norm, she was viewed as monstrous. Lombroso asserted that

[...] the born female criminal is, so to speak, doubly exceptional, as a woman and as a criminal. For criminals are an exception among civilized people, and women are an exception among criminals, the natural form of retrogression in women being prostitution and not crime [...] As a double exception, the criminal woman is consequently a monster. (151-152)

In addition, he states: “[...] we may assert that if female born criminals are fewer in number than the males, they are often much more ferocious” (150).

Clearly because the ideal woman was viewed as the model of virtue, “the criminal woman was condemned far more harshly than her male counterpart, since he was only seen to be enacting man’s natural sense of adventure.” In fact, the male criminal’s activity which drew on “entrepreneurial drive, courage, physical valor, and agility,” was not “far removed from Victorian notions of masculinity” (Zedner 40). In contrast to this view, the woman who repeatedly contravened the law represented only the negative attributes of femininity.

The criminal woman elicited a strong emotional response from society, and, in her fallen state, she was deemed to be more evil than the male criminal. This view persisted throughout the century. On April 29, 1865, *The Bath Express* condemned Constance Kent as monstrous after she confessed to the murder of her half-brother. She was viewed as more depraved and evil than any man who might have committed the same offence:

It was a wanton murder, not done by the hand of a man, for there is a *finesse* of cruelty about it that no man, we believe, however depraved, could have been guilty of; but it is the revengeful act of a woman—morbid, cruel, cunning—one in whom the worst passions have received a preternatural development, overpowering and absorbing the little good that she ever had in her nature. (Qtd. in Hartman 126)

Additionally, Reverend J.W. Horsley asserted in an article submitted to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, that “[criminal] men [...] are, at their worst, twice as good as [criminal] women at their best” (Qtd. in Zedner 45).

The cultural norms of society that demanded a woman conduct herself with modesty, deference and sanctity were viewed as the moral guardians of a woman’s darker side. However, when a woman became careless of the acceptance of society and disregarded the constraints placed upon Victorian womanhood, she was viewed as submitting to the evil side of her nature, for “beneath the façade of the loving, honest woman there [...] lurked a darker self, capable of all manner of evil” (Zedner 41). In 1864, Mary Carpenter, who was often sympathetic toward the female criminal, wrote in her book, *Our Convicts*, that

the very susceptibility and tenderness of woman’s nature render[s] her more completely diseased in her whole nature when this is perverted to evil; and when a woman has thrown aside the virtuous restraints of society and is enlisted on the side of evil, she is far more dangerous to society than the other sex. (i, 31-32)

It is precisely this dual view of women, that of the sublime angel with the capacity of a demon lurking deep within the recesses of her heart, that exacerbated the Victorian attitude toward the woman who was capable of extreme violence.

As the century progressed, the notion of ‘moral insensibility’ was constructed to explain habitual female criminals. In 1890, Havelock Ellis defined the morally insensible criminal as the “instinctive and habitual criminal” who lacked remorse (124). This explanation placed the blame on the woman who negated the feminine ideal and “seemed to be devoid of self-respect and completely uncaring of social disapproval” (Zedner 46).

Armadale by Wilkie Collins features a woman who embodies the dangerous and duplicitous aspect of feminine criminality. While she masquerades as the embodiment of the Victorian ideal 'angel,' beneath the surface seethes callousness and cruelty. The beautiful and erotic Lydia Gwilt, is, from first to last, a criminal whose self-interest, manipulation, and passion are evident. *Armadale* is a book "bursting at the seams with venom [and] social protest" (Boyle 159), and Collins uses Lydia Gwilt as a bad woman who "challenge[s] pious norms with the vigor and sanity of [her] deviance" (Barickman 114). When the novel first appeared in 1866, Lydia Gwilt was described as "one of the most hardened female villains whose devices and desires have ever blackened fiction" (Qtd. in Hughes 158). A reviewer in the *Spectator* charged Collins with:

[...] overstepping the limits of decency, and revolting every human sentiment [...] for its heroine [is] a woman fouler than the refuse in the streets, who has lived to the ripe age of 35, and through the horrors of forgery, murder, theft, bigamy, gaol and attempted suicide, without any trace being left on her beauty. (Qtd. in Boyle 170)

Clearly, the notion that a beautiful woman could be capable of unspeakable crimes was extremely unsettling to the Victorian consciousness.

Lydia Gwilt is a beautiful woman with an ugly and unseemly past. Her criminal career begins by forging a letter when she is twelve.¹ Later, when she is sent to a French school, Collins implies that there was a scandal when Lydia's French music teacher (who is married with children) attempts suicide and later goes mad. After leaving the school Lydia enters a convent, but she is expelled because "the priest considered her to be possessed by the devil" (A 523). Lydia then becomes associated with swindlers. She marries, but poisons her husband after he strikes her on the face with a whip when he

¹ John Sutherland notes in his introduction to the text that in 1832 (the year Lydia would have been twelve) forgery was a capital offence (xvii).

discovers she has taken a lover. For this crime she is sentenced to death, but the Home Secretary commutes her execution. She is subsequently tried for robbery after having been pardoned for murder and serves time in jail for theft.

It is at this point that the major plot line begins as Lydia assumes the guise of a governess to a Miss Milroy, whose family has rented a cottage on the estate of Thorpe Ambrose. Lydia masquerades as a governess in order to position herself close to Allan Armadale, whose wealth she covets. Her plan is to seduce Allan Armadale into marrying her. However, it is Ozias Midwinter (also named Allan Armadale) who falls in love with Lydia. This does not dissuade Lydia, however, as she devises a plan to marry Midwinter under the name of Allan Armadale and murder the true Allan Armadale (who is the owner of Thorpe Ambrose). Once this is completed, she intends to deny her relationship with Ozias Midwinter (after all, she has married him under the name of Armadale, not Midwinter) and subsequently install herself at Thorpe Ambrose as the newly widowed Mrs. Allan Armadale.

Lydia Gwilt is portrayed as a self-interested career criminal; and while Collins's depiction of Lydia as self-serving may be accurate, he also portrays her as the victim of "an indifferent, corrupt, and often hypocritical social system" (Boyle 170). The dual perspective with which Collins presents Lydia seems to reflect society's desire to believe in womankind's innate goodness. When forced to acknowledge a woman's capacity for violence, society tends to offer excuses for her behaviour.

Collins undermines Lydia's agency because it is not Lydia, but Mrs. Oldershaw (the charlatan who raises the orphaned Lydia), who orchestrates the initial plot to seduce Armadale. Oldershaw suggests the idea to Lydia in a letter:

Lydia, take the bull by the horns—and marry [Armadale]!...As long as he lives, you can make your own terms with him; and, if he dies, the will entitles you, in spite of anything he can say or do—with children or without them—to an income chargeable on his estate of *twelve hundred a year for life*. (A 160)

It is also Mrs. Oldershaw who suggests that Lydia position herself close to Armadale by securing a position as governess for Miss Milroy (A 164-165).

Additionally, Collins introduces the notion of destiny, which further suggests Lydia's lack of agency. Mrs. Oldershaw notes to Lydia that "it really looks as if fate had determined that you were to be Mrs. Armadale, of Thorpe-Ambrose—and who can control his fate, as the poet says?" (A 161). Collins draws on the notion of fate throughout the novel. Midwinter asks himself if he is "an instrument in the hands of Fate, or an instrument in the hands of Providence?" (A 103). Furthermore, it is suggested that Lydia's appearance at Thorpe-Ambrose is a validation of Midwinter's prophetic dream, foretelling the destruction of Allan Armadale. When Midwinter first sees Lydia he declares to Armadale: "There [...] stands the living Woman, in the Shadow's place! There speaks the first of the dream-warnings to you and me!" (A 266). Implicit within the notion of fate is the suggestion that Lydia is merely a pawn in the hands of fate, and not the calculating criminal who plots to murder Armadale. Midwinter reinforces the suggestion that Lydia's actions are controlled by destiny when he muses to himself: "What *is* to be, *will* be. What have I to do with it, and what has [Lydia to do with it]?" (A 416). Finally, Lydia concedes to fate when she writes in her diary: "As if [...] I could escape doing what [I am] fated to do [...]" (A 438).

The fact that Lydia's parentage is unknown reinforces the notion of mystery that surrounds her. No one knows who Lydia Gwilt *really* is. The narrator observes: "She may

be the daughter of a Duke, or the daughter of a costermonger. The circumstances may be highly romantic, or utterly commonplace” (A 521). Her heritage is utterly unknown, which in itself presents a dilemma to the Victorian mind. Unlike Lady Isabel, who falls from her aristocratic station, or Lady Audley, who as a member of the lower class rises to the position of lady, Lydia Gwilt’s parentage is a mystery. The possibility exists that she could be a member of either the very highest class or the very lowest.

Furthermore, Lydia aligns herself with Dr. Downward, whom the narrator suggests is an abortionist: “[...] the name on [the door] was ‘Doctor Downward.’ If ever brick and mortar spoke yet, the brick and mortar here said plainly ‘We have got our secrets inside, and we mean to keep them.’” (A 340). This serves to symbolically reinforce the secrets of Lydia’s heritage and her lack of parentage. Dr. Downward destroys the origins of life. He erases identity and eliminates heredity. Lydia Gwilt’s blood origin remains a mystery, forever cloaked in silence.

In a class-ruled society, a questionable heredity is disquieting. The fact that Lydia, as a member of the lower class, is able to disguise herself and transcend the class barrier is even more unsettling. Lydia is able to disguise her criminal nature behind the cloak of respectability, assume the position of a governess, and aspire to the position of lady. In this disguise, the narrator describes Lydia: “Modest and tasteful poverty expressed itself in the speckless cleanliness and the modestly-proportioned skirts of her light ‘print’ gown” (A 377).

Lydia Gwilt represents a threat to the respectable classes of nineteenth-century England. It is not merely the fact that the upright and venerable middle class is “threatened or infiltrated from below, [but that its] respectable position is squarely

founded on the seething underworld of vice and crime” (Hughes 160). Miss Gwilt’s criminal past serves as a potential contaminant to those members of the respectable classes with whom she associates. The fear of the lower classes penetrating the middle and upper classes, diluting blood-lines and spreading moral and physical corruption, was common, and Lydia Gwilt was a manifestation of this threat.

Lydia Gwilt embodies the notion of deception, both physically and morally, as the narrator points out: “Everything was right [about Lydia Gwilt], everything was smooth on the surface. Everything was rotten and everything was wrong under it” (A 524). While on the surface Lydia appears to be “such a refined woman, such a tender-hearted woman” (A 299), she is, in reality, “an adventuress of the worst class; an undeniably worthless and dangerous woman” (A 362). The narrator describes Lydia Gwilt as:

A miserable, fallen woman, who had abandoned herself in her extremity to the help of wretches skilled in criminal concealment—who had stolen her way back to decent society and a reputable employment, by means of a false character—and whose position now imposed on her the dreadful necessity of perpetual secrecy and perpetual deceit in relation to her past life. (A 345)

Lydia Gwilt attributes her criminal propensities to the social circumstances and restraints with which she has had to deal throughout her life. Lydia notes in her journal that:

An open carriage has just driven by my window, with a nicely-dressed lady in it. She had her husband by her side, and her children on the seat opposite. At the moment when I saw her she was laughing and talking in high spirits; a sparkling, light-hearted, happy woman. Ah, my lady, when you were a few years younger, if you had been left to yourself, and thrown on the world like me—[you might be where I am today]. (A 546)

Lydia Gwilt appears to be echoing Moll Flanders’s appeal: “Give me not Poverty lest I Steal [sic]” (Defoe, 149). Lydia is not only the product of her unknown heredity; she is a

product of her society as well. She serves to challenge the norms of heredity and class. Lydia Gwilt “begins as a social outcast [and] pursues a criminal career” (Barickman 133).

Richard Altick notes in his book *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel*, “even her name chimed ‘guilt’ and ‘gilt’” (323). Lydia, as a bigamist, murderer and forger, even at the age of thirty-five, “having already been tried on a murder charge and served time for theft, [...is] still beautiful—and dangerous” (Altick, *The Presence of the Present* 323). Much criticism by Victorian reviewers focused on the beauty of Lydia Gwilt, “despite her evil ways” (Sutherland xix). It appears that the Victorians held the view that the taint of her criminal nature should be reflected in the physical appearance of the woman. But like Lady Audley, Lydia Gwilt is a beautiful woman with a treacherous nature.

In his book, *Criminal Prisons*, Henry Mayhew asserted that, “the female criminal being left without any moral sense [...] to govern and restrain the animal propensities of her nature, is really reduced to the same condition as a brute, without the power to check her evil propensities” (Qtd. in Zedner 41-42). Ironically, it is exactly the base, animalistic nature of the woman that is so compelling to men. It is Lydia’s dark and dangerous side that, at the same time, fascinates and bewitches. Boyle asserts that “Miss Gwilt, in her relationships with [Midwinter and Armadale] and with society in general, represents the furthest development in sensation fiction of the disturbing admixture of Good and Evil in one woman, the angel-as-tigress” (167). The narrator evokes animal imagery when describing Lydia Gwilt, who “lifted her dress again above the impurities of the road—and went on her way with a dainty and indolent deliberation, as a cat goes on her way when she has exhausted the enjoyment of frightening a mouse” (A 379). She is depicted as the

delicate Victorian woman possessed of a deadly cunning. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of “lifting her dress” and “the impurities of the road” suggests the existence of the erotic, passionate woman beneath the guise of the angel.

It is the sensual, animalistic beauty of Miss Gwilt that is irresistible. As Lydia reflects: “I saw [Midwinter’s] big black eyes, bright and glittering in the dusk, devour me from head to foot in a moment [...] ‘I can deny you nothing,’ he whispered” (A 415). Where Hetty’s power over men lies in her childlike beauty, it is Lydia’s adult erotic and seductive nature that forms the basis of her power over men. Midwinter answers Lydia: “I *am* afraid of you” (A 416). He is attracted to the kitten, but fears the tigress. Midwinter is fascinated with the magnetism of Lydia Gwilt’s sensuousness, and yet at the same time fears the true nature of the woman that lurks beneath the gloss of beauty.

Lydia Gwilt’s sensuality is further portrayed through her physical appearance: “[Her] hair, superbly luxuriant...was of the one unpardonably remarkable shade of colour which the prejudice of the Northern nations never entirely forgives—it was *red!* [...her] lips were full, rich, and sensual” (A 277). Red hair was the unmistakable mark of the dangerous woman during the Victorian era. Richard Altick draws the conclusion that the “anti-red bias” drew some of its strength from the association with medieval drama, in which devils or demons were depicted as red-haired (*The Presence of the Present* 316). The association of Lydia with red clearly underscores her association with danger, passion, and the fact that she is “a temptress [...] with an unsavory past” (Barickman 133).

Lydia Gwilt’s beauty, combined with her dangerous passion, makes her irresistible. Kalikoff states that “for many Victorian observers, the comeliness of women

killers was increased or even created by the knowledge of their criminal passions, furious, or erotic, or both” (“The Execution of Tess d’Urberville at Wintoncester” 113). The duality of her nature is played out in the duality of the way men respond to her. Lydia keys into this duality in a letter to Mrs. Oldershaw when describing how Mr. Bashwood (Armadales lawyer) responds to her: “I am not sure whether I frighten him or fascinate him—perhaps I do both together” (A 335). Lydia Gwilt exploits the power of her beauty and sensuality as a means to obtaining the social position and wealth she covets.

Part of Lydia Gwilt’s fascination for men lies not only in the concealment of the true nature by her beauty, but also in the concealment of her face behind her veils. The fact that the face behind the veil is partially, if not completely, obscured, causes it to appear mysterious and fascinating. Borowitz reinforces this fact when he points out, “one of the appropriate definitions of a ‘beauty’ in the dictionary of the English language would be ‘any accused murderess, particularly when wearing a veil’” (12). The veil not only serves as the symbol of Lydia’s deception; it serves as the symbol of her duality as well. Lydia notes in her diary that:

As the time wore on, I began to feel a terrible excitement [...] There I was, alone with [Armadales], talking in the most innocent, easy, familiar manner, and having it in my mind all the time, to brush his life out of my way, when the moment comes, as I might brush a stain off my gown [...] It made my blood leap, and my cheeks flush [...] I thought it desirable to put my face in hiding by pulling down my veil. (A 486)

The Lydia Gwilt behind the veil is not the Lydia Gwilt the world sees. The veil serves to hide her inner nature and screen her evil devices.

The veil is also representative of what Miss Gwilt pretends to be. Early in her life, after spending some time in a convent, Lydia considers taking “the veil” (A 523). The

veil of chastity imposed by the Church offers a source of concealment for Lydia Gwilt, but like Mr. Bashwood, upon learning Lydia's past, the reader may comment: "You may well stare! Miss Gwilt, in the character of a Nun, is the sort of female phenomenon you don't often set eyes on. Women are queer creatures" (A 523).

Through the shift in narrative structure, from the third person to the first person of Lydia Gwilt, "the respectable society in the novel intersects with the criminal underworld, unflinchingly portrayed in all its sordidness and degradation" (Hughes 157). At the same time, however, it is precisely through the technique of the first-person narrative that the reader is able to understand and even sympathize with Lydia Gwilt. This shift of sympathy appears to have been the basis of much of the criticism directed at the novel when it first appeared. Barickman, MacDonald and Stark note in their book, *Corrupt Relations: Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Collins, and the Victorian Sexual System*:

What seemed to bother critics was not the existence of such a creature [as Lydia Gwilt], but their perception that Collins had placed her at the center of the novel in such a way as to invite or even compel the reader's sympathy, and, in so doing, to challenge social convention. (134)

It is through the first-person narrative that the reader is able to see into the mind of Lydia Gwilt and understand her dilemma. While the darker, evil side of Lydia plots to obtain the wealth of Thorpe Ambrose through murder and deception, the human side of Lydia struggles with her genuine love of Midwinter. It is through Lydia's own narrative that the reader is able to view her changing attitude:

July 29th [...] I was within a hair's breadth of turning traitor to myself. I was on the very point of crying out to him, 'Lies! All lies! I'm a fiend in human shape! Marry the wretchedest creature that prowls in the streets, and you will marry a better woman than me!' (A 490)

August 1st [...] After to-day's experience, it is impossible to deceive myself any longer. Come what may of it, I love [Midwinter]. (A 501)

August 10th [...] I have won a great victory; I have trampled my own wickedness under foot. I am innocent; I am happy again. My love! My angel! When to-morrow gives me to you, I will not have a thought in my heart which is not *your* thought, as well as mine! (A 515)

Barickman, MacDonald and Stark assert that although Lydia Gwilt commits murder, bigamy and forgery, she challenges the conventional Victorian notion of morality, as she commits her crimes “without the guilty torments experienced by the fallen woman” (134). This view, however, appears to ignore Lydia's second thoughts as well as her sacrificial death. When Lydia becomes aware that it is Midwinter who is to be the victim of the poisoning she intends for Allan Armadale, she intercedes in order to save Midwinter's life: “Live, my angel, live! [...] All your life is before you—a happy life, and an honoured life, if you are freed from *me!*” (A 666). This act effectively reveals the fact that Lydia possesses a conscience, unlike Hetty, and underscores Lydia Gwilt's willingness to sacrifice her own life for Midwinter's safety. Through her suicide, Lydia Gwilt transcends the Victorian convention demanding death at the end of the fallen woman's story. Lydia Gwilt chooses to take her own life as a sacrificial act for the man she loves, not as a result of the shame and stigma for her wrongdoing. Her death is not imposed upon her by a judgmental society; her death is a conscious act of choice. It is left for the reader to choose whether it is, indeed, an act of sacrifice or whether it is Lydia Gwilt's last act of rebellion.

While Hetty's act of infanticide and Lydia Gwilt's crimes may be viewed as unnatural, the fact remains that the crimes are, nonetheless, the natural result of the society in which these women lived. The unrealistic views of womanhood, together with

the social constraints faced by these women were, in large part, responsible for the actions of these women. While they are not angels, neither are they demons. They are both women who were faced with a struggle for survival in a culture that demanded strict adherence to the norms of convention. Because both of these women chose to break with conventional womanhood and turn to violent means to achieve their objectives, they were stigmatized and ostracized, and whether by their own hand, or by the arm of the law, they were both removed from respectable English society.

CONCLUSION

Victorians viewed female wrongdoing through the skewed lens of social acceptability. Gender-based social norms dictated appropriate behaviour, and when a woman deviated from the Victorian construction of the ideal woman, she was stigmatized and separated from society. Clearly, the socially approved norms impacted on how the woman offender was portrayed in Victorian literature.

Each of the female figures examined in this thesis undergoes a form of stigmatization and ostracism. Because female wrongdoing represented a contagion, the offending woman is removed from respectable society. Female wrongdoing is represented in each of the novels as a threat of imbalance to an otherwise balanced society, and whether the woman is guilty of sexual misconduct or a criminal offense, in order to re-establish the social order she is removed. It is significant that all of the female characters examined in this thesis are ultimately expunged from 'respectable society' at the end of their stories. Whether her extrication is by execution, natural death, institutionalization or transportation, each woman is removed from her family, and ultimately from society as a whole. This fact carries with it the implication that the woman who commits wrongdoing is viewed as beyond hope. She is not restored to her family, and she is not reintegrated into society. Even if she is not punished by the justice system, she is punished by removal from the sphere of respectable society. The contamination that blights her character is not allowed to seep in one way or another into a society that prides itself on being morally pure. The fact that all of these female characters are eliminated implicitly suggests that, while Victorians may not have been

able to deny female wrongdoing, it was possible to conceal the perpetrator, thus outwardly denying a woman's capacity for crime.

This implicit wish to deny agency to women who transgressed is suggested by the fact that of the ten characters examined, only Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*, and Hortense in *Bleak House* are dealt with in the public sphere of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the reader does not actually see Hortense tried, convicted or sentenced. There is merely the suggestion that she is taken into custody by Inspector Bucket. Three conclusions may be drawn from this fact. Firstly, there appears to have been a reticence in Victorian novels to condemn women within the scope of the criminal justice system for their wrongdoing. This view is reinforced by the fact that only Tess is actually executed for her crime. Secondly, the fact that it is women of the lower and working classes who are dealt with in the public sphere of the criminal justice system suggests that there is a class bias at work. For example, we do not see Lady Audley brought to justice, but rather secreted away to an asylum in France. We do, however, view the working-class Hetty being tried, and while we do not actually view the execution of the working-class Tess, we see the black flag raised to mark her death. Clearly, in the Victorian novel, class largely determined how wrongdoing was dealt with. Lastly, the fact that seven of the ten women in the novels discussed in this thesis are dealt with in the private sphere suggests that Victorians resisted exposing female wrongdoing to public scrutiny. It is significant that the deaths or removal of these women occur within the scope of the private sphere. Nancy in *Oliver Twist*; Lady Isabel in *East Lynne*; Madame de la Rougierre in *Uncle Silas*; Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*; Bertha in *Jane Eyre*; and Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* all die 'privately' at the end of their stories.

Nancy and Madame de la Rougierre are murdered at home, becoming victims of the men who dominate their lives. Lydia Gwilt dies by her own hand, Bertha Mason dies in the fire she sets, and Lady Isabel and Lady Audley die of natural causes. Bertha and Lady Isabel die at home. Lydia and Lady Audley die within the confines of a private institution. Like Lady Audley, Hester, in *Man and Wife*, is removed to an insane asylum, circumventing a criminal trial in the public sphere of the judicial system.

In the case of Lady Audley, the reticence to expose female wrongdoing to public scrutiny may also be linked to the blight on the patriarchal name that the female criminal represented. It was more desirable to secret a woman offender away in an insane asylum than to endure the shame and stigma attached to her offense.

While the social climate of the day may have influenced how each character was represented, the author who controls her fate ultimately determines the end that each character meets. The gender of the author appears to have an interesting impact on how female wrongdoing is portrayed. In the novels discussed, the female authors are much more critical of the women who stray than are their male counterparts. Eliot, Brontë and Braddon portray such women with a negativity that does not elicit sympathy for their plight. While society is not blameless for the situation in which Bertha, Hetty and Lady Audley find themselves, the primary fault is located within the flawed personality of the characters themselves. Lady Audley and Hetty are depicted as self-absorbed, and are ultimately punished for their departure from the ideal conception of womanhood. Brontë presents Bertha in an extremely negative way, suggesting that her madness is a result of her tainted heredity. Furthermore, she is represented as a blight on Rochester's life and a barrier to Jane's happiness. Wood's Lady Isabel, on the other hand, does evoke a

modicum of sympathy, but is primarily used as a cautionary model of 'what not to be,' suggesting the dangers of sexual independence. She exists as an example of a woman who breaches her wedding vows and abandons her husband's home in an irrational and emotional manner. Although adultery is a moral and not a legal offense, Wood treats Lady Isabel like a criminal. This implicit criticism of offending females leveled by female authors may be explained by the fact that women hold each other to a stricter moral standard than men do, and women tend to be more critical of their own sex.

The male authors, with the exception of Sheridan LeFanu's *Madame de la Rougierre* and Dickens's *Hortense*, treat their characters with more sympathy. Hardy makes a point of painting Tess as 'a pure woman,' and Dickens injects purity and nobility into the character of Nancy. Even Collins's Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* elicits sympathy when Collins skillfully shifts the narration to Lydia's voice. This technique is employed again in *Man and Wife* when Hester speaks in the first person through her manuscript. This shift in narrative point of view effectively creates a personal understanding of the character, allowing the reader to view the character from the 'inside' rather than from without, eliciting sympathy for each character's plight.

Interestingly, it is the foreign women who come under the harshest criticism by both male and female authors. Besides the narrators' critical remarks and descriptions of Bertha, Hortense and Madame de la Rougierre, the writers maintain a distance between the reader and these characters. We are never allowed to be privy to their thoughts, struggles, and intentions; therefore, the reader is unable to sympathize with their positions. This tends to reinforce the position of the foreigner as being outside the parameters of respectable British society.

The labeling of women who do wrong underscores the fact that women were not viewed in terms of the wrong done or the crime committed, but rather in terms of how far they deviated from the Victorian conception of the ideal woman. Lady Audley, for example, is not labeled as a bigamist or an attempted murderer, but rather as mad. Likewise, the characterization of Hortense's 'Frenchness' tends to overshadow her depiction as a murderess.

However, regardless of how female wrongdoing was labeled, whether the woman was viewed as fallen, foreign, mad, or bad, without a doubt, she held a fascination for the Victorians. As well, whether we sympathize with her plight or despise her for her flaws, the modern reader, like the Victorian reader, thoroughly enjoys being privy to her story.

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